

Motion by Councillor Jardine

Members this is a budget which commits to maintaining services despite unprecedented financial challenges.

In spite of significantly increasing costs budget plans being presented today include a commitment to deliver all capital projects previously announced and protect frontline Scottish Borders Council services wherever possible. Council has already agreed a Council Tax freeze for 2024/25 in return for Scottish Government funding.

The draft revenue and capital budget proposals have been developed following collaborative work over a number of months by a cross-party group of Councillors. The 1,163 responses from the general population along with the very welcome 862 responses from Secondary pupils, received through the Council Plan and budget survey have also shaped the plans.

Councillors across the Chamber have put aside political differences and have successfully come together to develop this single financial plan for 2024/25.

The impact of continuing high inflation and associated costs cannot be overstated, and these hit the Council budget from all angles: transport costs, energy prices and construction of our capital projects.

Proposed financial plans for 2024/25 therefore rely on almost £10million of one-off funding from Scottish Borders Council reserves.

This will give the Council time to engage with communities over the next 12 months to shape future service plans which will deliver essential permanent savings through the Council's ongoing Transformation Programme.

Despite the financial challenges we will still deliver what was an already ambitious capital investment plan, including new secondary schools in Peebles, Galashiels and Hawick and primary schools in Earlston and Eyemouth. We will deliver care villages in Tweedbank and Hawick as previously set out, and we will still be able to invest in the regeneration of our town centres and support our communities and the most vulnerable.

The key aspects of our budget for the Borders are

- £300m capital investment over the next three years, including into new schools and care villages
- £21.6m to be spent on roads and transport infrastructure over the next three years
- Funding to maintain a Demand Responsive Travel scheme in Berwickshire, building on the Pingo trial
- Additional funding to manage pressures in social work and social care due to demographic changes and increased need
- Investment into businesses infrastructure to support inward investment and job creation in Tweedbank and Duns
- Increased funding to support Live Borders and other local sport and leisure trusts

- Additional funding to manage significant pressures in out of area care placements for children and young people with additional needs and school transport
- Maintaining funding for additional community police resources, through a single Community Action Team of seven officers
- Continued commitment to making the Council more efficient to support budget savings, including through the use of technology

Council is asked to approve the revenue and capital plan budget for 2024/25 shown at item 12 on today's agenda.