

Questioner:	Ms Reid, Hereford
Question:	
<p>I note that at 9.20am on 11 January 2024 the following documents are not available on the webpage of the 16 January 2024 Scrutiny Management Board meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Children and Young People Directorate Budget Task and Finish Group report• Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024/25 to 2027/28 report• Earmarked Reserves and General Fund Balance forecasts to 31 March 2024 report <p>I understand that reports should be available one week before the relevant meeting.</p> <p>I intended to ask a public question in respect of the Children and Young People Directorate Budget Task and Finish Group report. However, the deadline for public questions is 9.30am on 11 January 2024.</p> <p>How will the Scrutiny Management Board ensure that in the future reports etc are available on time before meetings?</p>	
Response:	
<p>The Local Government Act requires Herefordshire Council to give five clear working days notice of a meeting of a constituted committee such as Scrutiny Management Board. It also requires Herefordshire to ensure that any reports to be considered at a committee meeting to be made available to the public at the same time as committee members.</p> <p>Scrutiny Management Board ensures that it receives reports in time for meetings through regular planning sessions between the chair and supporting officers. This process is mostly successful in ensuring timely publication of reports.</p> <p>The timetable for scrutiny of the budget setting process is impacted by release of financial settlement information to councils by central government. This compresses the time frame for the production of documentation to a greater extent than is usual for committees. In such situations, Herefordshire Council instead publishes reports at the earliest possible opportunity before the meeting.</p> <p>The consequence of this is that it has not been possible to publish all supporting reports five clear days before the budget scrutiny meeting. This impacts on committee time to prepare and also upon the ability of the public to submit questions to scrutiny. This is unfortunate.</p> <p>The final version of the budget documentation pack will go to cabinet and to full council and will be available at both meetings for the public and councillors to submit written questions.</p> <p>In March Scrutiny Management Board will be reviewing learning from this year's process as part of developing a full year cycle of budget scrutiny work and will seek to reduce the impact that external factors have upon the role of scrutiny and upon the public's ability to engage with the democratic and governance process.</p>	

Supplementary question:

Firstly, occasionally in the past information requests from the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee have not been timely dealt with.

In my public question, I pointed out the report entitled Children and Young People Directorate Budget Task and Finish Group was not on this meeting's webpage on 11 January 2024. At 1pm today, it is still not on the meeting's webpage.

I notice the matter is also on the agenda of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday 23 January 2024 but the report is not on that meeting's website as at 1pm today. Therefore, I understand that the report is late for that meeting.

In what ways, will the Scrutiny Management Board ensure that in the future reports etc are available on time before its own meetings and other council meetings?

Response to supplementary question:

Thank you for your question. Yes, it is unfortunate that some of the meeting papers for today's meeting were delivered late. Unfortunately, it is a function of putting the budget together this time of year, and over the Christmas and New Year period, there is a lot of work to get through and it does make it a struggle to provide the information in a timely fashion to be published as part of the agenda.

You're right, we were planning on having the Children and Young People Directorate Budget Task and Finish Group report coming to this meeting but, similarly, we've faced difficulties getting the report completed and approved, which is why it's been placed on the agenda for the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee next week to take it directly rather than it coming back through Scrutiny Management Board.

The hope and expectation is that we will have the report published before the weekend, so that committee members and the public have the weekend and Monday to look at it but, unfortunately, it is likely therefore also to be outside of the timeframe for receipt of public questions. I don't know whether there's any scope to do anything about that. It would be unfortunate if it was going to miss the public opportunity to submit questions on the back of it twice but I will look into that and, if there is any way of being able to accommodate public questions on this, we'll make it clear one way or the other when the report is published but thank you for your question.

It is the intention of this committee to look at the whole cycle of budget scrutiny at our March meeting for the coming year and to make recommendations, in terms of how we can try and reduce the time pressures that are created during the budgeting process, in order to both improve public engagement but also reduce the pressures on officers and members in terms of being able to undertake thoughtful development of the budget and an appropriate level of scrutiny. Any public comment and suggestions associated with that would be welcome ahead of our meeting.

I just apologise that we haven't got the report to this meeting and that it's going to be late to Children's also.