

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 12 January 2023

PRESENT – Councillors Donoghue (Chair), Cossins, Mrs Culley, Haszeldine, McCollom, Wallis and Willis

APOLOGIES – Councillors Allen, Mrs D Jones and Tait,

ABSENT – Councillors Bell

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillors Renton and Keir

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Ian Thompson (Assistant Director Community Services), Anthony Hewitt (Assistant Director Highways and Capital Projects), Brett Nielsen (Assistant Director Resources) and Hannah Miller (Democratic Officer)

CLS34 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

CLS35 MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

The Assistant Director Resources submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that Members give consideration to the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2023/24 to 2026/27, which had been approved by Cabinet at its meeting on 13 December, as a basis for consultation.

In introducing the report, the Assistant Director Resources reminded Members of the MTFP Briefing that was delivered to Members in December outlining the overall position of the MTFP, and requested that Members of this Scrutiny Committee now consider those services and finances specifically within the remit of this Scrutiny Committee to enable a response to be formulated and forwarded to the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee for consideration at its meeting scheduled to be held on 19 January 2023.

The Assistant Director of Resources provided an update on the Local Government finance settlement, which had been received on 19 December 2022, subsequent to the approval of the draft MTFP by Cabinet, and advised on the impact this settlement had on the assumptions made within that approved draft MTFP.

The submitted report stated that in recognition of the significant pressures facing local authority budgets and to help partially meet the pressures faced in Adult Social Care, the proposed Council Tax and Adult Social Care Precept levels had increased for 2023/24, at 2.99 per cent and 2 per cent respectively in line with Government changes to the referendum limits.

Discussion ensued regarding the consultation process for the MTFP; and concerns were raised in relation to assumptions, particularly in relation to the interest rates, and projected deficits in each financial year of the MTFP.

Discussion also ensued regarding the climate change programme, Members noted that an action plan was in place and was being delivered using existing resources; the budget for Street Scene and the adequacy of the current level of service; and particular concern was raised in relation to the free parking offer which had been extended. The Local Services Portfolio Holder in attendance at the meeting addressed Members concerns.

Members sought clarification in relation to the allocation of £0.893m for the Integrated Transport Block; the charges in relation to swimming, parking and pavement café licences; and queried the allocation in the events budget for fireworks.

IT WAS AGREED – (a) That the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee be advised that the majority view of the Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee is :-

- i. That this Scrutiny Committee is dismayed at the lack of consultation with residents on the MTFP and in particular the services and finances which are specifically within the remit of this Scrutiny Committee;
- ii. That this Scrutiny Committee does not support the proposed Council Tax increase of 2.99 per cent plus a 2 per cent Adult Social Care Precept in light of the cost living crisis and the impact of the proposed increases on residents; and
- iii. That this Scrutiny Committee is concerned regarding the reliance on positive assumptions in the MTFP which may not come to fruition, and the potential increased risk in the future.

(b) That the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee be advised that the minority view of the Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee is that this Scrutiny Committee supports the MTFP 2023/24 to 2026/27.

(c) That the Minutes be circulated to all Members of the Scrutiny Committee and Members in attendance at the meeting, in consultation with the Lead Scrutiny Officers supporting this Scrutiny Committee, be given authority to agree the Minutes of this Meeting of the Committee, to enable the Minutes to be considered at a Special Meeting of the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee, scheduled to be held on 19 January 2023.

CLS36 STRONGER COMMUNITIES FUND

The Stronger Communities Portfolio Holder submitted a report (previously circulated) updating Members on the spend to date against the Stronger Communities Fund and requesting that Members give consideration to continuation of the scheme into the 2023/24 financial year.

The submitted report stated that Cabinet agreed, at its meeting held on 8 February 2022 to the continuation of the scheme into the 2022/23 financial year as part of the MTFP; the fund enables Members to use an allocated amount of money to deliver the objectives of building stronger communities; each Councillor had been allocated £1k; and details were provided of the spend against the £50k to date, together with information on what had been delivered in wards on an individual Councillor basis. Members noted the deadline of 24 March 2023.

IT WAS AGREED – (a) That the current spend against the £50k be noted.

(b) That the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee be advised that the Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee support the continuation of the scheme in the 2023/24 financial year.