

Dear Councillor

CABINET - THURSDAY, 13 FEBRUARY 2014

I am now able to enclose for consideration at the above meeting the following reports that were unavailable when the agenda was printed.

**Agenda Item
No.**

- 5. BUDGET (Pages 1 - 4)**

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CABINET

13 FEBRUARY 2014

DELIBERATIONS OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANELS

ITEM 5B – BUDGET 2014/15 AND MEDIUM TERM PLAN 2015 TO 2019

The Panel has reviewed the Medium Term Plan (MTP) for 2015-19 and the Budget and the level of Council Tax for 2014/15. In doing so, Members have examined in detail the information presented in the report by the Assistant Director (Finance and Resources). They have welcomed the new format in which this information has been presented.

With regard to the level of Council Tax, the majority of Panel Members have endorsed the view of Executive Councillors that the Authority should freeze its level of Council Tax for the forthcoming year and accept the Government's Council Tax Freeze Grant. However, the Chairman has suggested that representations should be made to Government that the offer of the grant on a percentage basis rewards high spending local authorities and that alternative ways of distributing it should be used.

The Panel has noted that the reduction in forecast expenditure will now mean that the Authority's forecast Net Interest and Borrowing Costs will represent 16.4% of Net Spending in 2018/19. Having reviewed the options that are available to keep within the limit of 15%, the Panel has agreed that in the current circumstances the Cabinet should recommend the Council to approve the proposed MTP. However, Members have been pleased to note that a review of the capital programme will be incorporated into the forthcoming year with a view to making further savings. The Panel intends to continue to monitor this area and has established a working group to give further consideration to the question of the gross costs of capital.

In concluding their deliberations on this matter, the Panel has indicated that the Cabinet should recommend the Council to approve the proposed MTP, Budget and Financial Plan and freeze the level of Council Tax for 2014/14; that is, a Band D charge of £133.18. Members have emphasised that it will remain critical to identify the necessary savings for future years and that careful monitoring will need to continue to take place.

ITEM 6 – TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2014/15

In accordance with its responsibility for scrutinising Treasury Management, the Economic Well-Being Panel has reviewed and endorsed the Treasury Management Policy and Strategy for 2014/15.

ITEM 7 – HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL CORPORATE PLAN

All Panels have reviewed the proposed vision, strategic themes and aims for the 2014-16 Huntingdonshire District Council Corporate Plan. The outcome of the deliberations is as follows:-

a) Social Well-Being

The Social Well-Being Panel has made the following comments:

- ❖ It is stressed that the Council needs to get to the point where monitoring of the Council's performance can be undertaken,

- ❖ The first page of the Plan should include reference to monitoring,
- ❖ Facing the Future should be aligned to the Corporate Plan,
- ❖ The Corporate Plan Working Group should be involved in devising performance measures, and
- ❖ The Outcomes box on Value for Money needs to be further developed.

b) Economic Well-Being

Members of the Economic Well-Being Panel have been pleased to note that the clear message underpinning the Corporate Plan is the need to provide value for money. There are evident links between the Plan and the funding streams for local government.

In examining each of the four strategic themes, the Panel has made a number of comments and suggestions.

❖ **A Strong Local Economy**

Members have questioned whether sufficient effort is being made to enhance the local economies that already exist.

❖ **Enable Sustainable Growth**

Members have emphasised the need to recognise the importance the rural areas to the local economy. It is recommended that it is clarified that the aim is to have the right planning policies in place.

❖ **A Customer Focused and Service Led Council**

Members have suggested that this might be considered as more of an aim than a theme. The Council should decide whether it wants to be facilitator or an organization that delivers services.

In terms of the Council's overall vision, Members have suggested that this should incorporate reference to the opportunity that Huntingdonshire offers within all areas of the Plan. However, it has been questioned whether the broad spectrum of aims is realistic in the current financial climate.

With regard to the presentation of future performance information to elected Members, the Panel has supported the need for data to be made available to enable the Overview and Scrutiny Panels to monitor the performance of the Authority.

c) Environmental Well-Being

The Environmental Well-Being Panel has endorsed the decision to incorporate reference to the people of Huntingdonshire as a key theme running throughout the new Corporate Plan. Having queried whether there might be a more appropriate way of describing the Council's approach to homelessness, the Panel has expressed support for the draft Corporate Plan and expressed an interest in receiving performance data in due course.

ITEM 9 – FACING THE FUTURE

The Environmental Well-Being Panel, together with other Scrutiny Members, has reviewed the Scrutiny Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen's recommended approach to managing the ideas for savings that have emerged through the Facing the Future process and priorities for further research.

Members have discussed what the potential implications of the Council's approach to shared services and outsourcing and to individual savings suggestions might be. Some Members have questioned whether the Council should pursue options for shared services or outsourcing on the grounds that the Council would lose an element of control of transferred services. However, it has been recognized that this has to be weighed against the possible savings that might be achieved. Such a decision will not be taken without a detailed appraisal of all the Council's options.

Having requested reports on progress of the overall Facing the Future Project, the effect of the Project on the performance of the Council against the Corporate Plan and on individual savings proposals, the lists of suggestions appended to the report by the Assistant Director (Finance and Resources) has been approved for submission to the Cabinet, subject to the following amendments:

- transfer the suggestion relating to cancelling NNDR discretionary relief being from the Requires Further Research list (Appendix 3) to the Politically Sensitive list (Appendix 5).
- transfer all Democratic Services suggestions in the Politically Sensitive list (Appendix 5) to the Requires Further Research list (Appendix 2/3)

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