

# CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MINUTES** of a meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday 4 January 2023 at the Council Chamber - Shire Hall, Gloucester.

## PRESENT:

Cllr Phil Awford (Chair)	Cllr Dr Andrew Miller
Cllr John Bloxsom	Cllr Vernon Smith
Cllr Ben Evans	Cllr Lisa Spivey
Cllr Terry Hale	Cllr Chloe Turner
Cllr Colin Hay	

In attendance: Cllrs Paul Hodgkinson, Roger Whyborn, Cate Cody, Paul Baker, Gill Mosley, Graham Morgan

Virtually in attendance: Cllrs Stephan Fifield, Matt Babbage, David Drew, Wendy Thomas, Chris McFarling and Linda Cohen

Substitutes: Cllr Bernard Fisher

Officers in attendance: Rob Ayliffe, Peter Bungard, Colin Chick, Jason Humm, Steve Mawson, David Owen, Mark Preece, Claire Procter, Professor Sarah Scott and Chris Spencer

Cabinet members in attendance: Cllr Mark Hawthorne MBE, Leader of Council  
Cllr Stephen Davies, Children's Safeguarding and Early Years  
Cllr Kathy Williams, Adult Social Care Delivery  
Cllr Carole Allaway Martin, Adult Social Care Commissioning  
Cllr David Gray, Environment and Planning  
Cllr Lynden Stowe, Deputy Leader and Finance and Change  
Cllr Dave Norman MBE, Fire, Community Safety and Libraries  
Cllr Philip Robinson, Education, Skills and Bus Transport

Apologies: Cllr Andrew Gravells MBE and Cllr Jeremy Hilton and Cllr Dom Morris, Cabinet Member for Highways and Flooding

## 1. SCRUTINY OF THE DRAFT 2023/24 BUDGET & REVIEW OF COUNCIL STRATEGY

### 1. INTRODUCTION & COUNCIL STRATEGY

1.1. Cllr Mark Hawthorne and Pete Bungard introduced the context, revenue, and capital budget in turn. Members noted the following:

- The current [Council Strategy](#) remained sound and relevant as was published this time last year. What members needed to consider this time

was how major events over the past year had affected the context of the budget and MTFs, such as: Ukraine, inflation, cost of living, NHS pressures, 6.4% Local Government pay rise, Prime Ministerial changes etc.

- The budget discussions and process started in July, before inflation had peaked, and at that point there existed a large gap between what services wanted and the likely funding that would be available. On that information, there was a series of Star Chambers through October, of which the main objective was to ensure funding was fairly allocated across the board.
- What still remained outstanding at this point was the Government settlement and what their rules on taxation would be, so the decision was taken to go out to consultation on an unbalanced budget on 8 December 2022, which is the consultation document published for today's meeting.
- The Government settlement was confirmed on 19 December 2022 which allowed for a 3% council tax increase and 2% adult social care levy increase at council choice, and additional, targeted funding for frontline support.
- Cabinet will set a draft budget on 25 January 2023 and recommend it to full council for discussion at the 15 February 2023 budget meeting.
  
- This proposed revenue budget was £560m, which amounted to a £39m increase on the current year. The additional funding was: £13.5m for Adult Social Care, £17.6m for Children's Social Care and £9.3m for Environment and Economy.
- There was also a built in Children's Services reserve to try and reflect the difficulty in balancing out the children's placements budget, in addition to £7.2m built into the budget itself.
- Balancing this budget had been challenging considering this year's pay award (which settled at 6.4% but was budgeted at 2%) and inflationary pressures.
- The proposed increase would be paid for by using £10.3m from reserves, £8.4m from additional income (half of which was due to a better return on investments from increased interest rates) and £4.2m additional from Javelin Park due to the energy price increase.
- Whilst officers felt they were heading towards a balanced and good budget for this year, there was a warning for the 2024/25 budget as the council could not continue to use reserves in this way.
  
- Whilst acknowledging there was a period of uncertainty awaiting the Government settlement, Cllr Hawthorne paid tribute to the County Council network who did a fantastic job lobbying on many fronts.
- What resulted was a much better settlement than was expected, but this was against a backdrop of a higher pay award settlement plus the impact of inflation.
- Government also agreed to delay the implementation of the Adult Social Care Act by 2 years, allowing more time to discuss the true cost of the implementation for upper tier authorities.

