

Meeting of:	CABINET
Date of Meeting:	16 DECEMBER 2025
Report Title:	RECOMMENDATIONS FROM SCRUTINY BUDGET WORKING GROUP
Report Owner: Responsible Chief Officer / Cabinet Member	CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Responsible Officer:	MERYL LAWRENCE SENIOR DEMOCRATIC SERVICES OFFICER – SCRUTINY
Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:	The report relates to the role of the Scrutiny Budget Working Group and the development of Recommendations to feed into the development of the draft budget proposals and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) in accordance with the Scrutiny Budget Working Group process agreed by the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee (COSC) on 24 July 2025.
Executive Summary:	On 9 April 2025, Council approved that the working group be established with representatives from all scrutiny committees and chaired by the Chair of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee, to feed back to COSC. On 24 July 2025, COSC considered a report on the work undertaken in consultation with Scrutiny Chairs on the proposed arrangements for the Scrutiny Budget Working Group and any comments received following consultation with Groups and individual Independent Members and agreed the: a. Size, composition and nominations process for the Working Group; b. Draft Terms of Reference; c. Proposed Structure of Scrutiny Budget Working Group and Draft outline of schedule of meetings. The Recommendations from the Scrutiny Budget Working Group are being presented to Cabinet to consider during the development of the draft budget proposals and MTFS (subject to any additions or amendments agreed by COSC at their meeting on 11 December 2025 which will be presented verbally at the meeting).

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To present Cabinet with the Recommendations from the Scrutiny Budget Working Group for consideration during the development of the draft budget proposals and MTFS (subject to any additions or amendments agreed by the COSC at their meeting of 11 December 2025 which will be presented verbally to Cabinet).

2. Background

- 2.1 On 9 April 2025 Council agreed that the working group be established with representatives from all scrutiny committees and chaired by the Chair of COSC, to feed back to COSC.
- 2.2 On 24 July 2025, COSC considered a report on the work undertaken in consultation with Scrutiny Chairs on the proposed arrangements for the Scrutiny Budget Working Group and any comments received following consultation with Groups and individual Independent Members and agreed the:
 - a. Size, composition and nominations process for the Working Group;
 - b. Draft Terms of Reference;
 - c. Proposed Structure of Scrutiny Budget Working Group and Draft outline of schedule of meetings.

Structure of Scrutiny Budget Working Group

- 2.3 COSC agreed the following structure and schedule of meetings:
 - a. **29 July 2025 - Budget Steering Group meeting**

Steering Group to consider and discuss previous year's recommendations and 2025-26 indicative proposals, main priorities going forward and areas of concern. This to then inform where Scrutiny can add value, proposing potential areas of focus for the Scrutiny Budget Working Group and Deep Dive Groups to consider.

Group Comprising:

 - Chief Executive
 - Chief Officer - Finance, Housing and Change
 - Leader of the Council
 - Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance,
 - Cabinet Members for Resources,
 - Scrutiny Chairs
 - Group Leaders
 - b. **1 September 2025 - Scrutiny Budget Working Group**

To discuss areas of focus following outcome from the Steering Group and allocate up to 6 Scrutiny Budget Working Group Members to each of the four proposed Deep Dive Groups. Membership of Deep Dive Groups to be based on Member knowledge, expertise or preference expressed to

contribute to a specific Deep Dive Group. Chief Officer - Finance, Housing and Change to be invited to answer any overarching questions.

c. Four Deep Dive Groups met once each from mid September to mid October and the Chairs presented findings to Scrutiny Budget Working Group on 4 November 2025.

These Deep Dive Groups were chaired by the corresponding Chair of the related OVSC and included up to 6 other Members and met as follows:

Chief Executive's Directorate – 22 September 2025

Education, Early Years and Young People Directorate – 6 October 2025

Social Services and Wellbeing Directorate – 16 October 2025

Communities Directorate – 20 October 2025

This enabled there to be one clear overarching set of recommendations from the Scrutiny Budget Working Group rather than four sets of recommendations that could potentially overlap, conflict or risk too much duplication.

