

Agenda Item No: 5
Report To: Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Date: 21 October 2014

Report Title: Budget Scrutiny Task Group – scrutiny of the council's draft 2015/16 budget.

Report Author: Senior Scrutiny Officer

Summary:

The O&S Budget Scrutiny Task Group will scrutinise the Council's draft 2015/16 budget and report its findings and recommendations to the O&S Committee. The O&S Committee would then report to Cabinet on the soundness of the budget.

Key Decision: NO

Affected Wards: None

Recommendations: **The O&S Committee note the report.**

Policy Overview: The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has a duty to scrutinise the Council's draft Capital and Revenue budget.

Financial Implications: N/A

Risk Assessment No

Equalities Impact Assessment No

Other Material Implications: None

Exemption Clauses: N/A

Background Papers: None

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Report Title: Budget Scrutiny Task Group

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to inform the O&S committee of the dates for the meetings to scrutinise the council's draft 2015/16 budget and to remind the committee of the set up and operation of the Task Group.

Background

2. As set out in the Council's Constitution the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has a duty to scrutinise the Capital and Revenue budgets of the Council. In the past, the Budget Scrutiny Task Group has fulfilled this function by scrutinising the Council's draft Capital and Revenue budgets, making a judgement on them, and reporting back to the main O&S Committee.
3. The report from the Task Group may make recommendations to both the O&S Committee itself and also to Cabinet. Once endorsed by the main Committee the report is then forwarded to Cabinet.

Membership, Timetable and Meetings

4. The political make up of the current Budget Scrutiny Task Group is broadly politically balanced and comprises five Members - three Conservative Members (Cllrs Apps, Burgess and Mrs Martin) and two Members from the remaining groups on the Committee (Cllr Chilton (Chairman), Labour, and Cllr Mortimer, Ashford Independent) .
5. Any interested Member of the council is welcome to attend any or all of the meetings and to ask questions. Substitutes are allowed and the Task Group may co-opt other Members (except members of the Cabinet) as non-voting members when it is considered appropriate (for example, for the budget scrutiny that took place in 2010/11 the Chairman of the Budget Scrutiny Task Group was not a member of O&S, but was elected by the Task Group members to be the Chairman (non-voting) of the group).
6. The timetable for 2015/16 is as follows:-

Report on Draft Budget Proposals to Cabinet	4 Dec 2014
Budget Scrutiny Process	After 4 Dec 2014
Task Group to report back to O&S	27 Jan 2015
O&S Budget report to Cabinet	12 Feb 2015
Full Council – set council tax	19 Feb 2015

7. In 2013/14 the Budget Scrutiny Task Group met six times between 9 Dec 2013 and 16 Jan 2014, all the meetings took place during the day. Because of the Christmas break, this is quite an intense set of meetings. The Task Group reported back to the main O&S Committee on 28th January 2014. The

final report from O&S to Cabinet made four recommendations. Three of these were agreed by Cabinet and the fourth was withdrawn.

8. With the help of Finance officers, Heads of Service and other officers, the Task Group examines all the Service budgets and reports back any areas of concern.
9. The intention is that this year there will be five meetings timetabled as follows (all meetings are during the day):-

Date	Budgets
Dec 8th	Recharges Legal & Democratic Services Cultural & Project Services
Dec 15th	Community and Housing HRA
Dec 17th	Planning and Development Communications & Technology
Jan 6th	Finance: Accountancy & Exchequer, Revenues & Benefits, Audit, Personnel, Management Team, Strategy & Partnerships General fund etc.
Jan 13th	Finalisation of report to O&S

10. Any risks identified are put into a 'risk matrix' to show the likely probability of an issue occurring and the material impact it would have on the Council's budget if it did occur.

Conclusion

11. The O&S Committee is asked to note the arrangements for the scrutiny of the Council's draft 2015/16 budget, and the following details of the Task Group :-
 - a. Membership to be broadly politically balanced (3 Conservative and 2 other)
 - b. Substitutes be allowed
 - c. Other members of the Council may attend Task Group meetings and ask questions
 - d. The Task Group elects its own chairman
 - e. The Task Group may co-opt other Members (except members of the Cabinet) as non-voting members when it is considered appropriate.

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