

Email from Cllr Parkhouse on 3 September 2024

Dear Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee member,

You may recall that, at the June meeting, during discussion on Budget Scrutiny, Councillor Rees called on members to share their ideas and suggestions for dealing with the annual budget setting process with myself, stressing the need to have a robust plan in place after the October meeting. Thank you to those who have already responded; do not forget to write to myself and Councillor Rees with any suggestions you may have.

On the subject of scrutinising the budget, the Deputy Chair Catherine and I had a productive meeting with Dave Hodgson, Simon Copper and Pierre Doutreligne yesterday morning. It is our intention to propose that Budget Monitoring be brought to Customer Focus twice a year in line with our role as set out in the constitution.

Our proposal is to scrutinise the reports for Quarter 2 and for Quarter 4 (or 'Outturn Report'). If approved by the committee at the October meeting, this means that Budget Monitoring – Q2 would feature on the agenda for 27 November. Please note that this would not supersede any discussion about other budget scrutiny avenues.

From Cllr Read

I would like to input that I would hope that Customer Focus Scrutiny would receive a report from Portfolio Holders on options for ways to achieve a balanced budget with particular focus on the capital budget, ie regarding the viability of the MTFP on delivering the capital programme, the risks of non-delivery, and the impact in particular on the City's heritage assets such as the City Wall.

From Cllr Moore

I have reviewed my previous requests in light of your email to the following:

1. Review Council policy on income generation and progress of commercial income strategy 2020 - see strategy and appendix here: [Strategies, policies and plans - Corporate plans and strategies - Exeter City Council](#) and how this can contribute to the MTFP
2. The impact of reports and MTFP (including 25/26) service cuts/savings on the environment, inequality and protected characteristics - the scrutiny focus would be about how these are assessed and can be presented and if not how can this be done.

I would also like all PHs in their reports to be able to talk about service pressures and the options they are considering as part of their PH report, and I'd be grateful if you could ask them to cover this as part of the preparation for the meetings.

From Cllr Miller-Boam

I agree with your proposal for budget monitoring to be brought to the committee twice a year. For me, it's really important that we conduct any scrutiny of the budget in line with our committee constitution, more specifically that we scrutinise the **budget setting process** rather than the budget itself. I believe that is where we can add value as a committee.

In line with this, I would like to propose that we invite the Director for Communities to present the process for the budget public consultation to the committee. I suggest that this is done after the consultation is complete. As part of this I think we should look at examining how many responses were received, what mediums the consultations was available in, how accessible was it, and the demographics of the respondents. I think this would give us a good understanding and draw out learning points for next year.

From Cllr Palmer (proposal superseded by a stand-alone proforma)

I was thinking it would be good to include some key people data – people are any organisations most expensive resource but often get totally overlooked in business planning and budget reviews.

It would be great to have a couple of slides with a focus on staffing challenges and opportunities.

Key areas you could include are:

- How many roles have been recruited each quarter – are there any unexpected high turnover areas*
- Were external agencies used – what was the cost of using agencies*
- Where did applicants find out about the role – important from the perspective of ROI on advertising costs and diversity of candidates and potential reason for lack of candidates*
- Which roles/specialisms are we struggling to fill - is this a local issue or following national trends around skills shortages – how are we looking to address those gaps – use of agency/contractors/ market supplements*
- What are current temp/contractor/consultant costs – including any transfer fees for temp to perm – what strategies do we have in place to minimise those costs*
- How are we benchmarking salaries – are we in line with national/local salary data, what is our gender pay gap data telling us, who are our competitors and how do we compare – what strategies do we have in place to attract and retain staff if we are unable to offer higher salaries*

- *What is our talent strategy – where is our pipeline, how do we grow our own people, how are we succession planning for key roles*
- *How are we supporting the above with training opportunities – leadership training, management training, coaching and mentoring, skills-based training,*
- *How are we utilising our apprenticeship levy with existing staff In terms of upskilling or providing professional qualifications, how are we using the levy as part of our recruitment pipeline to support people Into the workplace in entry level roles or individuals who are career changing and may require specific qualifications or skills in their new role – do we have any figures on retention for those staff who came in as apprentices*

Hope that's at least a starter for a discussion around people data and more than happy to have a further discussion if it would be useful.