

Cabinet – 14 January 2009

Draft Budget 2009/10: Recommendations of Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel following Budget Consultation

Portfolio: Councillor Griffiths – Finance & Personnel

Service Area: All services

Wards: All

Key decision: No

Forward Plan: No

1. Summary of report

The findings of the 5 scrutiny panels and their recommendations as part of the budget process, prior to panels receiving cabinet's draft budget proposals were presented to cabinet on 17 December 2008. The corporate scrutiny and performance panel had an additional meeting with representation from all panels on 17 December 2008. This report contains their recommendations (**Appendix 1 & 2**).

2. Recommendations

That cabinet consider the recommendations of the scrutiny panel in drafting the 2009/10 to 2011/12 budget.

3. Background Information

Scrutiny panels participate annually in the budget setting process. For 2009/10 draft budget work has been ongoing through meetings from July 2008. There are further meetings scheduled in January 2009 to scrutinise the draft budget proposals. **Appendix 1** details the recommendations of the panel in relation to the council wide budget and **Appendix 2** provides specific recommendations on the services within the remit of the panel (Corporate Services).

4. Resource and legal considerations

The consideration of the resource planning documents by the scrutiny panels is an integral part of the council's budget setting process.

5. Citizen impact

The budget is aligned with service activity within service plans across the council.

6. Community safety

None directly associated with this report.

7. Environmental impact

None.

8. Performance and risk management issues

As part of the 2009/10 to 2011/12 budget process, resource planning information has been prepared. These documents were based around financial information but also information from service plans and performance data.

9. Equality implications

Services consider equalities issues in setting budgets and delivering services. Irrespective of budgetary pressures the council must fulfil its equal opportunities obligations.

10. Consultation

All scrutiny and performance panels have received budget presentations in respect of the services falling within their remit, and will receive and consider the draft corporate budget proposals during January 2009, providing an opportunity to make recommendations to cabinet. Cabinet may wish to consider the feedback contained within this report in formulating their draft budget proposals.

Background papers

Various financial working papers.
Approved MTFS – Cabinet 17 September 2008

Author

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Signed:



James Walsh
Chief Finance Officer
5 January 2009

Signed:



Councillor Griffiths
Portfolio Holder
5 January 2009

Draft Budget 2009/10 – 2011/12: Recommendations of the Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel following Budget Consultation in relation to the Council Wide Budget

Recommendations

- 1. That in considering the presentations from each of the other Scrutiny Chairs, the Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel support the recommendations as set out by the other scrutiny and performance panels, with the following additions and amendments:**

Health, Social Care and Inclusion

- That Cabinet ensure that, built into the budget are resources to support any contingency plan needed in the case of further instances in social care such as that of the collapse of Southern Cross.

Neighbourhoods

- That Cabinet continue with the illuminations in 2009, on the understanding that the viability of the event is based on a business case approved by the Neighbourhoods Scrutiny and Performance Panel with a view to ensuring that the event is, at the very least, cost neutral.
- Investigations be undertaken to establish the cost of modifying car park machines to include functionality to print car registration numbers on tickets and offer alternative, more flexible, methods of payment.

Regeneration

- Realistic and achievable budgets for services areas are set, for example with profit targets for Walsall Market.
- That consideration of Council communication material be looked at through the Value for Money assessment of the Communications Service currently be carried out by the Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel.

Corporate

- That a full options appraisal of the Payroll service be carried out, following on from the work done with the scrutiny VFM toolkit, including looking at providing payroll services to other organisations at a profit, with an ambition towards making this service cost neutral within three years.
- 2. That in considering the Council wide budget position, the Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel find it regrettable that Scrutiny panels were not provide with enough information on costs to allow meaningful recommendations to be made.**
 - 3. The Panel notes that a council tax rise above 5% may be deemed as excessive by the Government and run the risk of grant capping. However, in the current economic climate, where the Council is under significant budgetary pressure due to a fall in income and rise in costs, the Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel would be supportive of a Council tax rise of just less than 5% subject to any further information that may come to light.**

Signed:

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Marco Longhi', is written on a light blue background. The signature is cursive and fluid, with a vertical line to its right.

Councillor Marco Longhi
Chair, Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel

8 December 2008

Draft Budget 2009/10 – 2011/12: Recommendations of the Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel following Budget Consultation in relation to the Services within the remit of the Panel (Corporate Services)

Recommendations

Finance

1. That the 7.5 posts within the Welfare Rights Service that are currently at risk, become core funded rather than grant funded, in order to protect this valuable service.
2. That options are considered for the rationalisation of the work carried out by the Social Care Fairer Charging team and the Welfare Rights Service in order to realise possible efficiency savings.
3. That the budget for Finance remains unchanged but if any savings are required that these come from back office functions in order to protect the front line services within this area.

Legal Services

4. That the Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel consider it essential that sufficient levels of experienced and qualified legal staff are retained and as such the budget for this area should be protected.

Transformation

5. That Cabinet consider which further council services could be made up- front payment only in order to reduce the levels of uneconomical debt collections
6. That a review of debt collection processes is undertaken including the current criteria for referral to external debt collection services with particular reference to the size of the debt and sensitivity of the debt.
7. That a full options appraisal of the Payroll Service be carried out, following on from the work done with the scrutiny VFM toolkit, including looking at providing payroll services to other organisations at a profit, with an ambition towards making this service cost neutral
8. That the Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel would view any additional reductions in the Transformation service to be counter-productive due to the savings they are already securing across the council.

Corporate Performance Management

9. That given the complexity of the work covered by this service, and the requirements imposed on the Council by regulatory bodies, there should be no change to the budget in this area.

Signed:



Councillor Marco Longhi - Chair, Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel
8 December 2008