

Subject:	Budget Scrutiny 2015-16		
Date of Meeting:	14 July 2014		
Report of:	Assistant Chief Executive		
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Ward(s) affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT

- 1.1 The Overview & Scrutiny Committee (OSC) annually undertakes to scrutinise the council's draft budget plans for the coming year.
- 1.2 This report outlines the proposed format for the 2015-16 budget scrutiny process.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That Overview & Scrutiny Committee adopt the proposed format (3.3 to 3.6 in this report) for scrutiny of the 2015-16 budget plans.

3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 For several years Overview & Scrutiny members have conducted an annual scrutiny review of the council's draft budget plans. This has always been undertaken by a 'scrutiny panel' of cross-party elected members and co-optees, although the details of the scrutiny process have evolved over time.
- 3.2 For 2015-16 it is proposed to adopt a similar model to last year's budget scrutiny. The political groups will each be asked to nominate one member to sit on the budget scrutiny panel (independent members are also welcome to join the panel). As in past years Community Works will also be invited to be a co-opted member on the panel.
- 3.3 Scrutiny panel members will agree on a range of issues to explore across a series of meetings scheduled between the publication of this year's draft budget plans (early December 2014) and the February 2015 budget P&R meeting. The intention is not to explore the council's budget plans in their entirety, but rather to focus on key areas of interest – e.g. on services which are key in driving corporate priorities, on the areas of highest spend, on the services planning to make the largest savings, or on particularly high profile areas of spending. Panel members will jointly determine which issues to scrutinise.

- 3.4 The intention is to have three evidence-gathering meetings, the first to be a high-level overview of the budget plans and the strategic thinking that underpins it – hopefully involving the council’s Leader, the Chief Executive and the Executive Director of Finance & Resources. The second and third meetings will focus on spending plans for specific departments/services. The relevant Policy Committee Chairs, Directors and service leads will be invited to give evidence at these meetings.
- 3.5 A report with recommendations will then be agreed by panel members and presented to the OSC for endorsement at the 26 January 2015 OSC meeting. If endorsed the panel report will then be referred by OSC to budget P&R for consideration.
- 3.6 The intention is to give the council’s administration as much notice as possible of the likely focus of this year’s budget scrutiny. To this end, panel members will be asked to identify key areas of concern several months in advance of the publication of this year’s draft budget plans. However, it is obviously likely that some areas of interest will emerge following the publication of the draft budget plans or subsequent to the initial ‘high-level’ budget scrutiny meeting, and it may therefore not be possible to provide lots of notice with regard to all areas of scrutiny.

4. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 4.1 Previous iterations of budget scrutiny sought to examine the totality of the council’s budget plans. However, this proved onerous for scrutiny members, lead members and departmental officers, and offered no clear advantage over the more focused approach outlined above.

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION

- 5.1 Community Works/CVSF has had a co-opted seat on recent budget scrutiny panels, and elected members have welcomed the positive and expert contribution of the community and voluntary sector to budget scrutiny. It is proposed that Community Works is once again invited to be a co-opted member on the budget scrutiny panel.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 Feedback from last year’s budget scrutiny was that the format was more successful than in previous years, with the focused approach being as effective but less onerous than attempts to scrutinise the council’s budget plans in their entirety.
- 6.2 For this year the suggested format is therefore very similar to last year, although we are attempting to plan further in advance (as far as this is practically possible) to give the council’s administration as much notice of the scrutiny panel’s intentions as possible.

7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 7.1 Scrutiny of budget proposals is a key part of the consultation and engagement activity within the budget development process and informs Policy & Resources Committee in considering the annual budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy. The recommendations to this report on the scrutiny process have no direct financial implications.

Finance Officer Consulted: Anne Silley

Date: 01/07/14

Legal Implications:

- 7.1 Overview & Scrutiny Committee has power to appoint scrutiny review panels to carry out scrutiny work; budgetary proposals come within the permitted scope of such work.

Lawyer Consulted: Oliver Dixon

Date: 04/07/14

Equalities Implications:

- 7.2 None at this stage. Panel members will consider equalities issues when determining the panel ToR and an Equality Impact Assessment will be produced for the scrutiny panel.

Sustainability Implications:

- 7.3 None at this stage. Panel members will consider sustainability issues when determining the panel ToR.

Any Other Significant Implications:

- 7.4 None at this stage.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

None

Documents in Members' Rooms

None

Background Documents

None

