

Cabinet response to recommendations of the Budget Review Group

The document sets out the response of the Cabinet Member to recommendations made by the Budget Review Group and endorsed by the Scrutiny Committee on 01 February 2023 concerning the Scrutiny Budget Review 2023/24. The Cabinet agreed the response at its meeting on 08 February 2023.

Recommendation	Agree?	Comment
1) That the Council continues to dedicate funding to the work of the archive and maintains the post of professional archivist to ensure that this statutory duty is satisfactorily complied with alongside highly qualified volunteers.	Yes	I accept the recommendation from the Budget Review Group and the ongoing funding has been included in the Cabinet Budget recommended to Council.
2) That the Council provides an up-to-date, confidential explanation to all Members of the options available to the Council to achieve the savings that would arise from ODS depot consolidation.	Yes	A confidential member briefing can be provided from the officers and ODS representatives on the options assessed to date and the challenges. This will be based on work undertaken to date and not be commissioning further work. At present the ODS business plan does at present include savings from depot consolidation.
3) That the Council provides a statement setting out the options regarding the acquisition of a new cemetery site without which there would be a significant revenue shortfall.	Yes	Feasibility on a specific site is well underway. A cabinet and council report with a business case will come forward this year, and subject to planning and addressing restrictions on title, we will then be able to develop a delivery plan.
4) That the Council updates the estimates during the period of the MTFP of the income and expenditure, including capital, on the Covered Market to take account of the slippage in the plans to fill the empty units and in the plans to start evening openings with music to promote footfall.	Yes	Accepted. The expected revenue has been modelled for the masterplan exercise and can be monitored. Capital spend is monitored by Development Board and revenue spend by Property Services.

5) That the Council does not commit the windfall gains, arising from the deferral of the Fairer Funding Review and the receipt of additional grants, for spending which would be recurring.	Yes	The windfall gains from the Finance Settlement are estimated to be around £3.6 million with £2million of this falling in 2024-25. Since the Consultation Budget a number of budgetary pressures totalling £1.2 million over the 4 year period which will require funding. Further items totalling around £618k over the 4 year period have been provided for by the Cabinet as detailed in the budget report the balance of the funds, totalling around £1.8 million, will be transferred to the COVID Reserve to deal with future fluctuations in income and expenditure over the period of the MTFP. A caveat is that some of the unavoidable pressures met by this pot are potentially ongoing, but we agree with the spirit of Scrutiny's recommendation.
6) That the Council mitigates the pressure on residents arising from the current financial and economic circumstances and provides clear, concise information on the funding schemes available to help residents – including the provision of assistance to those who need it when applying for support.	Yes	The Council can commit to providing up to date advice on available funding schemes such as the Hardship Scheme and Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) via our website. It should be noted that there are several new funding streams which should be available to support residents, including one-off payments to those on low incomes (details currently being finalised), the new discretionary council tax hardship scheme, and we are hopeful of securing extended DHP funding.
7) That the Council re-assesses the assumptions being made about bad debt provision relating to commercial property.	Yes	The Council is required to assess its provisions that it holds at the year end, when closing the accounts. It currently holds a provision of around £6.8 million in respect of commercial rent debt which as at 31-3-2022 stood at £7.3 million.
8) That the Council diversifies its investment portfolio away from commercial property towards the regeneration of Council-owned properties which are eligible for Public Works Loan Board funding, and considers other types of	Yes	The capital programme allows for investment in property which is council owned, which is of a regenerative nature. Budget has been allocated in Corporate Property to recruit for this purpose to help to drive income back to pre-pandemic levels. Whilst the council will seek other

investments and assets, including potential investment in renewal energy projects within Oxfordshire.		potential investments in renewal energy projects it is also mindful of the need to adhere to PWLB lending criteria in that investments should not be predominantly for financial gain and is also mindful of some recent financial failures experienced by local authorities of making such investments.
9) That the Council re-evaluates its assumptions around reduction in use of park and rides as a result of changes in charges to create a more realistic picture of what both income levels and usage would look like with different fees.	Yes	<p>It remains challenging to accurately forecast the usage at the park and ride sites, particularly on weekdays, although we are seeing an increase in usage and income.</p> <p>The modelled 10% resistance factor on 1%, 2% and 3% increases shows that by increasing tariffs there is a significant risk that the Council would face a loss of income. The performance of the P&Rs will continue to be monitored throughout the year and the tariffs reviewed annually. The success of the combined ticket trial is currently being reviewed and any amendment to the tariff should include the learnings from this trial so the re-evaluation will be further downstream. We will continue to work with both County and the Bus Companies to mutually agree the charges.</p>
10) That the Council considers how patients who need to drive to the midwifery services at Florence Park might be supported with regard to parking charges.	In part	We are happy to make contact with the health authorities locally and explore a solution as part of the consultation on introducing charges which will be necessary. However, giving support to just one user in one car park would potentially be inequitable, and it is noted that payment for parking is not unusual to access other medical facilities.

<p>11) That the Council provides sensitivity analysis of the net revenues to the Council from the operation of the current ZEZ and its proposed expansion during the period of the MTFP in order to justify current assumptions.</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>The Council continues to work with Oxfordshire County Council on proposals for expansion of the Pilot ZEZ. Both data on existing operation as well as modelling capability on the likely usage of an expanded ZEZ rest with the County Council. It can be assumed that both the modelling and associated analysis of likely income would be required inputs to any final decision to proceed with an expanded ZEZ.</p>
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