

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO THE CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

1 SEPTEMBER 2021

REPORT OF THE INTERIM CHIEF OFFICER – FINANCE, PERFORMANCE AND CHANGE

REVIEW OF BUDGET RESEARCH AND EVALUATION PANEL

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to present the Committee with an update regarding the review of the role of the Budget Research and Evaluation Panel (BREP), for consideration.

2. Connection to corporate well-being objectives / other corporate priorities

- 2.1 This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate well-being objectives under the **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**:
1. **Supporting a successful sustainable economy** – taking steps to make the county borough a great place to do business, for people to live, work, study and visit, and to ensure that our schools are focussed on raising the skills, qualifications and ambitions for all people in the county borough.
 2. **Helping people and communities to be more healthy and resilient** - taking steps to reduce or prevent people from becoming vulnerable or dependent on the Council and its services. Supporting individuals and communities to build resilience, and enable them to develop solutions to have active, healthy and independent lives.
 3. **Smarter use of resources** – ensure that all resources (financial, physical, ecological, human and technological) are used as effectively and efficiently as possible and support the creation of resources throughout the community that can help to deliver the Council's well-being objectives.

3. Background

- 3.1 The purpose of the Budget Research and Evaluation Panel, previously agreed by Council on 6 September 2017, is to:
- a) Achieve consensus on the direction of the budget over the life of the medium term financial strategy;
 - b) Achieve a detailed overview and assessment of the budget proposals where the expertise and knowledge of each Committee contributes to a Corporate understanding and appreciation of the draft budget proposals;

- c) Assist the Council to develop a budget for the forthcoming year that aims to meet the needs of the communities of Bridgend County Borough;
- d) Facilitate firmer understanding of the budget setting process and the draft proposals in order to assist the Committees in making informed comments, constructive challenge or recommendations to Cabinet as part of the budget consultation process.

3.2 At the meeting of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 1 February 2021 the Committee made a number of recommendations regarding the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2021-22 to 2024-25, including the following:

“Recommendation 4:

The Committee recommended that Corporate Management Board and Cabinet are requested to review and define what the role and responsibility of BREP is and respond to Corporate Overview and Scrutiny to consider.”

3.3 The recommendations were reported to the meeting of Cabinet held on 9 February 2021, presented by the Chair of this Committee who advised that it was felt worthwhile revisiting the role and remit of BREP, in order to see whether or not any improvements could be made to the manner in which it functioned, bearing in mind that the role of the Panel had been last reviewed in 2017.

3.4 The Cabinet agreed to consider the Committee’s recommendations in response to the MTFs 2021-22 to 2024-25 and the Draft Budget Consultation Process and comments upon these would be included in the Medium Term Financial Strategy report to be considered by Cabinet and Council.

3.5 The following response from the Cabinet was reported to the meeting of Cabinet held on 23 February 2021, and to the meeting of Council held on 24 February 2021:

“Agreed.

The role and functions of BREP and the membership are clearly set out in the Terms of Reference for the Panel. This is agreed at the start of the meeting cycle. However, it is an opportune time to review whether these remain fit for purpose and if they enable BREP to deliver on the outcomes expected.

Cabinet and the Corporate Management Board will assist COSC in undertaking a review of BREP.”

4. Current situation/proposal

4.1 At the first meeting of BREP this year held on 14 July 2021, the Interim Chief Officer, Finance, Performance and Change presented some principles around the role and operation of the BREP following discussions with Cabinet and Corporate Management Board, to facilitate a discussion with BREP, and these are summarised below:

- Ensure that the 4 key functions set out in the Terms of Reference outlined in paragraph 3.1 above are delivered, reflecting that purpose in the operation of the Committee.

