

Minutes of the meeting of the Budget & Resources Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday 17 January 2023 at 19:00hrs

Present: Councillor Hume (Chair)
Councillors Wardle, Cannon, Geary, Imran, M Khan, Long (In place of N Khan) and Taylor

Apologies: Councillor N Khan (Councillor Long substituting), Councillor Clarke

Officers: E Richardson (Overview and Scrutiny Officer)

Witness: Councillor Marland

Also Present: Councillor Clarke observing via Teams
L Wheaton (Political Assistant)

BR34 Disclosures of Interest

Councillor M Khan advised that he had a housing company which provided private sector accommodation to the Council.

BR35 Draft Council Budget 2023/24 and Medium Term Financial Plan 2023/24 to 2026/27

Councillor Marland thanked the Committee for giving him the opportunity to discuss the Cabinet's One-off proposals for the 2023-24 budget. He advised that Cabinet's overall strategy to improve the lives of the residents of Milton Keynes had not changed even though the Council's financial position had changed since he last spoke to the Committee in October, due to the Government's fiscal policies.

He predicted that the Council was on course to produce balanced budgets in 2023-24 and 2024-25 due to the proposed increase in Council Tax, provided inflation stayed at no more than 9%. It wouldn't be prudent to try and balance the Council's budget based on one-off government funding, but it did give some leeway for extra funding to put into a number of political priorities.

Councillor Marland outlined the rationale for a number of the priorities, particularly the cost of living support, homeowner mortgage interest relief fund and economic development.

The Committee then discussed the following items in more detail with Councillor Marland:

OP23-18N & 19N Youth Counselling & Young Peoples' Mental Health - £25K and 50k

This was bridging funding to support additional service demands whilst the Council talked to the Integrated Care Board about NHS funding for young peoples' counselling and mental health services.

OP23-22 Parish Support Fund - £150k

Targetted support for the 10 most deprived parishes in Milton Keynes. Previous funding ad been spread equally across all parishes.

OP23-21N Home-Owner Mortgage Interest Rate Relief Fund - £250k

A discretionary scheme to provide emergency cover for interest rate rises by providing some breathing space for those most in need. Details of how the scheme would operate were still being worked out, but Milton Keynes was the first local authority to offer such a scheme. The Citizens' Advice Bureau already had the powers to offer help with mortgage rate rises and this would extend the support available to struggling residents.

OP23-23N Milton Keynes International Festival - £50k

Committee queried the increase to £300k for 2025/26 and were advised that this was to cover the anticipated increase in costs to run the festival.

OP23- 4N City of Code and Light - £40k

Additional funding to support the funding of the event by the Arts Council.

OP23-26N Council Champion Funding - £6k

Extra funding to support projects identified as part of the Ward Based Budget Scheme.

OP23-27N New City Plan Software - £75k

Funding for platform over and above the normal level of consultation as MK Gateway had raised the bar on community engagement.

OP23-30N High Street Support -£100k

Fund to support events in High Streets such as food festivals or the Olney Pancake Race, in order to encourage local footfall, improve the public realm and provide long term sustainability.

Committee requested that it received an update in the autumn on how the scheme was working and on what the money had been spent.

OP23-32N Economic Development - £100k

Funding for additional staff to promote the economic development of Milton Keynes. Committee suggested that clearer wording be used in the final budget papers so that the item could be easily understood.

OP23-34N Footpaths - £250k

Funding for a matrix which would be used to assess the degradation of

footpaths and redways and how to spend the repairs money most effectively.

RESOLVED –

That Councillor Marland be thanked for his contribution to the Committee's consideration of the 2023/34 draft budget proposals.

BR36

Report to Cabinet

The Committee then reviewed the draft report to Cabinet page by page making any necessary changes, amendments or corrections and agreeing and finalising the recommendations to be put to Cabinet at its meeting on 7 February.

RESOLVED –

That the Committee's recommendations on the draft 2023/24 budget reductions, savings and income generation proposals be included in its report to Cabinet on 7 February 2023.