

Budget Process Recommendations

Long Term Strategic Planning

The Committee recommends that the Council puts in place a long term strategic approach to budgeting, and highlights the importance of the bringing the medium and long term financial planning in line with the Corporate Plan and demands from government legislation.

Within this strategic approach, it is **recommended** that the Council should set out:

- How the strategic budget plan would support the Council in meeting the statutory obligations under the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act;
- How the strategic budget plan will accomplish the aims and objectives set out in the Corporate Plan;
- The financial planning should take into account new and existing partnerships and how the Council will work collaboratively;
- How the stakeholders, communities and citizens in Newport are engaged throughout the process.

Reviewing what information is presented to the public

In considering the specific proposals, both of the Performance Scrutiny Committees raised the issue of insufficient information within the business cases that were published for public consultation.

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee **recommends** that in future years, a robust process be put in place to ensure that the business cases contain more consistent information to reflect how the savings would be made, and contain all of the information that a member of the public would need to fully understand the impact of the proposal.

Contingency planning

The Committee discussed contingency planning with the Officers and were informed of a £1 million pound contingency within the budget, to account for any unforeseen budget pressures during the year. Members commented that it was difficult to assess whether this amount was sufficient, as it was not clear how this this million pound each year is calculated.

The Committee **suggests** that the Cabinet ensure that a robust contingency plan is in place for the medium to long term, to review regularly whether this amount is sufficient in the short to medium term.

Achievability

The Committee commented on the need to ensure that savings are achievable at this stage of the process, to ensure that it does not have a negative impact on the Councils ability to deliver within its budget next year. The achievability of annual savings needs to be better evidenced in the proposals and the impact outlined if the savings are not made. The Officers assured the Committee that the savings had been delivered at 90% within this year's budget, and that this was not an area of concern.

Whilst acknowledging these assurances, the Committee comments that there is a risk for the Council if these proposals are not achieved. The Performance Scrutiny Committees have commented that the information within the business cases were often insufficient to fully

understand how some of the proposals were to be achieved.

The Committee **recommends** that this risk should be closely monitored if these decisions are taken and implemented, to mitigate this risk of unachieved savings impacting on next year's budget.

Public Engagement

Public Engagement Process

The Committee discussed how the public consultation should be an all year round process rather than limited to the statutory consultation in the December / January period on proposals that have already been fully developed. By allowing the consultation to be held all year, citizens would be able to contribute to all stages of the development and implementation of the savings.

Performance Scrutiny Committee's recommendations highlight for that several of the business cases, the people who would be directly affected by the proposed savings were not consistently and adequately consulted upon prior to the proposals being developed.

The Committee **recommends** that in future years, the Council;

- Ensures that in depth consultations are held with those most affected by the proposals are completed prior to the proposals being fully developed and published in December / January. Work to identify effected groups should be done at the earliest possible opportunity to ensure those effected can be included in the development when a proposal is being considered.
- Develops the plan for public engagement on savings part of a wider strategic budget plan, to think more long term and strategically about how the public can be involved.
- Works towards making consultation on the budget proposals more meaningful through making it an ongoing, yearlong process rather than consulting at the end of the process when the proposals have been developed.

The Committee **recommends** that more is done to consult with the employees working in the areas that the savings are made. Utilising their knowledge and expertise in these areas could assist with identifying and potentially minimising any impact / risk within the proposals.

Feedback to consultees

The Committee **recommends** that mechanisms to provide feedback to the participants in the consultation be developed and implemented.

The Members felt that it was important that the information was provided in a number of different mediums to ensure it was available and accessible to all. The information should inform the consultees how the proposals had been informed by the information gathered during the consultation.

It is suggested that this could be achieved through holding a public forum at the end of the consultation period, and invite stakeholders and consultees to attend. A detailed press

release could also be used as a feedback tool, providing it summarised how the results of the consultation had been used.

The Committee were advised that the results of the consultation would be reported to the Cabinet. It is **recommended** that this report is made public, and provided enough information for the Cabinet to analyse and inform the decision on the proposals.

Public Accessibility

The proposals were not easily accessible to members of the public in this year's budget consultation. The Committee commented that the information was not presented in the most effective way to encourage public participation:

- The online presence of the consultation - The Committee stated that it was difficult to find the proposals, and the form was onerous to use. The form could be simplified and better signposting to the consultation on the website.
- Newport Matters advertisement for the consultation was small and easily missed. Members felt that this could have been more effectively utilised and was important element in encouraging participation as it went to every household in Newport.

The Committee **recommends** that this is looked at for next year's budget round and that this made easier for the public to access the information and comment on the proposals.

Strategic Planning of Public Engagement

The Committee felt that the Council is not moving up '*the hierarchy of engagement methods*' of citizen involvement and this year's budget consultation process was still at the inform / consult stage. (*Discussed by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee at its meeting on 28 September 2017 report ['Budget Consultation and Engagement'](#).*)

The Committee **recommends** that as part of the medium and long term planning, the Council should outline how it plans to develop citizen engagement and move from the inform/ consult stages, more towards involvement and collaboration models.

Developing How the Council Engages

Different ways of presenting the consultation was discussed and how a '*budget simulator*' had been used in another Local Authority, and explored as an option within Newport. This involved asking the public to effectively look at options for balancing a budget – to prioritise and select one area / proposal over another.

The Committee **recommends** that alternative methods of engaging with the public are explored for next year and whether more could be done to increase the range of demographics who respond to the consultation.