

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Agenda Item 18

Brighton & Hove City Council

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| Subject: | Proposal for Budget Scrutiny Panel | | |
| Date of Meeting: | 10 September 2012 | | |
| Report of: | Strategic Director Resources | | |
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| Ward(s) affected: | All | | |

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

1.1 This report sets out a proposed budget scrutiny process for 2013/14 building upon the model utilised last year.

1.2 Members are asked to agree to establish a budget scrutiny panel and co-opt representatives from the third and business sectors.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

2.1 That members agree to establish a panel to scrutinise the budget proposals.

2.2 That the Head of Scrutiny, in consultation with the chairs and deputy chairs of OSC and HWOSC, be delegated to find co-opted members from the community and voluntary, and business sectors to serve on the panel.

3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3.1 The budget process for 2013/14 and the development of outline proposals for 2014/15 has been set out in the report to 12 July 2012 Policy & Resources Committee. The timetable for budget documents appears as Appendix 1 to this report.

3.2 The 2012/13 budget scrutiny process was by some way the most robust scrutiny of the budget undertaken to date; informal feedback indicates a general level of satisfaction in terms of the information made available, opportunity to question decision-makers and involvement of partners.

3.3 Establishing a Scrutiny Review Panel to consider the budget had a number of advantages over the process in previous years. It allowed for more in-depth questioning, consistency across all areas and for the CVSF to engage with the process.

3.4 The aims of the Panel were:

- To provide cross-party challenge to the budget proposals brought forward by the administration.
- To understand the cumulative affect of budget cuts across the council, city, for service users and providers.
- To begin looking at public service budgets across the piece

- To make recommendations to Cabinet as to how to improve the budget

3.5 For the first time last year a single panel of members scrutinised the whole budget both detailed proposals for 2012/13 and outline proposals for 2013/14. In previous years each scrutiny committee undertook scrutiny of its area. Having a single group of members enabled a more consistent and cross-cutting scrutiny.

3.6 Also for the first time last year a community and voluntary representative was co-opted for the entire process. This allowed the views of the sector to be explored along proposals that were of direct consequence to them; this facilitated a well-informed debate on a number of parts of the budget and added value to the process as a whole.

3.7 There has been some suggestion as to whether greater focus is needed to produce recommendations on specific areas of the budget as a result of the scrutiny process. However experience over the last few years has shown that whilst changes to the draft budget are forthcoming as a result of the scrutiny process developing a political consensus for firm recommendations is considerably more challenging.

3.8 Recommendations have developed in previous years focusing on the actual process of budget setting, most notably on Equality Impact Assessments and the involvement of partners. During the 2012/13 cycle 'key areas of concern and questioning' were developed, by way of circumventing the problem of gaining agreement on recommendations on specific areas of the budget. This allowed issues of concern to all political groups and the CVSF to be highlighted in a non-confrontational manner.

3.9 It is perhaps unsurprising that given the inherently political nature of the budget, and the fact that opposition parties will look to bring forward alternative suggestions, that more challenging recommendations are not forthcoming. In this regard the scrutiny process itself can be seen as adding value by allowing in-depth questioning and challenge to proposals and by adding to the transparency to the budget setting process.

3.10 Building upon the success of last year it is recommended that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee establish a cross party Scrutiny Panel with two Members from each political group. Additionally, developing further the involvement of partners, both the CVSF and the Chamber of Commerce are invited to put forward member(s) to be co-opted onto Budget Scrutiny Review Panel 2013/14.

3.11 The scrutiny process would as in previous years commence immediately following the publication of draft detailed budget proposals for 2013/14 and outline budget proposals for 2014/15 in late November with the aim being to report to OSC in late January and then Policy and Resources Committee in early February.

3.12 The proposed draft budget timetable is attached as appendix 1.

4. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION

4.1 It is recommended that co-optees are invited from CVSF and Chamber of Commerce.

5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 5.1 Scrutiny of budget proposals is a key part of the budget process. The recommendations to this report on the Budget Scrutiny Panel have no direct financial implications.

Finance Officer Consulted: Anne Silley

Date: 01/08/12

Legal Implications:

- 5.2 The power to appoint scrutiny review panels is vested in the Overview & Scrutiny Committee; Part 5, paragraph 2 of the constitution refers.

The Committee may agree the appointment of non-voting co-optees for such a panel. In appointing co-opted members to the panel, regard must be had to both the expertise of the individual and the representative nature of their position.

Lawyer Consulted: Oliver Dixon

Date: 01/08/12

Equalities Implications:

- 5.3 A Budget Scrutiny Panel will consider information included in the Equalities impact Assessment.

Sustainability Implications:

- 5.4 A Budget Scrutiny Panel will consider sustainability implications

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 5.5 A Budget Scrutiny Panel will consider crime and disorder implications

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

- 5.6 A Budget Scrutiny Panel will consider risk and opportunity management implications

Public Health Implications:

- 5.7 A Budget Scrutiny Panel will consider public health implications

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 5.8 A Budget Scrutiny Panel will consider corporate/citywide implications

6. EVALUATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S):

- 6.1 The proposals are based on experience from different styles of budget scrutiny processes in previous years.

7. REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 To establish a sound process for scrutinising the budget proposals 2013/14.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. Budget Documents Timetable - Summary

Documents in Members' Rooms

None.