

Special Cabinet
19 January 2021

Subsequently, on 13 January, the budget proposals were considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, having been previously subject to review by a Task and Finish group established for that purpose.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a number of suggestions, listed on pages 3 and 4 of the report. It is not felt necessary to amend any of the budget proposals for these suggestions.

Specifically:

- The first two suggestions were covered by existing budget pots, which could be allocated for specific proposals.
- Grants for minority groups can be considered as part of the existing prioritisation process by the Grants Board.
- An increased hardship fund for renters requires government approval, which has been applied for.
- The corporate project pot has been reviewed, and is felt to now be at an appropriate level.
- Decarbonisation of the housing stock and Council facilities would come under any proposed use of the Climate Change Earmarked Reserve. Officers have recently submitted a funding bid under the government's decarbonisation grant scheme to reduce the carbon footprint on certain Council-owned buildings, including Campus East, Campus West, and Hatfield Swim Centre.
- For non-housing assets, as well as the use of Council offices and space, and Campus West, it is already intended to perform an Asset Strategy review in 2021 and the Modernisation Programme covers the use of Council office space.
- The Community Infrastructure Levy rate comparisons were provided to Members, and no suggestions were made to amend the proposals.
- The Garden Waste charge comparison rates within Hertfordshire were provided to Task and Finish Group Members and no suggestion was made to amend the charge for 2021/22.

Lastly, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee made a specific recommendation to investigate potential overlaps between the various General Fund reserve categories to ensure that no "double-counting" of risks has occurred.

Non ring-fenced General Fund reserves, projected to be £5.1M at 31 March, 2021/22, are adequate, but will be under pressure over the next few years, as explained at the 5 January Cabinet meeting.

Ring-fenced, or Earmarked, reserves, are projected to amount to £6.0M at 31 March 2022.

Within these, the Strategic Initiatives Reserve is for potential "one-off" projects, which experience has shown will require funding each year, even if the amounts are difficult to predict.

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By contrast, the Modernisation reserve is held to cover “invest to save” initiatives.

The remaining earmarked reserves are for specific purposes.

Having reviewed these reserves with Officers, Councillor D.Bell (Executive Member, Resources) was satisfied that no double-counting existed, although obviously, by their very nature, many are estimates, and may require release or replenishment during the 2021/22 financial year. This will be kept under review as part of the Council’s quarterly budget monitoring exercise.

RESOLVED:

- (1) Cabinet noted the report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and agreed the submission of the 2021/22 draft budget proposals discussed on 5 January to Full Council on 1 February 2021.
- (2) The Medium Term Financial Strategy presented on 5 January had been subject to a number of minor narrative changes following a review.

Meeting ended 5.07pm
AM