

MINUTES OF BUDGET WORKING GROUP MEETING

HELD 22 FEBRUARY 2024

Present: Cllrs: S Atkinson (Chair), S Hore, L Jameson, S O'Rourke,

Officers: Director of Resources, Director of Economic Development and Planning, Director of Community Services, Head of Financial Services.

1 Apologies

1.1 Apologies: Cllrs: S Hirst and J Rogerson

2 Minutes of meeting held on 1 February 2024

2.1 Members approved the minutes of the last meeting of the Budget Working Group.

3 Updated Budget Forecast

3.1 The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive took members through the very latest budget forecast.

3.2 The Secretary of State for DLUHC published the Final Local Government Grant Settlement on 5 February 2024. This followed the consultation period on the Provisional Settlement which ended on 15 January 2024.

3.3 The Government had made a number of changes which result in differences compared to the Provisional Settlement.

- Rural Services Grant - increased from £126,574 to £146,559.
- New Homes Bonus - increased from £647,509 to £665,149.
- Services Grant - increased from £8,619 to £9,456.
- Funding Guarantee - increased from £710,563 to £745,029.

3.4 Alongside the Final Local Government Grant Settlement, the Government had announced the new requirement for Productivity Plans, to be published by July 2024. The plans were to cover:

- Transformation of services to make better use of resources;
- Opportunities to take advantage of advances in technology and make better use of data to inform decision making and service design;
- Ways to reduce wasteful spend within systems, including specific consideration of expenditure on consultants and discredited staff Equality, Diversity and Inclusion programmes – this does not include programmes designed to promote integration and civic pride, and counter- extremism; and
- Barriers preventing activity that government can help to reduce or remove.

3.5 Following the Final Local Government Grant Settlement, the budget forecast was updated from that reported to Special Policy and Finance Committee:

Budget Shortfall	As Spec P&F report £	After Final Grant Sett £
2024/25	0	0
2025/26	174,298	153,655
2026/27	1,652,055	1,629,544
2027/28	1,908,131	1,883,705
2028/29	2,192,335	2,165,945
Total shortfall to be funded	5,926,819	5,832,849

4 Savings Plan

- 4.1 As previously reported to members, the council's external auditors had made a key recommendation in their Annual Audit Report (AAR) for the Council to prepare and agree a savings plan.
- 4.2 An outline proposal for what the council's Savings Plan may look like was presented to members for consideration.
- 4.3 There was discussion around the need for a balance across both savings and additional income. It was recognised that further work was needed and this was to be discussed further at a future meeting of the Budget Working Group.

5 Improvements to Capital Progress Reporting

- 5.1 At the meeting of Special Policy and Finance Committee, as well as approving the capital programme, members added a further recommendation due to concerns around the progression of schemes in the capital programme, schemes being moved between years, and the level of scheme slippage experienced in recent years.
- 5.2 As a result, members were presented with proposals for changes to what is reported to service committees on scheme progress. It was proposed that for future reports there would be greater focus on scheme progress in the Annex to the report, with a form being completed by the relevant Head of Service, detailing:
 - Progress Status
 - Reasons for the Progress Status
 - Information on Key Tasks and Milestones and Progress with these
 - Risk and Issues and how these are being addressed.
 - Any actions needed to keep the scheme on track.
- 5.3 Members were presented with a new proposed template for the reporting of progress on capital programme schemes to committees and were supportive.

6 Date of Next Meeting

- 6.1 The meeting with representatives of non-Domestic Ratepayers had been arranged for 26 February 2024
- 6.2 The next meeting of the Budget Working Group would be arranged separately for a date yet to be confirmed.