



**BUSINESS SUPPORT  
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
31 JANUARY 2019**

**DRAFT CAPITAL AND REVENUE BUDGET  
PROPOSALS 2019/2020**

**(Report back from other Overview and Scrutiny Committees)**

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**Summary**

This report presents for consideration the comments of all Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Committees on the provisional draft budget for 2019/2020 proposed by Cabinet on 20 November 2018.

**1. Budget and Policy Framework**

1.1 The adoption of the budget and the setting of the council tax are matters reserved for Council. In accordance with the Constitution, Cabinet is required to develop initial budget proposals at least three months before the Council meeting that determines the budget and council tax, which this year will take place on 21 February 2019. These proposals must then be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committees for their views with any proposals for change being referred back to Cabinet for consideration. At the Council budget meeting, the Council will consider the Cabinet's budget proposals and any report from Overview and Scrutiny.

**2. Background**

2.1 On 20 November 2018 Cabinet considered the draft capital and revenue budgets for 2019/2020 and agreed to forward these to all Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Committees as work in progress inviting them to offer comments on the proposals outlined.

2.2 The Business Support O&S Committee has a pivotal role in the consultation process that surrounds Cabinet's construction of the budget. It has the

responsibility to scrutinise and comment on the proposals. To this end the other O&S Committees have been invited to forward their comments to inform the process of scrutiny by this Committee as part of the constitutional consultation requirement for budget formulation.

- 2.3 The views expressed by the O&S Committees during this consultation period will be considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 5 February 2019.

### 3. Draft Capital and Revenue Budgets 2019/2020

- 3.1 The draft proposals discussed by Cabinet were disaggregated into overview and scrutiny responsibilities and each Committee has been asked to consider the draft proposals pertinent to their area of responsibility and comment back to this Committee.

- 3.2 Elsewhere on this agenda is a 2019/2020 budget report, which deals specifically with those areas of the budget pertinent to this Committee. All of the other O&S Committees – dates included for information – have now had the opportunity to consider the budget proposals recommended by Cabinet and their views are set out in this report.

Business Support O&S Committee	29 November 2018 and 31 January 2019
Children and Young People O&S Committee	4 December 2018
Regeneration, Culture and Environment O&S Committee	6 December 2018
Health and Adult Social Care O&S Committee	13 December 2018

- 3.3 The relevant extracts from the minutes of these Committees are set out below.

- 3.4 In addition, the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 29 November 2018 considered a report on the Council's e-petitions scheme. Members noted the work done by officers to explore the potential to develop the functionality of the Council's e-petition system supplied by mod.gov. The Committee noted there would be unbudgeted expenditure required to do this and asked officers to explore options for enhancing the system that would not incur any costs to the Council. The Committee recognised that there was no desire to identify Council funding given the current financial climate. The Committee therefore agreed to recommend to Cabinet that the mod.gov e-petition system should not be upgraded until such time as additional funds become available.

### 3.5 ***Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 29 November 2018***

#### **Draft Capital and Revenue Budget 2019/20**

##### **Discussion:**

Members considered a report which provided an update on progress towards setting the Council's draft capital and revenue budgets for 2019/20. In accordance with the Constitution, the Cabinet was required to develop 'initial budget proposals' approximately three months before finalising the budget and setting council tax levels at the end of February 2019.

The draft budget was based on the principles contained in the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2018-2023 approved by Cabinet in September and reflected the latest formula grant assumptions.

In response to a query about Medway Norse, the Chief Finance Officer advised that as a Teckal company Medway Norse could only generate a small percentage of its business from outside the Council. Also the areas of work it specialised in tended not to generate significant profits due to the small margins. The main driver for Medway Norse had always been about generating efficiencies.

A Member criticised the lack of any consultation with the public on the draft budget; asked if the business rate pilot retention scheme was likely to continue for a second year and expressed frustration at the fluidity of the date of the local government finance settlement. In response the Chief Finance Officer advised that the finance settlement date had been expected on 6 December but this may happen later in December and it was expected to include a decision about the extension of the pilot.

##### **Decision:**

The Committee agreed to:

- a) note that Cabinet has instructed officers to continue to work with Portfolio Holders in formulating robust proposals to balance the budget for 2019/20 and beyond, and;
- b) note the proposals outlined in the draft capital and revenue budgets and forward the proposals to the individual overview and scrutiny committees.

### 3.6 ***Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 4 December 2018***

#### **Draft Capital and Revenue Budget 2019/20**

##### **Discussion:**

The Finance Business Partner introduced the report which provided an update on the progress towards setting the Council's draft capital and revenue budgets for 2019/20, which had been based on the principals contained in the

Medium Term Financial Strategy 2018-23, approved by Cabinet in September 2018. It was explained that there was currently a gap of £4.4million but that officers were continuing to work to close the gap and produce a balanced budget for full Council to consider and approve in February 2019.

Members then raised a number of comments and questions, which included:

- **Head of Safeguarding saving** – in response to a query it was confirmed that the £314,000 savings demonstrated in Appendix 1 was being replaced with an increase to the budget of £1.7m due to the current cost of placements.
- **More detail** – comment was made that although this report had provided more detail than previous years it was not considered to go far enough to enable the committee to provide fully informed comment and challenge and officers undertook to feed this back for future reports.
- **New special school provision** – in response to a query as to why the costs relating to the proposed new special school at the Cornwallis site was not reflected in the capital budget proposals, officers explained that this was because the financing of the project had not yet been finalised and the amount reflected in the budget would be the repayment which would depend on the terms and conditions yet to be agreed.

