

Supplement for

Finance and Performance Panel (Panel of the Scrutiny Committee)

On **Tuesday 7 December 2021** At **6.00 pm**

Agenda Item 8 - Draft Review Group Written Questions

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	<p>The Scrutiny Committee has established a Budget Review Group to Scrutinise the 2022/23 Budget. The Panel is asked for the time being to NOTE the Budget, but to AGREE the proposed list of written questions to Heads of Service and add any further questions which are missing. These questions will form part of the discussion for the Budget Review Group meetings.</p> <p>NB These papers will follow as a supplement. Owing to the publication dates for Cabinet Panel members will only receive this on the day of the meeting itself.</p>	

The agenda, reports and any additional supplements can be found together with this supplement on the committee meeting webpage.

*View or subscribe to updates for agendas, reports and minutes at mycouncil.oxford.gov.uk.
All public papers are available from the calendar link to this meeting once published*

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Agenda Item 8

Respondee	Report reference	Question	Response
	Main report s. 2g	We know the amount that will be spent on carbon reduction, but can estimates be provided on how much reduction this spending purchases?	
	Main report s.9	How exposed is this budget to an increase in interest rates beyond current forecasts? What would be the areas of concern if rates were to hit 5%? How much would commensurate income from investments offset this?	
	Main report s. 16	Recognising it is a best estimate, how was the >£800k figure for Minimum Revenue Provision arrived at?	
	Main report s. 16	<p>Were the MRP rules to be brought in on 1st April 2022 what would be the Council's preferred response? Would this be covered in the short term by reserves?</p> <p>Just how serious is the disruption the MRP could cause to the Council's house building programme? What is a realistic worst case scenario? Would the primary problem be delay (the houses could not be delivered as quickly), or quantity (fewer houses would be built)?</p>	
	Main report s. 29	As a general point of strategy, if rates are historically low right now, is it not better to prefer debt to finance	

		things than reserves?	
	Main report s.29 b	What is the return on this, and over what duration? Is it inflation linked?	
	Main report s.29 c	What is the level of return the Council is budgeting for from this £5m investment?	
	Main report s. 31	Has staff turnover been an issue at the Council this year more than others? If so, to what degree has pay been brought up as a factor in exit interviews? Are the results broadly similar across the Council, or skewed in different service areas or at different rates of pay?	
	Main report s. 36 g	How will the success of grant recipients to operate more efficiently or get external funding be monitored and reported?	
	Main report s. 37	Covid obviously forced the public into remote interaction with the Council. What feedback has the Council had around this, and is it consistent with proposals towards greater channel shift and digitalisation?	
	Main report s. 66 c	Can more information be provided about what is meant by 'a more prudent approach to borrowing costs'?	
	Main report s. 67	Regarding interest rate cover, is all the HRA's existing borrowing fixed for 50 years? With so much borrowing scheduled to come, how high would interest rates	

		have to go before the figure of 1.1 fell to less than 1?	
	Main report s. 72	The biggest jumps in borrowing for the HRA are from now to 24/25. It is far from inconceivable that interest rates could double or triple from their ultra-low levels. Is bringing forward borrowing an option? If it is possible but has been rejected, what were the reasons?	
	App 3 p.9 line 17	What does this actually mean? What is expected to come out of this investment? How will it be different? What is the consequence of not spending the money?	
	App 3 p. 14 line 6	How was this space previously used for business continuity purposes, and to what extent will the Council have sufficient resource to manage business continuity event when it is gone? Have any mitigations been planned?	
	App 3 p.14 line 7	Are the lease restructures referred to the income strip for the Westgate or something else? If so, what?	
	App 3 p.22 lines 13-16	There has clearly been some degree of restructure to the team, with additional responsibilities for the Communications Manager. Does this represent a net growth in the team?	
	App 3 p. 26 Line 4	Just how bad are the delays from central government on giving	

