

Report to Cabinet

Title:	Budget Scrutiny Report
Date:	Monday 12 February 2018
Date can be implemented:	Friday 16 February 2018
Author:	David Watson
Contact officer:	Kelly Sutherland x.3602

Portfolio areas affected: All

For press enquiries concerning this report, please contact the media office on 01296 382444

Summary

The Finance, Performance and Resources Select Committee scrutinises the County Council's draft budget proposals each year and makes recommendations to Cabinet, based on evidence gathered in Budget Scrutiny meetings, held with each individual Cabinet Member and the Leader of the Council.

Cabinet agreed the draft budget on 18th December 2017 and the Budget Scrutiny meetings were held on 9th-11th January 2018. These meetings were held in public and were webcast live. In addition, members of the public were invited to submit questions, via email or twitter and the Chairman allocated time within each session to pose the public questions to the relevant Cabinet Member.

The Committee recognise that the County Council has faced another challenging year, trying to make savings without impacting too heavily on frontline services and that these decisions are becoming increasingly difficult. Increasing pressure in the area of Adult Social Care is a particular challenge.

The attached report (Appendix 1) details the Committee's key findings and recommendations. The Committee has made a number of recommendations on specific areas of individual portfolio budgets, as well as some cross-cutting issues.

Recommendation

1. That all Business Units across the Council should switch to timely monthly management accounting on an accruals basis including meaningful variance analysis/reporting.
2. That there should be improved level of visibility in individual budget lines across all portfolios for future Budget Scrutiny Inquiries. The financial data submitted should clearly identify the major costs of running the Council e.g. Home to School Transport, the EfW plant income and costs, on street parking revenue, Skills budget, number of Full Time Equivalent(FTEs) staff, costs of agency staff/interims, key drivers of demand in Social Care and associated unit costs. A high level Budget Book to enable more transparency for Members and the Public is proposed.
3. That where there are figures in the County Council budget which will also be reflected in a District Council's budget, there should be liaison between financial colleagues to ensure that the relevant figures agree e.g. recycling credits, S106 funding.
4. That mandatory face to face exit interviews should be undertaken for all staff on Range 10 or above, and where deemed appropriate, staff below that range and that the online exit interview process should be promoted more effectively to capture feedback from staff at other levels.
5. That Cabinet ensures that there is clear and effective leadership and programme management in the area of ICT and Digital to ensure that the Council's systems are robust, fit for purpose and can share data, where appropriate. This should include a centralised approval system for ICT procurement to ensure value for money and an improved customer experience.
6. That a realistic figure is included in the final Children's Services budget for legal fees.
7. That the Fostering Service undertakes a benchmarking exercise on foster carers allowances and a best practice review of independent fostering agencies to better inform the Council's approach to recruiting additional in-house foster carers.
8. That there should be a detailed independent review of the assumptions and cost drivers used to develop the Children's Services and Health and Wellbeing budgets, as well as a comprehensive review of processes and financial modelling to ensure more accurate forecasting of spend.
9. That the provision of Home to School Transport, both mainstream and Children with EHC Plans, by the Council meets national statutory guidelines only, that discretionary transport should be phased out and that parents/guardians are provided with reasonable notice for any policy changes.
10. That as part of the Strategic Options Appraisal for redelivering Library Services, an e-book pilot study should be undertaken.
11. That, within existing resources, a comprehensive gully survey is undertaken throughout the County to identify accurately the number of gullies and locations and use this to inform the creation of an effective maintenance programme.

12. That sufficient budget is set aside to enable the introduction of a programme of weed management on footways across the County.

A. Narrative setting out the reasons for the decision

See report as Appendix 1.

B. Other options available, and their pros and cons

See report attached.

C. Resource implications

The resource implications of all recommendations are to be considered as part of Cabinet's response to the Inquiry Report.

D. Value for Money (VfM) Self Assessment

See above.

E. Legal implications

N/A

F. Property implications

N/A

G. Other implications/issues

N/A

H. Feedback from consultation, Local Area Forums and Local Member views

N/A

I. Communication issues

Cabinet's response to the recommendations will be published.

J. Progress Monitoring

Where recommendations are agreed by Cabinet, the lead officer for each recommendation will be asked to provide a written progress update to the lead Cabinet Member. The Cabinet Member and relevant officers will be invited to the Select Committee to follow-up on the progress of the recommendations at 6 & 12 months.

K. Review

As above

Background Papers

Your questions and views

If you have any questions about the matters contained in this paper please get in touch with the Contact Officer whose telephone number is given at the head of the paper.

If you have any views on this paper that you would like the Cabinet Member to consider, or if you wish to object to the proposed decision, please inform the Democratic Services Team by 5.00pm on Friday 09 February 2018. This can be done by telephone (to 01296 382343), or e-mail to democracy@buckscc.gov.uk