

Appendix 12 - Comments on the budget from the Policy Overview Committees

Policy Overview Committees are an integral part of the consultation on the Cabinet's budget proposals each year. This opportunity enables Councillors, who are not in the Cabinet, to provide input or comment on aspects of the budget for the ensuing year.

The Corporate Services & Partnerships Policy Overview Committee met on 5 February 2015 to consider and coordinate all Policy Overview Committee comments and recommended them to Cabinet as set out below:

| | Budget remit | Comments |
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| Corporate Services & Partnerships - 8 January 2015 | <i>Administration and Finance Directorates and Residents Services (Asset Management).</i> <i>Consideration of Voluntary Sector Grants.</i> | <p>The Committee reviewed the relevant budgets in detail and whilst it did not make any specific comment, Members acknowledged that the delivery of front line services to residents of the Borough had not been impacted by the savings which the Council was making.</p> <p>The Committee noted that despite the current financial difficulties in local government finance, this Council's draft capital programme for 2015/16 consisted of a proposed significant capital investment of around £336,290k.</p> <p>This capital investment included:- the continuation of the Primary Schools capital programme, the development of a new Secondary Schools capital programme, the provision of a new landmark theatre and museum, investment in roads and pavements, as well as investment in new Youth Centres and improvement work associated with the Borough's highways, environmental and recreational facilities.</p> |
| Children, Young People and Learning – 14 January 2015 | <i>Residents Services (Education Policy & Standards) & Children & Young People's Services</i> | <p>The Committee noted the budget proposals submitted and acknowledges the work that has been undertaken in providing a working budget, noting constraints placed via external funding streams. Concerns were expressed by some Members about the levels of savings that needed to be achieved.</p> |
| Residents' & Environmental Services – 20 January 2015 | <i>Residents Services (various service areas)</i> | <p>The Committee commended officers on the proposed budget, particularly in relation to fees and charges where, for the most part, the Council proposes a freeze, with modest increases proposed for a small number of charges in 2015/16. Where increases are recommended, charges have been benchmarked against those of neighbouring authorities and shown to remain competitive.</p> <p>It was appreciated that the cemetery charges had not increased in a while and that action needed to be taken to bring them closer in line with other local authorities.</p> |

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| | | <p>Some Members suggested that consideration be given to reducing the percentage increase for residents and also be mindful of the proposed increase for non-residents, especially when some elderly residents have had no option but to move closer to their families (outside the Borough) due to health reasons but have requested to be buried where they were born, or indeed where they have lived for the majority of their lives. Officers should be allowed to exercise their discretion in terms of the rates in such cases to ensure that we are putting our residents first. However, most of the Committee understood the reasoning behind the changes in cost.</p> |
| <p>Social Services, Housing & Public Health – 21 January 2015</p> | <p><i>Adult Social Care and Residents Services (Housing / Public Health)</i></p> | <p>The Committee noted the budget proposals and welcomed the work of the Council in this challenging area. In particular, the Committee welcomed the ongoing work in relation to the preventative agenda so that informed decisions were taken to mitigate future risks. The Committee acknowledged the introduction of the Care Act 2014 brought a significant number of changes to Adult Social Care funding arrangements and the introduction of the Better Care Fund had significant ramifications to the way in which the Council funded health and social care.</p> <p>The Committee was concerned about the costs associated with Bed and Breakfast accommodation and the relationship between homelessness and the number of void properties. However, it also welcomed the steps being taken across Council Departments and in conjunction with partners to monitor the numbers of empty properties.</p> <p>The Committee welcomed the ongoing work to develop the supported living programme to promote independence and avoid costly residential placements but also recognised the need to monitor the slippage of several start dates closely. In relation to the Right to Buy Scheme, the Committee were assured that a stringent process was in place to restrict churn in the market place.</p> <p>The costs associated with transitional children were noted and in particular the estimate this could be managed down by 6% and not affect the quality of care by taking into account the experience in recent cohorts of children.</p> <p>The Committee also noted the importance of early intervention and prevention and the redesign of services so that savings could be achieved without impacting on front line services.</p> |