		<p>permission for selective licensing? Is it right to say that the main benefit is from a base budget transfer of the cost of running the scheme, meaning that a 'lumpy' payment profile would not matter significantly for the Council?</p>	
	<p>App 3 p.26 line2 5-7</p>	<p>What reduction in the respective teams' capacity do these reductions constitute? Were the efficiencies justified by there being too little demand for these services? Will a reduction lead to lower service levels in these areas?</p>	
	<p>App 3 p. 30 line 4</p>	<p>Calls on the homelessness reserve fall significantly in 2023/24, presumably with the reduced costs from the county-wide approach to rough sleeping. How much is left in the homelessness reserve, and at expected drawing rates, is it in danger of being emptied? If so, when?</p>	
	<p>App 3 p.35 line 6, 9, and 13</p>	<p>There is no figure in this line. Is the Council expected to make money from the ZEZ bid when it is paying half the costs?</p> <p>Please also send the briefing note.</p>	
	<p>App 3 p. 45 line 8</p>	<p>Who does the Council do conveyancing for, and what are its reasons for expecting this income to increase?</p>	

	App 3 p.53 line 17	What refurbishments are proposed at Masons Road?	
	App 3 p. 54 line 36-40	There are a lot of new posts associated with the Social Housing White Paper but no communications and engagement. Will this be done by the communications team, or existing resource within the Housing directorate?	
	App 3 p.56 line 48	Given that the Council is getting in project management advisors to advise on how much of the promised QL savings can actually be realised, is a post predicated on these premature?	
	App 6 p. 3 and main report s.55	Does this figure just cover the production of a revised business case (as per main report s. 55)? Is there a mismatch between the Council's current confidence in and commitment to the depot rationalisation and the surety of the savings arising from it for ODS?	
	App 6 p.3	The major improvements listed, structural and extensions and major adaptations, are very front-loaded. Is there an issue the Council should be concerned about that this profile is needed?	
	No reference	Since the Commercial Property Strategy was originally agreed, how many Council-owned properties have been sold, and to what total value? Is it correct that none have been	

		<p>purchased thus far? With the cost of property increasing at the moment, what is the current overall return on investment the Council would be expecting? What is the net revenue loss against budget of not having purchased properties to date?</p>	
	No reference	<p>Can an update be provided on the progress of letting two floors of SAC? What stage is the Council at? Do we have interested parties yet? Do we know what the expected rent would be? What is the payback period for the investment that needs to go in to make it lettable?</p>	
	No reference	<p>With Nottingham City Council having had to refund its HRA for £16m from its General Fund for misallocated spending, how confident is the Council that its demarcations between HRA and GF spending are correct, particularly as greater transparency over how HRA money is spent with the Social Housing White Paper?</p>	
	No reference	<p>What would be the cost of opening and maintaining the ground floor of the Broad Street</p>	

		Visitors' Information Centre or similar city centre premises (in City Council ownership), for 22/23?	
	No reference	How much does the City lottery cost to run and what does it bring in?	
	No reference	Cost of reverting to two planning committees (as against the current single committee with additional sessions)?	
	No reference	Cost of an additional tree officer (to support Urban Forest work) full/part time?	
	No reference	Cost of reinstating Green Flag scheme for city parks?	
	No reference	First bulky refuse collection free. Cost?	
	No reference	Additional HMO enforcement officer? Salary and expected return?	
	No reference	The Covered Market – increasing rents: what would a 2% increase bring in?	

	No reference	Car parks – increasing charges: what would a 5% increase bring in?	
	No reference	The cost of a Council Tax referendum for Warwick DC was estimated at £200k, plus a further £300k in the event that the referendum was lost. What would these costs be for Oxford?	
	No reference	Capital spend in this Budget Amendment could include a fund for renewables – last year there was a proposed investment of £15m over 4 years of the MTPF, with an anticipated return of 3%. Would the anticipated return be the same a year on?	
	No reference	Purchase of 3/4 bed homes for refugees, possibly under Afghan Resettlement Programme. Funding through CAF Bank with houses owned at arms-length by Council. What, if any, are the hidden costs/problems with this?	