

Committee: Health and Housing
Date: 9 January 2003
Agenda Item No: 4
Title: Budgets and Service Plans 2003-04
Author: John Dickson (01799) 510300
Nick Harris (01799 510313)

Summary

- 1 This report presents the draft revenue estimates for final consideration by this Committee. The detailed figures attached now include savings and growth items approved at the previous meeting on 7 November 2002, internal charges and developments since 7 November. The figures are subject to final checks for consistency and accuracy and do not include the implications of any new capital programme items, or the impact on internal charges of any growth or savings. The Committee is asked to reconsider these estimates including identifying any further savings before their inclusion in the overall budget report to the Resources Committee on 23 January 2003. Also included are the key points of the Service Plan for 2003-04

Background

- 2 At its meeting on 7 November 2002 this Committee considered its draft 2003-04 revenue estimates for the first time. The detailed figures provided at that stage included direct costs only i.e. excluding internal charges. The Committee was requested to consider its budgets in the light of the projected direct cost total that it approved at its meeting on 3 September 2002 together with a further savings target of £5,000 approved by Council on 22 October 2002.
- 3 The figures presented to the Committee on 12 November were less than the total projected in September by a margin of some £20,000 – a margin that is reduced to £15,000 when the £5,000 savings target was taken into account.
- 4 After considering the report it was resolved that:
 - The Committee notes that its agreed target position had been met

It was further

Recommended that officers be directed to prepare appropriate service plans for 2003-04 and full budgets for consideration during the next cycle of meetings.

Developments Since 7 November

- 5 At its meeting on 21 November the Resources Committee recommended that further savings and additional income be sought from the Environment and Transport and Community and Leisure Committees in order to meet their cash savings targets agreed at the meeting of the Council on 22 October 2002, to help to achieve the Council's agreed priority of keeping the increase of Council Tax at a sustainable level. This decision was endorsed by the Council meeting on 17 December following consideration of the Director of Resources report.
- 6 The Council's overall 2003-04 budget position reported to the Resources Committee on 21 November identified just £29,000 as room for manoeuvre in the Council Tax setting process subject to the Local Government grant settlement. On 5 December the provisional settlement was announced and increased the sum available for manoeuvre to £74,000. This is however, still a shortfall of £144,000 compared with the overall total target to achieve a Council Tax increase of 2.5% approved by Council on 22 October
- 7 A minor omission in respect of planned repairs to public conveniences in 2003-04 has been corrected. This adds £2,300 to the previously reported figures and reduces the margin by which the budget net direct costs are less than the target to £13,000.
- 8 A temporary part time Administrative Assistant has been employed in Environmental Services since September 2000 to deal with the increased workloads for all the services covered. At the March 2002 Resources Committee a report was presented recommending that this post be made permanent from April 2002. However at the time Members thought that the move of the Planning Section to Saffron Walden could offer possibilities of some redeployment and therefore deferred a decision. It is now clear that no such possibility exists and provision should be made in respect of this post. Although this post is currently being funded the proposal is to make this a permanent post and a growth item subject to Member approval. The estimated cost of the post of £10,270 is not included in the detailed figures attached.
- 9 In preparing the estimates no account has been taken of the possibility that the Council may wish, at some stage, to consider subsidising Housing Support costs under the Supporting People arrangements. Such subsidy might wish to be considered for clients not entitled to means tested financial support, including new elderly sheltered tenants of this Council after 1 April 2003 who will in future have to pay the full cost of the service. This would probably represent a very heavy cost to the General Fund. This is because the Council, if it wished to support its own new tenants, would appear also to be obliged under the new regulatory framework to give equal treatment to all

new and existing tenants receiving Supporting People services in Housing Association dwellings within the district. The no subsidy position assumed is consistent with the approved charging policy of the Supporting People Essex Commissioning Body.

- 10 No further savings, growth items or other changes for this Committee have been identified at this stage.

Summary of the Current 2003-04 Budget Position

- 11 This Committee's direct cost budget at £727,000 (£714,000 approved at the 7 November meeting plus the correction in respect of public convenience maintenance and the growth item in respect of Environmental Services staffing if approved) still meets the target with a safety margin of £2,000.

Service Plan

Key Features Include:

- 12 Housing General Fund
- Implement the Best Value Action Plan covering service improvements in homelessness and Housing Enabling. Please see separate report elsewhere on this agenda.
 - Implement all parts of the Homelessness Act 2002 that will include a Homelessness Strategy and a new allocation/housing needs points scheme. This is also part of the Best Value Review.
 - Implement the new Supporting People arrangements.
- 13 Health
- Implement air quality assessments in the area of Stansted Airport and the new A120 road using the new mobile unit.
 - Implement the inspection strategy for contaminated land and inspect high risk sites.
 - Carry out inter-authority audits for food safety and health and safety functions.
 - Review Border Inspection Post Systems and implement the new controls on imported organic foods.

The Next Step

- 14 The budgets approved by this Committee will be summarised with the budgets of the other Committees in a report to the Resources Committee on 23 January. This report will include "below the line items" such as investment

income and pension backdating costs. It will also make recommendations to the Council regarding the Council Tax.

- 15 This is the final opportunity for this Committee to consider its draft revenue estimates that now include all items identified to date. It is

RECOMMENDED that the Committee reconsider the draft revenue estimates including the growth item in respect of Environmental Services staffing before recommending them for inclusion in the overall budget to the Resources Committee on 23 January 2003.

Background Papers: Appendix BS09 – List of Possible Savings