

Report for: Housing & Regeneration Scrutiny Panel, 15th December 2020

Title: Scrutiny of the 2021/22 Draft Budget / 5 Year Medium Term Financial Strategy (2021/22-2025/26)

Report authorised by: Jon Warlow, Director of Finance and Section 151 Officer

Lead Officer: Frances Palopoli, Head of Corporate Financial Strategy & Monitoring

Ward(s) affected: N/A

**Report for Key/
Non Key Decision:** N/A

1. Describe the issue under consideration

- 1.1 To consider and comment on the Council's 2021/22 Draft Budget / 5-year Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2021/22 – 2025/26 proposals relating to the Scrutiny Panels' remit.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Panels consider and provide recommendations to Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC), on the 2021/22 Draft Budget/MTFS 2021/22-2025/26 and proposals relating to the Scrutiny Panel's remit.

3. Background information

- 3.1 The Council's Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules (Constitution, Part 4, Section G) state: "The Overview and Scrutiny Committee shall undertake scrutiny of the Council's budget through a Budget Scrutiny process. The procedure by which this operates is detailed in the Protocol covering the Overview and Scrutiny Committee".
- 3.2 Also laid out in this section is that "the Chair of the Budget Scrutiny Review process will be drawn from among the opposition party Councillors sitting on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee shall not be able to change the appointed Chair unless there is a vote of no confidence as outlined in Article 6.5 of the Constitution".

4. Overview and Scrutiny Protocol

- 4.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Protocol lays out the process of Budget Scrutiny and includes the following points:
- a. The budget shall be scrutinised by each Scrutiny Review Panel, in their respective areas. Their reports shall go to the OSC for approval. The areas

of the budget which are not covered by the Scrutiny Review Panels shall be considered by the main OSC.

- b. A lead OSC member from the largest opposition group shall be responsible for the co-ordination of the Budget Scrutiny process and recommendations made by respective Scrutiny Review Panels relating to the budget.
- c. Overseen by the lead member referred to in paragraph 4.1.b, each Scrutiny Review Panel shall hold a meeting following the release of the December Cabinet report on the new Draft Budget/MTFS. Each Panel shall consider the proposals in this report, for their respective areas. The Scrutiny Review Panels may request that the Cabinet Member for Finance and/or Senior Officers attend these meetings to answer questions.
- d. Each Scrutiny Review Panel shall submit their final budget scrutiny report to the OSC meeting in January containing their recommendations/proposal in respect of the budget for ratification by the OSC.
- e. The recommendations from the Budget Scrutiny process, ratified by the OSC, shall be fed back to Cabinet. As part of the budget setting process, the Cabinet will clearly set out its response to the recommendations/proposals made by the OSC in relation to the budget.

5. 2021/22 Draft Budget & Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2021/26

- 5.1 The MTFS agreed by Council in February 2020 assumed two years of relatively low budget gap (£1.9m & £3.1m) for 2021-2023; this was before the pandemic. The pandemic continues to have a significant adverse effect on the wider economy and public finances, reducing demand and supply in the short and medium term, presenting individuals, businesses and organisations with unprecedented challenges. The medium to long-term impact is unknown, though the OBR has forecast a return to pre-pandemic levels will not take place until late 2022.
- 5.2 The impact of Covid-19, has been such that the Council has fundamentally reconsidered its corporate planning including its change programmes and, reviewing the outputs and learning from the Recovery and Renewal work to understand the changed context in which it now works.
- 5.3 This Draft 2021/22 Budget and 2021/26 MTFS has sought to respond to this shift in Borough Plan via its General Fund (GF) and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) financial strategies and capital investments, including a more holistic approach to achieving organisational transformation and associated revenue savings, via work that spans across the organisation's departments. It also incorporates our best understanding of the ongoing implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on our services and plans. It has been clear all the way through what have been many months of financial planning that this would be an extremely difficult budget for the Council. Before making any additional savings and the recent SR20 announcements, the Council's forecast budget gap for 21/22 had increased to £17m, an increase of £15m on the February forecast.

