

FINAL 2023/24 REVENUE BUDGET & MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (2024/25 TO 2027/28); INCLUDING THE CAPITAL PROGRAMME

5.0 COMMENTS OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

- 5.2 The Panel discussed the Final 2023/24 Budget and Medium-term Financial Strategy (2024/25 to 2027/28) including Capital Programme at its meeting on 1st February 2023.
- 5.3 Councillor Harvey expressed praise for the report and thanked those involved in producing the budget for an excellent piece of work, a sentiment which was shared by the Panel.
- 5.4 Following a question from Councillor Harvey, the Panel heard that a planned temporary increase for Planning staff was included in the 2023/24 budget as an investment to help get the service back on track. It was further advised that once the service position was improved it would be in a position to generate some income for the Council through fees and charges.
- 5.5 Councillor Cawley asked for some clarification on this as the Fees and Charges document showed a planned decrease in Planning income, the Panel heard that there were recognised issues with recruitment and retention within Planning which were improving, but the forecasts were intended to not overestimate the potential income.
- 5.6 Following a question from Councillor Wells on the Community and Health line in Table 4b being significantly lower in 2023/24 than currently and also lower than subsequent years, the Panel were advised that the Officer would investigate the detail and report back to the Panel following the meeting.
- 5.7 Councillor Harvey asked for clarification on the damping adjustment in Table 2 and the Panel heard that this was linked to the re-baselining of the NNDR funding, the damping adjustments smooth the impact of this.
- 5.8 After a question from Councillor Pickering, the Panel heard that the agreed Council Principles underpinned and influenced the thinking and method when developing and setting the budget.
- 5.9 Councillor Gray commented that the purpose of the Panel was to scrutinise the report and to give Cabinet comments and thoughts to reflect upon rather than have a debate on the budget. He;
- reflected on unprecedented increase in government funding from the previous year which was good news for residents, whilst also allowing Council some flexibility on how that money be spent.
 - further expressed caution over the ambition to drive net expenditure down, observing that whilst inflation is predicted to fall it has not yet happened, in particular whether the expected salaries in Table 7 were realistic whilst maintaining the current staffing levels.

- did not dispute the removal of the Huntingdon redevelopment project from the Capital budget but did enquire how realistic it remained to deliver the anticipated projects within the budgeted staffing costs.
- challenged that the Fees and Charges in Appendix 2 did not match the rhetoric of keeping up with inflation or in line with neighbouring Councils, it was observed that this could be an area to develop.

5.10 Councillor Conboy thanked the Panel for their positive and constructive comments and commented that the opportunity to work with the shadow portfolio holder Councillor Jennings was a positive step forward.

5.11 Following the discussion, the Panel were informed that their comments would be added to the Cabinet report in order for the Cabinet to make a decision on the recommendations.