

Finance & Enterprise Scrutiny Committee

Response to Service and Financial Planning 2019/20 – 2021/22

1. The Finance & Enterprise Scrutiny Committee is a politically balanced committee of seven non-Executive elected members and two co-opted members. The Committee is the main mechanism by which Cabinet consults annually with Scrutiny on the budget proposals.
2. The Committee held two meetings on 8 January and 21 January 2019 to scrutinise the Service & Financial Planning Strategy 2019/20 – 2021/22 agreed by Cabinet for consultation on 3 January 2019.
3. An alternative budget was not put forward by the main opposition group.
4. The Committee would like to thank the Cabinet Member for Finance, Commercial Services and Economic Development and the Chief Financial Officer for their presentation and answering questions to assist the Committee in its deliberations. The Committee also thanks those Officers involved in providing written responses to a number of questions raised.
5. The general consensus of the Committee was to support the administration's budget approach in light of the lack of clarity around funding for 2020-21 and beyond. In particular, the Committee made the following observations and expressed concern around the following areas of government funding:-
 - (a) Since the Council had assumed responsibility for Public Health from April 2013, there had been a cut to the underlying grant in all years from April 2015 and the grant next year would be cut by £0.3m again in cash terms. Members expressed concern that a reduced grant would be detrimental to the realisation of the national and local ambition for the prevention agenda and asserted that proper funding was required from government for these responsibilities.
 - (b) Adult Care continued to be financially challenging, not just for Telford and Wrekin but for local authorities across the country, and the Committee keenly awaited the adult social care green paper proposals and a debate on funding long term social care.
 - (c) The Committee recommended that Cabinet reinvigorate the lobby to the Office for National Statistics with regard to the population undercount (around 4000 people) which under the current system equates to a loss of grant of around £1.2m per annum.
6. The Committee supported the intention to make maximum use of the powers conferred by the Rating (Property in Common Occupation) and Council Tax (Empty Dwellings) Act 2018 to encourage owners of properties that have been empty for a long time to bring them back in to use.