

CABINET

26 JANUARY 2024

REFERENCE REPORT FROM THE RESOURCES AND SERVICES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

A.1 SCRUTINY OF THE INITIAL BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR 2024/25

(Report prepared by Ian Ford)

BACKGROUND

In accordance with the requirements of the Budget & Policy Framework Procedure Rules the Resources and Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee (“the Committee”) has undertaken its scrutiny of the budget for the Council. Prior to its meeting on 10 January 2024, the Members of the Committee, met informally on 3 January 2024 with the Section 151 Officer and the Head of Democratic Services & Elections. The informal meeting aided the Members of the Committee in developing key lines of inquiry for its formal scrutiny meeting that was held on 10 January 2024.

At the Committee’s formal meeting on 10 January, it was aware that the initial General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget proposals for 2024/25 had been considered by Cabinet on 15 December 2023.

The Committee had been provided, as part of the material for them to consider, the following:

- 1) Updated General Fund Financial Forecast / Budget 2024/25 – the report considered by Cabinet on 15 December 2023.
- 2) Updated Housing Revenue Account Business Plan and Budget Proposals 2024/25 – the report considered by Cabinet on 15 December 2023.

Following the informal meeting of the Committee held on 3 January 2024 a series of written questions had been circulated to Portfolio Holders and their responses had been circulated to the Committee prior to its formal meeting on 10 January 2024. The Minutes of that meeting record those questions and responses in an Appendix.

At the 10 January meeting further supplementary questions had been asked of Cabinet Members and responses provided including, in some cases, a commitment to provide a written response.

The following such commitments to written responses being provided were given to the Committee:-

- Cllr. Andy Baker, Portfolio Holder for Housing & Planning - regarding whether the Council would pursue ‘joint ventures’ (such as ‘lease back’) as a way of increasing the housing stock.
- Cllr. Andy Baker, Portfolio Holder for Housing & Planning – in relation to how often the 30 year HRA Business Plan will be reviewed.

RESOURCES AND SERVICES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE'S RECOMMENDATION(S) TO CABINET

That:-

- (a) Portfolio Holders review the individual cost pressures and cost savings across their respective service areas and explain how they are managing that process;
- (b) this Committee must be consulted on both the review of the Housing Strategy and on any revised Strategy proposals that come forward before the Cabinet makes any decisions on this matter;
- (c) a longer term Savings Plan be produced to ensure longer term financial sustainability and that it be submitted to this Committee for scrutiny in the first quarter of 2024/2025;
- (d) a review be carried out of the Council's preferred service providers/contractors to ensure compliance with the Council's Procurement Procedure Rules; and
- (e) a review be carried out on whether to introduce a "traffic light" risk management system to manage cost pressures.

PORTFOLIO HOLDER COMMENT(S) AND RECOMMENDATION(S) TO CABINET

PORTFOLIO HOLDERS' COMMENTS

The comments of the Corporate Finance & Governance Portfolio Holder and other relevant Portfolio Holders (as appropriate) will be submitted to Cabinet at the meeting, to be considered as part of items 11 and 14 of the agenda, which are the General Fund and HRA final budget proposals for 2024/25.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO CABINET:

That the recommendations made by the Resources and Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee be welcomed and noted and that it be further noted that the responses of Portfolio Holders thereto will be considered as part of items 11 and 14 of the agenda.