

Annex B (part A)

Response to Budget & Resources Scrutiny Committee Recommendations (October Report)

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 October Report

General

1. That any in-year changes to the Council's Fees and Charges be notified to the Committee for information, as and when these occur.

Response: We will provide updates as appropriate to the Committee of any proposed changes to existing fees and charges, including where these are made during the financial year.

2. That as part of its ongoing remit to scrutinise the Council's resources, the Committee receives, as part of the regular in-year reporting process, updates on any staff savings being made.

Response: Agreed.

3. That while the proposed *Fairer Cost of Care* scheme remains cost neutral to the Council, any operational scrutiny will be in the remit of the Health and Adult Social Care Committee.

Response: Noted

4. That any changes to the cost neutral position of *Fairer Cost of Care* are brought back to the Budget and Resources Committee for further scrutiny.

Response: Agreed. We will confirm the position once the government have made a final decision and any funding decisions are known.

5. That the Committee welcomed the Council's increased use of dynamic, rather than framework, tendering / contract processes, wherever it provides the Council with better value for money when letting contracts

Response: Noted

6. That all parts of the Council be encouraged to consider the most appropriate approach to the tendering and contract process on a case by case basis to ensure the Council is getting best value for money.

Response: Noted. A number of different Council services are currently using this system.

Base Budget Pressures

7. **Homeless Prevention and Access (P23-5L)**

The Committee welcomed the constant monitoring of the changing financial position in relation to this item and approved the spend to save approach to try and keep demand down by the purchase of suitable accommodation to get rough sleepers off the streets.

Response: Noted. A further update will be provided in January 2023.

8. **Home to School Transport (P23-6L)**

- a) That in order to reduce Home to School Transport costs, the Council revisits the approach taken during 2016/17 when the intervention of a specialist Home to School Transport Task Force significantly reduced the costs in this budget.
- b) That in order to save on administrative costs, consideration be given to issuing bus passes for the rural schools' bus service every 3-4 years rather than annually.
- c) That consideration be given to selling any spare seat space on the rural schools' bus services to others, such as post-16 students perhaps or even local teachers, who would benefit from using the same route.
- d) That any future forecasting against the growth profile for Milton Keynes in relation to the provision of special needs education allows for the continued organic growth of the city as people continue to move in from other areas?

Response:

A) A multi-service project team is already in place reviewing HTST and the annual commissioning cycle, given that it is a high-risk budget / area of spend. The project team has built on the work of the previous task force, meaning that despite many additional challenges regarding the provision of home to school transport and a significant

rise in demand, the average cost per child receiving HTST support in Milton Keynes is lower now than it was in 2017/18, and the HTST cost per capita for children under 16 is significantly less the national average.

B & C) The service is happy to progress this recommendation and consider potential efficiency savings that can be achieved verses any risks.

D) The service recognises the need to ensure future budget forecasting aligns with the growth profile for Milton Keynes and the requirement for further special needs education, as well as the need for forecasts to be continually reviewed and amended in line with any changes that affect the demand for HTST provision (such as the impact of Covid on demand for specialist SEND provision).

9. **Creation of a Contextual Safeguarding Hub Team (P23-11N)**

- a) The Committee welcomed the proposed establishment of the Contextual Safeguarding Hub Team and urges the Council to proceed with this initiative as soon as practicable, and not wait for final budget approval in February 2023.
- b) That the Children's Services Team bring a report back to the relevant scrutiny Committee (Children and Young People) on the progress of the new Hub after it has been operational for 18 months.

Response: Cabinet thanks the Committee for its supportive stance on the Contextual Safeguarding Hub and have asked Officers to begin the steps to implement this as soon as practicably possible. A report will be brought back to the Children and Young People Committee within 18 months of full operation.

10. **Demographic Growth (Landscape) (P23-20L)**

That the Committee, as part of its further draft 2023/24 scrutiny work in January 2023 carries out a comparison between costs and savings in the landscaping budget.

Response: Cabinet notes this work on the Committees future work programme.

11. **Azure (P23-23N)**

That the Committee notes the moving of the Council's IT servers from Northampton to the MS Azure Data Centre and agrees that this is the right methodology to achieve this.

Response: Noted.

12. **Commissioning 2023: Recycling Income / Costs (P23-27L / P23-28L)**

- a) That as part of the next phase of improvements to Waste Management in Milton Keynes, detailed consideration be given to the collection and processing of green/organic waste and how this can be processed in the most sustainable way possible.
- b) That when this work has been done, a report on the separation and processing of green/organic waste be presented to the Scrutiny Management Committee for decision on whether further scrutiny on this aspect of waste management should be undertaken.

Response: Noted. Both the Finance and Environment & Waste teams recognise the importance of focusing on the organics service as an area to pursue a balance between best value and service provision to residents. The next phase of Commissioning will include a review of both collection, processing and disposal of Organic Waste. A report containing options for future delivery of the service aggregated against the cost of the current service, impact of recycling rate and the existing fleet. This report will be available in Q4 2023/24. Any profiled savings in the report would be deliverable within the current MTFP.

One-off Pressures

13. **Funding for Festival of Creative Urban Living (OP23-6L)**

That as £50k is allocated every year to support alternating festivals, consideration be given to putting the £50k into the base budget each year as ongoing support for these events in order to make the accounting process more transparent.

Response: Cabinet notes the above recommendation and will consider this alongside other pressures and budget movements as part of its draft budget report.

14. **In-House Academies (P23-25N[Planning]) & (OP23-10N [Legal])**

- a) That the Cabinet explores ways of retaining for the long term those staff trained as part of the Council's in-house academy programmes so that their skills are not lost to the benefit of Milton Keynes.
- b) That the Cabinet, with the help of the Finance Team and senior officers in the relevant departments, explores whether the use of the Apprenticeship Levy, which limits the Council's ability to retain the services of newly trained staff is the most sustainable way to fund the academies.

Response: Cabinet welcomes the support of the Committee in recognising the importance of establishing an in-house academy programme for Planning and Legal to develop and retain new talent to meet the future needs of our growing City and to meet the skills shortages in these areas. Cabinet will continue to explore further opportunities and as part of this evaluate the use of the Apprenticeship Levy scheme.

15. **Local Elections (OP23-11L)**

That as part of the proposed Community Governance Review the possibility of moving to all-out elections every four years be discussed with political group leaders as such a move could potentially save £300k for 2 years in the 4-year election cycle.

Response: Noted

16. **Major Projects (OP23-16L)**

That the provision of increased staff support for major projects be reviewed after three years to assess the benefit to the Council's ability to deliver major projects and whether the provision should be continued.

Response: Agreed