

**MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD**

**FINAL REPORT OF THE
AD HOC SCRUTINY PANEL –
COUNCIL BUDGET 2018-2019
AND PROPOSED SAVINGS**

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PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. To present the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel following its contribution to the consultation process in respect of the 'Council Budget 2018-2019 and Proposed Savings'.

AIMS OF THE SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION

2. As part of the consultation exercise, the Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel was engaged early in the process in order to comment on the Strategic Planning report, prior to its agreement by Full Council, and to develop potential recommendations in respect of future budget consultation activities.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

3. There were no terms of reference devised for this investigation. The Panel agreed that the aim to scrutinise and contribute to the budget consultation process was sufficient. Consequently, the Chair of the Panel requested that a final report be produced on this specific issue.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

4. In order to ascertain the current position regarding the Council's budget for 2018-2019 and the associated savings proposals, and to contribute to the consultation exercise, the Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel held meetings on 17 November 2017, 4 January 2018 and 8 February 2018.
5. The Panel was provided with information from the following officers of Middlesbrough Council:
 - J Bromiley – Strategic Director of Finance, Governance and Support;
 - A Brown – Director of Children's Care;
 - G Field – Director of Environment and Commercial Services;
 - AM Johnstone – Corporate Strategy Manager; and
 - P Stephens – Head of Performance and Partnerships.
6. The Executive Member for Finance and Governance, Councillor Nicky Walker, was also invited to attend meetings in order to provide information to the Panel.

The Budget Consultation Process

7. In previous years, a report in respect of the budget consultation process has been submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Board. This year, however, specific attention to the process has been afforded by the Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel.
8. The 'Strategic Planning 2018-2021' report was agreed by Full Council on 6 December 2017.
9. There were two areas for consultation:
 - Strategic priorities for the period under three themes: Business Imperatives, Social Regeneration, and Physical Regeneration; and
 - Budget proposals requiring consultation prior to implementation for 2018/2019.

10. Consultation was undertaken with the public and other stakeholders prior to 31 January 2018 in order to inform the 2018/2019 budget and Strategic Plan reports, which were considered by Full Council on 28 March 2018.
11. A questionnaire seeking views on the proposed strategic priorities and proposals was placed on the Council website for public access. This was trailed by a press release and promoted through social media channels. The press release resulted in local media coverage, including radio.
12. An e-mail link to the questionnaire was forwarded to over 500 stakeholders that had engaged in previous consultation exercises with the Council. This consultation closed on 31 January 2018, with 100+ responses received.
13. Executive Members had been fully briefed in respect of the consultation activity, with a briefing session also being made available to all Elected Members in November 2017.
14. The Elected Mayor of Middlesbrough had briefed the North East Chamber of Commerce (statutory budget consultee) on 30 January 2018.
15. Directorates e-mailed over 70 partners and stakeholders seeking feedback on proposals, which included Community Councils. Briefing sessions were offered in all cases. In cases where dialogue had been prolonged, the window for response provision was extended to 12 February 2018 to accommodate this.
16. During the consultation period, the Local Government Financial Settlement (LGFS) provided for an additional Council Tax increase in 2018/2019 and 2019/2020; Council agreed that this option would be consulted upon. This (separate) consultation was trailed by a press release and also attracted media coverage, with those wishing to comment invited to e-mail the Council. This consultation also closed on 12 February 2018.

CONCLUSIONS

17. Following receipt of information received, the Panel reached the following conclusions:
 - Social media plays a significant role in terms of increasing participation in consultation activities. The Council's main Twitter and Facebook platforms are utilised for such activities, including the budget consultation.
 - It is important that individuals of all ages are encouraged, and enabled, to participate in budget consultations.
 - Community Hubs were not used to publicise the budget consultation this year.
 - Stakeholders are contacted and invited to participate in budget consultation activities. Whilst there is no obligation to participate in the consultation, it was noted that participation is not currently monitored.
 - Publicity materials, e.g. posters and business cards, are not currently made available to Councillors for use in budget consultation activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

18. Based on the conclusions above, the Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel's recommendations for consideration are as follows:
1. To engage more residents in future budget consultation activities:
 - The Council should utilise contemporary social media applications, where viable;
 - Youth Participation Officers should develop a consultation plan linked to relevant budget proposals;
 - All community buildings, particularly Community Hubs, must be used to their full potential. For example: hosting of roadshow events (which have previously been undertaken successfully across Middlesbrough), with relevant Ward Councillor(s) and Councillors from surrounding Wards in attendance;
 - Consideration should be given to monitoring stakeholder engagement e.g. adding e-mail read-receipts onto electronic invitations;
 - Councillors should be provided with posters, business cards and other publicity materials for distribution, as appropriate, which could include Ward/Street Surgery sessions and Community Council meetings; and
 - Contact be made with local media outlets to engage them in promoting budget consultation activity.
 2. That an update be provided to the Overview and Scrutiny Board in October 2018 in respect of the 2019/2020 budget consultation arrangements.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

19. The Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel would like to thank the following for their assistance with its work:
- J Bromiley – Strategic Director of Finance, Governance and Support;
 - A Brown – Director of Children's Care;
 - G Field – Director of Environment and Commercial Services;
 - AM Johnstone – Corporate Strategy Manager;
 - P Stephens – Head of Performance and Partnerships; and
 - Councillor N Walker – Executive Member for Finance and Governance.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

20. The following papers were utilised/referred to in preparing this report:
- Minutes of the Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel meetings held on 17 November 2017, 4 January 2018 and 8 February 2018.

Body	Report Title	Date
Council	Strategic Planning 2018-2021	6 December 2017

**COUNCILLOR JEAN SHARROCKS
CHAIR OF THE AD HOC SCRUTINY PANEL – 2017/2018**

MEMBERSHIP

The Membership of the Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel for 2017/2018 is as follows:

Councillors J Sharrocks (Chair), J Hobson, L Lewis, J McGee, L McGloin, P Purvis, D Rooney, M Saunders and J Walker.

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