

ANGUS COUNCIL

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE – 9 OCTOBER 2018

**TRANSFORMING THE COUNCIL'S COMMUNICATION AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT
ARRANGEMENTS**

**JOINT REPORT BY THE HEAD OF FINANCE AND LEGAL AND THE HEAD OF STRATEGIC
POLICY, TRANSFORMATION & PUBLIC SECTOR REFORM**

ABSTRACT

This report seeks member approval of updated public engagement arrangements for the Council which will include specific work related to the Council's budget setting process for 2019/20 to 2021/22. The proposals have been subject to discussion and agreement through the Policy & Budget Strategy Group (PBSG) and the Committee is being asked to formally endorse these.

1. RECOMMENDATION(S)

It is recommended that the Committee:

- (i) Approve this report and Appendix 1 as the basis on which the Council will inform, engage and consult with the public in the future including as part of the 2019/20 to 2021/22 budget setting process; and
- (ii) Note the intention to investigate further the Wigan Deal for possible application in Angus and that officers will provide a further report in this regard.

2. ALIGNMENT TO THE ANGUS LOCAL OUTCOMES IMPROVEMENT PLAN/CORPORATE PLAN

- 2.1 This report contributes to all of the local outcomes contained within the Angus Local Outcomes Improvement Plan and Locality Plans as well as the Corporate Plan.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 It has been 4 years since the Council last conducted a large scale public consultation on its budget and in the years since the focus has been on communicating key messages about the budget and consulting on individual issues where considered appropriate. The scale of the Council's financial challenges and the inevitable impact this has on the delivery of services makes it more important than ever that the Council communicates and consults effectively on the decisions which must be made. This applies to all key decisions not just those connected with the Council's budget process.

- 3.2 Members may also recall the Accounts Commission's Local Government in Scotland Challenges and Performance Report 2018 (Report 131/18 refers) which highlighted the importance of "working with communities so that they are actively involved in decision making, know the effect decisions are expected to have on services and communities and see the impact of community empowerment". That report also stressed the importance of "focusing on the delivery of priority outcomes through:

- working with communities to understand their needs
- establishing effective cross-party relationships to work together and make the sometimes difficult decisions needed to achieve the council's priorities
- clearly linking budgets to plans and outcomes

4. CURRENT POSITION

4.1 Given the above background the Policy & Budget Strategy Group (PBSG) agreed that the time was right to consider our strategy for public and staff engagement for 2019/20 and beyond. The group noted some key issues to consider which included:-

- Consulting on our budget should not be a standalone exercise and an end in itself. It needs to be part of our wider engagement work and linked to our priorities. It should be more about engagement, having conversations with citizens around realistic, deliverable future service options rather than about budget detail.
- We need to ensure that the Corporate Plan and other relevant elements from the LOIP and Locality Plans are central to any budget related engagement. This is because we need to demonstrate how the council works with communities to achieve the LOIP outcomes.
- There is a lack of understanding among the public and many staff about the Council's financial challenges, how they come about and what we have done and plan to do to address them.
- There is a genuine need to address what the reality of having less money and fewer staff means for service delivery in terms of scope and quality. Efficiency is vital but it will not be enough on its own.
- We should be looking at our engagement covering a three year period so we need to be discussing what service delivery looks like over the next three years (2019/20 to 2021/22), not just for the next year.

5. PROPOSALS

5.1 The PBSG agreed that consulting on the Council's budget was not an end in itself and agreed that the Council should seek to discuss its budget proposals as part of a more holistic approach to communication and engagement with the public and Council staff. Detailed proposals in this regard have therefore been drawn up and are attached as Appendix 1 to this report. The Appendix sets out the key features of transformed arrangements for communication and engagement with the Committee are asked to endorse. These have been discussed and agreed by the PBSG.

5.2 Within Appendix 1 there is mention of the Wigan Deal and the possibility of something like this being suitable for adoption in Angus. Officers wish to investigate this more fully and will accordingly bring a further report to Committee in this regard.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no significant financial implications arising from the proposals in this report. Unlike a set piece budget consultation exercise where sizeable costs would be incurred most of what is proposed in this report can be dealt with using existing staff and budget resources. There is a need to invest in social media and basic engagement tools but the costs of this are modest and will be funded through the Council's Change Fund initially on a pilot basis.

NOTE: No background papers, as detailed by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to a material extent in preparing the above report.

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