



Report to Finance and Resources Select Committee

Date: 30 November 2023

Title: Budget Scrutiny Inquiry Group Scoping Paper 2024

Relevant councillor(s): Councillor Ralph Bagge, Chairman of the Finance & Resources Select Committee and Councillor Martin Tett, Leader of the Council

Author and/or contact officer: Chris Ward, Senior Scrutiny Officer

Ward(s) affected: Not ward specific

Recommendations: That the Finance and Resources Select Committee approve the approach to the budget scrutiny process for the 2024/25 draft budget.

Reason for decision: 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. The Finance and Resources Select Committee will conduct meetings with Cabinet Members in January 2024 in order to develop the conclusions and recommendations of its 2024/25 Budget Scrutiny Inquiry and as such an approach requires agreement.

Executive summary

- 1.1 Buckinghamshire Council is developing a three-year revenue budget and a four-year capital budget. Members require assurance that the budget proposals put forward for the Council are realistic and deliverable in line with the Council's priorities, as outlined in its strategic plan. The Finance and Resources Select Committee will conduct meetings with Cabinet Members in January 2024 in order to develop the conclusions and recommendations of its 2024/25 Budget Scrutiny Inquiry.

Content of report

1.2 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 February.

1.3 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.


1.4 A key task for the Finance and Resources Select Committee is to scrutinise a Draft Buckinghamshire Council Budget for 2024/25 and the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP).

1.5 The Inquiry will result in recommendations to Cabinet to ensure that the Budget for 2023/24 is robust.

1.6 *Key timing considerations*

- 8 and 22 November and 15 December 2023 - Finance and Resources Select Committee budget scrutiny private preparatory briefings on portfolios of Adult Services, Homelessness (Temporary Accommodation) and Children's Services.
- 4 January 2024 – Cabinet agrees draft budget.
- 5 January 2024 - 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.
- **8, 9 and 11 January 2024 – Budget Scrutiny**
- 13 February 2024 – Cabinet recommends final budget.
- 21 February 2024 – Council agrees final budget.

1.7 *Key Stakeholders*

- Cabinet Members
 - Corporate Management Team
 - Public (in terms of consultation)
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Evidence Gathering

1.8 The Inquiry Group will be provided with comprehensive financial information including:

- Briefings on Adults, Children's and Temporary Accommodation.
- Information provided by the Service Director for Finance.
- Medium Term Financial Plan and Capital Programme including any proposals for significant savings plans or capital investments.
- Published Q2 Performance data and Q2 Budget Monitoring report.
- Benchmarking data for certain portfolios such as Children's Services, Health and Wellbeing and Transport.
- Three days of meetings with Cabinet Members.
- Consultation feedback.
- Questions from the Public via social media.

1.9 The Budget Scrutiny Inquiry Group, working closely with the Scrutiny Officer, will identify some key lines of inquiry 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, for example:

- 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?
- What are the key climate change and environment actions you are taking and how do these impact upon your budget?
- How have you taken inflationary pressures and demand pressures into account when building your budget and what action has been taken to mitigate them?

Consultation and communication

- 1.10 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 three days during the week commencing 8 January 2024. This helps members and officers to keep their focus and to identify interdependencies across portfolio areas.
- 1.11 Meetings and webcasts can be publicised to encourage public involvement. Questions will be invited from members of the public via social media and e-mail during Budget Scrutiny week.
- 1.12 A press release and social media communications are required to launch Budget Scrutiny week.
- 1.13 Feedback from the public budget consultation exercise will be shared with the Inquiry Group.

Next steps and review

The budget scrutiny week will commence on 8 January 2024. The inquiry will result in recommendations to Cabinet to ensure that the Budget is robust. Cabinet will consider these recommendations at its meeting on 13 February 2024.

Background papers

Appendix A notes the outline project plan and **Appendix B** details the timetable for the sessions.

