

Supplement for

Finance and Performance Panel (Panel of the Scrutiny Committee)

On **Wednesday 6 December 2023** At **6.00 pm**

Agenda Item 8 - DRAFT Budget Review Group Written Questions

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Budget Review Group – Draft Written Questions (December 2023)

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	Report/ Page Reference	Question	Respondent	Response
1	Para 18-19	Business Rates Distribution Agreement – can more detail be provided on how this would work, what the ‘potential one-off return’ to the Council would look like, advantages and disadvantages and level of risk involved?		
2	Para 20-22	When will the Council be able to implement the new discretionary Council Tax premiums on second and empty homes?		
3	Para 23	New Homes Bonus – was any information made available in the Autumn Statement relevant to the assumptions made by the Council in the MTFP for 2024/25?		
4	Para 24	Council Tax Increase – what is the rationale for reverting to 1.99% increases after 2024/25 for the remainder of the MTFS period? What would be the impact on Council income if the Council Tax increase remained at the current maximum 2.99% for the remainder of the MTFS and what are the disadvantages of doing this?		
5	Para 25	Is the proposal to remove Class C (unfurnished empty homes attracting a 100% one-month discount) empty homes Council Tax discounts? Has this been incorporated into the budget documentation or not?		
6	Para 25	Are there any other Council Tax discounts surrounding empty homes that have been		

		reviewed for potential removal, or reduction of discount; what level of additional income could this attract?		
7	Para 27	When will the requested £7m redemption request from one of the externally managed property investments be received by the Council? What is the position with the £3m in the other fund?		
8	Para 30	What pay assumptions have been factored in beyond 01 April 2024 – how realistic are those assumptions? When are negotiations expected to be finalised (and what time period is the pay deal expected to cover)?		
9	Para 33	What happens where a ward member doesn't spend their full annual CIL allocation? Can any incentives be put in place to ensure ward members are spending the money each year (while maintain due diligence etc.)?		
10	Para 34	Efficiencies – robotic process automation (RPA) – have realistic assumptions been made in terms of delivery timescales for implementation of RPA and realisation of savings (i.e. is there over-optimism bias in current assumptions)?		
11	Para 34	Efficiencies – Housing Needs restructure (£50k per annum reduction in service costs) – how realistic/deliverable are these savings given current demand for housing services and the pressures faced in terms of housing need?		
12	Para 36-38	Fit for the Future Programme – can there be		

		clarification of savings delivered to date and savings left to deliver over the MTFP period? Is the timetabling of these savings realistic in terms of capacity of the organisation to deliver?		
13	Para 38	Letting of St Aldate's Chambers – will the income lost as a result of delays in the letting of St Aldate's Chambers be recouped in subsequent years? What is the current status of the letting of St Aldate's Chambers?		
14	Para 39	Corporate Property – has any consideration been given to converting any of the Council's commercial property portfolio into housing (e.g. temporary accommodation units) to alleviate pressures in other areas of the Council?		
15	Para 39	Planning fees – has consideration been given to what might happen to income if the number of planning applications decreases as a result of increased costs?		
16	Para 39	Planning fees – how will the Council balance increased planning fees with encouraging households to retrofit their homes? Will increased planning fees hinder the Council's Net Zero ambitions?		
17	Para 39	Car Parking Income – charging on Godstow Road and Florence Park agreed last year has not yet been implemented due to delays in making parking orders. What assurances are there that car parking charges will increase in a timely manner given the		

		Council relies on income from car parking?		
18	Para 39	Museum Income – is an addition £60k income target for 2024/25 realistic given the pressures on museum income in 2023/24?		
19	Para 39	Environmental Sustainability – is there any risk to the income through the Dynamic Purchasing System and EV Infrastructure given the transfer of responsibility for EVs to the County Council?		
20	Para 40	Was the Council successful in being awarded the Pioneering Places Programme bid from Innovate UK?		
21	Para 44	Point h – planning fees – does this need amending, as Para 39 seems to suggest the increase has been confirmed?		
22	Para 44	Leisure activities – how much risk is posed to the Council’s financial position in relation to the Leisure management contract? If the current financial position does not improve, at what point would the Council be at the stage of having to consider difficult decisions around whether or not to continue providing Leisure Services?		
23	Para 45	Increased expenditure – what impact would reducing the Capital Programme have on the Council’s overall position (clearly it would reduce income, but expenditure would also presumably be lower)? What are the advantages and disadvantages of continuing as is set out in the report versus reducing the Capital Programme?		
24	Para 46	Point a – staffing – will consideration need to		

		be given to a recruitment freeze during the MTFP? What impact would this have on services and project delivery?		
25	Para 46	<p>Point b – Temporary Accommodation: How important are the following items in relation to increased demand for Temporary Accommodation in terms of increasing costs to the Council: domestic abuse presentations as a result of legislation and homelessness case law (expanded definition of ‘priority need’) and other parts of housing law increasing number of people the Council has to accommodate when they present for help?</p> <p>Is there any indication of whether the pressure on Temporary Accommodation will continue to rise?</p> <p>Can assurances be provided that adequate controls are in place to help manage the situation? What is the escalation plan if the situation doesn’t stabilise?</p> <p>Is there any indication of imminent Government funding support for Temporary Accommodation?</p>		
26	Para 51	If the funding situation for local authorities does not improve, how long would current reserves sustain the Council for?		
27	Para 52	How much of a risk does the reduction in anticipated dividends from wholly owned companies as a result of inflation/construction cost increases pose to the Council’s overall position?		

28	Para 60-63	OxWED – how much risk is the Council assuming in relation to determination of the planning application and delivery of the development?		
29	Para 70	What are the timescales for completion of the HRA Strategic Review? Where will the outcome(s) be reported?		
30	Appendix 6	How realistic are the assumptions made within the Capital Programme? Would it be more favourable to make cautious assumptions and over-deliver, rather than the other way around?		
31	Appendix 7	Are fees and charges for Leisure Centres being considered separately to the budget round due to the contract being out for tender?		
32	Appendix 7	Are all proposed fees and charges for 2024/25 included in Appendix 7 (some service areas appear to be missing)?		
33	Appendix 8	Risk - Has the Council allowed for the huge rise in external audit fees? Will the increase come in during 2024/25?		