

SCRUTINY BOARD RESOLUTIONS ON THE BUDGET FRAMEWORK 2023/24 – 2025/26

The Council's Scrutiny Boards convened in January 2023 to consider proposals for the Budget Framework 2023/24 – 2025/26. The resolutions arising from the Scrutiny Boards' consideration of the Budget Framework are detailed below:

CHILDREN'S SERVICES, EDUCATION & SKILLS SCRUTINY BOARD

5th January 2023

MINUTE EXTRACT: BUDGET FRAMEWORK 2023/24 – 2025/26

The Finance Manager (Children's Services) presented the report in conjunction with the Director of Children's Services. Questions were as follows:

- Cllr B Groom – With OFSTED/Commissioner and the LGA Peer Review reports all being anticipated shortly, how much of the outcomes we expect to see in these reports has been baked into the budget we have received tonight?
 - Director of Children's Services – We have included the outcomes as best we can and also looked to other Councils who have experienced similar intervention as we are now. What tends to happen is that staff morale drops, and we see an increase in staff turnover as a result. The biggest unknown in terms of the reports and the one with the highest impact on the service, Sir Alan Wood's CBE report would be the one to look out for.
- Cllr B Groom – In terms of the savings that have been presented in the report the majority look to be savings as a result of in housing provision. Is there any further in housing that we could do in the future?
 - Finance Manager (Children's Services) – There is an inbuilt year on year savings in terms of the fostering service, the small residential homes scheme is unlikely to be able to stretch further but will always keep schemes under review for any potential expansion to save. The Service and Resources Directorate are always looking ahead over the current and future MTFP to identify where we can make savings.
- Heather Delaney (SPCV) – Is there more work that could be done on joint commissioning to limit the burden to the Council and encourage our partners to pay their fair share?
 - Director of Children's Services – Yes, we are looking at this currently and in particular at the LSCP. There is potential around joint arrangements with other Local Authorities and a more regional approach to, for example, buying residential placements in block.
- Cllr Mrs G Sleight – Can you provide more depth on item 1.20 (Social Work Recruitment and Retention and staff development) as to what work we are doing and whether we can do more as a region?
 - Director of Children's Services – The recruitment and retention of Social Work staff is a challenge everywhere. As a sector we are seeing fewer professionals join the profession and increasing demand from service

users. The key is how we differ in our approach to recruiting new staff and we need to adapt to the desired lifestyle that graduates now want which is more aligned to agency working and we can be smarter in our approach here. However, there will always be the key fundamentals which are job fulfilment, support in your role and progression which will be key to attracting and retaining staff alongside this we also need to shout about what we are doing well and what we are good at as a service. There is work currently ongoing to develop an academy for new staff into the profession and this will hopefully have a positive impact.

- Cllr A Rebeiro – On p.13 1.24 (Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) – when will we know more from the Department of Education on the results of their consultation on their SEND review to improve the experience for children and young people?
 - Director of Children’s Services – There has been further information and guidance provided by the Department since the report was written. We ourselves will be undertaking a Peer Review on our SEND offer the week after next and we could look to bring forward an item on the results of this.
 - Cllr D Gibbin – I would like to ask the Assistant Director of Education to produce a briefing note on the scale of the changes that will be implemented and the potential cost impact to the Council in regard to the review undertaken at a national level.

ACTION: Assistant Director of Education to produce a briefing paper on the SEND changes proposed at National level.

- Cllr A Rebeiro – On p.14 1.25 (Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG)) can I just confirm whether that amount will change?
 - Finance Manager (Children’s Services) – The figure in the report is the Period 6 figure, the Period 9 figure is currently being calculated and will be reported to the Cabinet in due time.
- Sajida Golby – Can we have more of a breakdown on the Child Protection Plan data?
 - Director of Children’s Services – Yes, we can break it down further, there is no outlier from the national statistics but we can provide a further breakdown to you.

ACTION: JH to confirm what data SG would like and liaise with DCS to secure data.

