



NORWICH City Council

Committee name: Cabinet

Committee date: 07/02/2024

Report title: Scrutiny Committee Recommendations

Portfolio: Councillor Kendrick, cabinet member for resources

Report from: Head of legal and procurement

Wards: All wards

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Purpose

To consider the recommendations made by scrutiny committee in relation to the council's provisional 2024/25 budget and medium-term financial strategy.

Recommendation:

To consider whether to adopt all or some of the recommendations from the scrutiny committee.

Policy framework

The council has five corporate priorities, which are:

- People live independently and well in a diverse and safe city.
- Norwich is a sustainable and healthy city.
- Norwich has the infrastructure and housing it needs to be a successful city.
- The city has an inclusive economy in which residents have equal opportunity to flourish.
- Norwich City Council is in good shape to serve the city.

The scrutiny committee is an important part of the democratic process, helping hold the cabinet to account and exploring how services are performing. As such, a well performing scrutiny committee can contribute to all corporate priorities.

Report details

1. Members considered the council's provisional 2024/25 budget and medium-term financial strategy at the committee meeting held 1 February 2024.
2. Members received a presentation from the Interim Chief Finance Officer (CFO) and were able to ask questions of the leader of the council and the cabinet member for resources.
3. Members thanked officers for their work on the budget.
4. The CFO explained the budget was set in the context of a precarious financial situation for local authorities with a lack of certainty in relation to government funding going forward.
5. Members expressed disappointment in relation to the number of consultation responses the budget received and that those received were not representative of the city's demographic profile.
6. The chief executive officer and the leader of the council advised that there were plans to review the process for conducting consultations in the new civic year and commented that they would welcome pre scrutiny of the review by committee.
7. Members considered recommendations to make to cabinet making a number targeted at improving the consultation process as below:

Recommendation	Rationale	Implications/ resource requirements
Remove the requirement to register to access Get Talking Norwich and add the demographic profiling questions into the main questions;	Members received feedback that this had discouraged some from completing the consultation.	Officer time to redesign the question format on Get Talking Norwich.
Ensure consultations include a clear statement of intent, which explains how the results and data collected will be used;	To provide clarity of purpose and intent to consultees.	Officer time to review and amend the consultation process and member time to consider and respond.
Ensure that consultees are responded to once the consultation has closed and summarise the changes which have been made as a result of consultation responses;	To engage in a dialogue with consultees, to illustrate that respondents are listened to and can influence outcome.	Officer time to consider responses and respond.

Include consultations in the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy to ensure that the sample response is representative of the population of the city;	To aim to ensure that consultation responses are representative of the community that the council serves. In order that all voices are included.	Officer and member time to consider how to ensure consultations are representative.
Provide a clear logic map which links the budget and corporate plan consultations;	To illustrate how the two consultations are linked.	Officer time to prepare and provide.
Avoid the use of leading questions in consultations;	To ensure that responses are not being led.	Officer time to review question style use and amend and member time to review and approve.
Ensure consultations are mindful of and mitigate against digital exclusion and literacy rates;	To ensure accessibility.	Officer time to consider and implement.
Consider the use of a more deliberative process to inform the decision making process;	To increase participation and improve responses.	Officer time to develop and member time to consider proposal.
Communicate how the council is spending its money to the public;	Members concerned that the budget is not understandable to a number of people. To ensure that the message is communicated in a clear, jargon free manner.	Officer time to develop communication.
Provide a briefing to members of the council on the Future Shape Norwich project;	In order that members understand the project.	Officer time to develop and deliver briefing and member time to attend.
Include a section on NCSL in the budget papers;	A section on Lion Homes is included in the capital strategy element of the budget, consideration of both the council's companies should be included in	Officers time to prepare and include.

	this section of the budget.	
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Consultation

8. These proposals were considered and agreed by members of the scrutiny committee. There has been no specific consultation on these proposals.

Implications

Financial and resources

9. Any decision to reduce or increase resources or alternatively increase income must be made within the context of the council’s stated priorities, as set out in its Corporate Plan 2022-26 and budget.
10. Any additional financial requirements where activities cannot be undertaken within existing resources will need to be subject to further consideration, and approval through a business case. This will need to include an appropriate funding source being identified and/ or being built into future years’ budget processes.

Legal

11. The proposals largely request that cabinet consider exploring specific matters further. If these result in formal business cases, the legal implications will require due consideration at that time.

Statutory considerations

Consideration	Details of any implications and proposed measures to address:
Equality and diversity	Members recommendations seek to encourage greater inclusivity in the budget consultation process.
Health, social and economic impact	Scrutiny of the budget ensures good economic management.
Crime and disorder	None.
Children and adults safeguarding	None.
Environmental impact	None.

Risk management

Risk	Consequence	Controls required
None at this stage.		

Other options considered

12. There have been no other options considered for this report, as it is a factual report based on the outcome of committee meetings that have already taken place.

Reasons for the decision/recommendation

13. This report will allow cabinet to make a decision on whether or not to take forward some or all of the recommendations.

Background papers:

None

Appendices: None

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