



Fairford Town Council

Mrs Jenny Poole,
Chief Finance Officer
Cotswold District Council,
Trinity Road,
Cirencester,
Glos,
GL7 1PX

16.01.18

Sent by email.

Dear Jenny

Comments on Cotswold District Council Budget Proposals 2018-19

We note that CDC has already agreed a 4 year deal with DCLG, together with estimates for the funding contributions from Business Rates and other sources; also, that the proposals assume any Council Tax increase will be kept within a 2% threshold, to avoid the need for a referendum being triggered. These represent 'top-down' constraints on the resources the Council will have to fulfil its statutory obligations. The key question is surely whether these resources are adequate. This is far from clear. Without this, the budget cannot be said to be sound.

We also disagree with the implication (para 2.3) that the New Homes Bonus (NHB) funding should be used to fund Council services in general – As stated below in relation to Planning services, it is clear from the DCLG background documentation that the NHB is intended to help address the impacts of development on communities and make it more acceptable to them (Ref https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6004/1846530.pdf). There is also a clear expectation that local councils should consult communities about how they will spend the money, especially communities where housing stock has increased (ref <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2010-to-2015-government-policy-house-building/2010-to-2015-government-policy-house-building#appendix-8-new-homes-bonus>) and therefore that it should not simply be used for other purposes.

The table in section 7 of the MTFs indicates total savings of £786,000 over the 4 year period attributed to '2020 Vision/Publica'. It is not clear whether/how this can be achieved without detriment to the quality of services. Also, it is partly offset by the expenditure on the 2020 Vision programme.

Community Centre, High Street, Fairford, Glos. GL7 4AF

One area which has given rise to particular concerns is Planning. This covers not only Forward Planning, but also Development Management including Enforcement.

Specific impacts from recent housing developments in Fairford have included:

- Increased traffic, congestion and pressure on car parking space at the doctor's surgery and other locations in the town, affecting both access and the local environment;
- loss of the Post Office sorting & mail collection facility, due to lack of physical capacity in the local Post Office to accommodate the additional addresses.

Additionally, the expansion of housing and the application of national and Local Plan policies has not prevented the closure of the town's last remaining Bank, Building Society agency and other shops. This clearly threatens the vitality and viability of our small town centre, which is struggling to maintain a 'critical mass'. We would suggest that, if the District Council is serious about maintaining the role of Fairford as a 'District Centre' serving the surrounding area and as a Principal Settlement potentially suitable for the location of further new housing (including 'affordable' housing), more radical action is needed, potentially including:

- Investing a significant proportion of the funds from NHB etc. proactively in securing public control of key premises in the town centre to provide opportunities for new businesses to complement the few that otherwise remain;
- Supporting reduced business rates in smaller key centres such as this;
- Continuing financial support to other services such as the Fairford sports/leisure centre, which have an important function as a locally accessible health/well-being related facility.

We would also suggest that the District Council should allocate resources to setting up an economic policy unit (as has been done by other similar authorities such as Vale of White Horse), with the principal aim of ensuring a better geographical balance of housing, employment and other economic activity and thereby maintaining the vitality of the District's essentially rural settlements for the longer term, rather than relying on the county Local Enterprise Partnership (GFirst LEP), which seems to focus almost entirely on the M5 corridor and do little that is of positive benefit to the majority of communities in Cotswold District.

We have previously agreed, through our District Councillors, that Town/Parish Councils can help the Council in performing its duties by providing a well-informed local perspective on Planning issues and in particular notifying the Council where it is observed that planning conditions (imposed to make developments acceptable and hence sustainable) are not being complied with, to the detriment of the local community. However, regrettably, there have been a number of occasions where we have raised issues related to new housing developments in Fairford impacting public health/safety, but CDC has either delayed or declined to take action, with the explanation that there are only limited resources and these have to be prioritised (Ref to specific examples in an Appendix?). This is unacceptable when Town/Parish Councillors and others are giving their time for free to perform a monitoring activity which is saving the District Council large sums of money, and is certainly not sustainable. It is also unacceptable given the large amounts of NHB funding that the Council receives. The very least that the District Council needs to do is to ensure that the relevant

functions are adequately staffed so that they can respond effectively (and reasonably) to these issues.

Appendix D of the Summary Service-Finance Performance Report indicates that both Planning & Strategic Housing and Environmental & Regulatory Services were significantly over budget in Q2 of 2017-18. This surely indicates that more resources need to be allocated to these areas.

Related to this, the recently announced 20% increase in Planning fees will presumably help. However, it is not clear how the 10% reduction in Building Control fees is justified.

Fairford Town Council would appreciate a detailed response to the above concerns so we can reassure our residents that Council funds are being spent wisely.

Yours sincerely

Cllr Richard Harrison, Fairford Town Council.

Cc Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown MP.