

City Executive Board response to the recommendation of the Finance Panel (Panel of the Scrutiny Committee) on the Budget 2018/19

Provided by the Board Member for Finance and Asset Management

17

Recommendation	Agree?	Comment
1. That Council Tax is increased by 2.99% in 2018/19 and 2019/20.	Y	Recommended to Council
2 - That the Council continues to charge the maximum premium on Council Tax charges for second homes and empty homes and aims to utilise new powers, when available, to increase Council Tax charges further on empty properties.	Y	Recommended to Council
3. That the Council continues to make the case to HM Government through the Local Government Association that the issue of delays to valuations undertaken by the Valuation Office Agency should be urgently addressed.	Y	Council officers have had several meetings with the VOA in relation to the delays in adding rating assessments for properties at the Westgate. Some progress has been made and 11 of the larger assessments out of 91 occupied properties are now on the list. The performance of the VOA is a nationwide problem and the Council will continue to raise this issue where and when it can.
4. That provision is made for additional resources for City Centre Management, including help in preparing for a bid for a Business Improvement District (BID), in view of the pressures upon city centre retail businesses located away from the Westgate Shopping Centre.	In part	The Westgate has initially had a very positive effect on the city centre. We have seen a sustained increase in footfall so far. A number of extra resources have already been made available (for instance, significant capital expenditure on the Covered Market and extra street cleaning). Officers are working to develop a City Centre Partnership, which we hope will prove a catalyst to a BID. At present this work is funded by existing resources..
5. That annual garden waste collection fees are increased from the current level of £45 to the target price of £52 per year in 2018/19.	N	At this stage we feel the current level of charge is appropriate.
6. That future budget reports clearly set out the total value returned to the Council by its Direct Services companies, as well as the dividend.	Y	Agreed

7. That consideration is given to the option of borrowing to invest (e.g. in commercial properties within the city), drawing on external advice.	Y	Work is currently underway to examine the feasibility of doing this, taking account of any risks of doing so
8. That a review is undertaken to identify whether the Council has the necessary skills, processes and constitutional rules in place to be an active and agile operator in the local property market, while maintaining a watching brief on any emerging government plans to limit such activities.	Y	The work identified above will review the arrangements in terms of governance, capacity and skills to be able to undertake property acquisitions as well as taking account of emerging government policy in this area.
9. That the Council plans to transfer the maximum number of five properties per year to its housing companies (recognising that decisions to purchase the properties are a matter for the companies).	Y	Agreed
10. That the Council maintains the Homelessness reserve at its current level by funding all additional spending on homelessness services from revenue.	In part	Following our budget consultation, we are proposing to top up the homelessness reserve. We will however make some calls on this money to fund our partnership activity in this area, and may need to draw on it further in the future.
11. That the Council continues to engage with partner organisations on the issue of plugging the emerging shortfall in funding for the homelessness pathway from 2019/20.	Y	Agreed. This is a major priority, in particular in our discussions with the County Council.
12. That the Council continues to engage with Oxfordshire County Council to resolve quickly the situation whereby recycling credits paid to the city by the county do not cover higher disposal costs.	Y	This approach has been made and an official response received. The request has been declined on the basis that market prices go up and down, we happen to be in a low demand part of cycle, city council has to manage these ups and downs, and the County has no money.
13. That waste disposal costs are remodelled to take account of the expected impacts on market prices of China's decision to ban plastic waste imports.	N	None of our plastic waste currently leaves the UK and we have a contract around services and price. Longer term this may become an issue for us. We are seeking to introduce a local recycling transfer station to improve our position in the market this would mitigate the impacts of this issue which at present are unknown. It is therefore premature to budget on a revised basis but attention has been flagged as a risk going forward and will be reflected in view on contingencies.

14. That pension provisions are kept under review given that an actuarial triennial review will take place within the MTFP period, and may have a budgetary impact in year 4.	Y	Agreed
15. That greater effort is made to encourage and identify 'invest to save' projects.	Y	The Council has a good track record of invest to save projects although they are not always transparent through the budget process. Examples include, Oxpens temporary car park, the Admin Review, Removal of desk top phones for mobile phones, Fee earning from enhanced Investigations Team, Waste recycling station reduced transportation charges, Additional parking spaces Seacourt Park and Ride, reduced temporary accommodation charges from £20 million investment in homes for the homeless

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