

BRIEFING NOTE	
TITLE	Future Council – Approach to Scrutinising Budget Options
TO	Policy and Performance Committee Chairs and Spokespersons
FROM	Mike Callon
DATE	Thursday 4 th September

1. Purpose

- 1.1 This note provides a summary of the discussion and agreement at a meeting of the Policy and Performance Committee Chairs and Spokespersons on 3rd September. The meeting was convened to agree a common approach across all P&P Committees to scrutinising the proposals that come forward from the Future Council Programme when these are published in September.
- 1.2 Members present at the meeting: Cllr Moira McLaughlin, Cllr Jerry Williams, Cllr Denise Roberts, Cllr Wendy Clements, Cllr Janette Williamson, Cllr Paul Doughty, Cllr Anita Leech, Cllr Steve Williams, Cllr Dave Mitchell, Cllr Alan Brighouse.

2. Review of approach undertaken in 2013/14

- 2.1 Cllr McLaughlin referred to a scrutiny review undertaken in October 2013 by the Regeneration and Environment Committee that had been circulated to the Chairs and Spokespersons. The Scrutiny Review reflected on the impact of 2013/14 budget options and proposed options for 2014/15. There was broad agreement that this had been a successful approach and that this should form the blueprint for scrutinising budget options this year.

3. Proposed approach for scrutinising budget options 2015/16

- 3.1 Cllr McLaughlin proposed an approach based on the October 2013 Review and consistent with the standard template for scrutiny review task and finish work. This approach will ensure that each committee operates independently but also delivers a consistent outcome from its scrutiny of the budget options based on the following principles:
- A task and finish approach is adopted with the three Policy and Performance Committees setting up a scrutiny panel to review the options that fall under their remit.
 - Each committee to determine the number of Members on its panel and the number of sessions required.
 - The panel should have an initial scoping meeting once the budget options are published to agree which options they wish to scrutinise and who they want to speak to i.e. Council Officers / external advisors.
 - The panel should determine the preferred days/times for the their Q and A sessions i.e. full evidence day, or a number of workshop sessions.
 - Cabinet leads should be invited to observe sessions.
 - In line with all task and finish scrutiny work, notes will be taken and a report with recommendations will be taken back to full committee for discussion and approval.

4. Discussion

- 4.1 Cllr Brighthouse highlighted the Council has been making savings since 2010 and as part of last year's review scope they considered the impact of previous efficiencies. The approach provides an opportunity to look back as well as forward.
- 4.2 Cllr S. Williams raised the issue about the number of Committee members on the panel. A recent car parking review had seven panel members and this was considered to be too many by some. It was acknowledged that the more Members on the panel, the hard it is to organise diaries for all to be able to attend all sessions. Cllr Brighthouse indicated that last year they had about five question and answer sessions with officers and it would be better use of time to organise a full day or two half day sessions.
- 4.3 Cllr McLaughlin emphasised that the number of Members on the panel and number of review sessions proposed are issues to be determined by the individual committees. The approach should not exclude any Member that wants to take part but will need to be sensitive to Members' availability. The smaller the panel is, the easier it is to manage diaries.
- 4.4 The approach proposed was endorsed by all the Members present. It was agreed that a note setting out the discussion and this approach be circulated and taken through the scheduled committee meetings over the next few weeks.