

FINAL 2024/25 BUDGET AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (2025/26 TO 2028/29) INCLUDING CAPITAL PROGRAMME

5. COMMENTS OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY.

- 5.2 The Panel discussed the Final 2024/25 Budget and Medium-term Financial Strategy (2025/26 to 2028/29) including Capital Programme at its meeting on 31st January 2024.
- 5.3 Following a question from Councillor Gleadow regarding the introduction of the garden waste subscription service, the Panel heard that this was introduced due to jeopardy in future budgets, there was a commitment to progress this service and to delay this would result in a considerable operational deficit alongside costs incurred by the project implementation and refunds to those who had already paid.
- 5.4 Councillor Martin enquired about why there was a 668% increase on last years budget under the Head of Service Strategic Insights and Delivery line, following which the Panel heard that the reasons for this would be sought and brought back to the Panel at a later date. Following the meeting, the Panel were advised that the reasons for the significant increase were;
- All of the funded Biodiversity for All roles (Project Manager/Project Admin/Two Graduate Ecologists) are now filled. These are funded through CPCA.
 - Sports Development was transferred into SID during 2023/24 from One Leisure.
 - Two staff were transferred into SID from Transformation.
- 5.5 In response to a further question from Councillor Martin, the Panel heard that in order to achieve good energy prices over the last couple of years, the Council had joined a framework agreement where energy is purchased in advance, meaning HDC benefitted from lower rates when prices were rising but that our consumption will continue at higher rates initially even though the market price is starting to decrease.. In addition it was noted that the Council's recent decarbonisation works had moved the Councils energy usage from gas to electricity which is a more expensive energy.
- 5.6 Following a question from Councillor Harvey, the Panel heard that the increase in the Finance and Resources figure in Table 21 included the creation of the new reserves going forward as well as other costs such as MRP calculations.
- 5.7 Councillor Pickering enquired why there were lines within the Fees and Charges document which were showing a 0% increase. The Panel heard that some of these were outside of the Council's control as they were statutory fees, that some fees such as One Leisure fees had increased but that all fees had been discussed with relevant portfolio holders and decisions made based on those.

- 5.8 Councillor Jennings highlighted a discrepancy between figures quoted as being in the MTFS for the Garden Waste Subscription Service and figures which had been presented to the Panel last year. The Panel heard that there had been a cost included in the business case relating to possible additional charges from the County Council. There has been no advisement of any additional costs that will be payable, so these figures have not been reflected through the MTFS.
- 5.9 The Panel heard, following a further question from Councillor Jennings on the decrease in the number of Council Tax properties compared to last year's MTFS, that the Council Tax team had undertaken work to ensure a more accurate figure in this year's budget rather than an estimation which had been used in previous years, therefore the team were fully confident on the figures given within the Council Tax base.
- 5.10 Detail was given to the Panel after a question from Councillor Jennings relating to the growth bids in Table 2B. That the growth bids within;
- Corporate Services related to assessments on rents on Commercial investment strategy, improving Civic Suite streaming, facility management remedial works on non compliant fire doors, implementation of workforce Strategy.
 - Finance & Resources related to additional resource to assist with reporting
 - And that detail would be sought and reported back to the Panel for growth bids within Planning and Regeneration & Growth.
- 5.11 Following a question from Councillor Wells relating to the detail in Table 7 surrounding supplies and services, communications and computing, the Panel heard that again the detail would be sought and relayed to the Panel after the meeting. Following the meeting, the Panel were advised that the sizeable decrease between last year's budget and the current year's budget was linked to reclassification of partner spend through the 3C ICT agreement; it was not a reduction in the Council's direct spend.
- 5.12 Councillor Cawley enquired about the growth shown under Leisure, Waste and Street Scene in Table 2, and the Panel were advised that this was due to an anticipated increase in wages in line with the planned national minimum wage increases and increased energy costs following the conversion to electricity from gas. The Panel also heard that the £900,000 in the report relating to the MRF contract was not yet confirmed but this was consistent with the information provided by the County Council to date.
- 5.13 Councillor Gardener advised the Panel that as a County Councillor, he had been advised that the County Council planned to charge the District Council for the anticipated reduction in waste disposal following the implementation of the garden Waste Subscription Service and expressed surprise that this cost had not been accounted for within the budget.
- 5.14 It was observed by Councillor Gardener that tables 14 and 24 did not show any planned training budget for either Leisure & Health or Planning Services whereas other services did show this. The Panel heard that there was a

centrally held budget for training but that some services had put specific training costs into their budgets in addition to this.

- 5.15 Councillor Cawley enquired about the £2.5m budgeted for the Workforce Strategy and asked for clarity on what this would cover. The Panel heard that this Strategy was still being developed and therefore the detail was not yet available however this was the amount which had been reserved for the work.
- 5.16 Following the discussion, the Panel were informed that their comments would be added to the Cabinet report in order for an informed decision to be made on the report recommendations.