**Scrutiny Budget Review 2024/25 – Scoping Document**

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| Review Topic | Budget Review 2024/25 and Medium Term Financial Plan to 2027/28 | | |
| Lead Member Review Group | Councillor James Fry | | |
| Other Review Group Members | Councillor Dr Hosnieh Djafari-Marbini  Councillor Chris Jarvis  Councillor Dr Christopher Smowton  Members of the Housing and Homelessness Panel will be invited to scrutinise Housing-related budgetary items:  Councillor Lizzy Diggins (Chair)  Councillor Paula Dunne  Councillor Laurence Fouweather  Councillor Jabu Nala-Hartley  Councillor Rosie Rawle  Councillor Jo Sandelson | | |
| Officer Support and allocated hours | Scrutiny Officer support – approx. 2-3 days per week from mid-December 2023 to mid-February 2024. Additional support from the Head of Financial Services, Management Accountancy Manager and other Senior Officers. | | |
| **Background** | The Finance and Performance Panel is responsible for scrutinising finance and budgetary issues and decisions, including the Budget 2024/25 decision.  The Budget 2024/25 paperwork will be published for consultation on **05 December 2023** ahead of a final decision by Full Council on **21 February 2024**. Scrutiny has formed a Budget Review Group to scrutinise the budget proposals in detail before reporting to Cabinet in February. | | |
| **Rationale** | To scrutinise the Council’s draft budget for 2024/25 and Medium Term Financial Plan for the following three years and provide public assurance of the Council’s budget setting processes and decisions. | | |
| **Key lines of inquiry** | Areas of focus for the Budget Review Group this year to include:   * The progress of financial mitigation strategies arising from COVID and the Council’s overall expectation of what the ‘new normal’ looks like financially * The interaction, robustness and financial impact of the financial returns to the Council from Oxford Direct Services and OX Place business plans * Specific consideration of the Council’s planning regarding macroeconomic factors such as inflation and the cost of living crisis * The robustness of plans and risks to the Council’s anticipated income streams, particularly relating to parking, commercial property and the Council’s companies * The robustness of the HRA Business Plan * Assessment of overall strategy and individual proposals to mitigate lost income and to reduce costs * Planned borrowing levels and the impact of the changes arising from Minimum Revenue Provision * Levels of contingencies and earmarked reserves * Deliverability of the Capital Programme and its relation to previous iterations of the Medium Term Financial Plan | | |
| **Indicators of Success** | * Robust independent scrutiny of budget proposals; * Detailed consideration of key lines of inquiry; * The production of an evidenced based report with recommendations; * Broad agreement on conclusions and recommendations amongst Review Group members; * The majority of recommendations are agreed by the Cabinet. | | |
| **Methodology/ Approach** | Evidence gathering to include:   * A budget briefing by the Chief Executive and Head of Financial Services; * Reviewing Budget 2024/25 paperwork, including options or bids presented to members; * Submitting written questions to Senior Officers and reviewing their responses; * Meetings with Executive Directors and Heads of Service. | | |
| **Specify Witnesses/ Experts** | * Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management * Chief Executive * Executive Director (Development) * Executive Director (Communities and People) * Executive Director (Corporate Resources) * Head of Financial Services * Head of Housing Services * Head of Planning Services * Head of Community Services * Head of Business Improvement * Head of Law and Governance * Head of Regulatory Services and Community Safety (*tbc*) * Community Safety Manager * Head of Corporate Strategy * Head of Regeneration and Economy * Head of Corporate Property * Management Accountancy Manager | | |
| **Out of scope** | Detailed estimates in relation to ODS and OX Place company business plans are out of scope, but not their overall impact on the Council’s budget and Medium Term Financial Plan. | | |
| **Projected start date** | 05 December 2023 | **Draft Report Deadline** | 19 January 2024 for Finance and Performance Panel on 22 January 2024 |
| **Meeting Frequency** | 4 meetings in January 2024 | **Projected completion date** | By 07 February 2024 Cabinet |

Draft outline of meetings (*all held remotely*)

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| Meeting one – Wednesday 03 January 2024, 6:00 – 8:00pm |
| Introduction to the budget and its context (**Cllr Ed Turner, Caroline Green and Nigel Kennedy**)  Introductions to service area budget proposals and questions from Review Group:   * Corporate Resources (**Tom Hook**) * Law and Governance (**Emma Jackman)** * Financial Services (**Nigel Kennedy**) * Business Improvement (**Helen Bishop**) * Corporate Strategy (**Mish Tullar**) |
| Meeting two – Thursday 04 January 2024, 6:00pm - 8.00pm |
| Introduction to budget proposals and answering Review Group questions from:   * Development (**Tom Bridgman**) * Planning Services (**David Butler**) * Regeneration and Economy (**Carolyn Ploszynski**) * Corporate Property (**Jane Winfield**) *to include a report on income from Council assets* |
| Meeting three – Tuesday 09 January 2024, 6:00pm - 8.00pm |
| To consider draft recommendations from previous meetings; introduction to budget proposals and answering Review Group questions from:   * Housing and Communities (**Peter Matthew, Nerys Parry, and Ian Brooke**) * Regulatory Services and Community Safety (**Richard Adams**)   Members of the Housing and Homelessness Panel will be invited to participate in the Scrutiny of the Housing element of this meeting. |
| **Meeting four – Monday 15 January 2024, 6.00pm - 8.00pm [prior to Finance and Performance Panel on 22 January 2024]** |
| To consider the draft Review Group report. |