

**RESOURCES AND SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
**14 JANUARY 2021**

**BUDGET SCRUTINY QUESTIONS OF PORTFOLIO HOLDERS**

Each Portfolio Holder was asked to address the Committee on the relevant sections of the budget and the extent to which the budget (including one off provisions and reserves) met the needs of the service in 2021/22 and the major risks of the service in so far as the budget was concerned. Specific questions were asked by the Committee as follows.

Question to	Question	Response submitted to the Committee
<i>09:10-09:30 hrs attendance</i>		
Cllr Giancarlo Guglielmi	The Council is at Year 5 of the 10 Year strategy to achieve savings required in its base budget over that time while avoiding the much larger savings required in a single year without that strategy. The savings target over the remaining five years of the strategy is significantly higher than was the case at the start of that strategy and yet underspends have been recorded. Is the strategy savings target therefore appropriate or should a lower savings target be set bearing in mind the experience to date?	<p>I don't think it would be prudent to consider relaxing the savings target at this point in time.</p> <p>The underlying principle of the long term plan is to enable income to grow over time, which may enable us to reduce the level of savings in the future but I don't think that time is now. The flexibility that the long term plan has provided has been crucial, especially this year where we have been able to 'relax' the savings target for one year – however this will in itself have a telescopic effect so the savings required in future years remain an important element of the long term plan.</p> <p>In respect of the underspends from previous years, as explained to the Committee previously, not all favourable items from prior years can readily translate into on-going savings on a permanent basis going forward, and some may be one-off in nature in any case such as general Government</p>

		<p>grant funding. Therefore, the underlying variances behind any outturn position will determine the way forward, rather than just looking at the overall outturn position itself.</p> <p>Nobody, unless they come across unlimited wealth, can repay their mortgage overnight and have a relaxed attitude when they know what the level of their repayments is on a regular basis, and depending on what type of mortgage they have, their repayment level goes down as the years pass.</p>
	<p>Further to the above, is it appropriate to look at extending the ten year strategy and if so by how long and what are the other considerations (e.g. increasing the forecast risk reserve).</p>	<p>This question was addressed in the report that the Committee considered back in November, where it was highlighted that the long term forecast would be reviewed in 2023.</p>
	<p>Large sums of money have been set aside to fund a range of projects and schemes. Is it time to make fresh decisions on the allocation of the funds and release or reallocate those funds where the original purpose is not to be pursued? In this regard I reference the sums allocated for the Clacton Town Centre Fountain (£159K) and for Residents' Free Car Parking (£221K).</p>	<p>Yes, it is time to make decisions about the money that has previously been set aside for projects that are no longer to be pursued. The general aim is to consider such re-allocations when a subsequent project comes forward but I appreciate that there may be long lead in times to such projects, which may leave money against budgets previously agreed for extended periods of time. However, it is a useful point to raise and I will review such budgets as soon as possible.</p>

	<p>On 13 August, the Committee recommended Cabinet:</p> <p>“Consider establishing a corporate dedicated project completion resource, with project management skills, with a direction to progress projects and priorities of corporate significance to the Council, support delivery milestones for those projects and unlock capacity and other issues that could frustrate delivery of those projects and priorities.”</p> <p>This was reported to Cabinet on 11 September and I invite the Deputy Leader to advise the Committee as to an update on the proposal.</p>	<p>As agreed by Cabinet, the issue raised was to be considered as part of developing the back to business initiative and associated action plan, which needed to translate comments and feedback into practical actions on the ground.</p> <p>Although this work remains on-going, at its meeting in November, Cabinet agreed the first of these tangible projects which are being taken forward. It is also important to highlight that an external consultant is currently undertaking an ‘audit’ of the various projects and initiatives we have proudly identified and backed with cash to see what additional capacity / resources may be needed to make the necessary progress. I will hopefully be able to provide a further update in early February. However I can’t emphasise enough the pressure our officers are under in responding to the on-going COVID 19 crisis, which will undoubtedly have an impact on this work.</p>
	<p>Currently the Council has almost £33M in reserves, is there an optimum reserve figure for a District Council of TDCs size/revenue budget?</p>	<p>As the Committee is aware, the question incorrectly gives the impression that the Council is sitting on £33m of uncommitted reserves.</p> <p>Leading on from the answer given above, we have cash backed a number of initiatives and projects rather than making promises based on future funding. A large percentage of the figure the Committee have referred to is therefore associated with continuing projects and initiatives which were</p>

