



Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held in The Jeffrey Room at The Guildhall, Northampton, NN1 1DE on Monday 6 February 2023 at 6.00 pm.

Present:

Councillor Ian McCord (Chair)
Councillor Andrew Grant (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Jamal Alwahabi
Councillor Keith Holland-Delamere
Councillor Mark Hughes
Councillor David James
Councillor Koulla Jolley
Councillor Colin Morgan
Councillor Ken Pritchard
Councillor Azizur Rahman
Councillor Richard Solesbury-Timms
Councillor Danielle Stone

Apologies for Absence:

Councillor Sally Beardsworth
Councillor Paul Clark
Councillor Maggie Clubley
Councillor Rupert Frost

Officers:

Martin Henry, Executive Director - Finance (Section 151 Officer)
Tracy Tiff, Deputy Democratic Services Manager
Richard Woods, Democratic Services Officer

41. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

42. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 16 January 2023 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

43. Chair's Announcements

The Chair advised that the deadline for amendments to the Budget was 5pm on Tuesday 14 February 2023, therefore any Members who wished to do so must submit such an amendment to Democratic Services by this time.

44. **Draft Report of the Budget Scrutiny Task and Finish Group**

The Committee considered the report of the Budget Scrutiny Task and Finish Group which provided the comments of West Northamptonshire Council's Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the Draft Budget 2023-24 and Medium Term Financial Plan – General Fund Revenue and Capital.

Over a series of four meetings, Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee undertook in-depth scrutiny of the Draft Budget 2023-24 and considered three key areas of the draft budget on which to focus scrutiny activity, there were: the Capital Programme, Fees and Charges, and the robustness of Care Budgets for Adult Social Services and Northamptonshire Children's Trust.

In relation to the overarching financial difficulties that the Council had navigated during the budget-setting process for 2023-24, the Committee accepted that such difficulties had largely been caused by factors beyond the Council's control, namely the continuing financial impacts of Covid, the inflation crisis, the cost of living crisis, additional inflationary pressures caused by the conflict in Ukraine, and demand-led pressures on services such as Adult Social Care and Children's Services, which formed a picture of national issues affecting many local authorities.

Throughout the budget scrutiny process, the Committee acknowledged that there had been approximately £48m of base budget changes and formed the view that the proposed draft budget was more accurate and therefore more deliverable than previous versions. The prevailing view of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee was also that in future years, the Committee should become involved in the budget-setting process much earlier, in order to improve information sharing, so that when challenges arise in the future they do not come as a surprise. This, in turn, would improve preparedness, collaboration, and resilience of the wider Council along with establishing more trust between the Cabinet and non-Executive Members. The Committee also expressed a view that Cabinet should look outward and make use of the knowledge and experience of all Members of the Council.

In conclusion, the Committee agreed that its Budget Scrutiny process had worked well and had been engaging, informative and had enabled the Committee to fulfil its budget scrutiny role and assist the Council in setting a balanced and deliverable budget for 2023-24. On behalf of the Committee, the Chair thanked all Officers, Cabinet Members, Assistant Cabinet Members, and the Leader of the Council who had provided information and input into the budget scrutiny process.

Members of the Committee also requested that two further items be added to the Committee Work Programme for consideration at future meetings, which included a review of the funding for Local Area Partnerships, along with an overview of the 'Wicked Issues' identified by Cabinet.

Resolved

- (1) That the report be forwarded to the Executive Director – Finance (Section 151 Officer) to be appended to the report to Cabinet and then to full Council on the Budget 2023/2024 and Medium-Term Financial Plan – General Fund Revenue and Capital and Housing Revenue Account.
- (2) That the recommendations of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee (annexe to the minutes as set out in the minute book) on the Draft Budget 2023-24 be forwarded to Cabinet for consideration.

45. **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

The meeting closed at 7.24 pm

Chair: _____

Date: _____