

Overview and Scrutiny Committee comments**Comments on the draft Budget 2013/14, Medium Term Financial Plan 2013-17 and Capital Programme 2013/14 to 2016/17****Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

1. The Executive Member introduced this report, which provided the Committee with an opportunity to comment upon the draft budget 2013/14, Medium Term Financial Plan 2013 to 2017 and Capital Programme 2013/14 to 2016/17, which had been presented and approved for consultation at a meeting of the Executive on 8 January 2013.
2. The Executive Member drew the Committee's attention in particular to the efficiencies and pressures impacting upon the Children's Services directorate amounting to £1.7M and £2.422M respectively in 2013/14, and wished to record his thanks to the officers of the directorate for all their hard work during the budget setting process this year.
3. Members of the Committee discussed the content of the report in further detail and raised the following issues:-
4. The Council's ability to manage budgetary pressures within Children's Services to the extent suggested i.e. from a pressure of £2.422M in 2013/14 to only £45k in 2016/17. The Executive Member explained that the directorate was undertaking extensive work now around demand management, early intervention and prevention, which would support robust management of pressures in the future. The Assistant Director also referred to the review of safeguarding thresholds over recent years and the substantial increase in casework as a result, which would peak and stabilise in 2013/14.
5. The additional budgetary pressures which would occur as a result of increased housing development and population growth. The Assistant Director confirmed that such growth had been taken into account when preparing the budget and Medium Term Financial Plan.
6. The Council's ability to "squeeze the pips" out of contracts. The Assistant Director confirmed that this was an organisation-wide ambition, which would be achieved by smarter, outcome based commissioning, new ways of working and greater contractual efficiencies.
7. The efficiencies proposed regarding school transport provision and walking to school assessments. Members were concerned to ensure that such assessments were undertaken with care and consideration and in partnership with schools on a school by school basis. The Executive Member was content to provide such an assurance.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Draft Budget 2013/14, Medium Term Financial Plan 2013-17 and the Capital Programme 2013/14 to 2016/17 be endorsed as set out.

Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

8. At their meeting on 17 January 2013 the Sustainable Communities OSC considered the draft budget 2013/14, Medium Term Financial Plan 2013 to 2017 and Capital Programme 2013/14 to 2016/17, which had been presented and approved for consultation at a meeting of the Executive on 8 January 2013. The Committee also received as an urgent item the Leisure Facilities Capital Programme, which had been scheduled to be considered by the Executive on 08 January 2013. In response to the reports and the further clarification provided by the Director of Sustainable Communities the Committee discussed the content of the report in further detail and raised the following issues:-
9. Why there was a £30k cost pressure identified at SC115 in the Draft Revenue Budget for 2013/14 relating to the Drainage Board and no additional pressure in future years. The Director confirmed that for the 2012/13 budget a saving of £30K had been agreed for payments to the Drainage Board however this had not materialised so this was re-instating the budget
10. Whether the £150k identified in the Capital Programme to reopen Houghton Regis swimming pool would be sufficient and how officers had reached that figure. It was also queried whether the Council would be able to afford to reopen the pool if it was going to cost more than £150k. In response it was commented that £150k was an estimate, a business case had been commissioned by the Executive that would provide a more accurate figure and would also include estimated costs to keep the swimming pool open for a period of five years. It was not guaranteed that the swimming pool would reopen but the money had been included in the Capital Programme so that if it was feasible then it could be. If the cost to reopen the swimming pool was higher than £150k Members could choose whether or not to proceed.
11. Increasing the capital allocation would impact on other schemes in the Capital Programme.
12. Funding for a potential new sports hall at Eaton Bray school would be considered as part of the Development with Stakeholders money identified in the capital programme

Recommended to the Executive

That the Draft Budget 2013/14, Medium Term Financial Plan 2013-17, Capital Programme 2013/14 to 2016/17 and the Leisure Facilities Capital Programme be endorsed as set out.

Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee

13. The Executive Member introduced this report, which provided the Committee with an opportunity to comment upon the draft budget 2013/14, Medium Term Financial Plan 2013 to 2017 and Capital Programme 2013/14 to 2016/17, which had been presented and approved for consultation at a meeting of the Executive on 8 January 2013.
14. The Executive Member drew the Committee's attention in particular to his supplementary briefing note, which had been circulated at the meeting and which provided Members with further detail regarding the changes made since preparation of the draft budget report as a result of the announcement of the Local Government funding Settlement for 2013/14. The net effect of these changes equated to a £1.8M shortfall, which would be met by not making the previously planned contribution to reserves of £1.4m and £0.4m use of reserves.
15. Members of the Committee discussed the content of the report in further detail and raised a significant number of specific queries, all of which were addressed by the Executive Member and officers in attendance. In addition, the following issues were also raised:-
16. Members were concerned about the proposed reduction in partnership funding, specifically the planned 10% reduction in the grant to the Citizen's Advice Bureau and Voluntary Community Sector organisations from 2014/15 onwards. It was Members opinion that this proposal should be reviewed prior to implementation.
17. Members were concerned about the proposals to reduce staffing levels generally as part of the Customer First programme, with particular reference to a proposed reduction of 5 Full Time Equivalents in the Revenues & Benefits team, and the impact this would have on the quality and speed of service provided. The Committee therefore agreed to monitor the programme carefully and requested regular, detailed, reports from the Executive Member concerning these issues.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Draft Budget 2013/14, Medium Term Financial Plan 2013-17 and the Capital Programme 2013/14 to 2016/17 be endorsed as set out.

Social Care, Health & Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Due to the postponement of the Social Care, Health & Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting of 21 January 2013 due to adverse weather, its comments on the draft budget will be submitted separately and following its re-scheduled meeting which is due to take place on Tuesday, 29 January 2013.

Committee comments on the Fees and Charges 2013/14**Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

1. Charges for school transport, which were currently set per year, term or half term. Members queried whether greater flexibility could be introduced to allow parents to purchase shorter periods, which would encourage cycling to school in good weather. The Assistant Director commented that the introduction of greater flexibility would be a challenge and could potentially impact upon the Council's current contractual arrangements with bus companies however greater flexibility was certainly an ambition which schools themselves, with the support of the Council, could investigate further; and
2. The performance of the music service following its redesign in 2011. The Executive Member confirmed that the music service was performing well, was cost neutral and continued to improve take up rates.

Recommended

That the schedule of Fees and Charges for 2013/14 for the Children's Services directorate be endorsed as set out.

Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

1. In response to the report and the further clarification provided by the Director of Sustainable Communities and the Executive Member the Committee discussed the content of the report in further detail and raised the following issues:-
2. Why charges to collect fridges and freezers from domestic premises had increased. It was clarified that increases in charges relate to the cost of disposing of these appliances
3. Why the cost to administer high hedges legislation was so high. It was clarified that this cost was high due to the additional costs to the Council during an appeal process.
4. The use of fees received in relation to sexual entertainment venues and whether the Council could use these fees for policing late night venues. It was clarified that the Council could decide to bring in a levy for licensed premises serving alcohol beyond midnight. A percentage of this levy was given to the police to support late night policing. If used, this levy would apply across the whole Central Bedfordshire area and not just in one location or venue. There were other approaches available to the Council to target specific premises and these were used where appropriate.
5. There were currently few problems in Central Bedfordshire relating to fly-tipping and they were not thought to be as a result of charges for the removal of bulky waste.
6. The issuing of fixed penalty notices, which was undertaken by the Environmental Protection Team.

7. The charging for displaying commercial posters in Libraries. Both displaying and charging would cease.
8. Specific problems in Flitwick relating to commercial posters. The Director undertook to ask Planning Enforcement officers to investigate concerns.
9. The reduction in fees for the first annual resident parking permit, which Members supported

Recommended

1. **That Executive be aware of the Committee's specific support for the reduction in fees for the first annual resident parking permit.**
2. **That Executive adopt the proposed schedule of fees and charges for 2013/14 as set out.**

Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee

1. Members of the Committee discussed the content of the report in detail and raised a number of specific queries, all of which were addressed by the Executive Member and officers in attendance.

Recommended

That the schedule of Fees and Charges for 2013/14 for Corporate Resources be endorsed as set out.

Social Care, Health & Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Due to the postponement of the Social Care, Health & Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting of 21 January 2013 due to adverse weather, its comments on fees and charges will be submitted separately and following its re-scheduled meeting which is due to take place on Tuesday, 29 January 2013.