

Agenda Item No: 6
Report To: Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date of Meeting: 24th January 2017
Report Title: Report of Budget Scrutiny Task Group
Report Author & Job Title: Will Train
Corporate Scrutiny and Overview Officer
Portfolio Holder Cllr. N Shorter
Portfolio Holder for: Finance, Budget and Resource Management



Summary: The Overview and Scrutiny Budget Scrutiny Task Group has scrutinised the Council's draft 2017/18 budget and regards it as legal and achievable.

Key Decision: NO

Significantly Affected Wards:

Recommendations: The O&S Committee recommends that the Cabinet:

- I. Be advised that the O&S Committee regards the Council's draft 2017/18 budget as legal and achievable
- II. Endorse the Service Plans and Risk Registers for each service
- III. Request that services include staff resource as a separate and individual risk within the Risk Register for each service.
- IV. Enhance the consideration of staffing within the strategic risk register
- V. Require the PID process to be a compulsory first step for determining the viability of all Council projects
- VI. Consider that an overview of progress made in delivering the Council's project programme be added as a regular item to the Cabinet and O&S Committee agendas
- VII. Give greater consideration to cross-service and strategic interdependencies and the maintenance of an authority-wide skills register to build resilience and reduce dependence on external consultancy
- VIII. Seek to continue the existing apprenticeship schemes in place across the Council and extend these where possible

Policy Overview:	Under the Council's Constitution the O&S Committee has a duty to scrutinise the Council's draft Revenue and Capital Budgets.
Financial Implications:	As noted in the report
Legal Implications	As Policy Overview above
Equalities Impact Assessment	Not required as appended to main budget report
Other Material Implications:	As noted in the report
Exempt from Publication:	NO
Background Papers:	Draft 2017/18 service budgets
Contact:	william.train@ashford.gov.uk – Tel: (01233) 330394

Report Title: Report of Budget Scrutiny Task Group

Introduction and Background

1. Under the Council's Constitution the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has a duty to scrutinise the Council's draft Capital and Revenue Budgets. The Committee constituted a five member Task Group to undertake this work, and presents its assessment of the draft Budgets within this report.

Report of the Chairman of the Budget Scrutiny Task Group

- 2.
- 3.

Summary

4. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee would like to thank all the Officers, Portfolio Holders and Lead Members who attended the Task Group meetings. The sessions yielded much information on the challenges facing services across the authority and highlighted a number of common threads relating to the achievability of next year's budget.
5. The Task Group is satisfied on the basis of the evidence presented that the 2017/18 budget is legal and achievable; but wishes to raise some specific points for consideration by the Cabinet.

Staff Pressures

6. A common theme raised throughout the service sessions was the pressure on staff resources – whilst heads of service were confident that their service plans and budgets were achievable, the evidence gathered showed that in many areas staff were under pressure in terms of the volume of work required of them to deliver both the 'day job' and the projects within the service plans.
7. Concerns were also expressed over the implications for service delivery in the event of key members of staff leaving the organisation. Whilst it was noted that in some cases contingencies existed to contract in consultants, the Task Group felt that the common theme of staffing needed greater, and more comprehensive, consideration across services.
8. The Task Group noted that 'Workforce Skills and Capacity' is the foremost risk with the Strategic Risk Register but on reflection of the evidence gathered felt that greater consideration should be given to staff resource within this Register.
9. Whilst several services included staffing as an individual risk within their Risk register, and it was felt that all services should assess this particular risk from

an overall service delivery perspective rather than just focusing on staffing risks within the assessment of specific projects or activities.

Programme Management

10. The Task Group felt that the new service plan template and risk registers were helpful in providing clarity over the resource requirements for the various service activities. It also heard evidence from across the authority that the programme management and PID processes had not only been well-received by officers and members but were also beneficial in terms of supporting the authority's commercial approach.
11. It was evident that the success of the new approach to programme management would rely on a complete buy-in from Members and Officers and a recognition that all projects will need to be assessed through the PID process to avoid overstretching of resources. Equally importantly, that progress against these initiatives, and their ongoing resource implications, should be reported regularly to senior managers and members.

Interdependencies

12. The new service plan template and accompanying risk register effectively highlights service interdependencies across the various projects being undertaken by the authority and will aid in determining the resource requirements for staff.
13. As part of a resilience measure to address concerns over staffing, some services noted that there were officers in other areas of the Council with the relevant skills to provide cover in the event of posts becoming vacant. Such arrangements, if required to be enacted, would doubtless be dependent on the level to which cover staff were already committed across the authority.
14. The evidence gathered through various sessions suggested that there was a high level of dependency on external consultants in some areas, with payments for consultant fees being drawn down from reserves rather than budget allocations being made for appointing permanent in-house staff, which concerned the Task Group given the authority's desire to grow talent in-house.
15. As a consequence, the Task group felt that the possibility of building resilience through cross-service support should be explored as a means to potentially achieve future budget savings instead of covering consultant fees.

Apprenticeships

16. The Task Group were pleased to hear that apprentices were being engaged in several services and that service heads and Portfolio Holders were supportive of the apprenticeship programme. It was felt that there was great potential in growing talent internally and that the apprenticeship programme was a very positive undertaking for the Council.
17. Several services noted that the apprenticeship scheme as it stood did not provide a suitable pool from which they could recruit and that their preference

was for graduate level posts. The Head of HR, Communications and Technology noted that her service was undertaking work on degree level apprenticeships and the Task Group felt this was a positive step to expand the existing apprenticeship schemes which should be supported.

Conclusion

18. On consideration of these points, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee commend the following recommendations to the Cabinet.

The O&S Committee recommends that the Cabinet:

- I. Be advised that the O&S Committee regards the Council's draft 2017/18 budget as legal and achievable**
- II. Endorses the Service Plans and Risk Registers for each service**
- III. Requests that services include staff resource as a separate and individual risk within the Risk Register for each service.**
- IV. Enhances the consideration of staffing within the strategic risk register**
- V. Requires the PID process to be a compulsory first step for determining the viability of all Council projects**
- VI. Considers that an overview of progress made in delivering the Council's project programme be added as a regular item to the Cabinet and O&S Committee agendas**
- VII. Gives greater consideration to cross-service and strategic interdependencies and the maintenance of an authority-wide skills register to build resilience and reduce dependence on external consultancy**
- VIII. Seeks to continue the existing apprenticeship schemes in place across the Council and extend these where possible**

Contact and Email

19. Will Train, Corporate Scrutiny and Overview Officer.
william.train@ashford.gov.uk