- The capital budget for this year was proposed at £231m which included additional £44m of new spend for 23/24, leaving the total capital budget for 2023/24 onwards totalling £531m. This was where the delivery of headline schemes will come from (e.g., M5 Junction 10 improvements).
- The proposed budget will take the full council tax and social care levy increase offered from Government which together amounted to a 4.99% increase. This was not a decision the council took lightly, it would be amongst 85% of upper tier authorities across the country taking the same decision, which reflected the huge demand on services at the moment. In addition, it was advised that the Government settlement each year assumed that councils took the total tax rise on offer and then adjusted the revenue support grant accordingly.

## **2. ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND COMMUNITIES**

2.1. Cllr Kathy Williams, Cllr Carole Allaway-Martin, Cllr Mark Hawthorne and Cllr Dave Norman outlined the commissioning intentions, ambitions and budget changes detailed in the draft MTFs and Council Strategy relating to Adult Social Care, Public Health, and Communities. In particular members noted the following:

- Over the past 18 months there had been two significant changes announced: the further implementation of the Care Act and the introduction of a National Quality Assurance Process by the Care Quality Commission. Although both implementations had been delayed for the moment, the service would continue to implement its Transformation Programme, which began to encompass the required changes.
- Officers continued to build on work and lessons learnt during the Pandemic, including the progress made in helping rough sleepers off the streets.
- The Ukrainian refugee resettlement programme continued to be a high priority, as did domestic abuse which had received Government funding to provide additional support for victims of domestic abuse and their children in safe accommodation, including the provision of additional Places of Safety; and funding to increase capacity in the young person's healthy relationship service.
- Pressures remained, most particularly in relation to the cost of living, fuel crisis and recruitment being at an all-time low.
- This was both a short and long-term demand led service, which was continually confronted with demands and change, its delivery and budget needed to be flexible but also have built-in surety that it can be delivered and sustained.
- Trading Standards, Civil Protection and Coroners, although reasonably small services, were significantly important to residents of Gloucestershire. There would be further investment of £163,000 for an additional area coroner to increase service resilience and to cover an increase in pathology fees. Trading standards would be receiving extra funding to enable enactment of additional statutory requirements from the

Food Standard Agency and to explore succession planning for the service.

- 2.2. A member raised that the guidance from the LGA on reduction of carbon emissions within social care services was not referenced in either the commissioning intentions or outcomes. It was advised that work was being done, such as trying to reduce travel between client groups and making sure social workers could work in smaller localities, but the monitoring of this was looked at as a council wide approach. An action was taken to review the suggested guidance.

**ACTION: Sarah Scott**

- 2.3. There was a discussion around the detail provided to help members understand the delivery, foreseen outcomes, and risk management of all commissioning intentions. Some members felt that it would be useful to understand what commissioning intentions had been carried forward from previous years and the timescale for delivery. It was explained that each service reviewed their risk registers regularly, as well as the council-wide corporate registers. The commissioning intentions provided today were the high-level intentions, the bridging gap between the council's strategic priorities and what services were doing on an annual basis. Members were aware that further detail would be provided prior to the full Council meeting next month
- 2.4. Officers were still working to understand the detail of the Social Care Grant. As mentioned previously, the settlement provided by Government was likely to be more than expected, but there were some indications that certain sums would be tied to specific activity. The further clarification was awaited from Government to ensure the council was allocating it to the right areas.
- 2.5. A member was concerned that the service was under massive pressure and reports to scrutiny regularly reflected officers not feeling there was enough money to deliver what was required. It was felt that the vast majority of the budget increase was essentially to meet inflationary pressures.
- 2.6. It was acknowledged that the sector did have massive challenges and pressures, not least with trying to recruit staff and there was not enough money in the system to fix these issues, which were often national. This was a significant budget, but it had a lot to deliver within it and officers were trying to deliver the best they could within the money available. Members were asked not to underestimate the significant financial pressures at play nationally and globally at the moment. This budget remained a growth budget, and thankfully services were not being cut in order to produce a balanced budget. The Leader added that if members were hearing examples of residents waiting or being stuck in hospital, they needed to be flagged urgently with the team as the data being received was not telling that story.