- 5.4 The recent SR 20 provides some level of financial improvement to this and other authorities for next year's budget, including additional social care grants. However, the main opportunity it provides for local authorities, including this council, is to generate funding to protect services at this key moment by increasing its council tax income. This draft budget therefore includes an assumption of additional income from a general council tax increase of 1.99% (the threshold set by government is 2%) and a further Adults Social Care Precept of 3% (the maximum allowed by Government), which give a total council tax charge increase of 4.99%. This proposed increase forms part of the budget consultation.
- 5.5 As it stands (and before any late adjustments), the Council is able set out a balanced draft budget for 2021/22, but only with a significant one-off use of £5.4m of reserves.
- 5.6 This meeting is asked to consider the proposals relating to the services within its remit and to make draft recommendations to be referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 18th January 2021 for discussion, prior to approval and referral to Cabinet for consideration in advance of the Full Council meeting on 22nd February 2021. For reference the remit of each Scrutiny Panel is as follows:
- Housing & Economy Priorities - Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Panel
 - Place Priority - Environment and Community Safety Scrutiny Panel
 - People (Children) Priority – Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel
 - People (Adults) Priority – Adult and Health Scrutiny Panel
 - Your Council Priority – Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- 5.7 As an aide memoire to assist with the scrutiny of budget proposals, possible key lines of enquiry are attached at **Appendix A**. This report is specifically concerned with Stage 1 (planning and setting the budget) as a key part of the overall annual financial scrutiny activity.
- 5.8 **Appendix B** is the Draft 2021/22 Budget & 2021/26 MTFS considered by Cabinet on 8th December 2020. This report sets out details of the draft Budget for 2021/22 and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2021/26, including budget reductions, growth and capital proposals. This includes details of estimated funding for 2021/22 and the remainder of the planning period and highlights areas of risk.
- 5.9 **Appendix C** provides details of the new revenue and capital budget proposals relevant to each Panel/Committee. A summary is provided, followed by detailed information for each proposal. Any invest to save revenue proposal dependent on capital or flexible use of capital receipts for successful delivery has been clearly identified in the summary.
- 5.10 **Appendix D** lists the pre-agreed savings relevant to each Panel/Committee. This document provides additional context and background to enable a more robust scrutiny of the draft proposals. Attention is also drawn to the 2020/21

Quarter 2 Finance Update Report presented to Cabinet on 8th December 2020 which provides a summary of the in year budget implications facing the authority which has informed the 2021/22 Draft Budget proposals now presented. The Council's 2020/21 Budget Book provides details of service budgets for the current year.

6. Contribution to strategic outcomes

- 6.1 The Budget Scrutiny process for 2021/22 will contribute to strategic outcomes relating to all Council priorities.

7. Statutory Officers comments

Finance

- 7.1 There are no financial implications arising directly from this report. Should any of the work undertaken by Overview and Scrutiny generate recommendations with financial implications then these will be highlighted at that time.

Legal

- 7.2 There are no immediate legal implications arising from this report.
- 7.3 In accordance with the Council's Constitution (Part 4, Section G), the Overview and Scrutiny Committee should undertake scrutiny of the Council's budget through a Budget Scrutiny process. The procedure by which this operates is detailed in the Protocol, which is outside the Council's constitution, covering the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Equality

- 7.4 The draft Borough Plan sets out the Council's overarching commitment to tackling poverty and inequality and to working towards a fairer Borough.
- 7.5 The Council is also bound by the Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act (2010) to have due regard to the need to:
- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Act
 - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share those protected characteristics and people who do not
 - Foster good relations between people who share those characteristics and people who do not.
- 7.6 The three parts of the duty applies to the following protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy/maternity, race, religion/faith, sex and sexual orientation. Marriage and civil partnership status applies to the first part of the duty.
- 7.7 The Council has designed the proposals in this report with reference to the aims of the Borough Plan to reduce poverty and inequality. The Council is committed to protecting frontline services wherever we can and the budget proposals have focused as far as possible on delivering efficiencies or increasing income, rather than reduction in services.
- 7.8 As plans are developed further, each area will assess the equality impacts and potential mitigating actions in more detail. Final EQIAs will be published alongside decisions on specific proposals.

