

Item 12

Strategy & Resources 7 February 2022 - Finance and Resources Portfolio: Liberal Democrat Group Amendment to Budget-Setting Report (BSR) 2022/23

To:

Councillor Mike Davey, Executive Councillor for Finance and Resources Portfolio

Report by:

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Wards affected:

(All) Abbey, Arbury, Castle, Cherry Hinton, Coleridge, East Chesterton, King's Hedges, Market, Newnham, Petersfield, Queen Edith's, Romsey, Trumpington, West Chesterton

Key Decision

Foreword to the Liberal Democrat Group Amendment

The city council budget does need to respond to the realities of declining government funding and uncertainty of other income sources. But its finances are not so problematic as to prevent it at the same time from playing a confident and outward-looking role to enrich and support our city as we move through the pandemic and towards the challenges of post-covid recovery. Our proposals seek to bring together strategies to ensure this happens: strategies that at present are missing.

Climate Change

Liberal Democrats originally initiated climate change strategies at the council and much of the continuing work is bipartisan. However, recent experience shows it clearly benefits from debate and challenge to ensure both urgency and ambition. We have identified three critical areas where, despite other achievements and the potential for influence and partnership, Cambridge is sadly in danger of falling behind:

- EV Charging
Enabling the charging of electrical vehicles for residents with no private off-road space has barely moved forward at all, and the woeful charging infrastructure in

Cambridge is a major obstacle to the switch to electric vehicles. The city council has built up commercial expertise in this through its car parks and should use this knowledge in partnership with the GCP (which is looking at parking implications) and the County Council (the highways authority which is keen to collaborate on a district by district basis) and galvanise action.

- Recycling

A zero-waste strategy also seems lacking. Nowhere is this more important than in food waste. Unlike many other City Councils and despite pilots in the city, we still do not have a citywide segregated food waste collection. Experience shows that food-waste collection reduces waste, landfill and carbon emissions. A major drive on home composting could also help move us towards being a zero-waste city.

- Insulation

Insulation of privately-owned homes remains a major national challenge, though vital in reducing carbon emissions. In addition to channelling selective central government grant funding support, the council could have a trusted and authoritative role in promoting owner investment, increasing awareness of payback potential and helping owners assess opportunities, navigate the market for suppliers, and access third party funding. Developing such a strategy is badly needed.

City Centre Car Parks

If the city council is to play a positive role in the Greater Cambridge Partnership for a less polluted, low-traffic city, it must reduce its city centre car parking provision. It needs a long-term strategy to re-purpose the car park sites to meet other needs of the city, whilst securing replacement income to support council services. Leaving this any longer risks frustrating wider transport plans whilst failing to ensure the long-term financial security of the Council.

Key Worker Housing

We also continue to argue for expansion of key worker housing, targeted towards those who fall between the housing needs register and market housing such as our valued carers, NHS staff and teachers. Cambridge housing costs have sky-rocketed and we must recognize that it is not only those who qualify for social housing that struggle to afford to live here. We need an ambitious strategy to address this urgent issue.

Recovery from the Pandemic

The pandemic has deprived older and younger people alike of opportunities. Younger people have missed out on the opportunity to make friends and socialize, whereas our older residents have been isolated from the 'lifeline' that comes from the company of others. It is important this does not permanently scar the generations. We are proposing to boost funding to help both groups.

We are also offering a hand of support to Cambridge's market traders. These independent businesses faced 2 years of restrictions and uncertainty, with closures imposed by both the national government and then separately by the Council. Even now, they are largely without the boost which comes from tourism. We will hold back from the proposed increase in their fees, in order to help speed-up their recovery. We will also provide an electricity supply to Hobson's Square in Trumpington to support stallholders and local events which will help to make it a more vibrant centre to the new community there.

Planning Enforcement

The city's continuing success as a place to live and work makes for ongoing development pressure which the council is responsible for regulating. It is important that respect for approvals and conditions is maintained; yet the hard-working planning enforcement team is clearly stretched and operates entirely reactively. We therefore propose an additional Planning Enforcement officer to ensure developers obey the rules and that public trust in the planning authority is maintained.