- Sajida Golby – In relation to p.11 1.19 9 (Early Help Level 2) how much conversation is going on at the ground level with the parents?
 - Director of Children’s Services – Dialogue is important as there is no point in engaging in an activity if it is not going to meet the need. The services that we provide must be responsive to needs as they change. This year Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council will embark on a formal partnership with Leeds City Council on their ‘Family Valued’ programme where engagement is a big factor. We can’t take a one size fits all approach when it comes to engagement.

ACTION: Cllr DG to confirm what levels of consultation happens in the North of the Borough.

- Cllr L McCarthy – On p.10 1.17 VI the report says we will recruit a LADO. Did we not have one before?
 - Director of Children’s Services – We have always had LADO provision but this was done on a rota basis as part of a share role approach. We will be moving to having a permanent LADO role that is not shared.
- Cllr L McCarthy – On p.12 1.22 (Child Protection Review Unit (CPRU)) the report talks about IRO case load levels and comparing them to other figures. Which figures are we comparing too?
 - Director of Children’s Services – I believe the comparison is from the IRO Handbook recommended levels.
- Cllr Y Clements – On p.11 item 1.20 (Social Work Recruitment and Retention and staff development) with the increase in demand expected to continue do we need to increase staff levels year on year? Can we have a table showing now vs expected levels and then data showing the previous years levels so we can track trends?
 - Director of Children’s Services – I don’t have that detail to hand but we can look to provide it for you. The intervention/prevention work that we have planned will be key to the staffing numbers as we move forward and it is unlikely we will see an impact until approximately Year 3 of that work.

ACTION: JH to liaise with Cllr YC to confirm what data is wanted and then work with DCS to secure it.
- Cllr A Wilson – Item 4.1 (Environment) what work is ongoing in the Council’s effort to reduce its impact on the environment?
 - Cllr D Gibbin – It may be best to look at the budget for the Cabinet Portfolio Holder - Climate Change, Planning & Housing as there would be more detail in efforts the Council is taking as a whole.
 - Director of Children’s Services – There are some things that we can do to limit the impact for example when we look to place a Looked After Child we would seek to place them as locally as possible.
 - Finance Manager (Children’s Services) – There has been a saving identified in the budget through Officer Transport Costs, we have seen that the New Ways of Working and increased level of remote working has saved us money but will also have reduced the service’s impact on the environment.
- Cllr S Gethen – On p.13 1.24 (Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) are the levels we are hoping to reduce caseloads by then manageable for staff?
 - Director of Children’s Services – No, we need to reduce caseloads further from that reduced figure. In the budget we have built in an additional 2 roles per year for the next year to try and keep up with demand and reduce pressure on staff.
- Cllr S Gethen – Again on p.13 1.24 (Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) it is stated that within Solihull we have seen a 16% increase the past 12 months. Will some of these be people who have applied before but been rejected and if so how many?
 - Director of Children’s Services – Yes some of them will have.

- Finance Manager (Children’s Services) – Some of this work is included in the Delivering Best Value work that has been ongoing and there will be a full report on this in March.
- Assistant Director (Education) – Whilst we have accounted for an increase in the number of EHCP roles there still remains a number of unknowns with the impact that the changes at the National level will have – as things stand they would be significant in terms of the further burden they would place on Local Authorities. We are waiting on the delivery plan for this which is already overdue. Further to this we also have the new OFSTED inspection framework which will also see an increase in resource levels.

In terms of whether we agree to an EHCP assessment or not the factors vary considerably – for example with schools requests for an EHCP assessment around 80% of those you would expect to be agreed to because they have carried out all the information gathering needed. When parents request an ECHP assessment, this number is quite low, often we are gathering information throughout the whole process, so you end up potentially changing the decision right towards the tribunal hearing because we have then been able to gather the sufficient information. To countenance this, we have changed the way we handle parent requests so that when a request is made by the parent we send the paperwork to the school to complete so we can gather as much information we can as early as possible to avoid having to get to the tribunal stage.

