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GOVERNANCE, STRATEGY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY BOARD
08/02/2024 at 6.00 pm



Present: Councillor McLaren (Chair)
Councillors J. Hussain, Moores, Surjan and Sykes (Substitute)

Also in Attendance:

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| Councillor Al-Hamdani | Liberal Democrats Shadow Cabinet Member Finance and Corporate Resources |
| Councillor Quigg | Conservatives |
| Sarah Johnston | Director of Finance |
| Chris Kelsall | Assistant Director of Finance (Capital and transformation) |
| Andrew Mather | Constitutional Services |

1 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Al-Hamdani, Hince and Woodvine.

Note: Councillor Al-Hamdani had given his apologies in order to present a report to the Scrutiny Board.

2 **URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no items of urgent business received.

3 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Surjan declared a non-prejudicial pecuniary interest in Items 6 and 7 in relation to the funding of voluntary organisations.

4 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

No public questions had been submitted.

5 **LIBERAL DEMOCRATS BUDGET AMENDMENT PROPOSALS 2024/25**

Consideration was given to a report outlining the Liberal Democrat Budget Amendment Proposals 2024/25 which presented to the Scrutiny Board, the Liberal Democrats suggested amendments to the Administration's Budget proposals for 2024/25 and offered some forward-looking proposals to achieve savings in future years.

The Liberal Democrats Shadow Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Resources, Councillor Al-Hamdani was in attendance to introduce the report and answer questions. Councillor Al Hamdani thanked officer for their assistance in preparing the proposals but pointed out the difficulties caused by the short timescale of the budget process.

The Liberal Democrats Capital Investment Proposals proposed £2m additional capital investment required to deliver 'Investment in Our Districts' which would be financed by redeploying part of the Fund for Emerging Priorities included in the report 'Capital

Strategy and Capital Programme 2024/25 to 2028/29' considered by the Board on 25 January 2024. The proposed expenditure left a total of £7.426m remaining within the Fund and did not require any Prudential Borrowing and therefore neither added expenditure to the Capital Programme nor incurred any additional revenue expenditure in the form of capital financing costs.

The Liberal Democrats proposed a range of additional budget reduction proposals for 2024/25 which would make £0.311m available for investment with a further £0.139m in 2025/26 as detailed in Section 4 of the report. The resource would be used to invest in a range of proposals aimed at improving the lives of residents within the borough. Proposed additional investments included:

Highways and Pavement Repairs (£0.100m)
Recreational and Green Spaces (£0.100m)
Youth Services (£0.050m)
Investment in Crime and Safety (£0.050m)
Whit Friday Band Contest (£0.011m)

Budget reduction proposals:

OPP-BR1-201 – Reconsideration of Council priorities with regards to the communications and Research Service (£0.365m)

OPP-BR1-202 – Reduction in mileage budgets to reflect change in work practices (£0.055m)

OPP-BR1-203 – Reduction in Trade Union Facilities Time (£0.070m)

OPP-BR1-204 – Review of car allowances to reduce the amount paid as a lump sum to staff doing zero or minimal mileage (£0.050m)

OPP-BR1-205 – Reduction in the Stationary Budget (£0.010m)

The report also suggested several areas for future consideration by the administration.

The Director of Finance in the role of Responsible Officer under Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 had evaluated the proposals and confirmed that the budget amendments as presented were robust and deliverable. However, as it was an alternative set of budget options the opportunity for testing the risks associated with the proposals are more limited and it is therefore necessary to afford a level of caution in presenting these alternatives.

Resolved:

1. That the following budget reduction proposals are accepted and commended to the Cabinet:

OPP-BR1-201 – Reconsideration of Council priorities with regards to the communications and Research Service (£0.365m)

OPP-BR1-202 – Reduction in mileage budgets to reflect change in work practices (£0.055m)

OPP-BR1-204 – Review of car allowances to reduce the amount paid as a lump sum to staff doing zero or minimal mileage (£0.050m)

2. The remaining budget proposals contained in the report be rejected.

6 **CONSERVATIVE BUDGET AMENDMENT PROPOSALS 2024/25**

A report was submitted presenting Conservative Group proposals for amendments to the Administration's Budget for 2024/25. Councillor Woodvine, Shadow Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Resources, had submitted a written introduction to the proposals as he was unable to attend the meeting. Councillor Quigg attended to answer questions from members of the Scrutiny Board.

Councillor Woodvine's introduction: Thanked Finance officers for their support in the production of the budget amendment proposals. Concurred with the Liberal Democrats that the tight turnarounds and timeframes had not allowed the Group to put together as rigorous proposals as they would have liked. The Conservative Group were proposing for the third consecutive year no increase in Council Tax for General Purposes. The Group accepted the Administration's budgetary reductions and unfortunately the use of reserves.

Councillor Woodvine reported that the Groups Budget is balanced and makes further budgetary reductions – these are in addition to those of the Administration and the primary reason for these is to counter the proposed increase in Council Tax for General Purposes. The report proposed an additional £1m to be taken out of reserves to fund the Council Tax freeze.

The proposed Budget reductions prioritised reducing non statutory staffing and service costs. Savings were proposed across: Executive Management; District Partnerships (but not including Council Ward Budgets); Communications; Administration and stationery; Elected Members' Allowances (Cabinet and Committee Chairs); and Mileage and car allowances.

The Conservative Group proposed abolishing the 'Big Bang Bonfire' and creating a fund for community events across the Districts including Christmas, Whit Friday and other events.

The report proposed reappropriation of funds for the Council's capital programme – this includes investing in the Royton and Shaw District Centres and a Saddleworth Health Centre. Priorities identified by our Group. Additional investment was also proposed for highways across the Borough.

Councillor Woodvine concluded that the priority of the Conservative Group is to keep taxation at the lowest possible level.

Details of the proposals were contained in Section 3 of the report and were summarized in Appendix One. Business Cases for the individual budget reductions were summarized in Appendix Two of the report.

The Director of Finance in the role of Responsible Officer under Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 had evaluated the proposals. The proposal not to increase the level of Council Tax for general purposes would significantly increase the budget challenge for 2025/26 and later years and as such must be considered a high-risk proposal given the financial pressures the Council will continue to face.

Councillor Quigg answered several questions from members on the proposals. Councillor Quigg again pointed out that difficulties were faced in obtaining information across all departments and that the Council's finances needed to be much more open and transparent to elected members and to the public, so they can access and engage with them properly

Resolved:

That the Cabinet be recommended to reject all of the recommendations of the report.

7 **GREATER MANCHESTER COMBINED AUTHORITY'S
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (GMCA) HELD ON 13TH
DECEMBER 2023**

The Scrutiny Board received and considered the minutes of the meeting of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority Scrutiny Committee held on 13th December 2023.

Resolved: That the minutes be noted.

8 **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Scrutiny Board considered its Work Programme for 2023/24.

Resolved: That the Governance, Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board's work programme 2023/24, be noted.

9 **KEY DECISION DOCUMENT**

The Board considered the Key Decision Document, which records key decisions that the authority is due to take.

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Resolved: That the Key Decision Document be noted.

RULE 13 AND 14

There was nothing to report under Rule 13 and 14.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 7.15 pm



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