

Scrutiny Budget Review 2024/25 – Scoping Document

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	<p>Councillor Dr Hosnieh Djafari-Marbini Councillor Chris Jarvis Councillor Dr Christopher Smowton</p> <p>Members of the Housing and Homelessness Panel will be invited to scrutinise Housing-related budgetary items:</p> <p>Councillor Lizzy Diggins (Chair) Councillor Paula Dunne Councillor Laurence Fouweather Councillor Jabu Nala-Hartley Councillor Rosie Rawle Councillor Jo Sandelson</p>
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	<p>The Finance and Performance Panel is responsible for scrutinising finance and budgetary issues and decisions, including the Budget 2024/25 decision.</p> <p>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.</p>
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	<p>Areas of focus for the Budget Review Group this year to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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	<p>Evidence gathering to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 (<i>tbc</i>) 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*)

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: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Development (Tom Bridgman)• Planning Services (David Butler)• Regeneration and Economy (Carolyn Ploszynski)• Corporate Property (Jane Winfield) <i>to include a report on income from Council assets</i>
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: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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.

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