- Cllr A Mackenzie – Parents and Carers have been so isolated over the last few years due to COVID-19. Informal parent groups used to help connect parents together to talk about issues and I understand Family Support Workers used to attend the meetings from time to time to help – will this be happening again?
 - Director of Children’s Services – I can see the value that informal networks can have, we saw the pandemic pull the carpet from underneath longstanding informal networks and re-establishing them is so important moving forward.

RESOLVED

- i) The board noted the pressures and mitigating actions set out in Appendix A. The board considered the schedule of fees and charges proposed for 2023/24, as attached at Appendix B.
- ii) The decisions were agreed unanimously, and no comments were made to be passed to the Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board and Full Cabinet for February 2023

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGED GROWTH SCRUTINY BOARD

17th January 2023

MINUTE EXTRACT: BUDGET FRAMEWORK 2023/24 – 2025/26

The Scrutiny Board received a report outlining the budget proposals identified within the Climate Change, Planning and Housing Portfolio for the period 2023/24 to 2024/25. The report was presented by the Finance Manager.

Members discussed and sought further information from Officers in relation to the following matters:

- The Neighbourhoods and Community Safety management restructure.
- The application of fees charges by the Council to cover the costs of the service/s or works provided.

Having considered the report, the Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board:

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the pressures and mitigating actions set out in the report; and,
- ii) To note the schedule of fees and charges proposed for 2023/24 as attached at Appendix B to the report.

HEALTH AND ADULT SOCIAL CARE SCRUTINY BOARD

23rd January 2023

MINUTE EXTRACT: BUDGET FRAMEWORK 2023/24 – 2025/26

The Directors for Adult Social Care and of Public Health presented the report, explaining how, during January, each Scrutiny Board was receiving a report outlining the proposals identified within their respective portfolios, for 2023/24 to 2025/26.

The Directors took Members through the report, which outlined the forecast budget position in regards to the relevant portfolios, detailing the pressures identified up to 2025/26 and the actions proposed to mitigate them. The key pressures highlighted from the report included progress towards fair cost of care, reform of the adult social care charging system, cost of living pressures and bad debt write-offs, as well as demographic and inflationary pressures. The pending introduction of Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspections for Adult Social Care was also highlighted. The main proposals to mitigate these pressures included Government funding where national allocations have been announced, as well as use of contingency reserves.

The Director for Adult Social Care explained that since the production of the report, there have been further national announcements with respect to adult social care funding, primarily via the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement and that the pressures and mitigations will be updated to take account of the new information now available. It was confirmed that the national Charging Reform has been delayed. The Director for Adult Social Care noted there had been a fourth meeting of the Budget Strategy Group in January.

The Directors highlighted the reporting undertaken to the Budget Strategy Group, as well as the Members' Budget Seminar.

Members raised the following queries:

