

Response to Budget & Resources Scrutiny Committee Recommendations

I would like to thank the Budget and Resources Scrutiny Committee for the hours they have put into this review.

I have set out our responses to their recommendations below:

Cabinet Response to January Report

COMMUNITY SAFETY

1. P022-N: Management Plan for Travellers' Sites [Neighbourhood Officer] (£47k)

OP13-N: Management Plan for Travellers' Sites [Improved Environmental Standards] (£43k)

That the Committee supports the appointment of a Gypsy and Traveller Neighbourhood Officer to work with occupiers of the sites at Calverton Lane and Willen Road together with the plans to improve the facilities at both sites and hopes that this will lead to a more positive relationship between the Council and residents on those sites.

Response: *Comments are duly noted.*

RESOURCES

2. P054-N: Investment Interest Income (£906k)

That the Committee, whilst recognising the difficulties in the financial markets, asks that the Treasury Management Team uses its best endeavours to maximise income in line with the current regulatory constraints.

Response: *The Council will continue to operate within the Treasury Management Prudential Code prioritising security over yield, but will endeavour to improve financial returns where prudent to do so.*

3. P052-N: Sponsorship Income (£260k)

That the Committee recommends the Council explores opportunities to maximise the use of advertising space available on roundabout signs and bus shelters by considering a reduced rate to businesses during 2021/22 in anticipation of business picking up again in 2022/23, or even a zero rate for businesses currently struggling financially, and which would produce some income to mitigate against this pressure.

Response: *Noted and this will be explored and confirmed.*

4. S056-L: Digital Transformation and Customer Services (-£93k)

S065-N: Facilities Rationalisation (-£250k)

That the Committee considered, given the possible need to further enhance the Civic Offices in view of the eventual relocation of staff from satellite offices and changes to home working patterns, that these savings may be too ambitious for 2021/22. Due to possible additional costs needed to facilitate the proposed changes in ways of working, delivering services and maintaining the productivity of home working, the level of any possible savings was an unknown quantity, requiring regular monitoring by senior management at the Council.

Response: *Agreed - All planned savings will be tracked, monitored and reported through to Cabinet as part of our regular financial monitoring reports each quarter.*

CLIMATE AND SUSTAINABILITY

5. S061-L: Closure of the Theatre Car Park (£71k)

That the Committee notes the closure of the Theatre Car Park was agreed last year as a saving and that this sum is dealing with the cost of the rateable position of the facility. However, the Committee urges the Council to make every effort to dispose of the building as quickly and as prudently as possible to minimise the potential for it to become an eyesore and a community safety issue.

Response: *Noted, we plan to market this asset promptly, although the timing of this will be reviewed in line with current market conditions.*

6. S020-N: Introduction of Demand Responsive Travel Service (-£789k)

a) That as this is a new, pioneering initiative, without a proven track record locally, the Committee wonders whether the most appropriate risk rating has been allocated to this proposal.

b) That the Committee further recommends that the scheme is regularly monitored to maintain the correct risk level in place in order to ensure the potential of the scheme can be realised as the Committee is concerned not just for the financial impact of the scheme failing but also the social impact on residents who need to rely on bus services to move round the borough.

Response: *Agreed, also given the current pandemic situation this will be reconsidered as amber. The scheme will be reviewed regularly, and the Strategic Placemaking Scrutiny Committee will receive an update at the end of 2021.*

7. Flooding

That the Committee considers, in light of the localised flooding during the Christmas 2020 period and the severe weather warnings for Storm Christophe which were in place during the third week of January, the Council must seriously consider, as a matter of urgency, carrying out flood defence plans which have already been agreed, but not yet implemented, as well as work to review the causes of a number of recent flooding incidents in the borough and assessing what further flood defence work may need to be carried out.

Response: *Noted. We await the outcomes of the Section 19 reports due by the end of February 2021 and we will act on the recommendations. We are also with the EA to accelerate flooding related capital programmes (informed by the Section 19 report), including the sourcing of additional funding.*

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

8. OP001-N: Supplementary Schools and Gypsy, Roma Traveller (£39k)

That consideration be given to using some of the funding set out in Annex R (One-off Additional Items) of the budget papers to cover this pressure.

