

Appendix 7

Matters raised by scrutiny committees

Will be available following scrutiny committees

Response to Scrutiny Recommendations

At their meetings, the People and Health Scrutiny Committee (10 January 2023) and Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee (12 January 2023) reviewed the draft proposals for the 2023/24 revenue budget and the assumptions used in developing them and an overview of the proposed savings and efficiencies to be made during the course of the year.

The committees raised a series of issues for Cabinet to consider prior to finalising the budget. The table below summarises the issues raised and provides a response to the consideration given.

Issues raised by the Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee	Response
Place Directorate – Highways, Travel & Environment	
It is noted that Dorset Travel is facing cost pressures of circa £2.5m in the current year and particular reference is made to SEND transport, which is facing significant cost increases, well above the rate of inflation. Concern is expressed about cost increases in this area and the impact on the budget. Recognise the links to work with Children’s and Adult Services to reduce costs for travel for the council.	Agreed. The SEND transport budget is under particular pressure at the moment. The travel transformation programme is examining the issues behind the cost increases and developing proposals to mitigate the pressure.
A comment made that it is difficult to justify increases to charges for car parking until improvements to car parks are rolled out, due to public expectation as to the service they should be getting.	Noted. The principle behind increasing car parking charges is that those residents who use car parks should pay for them, rather than the cost being funded by <i>all</i> Council Tax payers. Income generated through car park charges is ringfenced for use in highways services.
Place Directorate – Economic Growth, Assets and Regeneration	
The committee are content with the strategic approach being taken in the area of Economic Growth, Assets and Regeneration but flag a concern around whether there are sufficient staffing levels to deliver the council’s aspirations in this area.	The importance of having sufficient staff to deliver the plan is recognised. The budget recommendations include the proposal to use £5.3m of capital receipts for the purposes of transforming the Council’s asset portfolio over the next three to five years. Much of the £5.3M will be earmarked to buy in the additional staffing and skills needed.
Place Directorate – Natural Environment and Ecology	

In order to provide transparency around the council's costs for climate change work, consideration should be given to how costs in this area and investments received from external sources, can be presented outside of the budget book.	Agreed. Officers will prepare a clearer way of explaining the Councils spending and investment on the Natural Environment and Ecology. This will be shared at a future meeting of the scrutiny committee.
The committee wish to flag up the potential risks around decisions on the council's vehicle fleet – purchase versus lease of vehicles and fuel type (electric versus hydrogen).	Noted. Officers confirmed that lease vs purchase decisions are made on a case by case basis, depending on the type of vehicle being acquired. Consideration is given to financial, environmental and technological factors.
Place Directorate – Planning	
The committee flag a concern around the national issue of a shortage of planning officers and the risk that this could potentially present to the council.	Agreed. Dorset Council's ambition is to be an employer of choice. The People Strategy has actions to support recruitment and retention
Place Directorate – Culture, Community and Customer Services (and budget generally)	
Reference is made to the detail of savings associated with other smaller council programmes - consideration to be given to the level of detail provided in future budget reports, across all budget areas, and in particular with regard to smaller service/budget areas.	Additional detail has now been provided in the budget report to Cabinet. Full detail of current budgets is available here: Budget Book - Dorset Council
Corporate Development Directorate	
The committee are content with the budget information and proposals in this area.	noted
Central Finance and Capital	
The committee support the making of representations to the Government to secure an earlier date for receipt of the Financial Settlement (October).	noted
A 3 to 5 year Financial Settlement should be sought from the Government.	agreed
Support for continued communications between portfolio holders and directorates to continue to foster a 'one-team' approach.	agreed

<p>The committee accept the inflation rate assumptions made within the budget report.</p>	<p>noted</p>
<p>The Government to be asked to apply a formula approach to funding, which has an understanding of the issues pertinent to the council and how these affect the council's finances.</p> <p>In particular the council needs to continue to lobby the Government for a better/fairer(?) deal and understanding of the financial impact on the council of providing rural services.</p>	<p>Agreed. The Leader and Senior officers will continue to impress upon Government how the national funding formula needs to more fairly reflect the rural costs of Dorset.</p>
<p>The committee suggest that cross party working groups be established as part of the budget setting process, to allow opportunity for informed consideration of budget proposals, to feed into the member budget informal sessions.</p>	<p>The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Commercial and Capital Strategy will consider the proposal in advance of the 24/25 budget process.</p>
<p>Future Finance Settlements – there is currently uncertainty around future settlements to the council and a report on the implications of this is requested to be presented to the scrutiny committee at an appropriate time.</p>	<p>agreed</p>
<p>There is a concern that the Government has not yet completed the methodology in respect of the cost of care funding and therefore councillors are not in a position to be able to scrutinise the complete picture.</p>	<p>agreed</p>
<p>Capital Programme – there is a need to continue to keep the council's Capital Programme under review in terms of its affordability and alignment with the council's priorities.</p>	<p>agreed</p>
<p>Issues raised by the People and Health Scrutiny Committee</p>	
<p>During the discussion on the budget for adult social care and housing, several committee and non-committee members felt that the council should explore providing affordable social housing.</p>	<p>noted</p>