

**Committee and Date**

Transformation and
Improvement Overview and
Scrutiny Committee

20 January 2025

TRANSFORMATION AND IMPROVEMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 2 December 2024
In the Shrewsbury Room, Shirehall, SY2 6ND
10.00 am – 11.10 am

Responsible Officer Amanda Holyoak, Committee Officer
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Present

Councillor Claire Wild (Chair)
Councillors Joyce Barrow (Vice-Chair), Thomas Biggins, Rosemary Dartnall, Roger Evans,
Rob Gittins, David Minnery, Peggy Mullock and Dan Thomas

In Attendance

Andy Begley – Chief Executive, Claire Braddock – Overview and Scrutiny Officer,
Councillor Gwilym Butler – Portfolio Holder for Finance, Corporate Resources and
Communities, Tom Dodds – Scrutiny Manager, Amanda Holyoak – Committee Officer,
Ben Jay – Assistant Director Finance and Technology (Via MS Teams) Lezley Picton –
Leader (Via MS Teams), James Walton – Executive Director of Resources

38 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Tony Parsons.

The Executive Director for People and Executive Director for Health had also sent apologies.

39 Disclosable Interests

None were declared.

40 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 September 2024 were confirmed as a correct record.

41 Public Question Time

There were no public questions.

42 Member Question Time

There were no member questions.

43 Collaborative Budget

The Committee received and noted the report of the cross-party Collaborative Budget Task and Finish Group. The Portfolio Holder for Resources reported that the meetings of the group had been very well attended. No questions on the report were raised and the Portfolio Holder observed that this demonstrated the success of the approach.

44 Draft Financial Strategy 2024/25 - 2028/29

The Executive Director of Resources presented the report and apologised for its late circulation. The reason for this had been to enable it to reflect the most up to date position, including the information provided within the Policy Statement released on 28 November.

In response to a member question, the Executive Director explained that while the National Insurance contribution increase had no direct local authority impact, it would affect the supply chain and the council's costs for third party spend across the board. Discussions and negotiations would determine how these costs would be absorbed.

A member said he understood the difficulties caused by a change in government and the wait for financial settlement information but was disappointed with the level of detail within the report especially regarding possible mitigations. He felt that reference should have been made to financial savings agreed by the Council in February 2024 and that the Quarter 2 report should have been included on the agenda for the meeting.

The Chair referred to discussions held at the Collaborative Budget Task and Finish Group where it was agreed that some lines of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy required improved dialogue. The Portfolio Holder emphasised the distinct roles of councillors in setting policy and the day-to-day detailed work of officers. In response to a comment on availability of information he confirmed that he was not party to any more information than other members in the meeting and trusted the figures provided by officers.

The Executive Director reported that the Collaborative Budget Task and Finish Group would shortly be considering a set of proposals to go out to public consultation. An updated gap position could not be identified until the settlement was received during week commencing 16 December. He also reiterated that no information was being held back and there was no hidden policy agenda. If any savings required a policy change then that would have to be considered in the usual way by Cabinet or Council.

The Assistant Director Finance and Technology drew attention to the link on page 10 of the report to the February Council MTFS report. He understood that figures might not seem to link back in the way that might be expected, but the situation was moving extremely quickly and all information was available and could be tracked to ensure transparency. The Executive Director confirmed that the Core Spending power information in the paper was purely for the current year 2024 – 2025.

With regard to the Quarter 2 update, it had not been included as an item at this meeting as the committee wished to see quarterly reporting information ahead of Cabinet. On this occasion the timing of meetings meant that this had not been possible. The report could have been added to the meeting agenda if requested and was available on the website. If

there were any questions on it the Executive Director confirmed that he was happy to take them.

Committee members made reference to the comments on financial sustainability and risks within the External Auditor's Annual Report 2023 – 2024 considered by the Audit Committee on 28 November 2024. The Executive Director pointed out that this was a publicly available report and that governance issues were within the remit of the Audit Committee. He explained that unless there was a material change in the direction of travel of a key project there was not sufficient information available to quantify or build in identified risks into next year.

Answering further questions, officers explained that although it was usual for the settlement information to arrive very close to Christmas, for at least the last five years it had been possible to expect a principle of no fundamental changes. This would not be the case this year and usual assumptions could not be made, for example, the Council had only just learnt that the Rural Services Delivery Grant had come to an end. It was not possible in these circumstances to give a sense of what the funding gap would be ahead of the settlement.

Responding to a question about public transport funding, the Assistant Director Finance and Technology Management explained that there was some information available to the council on what would be covered. However, he drew attention to the imminent publication of the Devolution White Paper and potential implications for responsibilities around public transport and consequent funding impacts.

The Chair proposed that the report be noted and this was seconded. On taking a vote, this was agreed by the Committee. Councillors Roger Evans and Rosemary Dartnall asked that the minutes record that they had abstained.

45 Work Programme

The Scrutiny Manager referred to the forthcoming pre-election period and the financial strategy item planned for the next meeting. The Executive Director confirmed that the Quarter 3 report would not be produced until February but that period 7 or possibly period 8 information should be available for consideration in January.

The Committee agreed that the scheduled meeting date of 13 January 2025 would be too soon, and it was agreed to change this to 20 January 2025 so that the latest available information could be provided.

46 Date of Next Meeting

Monday 20 January 2025 at 2.00 pm.

Signed (Chairman)

Date: