

Cabinet Response: Budget Scrutiny Report 2014-15

T&F Group Chairman: David Shakespeare

Leader Scrutiny Officer: Andrew Brown (ext. 7048)

Date reported to Cabinet: 3 February 2014

Lead Cabinet Member: All

Lead Officer: Richard Ambrose and Sarah Ashmead

Recommendation	Agreed Yes/No	Cabinet Response including proposed action	Responsible Cabinet Member	Responsible Officer	Action by date
1: We recommend that the Leader continues to lobby government to provide timely financial settlements that enable local authorities to effectively plan their budgets within the given timescales.	Yes	This is a national issue of concern to all local authorities, and the Leader will continue to raise it with Government, both through the Local Government Association and directly with Ministers.	Martin Tett	Richard Ambrose	Ongoing
2: We recommend that Cabinet continue to move towards achieving local financial self-sufficiency to avoid future reliance on government funding.	Yes	The Cabinet's budget proposals are based on an increase in Council Tax levels of 1.5% in 2014/15 (and increases in future years) in order to ensure that the Council is able to tackle the challenges which lie ahead.	Martin Tett / Peter Hardy	Richard Ambrose	Ongoing
3: We recommend that a) Cabinet Members have autonomy to determine how savings are achieved within their portfolios, and are held accountable for these, and b) If a corporate Priority Based Resourcing exercise is repeated in future then we recommend that this takes place earlier, with better Cabinet Member engagement and greater consideration of wider implications (EIAs).	In part	Cabinet Members are responsible for bringing forward savings proposals for consideration by the Cabinet collectively. The Cabinet intends to review the way in which the MTP is developed in future years.	Peter Hardy	Richard Ambrose	Sept 2014
4: We recommend that a) A brief guide to 'understanding our budget' is produced that explains acronyms, definitions and what	In part	We agree 4(a). The information mentioned at 4 (b) is already available. In terms of EIAs, we will continue to meet our statutory requirements around EIAs, and to improve the quality of our assessments where	Peter Hardy / Martin Phillips	Richard Ambrose/ Angie Sarchet	Sept 2014

information is being presented; b) Further information about the Council's overall finances and portfolio outturn projections is included in the budget paperwork; c) EIAs continue to be improved through the consideration of rural and urban impacts, and EIAs relating to previously agreed savings are published when a plan is in place to achieve these		appropriate, but this needs to remain in the context of a light touch approach which does not create an industry for the Council.			
5: We recommend that the recent good work in improving participation and representation in the Budget Consultation is continued. Options for savings given in the resident consultation should be limited to areas of discretionary spend where funding cuts would be feasible in practice.	No	We are pleased to see the positive comments about the developments in the budget consultation arrangements. In terms of limiting the consultation, we believe that it is possible to make efficiencies and savings in all areas of the Council's expenditure, including areas of statutory spend, and this should be reflected in the scope of the consultation.	Martin Phillips	Marcus Grupp	
6: We recommend that Cabinet consider whether in the current climate there is a case for allocating unspent contingencies to fund one-off investment in assets that support the Council's strategic priorities.	No	The Council has already agreed plans to use some of its reserves for one off investments. Beyond this, the intention is to hold reserves for unforeseen or unplanned emergencies. For example, the Council allocated £3m from its reserves to tackle road repairs arising from bad weather last winter.	Peter Hardy	Richard Ambrose	
7: We recommend that a substantial review of Cabinet remits be undertaken if the Future Shape is agreed by Cabinet, to provide the public with clear and understandable lines of democratic accountability. In the meantime there may be a case for reviewing Cabinet remits where certain services (e.g. Planning, Advisory and Compliance) appear to cross two portfolios.	No	Cabinet portfolio remits are a political decision. It is for the Leader to review these from time to time where applicable.	Martin Tett		
8: We recommend that Cabinet commits to improving rather than maintaining the current condition of Buckinghamshire's roads. All options for allocating a level of resources that	In part	It has been the Cabinet's objective to improve, rather than maintain, the condition of the roads over the past three years. That is why we have invested £50m in roads over that period. As part of this	Martin Tett / Janet Blake	Richard Ambrose/ Sean Rooney	Ongoing

<i>will achieve this should be explored. As short-medium term borrowing rates are historically low, we recommend that consideration is given to prudential borrowing to take advantage of this opportunity. Consideration should also be given to the issuance of municipal bonds and to any other options for funding an enhanced long term programme of Strategic Highways Maintenance.</i>		budget, the Cabinet is pleased to be able to invest £15m per year in road maintenance and a further £1m per year in footpath repairs (£1.7m in 2014/5). Over the course of the next year, we will consider whether there is a viable business case for any borrowing to support a long term investment programme.			
<i>9: We recommend that further consideration is given to how the potential impacts of Connexions re-commissioning set out in the EIA, such as ‘a reduction in service levels and accessibility of Connexions services’, can be mitigated to minimise any effects on young people who are NEET.</i>	Yes	The Cabinet has reviewed the support for Connexions and has restored funding of £187k from 2015/16 onwards.	Mike Appleyard	Sue Imbriano	completed
<i>10: – We recommend that significant inflationary costs across all portfolios are re-modelled and updated annually to best reflect current estimates.</i>	Yes	Significant inflationary costs are annually reviewed and re-modelled at the start of the budget process.	Peter Hardy	Richard Ambrose	Ongoing
<i>11: We recommend that the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources considers our approach to property management and what can be learnt from the Aylesbury Vale Estates partnership model.</i>	In part	The Cabinet has chosen to adopt a Corporate Landlord approach and is working on a new property asset strategy which is focused on achieving greater return from its estate through a more commercial approach to estate management.	Peter Hardy	Ian Boll	October 2014
<i>12: We recommend that the Cabinet considers how best to step up efforts to explore and progress further joint working opportunities with partners, particularly where savings are potentially high, e.g. joining up waste and planning services with the District Councils.</i>	In part	The Cabinet is already fully committed to exploring joint working opportunities with a wide range of partners, and remains open to considering any proposals which could deliver benefits for residents and make financial sense. Joint provision of waste and planning services was explored under the Pathfinder project but did not prove acceptable to the District Councils.	Martin Tett	Chris Williams	Ongoing
<i>13: We recommend that there is a re-</i>	In part	The Cabinet is happy to consider any business	Martin	Susie Yapp	Ongoing

