

REPORT OF THE ENVIRONMENT REVIEW PANEL

(meeting held on 11 July 2002)

OUTLINE WORK PROGRAMME: EXPENDITURE PLAN PROPOSALS AND THE FINANCIAL STRATEGY (Report E, Minute 14)

Members were advised of the changes to their Work Programme that would be necessary in the light of the Cabinet's recommendations, contained in the Financial Strategy 2003/2006, to develop the draft budget before any proposals were considered by the Review Panels.

The Panel is concerned about this proposal. It wishes to draw the Council's attention to the fact that, in the light of past experience, meetings of all Review Panels have been arranged in September, October and November to allow them to adequately research and express a view on the draft expenditure plan proposals. The expenditure plan process in 2000/01 was undertaken to a truncated timetable, within the context of the new decision making processes. The Panels found that this was unsatisfactory and did not allow them to play an adequate role in evaluating and developing the expenditure plan bid.

The Panel discussed the proposal that they will only become involved in the process once the draft expenditure plan has been developed. They believe that this would significantly reduce the quality of the outcome as:

- There is a breadth of experience and knowledge represented on the Review Panel which would both generate and evaluate proposals;
- A wider member base is therefore of value in the early stages of budget generation, to ensure the best options are identified and brought forward;
- The use of a wider pool of expertise will ultimately lead to a more coherent budget which therefore has the potential to maximise the use of resources
- The period from November 2002 to February 2003 is insufficient to allow them to evaluate the expenditure plan proposals properly, and the proposals will already be well advanced with less scope for influence.

RECOMMENDED

That the views of the Panel be taken into account when the Council discuss the Cabinet's recommendations on the Financial Strategy.

Councillor P R Woods
Chairman