

Lancashire Chief Finance Officers 25th September 2009

Consultation on the County Council's 2010/11 Budget

Purpose

To inform CFO's of changes to the process of consultation on the County Council's budget and seek views on how best to engage with district and unitary councils through the process.

Background

The County Council's new administration has undertaken to consult on the 2010/11 budget in two stages.

- Stage 1 (Oct to Nov 2009) – Consultation on priorities for maintaining services and spending and areas to consider for savings in 2010/11 and future years.
- Stage 2 (11/1/10 to 2/2/10) – Consultation on the draft budget agreed at Cabinet 7/1/10

In addition to this change the administration wish to formally consult with the district and unitary councils as part of both stages of the process. This is in addition to the previous range of consultees including Trades Unions, Overview and Scrutiny, the Youth Council and Lancashire Locals.

The first stage of the process will be very much at the level of broad priorities and is unlikely to include locally specific information. Part of the objective at this stage is to increase understanding of the scale of the financial challenges facing the County Council.

The second stage of the process is intended to seek views on specific proposals. These will have local implications and in order to facilitate effective consultation with Lancashire Locals and the District and Borough Councils these will need to be highlighted as far as possible.

Options

Clearly there are a range of different options for delivering the process of consultation with the district and unitary councils at each stage of the process. The more obvious options include:

- Presentations to appropriate formal meetings, for example, an Overview and Scrutiny Committee leading to a formal response on behalf of the consulted council.
- Discussion in a meeting between either political or managerial leaders from each organisation again leading to a formal response.
- Exchange of correspondence.

Different methods may be appropriate to different stages of the process and also to different types of council. For example given the different relationship between the County and the two Unitary councils where discussions will concentrate on "cross over" issues (such as the level of private care home fees paid) it may be that a less public process is appropriate. Alternatively the District Councils in exercising their community leadership role may wish, particularly at stage 2, for a more public process. Another factor for consideration is that the County Council would not wish to divert attention from unitary and district councils' own consultation processes which will be going on at the same time. However, it may be possible to encourage joint consideration of the County and District Council draft budgets which would give a more rounded picture of proposed public service provision in a locality.

It also needs to be borne in mind that the County Council has a limited number of staff available to support this process which will involve engaging with up to 14 other organisations. It is therefore unlikely, for example, that the Executive Director for Resources will be able to attend meetings in all 14 other councils over the consultation period. However, efforts will be made, as far as possible, to accommodate the specific requests of individual councils.

The expectation is that responses through this process will be comments on the policy drivers and impacts of proposals rather than a technical critique of the budget proposals.

Reciprocity

Clearly the County Council would welcome the opportunity to be consulted on the budget proposals of the district and unitary councils, whether through presentations to Lancashire Local (as has been done in some districts) or more formally.

Recommendation

CFO's are asked to indicate how they would wish their Council to be consulted at each stage of the County Council's budget process by 9th October 2009.

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Lancashire County Council