

Cherwell District Council

Budget Planning Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Budget Planning Committee held at Bodicote House, Bodicote, Banbury, Oxon OX15 4AA, on 29 October 2024 at 6.30 pm

Present:

Councillor Edward Fraser Reeves (Chairman)
Councillor Matt Hodgson (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Gordon Blakeway
Councillor Andrew Crichton
Councillor Frank Ideh
Councillor Rob Pattenden
Councillor David Rogers
Councillor Les Sibley
Councillor Dom Vaitkus
Councillor Barry Wood

Apologies for absence:

Councillor Tom Beckett
Councillor Rob Parkinson

Also Present:

Councillor Lesley McLean, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance, Regeneration and Property

Officers:

Joanne Kaye, Head of Finance and Deputy Section 151 Officer
Matt Swinford, Democratic and Elections Officer

17 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest

18 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 September 2024 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

19 Chairman's Announcements

There were no Chairman's announcements.

20 **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

21 **Monthly Performance Report**

The Assistant Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) submitted a report to on the council's and financial position at the end of the financial year 2024-2025.

In introducing the report, the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Property and Regeneration advised the Committee that there was a projected in year underspend of (£4.596m), of which £3.765m was recommended to be reprofiled into future years.

With regards the Castle Quay office relocation project, the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Property and Regeneration advised the Committee, it had been identified that the full cost of the project would need to be increased by £646k. This was due to the fit out works being higher than the estimate provided by the Council's independent costs consultants and the need to include a contingency element within the revised budget levels.

It was reported by the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Property and Regeneration that in relation to revenue, the Council's forecast outturn position for 2024/25 was an overspend of £208k. This was primarily due to variations across Law and Governance, Planning and Development, Property and Environmental. All services had been requested to consider ways that the forecasted overspend could be mitigated to perform within their forecasted budget for 2024/25.

In response to a question regarding the overspend, Planning and Development and if this was due to the payment of costs after the Council had lost planning appeals, the Head of Finance directed the committee to Appendix 2 to the report and advised that the forecast is due to lower application income.

In response to a question about the re-profiling of the funding for the new depot in Bicester, the Head of Finance directed the Committee to section 4.2.4 of the report where officers have reported that a planning application been submitted however an ecological survey and protected species survey was required to be submitted with the application and the Council had been unable to obtain these services, due to high demand for Ecologists, until October. That had resulted in a delay of 4 months to the original programme and consequent reprofiling of the capital budget as the anticipated completion had been impacted by the delay to planning approval.

Following a question from the Committee regarding empty units within Castle Quay, the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Property and Regeneration advised that officers had been putting pressure on the marketing team for the site to make sure they were doing everything they can to fill the units.

Resolved

- (1) That the report be noted.

22

Fees & Charges Benchmarking 2024/25

The Assistant Director of Finance (S151 Officer) submitted a report which provided information to the Committee on the council's proposed 2025/2026 Fees and Charges benchmarked against other districts within Oxfordshire. The Committee were invited to feed back to the Executive as part of the 2025/26 Budget and Business Planning Process.

In introducing the report, the Head of Finance advised that the planning assumption on the fees and charges in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy assumed that fees and charges would be rise by a minimum of 2%. Services of the Council had been asked to review the proposed fees and charges to investigate if any fees and charges could have been raised more than 2%.

Following a question from the Committee regarding the proposed increase in car parking charges, the Head of Finance advised that car parking charges had been treated separately to other fees and charges. Car parking fees would be raised by 10p. Members debated the need for the proposed changes to car parking charges and requested further information in relation to the trial of free parking that took place for a limited period in 2023 at some council operated Banbury Town Centre car parks and if that trial had resulted in an increased footfall within the town centre.

In response to a question from the Committee querying the proposed 50% increase of the charge to collect stray dogs, Officers advised that further information would be requested after the meeting including numbers of stray dogs collected by the Council, and this information would be distributed to Members after the meeting.

It was proposed by Councillor Rogers and seconded by Councillor Reeves that Executive consider an increase of more than 2% for the fees and charges relating to planning application fees, dog bin emptying chargers and election charges.

Further to the Committee's discussions on car parking charges, it was proposed by Councillor Reeves and seconded by Councillor Rogers that, Executive be recommended to give consideration on an ongoing basis to increases to car parking charges.

Resolved

- (1) That the variances between the council's fees and charges and those of other Oxfordshire districts be noted.
- (2) That Executive be recommended to consider an increase of more than the 2% minimum which is the level already assume in the Council's planning assumptions to the following fees and charges.
 - Planning application fees
 - Dog bin emptying charges
 - Election charges
- (3) That Executive be recommended to give further consideration on an ongoing basis to proposed increases to car parking charges.

23 **Review of Committee Work Plan**

The Committee considered it's work plan and had no queries or additional items for the Committee Work Plan.

Resolved

- (1) That the work plan be noted.

The meeting ended at 7.24 pm

Chairman:

Date: