

Minutes of the meeting of the BUDGET SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held on TUESDAY 23 JANUARY 2018 at 7.00 PM

Present: Councillors R Bradburn (Chair), Bald, Burke, Cannon, Crooks, P Geary, Khan, C Wilson and K Wilson

Apologies: Councillors Ganatra and Geaney

Officers: E Richardson (Overview and Scrutiny Officer)

Declarations of Interest: None

BS36 REVIEW AND REPORT WRITING

The Committee's Planning Group had prepared an initial draft of the report which had been circulated to the Committee in advance of the meeting.

The draft report was welcomed for its brevity and its concentration on what the Committee considered to be the most important issues for 2018/19.

The Committee discussed the draft report, particularly the recommendations, in detail, making suggestions for changes and amendments as appropriate. The revised version would be recirculated for final comment and once approved forwarded to the Cabinet Committee Manager for inclusion in the papers for the meeting on 6 February 2018.

The Committee then discussed at some length the option under the Fast Track Service for applicants for planning permission to request a particular planning officer to handle their application. Although the Committee welcomed any innovative proposals for income generation from the Council's Service Groups, provided their viability was backed up by credible evidence, it remained concerned that an erroneous, external perception of what this offer meant could cause reputational damage to the Council. The Committee acknowledged that the risk of corruption amongst the Council's planning staff was low, but it would have liked to have received more reassurance that all the necessary checks and balances were in place to ensure that even the suggestion of the possibility of corruption did not become a reality.

The Committee agreed that, in addition to the recommendations included in the January Report to Cabinet, it would make a separate referral to the Audit Committee requesting that it sought reassurance on behalf of the Council that all the necessary procedures were in place to ensure that this scheme operated successfully.

Another concern considered by the Committee was whether increased use by applicants of the Fast Track Planning Service which would mean more pressure on internal resources would have a detrimental effect on the processing of applications through the standard service. Again, as a separate recommendation from the January Report, the Committee agreed that the Planning Service should be asked to monitor performance to ensure that applications using the standard service were

not delayed in order to accommodate applications in the Fast Track Service.

RESOLVED –

1. That the Committee's January Report containing its recommendations on the Council's draft 2018/19 budget proposals be presented to Cabinet on 6 February 2018.
2. That the Budget Scrutiny Committee is concerned that the external perception of the offer under the Fast Track Service for applicants for planning permission to request a particular planning officer to handle their application could cause reputational damage to the Council. The Committee requests the Audit Committee to seek re-assurance that all the necessary procedures are in place to ensure that this scheme operates successfully and does not leave the Council open to charges of corruption, even if these are only perceived and not actual.
3. That the Planning Service monitors the performance of the planning application process to ensure that applications going through the Standard Service are not delayed in order to accommodate the Fast Track Service.

THE CHAIR CLOSED THE MEETING AT 08.15 PM