

Meeting:	Overview and Scrutiny committee
Date:	31 January 2005
Subject:	Budget Processes Review
Responsible Officer:	Director of Organizational Performance
Contact Officer:	Lopa Sarkar
Portfolio Holder:	Finance
Key Decision:	No

Section 1: Summary

Decision Required

- 1) The report of the Review Group is endorsed
- 2) The report of the Review group is referred to Cabinet for consideration

Reason for report

The report of the scrutiny review sets out the recommendations for the scrutiny review group and covers Phase One of this review. These findings have helped shape the direction of the Phase Two review currently underway as of January 2005.

Benefits

Improve consultation systems and increase participation of residents in the budgeting process while opening avenues of communication between different groups who have a vested interest in the budgeting process.

Cost of Proposals

The existing budget provision for budget consultation is £28,000.

Risks

By increasing resident's expectations through consultation, there is a risk to the reputation of the Council if residents' suggestions are not put into action.

Implications if recommendations rejected

If this report is not endorsed it cannot be moved forward for Cabinet's consideration. This will mean foregoing an opportunity for increased community engagement.

Section 2: Report

2.1 Brief History

On 9 September 2003, the meeting of Cabinet approved the development of a two stage budget consultation process and approved the work to be undertaken to improve the consultation process.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee Budget Processes review comprises of two work streams. The first is looking at the budget in the strategic environment while the second looks at communications. The later will look at communications around the budget process at all levels.

This report entails the information collected during phase one of the review. Phase two continues with the Community Budget Group.

2.2 Options considered

As set out in the report of the Review Group.

2.3 Consultation

In May 2004 adverts were placed in the Harrow Times, around the Civic Centre, and on the Harrow internet site asking for resident feedback on the Council's current budget practices.

In August 2004, surveys were sent to a selection of Harrow Council employees asking for their opinions on current budget practices. Following this, in September 2004 surveys were sent to councillors asking them similar questions.

2.4 Financial Implications

Any costs associated with these proposals would be contained within approved budgets.

2.5 Legal Implications

None.

2.6 Equalities Impact

This report includes recommendations which pay particular attention to including and representing groups who at times find themselves under represented in activities which look to find the general public's opinions.

Section 3: Supporting Information/ Background Documents

Report of the scrutiny review of the Budget Processes Review – Phase One