
Report To:	Policy & Resources Committee	Date:	31 January 2017
Report By:	Head of Legal & Property Services	Report No:	LP/006/17
Contact Officer:	Gerard Malone	Contact No:	01475 712710
Subject:	Membership of the Members' Budget Working Group		

1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to note the continuation of the Members' Budget Working Group (MBWG) following the withdrawal of the SNP Group representation.

2.0 SUMMARY

- 2.1 At its September 2014 meeting, the Policy & Resources Committee approved the establishing of the MBWG as an internal, Members' Working Group and informal forum for cross-party scrutiny and consideration of the Council's budget proposals. The MBWG was established in the light of the severe financial pressures faced by local government in the foreseeable future.
- 2.2 The MBWG comprised as far as practicable the political representation of the Council to assist openness, transparency and inclusiveness in the developing of the Council's budgets.
- 2.3 In November 2016, the Chief Executive was advised of the SNP Group withdrawal from the MBWG and also from the Strategic Leadership Forum.
- 2.4 The withdrawals have been noted and this report focuses on the decision of the remaining members of the MBWG at its meeting in December 2016 to continue to meet in order to provide an effective and necessary working group for purposes of budget development.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Committee note the terms of this report.

Gerard Malone
Head of Legal & Property Services

4.0 BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The Policy & Resources Committee at its meeting in September 2014 approved the establishing of an extended Strategic Leadership Forum to form the MBWG. The MBWG is an internal, Members' Working Group which is an informal forum for cross-party scrutiny, consideration and developing of the Council's budget proposals. It was established in the light of the severe financial pressures faced by local government.
- 4.2 The MBWG is comprised of the Members of the Strategic Leadership Forum and is supplemented by additional Members to reflect as far as practical the political representation of the Council to assist in openness, transparency and inclusiveness for purposes of developing the Council's budgets. The meetings of the MBWG enable open and frank discussion amongst the political groups and seek to achieve consensus insofar as possible in the developing of budget proposals. The Group enables the political leadership of the Council to engage in an informal basis but it does not carry out responsibilities on behalf of the Council or its Committees and is entirely separate from the Council's formal Committee structure and Scheme of Administration. Its Members believe that it has a track record in developing consensus to assist the Council's approach to its annual budgeting processes.
- 4.3 On 10 November 2016, the Chief Executive received intimation of the SNP Group withdrawal from the MBWG and the Strategic Leadership Forum. The withdrawal from the MBWG was reported to its meeting on 20 December 2016 and it was the decision of the MBWG to continue to meet for the purposes, set out above, to assist effective engagement for the majority of the political groups within the Council for purposes of budget development.
- 4.4 It is this Council's commitment to ensure that all relevant, impartial advice on budget issues is available to all Groups. The practical effect of the withdrawal from the MBWG means that the SNP Group will have normal, unrestricted access to all relevant budget background information and access to briefing with senior Officers. As non-participants in the MBWG for the future, the SNP representation will not, however, have access to the MBWG reports. The advantage of the MBWG for Officer liaison includes benefits in terms of time and information management in relation to the provision of impartial advice but this is a matter that will now be dealt with separately through the provision to the SNP Group of relevant budget background information and access to briefings with senior Officers on budget issues. In summary, there will be no information deficit caused by the non-availability of MBWG papers to the MBWG's non-participants.
- 4.5 The SNP Group withdrawal from the Strategic Leadership Forum is a separate matter but this is a high-level political working group within the Council and is outwith the formal Committee processes and Scheme of Administration. It is within the discretion of any political group or any Group leader to choose to attend or not to attend the Strategic Leadership Forum: the absence of one political Group has an obvious potential impact on consensus-working for any relevant item that may be on the Forum's agenda. However, this is an issue of political management and individual choice for any Group or group leader.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

Finance

- 5.1 There are no financial implications.

Financial Implications:

One off Costs

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	Budget Years	Proposed Spend this Report	Virement From	Other Comments
n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Annually Recurring Costs/ (Savings)

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	With Effect from	Annual Net Impact	Virement From (if Applicable)	Other Comments
n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Legal

- 5.2 The MBWG and the Strategic Leadership Forum are not comprised within the Council's formal Committee process or Scheme of Administration. Both Groups are informal Working Groups of the Council.

Human Resources

- 5.3 None.

Equalities

- 5.4 None.

Repopulation

- 5.5 There are no direct repopulation implications.

6.0 CONSULTATIONS

- 6.1 The CMT has been consulted in the preparation of this report.

7.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 7.1 There are no background papers.