
Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources

5th February 2024

Name of Cabinet Member:

Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources – Councillor R Brown

Director approving submission of the report:

Chief Legal Officer

Ward(s) affected:

Citywide

Title: Petitions Relating to the Budget Setting Proposals 2024/25

Is this a key decision?

No

Executive summary:

On 12th December 2023, Cabinet approved the Pre-Budget Report for 2024/25 which outlined, for consultation, a set of new revenue budget proposals for 2024/25 to 2026/27 which represented changes to the Council's existing Budget. The proposals are subject to an eight week consultation period which ends on 7th February 2024. The outcome of the consultation process will be included in the final Budget Setting Report for 2024/25, which will be considered by the Cabinet and Council at their meetings on 20th February 2024.

Petitions have been received in relation to the proposals and this report outlines those petitions. In line with the Council's Petition Scheme, the petition organisers/sponsor have been invited to attend the meeting to outline their concerns to the Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources.

Recommendations:

The Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources is recommended to:

- 1) Note the petitions received and consider any comments and issues raised at the meeting.
- 2) Agree that the petitions and the issues raised be considered as part of the consultation process for the Budget Setting proposals for 2024/25.

List of Appendices included:

None

Background papers:

None

Other useful documents

Pre-Budget Report for 2024/25 – Cabinet, 12th December 2023

Has it or will it be considered by Scrutiny?

No

Has it or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?

The outcome of the consultation on the Budget Setting for 2024/25 will be considered by Cabinet and Council on 24th February 2024

Will this report go to Council?

As above

Report title: Petitions Relating to the Budget Setting Proposals 2024/25

1. Context (or background)

- 1.1 The Council is required to set a balanced budget and this legal duty is balanced with continuing to deliver the key services to residents and businesses in the City.
- 1.2 The Pre-Budget report forecast a £9m shortfall and indicated that this had been brought on by rising demand, underfunding and the tough economic climate, not just in Coventry but across the whole sector. As a result of these pressures, a number of cost-cutting proposals were put forward for residents, colleagues and businesses to comment on. The proposals are subject to an eight week consultation period which ends on 7 February, 2024.
- 1.3 The first petition currently bears 3307 signatures and relates to the proposal to remove the current 3 hours free parking at the War Memorial Park and standardise parking charges with those at Coombe Country Park, as follows:

Up to 1 hour - £1
1-2 hours - £3
2-4 hours £3.50
Day ticket £5

The petition reads:

“We the undersigned petition the Council to ensure that Car Parking at Coventry’s War Memorial Park remains free of charge for the first three hours.”

The justification for the petition reads:

“A lot of people travel to the park to enjoy playing games, running, dog walking and visiting the café etc. It is also, as the name indicates, a lasting memorial to Coventry servicemen who were killed in the two world and subsequent wars. By introducing parking charges for the first three hours this will decrease the number of visitors to the park and encourage people to park their vehicles in neighbouring roads adding to traffic congestion etc.”

- 1.4 Two petitions have been received in relation to the proposal to remove funding that subsidises the provision of non-statutory school transport which affects 5 dedicated school routes to Bishop Ullathorne Secondary school and an extension to a public transport route serving Blue Coat Secondary school, affecting approximately 400 pupils (less than 2% of the secondary school cohort). The City Council provided funding to subsidise these routes following a commercial provider going into liquidation during the pandemic in 2020. The City Council will continue to provide bus passes for children entitled to statutory support for home to school transport to enable them to utilise the public transport network.

1.4.1 The first petition relating to this issue bears 538 signatures and reads:

“We the undersigned petition the Council to not make its planned cuts to the existing bus services provided to our children at Bishop Ullathorne Catholic School. The current funding subsidising the school buses is essential and we require the buses below not to be removed from service. • The Number 50 Bus • The Number 60 Bus (expanded capacity to be removed) • The Number 48 Bus • The Number 40 Bus • The Number 49 Bus”

The justification for the petition reads:

“The current transport system to put it politely is inadequate. The loss of services suggested by the council will be adding pressure to the current transport system. Children are having to wait an hour sometimes to catch the number 9 bus without the proposed cuts to the provisions.

Children from the neighbouring school Finham Park Secondary school also rely on the number 9 bus and I have been told by parents that some children arrive home around 5.30pm due to the buses being full.

