

BUDGET PANEL

26 June 2018

Present: Councillor S Bashir (Chair)
Councillor P Kloss (Vice-Chair)
Councillors A Barton, N Bell, J Johnson, R Martins, M Parker,
G Saffery and N Shah

Also present: Councillor Mark Watkin

Officers: Interim Head of Finance - shared services
Head of Finance
Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer

1 Training: the role of Budget Panel

The Head of Finance provided an overview of the role of Budget Panel in its scrutiny.

During and following the presentation, the Head of Finance responded to questions from members.

It was agreed that a glossary of terms would be circulated to Budget Panel members for future reference.

2 Apologies for absence/committee membership

Alison Scott, the newly appointed Head of Finance, was introduced to Budget Panel members. She replaced Bob Watson who had left the council in March 2018. The interim Head of Finance, Martin Henwood, would be leaving the council at the end of July.

3 Disclosure of interests

There were no disclosures of interest.

4 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 March 2018 were submitted and signed.

Financial outturn 2017/18

The Panel received the report of the Director of Finance. The report informed Budget Panel and Cabinet of the revenue and capital outturns for the financial year 2017/18.

The Interim Head of Finance introduced the report. He advised that the outturn report enabled comparison with the revised budget (approved by Council on 30 January 2018) and provided an indication of the accuracy and robustness of the council's financial control.

Members considered the revenue outturn, specifically the variance outturn to revised budget by service area. The £2,350 underspend after carry forwards was noted. This figure included some large adverse variances, including housing benefit payments and professional fees associated with the council's investment programme. It was agreed that these variances needed to be viewed in the context of the overall budget in those areas.

There followed a discussion about the carry forward requests for 2018/19. Budget Panel members highlighted three significant areas which cumulatively accounted for more than half of the total.

The Interim Head of Finance explained that £365,000 was being carried forward for commercialisation and service transformation projects in 2018/19, including the introduction of the customer relationship software Firmstep. Although the scope of work remained unchanged, the timescales for a number of projects had shifted. A further £258,650 was being carried forward for the Watford Junction Project to enable revenue spend during 2018/19. Lastly, £104,330 was being carried forward for the Community Asset Review – a stock condition survey of various leisure and community venues around the town. It was anticipated that this might include some expenditure on the community facilities.

Budget Panel members considered the capital position and capital programme, noting that a net re-phased budget of £7.5 million remained unspent at the end of the financial year. The Interim Head of Finance explained the volatility of the phasing of budgets on some of the council's major projects, including Riverwell and the High Street. The Panel noted that Watford Borough Council's sizeable overall budget was overseen with some efficiency by a small team of officers.

RESOLVED –

that Budget Panel agrees the recommendations to Cabinet as set out in the report.

6

2018/19 Work Programme

The panel received the draft 2018/19 work programme. It was explained that this had been agreed with the interim Head of Finance and the Chair.

There was a discussion about the Watford 2020 programme. It was noted that this issue was on Overview and Scrutiny Committee's agenda and would feature significantly in Budget Panel's on-going scrutiny of the council's finances.

It was agreed that the Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer would liaise with officers to see if there was scope for any additional work for Budget Panel in this area.

RESOLVED –

that Budget Panel approves the work programme for 2018/19.

Chair

The meeting started at 7.00 pm
and finished at 7.45 pm