

## Budget Inquiry Group Scoping Paper

<b>Title</b>	Budget Scrutiny 2021
<b>Signed-off by</b>	Finance and Resources Select Committee
	Sarah Ashmead, Deputy Chief Executive
	Ian Hunt, Head of Democratic Services (Statutory Scrutiny Officer)
<b>Author</b>	Leslie Ashton, Senior Democratic and Electoral Services officer
<b>Date</b>	26 November 2020
<b>Inquiry Group Membership</b>	Finance and Resources Select Committee Members
<b>Member Services Resource</b>	Democratic Services will provide the following officer support:  Kelly Sutherland, Committee & Governance Manager – Policy Advice & Project Oversight Leslie Ashton - Policy Lead and Project Management Committee Assistant – Administrative support (as needed)
<b>Lead Cabinet Member</b>	Martin Tett, Leader
<b>Lead Officer</b>	Richard Ambrose, Service Director for Corporate Finance and s.151 Officer
<b>What is the problem that is trying to be solved?</b>	<p>Members require assurance that the budget proposals put forward for the Council are realistic and deliverable and in line with the Council’s priorities, as outlined in its Strategic Plan.</p> <p>The Finance and Resources Select Committee will conduct meetings with Cabinet Members in January 2021 in order to develop the conclusions and recommendations of its 2021/22 Budget Scrutiny Inquiry.</p> <p>It is recognised that all councils are facing significant financial challenges and uncertainties this year as a result of the Covid pandemic. Given this context, Buckinghamshire Council is developing a one year revenue budget and a 4 year capital budget, with a focus on understanding and mitigating the risks to the council.</p> <p>Through scrutiny of financial data and performance information and by questioning Cabinet Members and relevant supporting officers, the Inquiry Group will explore the risks and assess whether budget proposals are sufficiently robust in the current context. After gathering evidence, the Inquiry Group will produce a report making recommendations to Cabinet to highlight any areas of risk and to suggest any amendments to be considered ahead of the Budget being agreed by Full Council in late February.</p>
<b>Is the issue of significance to Buckinghamshire as a whole?</b>	Yes - Budget proposals for Buckinghamshire Council will have an impact on Buckinghamshire as a whole.

<b>Is the topic of relevance to the work of Buckinghamshire Council?</b>	Yes, see above
<b>Is this topic within the remit of the Select Committee?</b>	<p>Scrutiny of the budget is a priority within the Select Committee's remit. The subject falls within the remit of the Leader, but involves all Cabinet Members.</p> <p>A key task for the Finance and Resources Select Committee is to scrutinise a Draft Buckinghamshire Council Budget for 2021/22 and the Medium Term Financial Plan.</p>
<b>What work is underway already on this issue?</b>	<p>See key timing considerations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On 1 October 2020 the Committee received a 6-month update on progress against the 2020 Budget Scrutiny recommendations.</li> <li>On 26 November 2020 the Committee will receive a briefing from Richard Ambrose, the Service Director for Corporate Finance, on the draft budget and key financial issues.</li> </ul>
<b>Are there any key changes that might impact on this issue?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The ongoing uncertainties around the implications of the Covid-19 pandemic.</li> <li>Possible implications of Brexit.</li> </ul>
<b>What are the key timing considerations?</b>	<p>Timings of budget consultation:</p> <p>26<sup>th</sup> November 2020 - Finance and Resources SC budget scrutiny preparatory briefing</p> <p>5 Jan 2021 – Cabinet agrees draft budget</p> <p>January 2021 (<i>date tbc w/c 4/1</i>) - the Section 151 Officer will give a more detailed private briefing to the Inquiry Group to confirm the Local Government Settlement and highlight any key challenges or budget pressures that members should be aware of. Members will also be informed of any public consultation feedback and guided through the Draft Budget paperwork.</p> <p><b>Budget Scrutiny – 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> January 2021</b></p> <p>16<sup>th</sup> February 2021 – Cabinet recommends final budget</p> <p>24<sup>th</sup> February 2021 – Council agrees final budget</p>
<b>Who are the key stakeholders &amp; decision-makers?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cabinet Members</li> <li>Corporate Management Team</li> <li>Public (in terms of consultation)</li> </ul>
<b>What might the Inquiry Achieve?</b>	The Inquiry will result in recommendations to Cabinet to ensure that the Budget for 2021/22 is robust.
<b>What media/communications support do you want?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Press release and social media communications to launch Budget Scrutiny Week</li> <li>Questions invited from Public via social media during Budget Scrutiny Week</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Link with Communications team regarding Council’s consideration of the Budget</li> <li>• Press release and social media communications to promote the report once published</li> </ul>
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## Evidence-gathering Methodology

### **What types of methods of evidence-gathering will you use?**

The Inquiry Group will be provided with a considerable amount of information as background to the financial proposals, including:

- Information provided by the Service Director for Corporate Finance
- Directorate budget summary information, including any proposals for significant savings plans or capital investments.
- Published Performance data
- Three days of meetings with Cabinet Members
- Consultation feedback
- Questions from the Public via social media

The Budget Scrutiny Inquiry Group, working closely with the Scrutiny Officer, will identify some key lines of enquiry to follow during the Portfolio Holder meetings. Whilst the portfolio areas are very different, there will be consistent questions that can be put to all of them e.g.

- How will your proposals impact on Buckinghamshire residents?
- How do your budget proposals fit with the Council’s overall objectives and priorities as outlined in the Strategic Plan?
- What are the biggest areas of risk in your budget and what plans are in place to mitigate them?

### **How will you involve service-users and the public in this inquiry?**

- Meetings where each individual Cabinet Member will be questioned on their budget proposals should be held in public and webcast. Meetings with Cabinet Members are planned to take place over 3 days during the week commencing 11 January 2021. This helps members and officers to keep their focus and to identify interdependencies across portfolio areas.
- Feedback will be fed through from the Public via budget consultation
- Meetings and webcasts can be publicised to encourage public engagement - public questions could also be invited by social media or email.

## Outline Inquiry Project Plan

Stage	Key Activity	Dates
Scoping	Inquiry Scope Agreed by Select Committee	26 November 2020
Evidence-gathering	Pre-Budget briefing	26 November 2020
	Private Budget briefing with Inquiry Group members	TBC w/c 4 January 2021
	Budget Inquiry Meetings with individual Cabinet Members	11, 12 and 14 January 2021
Developing Recommendations	Inquiry Group/SC meeting – Key Findings Report & Possible Areas of Recommendations considered	14 January 2021
Reporting	Draft Inquiry Group report with recommendations completed (signed-off by SC Chairman)	18 January 2021
	Select Committee agrees report to go forward to decision-makers (via email)	20 January 2021
	Cabinet papers published	8 February 2021
	Cabinet considers recommendations	16 February 2021
	Full Council Report	24 February 2021