2.7. Noting the need to take money from reserves for this year's budget, it was questioned whether officers felt the remaining reserve was sufficient. Members were advised that officers regularly carried out risk assessments of the council's financial position to try and assess if the general reserves available were sufficient. At the moment it was felt £12m was probably not quite enough and work would continue to manage this going forward. In terms of helping to manage volatile areas of the budget such as social care, specific reserves had been set up.

## **2.8. Public Health**

- Officers were largely focused on delivering statutory responsibilities, work to address health inequalities and promote healthy lifestyles, delivery of the Gloucestershire domestic abuse strategy, supporting vulnerable individuals in community and accommodation-based support and overseeing the delivery of the Homes for Ukraine programme.
- The proposed budget for this service area was £35.5m, just over £25m of which comes from a ring-fenced government Public Health grant, and it was awaited to see if there will be an uplift in the grant for the 23/24 financial year.
- Some of the proposed budget increase for 23/24 related to contract inflation and covering the costs of uplift in pay for NHS staff who were commissioned in contract delivery for the council with respect to the provision of sexual health services and the public health nursing service.
- It was noted that Public health had also taken on a number of additional responsibilities in recent years (the Covid response, Ukraine settlement programme and the Levelling Up agenda), delivering a huge amount of change.

2.9. In relation to the Build Back Better councillor fund, it was confirmed about half of the available funds had not been spent which amounted to around £1.4m (since the date of the meeting, the unspent funds now total £1.2m), the amount each councillor had spent of their individual pot varied. A piece of work was ongoing to work out how much each individual councillor had left and a reminder to be sent out. A member suggested that some form of central coordination arrangement would be useful to help members who had requests for joint contributions across divisional boundaries.

2.10. There was a question about how effectively GCC was working with district partners in this area. Members heard that there was a lot of work streams that required joint working, for example, Ukraine resettlement, Covid response, Levelling Up etc. Officers felt there were strong relationships in these areas, and there had been very good examples, especially during Covid, where all 6 councils had sensible discussions to understand the issues, allocated funding (when available) where need was greatest and ensured the right authority was delivering the best solution available for the county as a whole.

- 2.11. Referencing page 71 in the consultation report, a member questioned how much of the ongoing cost of Covid was now being absorbed into budgets. It was advised that officers would no longer be able to differentiate ongoing Covid costs in the budget but what they were no longer seeing was one off associated Covid costs. This budget was now working with the 'new normal' and areas Covid had impacted for the foreseeable had been readjusted as appropriate e.g., the impact on parking income had meant going forward it will be readjusted at a lower income level.
- 2.12. A member raised concern that this area was not being funded sufficiently. This was not a growing area of the budget as all increases related to inflation and pay changes. It merely tried to maintain the status quo whilst members were aware of issues such as children's mental health waiting times. While acknowledging the point made, it was suggested that a significant part of public health's work involved enabling and influencing wider partners in the system and working through others. Part of the solution would be lobbying health colleagues as many services, such as mental health care for children and young people were delivered through other organisations e.g., the Clinical Commissioning Group (now Integrated Care Board) and part of Public Health's role in the wider system was to influence the spend elsewhere. It was not for council budgets to fund all NHS provided services. It was suggested that pressures in children's mental health services may be a good issue to explore via the Health Scrutiny Committee.

**ACTION: Democratic Services**

- 2.13. Members noted the importance of monitoring service changes that had been made following the pandemic, such as the introduction of virtual appointments to ensure there were no adverse effect on residents.

### **3. CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

- 3.1. Cllr Stephen Davies and Cllr Phil Robinson outlined the Commissioning Intention, ambitions, and budget changes detailed in the draft MTFS relating to Children and Young People. In particular members noted the following:
- Cabinet in November had reported an overspend of £14.992m, with significant variances in external placements, safeguarding staff costs, children with disabilities and home to school transport.
  - It was outlined that there would be significant investments in the budget for vulnerable children (10.4% increase), particularly around external placements (£6.235m), and pay award commitments (£3.769m).
  - There would be significant investment in education, particularly around home to school transport (4.649m) and support for children with SEND (£1.411m).
  - Members were informed of the work in terms of implementing the sufficiency strategy to ensure the right mix of placements available and to deliver in-house provision to reduce costs and provide more appropriate

placements. The placement market was currently driven by private investment, and this was leading to increased costs.

