

**Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on 7 February 2023
and Budget Review Group Meeting 8 February 2023**

**Summary of Comments made on the Cabinet Agenda for
Thursday 9 February 2023**

5 Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme

The Budget Review Group supported the recommendations, in doing so recognising the administration burden for the Council of chasing the demand for any percentage of Council Tax to be paid against the balance of lost income.

The Group encouraged the Cabinet to ensure the message on eligibility is communicated clearly and simply to all residents and targeted to those who the Council consider may be eligible.

The Group welcomed the assurance from the Portfolio Holder to provide, to District Councillors, a one page eligibility sheet so they can help direct/filter enquiries.

The Group highlighted that any communication that is issued should highlight the process for making a claim, including an in person option.

The Group requested that all members are provided a breakdown of the number of properties within each Council Tax Band to supplement the Table as set out in 1.4.

6 Council Tax Support Fund

The Budget Review Group supported the recommendations in the report.

7 General Fund Revenue and Capital Budget

The Budget Review Group did not take a formal view on supporting or not the budget proposals.

The Group raised a number of points that the Cabinet and Council should take into consideration when finalising the budget and Council Tax setting for the 2023/24 financial year:

- The Council only has sufficient reserves for about two years (23/24 and 24/25) to sustain projected deficit of £3.5million.
- The change management strategy, from 24/25 onwards, was a key with proposing a positive budget effect of £1.5million recurring reducing the demand on Council reserves.
- Not increasing Council tax had a net adverse effect on the budget of just under £300,000 per annum for the Council.
- Assumptions had been in the budgeting on a lower anticipated number of new homes and inflation based on OBR, Government and advisors.
- Budget assumes no government funding in 24/25 but chancellor has indicated (with no detail or figures) this will not be the case.

- CEAP reserve of £500k per annum has not been increased to allow for inflation and would be used to fund £70k work on Bio Diversity (as set on Cabinet agenda).
- There is no further news on the business rate retention reset proposal.

The Group noted that:

- Further details of the proposed £160k for Abbey Fields Cycle route will be shared with all Councillors.
- There was an error on the totalling in Appendix 5b and a revised one would be circulated to all Councillors.
- Officers would share the split of right to buy receipts between the one to one budget and any purpose capital budget.
- Officers would share with all Councillors the assumptions & calculations that lead to the MTFS forecasts.

8 HRA Budget and Rent Setting

The Budget Review Group supported the recommendations in the report.

The Group were concerned that while the HRA was on target for delivering its plans for 2023/24, in the following financial years the Council may have to reduce the ambitions in terms of development, decarbonising, decent home standards and support to customers, because of the impact in rental income reduction. While at this time there is not a proposal for cuts at this time if the restrictions on rent continue there may be a need to.

The Group welcomed the agreement that the Head of Housing would share contact details of the Housing Team Financial Inclusion Officers with all councillors to help them filter and direct cases

10. Relocation of Office Accommodation and the Provision of Public Facing Access to Council Services

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee thanked officers for their work on the report and the project. Members were satisfied that the proposals would provide access to Council services and facilities for the most vulnerable, however more detail was requested on how more disruptive visitors would be controlled, and how the space as a whole would operate.

The Committee requested that it be provided with a report six months' post-opening to ensure that the needs of residents were being met.

11. Riverside House Disposal Options

The Committee thanked officers for their work and noted the report.

13. Warwick District Council Change Management Programme

Overview & Scrutiny Committee Members were conscious of the potential impact of the proposals on the workforce and wished to be kept informed on staff satisfaction levels and wellbeing.

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee recommend that:

1. Aspects of wellbeing are included in the Terms of Reference programme; and
2. Members are involved in helping to shape the programme prior to the elections in May (the appropriate PAB was suggested as the means for this to happen).

The Cabinet is required to vote on this because it forms a recommendation to it.

16. Significant Business Risk Register

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee asked the Deputy Chief Executive to liaise with the Audit & Risk Manager to request that the next SBRR report contained a summary of risk movement detailing why changes to risk rating had occurred from the previous evaluation. The SBRR would be added to the Committee's Work Programme as a standing item for call-in off the agenda for Cabinet.

The Committee thanked officers for their work on the report and drew emphasis on the need for future Councillors to receive a good level of financial training to help with their responsibility to scrutinise financial reports.

The Committee enquired whether the new entry in Risk 16 referring to "Working with partners to address local risks – e.g., Severn Trent Water on water quality issues caused by storm overflows" would be better placed under Risk 17 because it did not have much to do with carbon neutrality.

Under Risk 17 it was noted that the wording had changed slightly to state "colder changes and increased rain fall/flooding". The Committee noted that the weather had not become really cold and suggested "greater variability in seasonal temperatures" might be a more apt description to use rather than "colder changes".