energising of efforts to devolve further competencies to parish and town Councils where it benefits both parties and makes financial sense to do so. There should be a clear offer as to what further devolved opportunities and financial support there could be in future.		cases for devolving services which deliver benefits and make financial sense. The Cabinet Member is already in discussion with parish and town councils about further opportunities.	Phillips		
14: We recommend that Prince2 methodology is used throughout the Capital process and that all business cases are prioritised on a scoring basis. We recommend that consideration be given to whether there are opportunities to do things differently or work more closely with partners on property issues (e.g. sharing existing office space rather than building new offices).	In part	Project Management and project prioritisation techniques will be picked up as part of the capital review process in response to the recent audit report. Prince 2 methodology is the default approach throughout the Place capital programme. The corporate landlord approach recommends a strengthened property board function to be implemented and this has already happened. A revised business case template is being developed for property projects which aligns to the new property asset strategy.	Peter Hardy	Richard Schmidt / Ian Boll	Ongoing
15: In the event that additional resources are available in the base budget, we recommend that the following areas should be considered a high priority for buy backs, partial buy-backs or additional spending:					
a) Supporting People (£750k from 2015/16) in Health and Wellbeing. We recommend that the Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing explores ways of protecting this funding to minimise adverse impacts on vulnerable people, the local voluntary and community sector and other Council services.	In part	Whilst no additional resource has been provided in the budget proposals, the Cabinet Member will look at ways of protecting these services as much as possible by seeking efficiencies through the recommissioning process.	Patricia Birchley	Trevor Boyd	December 2014

<p>b) Discretionary Advocacy (£44k) in Health and Wellbeing. We recommend a buy back on the basis that these activities become statutory in the Care Bill from 2015/16. If a buy back is not possible, we recommend that the Cabinet Member explores how to fund discretionary advocacy from within existing budgets.</p>	Yes	The sum of £44k has been restored in the budget proposals for discretionary advocacy.	Patricia Birchley	Trevor Boyd	completed
<p>c) Children's Partnership Team (£75k in 2014/15 rising to £237k in 2016/17) in Education and Skills. We recommend that activities supporting Child Poverty and vulnerable groups are protected. If this is not possible then we recommend that the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills explores how these activities could be done differently at lower cost rather than stopped.</p>	Yes	The Cabinet has restored these sums in the budget proposals.	Mike Appleyard	Sue Imbriano	completed
<p>d) Short breaks for disabled children (£430k in 2014/15 rising to £480k in 2015/16) in Children's Services. We recommend a buy-back to protect services that prevent additional families from requesting social care assessments.</p>	Yes	The Cabinet recognises that this service is a lifeline to families and disabled children. We have therefore restored the sum of £300k in 2014/15 rising to £350k in 2015/16 in order to protect the Short Break services.	Angela Macpherson	Sue Imbriano	completed

<p>e) Local Area Technicians (LATs) (unspecified) in Planning and Transportation. We recommend that savings aren't achieved through reducing LAT posts, and that the policy of keeping 50% of LATs in the office be reviewed to ensure that they are used to their best capacity.</p>	Yes	There are no current plans to reduce the number of LAT posts.	Janet Blake	Neil Gibson	completed
<p>f) Weed spraying (£201k) in Planning and Transportation. We recommend a buy-back of this proposed saving. We also recommend that TfB improve their programme management of this service so that weed spraying is undertaken in May and September only.</p>	In part	The Cabinet has restored £150k to the budget for weed spraying, with the requirement that the team improves the effectiveness of the service.	Janet Blake	Neil Gibson	completed
<p>g) Strategic Client (unspecified) in Planning and Transportation. We recommend that sufficient additional resource is allocated to provide effective management of the contract thereby ensuring best value for money.</p>	Yes	Ensuring value for money from this contract is a key priority and the Cabinet has provided £140k per annum for this purpose.	Janet Blake	Neil Gibson	completed
<p>h) Voluntary and Community Sector (£77k) in Community Engagement. We recommend that funding to Community Impact Bucks and BMKALC is protected so as not to impact staffing posts that support the voluntary and community sector, or parish and town Councils respectively.</p>	In part	The Cabinet has restored the funding for these services in the budget proposals. However, it is important to recognise that this funding is not protected indefinitely and it may be reviewed as and when these services are recommissioned in the future.	Martin Phillips	Susie Yapp	completed

30 January 2014