Response: *This one-off pressure is currently to be funded from unallocated social care funding.*

9. S010-N: School Improvement Service (-£200k)

That while understanding the rationale of developing a new way of schools sharing good practice and applauding the concentration of the service on Milton Keynes, the Committee would like to put on record that it considers there is still a level of risk, albeit low, which could jeopardise the aim that all schools in MK are graded as good.

Response: *Comments are noted. The focus of the service will remain in prioritising Good and Outstanding Gradings in the overall effectiveness of our MK schools and although this proposal may reduce some level of strategic capacity, a different approach to improving outcomes and increasing educational effectiveness in a systemic way is considered to best enable a shared responsibility across the whole Education partnership for achieving good educational outcomes for children and settings.*

10. S009-N: Youth Offending Team (-£74k)

That following discussion at the meeting, the Committee recognised that this saving was the result of new ways of working, that achieving the proposed saving was possible with little impact on the services provided and that an effective Youth Offending Team could be maintained.

Response: Noted

11. S011-N: Children's Services Management Changes (-£248k)

That the Committee was encouraged by the robust response of the Cabinet Member to its concerns about the possible effects of this reduction on the level of service delivery and good management practice across the whole of Children's Services. The Committee suggests that future monitoring of the effects of these changes be referred to the Scrutiny Management Committee for allocation into the 2021/22 Scrutiny Work Programme.

Response: Agreed

CAPITAL PROGRAMME

12. That the Capital Programme is regularly monitored to ensure that where approved schemes have been removed from the schedule in-year, they can be re-instated when necessary so that delays to important works such as the flood defences referred to in Recommendation 7 can be avoided in future.

Response: Agreed this will be reported through as part of our quarterly financial report to Cabinet.

ECONOMY AND CULTURE

13. OP005-L: Women's European Football Championships (£25k)

That the Committee commends the work done to secure Milton Keynes as one of the venues for the Women's European Football Championships and looks forward to the success of this event.

Response: Noted

PUBLIC REALM AND HOUSING SERVICES

14. P032-L: Demographic Growth (Landscaping) (£32k)

That the Committee requests that it receives a report during 2021 (and in time for the preparation of the 2022/23 draft budget) setting out the level of commuted sums the Council receives or holds for landscape maintenance and how this money is allocated and spent so that it has a better understanding of why this is recurring pressure each year.

Response: *Agreed*

15. P040-N: Contamination of Recycling at the MRF (£240k)

a) That the Cabinet notes that some members of the Committee considered this may be a contractual issue that required further investigation.

b) That in addition, the Committee recommends the Council develops a thorough education campaign for the residents of Milton Keynes on how to recycle appropriate items correctly using all possible means, such as direct contact, social media etc, and including any lessons learned from the current waste bin pilot on how contamination of recycling can be reduced.

Response: *Noted. There is no contractual issue with the MRF operation, this has been extensively reviewed in conjunction with finance and legal. We will continue with educational campaigns in line with the COVID-19 protocols, such as 'eco-warriors' and reconsider of planned communications in 21/22 in light of the ongoing lockdown, the waste collection trial and any future required lockdowns, which impact significantly on waste. A £150K communications programme with Keep Britain Tidy is due to commence in February that was delayed from last year and this will work to challenge behaviour and communicate clear contamination messages in an innovative way.*

16. P046-N: Gully Emptying (£50k)

OP011N: Gully Emptying (£100k)

That the Committee welcomes the investment in developing an intelligence led approach to gully cleansing that takes into account the varying risk profiles of individual gullies.

Response: *Noted*

17. OP14-Pest Control Maintenance and Management (£50k)

That whilst acknowledging the particularly severe problem of rat infestation in Central Milton Keynes and the so-called "doughnut" estates, this work is expanded

and becomes a base budget item to enable the Council to future proof its ability to offer a workable, borough-wide solution, to the infestations occurring at many local centres beyond the immediate central area. The Committee considered that it was important to maintain the impetus of this project by incorporating it into the Council's regular scheme of neighbourhood maintenance so as to prevent the problem of infestations escalating again, giving rise to the necessity to find one-off funding in future years.

