

Budget Minutes - Adults and Safer City Scrutiny Panel 27 November 2018

Draft Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2019-2020

Alison Shannon, Chief Accountant, introduced the draft budget and medium term financial strategy report and then explained that panel comments on the proposals would be included in the report to Scrutiny Board and Cabinet as part of the consultation process. The Chief Accountant also invited the panel to comment on the budget consultation process itself and changes they would like to see in how the information was presented in the future.

The Chief Accountant explained that an update on the previously reported projected budget challenge of £19.5 million was published in October 2018 which led to a revised budget deficit of £6 million for 2019-2020. The panel were advised that the reduction was achieved because of work done to identify budget efficiencies, budget reduction and income generation opportunities.

The Chief Accountant reported that the report does not provide specific detail on budget efficiency proposals as they do not impact on the provision of services to the public. There were no budget reduction and income generation proposals relating directly to the remit of the panel.

The panel queried the number of people who attended the public consultation events arranged to get views on the budget proposals. The Chief Accountant noted that there was a good response to the online consultation but figures relating to public meetings were low, the consultation was still ongoing and final figures could be provided at a later date.

The panel were advised that the budget consultation events were promoted using social media, leaflets, the Express and Star and posters near the venues. The event was also promoted on the Council website where the public are also invited to complete an online response form to share their views on the consultation process. This consultation is still ongoing and receives a greater response. The information will be used when reviewing the consultation process.

The panel discussed the effectiveness of the methods used to promote public budget consultation events and suggested further consideration is given to the needs of specific groups and how best to engage them and support their participation.

The Chief Accountant accepted that the numbers of people attending budget consultation has traditionally been low. However, the response from the public to the online consultation has been much greater compared to public events.

The panel questioned the use on online consultation methods and emails to engage with members of the public and considered that it was not suitable for some residents.

The panel queried the lack of detail in the report about the budget efficiency proposals where no formal public consultation is required on the basis that they have no impact on service provision. The Chief Accountant advised the panel that some of the savings relate to the release of vacant posts which are no longer considered necessary due to changes in how services are delivered, draw down of one-off grants and efficiencies across non-salary budgets. The Director of Adult Services

gave an example of a change in working arrangements at Duke Street which had no effect on service provision.

The panel requested a briefing paper on the implications of budget efficiency proposals relevant to this panel and that this information is shared with the panel to better understand their impact on future service provision. The Chief Accountant agreed to provide the information to the panel. These proposals can be implemented without awaiting the outcome of formal budget consultation process.