

Motion to amend the Budget

Proposer Councillor Aled Davies

Seconder Councillor Phyl Davies

Since Cabinet approved and proposed the Revenue Budget and Capital Strategy to Council the Council has received unexpected additional funding from Welsh Government. Much of the funding provided has to be used for specific purposes but some allocations are unhypothecated and will improve the financial position of the Council for the current 2021/22 financial year.

These funds are one off and cannot be used to meet ongoing recurring costs, however by using these funds to meet Capital Costs it will reduce the Councils need to borrow and make a saving against the revenue budget.

We have also received an additional Capital allocation of £3.6 million that we were not anticipating.

The use of these funds to meet Capital expenditure enables the Council to reduce its budget requirement for 2022/23, the budget is funded by the Welsh Government settlement and Council Tax so with a lower budget requirement we are able to reduce the level of Council Tax we needed to raise through the 3.9% increase.

Our aim is to deliver value for money for our residents and all times keep Council Tax as low as possible. Especially in these times where we see the cost of living increasing significantly. But we also have to ensure that the frontline services we provide are available to meet the ongoing needs of our residents. This is always a difficult balance to achieve.

It is therefore proposed that the additional funds provided by Welsh Government, Capital (£3.6m) and Revenue (£2.3m) , together with the projected underspend on MRP for 2021/22 (£1.5m) as highlighted in the Quarter 3 Budget monitoring report as presented to cabinet on the 22nd February 2022, be used to fund existing Capital schemes reducing the need to borrow for that purpose. and reducing the revenue required to fund that borrowing by £404K

The reduced borrowing releases Minimum Revenue Provision and External Interest budgets by £404K, and this saving can be used to reduce the Council Tax increase from 3.9% to 3.39% and still maintain a balanced budget.

Proposed amendment – to replace Recommendation 2 as follows

2.1 Council Approves the Revenue Budget for 2022-23 with the inclusion of a 3.39% increase in Council Tax in 2022-23 at a net cost of £404K with the Section 151 officer instructed to publish a revised Finance Resource Model (if required) as soon as possible.

2.2 The cost of recommendation 2.1 is financed by a reduction in the Minimum Revenue Budget/External Interest Budget of £404K.

Financial Assessment

The proposal would result in the following budget amendments

- A reduction in the Council Tax Income budget of £452K, netted off by an adjustment to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme Budget of £48K. A net Adjustment of £404K.
- A reduction in the Minimum Revenue Budget/External Interest Budget of £404K.

This does maintain a balanced budget for 2022/23. But does increase the budget gap in future years due to the Council Tax foregone. An updated FRM will be provided by the Head of Finance in due course.

Head of Finance (Section 151 Officer) comment

Ringfencing the additional surplus now projected for 2021/22 to replace borrowing planned within the Capital Programme in 2022/23 will reduce the budget requirement for MRP and Interest. Coupled with the additional Capital allocations provided by Welsh Government and the underspend on MRP in 2021/22 would see borrowing replaced by direct capital funding from revenue/reserves.

This would maintain the current Capital Programme as set out in the budget proposal, however this does mean that Council is foregoing the opportunity to set aside additional funding for future capital investment or increasing the Council reserves. Setting aside these funds would assist in reducing the level of risk being carried by the Council providing more flexibility in managing pressures, this year or in the future.

The use of these funds rather than borrowing will reduce the Capital Financing Requirement and the prudential indicators will improve to those that are set out in the Budget report and the Capital and Treasury Management Strategy. These are estimates and other factors will change these as we progress through the financial year as is the case in every year, these documents can therefore be considered as they stand today.

The proposed amendment is based on additional funding confirmed, but the surplus position is based on the Quarter 3 projected Outturn, a further forecast will be undertaken at the end of February 2022. That could see the projection improve or worsen. The final Outturn position will not be known until May 2022. In addition we do not yet know the full cost of responding to the recent storms and how that will impact on our Budget outturn, either directly or indirectly through insurance excesses. Nor do we know what funding will be forthcoming from WG if any to support these costs. The Emergency Financial Assistance Scheme has been in place in previous years, but we are notified annually if this remains the case and what our threshold is for the value the Council must exceed before being able to claim. These are general budget risks that were there before the additional funding was received.

The level of change proposed by the amendment does not therefore change the Section 151 Officers opinion to that expressed in the original report as set out below.

The Section 151 Officer concludes the estimates used in the amended budget proposal for 2022-23 remain adequately robust but a level of risk remains. Based on the assessment of reserves, the overall level is adequate but remains at the lower end of acceptability given the scale of savings required, the ongoing impact of the pandemic and the financial uncertainty facing the Council over the medium term.