

Report of Scrutiny Committee

1. This report summarises the business considered at the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 8 February 2022.

Draft Budget 2022/23 and Summary Position over the Medium Term

2. The Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Assets (Councillor Matthew Tomlinson) and the Director of Finance/Section 151 Officer (Louise Mattinson) attended the meeting to present the draft budget position for 2022/23.
3. We queried why the proposed increase of 1.99% to council tax was deemed necessary when the Council has healthy reserves and were advised, in response, that the Council needed to account for rising inflation rates.
4. Confirmation was provided, however, that the 7% inflation rate was not built into the projected cost base for the budget but that it would be subject to review over the forthcoming year.
5. We sought clarity over reference to there being no proposed cuts in services in the budget and assurances were provided that all council services would continue to be provided.
6. We queried how the government-backed council tax rebate of £150 to households in Bands A-D to help with rising energy costs would impact the council and it was explained that further details and guidance on administration was expected imminently.
7. We also welcomed the Cabinet Member's aim to consult residents on the budget earlier in future years as it was questioned whether a 10-day consultation period was sufficient.
8. Some concern was expressed over the increase of the Disabled Facilities Grant administration charge from 5% to 12.5% and the impact this may have on disabled residents. Assurances were provided that this would not result in any increased charges to residents and that it would enable recruitment of an additional officer to support the scheme.
9. Confirmation was also provided in response to a query that the £35,000 government grant for Brexit preparations had not been used and remained within the Council's reserves.
10. We challenged reference to the Community Conversations supporting positive mental health for young people after receiving contradictory information at a previous meeting. It was requested that the Thriving Communities section be updated to reflect that this was not the aim of these events.
11. We also requested that reference to refurbishment works at Margaret Road playground in Penwortham be included within the investment priorities.
12. We queried the £3.1 million allocated for the development of affordable homes and requested further information on the funding streams for these projects.
13. Further information on the Council's promotion of apprenticeships across the borough was also requested.
14. We questioned the role of the Scrutiny Committee with regards to the Capital Programme and were advised that the committee would be best placed to assess and challenge the practicality, resources and capacity of the Capital Programme.

15. We thanked the Cabinet Member and Director for their attendance and report.

Update on South Ribble Leisure Ltd.

16. The Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing, the Director of Commercial and the Assistant Director of Projects and Development attended the meeting to present an update on progress made by South Ribble Leisure Ltd.

17. We queried how feedback from leisure centre customers is continuously gathered and it was explained that South Ribble Leisure now has a website and app where customers can provide feedback. A full customer survey is also anticipated to be undertaken by September 2022.

18. We requested that the full business plan be provided to the Scrutiny Committee.

19. We welcomed collaboration between the leisure company and the Council's Communities teams on the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme and asked that an upcoming report on this also be provided to the Scrutiny Committee.

20. We also queried whether initial IT issues at the leisure centres had been rectified, to which it was stated that these had not been fully resolved despite significant improvements.

21. We asked that a further update on the Leisure Local Action Plan be included in the next quarterly Leisure Company performance report to the Scrutiny Committee.

22. We thanked the Cabinet Member, Director and Assistant Director for their report and attendance.

Recommendation(s)

That Council note the report.

Councillor David Howarth
Chair of Scrutiny Committee
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