Acoustic Monitoring Cameras

Last October, we were pleased that the council supported our case to throw its weight behind an effort to reduce the nuisance and danger of noisy vehicles racing around the city. There has subsequently been much national interest in new acoustic monitoring cameras which several authorities are adopting. Recognising the challenges faced by the police in tackling this problem and the opportunity for partnership, we propose to fund two such cameras for deployment in the city.

Public Scrutiny of decisionmaking

The council's leadership has embarked on a lengthy and expensive corporate transformation programme, which remains a 'black box', destination unknown, to both the public and to opposition councillors, but smothered in meaningless branding. When something emerges we will press for full discussion before decisions are made on cutbacks; we will fight negative impacts on those already suffering disadvantage, on services necessary to civilized city life or on the quality of the democratic forum which the council provides to the city community.

In the meantime, as a result of the length of the transformation process, the current budget resorts to a large stealth cut – the largest cutback in the whole package - by failing to recognise the current high level of inflation. This completely removes from public sight and accountability the decisions that officers will now need to take to make their budgets balance. We are proposing that elected members monitor this process as the year progresses, allowing them to ensure consistency with the council's values, including equalities impacts.

Councillor Tim Bick, Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group

Councillor Jamie Dalzell, Liberal Democrat Group Spokesperson on Finance and Resources

1. Executive Summary

The Liberal Democrat proposals will:

- bring forward strategies on key areas related to climate change, including electric vehicle charging, progression towards a zero waste city, and the provision of support for insulation of private homes;
- consider opportunities to reduce car park spaces in the city centre, and to re-purpose existing car park sites;
- explore options for expanding the provision of key worker housing through the Cambridge City Housing Company;

- deepen post pandemic initiatives supporting some of the most affected, including children in poverty and older and vulnerable individuals;
- defer the annual increase in fees for market traders by 3 months, in order to support their post-Covid recovery;
- fund the installation of an electricity supply at Hobson Square, enabling markets and other events to increase vibrancy in the new community;
- fund the installation of two acoustic monitoring cameras to tackle anti-social driving and noisy vehicles;
- strengthen planning enforcement in the city through a new Senior Planning Enforcement Officer post, funded through a reduction in the Corporate Communications team; and
- require regular scrutiny by Members, in public, of the impact of the Council's approach to inflation in 2022/23 (namely that general inflation is required to be absorbed by Council services).

2. Recommendations

Changes to recommendations highlighted in italics refer to the recommendations contained within the Budget-Setting Report (BSR) 2022/23, as presented to the meeting of the Strategy & Resources Scrutiny Committee held on 7 February 2022, subject to any other amendment agreed by the Executive Councillor at this committee meeting.

The Executive Councillor is recommended to:

General Fund Revenue Budgets: [Section 5, page 26 refers]

2.1 Under recommendation 2(a), add:

- ***Together with the changes in Appendix 2 to the Liberal Democrat Group Amendment to Budget-Setting Report (BSR) 2022/23.***

2.2 Incorporate and replace the table shown in Appendix 5 into the Budget-Setting Report (BSR) 2022/23 at the page so annotated.

Capital: [Section 6, page 29 refers]

2.3 At recommendation 2(e), after "Capital Plan", add "***together with the changes in Appendix 3 to the Liberal Democrat Group Amendment to Budget-Setting Report (BSR) 2022/23***".

2.4 At recommendation 2(g), after "Appendix C(c)", add "***(as amended by the changes in Appendix 3 to the Liberal Democrat Group Amendment to Budget-Setting Report (BSR) 2022/23)***".

2.5 Incorporate and replace the tables shown in Appendix 5 into the Budget-Setting Report (BSR) 2022/23 at the pages so annotated.

General Fund: Expenditure and Funding 2021/22 to 2031/32: [Section 7, page 35 refers]

- 2.6 Incorporate and replace the tables shown in Appendix 5 into the Budget-Setting Report (BSR) 2022/23 at the pages so annotated.

