

WILTSHIRE COUNCIL

JOINT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY SELECT COMMITTEE

9 FEBRUARY 2012

BUDGET SCRUTINY – EXPLANATION OF PROCEEDINGS

Purpose of the Report

1. To clarify the purpose of the meeting and how it will run.

Background

2. The meeting provides an opportunity for non-executive councillors to question the Leader and Cabinet on the draft budget before it is put to the full council.
3. Rather than create a burdensome and bureaucratic model for the coming together of the four scrutiny select committees, the committees are meeting jointly to consider the draft budget. The first item of business will be for councillors to elect a Chairman for the meeting.
4. The intended outcome of the meeting is to submit a summary of the views expressed and for these to be considered by Cabinet on 15 February and taken into account by Council on 28 February 2012 when the 2012/2013 budget is agreed.

Evidence and Informed Discussion

5. Councillors will be familiar with the need for any discussion, conclusions and recommendations arising from a scrutiny exercise to be informed and evidence based.
6. Consequently, if any councillor wishes to make a proposal on the content of the draft budget, s/he should be able to demonstrate credible evidence for the proposal. The case for a proposal will need to be strong enough to convince the joint meeting to support such a recommendation, and to stand up to challenge at the Council meeting on 28 February.
7. Councillors will also be familiar with the need to focus their questions on strategic and policy matters when considering the budget. Any “political” comments are best left for full Council.

Roles and Responsibilities

8. The Director of Finance will be invited to explain the technical aspects of the budget report and the budget setting process.
9. The Leader of the Council will then be invited to introduce the draft budget and to provide the context and rationale for the proposals. Although Cabinet has not yet met to approve the budget, the Leader has confirmed that she and her Cabinet colleagues are in full support of the proposals in the report.

10. Councillors will then be given the opportunity to question the Leader based on the evidence presented. She can be supported in answering questions by the Deputy Leader / or Corporate Directors.
11. Councillors will then be given the opportunity to question the respective Cabinet members on the evidence presented. He/she can be supported in answering questions by the relevant portfolio holder(s) and / or Corporate / Service Director.

Budget Material

12. The budget report and appended Financial Plan have been circulated to all Councillors in preparation for the setting of the 2012/2013 budget. Councillors are asked to bring their copy with them to the joint meeting.

Order of Debate & Procedure

13. The meeting will be based on the normal rules of procedure and debate as set out in the Council's Constitution.
14. The meeting has been structured on the basis of the Financial Plan:
 - (1) the Director of Finance will explain how the budget was compiled and respond to questions on technical aspects of the budget report and budget setting process
 - (2) the Leader of the Council will introduce the overall draft budget for 2012/13 and respond to questions on the context and rationale
 - (3) the Director of Finance will provide an update on progress against the Business Plan and the context of the Financial Plan update
 - (4) the Chairman of the joint committee will invite questions and comments from councillors on the Financial Plan 2012-13: this will be done section by section
 - (5) the Chairman of the joint meeting will summarise the main points, and close the meeting

Conclusion

15. A summary of the comments made at this meeting will be submitted to Council for it to consider on 28 February as part of the budget setting debate, and will be made available to Cabinet on 15 February when it determines its budget recommendation.

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