

## 5 Draft Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2019-2020

The Panel welcomed the Director of Finance Claire Nye and the Cabinet Member for Resources, Cllr Louise Miles to the meeting.

It was noted that the budget scrutiny feedback from the scrutiny panels was included in the supplementary agenda pack. All of the panels had been given the opportunity to review the outcomes of the consultation process and the draft budget proposals and the final recommendations from scrutiny would be fed back to Cabinet in

January 2019. All panels and the Board had also been requested to feedback on the process that the budget consultation took and the way in which scrutiny was engaged.

Some members considered that the report would have been easier to scrutinise if each separate report had focused on the items specific to that scrutiny panel as it was considered that some descriptions in the report were brief and councillors had to drill down into the report to get to the salient information. It was considered that having some additional, contextual detail in the report might have been beneficial.

The Cabinet Member stated that consultation had not just been with the panels but also the public and specific groups who had also requested more context in the report, so this would be taken on board for the future.

The Chair of the Confident, Capable Council Scrutiny Panel agreed that it had been easier to deal with the budget in her previous role as Chair of the Adults and Safer City Scrutiny Panel as this had looked at one specific section of the budget. To make sense of the whole budget required much clearer guidelines as it seemed that there was very little that they could recommend without endangering the whole process.

The Cabinet Member stated that she wanted to see earlier engagement in the budget setting process in the future which would hopefully enable councillors to put it in more context.

It was stated that the process appeared opaque, the budget and various reports were seen in lots of different places in lots of different contexts but that it was still not clear to members of the public what the Council was actually doing and it was thought that the Council and councillors could be more helpful in aiding this understanding. It was agreed that scrutiny did need to have an earlier input into the budget setting process.

The Cabinet Member agreed that she would take on board recommendations regarding having specific papers for specific scrutiny panels and that she was currently investigating how prescriptive budget consultation rules were in order to open up the process in the future.

The Chair of the Scrutiny Board stated that the presentation of the budget had been clearer this year than any other year, but that scrutiny did need to be involved in the process earlier.

The Board queried what the timetable was for budget setting as it was too late at this stage to make any meaningful recommendations.

The Cabinet Member agreed and stated that she was looking at bringing the whole process sooner starting straight away in the municipal year and holding an ongoing dialogue with scrutiny throughout the process.

An example was put forward regarding the WV Active Bert Williams Café and the need to look at opening times and the fact that there had been no consultation with ward councillors. It was agreed that consultation with ward councillors was vital before any cuts or changes were made to local services as they were best placed to identify alternative courses of action.

Resolved: 1) That all of the comments from Scrutiny Board and the Panels be fed back to Cabinet.

2) That scrutiny be involved in the budget setting process at a much earlier stage than was presently the case.

3) That there be much greater consultation with ward councillors before any decisions are taken in their wards.