

**The minute of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 13 January 2022 for
MOS/21/01 Draft General Fund (GF) 2022/23 and Four-year Outlook**

MOS/21/1 DRAFT GENERAL FUND (GF) 2022/23 AND FOUR-YEAR OUTLOOK

- 14.1 Councillor Whitehead introduced the report and outlined that there were still some minor effects from the covid-19 pandemic. The General Fund Budget included an assumption of no increase in council tax as the local government settlement included an additional £97k, this proposal would be taken to the Full Council in March.
- 14.2 Councillor Caston queried the instillation of heat pumps at leisure centre facilities and whether the cost of this change had been calculated. The Assistant Director - Environment and Commercial responded that an assumption had been made for the discounted rate however, there would be a fluctuation in the rate.
- 14.3 Councillor Ekpenyong queried the reduction in income from Stowmarket High School. The Assistant Director - Environment and Commercial responded that there had been lesser use of the sports halls over the pandemic by the school, however conversations with the school were ongoing.
- 14.4 A short break was taken between 09:54-09:56am.
- 14.5 Councillor Scarff questioned page 12 of the papers and referred to the annual increase of staffing cost and whether this included the 5% vacancy management factor. The Assistant Director – Corporate Resources responded that it had been based on full staffing and the pay inflation had been based on this. However, 2% had been used as a benchmark.
- 14.6 Councillor Scarff questioned the risk that the savings programme would not deliver effectively and whether the Overview and Scrutiny Committee could look at the programme in ongoing budget monitoring. The Assistant Director – Corporate Resources responded that it had not been assessed in terms of savings. However, it could be a useful role for Overview and Scrutiny to monitor once it had been developed.
- 14.7 Councillor Ekpenyong queried the whole budget in relation to staffing and the ability to recruit, salaries, and compensation packages. Councillor Whitehead responded that Mid Suffolk previously had a Transformation Fund, which was now the Growth Efficiency Fund, so there was resource for transformation.
- 14.8 Councillor Welham queried the £3.5 million that the Council had in reserves that had not been spent and whether this could have been better used in the communities. Councillor Whitehead responded that this would be considered by Cabinet.
- 14.9 Councillor Caston queried the non-pay inflation of 2%. The Assistant Director – Corporate Resources responded that 2% estimation had been built in for year 2023/24 based on government indicators. In addition to this, managers had been asked to take a different approach to the formation of their budgets due to previous underspend and include the inflation within their budgets.

14.10 Councillor Muller questioned the replacement of refuse vehicles. The Assistant Director – Corporate Resources responded that the majority would be replaced on a different schedule. Councillor Fleming added that there had been some uncertainty as to how they would need to be designed for a new waste system.

14.11 Councillor Scarff suggested that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the budget and asked Cabinet to note the comments that the committee had made. Presented information should be given ahead of the meeting.

14.12 Councillor Scarff suggested that in the future the Overview and Scrutiny Committee looked at the budget process including how transformation changes were monitored during the year.

14.13 Councillor Ekpenyong stated that need to understand where the money was being spent in relation to the priorities and if the budget process could be improved.

14.14 Members debated the issues, and the following suggestions were made:

- That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the General Fund budget 2022/23 and Four-year Outlook and asks that the Cabinet Member for Finance and Officers take into consideration the comments made at the meeting.
- That the budget preparation process is reviewed by the Section.151 Officer and the Monitoring Officer to ensure that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee can be involved earlier in the development of the budget, enabling a more strategic approach to scrutinising the budget. Further that the Monitoring Officer and Constitution Working Group reviews the terms of reference for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Joint Audit and Standards Committee to ensure that financial scrutiny is being undertaken in the most appropriate way.

14.15 Councillor Keith Scarff proposed these recommendations.

14.16 Councillor Sarah Mansel seconded this motion.

By a unanimous vote

It was RESOLVED: -

That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the General Fund budget 2022/23 and Four-year Outlook and asks that the Cabinet Member for Finance and Officers take into consideration the comments made at the meeting.

That the budget preparation process is reviewed by the Section.151 Officer and the Monitoring Officer to ensure that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee can be involved earlier in the development of the budget, enabling a more strategic approach to scrutinising the budget. Further that the Monitoring Officer and Constitution Working Group reviews the terms of reference for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Joint Audit and Standards Committee to ensure that financial scrutiny is being undertaken in the most appropriate way.

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