The Chair of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee observed all Deep Dive Groups discussions and conclusions as well as chairing the relevant one to their OVSC.

d. 7 November 2025 - Budget Steering Group Meeting

The Conclusions and Recommendations of the Scrutiny Budget Working Group were presented informally to feed into and potentially impact the development of Cabinet's draft budget proposals and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

e. 11 December 2025 – COSC Meeting

A report will be presented to COSC (as the Scrutiny Committee with overall responsibility for budget scrutiny) seeking consideration of the Recommendations of the Scrutiny Budget Working Group for forwarding to Cabinet to consider during the development of the draft budget proposals and MTFS (subject to any additions or amendments made at the meeting of 11 December 2025).

3. Current situation / proposal

3.1 The structure agreed by COSC on 24 July 2025 also agreed the following further steps:

a. Cabinet 16 December 2025

To formally receive the conclusions and recommendations of the Scrutiny Budget Working Group from COSC in advance of final budget proposals and formal response to be provided by Cabinet on 17 February 2026.

b. **COSC 15 and 27 January 2026**

COSC consider draft MTFS and budget proposals and make conclusions and recommendations to Cabinet.

c. **Cabinet 3 February 2026**

To present COSC conclusions and recommendations on the draft MTFS and Budget proposals

d. **Cabinet 17 February 2026**

Cabinet considers recommendations and agrees final MTFS / budget for submission to Council.

e. **Council 25 February 2026**

Council considers budget and votes on it.

3.2 Cabinet is recommended to consider and respond to the Recommendations of the Scrutiny Budget Working Group attached at **Appendix A** (subject to any additions or amendments agreed by the COSC at their meeting of 11 December 2025 which will be presented verbally to Cabinet) and consider them during the development of the draft budget proposals and MTFS.

3.3 Also contained in **Appendix B**, for information only are requests for additional information made by Members at the Scrutiny Budget Working Group on 4 November and Steering Group on 17 November 2025 some of which follow on from previous requests made by the Deep Dive Groups which received initial responses. The requests will be circulated for response subject to endorsement by COSC at their meeting on 11 December 2025 to help inform COSC's deliberations of the MTFS / draft budget proposals in January 2026.

3.4 For information, following the conclusion of the Scrutiny Budget Working Group process for 2025-26, an evaluation of the process for this initial year will be carried out to inform the process for the following year.

4. Equality implications (including Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language)

4.1 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 directly as a result of this report, however some of the Recommendations if taken forward could have Equality implications which would need to be considered by the relevant service area.

5. Well-being of Future Generations implications and connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives

- 5.1 The well-being goals identified in the Act were considered in the preparation of this report. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable impacts upon the achievement of well-being goals/objectives as a result of this report.
- 5.2 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 scrutiny function contributes to the 5 Ways of Working set out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and how they contribute to the Council developing its own five ways of working, driving and measuring those ways of working.
- 5.3 The scrutiny arrangements assists in the achievement of the Council's 4 Well-being Objectives under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, listed below:
1. A prosperous place with thriving communities
 2. Creating modern, seamless public services
 3. Enabling people to meet their potential
 4. Supporting our most vulnerable

6. Climate Change and Nature Implications

- 6.1 There are no Climate Change or Nature Implications directly arising from this report, however some of the recommendations if taken forward could have climate change or nature implications which would need to be considered by the relevant service area.

7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications

- 7.1 There are no safeguarding and corporate parent implications directly arising from this report, however some of the recommendations if taken forward could have safeguarding and corporate parent implications which would need to be considered by the relevant service area.

8. Financial Implications

- 8.1 The report relates to the Scrutiny Budget Working Group recommendations being forwarded to Cabinet to consider during the development of the draft budget proposals and MTFS.

9. Recommendation

- 9.1 Cabinet is recommended to consider and respond to the Recommendations of the Scrutiny Budget Working Group attached at **Appendix A** (subject to any additions or amendments agreed by the COSC at their meeting of 11 December 2025 which will be presented verbally to Cabinet) and consider them during the development of the draft budget proposals and MTFS.

Background documents

None.