- A Member noted how, for the Adult Social Care and Health Portfolio, it was proposed to use capital funding to reduce care expenditure and they requested further detail on this.
- The Adult Social Care and Support Finance Manager explained how there would be focus on capital funding to support initiatives, such as adaptation of buildings, to enable people to live independently for longer and reduce ongoing care expenditure.
- A Member highlighted how the Autumn Statement indicated increased adult social care precept flexibilities, in total 2%. They noted 1% had already been assumed in the MTFs, which enabled the Council to consider an additional 1% and requested clarification on this.
- The Adult Social Care and Support Finance Manager confirmed there was potential for the Council to consider an additional 1%. Following further queries, he explained that Central Government assumes the full precept has been taken, when allocating funding to Local Authorities.
- A Member raised the proposed fees and charges scheduled for 2023/24, noting how some of these were proposed to increase in line with the Consumer Prices Index, at 6%. They queried the proposals for the Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG), an amount set aside to cover an individual's everyday expenses, when they were in receipt of local authority arranged home care.
- The Adult Social Care and Support Finance Manager confirmed the MIG was set by the Department of Health and Social Care and our policy was to use these rates.
- The Member explained they recognised the MIG for 2023/24 had not been set yet by the Department of Health and Social Care and they noted there was discretion to supplement this locally, if it had not been increased in line with inflation.
- A Member highlighted Government announcements on additional funding for local areas to buy extra beds in care homes, to support hospital discharges. They queried whether there had been any challenges in securing this additional capacity.
- The Adult Social Care and Support Finance Manager confirmed there were some challenges. The focus was upon ensuring people received the right type of care, to support clear improvements in hospital discharges and as this funding was time-limited it was necessary to plan for this funding to end on 31st March.
- A Member queried whether the monies awarded to support the development of Family Hubs was one-off funding.
- The Director of Public Health explained how the funding had been awarded by the Department for Education for two years, with clear programme goals and outcome measures, to review its effectiveness. The monies had been awarded to support the launch of the Family Hubs and there were ongoing discussions with the Department for Education on longer term funding arrangements. The hubs would co-locate a range of existing services for families, in accessible locations, linking this with a strong digital offer. It was proposed to establish a reserve for the Family Hubs, to support service set up and on-going operational delivery.
- A Member highlighted how the majority of existing non-NHS Public Health contracts that came to an end during the MTFs period were secured on fixed

annual prices that did not provide for inflation. They queried the percentage of overall spend these contracts represented.

- The Director of Public Health explained they represented a small percentage of the overall Public Health grant. She detailed how the majority of the Public Health grant was spent on NHS contracts, such as Health Visiting, as well as drug and alcohol services.
- A Member queried the anticipated Adult Social Care directorate reserves, following the use of £1.774m reserves in 2023/24, to enable a balanced budget position.
- The Adult Social Care and Support Finance Manager detailed how, at the end of the current financial year, it was anticipated there would be a £7m reserve. Following the proposed use of reserves in 2023/24, as outlined in the report, it was anticipated there would be a reserve balance of approximately £5.3m.

RESOLVED:

The Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Board:

- i) Noted the pressures and mitigating actions set out in Appendix A.
- ii) Supported the schedule of fees and charges proposed for 2023/24, as attached at Appendix B. This was subject to the Member comments in regards to the Minimum Income Guarantee, as outlined in the minutes above, being taken into account.
- iii) Supported the indicative service budgets proposed for 2023/24, as attached at Appendix C.

RESOURCES AND DELIVERING VALUE SCRUTINY BOARD

9th January 2023

MINUTE EXTRACT: BUDGET FRAMEWORK 2023/24 – 2025/26

The Scrutiny Board received a report outlining the budget proposals identified within the Resources Portfolio for the period 2023/24 to 2024/25. The report was presented by the Assistant Director, Finance & Property Services.

Members discussed and sought further information from Officers in relation to the following matters:

- Detail supporting the Age U.K contract and the nature of the associated pressures with the contract.
- The on-going review of the Communities and Partnerships staffing structure and whether there were any implications arising around the staffing structure.
- Recruitment and retention issues within the Resources Directorate and for how long was the existing recruitment and retention situation expected to last.

- Gambling Act, Permits and Licenses: Members discussed the annual fees proposed for casinos, bingo clubs, betting and licensed premises and questioned whether the authority was maximising the potential income from these premises, especially when benchmarked against neighbouring authorities.
- Catering Service: Members raised the inflationary pressures, such as food costs and pay settlements, on the Council's Catering Services and queried whether it was still a viable service going forward.
- Fly-Tipping in the Borough: How many individuals were fined for fly-tipping in the borough in the last 12 months leading to a successful penalty charge of £400.
- The appointment of a Media Officer and related cost pressures.
- The appropriateness of the level of Fees and Charges associated with the Licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO's) for developers, particularly for those newly constructed HMO's in the borough, and whether these could be raised or not.
- Environmental Health: Enforcement contract details and the related statutory fees in place.
- The legal and statutory requirements placed on a Local Authority to provide a school meals service to those schools under management of the Local Education Authority (LEA) and the options of the *Hand Back* and *Cost-Plus* fiscal models for such service delivery by the Local Authority.

