

OFFICERS' COMMENTS ON ALTERNATIVE BUDGET PROPOSAL BY THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY (AMENDMENT 2)

The following sets our comments by officers on a proposal offered up in the budget amendment. Members of the Council should take this advice into consideration when considering and debating the amendment in question.

General Comments of the Chief Financial Officer

The proposals are deemed to be cost neutral in 2014/15, although there is likely to be some additional one-off costs of the savings proposal, as outlined in the detailed comments. Ongoing savings from 2015/16 are estimated to be £225k per annum, compared to additional costs of £255k.

The difference, taking account of both one-off and ongoing costs, will need to be added to the savings target for 2015/16

General Comments of the Assistant Chief Executive (Legal)

When carrying out its functions (including when making budget decisions), the Council must have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful conduct under the Equality Act 2010 (e.g. discrimination), the need to advance equality of opportunity and the need to foster good relations between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who don't. Some form of equality analysis may be required to ensure the Council acts consistently with this public sector equality duty and the level of such analysis will generally depend on the nature of the decision and how it will impact on individuals. In some cases consultation with affected people may be required. Some of the proposals outlined below may give rise to the need for analysis.

Where budget is made available for a particular proposal, implementation will generally be a matter for the executive.

Specific legal comments are set out below in relation to proposals which require them.

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Proposal

Provide additional resources to identify and fix pot holes - £120,000.

Corporate Director's Comments

This proposal would provide two months borough wide coverage. The average cost per pothole repair is £83.

Any additional comments of the Chief Financial Officer

This is assumed to be one-off additional expenditure for 2014/15, funded either from compensatory savings or bringing forward the use of general fund reserves.

Any additional comments of the Assistant Chief Executive (Legal Services)

None

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The following sets our comments by officers on a proposal offered up in the budget amendment. Members of the Council should take this advice into consideration when considering and debating the amendment in question.

Proposal

Provide additional resources to clean up dog mess - £100,000.

Corporate Director's Comments

The resources could be used to fund either 3 additional sweepers or an extensive education programme for dog owners or a mixed of both.

Any additional comments of the Chief Financial Officer

This is assumed to be one-off additional expenditure for 2014/15, funded either from compensatory savings or bringing forward the use of general fund reserves.

Any additional comments of the Assistant Chief Executive (Legal Services)

None

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Proposal

Fund extra ESOL classes - £46,000.

Corporate Director's Comments

The proposal is unlikely to eradicate the waiting list which has already come down from up to two years to eight weeks. The causes relate to issues like eligibility queries, reluctance of applicant to travel to vacancies in other parts of the borough and delays related to finding and payment for childcare. That said, the average cost per group of 15 learners for 140 hours provision is £17k, the sum provided will pay for an additional two classes.

Any additional comments of the Chief Financial Officer

This is assumed to be one-off additional expenditure for 2014/15, funded either from compensatory savings or bringing forward the use of general fund reserves.

Any additional comments of the Assistant Chief Executive (Legal Services)

None

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The following sets our comments by officers on a proposal offered up in the budget amendment. Members of the Council should take this advice into consideration when considering and debating the amendment in question.

Proposal

Add 6 Police Constables, on top of any planned increases in police numbers - £73,000.

Corporate Director's Comments

The proposed sum of £73k will not pay for 6 additional police constables as the MOPAC agreement has to be for a 3 year term. The minimum sum required for an additional 6 in year 1 is £73k but the total sum that would need to be committed over a 3 year period would have to be £582k.

Any additional comments of the Chief Financial Officer

The proposal is to provide for an additional 6 Police Constables under the current MOPAC agreement, at a cost in 2014/15 of £73k. This requires a minimum 3 years agreement that is estimated to cost a further £255k per annum to March 2017. The 2014/15 cost can be funded either from compensatory savings or by bringing forward the use of general fund reserves, but additional savings will have to be identified within the MTFP for 2015/16 and 2016/17.

Any additional comments of the Assistant Chief Executive (Legal Services)

None

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The following sets our comments by officers on a proposal offered up in the budget amendment. Members of the Council should take this advice into consideration when considering and debating the amendment in question.

Proposal

End all corporate, commercial and private events except already contracted events - £134,000.

Corporate Director's Comments

The Parks and Open Spaces budget is committed to contributing to the MTFP through the generation of additional income. The proposal would provide core funding for one year to take the place of this income.

Any additional comments of the Chief Financial Officer

This is assumed to be one-off additional expenditure for 2014/15, funded either from compensatory savings or bringing forward the use of general fund reserves.

Any additional comments of the Assistant Chief Executive (Legal Services)

None

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The following sets our comments by officers on a proposal offered up in the budget amendment. Members of the Council should take this advice into consideration when considering and debating the amendment in question.

Proposal

Cut the budget for spin doctors and advisors - £502,000.

Corporate Director's Comments

The base budget for the Mayor's Office is £325k in 2014/15. There is an additional one-off budget for 2014/15 of £277k, funded from earmarked reserves. This brings the total budget for the Mayor's Office to £602k.

Under statute the Mayor has a right to a political advisor. Beyond that is a matter of Council's/Mayor's executive discretion under the constraints of the approved budget for the service.

Reducing the 2014/15 budget to £100k to fund a political advisor and the existing PA/Executive assistant would represent a £502k saving in 2014/15, but only a recurrent saving of £225k (i.e. for 2015/16 and beyond). Considerations will have to be made for the cost of making staff redundant. There may also be committed costs that will reduce saving in 2014/15.

Any additional comments of the Chief Financial Officer

The proposal is to reduce the budget for the Mayor's Office by £502k. This represents a one-off saving of £277k and an ongoing saving of a further £225k.

There is a high likelihood of additional redundancy costs which could be financed by bringing forward general fund reserves.

Any additional comments of the Assistant Chief Executive (Legal Services)

None