

ECONOMY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 20 January 2022

PRESENT – Councillors Renton (Chair), Bartch, Boddy, Harker, L Hughes, Mrs D Jones, McEwan and Wright

APOLOGIES – Councillors Crudass and Paley

ABSENT –

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillors Durham, Marshall, Tait and Willis

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Elizabeth Davison (Group Director of Operations) and Shirley Wright (Democratic Manager)

ER33 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

ER34 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN - TO CONSIDER A RESPONSE TO CABINET ON THE PLAN TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THE VIEWS OF ALL OF THIS COUNCIL'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEES :-

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of meetings of this Council’s Scrutiny Committees which had been held to discuss the proposals contained within the draft Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2022/23.

It was reported that each of the Council’s Scrutiny Committees had been requested to consider the MTFP 2022/23 to 2025/26 and to forward any views, particularly in relation to those services and finances which were specifically within their remit, to this Scrutiny Committee for consideration.

Each of the Chairs/Vice Chairs, in attendance gave an overview of the discussions which had taken place at their meetings, together with the agreed response to this Scrutiny Committee.

(a) Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee

It was reported that the following views had been proposed at the meeting held on 6 January 2022 :-

(i) the Leader and the Cabinet Member for resources should continue to lobby the Government in relation to the need for increased funding;

(ii) Cabinet should ensure work is undertaken to plan for the projected budget deficit over the four-year period of the MTFP, including details of what steps and actions might need to be taken; and

(iii) a comprehensive communication strategy should be developed to better inform residents of the Borough of the reasons for the proposed increase in Council Tax and

how the funding is being spent to deliver services.

Discussion ensued on the need to clarify further, points (i) and (ii) above, and it was suggested that a time frame should be included on the reporting back in relation to (ii) above, and that, in relation to (i) above, it should be clear that the Leader and Cabinet Member for Resources continue to lobby Government in relation to both the increased funding generally for local government and an alternative method of funding adult social care.

(b) Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee

It was reported that that Scrutiny Committee had no comments to make on the MTFP itself, however, in relation to the continuation of the Stronger Communities Fund, it had advised that

it supported the continuation of the scheme in the 2022/23 financial year.

Discussion ensued at the meeting on the total amount of funds which had been allocated to date; the need for the process to be clarified in terms of ensuring that Members understood that the fund needed to be allocated from their individual credit union account by the end of the financial year; the reporting process and monitoring to ensure that the aims and objectives of the fund were being met; the carry forward of any individual Members unspent funding with the caveat that any individual fund would not exceed £1,000 in any one financial year and the continued six monthly reporting by the Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee.

(c) Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

It was reported that the following views had been proposed at its meeting held on 10 January 2022 :-

(i) if additional funding became available, Cabinet should give consideration to increasing the budget allocation to early Help Services to prevent expensive and intrusive statutory interventions in the future and is therefore a more financially viable way of supporting families.

Following questions by Member in relation to savings within the Adults and Childrens' staffing budget, it was reported that this related to staff turnover and that further detailed information could be provided.

(iv) Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee

It was reported that that Scrutiny Committee had no comments to make on the MTFP.

Discussion ensued on the New Homes Bonus Grant and the continuation of the work to bring derelict properties within the Borough back into use

(v) Adults Scrutiny Committee

It was reported that that Scrutiny Committee had no comments to make on the MTFP

Taking into account the above and the discussions which had taken place, the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee gave consideration to the views it wished to put forward to Cabinet on behalf of all of the Scrutiny Committees.

That Cabinet be advised that the following is the response of the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on behalf of all of the Council's Scrutiny Committees in relation to the Medium Term Financial Plan 2022/23 to 2025/26 consultation :-

(a) the Leader and the Cabinet Member for Resources should continue to lobby the Government in relation to the need for :-

(i) increased funding generally for local government; and

(ii) an alternative method of funding the current pressures in Adult social care as the Adult Social Care Precept is not a sustainable solution.

(b) Cabinet should ensure work is undertaken to plan for the projected budget deficit over the four-year period of the MTFP, including details of what steps and actions might need to be taken and report back to the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee in 12 months' time;

(c) a comprehensive communication strategy should be developed to better inform residents of the Borough of the reasons for the proposed increase in Council Tax and how the funding is being spent to deliver services;

(d) If additional funding becomes available, Cabinet should consider increasing the budget allocation to Early Help Services to prevent expensive and intrusive statutory interventions in the future and is therefore a more financially viable way of supporting families;

(e) having considered the use, to date, of the Stronger Communities Fund, the view is that Cabinet should consider the continuation of that Fund in the 2022/23 financial year; and

(f) the continuation of the on- going work around the New Homes Bonus Scheme