		<p>agreed to be carried forward at the end of 2019/20 which would have been included in a report that the Committee considered last year.</p> <p>A number of reserves have also been set aside to meet risks going forward, which if not provided for could put the financial sustainability of the Council at real risk, something I am not prepared to expose us to.</p> <p>In terms of uncommitted reserves, the figure set aside is £4m, which is based on a risk assessed approach.</p>
<i>09:40-10:00 hrs attendance</i>		
Cllr. Lynda McWilliams	Sums of money have been allocated for “Public Health Improvement Projects” (£95K), the “Tendring Community Fund” (£500K) and the “CCG Wellbeing Hub” (£245K) with overlapping objectives. Is there a coherent approach to the delivery of those objectives given that when we come out of covid restrictions the extent of the need in the community for help is likely to be extensive?	<p>All these funding pots are being looked at holistically, together with the back to business agenda and the business support grants. An announcement will be made shortly about the opening of the Tendring Community Fund, to support our voluntary organisations at this challenging time.</p> <p>Following nominations from Group Leaders, the Working Group for the Tendring Community Fund comprises Councillors McWilliams (Chairman), Alexander, Allen, Bush, Chapman, V E Guglielmi, J Henderson, Land, Newton and Wiggins. In addition there was a vacancy on the Working Party following the passing of the late Councillor Joy Broderick.</p>
<i>10.10-10.30 hrs attendance</i>		

<p>Cllr. Alex Porter</p>	<p>Given that a significant element of the Tourism season in 2020 was lost due to Covid restrictions, and the importance of Tourism to the local economy of the District, how are resources going to be applied to ensure that the 2021 season is as successful as it can be.</p>	<p>As the committee is aware, the draft tourism strategy was considered by Cabinet in October and was subsequently sent out for consultation. The final strategy is due back to Cabinet in February with an accompanying delivery plan for year 1. This will contain a number of actions to support the District's recovery. Further to this, there are a number of short term projects listed in the emerging Back to Business delivery plan, with the aim of supporting the local tourism economy, e.g. Clacton 150, Celebrate Tendring etc.</p>
	<p>At the start of 2021/22 there will be £174K in the "Leisure Capital Projects Reserve". Can you tell the Committee what Capital Projects this is to fund? The Committee is aware that a separate allocation of £521K has been made for the Clacton Leisure Centre spa and wet-side redevelopment.</p>	<p>A number of planned essential maintenance projects will be addressed through this reserve and a report is due to be considered in the coming months. This will include the replacement of sand filter media (for the District's swimming pools) and a boiler replacement. This is scheduled to take place towards the end of the year.</p>
<p><i>10.40–11.00 hrs attendance</i></p>		
<p>Cllr. Paul Honeywood</p>	<p>The population profile of the District suggests that there will be a higher number of properties requiring adaptations to make them suitable for those with mobility impairments. In the circumstances is it timely to look at the needs across the District and the appropriate resources to meet those needs across both the HRA and the General Fund.</p>	<p>The district does indeed have a population age profile that shows a higher proportion of older people living in the area.</p> <p>This is a fact that we are very aware of and is reflected in the adaptations programme that we offer to residents which is by some margin the largest in Essex for Disabled Facilities Grants. The Council has an allocation from the Better Care Fund of over £1.8M and is therefore more than adequately resourced to provide the adaptations necessary.</p>

		<p>Within our own housing stock we have the benefit of a capital allocation of over £400k in the HRA to cover the cost of adaptations that are required by our own tenants.</p> <p>Working with partners in the healthcare system and with Essex County Council we identify those in need of adaptations and provide a comprehensive service to ensure they receive the help required.</p>
	<p>The HRA budget for 2021/22 includes lost rental income of £160K arising from void properties. We are advised that on average there are 50-60 properties that are void each contributing £84.10 per week of lost income. It obviously takes time to turn around a void property and rehouse individuals and families in need. What measures will be implemented in 2021/22 to reduce the average void period and reduce the cost associated with it.</p>	<p>The number of void properties has increased throughout 2020 for a number of reasons not least the current pandemic that has at times meant it has not been possible to let properties or increased the time taken to turn them around and complete the allocation and re-letting process.</p> <p>This is a situation we are acutely aware of and measures have been put in place, some of which were already planned, to speed up the process of re-letting a property once it has become vacant. These measures include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A new software system for Housing Register applications to be introduced in February that will allow online applications and electronic handling of information and communication with applicants</li> <li>• Linked to that software, a further piece of software that will hold, track and manage the allocation of void properties, reducing a lot of manual processing that current slows the process</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A new Term Maintenance Contract with built in performance targets and penalty clauses will be in place from April that will give better control over the speed and quality of works undertaken.</li> <li>• An officer taskforce meeting fortnightly with the specific aim of reducing void times to as a low as possible.</li> </ul>
<i>11.10 -11.30 hrs attendance</i>		
Cllr. Mary Newton	£126K has been set aside to be spent on preparations for the UK's exit from the EU. As the UK has now left the EU should that sum be released or reallocated or is it earmarked for specific measures?	This sum was retained to allow the Council to address any critical issues in the immediate build up to or after EU transition. Work is now underway to work through other identified expenditure for EU transition such as Variable Message Signs for the District's roadsides.
	£1.585M has been set aside for "Business Investment and Growth Projects". That's a large sum of money in the Council's accounts. What Business and Growth Projects are to be funded from that sum in 2021/22?	Now the Economic Growth Strategy has been refreshed and adopted, a delivery plan will be brought forward in the coming months for allocation of this budget towards strategic goals.
<i>11.40 –12.00 hrs attendance</i>		
Cllr. Michael Talbot	£44K has been set aside to fund "2 One year fixed term posts to support improvements to the overall appearance of the district". Where are we with the delivery of this? What is the plan?	<p>The post is incorporated into the Public Realm team which has enabled the service to undertake improvements to public realm as opposed to meeting current maintenance requirements.</p> <p>This includes improvements to the round garden Walton on the Naze, the Mayflower 400 open space Harwich, the restoration of rockeries along Clacton seafront and the commencement of improvements to the seafront open space and garden at Martello Bay Clacton.</p>