- It was explained that the Edge of Care Service would be further developed and the continuation of the workforce strategy.
- In terms of risks, the rise in children in care numbers (883) and those on child protection plans and further demand pressures around the ongoing impact of Covid were outlined.
- School performance had improved considerably. Secondary school performance was the best in the South West. There was now a greater proportion of good and outstanding schools. SEND was a major focus. It was estimated a further two special schools would be required in the near future.
- The increase in agency workers had a financial cost as well as a quality cost in terms of continuity. This was an important area to continue to work to address. Members understood the 'grow our own' strategy in terms of the development of social workers through the academy.

3.2. Reflecting on the overspend, it was suggested that there was a clear strategy to reduce that with the right intervention at an early stage to move away from costly placements and to reduce the proportion of agency workers.

3.3. It was explained that £16m costs were for home to school transport and £10m of that was in relation to SEND. This was one of the reasons for embarking on the Edge review to look at producing savings through changing practices such as sharing taxis. Through appropriate consultation with parents and schools, better solutions could be found to help reduce costs and improve the independence of young people.

3.4. ICT floorwalkers were being removed as many of the problems in ICT had been addressed and there were no longer the same numbers of individuals in the office. There was an alternative service in place which better reflected what was required and it was cheaper and more efficient.

3.5. In relation to how children in care numbers were being forecasted it was explained that it was challenging as there are multiple variables such as long-term implications of Covid and service change that should reduce numbers. The number of children in care should be able to be reduced as currently the level was higher than average. The forecast was based on the fact that with better practice those numbers should fall but there were other factors to consider, including pressures within schools. Improved practice and early, effective intervention was the answer.

3.6. Some members stated that they did not have confidence in the forecasting as the figures had previously been wrong. They suggested additional investment in improving practice. One member suggested that the increases in the budget was attempting to catch up with increasing costs and that this did not represent real increases. In response the Cabinet Member stated that the budget showed the continued intention to improve practice and

invest. Small numbers of people had huge cost implications on the budget which accounted for a large proportion of the overspend.

- 3.7. With regard to commissioning intentions, it was explained that some things were extended because they were working well, and that additional commissioning was carried out. The intentions represented long term aims. Some members were looking for additional detail on plans developed from these and detail of outcomes from previous commissioning intentions. It was important to understand timescales around delivery.
- 3.8. Members raised the educational attainment gap between black and ethnic minority groups and white children and the gap in relation to household income. There were a number of programmes schools were encouraged to participate in, with one specific one in Gloucester City. Details could be sent out to the member.

**ACTION     Chris Spencer**

- 3.9. One member asked what children's services as doing to monitor and bring down carbon emissions and to take a leadership role with schools with regards to climate change. The Edge review of home to school transport was looking to have carbon footprint considerations as well as to achieve value for money. Schools were encouraged not to use single use plastics. Leckhampton school had been opened which was built to be carbon neutral. Cllr Phil Robinson as Cabinet Member outlined that for all capital investment there was a consideration in terms of how that related to the Council's carbon reduction targets. In addition, the introduction of electric vehicles and being able to work remotely in terms of social workers filling in paperwork after a visit were all given as examples.
- 3.10. There was a discussion around timeliness of EHCPs and how the work to improve performance in this area was reflected in the budget. Details were given around the challenges of maintaining the 40% target in this area.
- 3.11. One member was looking for an overall number of students who had been through the Social Work Academy and suggested that there was a danger that some may only stay a short period in Gloucestershire before moving elsewhere. 40 students per year were supported through the Academy with the hope that they would choose to stay in Gloucestershire once qualified. This supported the 'grow our own' principle. There was some discussion on the power of recruitment agencies and the pay differential that was created by that.
- 3.12. One member asked what mitigations were in place to ensure children services could continue in the face of climate change, in particular in relation to schools. In response it was explained that these considerations were at the heart of all capital investment. The member queried if new schools were equipped for the outside temperature to reach 40 degrees. Examples were



given of design considerations that helped to regulate the temperature in an environmentally friendly way.

