



Budget Scrutiny 2014/15 – options

Introduction

1. This paper puts forward options for undertaking scrutiny of the Council's 2014/15 budget through the new select committee model, implemented in May 2013. Scrutiny in Buckinghamshire is now delivered through four select committees. These replace the previous two committee model (Commissioning and Health):
 - I. Education, Skills and Children's Services select committee (ESCS)
 - II. Environment, Transport and Locality Services select committee (ETLS)
 - III. Finance, Performance and Resources select committee (FPR)
 - IV. Health and Adult Social Care select committee (HASC)

Recommended option – Option 2 - Co-opting committee chairmen onto the FPR committee

2. Co-opting ESCS, ETLS and HASC select committee chairmen to the FPR select committee ensures that all select committees are able to formally feed into the budget scrutiny process. The co-optees will be invited to all budget scrutiny sessions. However, it is recognised that some co-optees may not be able to attend sessions that don't directly relate to their committee's terms of reference, due to the additional demands on their time. Representation of the ESCS, ETLS and HASC committees at the budget scrutiny will be less than in options 1, and fewer non-executive elected representatives will be involved in questioning key decision makers. However, this should be a more focused approach because each co-optee can represent the whole of their committee, and all non-FPR select committee members will have had an opportunity to feed in their views to their committee chairman. The effect of this approach on proportionality would need to be considered.

Design criteria

3. Budget scrutiny now falls within the remit of the Finance, Performance and Resources select committee, which consists of 8 elected representatives (members) and is politically proportionate to the Council. The design criteria for budget scrutiny is to:
 - I. Ensure that Scrutiny has a joined-up and coherent approach to scrutinising budget proposals
 - II. Ensure that non-executive elected representatives from all select committees are exposed to the budget proposals and have an opportunity to feed into the budget scrutiny process
 - III. Hold evidence sessions in public to question each Cabinet Member on their Strategic Plan and budget proposals
 - IV. Provide a 'critical friend' and a second opinion on the budget proposals
 - V. Ensure that the democratic function of the Local Authority is not lost at a time when budgets are understandably under pressure

Previous budget scrutiny



4. Scrutiny of the Strategic Plan and Draft Budget for recent years was undertaken by a Task and Finish group comprising of elected members. This Task and Finish group was initiated by the now obsolete Overview and Scrutiny Commissioning Committee (OSCC).
5. Evidence sessions were held in public over three days, where the Task and Finish group questioned each Cabinet Member on their strategic plan priorities and budget proposals. The group also met with representatives of voluntary organisations and the business community in Buckinghamshire.

Options for budget scrutiny

6. Draft budget proposals for each portfolio to be set as a committee item for discussion at meetings of the relevant select committee(s) prior to the three-day budget scrutiny evidence sessions (to be held in January 2014).
7. The FPR committee will retain the public questioning/evidence gathering format which has worked well in previous years.
8. The following options set out ways in which the select committees could feed their views and questions into the budget scrutiny process:

Option 1 – Co-opting committee members onto the FPR committee

9. The chairmen of the ESCS, ETLs and HASC select committees each select two committee members to be co-opted onto the FPR select committee. These co-optees represent their committee at the budget scrutiny session(s) that focus on portfolios/services within their committee’s terms of reference only.

Benefits	Disbenefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wide range of non-executive members involved in questioning key decision makers, so positive for the development of these members - ESCS, ETLs and HASC select committees are represented by more than one committee member at budget scrutiny - Co-optees bring detailed knowledge of specific portfolios to the budget scrutiny process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Involvement of different members in scrutinising different budgets is a less joined up and consistent approach than option 2 - A larger group of members (10 at a time, 14 in total) would be involved in budget scrutiny compared to option 2, which may make it harder to form consensus - Co-optees have no involvement in scrutinising budgets outside of their select committee’s terms of reference (a less holistic approach to scrutinising the overall budget) - Co-optees may make the FPR committee less politically proportionate

Option 2 – Co-opting committee chairmen onto the FPR committee

10. The chairmen of the ESCS, ETLs and HASC select committees are co-opted onto the FPR committee for the budget scrutiny sessions relating to their committee’s terms of reference and any other sessions that they are able to attend.

Benefits	Disbenefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ESCS, ETLs and HASC select committees are represented by their chairmen - Co-optees bring detailed knowledge of specific 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Co-optees are likely to make the FPR committee less politically proportionate - Fewer elected representatives are involved in

portfolios to budget scrutiny process - Consistency of approach - Fewer members involved than option 1 so consensus should be easier to form	questioning key decision makers than Option 1, so less positive for member development
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Option 3 – A discrete budget scrutiny inquiry group is established

11. The chairmen of the ESCS, ETLs, FPR and HASC select committees each select two committee members to form part of a discrete budget scrutiny inquiry group. This inquiry group (similar to a ‘Task and Finish group’) would conduct the budget scrutiny on behalf of the FPR select committee.

Benefits	Disbenefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All select committees can be equally represented - Positive for the development of members involved - Smaller committee size than options 1 and 2 if required - Consistent membership and approach to budget scrutiny 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Risk that some members represent themselves rather than their select committee colleagues. - Fewer elected representatives are involved than options 1 and 2 - Need to consider selection process of chairman (FPR chairman selects or inquiry group elects) and how to ensure political proportionality - The majority of FPR committee members are excluded from budget scrutiny process

Timeline

12. An outline timeline for budget scrutiny is as follows:

- I. July 2013 – Budget scrutiny format option agreed by FPR select committee
- II. July - September 2013 – Budget scrutiny planned by FPR chairman and Scrutiny Officer
- III. November 2013 – All select committees discuss draft budget proposals for portfolios/services within their committee’s remit
- IV. January 2014 – FPR select committee hold evidence sessions in public to question each Cabinet Member on their Strategic Plan and budget proposals (ESCS, ETLs & HASC committee chairmen are co-opted)
- V. February 2014 - FPR select committee report and recommendations to Council
- VI. February 2014 - FPR select committee report and recommendations to Cabinet
- VII. February/March 2014 – Cabinet response

