

Budget & Finance Scrutiny Committee – 16 October 2012

Update on the position of budget savings with regard to equality impact assessments, consultation and communication

Equality impact assessments: we need to assess and analyse the practical impact on those individuals or groups whose needs are affected by service cuts or changes. We have adopted a proportionate approach that takes into account the relevance of a proposal with regard to equality. This measured approach recognises that our resources are best aimed at dealing with those savings proposals that could have a more significant impact.

A scoping exercise to determine which budget saving proposals will require an equality impact analysis and/or service user consultation has been completed for the Budget Strategy report - 2013/14 and 2014/15 budget saving proposals including the review of fees and charges

This scoping exercise identified suggested requirements for impact assessments and consultations, as follows:

- No specific impact assessments or consultation activities have been identified for the 2012/13 additional saving proposals (approved at Cabinet on 28 June 2012). An overarching Impact Statement has been completed.
- Individual impact assessments and consultation activities have been initially identified for the 2013/14 additional savings proposals and the 2013/14 and 2014/15 proposals included in the March 2012 Budget Strategy report to Council.

In July 2012 the Policy Review Board agreed the initial list of proposed saving suggestions that needed further exploration with lead officers as to the extent of an impact analysis and service user consultation.

For savings proposals which are at a sufficiently developed state, a proportionate impact assessment and service user consultation will be undertaken. Where a proposal is still at a very early stage, a plan has been put in place to carry out an equality impact assessment during its development.

Consultation: the budget consultation in 2011-12 helped establish the principles and policy direction for a three year strategy. This required a broad range of inputs, over 3000, from across the whole community.

During 2012-13 we are refining these proposals into specific savings; this requires a different kind of targeted consultation with service users and stakeholders. They are often the most difficult types of engagement and rarely involve large numbers of people because we are looking for a precise reflection of the service and the impact that these types of changes can have.

Dependant on the settlement in late Autumn, there may be a further set of substantial budget savings proposals and we will need to review our position on consultation, which at that point may require both specific service user and stakeholder consultation as well a wider whole community consultation.

Currently, Assistant Directors are exploring further savings proposals,. Dependant on our budget position these proposals may or may not be included in the draft Budget Strategy to be published in December or January.

It is the intention of both the Communications Team and Community Engagement and Equalities Team to explore which of these further savings proposals may need an impact assessment, consultation and managed communication messages. We plan to do this in advance so we can be prepared if the savings proposals are put forward into the draft budget strategy. We are aware that further difficult decisions may need to be made and savings proposals may well have more of a direct impact on individuals and groups.

If we need to go out to 'wider whole community engagement' we will have contingency plans to carry out a 'budget road show' in January. The road show will be based on last year's public budget consultation event which was a hand's on participatory consultation activity. Residents and members of key forums across Telford and Wrekin will be invited to attend the road show. We are also considering a series of focus groups with residents. The focus groups will help us to explore priorities with regard to future budget savings.

Communications

In line with engagement activity around specific services, a series of core messages to support any service specific communications around budget and any savings proposals that have currently been identified.

The strategy will divide budget communication into two phases:

- The period prior to the announcement of the Council budget settlement which is expected in December 2012. During this period activity will focus on broader higher level budget messages across a variety of communications channels, particularly the Council's website, social media, press and the publication Your Voice.

These will focus on:

- The serious ongoing budget challenge that the Council faces
- These savings that must be found are as a result of unprecedented cuts in government grants
- Highlighting the savings that the Council has already achieved since 2009, including reductions in senior management and staffing, service efficiencies and procurement

- The promotion of ways that people can continue to be involved in putting forward ideas for ways to improve services and make savings
- Underpinning this will be the message that the Council's expect that the budget will only worsen and that we will be seeking significant public involvement in and consultation on any future savings proposals

The second phase will come once the Council's settlement is known. As any future savings suggestions are developed by service areas, these will be assessed for potential impact. The scale of this consultation will depend on the type of savings identified and if there is an issue or question which will have a direct effect on all residents on which the Council will be seeking the public's views.