

To: Cabinet

Date: 12 February 2020

Report/Comments of: Scrutiny Committee

Title: Scrutiny of the Corporate Strategy, Budget And Medium Term Financial Strategy

SUMMARY OF REPORT CONSIDERED	
Report Title:	Corporate Strategy, Budget And Medium Term Financial Strategy
Purpose/Description of Report:	To provide feedback to Cabinet on the Corporate Strategy, Budget And Medium Term Financial Strategy
Key Decision:	Council Decision
Scrutiny Lead Member:	Councillor P Cumbers
Relevant Portfolio Holder:	Councillor J Orson/Councillor R de Burle

1. Introduction and Overview

The Scrutiny Committee met on 21 January 2020 to consider the Corporate Strategy, the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account revenue budgets for 2020/21, the capital strategy and the general fund capital programme and Medium Term Financial Strategy.

All members were invited to attend the Scrutiny Meeting to ensure that no member was excluded from providing feedback on the Council's Corporate Strategy and Budget proposals for 2020/21.

Members were also invited to provide any technical questions in advance to ensure that officers were able to provide detailed responses.

The Leader and Members of Cabinet along with Members of the Senior Leadership Team were present to respond to feedback and questions.

2. Summary of Feedback/Recommendations for Cabinet Consideration

- Members were pleased with how the new governance structure was progressing, noting that Cabinet and Scrutiny Committee were able to work together to achieve the best solutions for the Council and the community.
- It was noted that this was a balanced budget and was the first budget 'in surplus' for many years. Difficult decisions had been made by officers and Members, the results of which were beginning to be realised.
- Concerns were raised over the Council not contributing to the Investment Income Reserve fund in 2019/20, in order to minimise the projected overspend on the General Fund and any potential draw on the Corporate Priorities Reserve however it was recognised that the contribution in 2020/21 compensated for this
- Investment in the Council's Commercial Property team to enable the use of assets to build homes, create jobs and generate income (one of the Council's key investment proposals) would need clarification, as concerns had already been raised about how this would work in practice. The impact of this on Council assets would need to be considered.
- The reduction in planning applications was highlighted along with the lack of larger scheme submissions.
- Tackling nuisance and antisocial behaviour (ASB) quickly was essential and the Council's Legal and Enforcement teams needed to be funded effectively.
- Members were keen to see improvements in debt recovery.
- There should be robust procedures around collection of s.106 monies.
- The reduction in income from the Cattle Market should be addressed; this was a topic that Scrutiny were keen to look into.
- Members were in favour of ending the 'Tuesday Premium' for car parking.
- The Council recognised that local pubs were the 'hub' of the community and anticipated that Rural Pub Relief would help to support them.
- Members commented that the Corporate Strategy lacked a focus on tackling the climate emergency. The Council needed to enhance not simply protect the environment.
- Members recognised that there was an increase in the use of electric vehicles. Currently Melton had only two electric vehicle charging points (in the town). More would be needed. District councils were considering a collective scheme around this issue, which could link in with growth and tourism.

- Members were concerned that the Council was not maximising its Housing Revenue Account (HRA) income, via health and safety service charges. This had been previously raised at a meeting of Scrutiny Committee on 7 January.
- Concern was raised that the risk assessment relating to the costs of homelessness was understated. This has been reassessed as a result.
- Setting out how the Council would achieve its Key Priorities over the next 4 years was vital. It would need to, engage, communicate and campaign effectively.
- Members noted that Council would be the ultimate decision maker and would be asked to approve the proposals at their meeting on 26 February 2020.

In questions provided in advance of the meeting members had raised the following issues:

- It was important to learn lessons from previous budgeting experiences
- Clarification regarding risks, current liabilities and contingency arrangements was requested
- The budget should be able to deliver the Council's key priorities
- All trading activities should be monitored and reviewed where underperforming
- The commercialisation agenda could provide additional income for the Council
- Investing in Council Assets may bring a greater return than traditional investment models

Written by: Scrutiny Committee Chairman in consultation with Members of the Scrutiny Committee