

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION

At a meeting of this Committee held on
5 February 2024

(Present) **Councillor D Long (Chair)**
Councillors Bell, Hattersley, T Long, McCormack, Mussell,
Osundeko, Spencer and Sweeney

(Not Present) **Councillors Johnson, Richards, and Tasker**

Mr C Williams – Roman Catholic Church
MR D Thorpe – Church of England

31 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Johnson and Tasker, and Mr Thorpe.

32 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 15 JANUARY 2024

* **Resolved that the Minutes of the meeting held on 15 January 2024 be approved and signed.**

33 DECLARATION OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS

No Declarations of Interest from Members were made.

34 DECLARATIONS OF PARTY WHIP

No Declarations of Party Whip were made.

35 2024/25 BUDGET SCRUTINY TASK GROUP REPORT

The Commission gave consideration to a report documenting the activity of the 2024/25 Budget Scrutiny Task Group. The report detailed the findings of the Task Group in relation to the robustness of the Council's budget setting process and set out a statement regarding the conclusions and recommendations of the task group that the Commission was requested to adopt so that it could be submitted the Director of Finance (S151) to include in reports to Cabinet and Council for them to consider as part of the budget approval process.

During the discussion about the report the following points were made:

- Members of the Commission agreed that while the response rate to the public consultation may have been within an acceptable range for the Council it would have been preferable to have had a larger engagement in the consultation.
- Members requested that officers give consideration to a greater range of promotional methods - in particular messages on highway matrix signs, QR codes, and encouraging councillors to promote consultation among their constituents - to increase the awareness of residents of future budget consultations and encourage

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more responses, including increased accessibility of hard copy as well as digital consultation forms.

- Members agreed that consideration should be given to alternative approaches to budget setting such as establishing a citizen's jury for the budget and greater co-production of revised operational policies and strategies.
- Given the existential challenge faced by local government nationally, Members agreed that Cabinet should develop a radical, long term, strategy for cost collaborations with partner organisations for the Autumn 2024 to support the next budget setting process.
- It was suggested that the timing and process for scrutiny of the budget had been squeezed and Members hoped there would be an opportunity to revise the budget scrutiny process for next year. It was also suggested that during future scrutiny exercises related to budget setting additional information regarding impact assessments and options considered and dismissed would be beneficial to the scrutiny process.
- Members questioned why Government only provided one-year settlements when local authorities were required to set three year medium term financial strategies (MTFS). The Director of Finance (S151) informed the Commission that MTFS's were required to ensure local authorities understand potential medium-term requirements to set effective annual budgets and confirmed that the Council had previously lobbied Government regarding the benefits of three-year rather than annual settlements. The Commission supported the argument for three-year settlements.
- Members felt that it would be beneficial to include more information regarding impacts on specific sections of the population and place of budget decisions: for example, the percentage of residents effected by a decisions, or implications of a decision for rural vs urban communities.

Having considered the points raised during the discussion of the report, the Commission agreed to a number of additional points to be included in the statement, as set out in the report, that would be submitted to the Director of Finance. Following agreement regarding the general points that the Commission wished to add to the statement it was agreed that the Chair would work with the Senior Scrutiny Officer to develop precise wording for the amendments after the meeting following which the statement would be emailed to the Director of Finance (S151).

* **Resolved that:**

- (1) the report be noted;**
- (2) subject to the inclusion of amendments proposed during the meeting, the statement of the Commission regarding the robustness of the budget setting process as set out in paragraphs 4.8 to 4.17 of the report be approved;**
- (3) the Chair submit the precise wording for the amendments to the statement agreed during the meeting to the Senior Scrutiny Officer following the meeting; and**
- (4) the Senior Scrutiny Officer submit the amended statement to the Director of Finance (S151).**