

Cabinet Committee Report to Full Council Thursday 18 April 2024

On Thursday 8 February 2024 the committee considered the following items

I. FORWARD PLAN

Cabinet noted the Forward Plan.

2. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

1) Question received from Jeffrey Steers.

The proposed 24/25 capital budget earmarks £8 million for provision of leisure, education and business facilities and a further £1.95 million for regeneration. What capital investment projects in Newent will be funded from these amounts?

Response

Thank you for your question, Annex D of the Revenue and Capital Budget 2024-25 report at item nine on tonight's agenda gives details of the proposed capital programme. The scheme description for the £8 million earmarked for provision of leisure, education and business facilities refers to the Five Acres project and is funded from the Government grant achieved specifically for this project.

The scheme narrative for the £1.95 million reads Property Purchase, Cinderford and this refers to the acquisition and build of our waste depot, in preparation for the new waste and recycling contract with Ubico, from August 2024.

No capital projects in Newent will therefore be funded from these specific amounts in the capital programme.

2) Question received from Karen Cockfield.

County Cllr McFarling has recently declared in an email that unless the increased car park charges are enforced to generate a 200k annual profit then the car parks may well need to be sold off by the council to avoid bankruptcy -and a number of essential services would have to be curbed or withdrawn. As the council's finances are that precarious that a reported 15k annual deficit on car parks running costs will bankrupt the council, the public are owed a statutory right to examine the financial detail to substantiate these claims and respond accordingly. CMF has also stated that the public would be given another 3-4 weeks to comment on the amended budget proposal. I believe as it stands the council are in breach of Sect 8 and 12 of their undertakings over consultation and equality. Please confirm that you have checked with the head of legal svcs of the GCC and will extend the consultation period accordingly whilst the public are given this latest amended budget and calculations to comment on.

Response

Thank you for your question, the Consultation will not be reopened and reran. This Council is required by statute to set a legal budget by the 11th of March 2024 and full Council is set

for the 22nd of February 2024. An Equalities Impact Assessment will be included in this final report. These legal requirements and costs of delay are included in the Budget paper. There were record number of responses to the budget consultation compared to 2023/2024 when the same process was followed. This was a 5700% increase on the previous year. Details of the consultation process have clearly been set in the December cabinet report when the draft budget was presented. These were widely publicised in the local media (including a free hard copy of a newspaper) as well as a local communication campaign. There was a varied method of responses received including emails, letters and a petition.

- 1) There have been public meetings where the draft budget proposals were discussed and where public questions could have been asked. These are as follows:

9th of November 2023 –Cabinet when budget timetable and plan was published and discussed.

7th of December 2023 –Cabinet when the draft budget proposals were approved for consultation.

11th of January 2024 –Overview and Scrutiny committee where the draft budget proposals were discussed.

The current budget proposals have also changed significantly around the car parking since the consultation closed which demonstrates that the Council has duly considered responses and options.

The current MTFs which is published in today's agenda show as that this Council has a £2.8m funding gap to find in the next 5 years if the local government settlement reduces funding as expected. Therefore, as stated in the MTFs, tough decisions are needed now and into the future if this Council is not to follow other local councils in declaring a Section 114 Notice. We are currently not in this territory however careful financial management is needed going forward.

The legal service for Forest of Dean District Council are aware of the concerns that you have raised.

3. Member Questions

There were no member questions.

4. COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION FOR CARE LEAVERS

Councillor Andy Moore, Cabinet member for Finance presented report F.667 to consider proposals to extend the age that Care Leavers can receive a reduction in Council Tax from 21 years to 25 years.

Resolved, that Cabinet recommends to Full Council:

1. To extend the age that a care leaver can receive a reduction in their council tax from 21 years to 25 years;
2. To include those care leavers from outside of Gloucestershire County within the offer;

3. To approve the amended Eligibility Criteria as set out in Annex A

Agreed by assent.

5. REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET 2024-2025 AND PAY POLICY

Councillor Andy Moore, Cabinet Member for Finance presented report F.668. The report summarised the Cabinet's final budget proposals and Pay Policy Statement for 2024-2025. The budget projections had been prepared taking in to account the provisional local government finance settlement figures released on 18 December 2023 and additional support given on 24 January 2024. The final figures were not expected before publication of the report but were not expected to change significantly from the provisional figures and additional support update.

Resolved, That Cabinet recommends that Full Council considers and approves:

- a) the final budget proposals including a proposed council tax for the services provided by Forest of Dean District Council of £205.80 (a £5.96 increase which equates to 2.99% based on a Band D property) for 2024-2025, summarised at Annex A
- b) the proposed savings, outlined in Section 5.11 and Annex B;
- c) the growth proposals, including one off initiatives in Section 5.12 and Annex C;
- d) the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) outlined in Section 5 and Annex J;
- e) the use of reserves and general balances and note the projected level of reserves as detailed at Annex E;
- f) the proposed capital programme at Annex D;
- g) the S106 Balances and proposed projected uses in 2024-2025 at Annex F;
- h) the proposed fees and charges for 2024-2025 at Annex I;
- i) the proposed usage of the planned maintenance reserve and ICT maintenance reserve (note the current 5 year plan) at Annexes G and H;
- j) the Pay Policy Statement for 2024-2025 at Annex K;
- k) note that the Council will remain in the Gloucestershire Business Rates Pool for the financial year 2023-2024 as per Section 4.10 to 4.13

Agreed by assent.

6. FINANCIAL STRATEGIES 2024 - 2025

Councillor Andy Moore, Cabinet Member for Finance presented report F.669. The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Prudential Code requires the Council to consider and approve a Capital Strategy annually in advance of the forthcoming year. Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC) statutory guidance on treasury management requires separate annual Investment and Treasury Management Strategies to be considered. The Council has adopted and complies with the CIPFA Code of Practice on Treasury Management and the Prudential Code ensuring best practice is maintained.

Resolved, that Cabinet recommends that Full Council approves:

a) *all of the financial strategies in Annex A to E*

Agreed by assent.