

Cabinet

Supplementary Information

OSMB Comments on the Budget Proposals



Date: Monday, 30 January 2017

Time: 6.00 pm

Venue: City Hall, College Green, Bristol, BS1 5TR

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Supplementary Agenda

6. **Reports from scrutiny commissions - Comments from the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board on the Budget Proposals**

(Pages 3 - 5)



Comments to Cabinet Regarding Council's Revenue Budget for 2017/18.

At the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board meeting on 19th January 17, Members considered Bristol City Council's Corporate Strategy 2017-2022 as well as the Savings and Investment Proposals, which form the basis of the Council's Revenue Budget for 2017/18 and Capital Programme for 2017 – 2022.

Members noted that the Mayor and Cabinet would be considering the Revenue Budget for 2017/18 at the Cabinet meeting on 30th January 17 (postponed from 24th January) and asked that the following comments be provided for consideration at the meeting;

This submission reflects the discussion had by members at OSMB and is not a reflection of unanimous support for all the recommendations.

1. Budget Process

- a. Members commented on the process to date for setting the budget, acknowledging that it had been a very complex task for all parties to gather the relevant information, particularly due to the levels of savings that needed to be identified.
- b. The Board suggested that scrutiny could be a useful forum for developing any proposals that require more work for this budget.
- c. Concern was expressed about the timescales and rapidly changing nature of proposals and it was suggested that lessons could be learnt from this process for the future.
- d. The Board agreed that scrutiny would like to play more of an active role in setting future budgets and hoped they could work with the Mayor, Cabinet and senior officers to improve the level of engagement and information flow in subsequent years particularly with communities and external partners.

2. Impact of Proposals specifically the Equalities Impact Assessments

- a. The Board considered the Cumulative Equalities Impacts Assessment (EqIAs) that had been prepared to accompany the budget proposals. There was strong consensus that the impact of service changes on equalities groups needed to be carefully assessed if the Council were to continue to serve and protect those most in need of services.
- b. It was felt that in future a breakdown of equalities impact by directorate (not just by individual proposal) would be useful but that this must feed into a robust overall picture. In addition the impact of proposals taken forward should also be tracked cross council to create a 'whole council' view of the impact. There was concern that proposals may have been developed in directorates and impacts in other directorates not fully considered.
- c. Members agreed that EqIAs were an essential part of any review of spending and suggested that they needed to be prepared earlier in the process, during the early design stage, so they could shape emerging ideas, rather than assessing the impact of a decision once it was close to the point of being made.
- d. Concerns were raised about the quality of the impact assessments available. It was acknowledged that these were being updated and this was a reflection of the tight timescales being worked to by officers.
- e. Members also highlighted concern about the process for engaging other service providers and partners during the design of the proposals. It was felt this should be strengthened in future and brought in during the early design phase.



3. Prioritising spend across the council

- a. Consideration was given to the scale of proposed reductions to the People directorate budget, which included Children's Services and Adult Social Care. Members noted, with reluctance and unhappiness, that there would be significant cutbacks in some areas, which would inevitably affect service provision for some residents. There was particular concern about the proposed reductions in funding for early intervention schemes, such as Children's Centres and housing for the vulnerable, since stopping spending on preventative measures often resulted in additional spend later down the line.
- b. Members accepted that the savings required in the current financial year meant that reductions were necessary across all directorates. However, they were concerned that overtime the Council could find itself channelling the vast majority of its budget into supporting the People directorate at the expense of many other important elements of the Council's work, for example infrastructure provision, community amenities and so on.
- c. The Board suggested that a debate should take place to agree the longer term strategy around spending priorities that explores the balance between investment in the economy, provision of statutory services and early intervention. It was highlighted that a cross directorate approach should be taken and consider both the short, medium and long term implications. Certain areas, if protected from savings, could have a longer term benefits that could be transferred to supporting other services. It was raised that once certain facilities or amenities are lost they will not be regained and consideration should be given to the longer term implications of this.

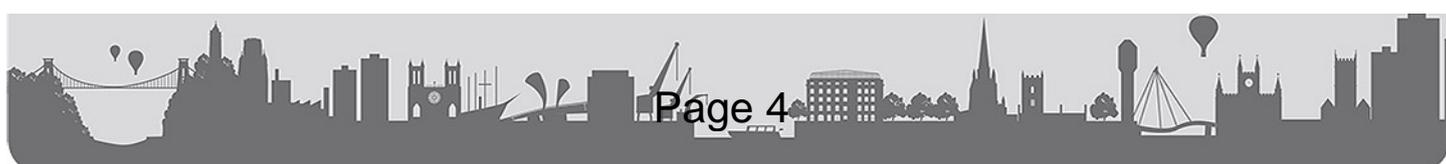
4. Specific savings proposals - Council tax, Neighbourhood Partnerships, Libraries & Parks

These points were highlighted specifically by a number of members of OSMB. This is however not a reflection of unanimous support for all the remaining proposals.

- a. The Board considered the proposals in relation to increasing Council Tax by 5%. Members were concerned that the rise could affect the most vulnerable residents but reluctantly acknowledged that it was a necessary in order to produce a balanced budget.
- b. There was strong opposition to the plans in relation to changes to Neighbourhood Partnerships (NPs). Members were firstly concerned about the suggestion that NPs be replaced with other mechanisms for community engagement as some had been very effective at facilitating the relationship between the Council and local residents. Secondly, Members were disappointed to see that the NPs appeared to be winding down before any formal decision had been made, and they expressed concern about timing and communication around the proposed changes to enable communities to adjust as required.
- c. Members were also disappointed to see the plans in relation to libraries. The Board agreed that the current network of libraries provided vital community assets across the city and once they had been scaled back they would never be replaced. Members expressed regret that the plans to develop libraries into community hubs that offered shared services from a number of providers had not fully materialised and saw this as a missed opportunity.
- d. Members were also concerned about the extent of the savings proposed for the Parks service and questioned the deliverability of this level of savings and self-financing options.

5. Income generation and commercialisation

- a. The Board went on to consider the role that income generation and commercialisation should play in future plans for the Council. There was universal agreement that whilst income



- b. generation inevitably required some investment it was essential for the Council to develop other sources of income if it was to become more self-sufficient. Members suggested that Scrutiny would be the ideal vehicle for exploring new opportunities for generating income and hoped the Executive would embrace joint working in this area.

6. Thanks

- a. Members expressed thanks to all those involved in the budget process, particularly the Section 151 officer and her team, who had worked tirelessly to ensure the relevant information was available on time.
- b. Members of the People Scrutiny specifically welcomed the number of briefings run by officers this year on the people budget proposals.

