

## Corporate Scrutiny Committee – 6 February 2024

### Written question from Cllr Chris Jarman to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee:

#### Background:

#### Distinction between Alternative Budget Proposals and Budget Amendments.

I submitted a written question ([MQ-01-24](#)) to the last meeting of Corporate Scrutiny of 9<sup>th</sup> January 2024 requesting clarity by the committee on the correct interpretation of our Constitution relating to the entitlement of Opposition Groups to receive necessary information and support leading to their submission of an **Alternative Budget Proposal**.

The Committee requested written answers to the questions from the 3 statutory officers. The committee and I have received their response.

The response so far provided fails to answer the question raised but rather conflates and confuses the two terms of **Alternative Budget** and a **Budget Amendment** which are very clear in their separate usages in our Constitution. Such blending and attempted distortion of meaning is repeatedly introduced as in answer 2 “Those amendments may be called alternative budgets but they are nevertheless amendments to the proposal that the cabinet are by law obliged to table.” and in others responses by the repeated use of the term “alternative budget proposals/ amendments” attempting to imply that they are one and the same, which they are not.

The distinction is apparent in all common usages where

- the former **Alternative** is defined (Oxford *adjective*) as “available as another possibility or choice” without dependency on any other submission, whereas,
- an **Amendment** is defined (Oxford *noun*) as “a minor change or addition designed to improve a text, piece of legislation, etc.” clearly being wholly dependent on the existence of another submission which it is proposing to amend.

They are demonstrably different instruments, and our Constitution repeatedly draws the distinction. Page 233 of our Constitution deals with the entitlement of opposition groups to receive information and resources with which to submit an alternative budget:

“(b) Opposition groups are also entitled to confidential information and discussions with officers to enable them to formulate **alternative budget proposals**. These will remain confidential until determined by the respective political groups or until published in advance of Cabinet/Committee/ Council meetings, whichever is the earlier.”

Another section of our Constitution deals only with the processing of budgets during the respective Full Council meeting and is not relevant to this question.

**Question:**

Will Corporate Scrutiny confirm the continued validity and clear intent of our Constitution page 233 above such that Opposition Groups are and remain entitled to the data and resources required to enable them to formulate **alternative budget proposals** and, specifically, that such **alternative budget proposals** are not limited to amendments to other budget proposals?

**Response**

*The Committee agrees that the provisions in the constitution for alternative budget proposals means that any Councillor Group should be provided with data and resources in order to present an alternative budget, subject to overriding considerations of law. We recommend raising any wider issues with Audit and Governance Committee.*