



Meeting **CORPORATE STRATEGY AND CO-ORDINATION SELECT COMMITTEE**

Date **11 OCTOBER 2004**

agenda item number

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES

PROPOSED BUDGET CONSULTATION ARRANGEMENTS 2005/06

1. **PURPOSE**

- 1.1 To outline the proposed methods of consulting with the public about the budget for 2005/06.

2. **INFORMATION AND ADVICE**

- 2.1 We have used focus groups with an independent facilitator for the last two years. Last year, the process was improved by involving the participants in a budget setting exercise, which seems to have been well received. We also gave the facility for elected members to view a focus group through a viewing facility. This seems also to have been worthwhile, we are currently planning the focus groups which are scheduled to take place in early November. The benefits of focus groups are:

- a) involving members of the public directly in small groups, so that each individual has to contribute their views. In this way, the "silent majority" have their views taken into account;
- b) it helps the Council to understand the best ways to communicate with the residents about the County Council, its services, and its methods of financing;

- c) participation in a professionally facilitated event allows us to examine the reasons why people hold the views they do;
- d) each year, new locations have been used, so that a wider spread of the county has been obtained;
- e) the scope for observation provides elected members with the opportunity to hear first hand about the impact of their plans.

2.2 Wider consultation is achieved through;

- County News with responses encouraged either by e-mail or letter, which we have been prepared to publish. In the past, an autumn edition of County News has set the scene, followed by a more detailed consultation process in January, after the Council has issued its budget proposals for consultation. County News should reach all households in the county, thereby allowing information to be provided about the issues facing the County Council as it considers its budget for next year.
- The quarterly report to stakeholders
- Presentations made to particular groups of stakeholders on budget issues
- The use of In-Contact to inform staff about budget issues
- Awareness raising by posters in libraries etc. on budget facts.

2.3 There are a series of roadshows taking place this autumn, designed to increase the public's awareness of County Council services, and allow them to find out more about services in which they are particularly interested. Staff will be available to answer questions about Council Tax. The roadshows will help elected

members who are present to be aware of the sorts of issues that are of interest to the public.

- 2.4 There is still a statutory requirement to consult with representatives of business ratepayers. Last year, we organised a joint event with Police and Fire, and it is proposed that this will be continued this year, so that representatives are not burdened by having to attend a number of separate meetings. In practice, representation at these meetings has been consistent, but small in numbers. Nevertheless an interesting dialogue has ensued each year.
- 2.5 The media will be briefed on budget issues facing the Council, and later on the decisions it proposes to take.

3. **RECOMMENDATION**

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Committee discusses the proposed budget consultation arrangements for 2005/06.

ARTHUR DEAKIN
DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES

Background Papers

Nil.

