

CLrs Lorna Dupré and Mark Inskip

MONTHLY REPORT FEBRUARY 2023

Finance & Assets Committee

The Finance & Assets Committee met on 23 January, where the main item of business was the recommendation of a budget to the Full Council on 21 February.

The current yearend forecast underspend for 2022/23 is £191,100. This compares to an underspend of £2,367,039 the previous year. Underspends are transferred into a Surplus Savings Reserve which is then called upon in future years. The Council will receive a number of grants from Government, including New Homes Bonus and Rural Services Delivery Grant. The Council benefits significantly from the growth in business rates since the last base reset in 2013.

The assumptions in the administration's proposed budget are as follows.

- The April 2023 inflationary pay increase for staff has been assumed at 4 per cent.
- Inflation has been put in at 80 per cent for gas and electricity.
- Where known, inflation on contracts has been included to reflect the expected increase in these during the year. These include insurance and IT licences.
- 21 per cent has been added to the Waste contract with East Cambs Street Scene (ECSS) and 6 per cent for the Parks and Gardens contract with ECTC.
- Other expenditure budgets have been increased by 6 per cent for inflation.
- Pension Fund revaluations take place every three years, with the last one being on 31 March 2022. The consequence of this revaluation is that the Council's primary rate will be increased from 17.2 per cent to 17.4 per cent for the three years from April 2023. In addition, the Council's lump sum contribution will also be changing: the Council paid £485,000 in 2022/23, and this will change to £493,000 in 2023/24, £465,000 in 2024/25 and 2025/26 in 2025/26.
- The Housing Benefit budget reflects the mid-year position for 2022/23 using the latest information received from Anglia Revenues Partnership (ARP).
- No adjustments to spend have been made to reflect the anticipated increase in population within the District.
- Budgeted income from the commuter car park and the Leisure Centre management fee both remain reduced when compared to the value in the 2020/21 budget to reflect the ongoing implications of the Covid-19 pandemic on these services.

The Council's proposed net operating budget for 2023/24 is £12,282,471. Its policy is to retain 10 per cent of its net operating budget in unearmarked reserves. The increase in the General Reserve will be funded by a transfer from the Change Management Reserve.

The administration says it 'has no long term capital objectives at this time'. Its medium term capital programme is valued at £6,569,299. This includes a spend of £2.775m on new waste vehicles, and a provision of £1m for new black bins (for the waste we currently use black sacks for) in case the Government's forthcoming Waste Strategy requires these.

There is no expectation in the administration's medium term financial strategy of spending on a refresh of the council's Local Plan, which will be eight years old in April.

On 21 April 2022 the Council approved a further loan facility of £7.5 million to East Cambs Trading Company. Much of this will be provided in the current year (2022/23), but the current profile of this facility assumes that £1.7 million will be provided in 2023/24. This funding is for building developments at the former Paradise Pool site and for Phases 2 and 3 at the former MoD site in North Ely. The Council has security in place with regard to this loan in the form of a debenture which will provide it with first ranking security over all unsecured assets of the Company, once the loan to the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority is repaid, which is expected to be in 2022/23.

It is currently expected that the district council will freeze its share of Council Tax again this year, at £142.14 at Band D.

Voter identification

Lorna has submitted a motion to the February council meeting calling on the Council to

- I. Instruct the Chief Executive to write to the Cabinet Office to express the Council's complete opposition to the proposals for mandatory Voter ID in view of the damaging effect it will have on UK elections, and to demand that this section of the new legislation is repealed immediately;
- II. Write to every household in East Cambridgeshire about the new requirement for voter identification and the risk that electors may be disenfranchised;
- III. Work with partners including parish councils and the County Council to increase awareness of the change in legislation and the new barriers to electoral participation;
- IV. Liaise with the County Council and other partners to develop and implement a targeted programme to ensure that residents particularly at

risk of losing their right to vote are made aware of the requirement to apply for identification papers in order to vote, and supported to do so; and

- V. Receive a report to the March meeting of the Council's Finance & Assets Committee to update on the activities carried out under I-IV above, publish the numbers of applications for Voter Authority Certificates received, and the number awarded, and advise of any issues arising.

Levelling up

The district council's 'Levelling Up' bid, for refurbishment of eSpace North in Littleport and a cycle route from Littleport Station to the A10 BP roundabout at Wisbech Road, was turned down by the Government.

More committee cancellations

February's Licensing Committee meeting has been cancelled, meaning that more council committee meetings were cancelled (four) than took place (three) in the first two months of this year.

Meet your councillors

- Monday 13 February, 6:30-7:30PM
- Monday 6 March, 6:30-7:30PM

Please note that the February date is a week later than previously advised.

All in the Community Room at Sutton School. Between surgeries, residents can continue to contact us by email, Facebook, or phone.

Cllr Lorna Dupré

Cllr Mark Inskip

District Councillors for the Sutton ward