Members requested further information to be supplied outside of the Scrutiny Board meeting in relation to:

- Bereavement Services: Fees and charges referred to the Exclusive Right of Burial being for 75 years. What arrangements are implemented when the 75-year period for plot holders expired.
- Fees and Charges: Court Summons and Liability Orders in relation to Council Tax and Business Rates. Members sought further information as to why the recommendation was not to increase these charges further than currently proposed.
- Civic Suite: Members sought further cost detail in relation to the procurement of alcohol for civic events held in the Civic Suite.
- Strategic Land & Property: The £151,000 annual cost pressure relating to the ongoing rental income pressure for Touchwood; Members sought further detail as to cost pressure projection / profile for future years.

Members of the Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board requested that the following matters be drawn to the attention of the Full Cabinet meeting scheduled for 9th February 2023:

- Members' Committee Teas: Members questioned the potential for individual Members to cover the cost for any Committee Teas they may order through their respective Members' allowance

Having considered the report, the Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board:

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the pressures and mitigating actions detailed in Appendix A and savings proposals detailed in Appendix B and to feed back the Scrutiny Board's comments detailed above to Full Cabinet scheduled for 9th February 2023; and,
- ii) To note the Schedule of Fees and Charges proposed for 2023/24 and to feedback the Scrutiny Board's comments detailed above to Full Cabinet scheduled for 9th February 2023.

STRONGER COMMUNITIES & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY BOARD

10th January 2023

MINUTE EXTRACT: BUDGET FRAMEWORK 2023/24 – 2025/26

The Board considered a detailed report setting out the budget proposals identified for 2023/24 to 2025/26 within the Communities & Leisure; Partnerships & Wellbeing; and Environment & Infrastructure Cabinet Portfolios as recently endorsed by the Budget Strategy Group.

The report outlined a forecasted budget position for those Portfolios, the pressures identified over the period up to 2025/26, together with the actions proposed to mitigate against them. The key pressures highlighted within the report included:

- Leisure Centres income and costs.
- Funding for the Employment and Skills Team.
- Car parking income.
- Strategic Environment Contract (SEC) costs.

Officers reported that the main proposals to mitigate against those pressures included:

- Renegotiation of the Leisure Centres contract.
- Strategic review of future Employment and Skills offer.
- Review of street lighting.
- Review of Communities & Partnerships Division.

The report drew attention to risks relevant to the Portfolio's budget position including the operation of Leisure Centres; continuity of external funding; cost of trees within the public realm; and new requirements on waste disposal.

Additionally, the report highlighted the forecast funding gaps for the period from 2023/24 to 2025/26, as reported to the Budget Strategy Group and the Members Budget Seminar. A fourth meeting of the Budget Strategy had been scheduled for later this month to consider the updated position following the conclusion of some outstanding matters.

Each individual Scrutiny Board, this month, was now being asked to consider the budget proposals which related to the Cabinet Portfolios within their remit. Included within the report were details pertaining to portfolio-specific considerations insofar as pressures and proposed mitigations; key risks relevant to the budget proposals; and a

schedule of fees and charges proposed for 2023/24 for services provided by the above three Cabinet Portfolios.

