



Date: 17 December 2018

Councillor Chris Weaver,
Cabinet Member Finance, Modernisation & Performance,
Cardiff Council,
County Hall,
Cardiff
CF10 4UW

Dear Chris,

Policy Review & Performance Scrutiny Committee: 12 December 2018

A sincere thank you for attending the Policy Review and Performance Scrutiny Committee in December to consider progress in addressing the Budget Reduction Requirement for 2019/20 and the budget consultation Changes for Cardiff. Following the scrutiny, Members agreed that I pass on the following observations captured during the Way Forward for your consideration.

Oversight of budget planning

The Committee notes that until the Final Settlement is confirmed there are some uncertainties that Cabinet will need to debate further to ensure the budget gap is closed.

We note that should the settlement be greater than forecast then the option of retaining a Financial Resilience Mechanism within the Council's budget will be reviewed. We take on board that some notable uncertainties exist around proposals for funding, such as Teachers pension, and that proposed Council Tax increases have not yet been agreed, and could exceed last year's levels with Welsh Government clearance. We note also that final proposals will include the Section 151 officer's advice to Cabinet and take into consideration the longer term budget prospects for 2020/21.

Members were interested to hear that the proposed directorate savings totalling £19,377m this year, at the highest point had been £42.3m in previous years. We

note that proposed new grants from Welsh Government are understood to relate to additional activities.

Budget Consultation 2019/20

The Committee is of the opinion that the budget consultation this year is not straightforward to complete. Specific observations were:

- Some questions exploring issues, such as *foster care* and *funding for city events*, require the respondent to make a judgement without providing the figures that would enable an informed judgement.
- There is considerable information contained in the survey, and the questions are peppered throughout. Members suggest that if the questions were concentrated in a removable section, then the remaining information could be retained as a useful resource for future reference.
- We consider that some of the questions are leading.
- Members consider some of the language used in the survey, such as referring to foster caring as a career, could be improved upon.
- Importantly, Members have concerns about an apparent lack of pre-launch testing. We consider that this survey could have been improved had it been tested with Councillors, minority groups, and particularly with the Youth Council.
- We acknowledge that timescales are short between the announcement of the Local Government Settlement in October and publication of the survey in November, however we believe scrutiny of the draft survey would benefit all and urge you to factor engagement with scrutiny into your planning timelines for the 2020/21 budget consultation.

The Committee wishes to endorse the importance of focus group work to inform the survey, and particularly your targeted community work with ethnically diverse minority groups, using sensitive and appropriate facilitators.

Once again, on behalf of the Committee, please pass my sincere thanks to all who attended PRAP Scrutiny Committee for consideration of the ongoing challenges of the Budget Strategy for 2019/20. Our oversight of progress in budget planning does

not require a response, however I look forward to a response to our suggestions for improvement in respect of future budget consultation exercises.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Walker". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

COUNCILLOR DAVID WALKER

CHAIR, POLICY REVIEW AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

cc Members of the Policy Review & Performance Scrutiny Committee
Christine Salter, Corporate Director Resources
Ian Allwood, Head of Finance
Gareth Newell, Policy, Partnerships and Citizen Focus Manager
Joanne Watkins, Cabinet Office Manager
Heather Warren, Cabinet Support Officer.