Response: : *Noted. The evidence and data from these activities within 20/21 and 21/22 will be collated to make a case for future years.*

18. HP07: Maintenance and Upkeep of Local Areas (£275k)

That the Committee welcomed the news that funding had also been allocated within this Housing Revenue Account budget to tackle the issue of pest control on council estates.

Response: *Noted*

19. S068-N: Booking System at Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs) (-£150k)

S017-N: Charging for Non-Household Waste at HWRCs (-£50k)

That the Committee welcomes the proposed savings by permanently extending the on-line booking system introduced 2020/21 as part Covid-19 social distancing measures and is pleased to learn that feedback on the use of the booking system has been generally positive.

Whilst the Committee was pleased that the vast majority of residents were successfully using the new appointment system to dispose of their household waste properly, it remained concerned that a small number of individuals might use the new system as a reason to engage in illegal fly-tipping, the costs of which could negate any savings.

The Committee was also concerned that the introduction of charges for non-household waste being deposited at the HWRCs could also exacerbate the issue of fly-tipping.

Response: *Noted and we will keep this under review. The Council has invested in CCTV to work on pursuing Flytippers as a priority and the Environmental Crime Unit will be working on a Flytipping Action Plan in coordination with the portfolio holder and Head of Service.*

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

20. P009-N: Learning Disability (Covid-19) (£941K)

P010-N: Internal Day Care Income (Covid-19) (£315k)

P011-N: Care Home Market Sustainability (Covid-19) (£388k)

That in the event of lockdown measures easing, which enables the resumption of these services, any changes to the above listed pressures are reported to the Budget and Resources Scrutiny Committee for further scrutiny.

Response: *Agreed*

21. OP003-L: Domestic Abuse Co-ordination Officer (£50k)

That consideration be given to making this a permanent role and base-budget item in view of the evidence that the Council is receiving up to 21 referrals a month requiring such expert assistance.

Response: *This post works alongside the Domestic Abuse Partnership Board and the focus of work is the Action Plan delivery in the new Strategy. Operational expert assistance is delivered by the new Domestic Abuse roles in the Homelessness Services and Adult and Childrens Safeguarding Services. We will review the need for this officer role in advance of the 2022/23 budget.*

FUTURE WORK BY THE BUDGET AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

22. "Annex R" Progress Reporting

That the Budget and Resources Scrutiny Committee receives an information item at each meeting during 2021/22 tracking progress against various projects outlined in "Annex R".

Response: *Agreed*

23. S039-N: Legal Services (-£64k)

That the Director of Law and Governance brings a report to a meeting of the Budget and Resources Scrutiny Committee during 2021/22 illustrating that the savings envisaged from the reduction in the use of external legal services are being made and that they are on track to meet or even exceed the predicted £64k saving.

Response: *Agreed*

24. P032-L: Demographic Growth (Landscaping) (£32k)

That the Committee receives, at its September 2021 meeting, a report on the work requested in Recommendation 14 on why demographic growth in relation to landscaping work is a perennial pressure in the Council's annual budget.

Response: *Agreed*

25. P009-N: Learning Disability (Covid-19) (£941K)

P010-N: Internal Day Care Income (Covid-19) (£315k)

P011-N: Care Home Market Sustainability (Covid-19) (£388k)

That the Committee receives an update on these pressures, at an appropriate meeting during 2021/22, if the situation in relation to the above changes.

Response: *Agreed*

26. S068-N: Booking System at Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs) (-£150k)

S017-N: Charging for Non-Household Waste at HWRCs (-£50k)

That once the emergency, pandemic measures have been lifted, the Committee receives a report on progress after 6 months of normal operation at the HWRCs on whether or not these savings are being achieved and the benefits of the booking system being maintained.

Response: *Agreed*

PROCEDURAL

27. Best Practice

That Councillor Nolan and the staff in Children's Services be congratulated for their excellent Business Case for OP001. The Committee recommends that this particular Business Case should be used as an exemplar of good practice by all directorates in the future.

Response: *Noted and agreed*