



REPORT TO:	FINANCE & MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM: 6(a)
DATE OF MEETING:	29 APRIL 2004	CATEGORY: DELEGATED
REPORT FROM:	CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	OPEN:
MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:	CLLR R BELL (CHAIR OF THE CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE)	DOC:
SUBJECT:	RESPONSE TO THE BUDGET REPORT	REF:
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	ALL	TERMS OF REFERENCE: FMO8

1.0 Recommendation

- 1.1 That the Finance and Management Committee formally agrees the recommendations contained in the original report of the 17 February 2004 with the exception of the item relating to the repayment of Council debt.

2.0 Purpose of Report

- 2.1 To report the outcome of a meeting with Cllr Wilkins (Chair) over the Committee's response to a report by the Corporate Scrutiny Committee on the 2004 Budget Proposals.

3.0 Detail

Background

- 3.1 Under the Council's Constitution, the Corporate Scrutiny Committee is responsible for assisting the Finance and Management Committee to develop the Council's annual budget, budget strategy and Capital Strategy and for scrutinising the performance of Council and/or policy committees in respect of financial management (Article 6).
- 3.2 The Corporate Scrutiny Committee submitted a report reviewing the 2004 Budget proposals to the 17 February meeting of this Committee (Minute No. FM/88 refers).

- 3.3 The report was noted was 'noted' by the Committee, although it contained 6 specific recommendations (Annexe A).
- 3.4 The Overview Committee discussed this response at its meeting on 23 February. Members were concerned that no explanation had been given as to whether the recommendations had been accepted and whether they would be implemented. It was agreed that Cllr Wilkins should be invited to the next meeting of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee to discuss the issue.

Meeting with the Chair

- 3.4 The Corporate Scrutiny Committee met with Cllr Wilkins on 28 March.
- 3.5 Cllr Bell (Chair of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee) explained the disquiet felt by the Overview Committee over this issue. In response, Cllr Wilkins said that the main point of contention for his Committee was the second recommendation concerning the repayment of Council debt. The way in which the recommendation was worded created the impression that the Overview Committee would have the final 'say' in the decision, which was not the role of the scrutiny function. Cllr Wilkins considered that the Chief Finance Officer's report to his Committee had been comprehensive and provided members with sufficient information which to take a decision.
- 3.6 Cllr Bell explained that the Corporate Scrutiny Committee had put forward the recommendation to give the Finance and Management Committee additional time and resources to explore the issues surrounding this very difficult decision in more depth.
- 3.7 In terms of the other recommendations, Cllr Wilkins indicated that there was nothing contentious and assured the Committee that they were already in process.
- 3.8 Cllr Murphy (Vice Chair) highlighted the importance of scrutiny within open governance, stressing the need for policy committees to formally respond to recommendations in order to complete the process. Cllr Wilkins felt that by attending the meeting, he was providing such a response.

Conclusions

- 3.9 This was a useful meeting which went some way to reassuring members of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee that their hard work on the budget proposals was appreciated and valued.
- 3.10 The Committee would like to thank Cllr Wilkins for attending the meeting and for his helpful contribution

4.0 Financial Implications

- 4.1 None arising directly from this report.