The proposed cuts to the school buses listed above would add an additional 300 children to the public bus services, causing chaos and delaying children further from reaching their homes safely.

These disturbances will cause an imbalance to the children’s school life/ home life. Loss of hours will eventually affect their education, limiting their time to study. These bus provisions provided by the council are essential to safeguarding our children. Travelling home late at night, with the anxiety of not knowing how and when they will get home will not benefit our children but hinder their growth.

We as parents ask the council not to make any cuts to the existing services. We hope you make the right decision.”

1.4.2 The second petition relating to this issues bears 250 signatures and reads:

“We the undersigned petition the Council to continue to provide subsidy to ensure pupils get to schools (especially when they are faith schools) in a safe, consistent manner.”

The justification for the petition reads:

“There are limited faith schools across the city and it is not possible for pupils to access safe reliable transport to attend such schools. If schools buses are not available, omissions will increase with an additional 350+ students sourcing different modes of transport. Local residents will be affected by the increase in cars with limited parking already. Children deserve a safe mode of transport to school especially when trying to access a faith school. There are crime concerns regarding going via the city centre. Access roads are currently 50/60MPH (A45/Kenilworth Road), huge concerns with increased number of children crossing

here. Public buses currently run at full to over capacity. If the school bus is late this does not affect their attendance. Bishop Ullathorne is a faith school and to remove transport does feel discriminative. Consideration of SEND/autistic/ADHD/mental health conditions and the impact the removal of school buses will have on them, needs to be considered.

Increased truancy and decline in punctuality.

Children's education and safety are the main areas to address. The removal of a reliable, safe bus route exposing vulnerable children could lead to safeguarding issues and also impact on children's education. Who will be accountable for his?"

- 1.5 Any additional signatures received to the petitions after the publication of this report will be reported orally at the meeting.

2. Options considered and recommended proposal

- 2.1 A Budget Setting report is scheduled to be considered by Cabinet and Full Council on 20th February 2024 and the petitions and the issues raised in these petitions and the wider consultation will be taken into account as part of this decision-making. This is the recommended option.
- 2.2 The other option will be to "do nothing" which is not recommended.

3. Results of consultation undertaken

The proposals relating to the Budget Setting report 2024/25 have been the subject of an extensive 8-week consultation period that ends on 7th February 2024. The outcome of the consultation will be included in the final Budget Setting report 2024/25 to be considered by Cabinet and Council on 20th February 2024.

4. Timetable for implementing this decision

The Cabinet Member is considering the petitions during the consultation period in order that the issues raised can be fed into the consultation process and considered alongside other responses when Cabinet and Council make their final recommendations on the Council's budget. Any decisions relating to the Budget Setting report will be implemented in the 2024/25 financial year.

5. Comments from Chief Operating Officer (Section 151 Officer) and Chief Legal Officer

5.1. Financial Implications

There are no implications specific to the recommendations in this report. The cost savings identified in the pre-budget report in relation to both of these items are as follows:

War Memorial Park – Parking Charges	£150k
Ceasing of Bus Services	£128k (rising to £220k in a full year)

5.2. Legal Implications

The petitions are being considered in line with the Council's Petition Scheme.

The proposals in the final Budget setting report are required to meet the Council's statutory obligations in relation to setting a balanced 2024/25 budget. This includes the duty to report to the Council on the robustness of the estimates provided and the adequacy of the financial reserves in place. Section 31A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 refer.

6. Other implications

6.1. How will this contribute to the One Coventry Plan?

<https://www.coventry.gov.uk/strategies-plans-policies/one-coventry-plan>

Not applicable to this report. The implications of the final recommendations will be contained in the Budget Setting Report 2024-25.

6.2 How is risk being managed?

Not applicable to this report. The implications of the final recommendations will be contained in the Budget Setting Report 2024-25.

6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?

Not applicable to this report. The implications of the final recommendations will be contained in the Budget Setting Report 2024-25.

6.4 Equalities / EIA?

EIAs for all of the proposals contained in the Pre-Budget Report for 2024/25 were undertaken and attached as appendices to that report.

6.5 Implications for (or impact on) climate change and the environment?

Not applicable to this report. The implications of the final recommendations will be contained in the Budget Setting Report 2024-25.

6.6 Implications for partner organisations?

Not applicable to this report. The implications of the final recommendations will be contained in the Budget Setting Report 2024-25.

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