

Cllr Paul Stuart, Leader of the Council
Paul Satoor Chief Executive
cc Cllr Jeff Green Leader of the Conservative Group

21st November 2023

Dear Councillor Stuart and Chief Executive,

Independent Assurance Panel Update

At our meeting on 13th November 2023 it was very encouraging to be able to discuss the draft Corporate Plan for 2024/2027 alongside the emerging MTFS for the same period.

The Panel is reassured that you will be able to set a balanced budget for 2024/25 and that the gaps for the subsequent 2 years of c.£1.3m and £6.7m (and these figures take into account the savings that you already identified) will become manageable and that savings will be identified. You have delivered far greater levels of savings than this over the past two years which gives confidence. You should proceed to identify the required level of additional savings as soon as you can after the budget for 2024/25 is agreed at full council in February 2024.

The Corporate Plan and draft MTFS need better linking and there is a need to clearly match your resources to your stated priorities. The Panel will be expecting to see this at our next meeting after Full Council in February 2024. Alongside this you will need to put in place a very robust and comprehensive performance management framework to ensure that up our priorities are delivered.

We were particularly pleased at the Panel meeting to hear that both of the largest political parties have greater confidence in the quality of financial reporting and that trust in senior officers has improved significantly. This is also evident to the panel and we too have far greater confidence in the quality of financial reporting.

We remain concerned about the delivery of your ambitious regeneration plans although we fully appreciate the challenging economic context in which you are seeking to deliver. However, the capital spend on your schemes remains relatively low. Again it was positive to see the project management and delivery plans that you have now put in place and we would anticipate that the MTFS that is presented to February 2024 Council reflects the anticipated levels of spend over the 3 year period of the plan. This will enable Members to effectively monitor both delivery and spend going forward.

We look forward to meeting again after your full Council meeting in February 2024 and we very much hope that if all the factors outlined above are met then we will at that point be able to stand down the panel.

Thanks again for all the hard work that the council has put in to date.

Yours sincerely

Carolyn Downs
Panel Chair