**Decision:**

- 1) The Committee noted that the Cabinet had instructed officers to continue to work with Portfolio Holders in formulating robust proposals to balance the budget for 2019/20 and beyond.
- 2) The Committee noted that its comments would be forwarded to the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee in January 2019.

3.7 ***Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 6 December 2018***

**Draft Capital and Revenue Budget 2019/20**

**Discussion:**

The Committee received a report providing an update on progress towards setting the Council's draft capital and revenue budgets for 2019/20.

The report set out the process by which the budget would progress through to Cabinet and Council in February 2019.

The Chief Finance Officer addressed those areas where there had been budget pressures in 2018/19 and those where there had been a shortfall in income levels.

The Director Regeneration, Culture, Environment and Transformation and Deputy Chief Executive advised upon the measures currently being taken to reduce income shortfalls.

In response to a question as to how the Council would react to a downturn in the economy, the Chief Finance Officer advised that he was not planning any further draw upon Reserves. However, he appreciated that fluctuations in the financial market were currently difficult to forecast.

#### **Decision:**

The Committee noted that Cabinet has instructed officers to continue to work with Portfolio Holders in formulating robust proposals to balance the budget for 2019/20 and beyond.

### **3.8 *Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 13 December 2018***

#### **Draft Capital and Revenue Budget 2019/20**

#### **Discussion**

The report presented the Council's draft 2019/20 budget. This built upon assumptions that had been presented to Cabinet in the Medium Term Financial Strategy in September 2018. The budget was due to be approved by Council on 21 February 2019. The draft budget presented a £4.408million deficit for 2019/20, which was bigger than the deficit that had been set out in the Medium Term Financial Strategy. There were overspends in a number of service areas, which included Children's Social Care SEND related placements. The Government's October 2018 Budget had outlined the additional provision of £650million of funding, across the country, for social care. Officers estimated that the Council would receive an additional £2.6 million as a result, which would help to address the gap in the budget but this income had not been included in the draft budget.

The Council had been unsuccessful in its bid for 2019/20 Business Rate retention. This would have allowed the Council to retain all Business Rates generated in Medway rather than being required to pass 50% of the revenue to the Government for reallocation. The Council had successfully taken part in a pilot for 2018/19, which had been a boost to the financial position and the draft budget had assumed that the 2019/20 bid would be unsuccessful. It was noted that Medway's Revenue Support Grant from the Government had reduced from £65million in 2009 to £6.3million for the next year as the Government moved towards making councils reliant on locally generated funding. The Government had confirmed that there would be no change to the council tax referendum limit or the new homes bonus, both of which had been assumed in the draft budget. Some local authorities were projecting that they would have to pay the Government more than they would receive in Revenue Support Grant. This was not expected to apply to Medway in the short or medium term. Lead Members and officers were currently working to produce a

final draft budget to present to Council. There was a statutory obligation for this to be a balanced budget.

A Committee Member asked what mitigation there could be to give confidence that essential services could be maintained in view of the budgetary pressures. The Head of Finance Strategy said that, in relation to the extra £2.6 million of funding for social care, there would be freedom for the Council to determine how to allocate this across children's and adult social care. There was an ongoing process between Lead Members and Children and Adults to allocate funding. The Government had also announced that reductions in business rate relief would be cost neutral for local authorities.

In response to a further Member question, the Head of Finance Strategy said that the Chief Finance Officer and she would be available to attend scrutiny committee meetings when there was due to be discussion of budgets.

## **Decision**

The Committee:

- i) Noted that Cabinet had instructed officers to continue to work with Portfolio Holders in formulating robust proposals to balance the budget for 2019/20 and beyond.
- ii) Commented on the proposals outlined in the draft capital and revenue budgets in so far as they related to the services within the remit of the committee and agreed to feed this back to the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee in January.

## **4. Risk Management**

- 4.1 The risks exposed by a failure to effectively manage the resource planning and allocation process to achieve priorities and maintain effective service delivery are great. The grant reductions imposed by Government have made this process difficult.

## **5. Financial and Legal Implications**

- 5.1 The reports as distributed to the individual overview and scrutiny committees set out the budget proposals recommended by Cabinet. Responses to those proposals are contained in this report.
- 5.2 The Constitution of the Council incorporated under the Local Government Act 2000 contains the budget and policy framework rules. The relevant parts of the Constitution are as follows:
  - The budget and policy framework rules contained in the constitution specify that the Cabinet should produce initial proposals for the budget three months before the Council meeting that is scheduled to determine the budget and Council Tax. These initial proposals should then be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committees. The Overview and

Scrutiny Committees will advise the Cabinet of their views of the proposed budget, having six weeks to respond to the initial proposals of the Cabinet.

- Under the constitution the Cabinet has complete discretion to either accept or reject the proposals emanating from the Overview and Scrutiny Committees. Ultimately it is the Cabinet's responsibility to present a budget to the Council, with a meeting arranged for this purpose on 21 February 2019. The statutory deadline for approving the Council Tax is 11 March 2019.

## **6. Recommendations**

6.1 Members are asked to:

- a) consider the comments from the individual Overview and Scrutiny Committees, as set out in Section 3, together with those pertinent to this Committee considered earlier in this agenda, and determine which of these are forwarded to Cabinet on 5 February, and;
- b) recommend to Cabinet that the Council's mod.gov e-petition scheme not be upgraded until such time as additional funds become available.

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### **Appendices:**

None

### **Background papers:**

Draft Capital & Revenue Budget 2019/20 – Cabinet 20 November 2018  
<https://democracy.medway.gov.uk/mgconvert2pdf.aspx?id=38821>

Medium Term Financial Strategy 2018-2023 – Cabinet 25 September 2018  
<https://democracy.medway.gov.uk/mgconvert2pdf.aspx?id=43679>