#### **4. FIRE AND RESCUE**

- 4.1. Cllr Dave Norman outlined the commissioning intentions, ambitions and budget changes detailed in the draft MTF5 and Council Strategy relating to Fire and Rescue. In particular members noted the following:
- The revenue budget would be increased by around £3m overall for 2023/24, with additional funding for staffing to ensure continued progress was made on fire fighter safety, prevention, and protection activities, and to continue to positively develop its organisational culture.
  - There had been support from reserves to enable formation of a Programme Management team to manage the delivery of the Service's improvement plan objectives.
  - Due to the fact that currently 51% of operational staff were in their development stage, coupled with an increase in specialist function within the remit of a fire fighter's role, budget allocations of £400,000 for core training, £175,000 for courses and £225,000 for additional training hour per week for on call staff would be allocated.
  - A further £25,000 had been provided to ensure annual fitness tests that complied with national standards, £174,000 to ease inflationary pressures, £758,000 for new schemes of capital investment which includes improvements to Stroud Community Station, equipment, and improvements to fleet.
  - There were no savings or requirements for efficiency, the focus was on investment and improvement.
- 4.2. Work was ongoing in respect of addressing the Service's Scope 3 emissions. They were exploring things such as improving station premise (through the use of photovoltaic panels for example), incorporating electric vehicles into the fleet and investing in the best low emission technologies.
- 4.3. Members were advised that the improvement journey in response to the previous HMIFRS inspection continued. The inspection had highlighted 2 main areas of concern, which resulted in an improvement plan that produced 11 areas for improvement (around 100 changes). A significant portion of the £984,000 allocated for staff investment was to employ additional staff, the inspection had brought out that some of the cultural challenges were due to workload demands and a lack of work/life balance. Referencing the recent national report on culture and behaviour in 2 London services, the Cabinet Member was clear that all fire services should be paying attention to these issues and should ensure anything done, said, or seen at any station was reported immediately and challenged head on.
- 4.4. It was explained that the £720,000 of backpay from last year covered the previously discussed 4% difference in the pay award for staff. It was funded

this year through reserves but there had to be a permanent budget adjustment for service's going forward.

- 4.5. The Chief advised that the investment in treadmills was in relation to the requirement of all Service staff to undergo an annual occupational health assessment. These tests were required to be run in-house to avoid staff needing time away from duties, but currently the on-call fire station did not have properly calibrated machines. The Service had a duty of care to staff to ensure they were fit and able to undertake these annual assessments. The Chief had suggested investing half of the allocated budget to begin with to ensure the demand was there.

**ACTION: Mark Preece**

Explore issues reported around customer access to trading standards.

## **5. ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMIC GROWTH**

- 5.1. Cllr David Gray, Cllr Philip Robinson and Cllr Dave Norman outlined the Commissioning Intentions, ambitions, and budget changes relating to Environment and Economic Growth, including Road Safety and Libraries. In particular members noted the following:

- The attached presentation outlined the overall picture of a sustainable economic future delivered via a number of projects, as a result of the revenue budget allocated to the department to lobby and secure funding from external partners. Projects such as M5 Junction 9 was not only a road improvement scheme but would also enable the delivery of a sustainable garden town of 15,000 new homes and 20,000 new jobs.
- The annual resurfacing programme was on track, a record level of resurfacing was delivered last year with 16,000 tonnes of black top laid in one month alone.
- The team repaired over 40,000 potholes and delivered an effective emergency response to adverse weather impacts.
- A highways transformation board had now been created to review how to improve its customer services.
- The backdrop of a very difficult few years in relation to public transport, due to Covid impacts, withdrawal of services by Stagecoach, inflationary pressures etc., had been met with significant investment and showed the council's commitment to public transport provision.
- £1.352m for rollout of The Robin initiative in rural communities, £305,000 for bus service contracts, £398,000 one off increase for contract inflation, £148,000 for public transport procurement and £500,000 had been proposed for ITU and education teams to review home to school transport.
- The Council had now adopted a refreshed Road Safety Policy and were working with colleagues across the county via the Gloucestershire Road Safety Partnership. The budget proposed £155,000 for additional staff to

support the technical requirements around assessing accident hotspots, analysing statistics and to deliver any requirement education/training.

