

# MINUTES OF BUDGET WORKING GROUP MEETING

HELD 11 JULY 2024

Present: Cllrs: S Atkinson (Chair), S Hore, L Jameson, S O'Rourke and M Peplow.

Officers: Chief Executive, 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 11 April 2024**

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

## **3 Overall Capital Outturn 2023/24**

3.1 Members were taken through the final outturn position for the capital programme for 2023/24.

3.2 The revised estimate capital programme was £3,189,580. The outturn position was £2,068,212, meaning a total variance of £1,121,368 and of this:

- £1,074,286 was unspent budget on schemes not completed at year-end and was slippage from the 2023/24 financial in to the 2024/25 financial year; and
- £47,082 related to net underspends on schemes completed in-year.

3.3 The size of the capital programme was discussed, as was the availability of staffing resources to progress schemes.

3.4 Members also reflected on the large proportion of the capital programme that had been moved to the 2024/25 financial year when the capital programme was revised.

## **4 Overall Revenue Outturn 2023/24**

4.1 Members were taken through the overall revenue outturn for the council, covering all committees. Full details of individual variances at year end were to be reported to service committees in the August/September round of meetings.

4.2 The report gave detailed information covering General Fund outturn, Impact on General Fund balances and Earmarked Reserves, Business Rates and the Collection Fund.

4.3 The final position showed a surplus of £177k during the year, compared with the Revised Estimate which showed a surplus of £5k and the Original Estimate which had predicted a deficit of £299k.

4.4 The impact of the movements on earmarked reserves was detailed and shown against the outturn position.

4.5 General Fund balances stood at £2.896m after adding the surplus for the year of £177k

4.6 Earmarked Reserves stood at £15.645m as at 31 March 2024.

4.7 There was an overall surplus on the Collection Fund of £1.831m made up of a surplus for council tax of £926k and a surplus in respect of business rates of £905k.

## **5 RVBC Productivity Plan**

5.1 A draft Productivity Plan had been produced in response to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) review of productivity in local government, as outlined in the Local Government Finance Settlement 2024/25

5.2 The Productivity Plan was arranged around the four themes suggested by the Government:

- a) transformation of services to make better use of resources,
- b) opportunities to take advantage of advances in technology and make better use of data to inform decision making, service design and use of resources,
- c) ways to reduce wasteful spend and improving efficiency,

d) barriers preventing activity that Government can help to reduce or remove.

5.3 Members were very supportive of the document that had been produced and there was a discussion around some further points to include, and a suggestion to create an executive summary at the beginning of the document.

5.4 It was agreed that the document would be amended and then circulated for any additional comment and approval before being submitted to the government and being published on the council's website by 19 July 2024.

## **6 Update – Clitheroe Castle Improvement Scheme**

6.1 A position statement had been provided by the Director of Community Services which outlined the current status of:

- Castle Keep
- Castle Museum
- Atrium Café
- Castle Grounds
- Castle Public Realm Works
- Green Flag Award

6.2 The statement also discussed the next steps

- Agreeing an overall vision for the castle grounds encapsulating the elements above.
- Progressing works to the Castle Keep as early as possible (August Committee).
- Finalising options for the castle museum and the Atrium Café (October Committee).
- Having further discussions with the National Lottery regarding developing an overall Place Based Scheme for the Grounds
- Recommend to Community Committee that the Council apply for a Green Flag Award for the Castle Grounds in 2025.

6.3 Members discussed the proposals and also the ability to attract further funding.

6.4 It was agreed that improvements were needed in respect of the street furniture and lighting within the park, including better lighting of the Castle Keep and ramps.

6.5 It was explained that with regard to the works on the Castle Keep, the funding priority was with stabilising the castle which may mean that other elements of work may not be able to be done.

6.6 The difficulties in meeting the needs of all users of the castle grounds was discussed.

## **7 Council Tax Premiums**

7.1 A report was provided to members on the powers that Billing Authorities have in order to charge Council Tax premiums on empty properties and second homes so that members could consider whether to change the Council's current policy.

7.2 The report included a Government Research Briefing on Council Tax and empty properties.

7.3 After much discussion it was concluded that there was no evidence that the introduction of premiums reduces the number of empty homes and second homes as there was potential to attempt to avoid the charges. The negligible financial benefit to the council was also discussed.

7.4 At this time, there was no appetite to change the Council's current Council Tax discounts and premiums, but it was suggested that the position should be kept under review.

## **8 Any Other Business**

8.1 There were no major items of other business.