

## APPENDIX E

### WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

#### JOINT MEETING BETWEEN THE TOWN AND PARISH COUNCILS

6<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2009

#### EXECUTIVE – 7<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2009

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#### Title:

#### **BUDGET CONSULTATION**

**[Portfolio Holder: Cllr Mike Band]**

**[Wards Affected: N/A]**

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#### Summary and purpose:

The purpose of this report is to set out the proposed scope and timetable for undertaking a budget consultation exercise during summer/autumn 2009. The Executive is requested to consider and agree the suggested approach and the schedule of services to consult on.

The Joint Meeting with Town and Parish Councils will be meeting on the 6<sup>th</sup> July 2009 and any comments arising from this meeting will be tabled at the Executive.

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#### How this report relates to the Council's Corporate Priorities:

A key element in demonstrating Value For Money, which is a corporate priority, is understanding customer's views and using these to inform spending priorities. A budget consultation exercise would support this aim.

#### Equality and Diversity Implications:

The budget consultation exercise would be subject to an equality impact assessment and particular focus would be placed on involving vulnerable or disadvantaged groups in the consultation process.

#### Resource and legal implications:

The Executive approved a carried forward from 2008/2009 of £18,000 to undertake a budget consultation exercise. The proposals included in this report can be contained within this amount.

The Government introduced a new duty to consult in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and has clearly stated in other guidance that every local authority area should give people a real say over public budgets in some form by 2012.

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#### Background

1. Budget consultation, sometimes referred to as participatory budgeting, engages local people in taking decisions on the spending priorities for a defined public budget in their local area. This could either be at a very local level, involving residents in the spending decisions on a particular project; or at an authority-wide level, consulting citizens on priorities as part of an annual service planning round.
2. Budget consultation would have a number of benefits for Waverley, including:
  - Helping us understand the desires and priorities of local people, and how this impacts on our budgetary priorities
  - Generating buy-in from local people; encouraging them to develop a sense of local identity and corporate ownership
  - Raising awareness among participants of the range of services provided by the council and the hard choices its needs to make in deciding the budget
  - Helping meet the government's ambition that every local authority area will give people a real say over public budgets in some form by 2012

### **Proposed Approach**

3. Corporate Management Team has discussed the potential for undertaking a budget consultation exercise to help inform the next service and financial planning round. Firstly, it is important to involve other organisations who are close to public opinion, such as town and parish councils, and to utilise intelligence already in existence, such as health checks. Secondly, it is necessary to ensure that any consultation process is robust, credible and tried and tested. Corporate Management Team agreed that the most effective approach would be to utilise a professional market research company with the capacity and skills to manage the questionnaire design, sampling, consultation and data analysis.
4. A leading company providing Participatory Budgeting services is Research For Today (RFT), who offer *Simalto Budgeting Consultation*. RFT describe Simalto as "a flexible, powerful approach designed to answer the questions councils actually have, rather than simply provide interesting information".
5. The strength of this approach is the ability to model respondents' preferences across a series of budgetary trade-offs, for example:
  - Would they be willing to see a reduction in grass-cutting (from  $x$  to  $y$  times per year) if it meant a reduction in council tax of £ $z$ ?
  - Which is more important to them; processing planning applications swiftly, or keeping car park charges at a certain level?The resultant data can then be analysed by a series of pre-determined variables, such as age, location, gender etc.
6. Research For Today offers an all-inclusive service and price, including sample selection, questionnaire development, surveying, data analysis, results presentation and follow-up technical support. The results and model would then be owned by Waverley.

7. The Simalto approach has been used by over 100 different councils, including Surrey CC, and achieves a very high level of positive customer feedback.
8. RTF advise that 12-15 areas is the optimum number to be included in the questionnaire, providing respondents with a broad range of options, but without drowning them in detail. It is proposed to only include discretionary services in the consultation, and to specifically exclude any service areas that the Executive is certain it does not wish to change at this time.
9. It is proposed that the Finance Portfolio Holder selects a small number of other portfolio holders to discuss and agree the service areas to consult on and the way in which these questions are expressed. As well as asking questions about services, consultees would also be presented with the Band D council tax cost of each service and, where appropriate, the cost of any potential change to that service eg. one less grass cut.
10. The detailed sampling with RFT would be discussed at an inception meeting. The exercise can utilise a range of consultation methods and other authorities have used different combinations of these. Officers consider that any of the methods set out below or a combination of these would be appropriate for meeting Waverley's needs:
  - Involve the Town and Parish Councils in discussions on budget priorities
  - 200 face-to-face interviews by random sample
  - Specific forums / workshops (50 people per forum to allow us to "boost" particular demographics or involve certain interested groups such as local business, faith and disabilities forums etc
  - Web-based tool to allow consultees to participate electronically

### **Timing**

11. In order to provide a useful input into the 2010/11 service planning process, a full analysis of the results from the consultation exercise would be needed by early October.
12. Outline timetable:
  - June** – Procurement and early draft of survey and sampling proposals
  - July** – Executive and CMT discussion of surveying and sampling proposals. Present proposals to Town and Parish Councils. Prepare publicity materials
  - August** – Finalisation of surveying and sampling (during holiday period) - involve town and parish councils
  - September** – Surveying, with results by the end of the month.
  - October** – Integration of results into service planning process

### **Summary**

13. In summary, it is proposed to employ RFT to undertake the consultation work and officers will ensure the necessary waivers or Contract Procedure Rules are in place. The cost of the exercise will be contained within the budget.

Officers will work with Members to develop the questions and context and to agree on the most appropriate mix of consultation methods.

### **Recommendation**

It is recommended that the Executive:

1. Agrees to undertake a budget consultation exercise for general services ahead of the 2010/2011 budget-setting process; and
2. Requests the Finance Portfolio Holder, in conjunction with other Members of the Executive as appropriate and the Deputy Chief Executive, to agree on the mix of consultation methods to be employed to work up the detailed questions and methodology and to commence the process in accordance with the above timetable.

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### **Background Papers (DCEX)**

There are no background papers (as defined by Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) relating to this report.

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