

Ask for/Gofynnwch am **Scrutiny**

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NEWPORT
CITY COUNCIL
CYNGOR DINAS
CASNEWYDD

Councillor John Guy,
Chairperson of the Overview and Scrutiny
Management Committee

C/O Scrutiny Office
Civic Centre/Canolfan Ddinesig
Newport/Casnewydd
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Dear Leader's Office,

I am writing on behalf of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee to inform the Cabinet of the recommendations and comments made by the Committee at their July 26th Meeting.

The Committee made recommendations and commented on the agenda item, *Budget Process and Public Engagement – Recommendations Monitoring*. These recommendations and comments included items that lie within the Cabinet remit:

- Make necessary plans to put in place arrangements to ensure that the public consultation of the budget proposals begins as early as possible this year.
- Consider and plan how the Council will move up the Hierarchy of Engagement, and monitor the progress towards implementing this. The Committee considers that involving the public in the budget saving process was a key priority for developing how it engages with the public.
- Establishes and develops relationships with the Universities in Newport, to establish links with relevant students who may be interested in undertake research on behalf of the Council as part of their degree programmes.

For information and reference the full minutes of the agenda item are **attached**.

If you have any response or comment on Committee's recommendations or comments, I would be grateful if you could provide this by 25th October. Your response will be submitted to the Committee for consideration at its next meeting on 15th November.

Yours sincerely,

Councillor John Guy
Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

**Extract of the Minutes of Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee
held on 26 July 2018 at 10am**

can be consulted throughout the year. The Belle Vue Park Car Parking was given as an example by a Member. People could be consulted on whether free parking in parks or a small rise in Council Tax was preferable.

- Comment was then made that the Council had not taken advantage of some opportunities. An example was given that Welsh Government offered a sum of money to be applied for by Local Authorities so they could liaise with local businesses to allow the public to use their toilets however the Council had not applied. The Officer acknowledged that this opportunity had not been taken up. The Officer advised that it was a challenge to move up the Hierarchy of Engagement as it was difficult to change the culture and mind-set to enable this to happen. The arrangements for this year's budget consultation were being developed, and pre consultation engagement ideas were being looking into, such as Hereford Council's method of engagement.
- Concerns were raised regarding the Council moving away from paper surveys as an engagement tool. Members were advised that paper surveys required a member of staff to manually input responses which was an additional resource requirement. However, paper copies would still be available, and the Council was not moving away from this method of engagement. Last year both paper and face to face surveys were produced and included in the overall data.
- It was also asked if it would be better if the Budget Consultation could be tailored in a way that people could choose which questions and areas that they wished to provide opinion on.
Members then suggested that links to the survey could be given to those directly impacted such as parents at schools and library users if those were to be affected by the budget. Members were told that this could considered, Officers also stated that the previous survey was overcomplicated, when the information needed to be balanced and clear.
- The Officer advised that the figures around the impact the bus WIFI had could be provided to the Committee. There were around 150,000 unique sign-ons using the bus WIFI, which asked users five questions around consultation and engagement. However the bus WIFI was not able to provide sufficient data to base a budget consultation on. The bus WIFI had been used last year in the budget consultation to raise awareness and to find out if people would complete the consultation or not. 45% of people said they would not respond to budget consultations.
- Members were told that the times that had the best results were when survey questions were asked in a face to face, one to one setting, an example was given from last year when a day was spent in the Market talking to people about the budget. The Market session discussed the budget proposals with around 40 people responding to questions. This brought in better quality data, however it was resource intensive.

The Committee then thanks the Head of People and Business Change for attending.

The Head of Finance presented an overview of the report to the Committee. The Officer advised that the framework was in place to allow for medium term and strategic approach to the budget. There was a 4 year plan that had identified where funding was going during that period and the cost pressures which allowed for saving proposals or strategies on how the Council would deal with budget pressures. In terms of the Corporate Plan, it had been very explicit with "20 promises by 2022" with most of them being achieved using existing

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The Head of Finance was thanked by the Committee for attending and answering their questions.

Recommendations and Comments

The Committee acknowledged that the Officers were working towards improving public engagement for the budget process and that this was only one part of the overall, Council wide public engagement review that was being undertaken. It was noted that this review was being reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee in November for consideration.

However, the Committee expressed concern that the outcome of this review would be too late to impact upon the consultation for this year's budget process. The Committee felt that the quality and consistency of the information within the Business Cases was of particular concern last year, within inconsistent levels of information.

The concern for this year was that the resources to ensure the quality of these Business cases had been reduced with the removal of the Business Improvement and Performance Team from the process, and that this reduction in resources could negatively impact upon the quality of this year's proposals.

The Committee requested the following information:

- Head of People and Business Change to provide additional information on the impact of bus WIFI had on engagement levels, including the types and depth of response and information on samples.
- Head of People and Business Change to provide a brief overview of the four Strategic Groups, their remit and reporting arrangements.
- Head of Finance to provide a brief to outline the quality assurance process which will be used for this year's budget process.

The Committee requested that the Cabinet:

- Make necessary plans to put in place arrangements to ensure that the public consultation of the budget proposals begins as early as possible this year.
- Consider and plan how the Council will move up the Hierarchy of Engagement, and monitor the progress towards implementing this. The Committee considers that involving the public in the budget saving process was a key priority for developing how it engages with the public.
- Establishes and develops relationships with the Universities in Newport, to establish links with relevant students who may be interested in undertake research on behalf of the Council as part of their degree programmes.