

## Policy & Resources meeting – 24<sup>th</sup> January 2024

### **Agenda Item 6 – BUDGET & PRECEPT 2024/25**

A meeting of the Budget Working Party was held on Monday 8<sup>th</sup> January 2024 in the Council Chamber. Cllr David Hare chaired the meeting, present were: Cllrs A Bassett, N Brock, M de Jong, J Eastwell, T Holton, M Iyengunmwena, S Jordan, N Jorgensen, A Long, S Matthews, A Neal, S Newton, B Owen. Also present were the Town Clerk, Jo Friend, and Deputy Town Clerk, Emma Carroll.

Prior to the meeting, all ETC councillors had been provided with electronic copies of the Draft Budget 2024/25, a summary of draft budget figures, an ear marked reserves report and a document detailing suggestions for the Budget 2024/25.

#### **Main points from the meeting:**

Councillors were generally happy with the figures contained in the budget document.

It was agreed that all the suggestions detailed in the supporting document should be included in the 2024/25 budget, including the new Net Zero earmarked reserve. Further comments on these suggestions included an increase to £1,000 in the budget for pull-down projector screens, and an acknowledgement that any work towards net zero, funded by the new EMR, would need a gradual, informed approach and, most likely, the setting up of a working group to oversee it.

Cemetery – the current drainage issues at Mays Lane Cemetery (causes = soil type and restrictions on dealing with ‘grey water’) should be taken into account when planning the detail of the extension area. If permanent drainage is not possible perhaps matting could be used.

Hall hire – a question was asked, should hire charges be amended to reduce the amount ETC, in effect, subsidises the community centres? Should hirers pay more to offset the cost of running these buildings rather than these costs being funded by the precept, and hence all residents? Councillors generally agreed that there was a balance to be achieved as the community centres provide a vital service to Earley and to charge hirers a fee to enable ETC to break even would put hire charges beyond the reach of most. The Amenities & Leisure Committee is due to carry out the annual review of charges for 2024/25 at its meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> January – recommendations will go to Full Council on 7<sup>th</sup> February.

Town maps – upgrading these provides an opportunity to review what information is depicted on the maps (bearing in mind most people have access to a mobile phone) and where the maps are located. It was suggested that an A4 version of any new map could be put on council notice boards.

Electric vehicles – the installation of charging points should be a fundamental part of purchasing any EV for ETC.

It was noted that an inflation rate of 5% was used for figures in the Budget 2024/25 document and, for illustration purposes, an assumption made that the precept would remain at its current level. The impact on the precept and on the typical Band D figure of increases of 0%, 1%, 2% and 3% were shown on the summary of draft budget figures as provided to councillors.

A request was made that future income & expenditure reports to the P & R committee contain a commentary on 'where we're at in relation to the current year's budget'.

Precept

There was some discussion about the level of precept required for 2024/25. Cases were made for a 0% increase, a 1% increase and a 3% increase. This will be debated further at the Policy & Resources Committee meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> January and a recommendation will be made for Full Council to consider on 7<sup>th</sup> February 2024.