

Meeting of:	CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Date of Meeting:	29 JUNE 2026
Report Title:	SCRUTINY BUDGET WORKING GROUP
Report Owner: Responsible Chief Officer / Cabinet Member	CHIEF OFFICER LEGAL, REGULATORY AND ELECTORAL SERVICES
Responsible Officer:	RACHEL KEEPINS DEMOCRATIC SERVICES MANAGER
Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:	The Committee considered a Review of Scrutiny on 17 March 2025 and, subsequently on 9 April 2025, Council agreed changes to the structure, names and remit of Scrutiny Committees and the setting up of a Budget Working Group. Accordingly, as required by the Council's Constitution, Council approved the related amendments to the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules within the Constitution and the size and Terms of Reference for the Overview and Scrutiny Committees at its Annual Meeting held on 14 May 2025.
Executive Summary:	<p>The Committee considered a report on the Scrutiny Review and the options for scrutiny arrangements going forward on 17 March 2025. Subsequently, on 9 April 2025, Council agreed changes to the structure, names and remit of Scrutiny Committees and the setting up of a Budget Working Group.</p> <p>The Committee agreed a report on 24 July 2025 which presented details of the work undertaken in consultation with Scrutiny Chairs and the arrangements for the Scrutiny Budget Working Group.</p> <p>Following the implementation of the Scrutiny Budget Working Group arrangements delivered last year, the Scrutiny Chairs have reflected on the process and discussed proposed changes to some aspects of the process for this year. The changes were circulated to Group Leaders and Cabinet and Corporate Management Team for their views.</p> <p>This report is presented for consideration by the Committee of the proposed amendments to the process for this year.</p>

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 Following the implementation of the agreed Scrutiny Budget Working Group (SBWG) process delivered for 2025-26, the Scrutiny Chairs have reflected on the process and discussed proposed changes to some aspects of the process for this year. The proposed amendments were circulated to Group Leaders, Cabinet Members and Corporate Management Team for their views.
- 1.2 The report presents the Committee with:
 - a. The Terms of Reference previously agreed in **Appendix 1**, for noting;
 - b. The proposed amendments to the SBWG process for this year in **Appendix 2**; and
 - c. The proposed amended structure of SBWG and draft outline of schedule of meetings in **Appendix 3**.

2. Background

- 2.1 Members may recall that previous scrutiny of the Budget process included a dedicated Budget Research and Evaluation Panel (BREP), plus detailed scrutiny of the draft budget by each individual Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OVSC) who feed back to the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee (COSC) to provide recommendations to Cabinet. This process resulted in an intense period of scrutiny in early January, which was resource intensive for officers and Members and there has been cross party feedback that the sessions are repetitive and overlap in subject matters.
- 2.2 On 9 April 2025, as part of its consideration of the Scrutiny Review, Council took the decision to allocate budget scrutiny exclusively to COSC and agreed that a working group be established with representatives from all scrutiny committees and chaired by the Chair of COSC to feed back to COSC. This would reduce duplication and allow for in-depth scrutiny to be undertaken throughout the budget setting process with meaningful engagement between Cabinet and Scrutiny.
- 2.3 Following consultation with Scrutiny Chairs a report upon the Scrutiny Budget Working Group arrangements was agreed by the Committee on 24 July 2025.

Size, Composition and Nominations to the Working Group

- 2.4 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. The Committee agreed on 24 July 2025 that all Scrutiny Chairs sit on the Working Group.
- 2.5 The Committee also agreed that the Scrutiny Budget Working Group be comprised of a total of 24 Members from across all Overview and Scrutiny Committees (OVSC), with Group Leaders being asked to seek expressions of

interest for nominations from their Members. The Scrutiny Chairs agreed that whilst there would be an aim for political balance as far as possible, it was important that membership focused on Members who express a real interest in sitting on the Group and could commit their time, rather than meeting an allocated number. A membership of 24 was felt appropriate as it would allow for wide participation from Members with knowledge and experience from across all four Overview and Scrutiny Committee remits.

- 2.6 The Terms of reference for the SBWG approved by the Committee on 24 July 2025 are attached as **Appendix 1**, for information.

3. Current situation / proposal

- 3.1 Following the implementation of the Scrutiny Budget Working Group arrangements delivered last year, the Scrutiny Chairs have reflected on the process and discussed some proposed changes to some aspects of the process for this year. The proposed amendments were circulated to Group Leaders, Cabinet Members and Corporate Management Team for their views.

The proposed changes to the SBWG process for this year are attached as **Appendix 2**.