As a result of the report and supporting appendices, the following questions and observations arose:

- Cllr B Donnelly highlighted any increase in fees and charges for leisure centres may be a false economy and may cost more in the long run due to the perceived longer-term negative effects on health if fees and charges were prohibitive to residents wishing the access physical activity and exercise. Officers were asked if this scenario had been considered and what measures were in place to mitigate against it. The Deputy Director of Public Health confirmed that increases had been considered as sensitively as possible and the concessionary prices were unchanged* [***please refer to post-meeting note below**]. A pricing differential remained between Tudor Grange Leisure Centre and North Solihull Sports Centre to take account of differing demographics and levels of deprivation. The Board was also advised that the operating costs for the leisure centres was extremely high and the energy crisis had added further significant budget pressures. Usage and footfall profiles were being actively monitored and the availability of some service offers (e.g. the health suite and spa) were being tailored around times of peak demand each day to help reduce energy consumption.
- Cllr A Feeney asked what consideration had been given to fees and charges relating to Bereavement Services. The Finance Manager for Economy & Infrastructure advised that this service area fell outside of the scope of this Scrutiny Board, being the responsibility of the Resources Cabinet Portfolio. By way of a general update, Officers advised that the pressures on that service (relating to the impact of the energy crisis) were being considered corporately. Fees and charges for that service area were proposed to increase in 2023/24, in line with inflation.
- Cllr M Carthew highlighted the benefits of LED lighting and waterless technology in leisure centre facilities which were considered environmentally friendly and could contribute to budget savings via lower energy consumption. The Deputy Director of Public Health confirmed the use of LED lighting already which was a single element of a suite of ongoing initiatives to reduce energy consumption at both leisure centres.
- Cllr G Sleigh referred to the UK Central Programme and asked for a further update on the funding allocations. The report highlighted that the West Midlands Combined Authority had indicated that the funding required to fully deliver all the projects within the Programme was unlikely to be available as originally envisaged. The Finance Manager for Economy & Infrastructure advised that feasibility work was continuing on the list of projects for Solihull and, as part of taking those business cases forward, alternative sources of funding would be sought where required and bids progressed.
- Cllr S Sheshabhattar asked for an update on funding for parking displacement and confirmation of which budget heading it would fall within. The Assistant Director for Highways & Environment confirmed that the Parking Displacement Programme still fell within the Environment & Infrastructure Cabinet Portfolio and a budget of £50k had been allocated to that programme for 2023/24.
- Cllr P Hogarth MBE welcomed no proposed tariff increases to the fees and charges within the Borough's car parks for 2023/24. This was considered vitally important to protect the Borough's retail trade, ensuring Solihull remained

competitive with retail centres within neighbouring authorities, and supporting the ongoing post-pandemic economic recovery.

- The Chairman highlighted the new requirements for the disposal of domestic seating and asked what additional budget pressures this might cause. The Assistant Director for Highways & Environment advised that domestic seating to be disposed of would now need to be broken apart and incinerated (rather than landfill) to remove the risk of pollutants being released into the environment. The Council was currently negotiating contractual disposal costs and once agreed, it was anticipated that the disposal of this type of bulky waste would become much more expensive to the authority. Officers flagged this as a potential risk at this stage in the budget setting process and advised that at some point in the coming year, additional funding would need to be identified. Officers also assured the Board that the current level of fees and charges for bulky household waste collections was still reasonable, taking account of this specific emerging issue.

The above observations and recommendations of this Scrutiny Board would now go forward to the Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board and Full Cabinet during February 2023.

[Post-meeting note: Following the meeting, an inaccuracy in an answer given to Members' questions was realised. In response to a question about the increase in Leisure Centre fees and charges, the Deputy Director of Public Health erroneously advised that the concessionary prices were unchanged. The concessionary prices were increasing in line with inflation, and this was confirmed on pages 111-114 - Appendix B(i) - of the published agenda. Board Members were alerted to this inaccuracy on 11 January 2023, and no additional comments or concerns have been received.]

RESOLVED

That, the Board **UNANIMOUSLY** makes the following **RECOMMENDATIONS** to the Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board and Full Cabinet:

That, subject to the observations and comments recorded in the preamble above, the Board:

- i) Acknowledges the pressures and mitigating actions set out in Appendix A to the report;
- ii) Supports the schedule of fees and charges proposed for 2023/24, as attached at Appendix B to the report; and
- iii) Supports the indicative service budget proposals for 2023/24, as outlined in the report at Appendix C.

End