- Take a consistent challenging approach to achieving the objectives.
- Have innovation at the centre of its work.
- BREP process is central to the scrutiny of the MTFS – Scrutiny Committees are responsible for scrutinising Directorate proposals with outcome being reviewed and deliberated at BREP.
- Need to make a difference by assisting in finding proposals and solutions.
- Chair has a key role in setting the agenda, controlling discussions and making recommendations.
- The Panel needs to explore high value budgets and high cost services and could take evidence and thoughts from witnesses from a wider circle.
- Focus on Corporate responsibility and not get distracted into ‘ward’ issues.
- Add value that is not provided elsewhere.
- Does the Panel wants to do some ‘task and finish’ pieces of work in more detail to inform the process.
- Ensure that BREP is adequately resourced if any responsibility or functions change e.g. task and finish groups.
- Ensure that Cabinet give due consideration to proposals made by BREP on a timely basis and that recommendations are implemented – review action plan regularly.

4.2 Members of BREP discussed the paper and made the following comments:

- Members could look at deep dives into the areas of most concern in terms of the financial affairs of the council.
- There was a role for BREP going forward and it had worked well in the past. It was really important to have cross-party attendance and for each BREP member to take part and contribute. Members should be looking at wider budget issues, not just proposals put forward.
- BREP fostered a collaborative forum for in-depth discussion but needed to take that forward. Once Members had discussed a financial issue, recommendations could be passed on, actioned and feedback on those actions and outputs provided.
- There had been interesting and useful discussions, in the past which helped to shape the budget position going forward.

- The need to remain corporate and strategic, regarding big strategic decisions, which impacted on the budget. There was room for improved synergy between BREP and the formal scrutiny process and suggestion that after a particular work item, recommendations could feed into the formal scrutiny process.
- The importance of BREP considering its business in a non-partisan and non-political way prior to the debate about the budget.
- Scrutiny Committees' work programmes were already quite full but it was important that scrutiny of the individual parts of the budget were programmed into the 3 Scrutiny Committees in order for their findings to feed into BREP.
- Agreement with the view that this needed to be approached from a corporate whole council perspective.
- Assistance from BREP could be sharpened to be challenging on some of the key strategic aims and areas of the budget and make proposals.

4.4 At the second meeting of BREP held on 13 August 2021, the Interim Chief Officer, Finance, Performance and Change reminded Members of their discussions in the July meeting regarding the working of BREP which Members had been in agreement with, and that the recommendation was that a report would be presented to COSC on 1 September 2021.

4.5 A Member of BREP asked that the disappointment that so few members had been in attendance for the second meeting of BREP, despite it being one of the key actions agreed, be recorded. Members agreed they wanted to strengthen attendance and participation as the remit was a priority matter and agreed that strengthening attendance should be included in this report.

5. Effect upon policy framework and procedure rules

5.1 There is no effect upon policy framework and procedure rules.

6. Equality Act 2010 implications

6.1 The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act, Socio-economic Duty and the impact on the use of the Welsh Language have been considered in the preparation of this report. As a public body in Wales the Council must consider the impact of strategic decisions, such as the development or the review of policies, strategies, services and functions. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts as a result of this report.

7. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 implications

7.1 The Act provides the basis for driving a different kind of public service in Wales, with 5 ways of working to guide how public services should work to deliver for people. The following is a summary to show how the 5 ways of working to achieve the well-being goals have been used to formulate the recommendations within this report:

- Long-term - The consideration and approval of this report will assist in the budget setting process for both the short-term and in the long-term.
- Prevention - The consideration and approval of this report will assist in the budget setting process by approving and shaping preventative measures provided by Directorates to generate savings.
- Integration - The report supports all the well-being objectives.
- Collaboration - The consideration and approval of this report will assist in the budget setting process by approving and shaping collaboration and integrated working to generate savings.
- Involvement - Publication of the report ensures that the public and stakeholders can review the work that has been undertaken by Scrutiny members.

8. Financial implications

- 8.1 The report relates to the budget setting process and the financial implications associated with that. There are no financial implications directly associated with this report.

9. Recommendation

- 9.1 The Committee is requested to consider the report and endorse the review of the role of the Budget Research and Evaluation Panel (BREP).

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Background Documents: None