Proposed Amended Structure of Scrutiny Budget Working Group

- 3.2 A proposed amended structure for the Scrutiny Budget Working Group is attached as **Appendix 3** which maps out the suggested meetings for this year to feed into the draft Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) Budget process for 2027-28 to 2030-31. The structure incorporates the following proposals from the Scrutiny Chairs:

a. Scrutiny Budget Working Group in July 2026

(Steering Group Members to be invited to join SBWG members for the first item on the Agenda for a Steer)

Comprising: Chief Executive, Corporate Director of Finance and Transformation, Leader, Cabinet Member for Finance and Transformation, Scrutiny Chairs and Group Leaders. Steering Group to consider and discuss previous year's recommendations and 2027-28 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 SBWG and Deep Dive Groups to consider.

Second part of the meeting for SBWG Members:

To discuss areas of focus following outcome from the Steering Group and allocate SBWG Members to each of the three proposed Deep Dive Groups. Membership of Deep Dive Groups should be based on Member knowledge, expertise or preference expressed to contribute to a specific Deep Dive Group. Corporate Director of Finance and Transformation to be invited to answer any overarching questions.

b. **Three Deep Dive Groups meet twice each from September to Mid November 2026 and present findings to Scrutiny Budget Working Group mid-November**

These Deep Dive Groups would be chaired by the corresponding Chair of the related OVSC and include other Members of SBWG.

Scrutiny will support the meetings and draft outline actions arising, however it will be for the Chair of each Deep Dive Group to present the key findings to all Members of SBWG, to discuss their merits and agree any resulting recommendations.

This will enable there to be one clear overarching set of recommendations from the SBWG rather than four sets of recommendations that may potentially overlap, conflict or risk too much duplication.

Scrutiny Chairs can attend all Deep Dive Groups as well as chairing the relevant one to their OVSC.

c. **Scrutiny Budget Working Group in Mid to End November 2026**

First Part of the meeting Scrutiny/Deep Dive Group Chairs to present feedback from each of the Deep Dive Groups to SBWG Members to consolidate the conclusions and recommendation from the 3 Deep Dive Groups.

Steering Group Members to be invited to join SBWG members for the second part of the meeting to receive the conclusions and recommendations of the Scrutiny Budget Working Group to feed into and potentially impact the development of Cabinet's draft budget proposals and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

d. **COSC 10 December 2026**

To receive the conclusions from the Scrutiny Budget Working group for endorsing and formal onward reporting to Cabinet (as COSC is the Scrutiny Committee with overall responsibility for budget scrutiny).

e. **Cabinet 15 December 2026**

To formally receive the conclusions and Recommendations of the Budget Working Group from COSC in advance of final budget proposals and formal response to be provided by Cabinet on 16 Feb 2027.

f. **COSC 21 January 2027**

COSC consider draft MTFS and budget proposals and make Conclusions and Recommendations to Cabinet.

g. **Cabinet 2 February 2027**

To present COSC Conclusions and Recommendations on the draft MTFS and Budget proposals

h. **Cabinet 16 February 2027**

Cabinet considers recommendations and recommends the MTFS 2027-28 to 2030-31 to Council for approval.

i. **Council 24 February 2027**

Council asked to approve the MTFS 2027-28 to 2030-31 and vote on it.

- 3.3 Members are asked to note that as well as the ongoing budget work of the COSC and SBWG, the Corporate Director – Finance and Transformation has agreed to provide regular budget briefing sessions to all Members and to individual Political Groups should they wish.
- 3.4 In order to ensure that Members nominated to the proposed Scrutiny Budget Working Group and allocated to the relevant Deep Dive Groups are able to commit their time to the Groups, and due to the number of Cabinet Members and Senior Officers who would be required to attend each of the Groups, the Scrutiny Team are currently looking at potential dates for Deep Dive Group meetings with a view to holding proposed dates in diaries pending approval of the proposed amended process and nominations to Deep Dive Groups.

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 as a result of this report.

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 assist 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 arising from this report.

7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications

7.1 There are no Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications arising from this report.

8. Financial Implications

8.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

9. Recommendations

9.1 The Committee is requested to consider the report on the proposed amendments to the Scrutiny Budget Working Group process and, any comments received following consultation, and to:

- a. Note the Terms of Reference in **Appendix 1**;
- b. Consider and agree the proposed amendments to the SBWG process for this year set out in **Appendix 2**; and
- c. Agree the proposed amended structure of Scrutiny Budget Working Group and draft outline of schedule of meetings in **Appendix 3**.

Background documents

None.