

Extract from Scrutiny Board Minutes – 17 December 2019

7 Draft Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy

The Portfolio Holder for Resources introduced the report on the Draft Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy. She said she would welcome Scrutiny Board's comments.

A Member of the Panel asked if there had been any update received from Government since the General Election on the Local Government Financial Settlement and the reward of any future grant money. The Cabinet Member for Resources responded that one of the main reasons the budget had moved to a red risk was because of the uncertainty on the national position. Ordinarily the Council would anticipate hearing confirmatory financial figures from Government in December, but it was now expected in January. A draft budget had been drawn up based on previous indications from Government.

The Director for Resources commented that she expected the financial settlement from Government to be in line with previous announcements. Finance Officers had been studying the promises from recent Conservative Manifestos to help obtain a clearer picture of potential funding. At the LGA (Local Government Association) Conference in January they expected to hear from Junior Ministers on their plans for the future.

The Chief Executive commented that he wanted to make sure every opportunity was taken to put forward the Council's propositions to the new Government. He cited as an example the Town funds which had been announced in the last budget, where notionally up to £25 million per geographical place had been promised. Wolverhampton had been identified as one of the place's, but Civil Servants had indicated that Wolverhampton would probably not receive the maximum £25 million. The Council would however be pushing the limits on all potential funding streams, which would help to rebalance the economy in the City. As an example, he cited City Learning Quarter as a project to champion.

Members of the Panel thanked Officers for how the budget had been presented to the Scrutiny Panels, which had been greatly improved from previous years.

A Member of the Panel asked about the costs of Norovirus in the City, in relation to social care. The Portfolio Holder for Resources commented that in the past the costs of care provision associated with the Norovirus had been reflected in the figures for social care. There was in fact an adult social care quarterly financial briefing taking place the following day, which would enable effective monitoring of the latest position.

A Member of the Panel remarked that the future of the Towers Outdoor Activity Centre was uncertain. They knew that no final decision had been made, but they were keen to know of the future plans and any alternatives to potential closure. The Portfolio Holder for Resources responded that she was aware of recent comments on social media about the future of the Towers Outdoor Activity Centre. She assured Members that no formal decision had been made. She added that it was felt important to spend as much money as possible on local youth provision. One of the issues for the Towers was the take up of

use, which was dependent on the schools. They were asking for updated information on the Towers following a meeting that had been held the previous day.

Resolved: That the new format in how the Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy is presented to the Scrutiny Panels be reported back to Cabinet as a positive change.