- A further £400,000 capital (in addition to the existing £600,000) to tackle the highest priority KSI sites.
- Any remaining capital from the £600,000 Community Speedwatch fund will be rolled over into 2023/24 to enable scheme delivery from Phase 2 bids to continue.
- There remained a dedicated desire to continue to enhance the library service. The programme had received a successful NPO bid of £750,000 over the next 3 years for cultural activity development.
- Capital was key to a lot of infrastructure improvements, facilitating growth and helping to offer residents a green future.
- Flood alleviation was a very important part of council activities, since 2007 there had been £59m capital spend and over £2m per year to help protect communities.
- This budget reflected the council's continued commitment to addressing climate change, whilst offering value and excellent services to residents.
- There would be a continued spend of £1m per year directly on addressing climate change through things such as tree planting, officer support in areas such as biodiversity, the roll out of electric vehicle chargers and commitment to Climate Leadership Gloucestershire.
- The impact and pressure of inflation amounted to around £3.5m within the Environment and Planning portfolio alone.
- Decarbonisation of transport remained key for future work, GCC was working with UK100 group on how to implement it alongside district colleagues.
- The success of the Energy from Waste scheme would result in £4m worth of income for 2023/24 which was ahead of where we expected it to be by this point.
- Cabinet members felt this was another very positive budget for this area which reflected the strengths of county and the council, the continued hard work done by the officers and commitment to deliver.

5.2. It was confirmed that the additional £400,000 within road safety would be used in areas where the data, including from the Community Speedwatch initiatives, identified the greatest need for road safety improvements and to benefit of the vast majority of residents.

5.3. On the issue of transport decarbonisation, a member questioned where the budget would seek to address journeys that could not be achieved by a change to walking or cycling, noting that Mass Rapid Transport (MRT) solutions had been discussed. It was advised that there was no 'one' solution for long journey decarbonisation. The types of activities the council was actively involved in and promoting would include things like the MRT under the heading of the £1m fund for future resilience, there was also the rollout of electric vehicle infrastructure and rail connectivity improvements. Another key addition to these alternative travel options would be Transport Hubs. Although there was no specific location yet identified, it was proposed

that between £100-200,000 be made available per district to deliver at least one. The council continued to participate in progressing this agenda within Climate Leadership Gloucestershire and were due to go live with a public consultation on their decarbonisation action plan shortly.

- 5.4. There was concern the tree planting programme was not progressing as needed to hit the target of 1 million by 2030. It was acknowledged that this was an ambitious target and the council remained committed to delivering it. Such programmes were usually slowest at the start as it took a lot of time to identify sites and officer capacity, partners to help deliver etc. it will therefore begin to accelerate. In addition, there was also a commitment that for every tree removed from the highway (for example due to Ash Dieback disease), it would be replaced with two, be that where it stood before or in a more appropriate place.
- 5.5. Officers clarified that the Highways & Transport Transformation Fund was purely allocated to explore how the highways maintenance function performed, and how it could be improved to provide a better service for residents. There was currently a mismatch between statistics and feeling within communities, this fund would help officers get within that thinking, reflect on the service provided and better understand what residents expected.
- 5.6. A member queried the figure provided for the Energy from waste contract benchmarking on page 85 of the consultation document. It was advised that in previous years this cost had not changed much contract to contract but due to the exceptional economic situation at the moment, some of the contract terms had increased and therefore needed to be met with additional budget. It was stressed however that these costs were more than offset by the increased revenue received from Javelin Park through energy sales.
- 5.7. Noting the cost reductions on page 86, officers explained that the reduction in relation to road sweepings was as a result of a review of the service that found there was much more opportunity to recycle street sweepings rather than treating the entirety as residual waste. The street lighting reduction was as a result of plans to phase in a reduction of brightness in particular areas as well as investing in more efficient technologies.
- 5.8. Concern was raised that little was being done in this budget to help promote walking in the county. It was advised that there was a lot of money spent in this area, repairing and resurfacing pavements for example, but these ongoing costs would not be reflected specifically in this budget as it primarily focused on changes. Another example was the proposed Cheltenham Mini Holland Scheme which, if progressed and successful, could provide a business case for further projects going forward.
- 5.9. A member questioned how this budget would help address the remaining areas not reached by the Gloucestershire Broadband programme. It was

explained that the programme had realistically now been rolled out as far as it could without a significant cost soar. What the Council would now look at was other ways of enabling residents to access that connection, for example, providing a local subsidy or exploring alternative technologies.

