

## Scrutiny comments on 2019/20 draft budget

### **Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board – 24 January 2019**

The Board appreciated the transparency of the budget process and the time and detail provided by the officers. Members felt that discussions held in scrutiny panels had been listened to.

In future, where possible, figures from previous years should be provided to allow like for like comparisons. In addition, scrutiny would welcome more involvement in the development and monitoring of the capital programme.

The Chairman expressed concern about the possible reduction in scrutiny resources in October and welcomed the response from the Leader and Chief Executive that this would be considered as part of the wider Council re-design. In addition, the Board agreed that they wanted to be involved in the Council re-design process, especially from a quality assurance point of view.

### **Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel - 11 January 2019**

- Members welcome the additional funding for Children's Services, especially when seen against the Council's wider financial situation.
- The Panel recognises that work is ongoing on the structure and staffing of Worcestershire Children First and would welcome a further update on this in due course.
- The Panel supports the development of the Edge of Care Service and the decision to divert funds from residential care to fund this. Members recognise that the sooner the Edge of Care Service can be seen to make a difference, the sooner the financial benefits can be realised.
- The Panel welcomed the extra £0.675 million to fund additional staff to support the delivery of the SEND Action Plan.
- Members would wish to see further information on the Capital Programme for schools once details of the schools capital grant from 2019/20 onwards are available.

### **Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel – 18 January 2019**

#### New Savings, Reforms and Income Proposals for Consultation

The Panel discussed the proposed redesign of the Economy and Infrastructure (E&I) Directorate which aims to save £1.1million, and represents approximately 10% of the Directorate's staff. Members were reassured by the fact that a significant proportion of the savings total (approximately £650,000.00) would be accounted for by deleting vacant posts.

Whilst commending the E&I Management Team for its leadership in driving increased productivity and innovation from necessary efficiencies, the Panel has queried the

impact of savings and reforms on the wellbeing/sustainability of existing staff, and has been advised that the Directorate is mindful of work demands and that flexible working helps.

The Panel has established that the proposed reform of the Archives Service with a proposed saving of £405,000 is a budget reduction, and is unrelated to accommodation costs around The Hive, which has been previously discussed with the Panel. During its budget scrutiny, the Panel heard from several members of the public who use the Archives and Archaeology Service, as well as from a Panel member who had been part of a Scrutiny Task Group review of the Service in 2015. The Panel also heard that the reform project is in its early stages and would be shaped by further discussion and risk assessment as well as by the Member Advisory Group which Council had agreed would inform the relevant Cabinet Member's direction of travel. Several Panel members supported the need for the Archives Service to retain its accreditation, which is so important to its reputation and also its ability to generate income. Whilst cultural services had ranked low in the Council's survey of residents, some Panel members pointed out that this would always be the case with lesser used services, but did not mean that the Council should not support such services.

#### Cost pressures

In relation to cost pressures and the projected increase in costs of waste disposal (of £0.4million) as the number of households increases, the Panel awaits the outcome of discussions with the District Councils on ways to help cover the extra waste disposal costs of garden waste collections in future years.

#### Availability of information for budget scrutiny

The Panel reiterated the need for the Scrutiny Panels to have access to budget figures (2019/20 Budget Book) information to enable effective budget scrutiny and noted that it was the intention next year to provide the Budget Book at an earlier stage in the process to enable more effective Budget Scrutiny.

### **Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel - 22 January 2019**

- In terms of the Budget information included with the agenda, the Panel felt that there was an overload of general information, which made it difficult to identify the detailed information on areas specific to the Panel, to support the focus of their scrutiny. Panel members suggested that a short report specific to the Panel or an appendix for each Panel would be a more helpful approach for next year.
- Members felt that the positioning of the CMR Communities role needed to be reviewed. The current arrangement where responsibilities fall within different Panel areas is inefficient. On a related issue they were open to the idea of occasional Joint Scrutiny Panel meetings, where it was felt this would be an efficient approach.
- In respect of investment being made on training staff for commissioning, the Panel requested that they receive details of the return on this investment during the year ahead.

- Members wished to give positive feedback on the budget update they had received. They felt that the Senior Leadership Team appeared to have a clear grip on what was needed to be achieved and the vision and methodology to be able to achieve it. Members welcomed improvements in productivity and efficiency which had taken place and had confidence that there was a management team structure now in place to ensure these improvements continued. The Officers and Portfolio Holders assured the Panel that the savings offered were both realistic and achievable with more control in place to prevent slippage. Members also felt that through their own active engagement on Scrutiny Panels they had also contributed towards this improved situation.
- The Panel felt that it would be helpful if each Scrutiny Panel received a list of key aims/targets within their remit, which were currently being worked towards in budget and performance terms. An update could then be provided regularly to the Panels as to progress being made (perhaps using the traffic light system). This would enable Members to assess progress made both during the year and from issues raised in previous years.

### **Adult Care and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Panel and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 23 January 2019**

The Panel welcomed the news that the County Council and its six District Council partners had been successful in its application to be a 75% Business Rates Retention Pilot. This was a one off cash allocation in 2019/20 and worth around £4.9 million with the money being spent on District or County Council services specifically to help prevent or reduce the costs of Adults' and Children's social care across the County.

Disappointment was expressed that the more detailed information, which would be available in the 31 January Cabinet Agenda was not available to Scrutiny for its meetings and that the Panel wasn't scrutinising the most up to date information. The Chief Financial Officer reassured the Panel that there was no expectation that there would be any changes to the Budget in respect of Adult Social Care from the 13 December Cabinet paper being considered by the Panel.

Whilst noting that the Panel was concerned about the cost pressures associated with the ageing population of Worcestershire, there was bigger concern about the cost pressures around the budget for support of adults with learning disabilities and further detail was sought.

The Panel discussed the sufficiency of the provider market for nursing and domiciliary care and noted that the Worcestershire market was fairly stable as there were no large providers. The Directorate was due to carry out its annual negotiation process with providers and was confident that the Worcestershire offer would be fair.

The Chief Financial Officer and the Director of Adult Services were congratulated on the due diligence carried out in respect of the budget proposals and the work done to establish the reliability of Adult Care's savings proposals.