

SUBJECT: BUDGET REVIEW PROCESS 2025/26

DIRECTORATE: CHIEF EXECUTIVE & TOWN CLERK

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1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To present to Members the process for the scrutiny of the proposed budget and Council Tax for the 2025/26 financial year and the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025-2030.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) sets out the overall framework on which the Council plans and manages its financial resources to ensure that they fit with, and support, the direction of the Council's Strategic Priorities.
- 2.2 The Council's scrutiny function have an important role to play in providing a challenge during the development of the MTFS questioning the assumptions behind the budget and examining the principles and planning process that underlie its development.
- 2.3 The scrutiny of the budget should be as inclusive as possible and members should have sufficient background and understanding of the issues affecting the budget so it is important that there are opportunities for all members to be involved in the development of the budget and MTFS so that they fully understand the financial position of the Council. It is also important that there is an effective scrutiny in place of the proposed budget in order to support the Executive in reaching the right decisions with regard to finances.
- 2.4 As in previous years the process to be followed operates as a hybrid of all member awareness sessions along with a separate review process involving members of the Performance Scrutiny and other committees, this has proven to be the most effective approach.

3. Proposed Process for 2025/26

- 3.1 It is proposed that the scrutiny of the budget is undertaken in two separate stages; firstly, all members will be invited to a briefing session which will;
 - assist them to gain a greater understanding of the financial environment in which the Council is currently operating,
 - provide the opportunity to ensure that they are up to date with the latest changes in local government finance, and;
 - understand the impacts that these conditions have had on the financial position of the Council, the issues that it faces and how the Council is

responding to these.

This briefing session will afford all members the opportunity to gain a greater understanding and awareness of the Council's financial position, thus aiding further scrutiny of the budget and in the case of the opposition party if desired the preparation of an alternative budget.

- 3.2 Secondly, a more traditional scrutiny process will be undertaken to review in more detail the MTFS and the robustness of the proposed budget options and Council Tax for the 2025/26 financial year. This will be undertaken in a committee format as the Budget Review Group with the appropriate governance arrangements in place.
- 3.3 The main objective of the Group will be to examine the principles and planning process that underlie the proposed budget and Council Tax to be recommended by the Executive for the 2025/26 financial year. In general, the Group's aim will be to establish that at each stage the budget;
- is clear, focused, achievable, realistic and based on sound financial practices;
 - has clear linkages with corporate and other plans that form the Policy Framework to establish that they are identifiable and designed to improve services in the Council's strategic priority areas

Officers will also endeavour to present some early responses from the budget consultation exercise to the Group, with the full summary of responses being presented to Performance Scrutiny Committee, along with the minutes from the Group meeting.

- 3.4 It is proposed that the following governance arrangements shall be in place for the Group;
- The Group will be made up of 10 non-Executive Members with a 6:2:2 proportionality share (ordinarily the group would consist of 9 members, but in order to achieve balanced proportions it is necessary to increase to 10 for this year).
 - The Group will be a sub group of the Performance Scrutiny Committee, although Members do not have to be Members of this committee.
 - The chair of the Group will be the Chair of the Performance Scrutiny Committee
 - The Group will be the main mechanism by which the Executive will formally consult scrutiny on the consideration of their budget proposals.
 - The meetings will be held in public and will be administered by Democratic Services.
 - Specific Portfolio Holders and Directors (or Assistant Directors) can be invited to attend the meetings of the group or be requested to provide

written responses if so required.

- Advice will be provided to the Group members by officers from the Council's Financial Services Team.
- The Chair of the Group shall be required to provide a report to the next full Performance Scrutiny Committee summarising the Groups findings and making recommendations to the Executive.

3.5 Party Groups have been asked to submit nominations to the group, which will be confirmed prior to the provision of any agendas for the Group.

3.6 The following timetable is proposed for the process for 2025/26.

Executive – Approve draft budget proposals for 2025/26 and Medium Term Financial Strategy	20 January 2025
All Member Briefing <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Current financial climate• Latest developments in local government finance• Impact on the Council and the Council's strategy for responding	27 January 2025
Budget Review Group – presentation of the MTFS 2025-2030 and the proposed budget and Council Tax for 2025/26.	5 February 2025
Performance Scrutiny Committee – Consider response from Budget Review Group and refer to the Executive	20 February 2025
Executive – Consider response from the Performance Scrutiny Committee and approve for referral to Council the final budget proposals for 2025/26 and Medium Term Financial Strategy	24 February 2025
Council – Approval of budget proposals and Council Tax for 2025/26 and Medium Term Financial Strategy	4 March 2025

4. Strategic Priorities

- 4.1 The budget process will set out the resources in support of the Council's Vision 2030 and strategic priorities and determines the service plans for the year ahead. Effective scrutiny of the budget process should support the Executive in reaching the right decisions with regard to finances.

5. Organisational Impacts

5.1 Finance

There are no direct financial implications arising as a result of this report.

5.2 Legal

There are no direct legal implications arising as a result of this report.

5.3 Equality, Diversity and Human Rights

The Public Sector Equality Duty means that the Council must consider all individuals when carrying out their day-to-day work, in shaping policy, delivering services and in relation to their own employees.

It requires that public bodies have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination
- Advance equality of opportunity
- Foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities

Due to the nature of this report, there are no direct equality, diversity, or human rights implications.

6. Risk Implications

- 6.1 There are no specific risks associated with this report.

7. Recommendation

7.1 Members are asked to:

- a) Note the objectives and confirm the governance arrangements of the Budget Review Group for 2024/25 as set out in paragraphs 3.3 – 3.4
- b) Note the timetable for the Group as set out in paragraph 3.6
- c) Delegate responsibility for nominations to membership of the Group to the leaders of the respective political groups, including the Vice Chair to be recommended by the larger political group.

Is this a key decision? No

Do the exempt information categories apply? No

Does Rule 15 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules (call-in and urgency) apply? No

How many appendices does the report contain? None

List of Background Papers: None

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