

PUBLIC QUESTIONS RECEIVED for Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee – 22 March 2018, from Mr Peter Cleasby

To Councillor Pearson (Portfolio Holder for Support Services).

Question 1

In view of the confusion in the 2018/19 budget as to what are and what are not changes in real spending, caused by the reallocation of overheads since the previous year, will this Committee decide, or formally recommend to the Executive (and if necessary to full Council) to decide, that it should be a requirement for all future budgets and in-year changes to budgets be accompanied by a detailed commentary explaining for each budget line:-

- (a) What is the real change in spending;
- (b) What will be the impact of the change on the service provided?

Response 1

Councillor Pearson responded to the question stating that the 2018-19 budget followed the same process as previous budgets. The medium term financial plan and strategy were reported to the Executive in December 2017. The detailed budgets for each Scrutiny Committee were considered during January and the overall budget considered by Executive and Full Council during February.

He explained that all Councillors were invited to an informal presentation of the budget in December 2017, which set out the changes to the budget including the new proposals being added to the budget and the savings being made. The Covering reports to the three Scrutiny Committees also set out the changes to budgets that were being made including the changes to the allocations of support services, changes to superannuation and changes to communications and marketing budgets in addition to the additional proposals and savings for each Committee.

Councillor Pearson stated that the budget book breaks down, for each line of the budget, the changes as a result of new recurring and non-recurring proposals (additions and savings) and other adjustments. At every Committee, as well as at the informal briefing, there was an opportunity for questions to be asked by Members relating to the budget and the changes that have been made, so there was no confusion by the time the budget was set in February.

The Finance team were currently working with Members to review the financial information presented to Councillors and to support them in carrying out the proper scrutiny of the financial position of the Council, which may result in changes to the papers produced.

Debate

Members discussed the reports and presentation of financial information received from officers, who they considered were explained in a clear and understandable way. Where more clarity was required, the officers were available to provide additional clarification, which could be explained to constituents. Members had met with accountancy officers who were continually addressing ways of making reports more clear and suggested improvements were always welcome.

Supplementary Response from Mr Cleasby

Mr Cleasby thanked Members for their responses and recognised that Councillors had the means to speak with Council officers, who could provide them with explanations to reports,

but there still needed to be a wider transparency to the public. He accepted that members of the public could ask their Ward Councillor to provide explanations to financial reports, but more public clarity would be welcome.

(It was noted that the question and response would be attached to the minutes).