General Fund Reserves: [Section 8, page 44 refers]

- 2.7 Incorporate and replace the table shown in Appendix 5 into the Budget-Setting Report (BSR) 2022/23 at the page so annotated.

General Fund Future Strategy: [Section 9, page 63 refers]

- 2.8 Incorporate and replace the table shown in Appendix 5 into the Budget-Setting Report (BSR) 2022/23 at the page so annotated.

Section 25 Report: [Section 10, page 65 refers]

- 2.9 Note the Section 151 Officer's assessment, at Appendix 6, of the impact of these proposed amendments on the Section 25 report presented at Section 10 of the Budget-Setting Report (BSR) 2022/23.

Equality Impact Assessment: [Appendix E, page 106 refers]

- 2.10 Append Appendix 4 to the existing Equality Impact Assessment at Appendix E to the Budget-Setting Report (BSR) 2022/23.

Other Recommendations:

- 2.11 Accept the non-financial proposals set out at Appendix 1.
- 2.12 Recommend to Council formally confirming delegation to the Chief Financial Officer (Head of Finance) of authority to make any other consequential changes to the Budget-Setting Report (BSR) 2022/23 as a result of these amendments.

3. Council Tax

No changes to council tax are being proposed by the Liberal Democrat Group.

4. Implications

All budget proposals have a number of implications. A decision not to approve a revenue bid will impact on managers' ability to deliver the service or scheme in question and could have financial, staffing, equality and poverty, environmental, procurement or community safety implications. A decision not to approve a capital or external bid will impact on managers' ability to deliver the developments desired in the service areas.

(a) Financial Implications

Financial implications of budget proposals are summarised in the Budget-Setting Report (BSR) 2022/23, as amended by the recommendations above.

(b) Staffing Implications

Staffing implications of budget proposals are also summarised in the Budget-Setting Report (BSR) 2022/23, as amended by the recommendations above.

(c) Equality and Poverty Implications

A consolidated Equality Impact Assessment for the budget proposals is included at Appendix E to the Budget-Setting Report (BSR) 2022/23, as amended by Appendix 4. Individual Equality Impact Assessments have been conducted to support this.

A local poverty rating (using the classifications outlined at Appendix B(a) to the Budget-Setting Report (BSR) 2022/23) has been included for each budget proposal to assist with assessment.

(d) Net Zero Carbon, Climate Change and Environmental Implications

Where relevant, officers have considered the climate change impact of budget proposals which are annotated as follows and as detailed in the Climate Change Rating Tool in Appendix B(a) to the Budget-Setting Report (BSR) 2022/23:

- Positive High / Positive Medium / Positive Low: to indicate that the proposal has a high, medium or low positive impact on climate change.
- Nil: to indicate that the proposal has no climate change impact.
- Negative High / Negative Medium / Negative Low: to indicate that the proposal has a high, medium or low negative impact on climate change.

(e) Procurement Implications

Any procurement implications are outlined in the Budget-Setting Report (BSR) 2022/23, as amended by the recommendations above.

(f) Community Safety Implications

Any community safety implications are outlined in the Budget-Setting Report (BSR) 2022/23, as amended by the recommendations above.

7. Background papers

These background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

- Budget-Setting Report (BSR) 2022/23
- Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) October 2021
- Individual Equality Impact Assessments

8. Appendices

Appendix 1: Liberal Democrat Group Budget Amendment – Non-Financial Proposals

Appendix 2: Liberal Democrat Group Budget Amendment – Revenue Budget Proposals

Appendix 3: Liberal Democrat Group Budget Amendment – Capital Budget Proposals

Appendix 4: Liberal Democrat Group Budget Amendment – Equality Impact Assessment

Appendix 5: Liberal Democrat Group Budget Amendment – Revised Tables for BSR

Appendix 6: Liberal Democrat Group Budget Amendment – Section 25 Report

9. Inspection of papers

To inspect the background papers or if you have a query on the report please contact Caroline Ryba, Head of Finance, tel: 01223 - 458134, email: caroline.ryba@cambridge.gov.uk.