## **6. CORPORATE**

6.1. Cllr Lynden Stowe outlined the Commissioning Intentions and budget changes detailed in the draft MTFs relating to Corporate Resources. In particular members noted the following:

- This budget area covered the provision of resources to enable services to be delivered.
- A proposed increase of £7.7m, of which £5m related to pay awards.
- £800,000 increase for legal costs, specifically in children's social care and due to the court backlog.
- £800,000 for investment into staff retention and an increase in information requests and complaint handling.
- £1.135m around IT upgrades, cyber essentials and ensuring staff have better equipment for agile working progress.
- This budget also included the pay contingency for next year's pay award which had been proposed at 4% with an additional 0.5% reserved.

6.2. It was confirmed that there was a capital budget of £12m per year allocated for property improvements to ensure they were rentable where needed. There was a continued review of the use of Shire Hall to understand the impact of changes to working patterns caused by Covid. It was Covid impacts on working patterns, acknowledged that such projects were likely to result in a positive return.

## **7. SUMMARY**

7.1. The Committee had the opportunity to feed back to the Chief Executive and Leader of Council on the themes and trends that had been identified over the course of the day.

7.2. Members had been advised to consider how effectively the proposed budget responded to:

- The changing needs of Gloucestershire residents and communities
- The priorities and ambitions set out within the Council Strategy
- Any legislative or other changes in national policy or guidance

7.3. While the Committee did not make any formal recommendations, the significant comments raised by Members at the end of the day are listed below.

7.4. Adults Social Care and Communities

*Minutes subject to their acceptance as a correct record at the next meeting*

- Explore opportunities to expand the detail available to members on understanding the delivery and risk management of all Commissioning Intentions – noting more detail will be provided at council in February (discussion at 2.3).
- Suggestions on reviewing whether additional funding could be provided via the Build Back Better Fund in the future and whether a central resource could be made available to help coordinate members in pooling their funding allocations for larger/cross divisional projects (discussion at 2.11).
- Proposed Health Scrutiny item around sufficient funding of areas such as children’s mental health services which was the responsibility of partners outside the Council (discussion at 2.15).

#### 7.5. Children and Families Scrutiny Committee

- Commissioning intentions – some members were looking for additional detail on plans developed from these and detail of outcomes from previous commissioning intentions. It was important to understand timescales around delivery and why some had continued over a number of years.
- Pressure created by recruitment agencies and the importance of the social work academy.
- Importance of effective forecasting with some members suggesting a lack of confidence in the budget being able to meet demand. There was recognition that small numbers of children sometimes made-up large amounts of the overspend and that this was difficult to forecast.

#### 7.6. Feedback to the Leader and Chief Executive

In addition to the above points, members of the Committee fed back the following observations and suggested actions:

- Some members highlighted the need to spend as much as possible on prevention and intervention, particularly within Adult and Children’s Social Services.
- To ensure the budget and commissioning intentions satisfy new obligations on local authorities via the Environment Act 2021. This was not currently explicitly referred to within the consultation document.
- Each department within the council should have an understanding and ownership for their own climate change implications, particularly Scope 3 Emissions arising from their activities. This should not just be held centrally.

*Minutes subject to their acceptance as a correct record at the next meeting*

- The Committee understood the reason behind the council tax increase but remained concerned about the impact this will have on residents, particularly considering the ongoing cost of living crisis.
- Noting the significant pressures faced over the past few years, through extraordinary events such as Covid, energy crisis etc., and the impact these have had on the council's transformation programmes, a member raised concerned that this may become the 'new normal' and what this would mean for future improvement plans.

## **CHAIR**

Meeting concluded at 16:45.