

**MINUTE EXTRACTS OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANELS
CONCERNING THE 2019/20 BUDGET CONSULTATION**

Environment, Culture and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 8 January 2019

35. 2019/20 Draft Budget Proposals

It was noted members had received a full draft budget pack as well as agenda papers related to items of the draft budget relating to Environment, Culture and Communities. The information was the same but presented in a different format.

Discussion on the budget resulted in the following comments and questions:

- Members queried why an income was not received where an office space was reclassified from Class B to a Class C dwelling. Andrew Hunter, Director: Place, Planning & Regeneration informed members this fee was set universally across all local authorities so could not be changed locally.
- It was acknowledged this was a consultation process but members queried why some of the proposed fees and charges appeared particularly high. For example, on page 61 of the agenda there were large increases for marriage in the Haversham room at South Hill Park. Other examples of substantial increases included an 8.2% increase for the internment of a body over 16 years of age in comparison to a 3.5% increase for most other fees and charges and an increase in the fee of citizenship ceremonies held at the weekend. Laura Cooper, Finance Business Partner, agreed to check the reason for the increases with officers responsible for this area and report back to members.
- Members queried why the season ticket for parking at Braccan Walk (page 77) was proposed to increase by 12.5% as it was thought the hourly rate had been frozen. Damian James, Assistant Director, Contract Services, informed members the season ticket rate was set using the market rate in comparison with other local authorities; benchmarking against other car parks in the area, which were owned privately, and rounding the figure up to £45.00. The season ticket approval was a different process than full Council. Some season tickets had been kept low previously to allow the new Town Centre to bed in but there was now an opportunity to increase fees.
- Members queried why there was a proposed 139.9% increase in the charge for transferring a Hackney Carriage vehicle to a new owner (page 85). Damian James explained this was due to Bracknell Forest Borough Council (BFC) bringing their fees in line with West Berkshire and Wokingham Borough Council's fees as part of a joint Public Protection Partnership.

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Children, Young People & Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel meeting heard on Wednesday 9 January 2019.

31. 2019/20 Draft Budget Proposals

Paul Clark, Finance Business Partner, provided an overview on the proposed items in the revenue budget for 2019/20 affecting children, young people and learning. He explained the key parts were prior commitments; proposals regarding new pressures and proposed efficiencies and savings. The current deficit to meet identified needs for Children and Young People was £2.5m. Options available to the Council in order to address the funding gap included raising council tax; drawing down from reserves and/or making reductions in expenditure.

As a result of discussions the following comments and questions were made:

Revenue Budget

- Members queried a £135k pressure listed in Schools ICT services when three posts had been deleted. It was believed the pressure on that line corresponded to another line which offset the pressure but the member was advised to ask the Interim Executive Director: Delivery directly as they would be better placed to answer this question.
- Members asked why there was a proposed £46k saving anticipated in the Special Educational Needs (SEN) budget at a time when needs were increasing. It was acknowledged SEN was an area of growing need but the saving related to a review of roles and responsibilities in this area to ensure the right people were in the right roles according to national and local priorities.
- Members asked how the Council would ensure the same level of service for training parents and carers to support children with specialist medical needs as it was noted the funding arrangements were changing. Members received assurances that training would be funded by East Berkshire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) in the future but processes and people delivering the training would remain the same.
- Members asked the Finance Business Officer what the greatest pressure was for 2019/20 and were directed towards Annex C on Page 30 of the Agenda which highlighted the changes and explained these were not considered to impact significantly on services. Cllr Gareth Barnard, Executive Member for Children, Young People and Learning noted pressures were usually due to increasing numbers of looked after children (LAC) and an increase in complexity of needs. In order to cope with those pressures the department had already e-engineered their approach to the 'front door' to ensure good multi-agency working as well as making changes to the School Improvement Team to hold governors and senior leaders to account more effectively.
- Members queried if children without needs were receiving less as resources were needed for children with higher needs. Cllr Gareth Barnard responded that at the last School's Forum it was announced a further £1m was being committed for revenue needs of schools offering additional places for all children and there was a tenuous link between school funding and attainment. The crucial thing was strong leadership. He also noted some schools had accumulated substantial sums of money and there was an argument it should be spent on those children attending that school currently and Ofsted showed Bracknell had made good progress in that area.

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- It was noted the data relating to housing related savings on Page 30 should not have appeared in the agenda as they would be scrutinised by the Adult Social Care, Health and Housing Overview & Scrutiny Panel.

Capital Budget

Paul Clark, Finance Business Partner, explained the budget, as set out on Page 55, Annex C, showed investment of £13m in services for children and young people.

- Members asked if the merger of Ascot Health Infant School and Ascot Heath Junior School was funded by the Church of England or the Council? The Finance Business Partner explained the amalgamation was complicated by land ownership issues but following a conversation with the Oxfordshire Diocese ownership of the land would rest with the Council and the legal transfer was currently being finalised. Cllr Gareth Barnard explained that whilst the Council would take on financial issues relating to the schools the amalgamation would allow the schools to become one entity, one strong leadership team and improve education on the site.
- Members were keen to learn when the new youth facility at Braccan Walk, as per the funding stream on Page 66, would be ready. Cllr Gareth Barnard informed members that it was included in the capital funding pending the conclusion of the feasibility study so that the funds for the project were in the budget. It was noted children and young people had been heavily involved in developing what the youth facility would look like.