		<p>The post will support future projects including Clacton Town centre enhancements, a new flood memorial garden, Harwich and refurbishment of the Cliff Dovercourt.</p> <p>In addition, improvements are planned for the entrances at Weeley crematorium, Kirby and Clacton cemeteries and Rush Green recreation ground Clacton as well as the seafront garden and boating pond area of Clacton. Public realm is also working towards landscaping and enhancing existing children's play areas to provide a more welcoming and safer environment.</p> <p>Public Realm improvements will be conducted with the support of Building and Engineering Services on projects including Clacton town centre, the Cliff Dovercourt and others.</p> <p>Public Realm are happy to provide information on areas of refurbishment / improvement as opposed to general maintenance.</p> <p>The post has approximately 6 months to run. It would be beneficial to have further funding, or for additional resources to be provided for future projects.</p> <p>The service is trying to concentrate on areas of maximum impact such as visitor / communal areas, but is also happy to consider ideas or requests from members.</p>
--	--	---



		Well maintained and enhanced public realm has many benefits including positive health and wellbeing physical and mental, encouraging business and economic regeneration as well as lowering crime and anti-social behaviour.
	The net ongoing savings being built into the budget includes £115K to reflect the expected continuation of increased recycling performance from the waste collection service changes from 2019. Given the financial benefit to the Council from increasing recycling should some of that saving be allocated to improving signage to and the general area of recycling bring sites to make them more attractive and encourage their use?	Officers within the Street Scene Team are currently undertaking an audit of all the 80+ bring sites located across the district with the intention of highlighting both the potential for increasing the scope of materials collected at the sites but also the overall standard of the site and signage with the ambition of enhancing the experience of the users to these sites, which in turn will help to promote and enhance recycling It is anticipated that these works, once completed will be within the current waste and recycling budgets and would not require any additional budget.
	The Committee has previously asked that the capital provision for cliff stabilisation works (£4m) should incorporate a district wide survey to highlight the Council's likely exposure to such costs in the foreseeable future. Do you think it prudent to try to estimate that financial risk and will such a survey be pursued (and particularly if external funding is secured to reduce the £4m currently allocated for the slippage at Holland-on-Sea)?	The £4m capital allocation is for specific works to two slipped areas in Holland on Sea.  A previous piece of high level consultancy linked to the recently completed cliff stabilisation package identified that all of the cliffs owned by the Council have low factors of safety and could be subject to future movement. In general secure slopes of this type would be at 18o and those owned by the Council are as steep as 30o in places.

		<p>Officers commissioned the work following internal assessment of the areas of the District's coast for which TDC is responsible as Coast Protection Authority and as the landowner: Brightlingsea near Promenade Way (where there are no cliffs), Clacton Martello to Haven Frinton Greensward to Walton Naze and Dovercourt West end Lane to Harwich Beach.</p> <p>Because the council is the landowner opportunities for third party funding are limited. It is likely that the Council could be liable to other parties if infrastructure such as streets are damaged</p>
<i>12:10-12:30 hrs attendance</i>		
Cllr. Neil Stock OBE	The sum of £862K has been allocated to the "Back to Business Initiative" and the Committee would like to know where we are with the detailed action plan that will start to commit funds from that sum. Can you provide that update?	The draft delivery plan for the Back to Business agenda is now complete and will be brought forward to Cabinet following a meeting to approve the content.

In addition, all Portfolio Holders are asked to confirm that the Fees and Charges they are responsible for have been reviewed to ensure that they are set at a level to recover the costs of the service they relate to or otherwise have been set at levels set by statute.