

HAVANT BOROUGH COUNCIL

Scrutiny Board

30 January 2018

Review of the Budget 2018/2019

FOR RECOMMENDATION

KEY DECISION NO

REPORT BY: Budget Scrutiny and Policy Development Panel

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The review was established to analyse the formation process for the 2018/19 budget.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 The Scrutiny Board Recommend to Cabinet:

2.1.1 to instruct the Chief Finance Officer to review each service's budget to identify funds which could be used by more than one service and that these budgets be moved so that they can be easily accessed by all relevant services;

2.1.2 to request the political group leaders to encourage their members to consent to receiving electronic versions of all committee papers; and

2.1.3 to instruct officers to prepare a business case for paperless meeting papers, highlighting the costs and potential savings for this move.

3.0 RESOURCES:

3.1 A move towards paperless meeting papers will reduce the Council's printing costs.

3.2 The creation of central budgets for funds accessible by more than one service will ensure that budgets are more effectively used.

4.0 LEGAL:

4.1 In relation to paperless meeting papers, the Council is required to supply a reasonable number of papers agendas/reports for members of the public. The Council is also required to send paper copies of meeting papers to Councillors, if they do not consent to electronic versions of meeting papers.

5.0 STRATEGY:

5.1 The delivery of financially sustainable services is a key commitment in the Councils' Corporate Strategy.

6.0 RISKS:

6.1 An increase in fees is likely to lead to lead to complaints from members of the public.

7.0 COMMUNICATIONS:

7.1 Residents should be fully informed of any change in fees and charges and the reasons for these increases.

8.0 FOR THE COMMUNITY:

8.1 The delivery of financially sustainable services, which are affordable for customers will benefit the community.

9.0 METHODOLOGY

9.1 This review was undertaken to review the budget proposals for 2018/19. It was agreed that the review would be carried out investigating a sample of services as follows:

- a) Early thoughts discussions' with four services.
- b) Discussion with the Leader of the Council, Chief Executive Officer, and the Chief Finance Officer on the strategic direction for the budget 2018/19.
- c) Deep Dive' sessions with the four services reviewed at a) above.

9.2 Full details of the methodology of the project are set out in a separate Findings Pack.

10.0 KEY FINDINGS

10.1 The current financial year had included a £1million target for Heads of Service (HoS) to make up through stretched incomes or efficiency targets. This had proved difficult as there had been additional pressures on services within the year.

10.2 These additional pressures had included elements such as additional costs relating to the 5 Councils Contract, the implementation of Universal Credit, and Government policy on planning fees.

10.3 The Panel was concerned to learn that efficiency targets appeared to be set, without consultation on services after the budget had been agreed. As a result services are unlikely or struggling to make savings/increase income to

reach these targets. The Panel notes that processes are in place to improve monitoring of the Council's financial performance.

10.4 The Panel has identified the following potential efficiencies

(a) Contingency Funds

The Panel was concerned to learn that funds for works to repair a listed building in this financial year was funded out of the Neighbourhood Service even though there was a specific fund for this purpose held in the Planning Service. The Head of Service for Neighbourhood Support was unaware of the budget held by Planning and explained that the difficulties using a budget from another service to fund works undertaken by another service was lengthy and in some cases it was easier just to use her own budget to fund the works. The Panel consider that a review of each service's budget should be undertaken to identify funds which could be used by more than one service and that these budgets be moved so that they can be easily accessed by all relevant services.

(b) Paperless Meetings

The Panel noted that Hampshire County Council had saved money by moving away from paper agendas/minutes and requiring all members of their Council to access these documents using tablets issued to them by the Council. The Panel acknowledges that there are some legislative requirements that require paper copies of reports and agendas to be made available to members of the public and Councillors. However, it considers if members could be persuaded to move towards using tablets to access meeting papers, it will reduce the Council's printing costs.

The Panel accepts that the Council does not have the funds to supply tablets to all Councillors. However, there are a number of Councillors who possess tablets and the Council does give an IT allowance (as part of the basic Councillor allowance) which can be used towards purchasing the required equipment. The Panel therefore consider that Councillors should be encouraged to agree not to have paper copies of meeting papers and the feasibility of using the Council agenda management system to supply paperless copies of these papers be investigated.

10.5 Based on the information submitted during the review, the Panel are satisfied with the proposals put forward. The officers have undertaken research to calculate the market rate for each fee or charge and the proposed increases can be justified. It is acknowledged that details of some of the increases in fees and charges may be challenged in areas such as off street parking fees. However, these fees have not been increased for the past 4 years.

Appendices

Appendix – Comments on Final Report

Background Papers

[Findings Pack](#)

Contact: Councillor Gary Hughes
Title: Scrutiny Lead for the Budget Scrutiny and Policy Development Panel
Telephone: 02392 374152
E-Mail: gary.hughes@havant.gov.uk