

**AGENDA MANAGEMENT SHEET**

**Name of Committee** Resources, Performance And Development Overview And Scrutiny Committee

**Date of Committee** 19th June 2007

**Report Title** Public Consultation Process for 2008/09 Budget and Council Tax

**Summary** This report outlines the process to be undertaken for the 2008/09 budget and council tax consultation with the public.

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**Would the recommended decision be contrary to the Budget and Policy Framework?** No.

**Background papers** None

**CONSULTATION ALREADY UNDERTAKEN:-**

Details to be specified

- Other Committees
- Local Member(s)
- Other Elected Members  Cllr Booth, Cllr Atkinson, Cllr Haynes 'noted for consideration by committees'
- Cabinet Member  Cllr Cockburn – for information
- Chief Executive
- Legal  Sarah Duxbury – 'comments incorporated within the report'
- Finance  Dave Clarke – reporting officer
- Other Chief Officers
- District Councils
- Health Authority

Police

Other Bodies/Individuals

**FINAL DECISION** **NO**

**SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS:**

Details to be specified

Further consideration by  
this Committee

To Council

To Cabinet  The consultation process will be formally  
approved by Cabinet at its meeting on 26 June  
2007

To an O & S Committee

To an Area Committee

Further Consultation

# Public Consultation Process for 2008/2009 Budget and Council Tax

## Executive Summary

### Introduction

This report considers the approaches that Warwickshire County Council have taken to engage the public in the budget process over the years, drawing conclusions from these and proposing the approach for 2008/09 budget consultation process.

### Review of the Public Consultation Process on the Budget

A number of different methods have been tried to engage the public in the budget process. Despite all of these different approaches engaging the public's interest in the budget process has not been successful.

One of the main difficulties in trying to establish a meaningful consultation process is that budget proposals are developed within each Party Group. These proposals are then not made available until just before the Council meeting in February. Therefore the consultation process does not include any firm budget proposals to present to the public. This results in the various methods of consultation being vague and uninteresting for the public.

Although it may be pessimistic, until a single budget process with firm proposals for the public to consult on is established, the budget consultation will always be unsuccessful.

### Proposals for the 2008/09 Process

It is proposed to limit future consultation to the use of the Citizens Panel with an option to present to the Area Committees.

### Results

The results and analysis of the 2008/09 budget public consultation process will be presented for consideration at Cabinet on 10<sup>th</sup> January 2008. The date of the Resources, Performance and Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee before the 10<sup>th</sup> January Cabinet is 13<sup>th</sup> November 2007. This means that the results of the consultation process will not be available to this Committee until after they have been reported to Cabinet in January 2008.

## Agenda No

# Resources, Performance and Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee - 19th June 2007.

## Public Consultation Process for 2008/09 Budget and Council Tax

### Report of the Strategic Director, Resources

#### **Recommendation**

It is recommended that the Committee:

- Comment on the proposals for public consultation on the 2008/09 Budget and Council Tax outlined in Section 3 of the report
- Make any observations they would wish to be included in the report to Cabinet, on 26<sup>th</sup> June 2007, when the process will be approved.

## **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 The budget is a statement, in financial terms, of the authority's plans for the financial year. As such the authority has considered it best practice to seek the priorities and views of all stakeholders in its preparation.
- 1.2 This is done throughout the year as part of our corporate consultation process. However, in previous years numerous approaches for engaging the public in the budget process have been undertaken.
- 1.3 This report considers these approaches that Warwickshire County Council have taken to engage the public in the budget process over the years, drawing conclusions and proposing the approach for the 2008/09 budget consultation process.

## **2 Review of the Public Consultation Process on the Budget**

- 2.1 Over the years Warwickshire County Council have tried a variety of methods of engaging the public in the budget process. These have included:
  - Public meetings
  - Employment of an external convener
  - Development of a budget 'game' on the Council's website
  - Questionnaires to the Citizens panel
  - Presentations at the Area Committees

- 2.2 Despite all of these different approaches engaging the public's interest in the budget process has not been successful. Because of this lack of interest the results have often been regarded as not showing a true representation of all sections of the community.
- 2.3 One of the main difficulties in trying to establish a meaningful consultation process is that budget proposals are developed within each Party Group. These proposals are then not made available until just before the Council meeting in February. Therefore the consultation process does not include any firm budget proposals to present to the public. This results in the various methods of consultation being vague and uninteresting for the public.
- 2.4 Although it may be pessimistic, until a single budget process with firm proposals for the public to consult on is established, the budget consultation will always be unsuccessful.

### **3 Proposals for 2008/09 Budget Consultation**

3.1 With the view taken in section 2 above, it is proposed to limit future consultation to the use of the Citizens Panel with an option to present to the Area Committees.

#### **3.2 Citizens Panel Survey**

3.2.1 The citizens panel surveys used in the consultation process for 2007/08 produced a response rate of 49% (approximately 1,000 responses). For 2008/09 a similar survey will be sent to members of the citizens' panel, which is likely to generate a similar response.

3.2.2 If possible there will be several questions included within the Public Satisfaction Survey taking place towards the end of the year, although the results may not be available in time for the results to be included within the report to Cabinet in January 2008.

#### **3.3 Area Committees**

3.3.1 Presentations to the Area Committees may provide a further option for consultation should members feel they are worthwhile.

3.3.2 The meetings were held in November last year and gave a brief overview of the resources available to the Council. However, these meetings were not well attended by members of the public. The equivalent dates for this year are:

<b>Area Committee</b>	<b>Date</b>
Warwick	13 <sup>th</sup> November 2007
Stratford upon Avon	14 <sup>th</sup> November 2007
North Warwickshire	21 <sup>st</sup> November 2007
Nuneaton and Bedworth	28 <sup>th</sup> November 2007
Rugby	6 <sup>th</sup> December 2007

- 3.3.3 Unfortunately these dates may mean that the Council is not aware of the resources available for 2008/09 and will find it difficult to present to the public any detailed financial information. Also, due to the length of time from the date of the first meeting to the last meeting more information may become available during the intervening period. This would result in the later Committees receiving more information than the earlier ones and would lose any consistency in the consultation process.
- 3.3.4 The committee dates subsequent to these meetings, when all the information could be presented are in January 2008 which would be too late to be included in the report to Cabinet also planned for January 2008.

## **4 Results**

- 4.1 In previous years the results of the consultation have been presented to this Committee for comment before being reported to Cabinet. For this year's process, this would mean this Committee seeing the report on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2008 with Cabinet getting the results on 31<sup>st</sup> January 2008. However, this would be too late for the results to help inform the budget setting process.
- 4.2 In order for the information to be presented to members in time for them to take account of the views from the consultation in the budget setting process it is proposed that the results and analysis from the 2008/09 budget public consultation process will be presented for consideration at Cabinet on 10<sup>th</sup> January 2008.
- 4.3 The date of the Resources, Performance and Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee before the 10<sup>th</sup> January Cabinet is 13<sup>th</sup> November 2007. This means that the results of the consultation process will not be available to this Committee until after they have been reported to Cabinet in January 2008.

DAVE CLARKE  
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June 2007