- 7.9 Any comments received will be taken into consideration and included in the Budget report presented to Cabinet on 9th February 2021.

8. Use of Appendices

Appendix A – Key lines of enquiry for budget setting

Appendix B – 2021/22 Draft Budget & 2021/26 Medium Term Financial Strategy Report (presented to Cabinet 8th December 2020)

Appendix C – 2020 New Budget Proposals

Appendix D - Pre-agreed savings

9. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

Background papers: 2020/21 Quarter 2 Finance Update Report - Cabinet 8th December 2020

<https://www.minutes.haringey.gov.uk/documents/s119987/Q2%20Finance%20Update%20Report%20ver2.0%20Cabinet%20FINAL.pdf>

2020/21 Budget Book

https://www.haringey.gov.uk/sites/haringeygovuk/files/haringey_2020-21_budget_book.pdf

Financial Scrutiny: Understanding your Role in the Budget Process

This document summarises issues and questions you should consider as part of your review of financial information. You might like to take it with you to your meetings and use it as an aide-memoir.

Overall, is the MTFS and annual budget:

- A financial representation of the council's policy framework/ priorities?
- Legal (your Section 151 Officer will specifically advise on this)?
- Affordable and prudent?

Stage 1 – planning and setting the budget

Always seek to scrutinise financial information at a strategic level and try to avoid too much detail at this stage. For example, it is better to ask whether the proposed budget is sufficient to fund the level of service planned for the year rather than asking why £x has been cut from a service budget.

Possible questions which Scrutiny members might consider –

- Are the MTFS, capital programme and revenue budget financial representations of what the council is trying to achieve?
- Does the MTFS and annual budget reflect the revenue effects of the proposed capital programme?
- How does the annual budget relate to the MTFS?
- What level of Council Tax is proposed? Is this acceptable in terms of national capping rules and local political acceptability?
- Is there sufficient money in “balances” kept aside for unforeseen needs?
- Are services providing value for money (VFM)? How is VFM measured and how does it relate to service quality and customer satisfaction?
- Have fees and charges been reviewed, both in terms of fee levels and potential demand?
- Does any proposed budget growth reflect the council's priorities?
- Does the budget contain anything that the council no longer needs to do?
- Do service budgets reflect and adequately resource individual service plans?
- Could the Council achieve similar outcomes more efficiently by doing things differently?

Stage 2 – Monitoring the budget

It is the role of “budget holders” to undertake detailed budget monitoring, and the Executive and individual Portfolio Holders will overview such detailed budget monitoring. Budget monitoring should never be carried out in isolation from service performance information. Scrutiny should assure itself that budget monitoring is being carried out but should avoid duplicating discussions and try to add value to the process. Possible questions which Scrutiny members might consider –

- What does the under/over spend mean in terms of service performance? What are the overall implications of not achieving performance targets?
- What is the forecast under/over spend at the year end?
- What plans have budget managers and/or the Portfolio Holder made to bring spending back on budget? Are these reasonable?
- Does the under/over spend signal a need for a more detailed study into the service area?

Stage 3 – Reviewing the budget

At the end of the financial year you will receive an “outturn report”. Use this to look back and think about what lessons can be learned. Then try to apply these lessons to discussions about future budgets. Possible questions which Scrutiny members might consider –

- Did services achieve what they set out to achieve in terms of both performance and financial targets?
- What were public satisfaction levels and how do these compare with budgets and spending?
- Did the income and expenditure profile match the plan, and, if not, what conclusions can be drawn?
- What are the implications of over or under achievement for the MTFS?
- Have all planned savings been achieved, and is the impact on service performance as expected?
- Have all growth bids achieved the planned increases in service performance?
- If not, did anything unusual occur which would mitigate any conclusions drawn?
- How well did the first two scrutiny stages work, were they useful and how could they be improved?