1. Can you describe the approach that your local authority has taken to both short-term and long-term budget planning since the onset of the financial crisis? For example, has your local authority taken a “zero-based” approach, or has it set out a range of options for savings? Please supply any relevant supporting documentation, for example copies of any budget planning exercises etc.

Whilst the Council’s approach to budget planning is still largely incremental, a programme of key strategic reviews is being undertaken within the governance framework of the Changing for the Future Board. The Changing for the Future Board was established in August 2010, as part of a strategy to achieve the level of savings required to deliver future balanced budgets (see report 441-2010 attached). Report 439-2012 attached summarises the savings reports that have been approved by the Changing for the Future Board.

2. Can you describe the consultation that your local authority undertook on your budget plans, both with stakeholders, and the general public?

Budget savings proposals are discussed, where appropriate, with the relevant stakeholder groups eg staff, trade unions, voluntary organisations, service users etc. There is no formal public consultation exercise, although this is something we have undertaken in the past (with little feedback) and may consider again in the future. Savings proposals are, however, put into the public domain around one month before being formally considered by elected members and usually attract a fair degree of press interest. This in turn results in feedback from the public in respect of certain savings proposals that are deemed to have a detrimental impact on services. This has then resulted in adjustments to savings proposals where possible and appropriate and is considered to have a more significant impact on responses from citizens than previous consultation exercises.

3. How have the outcomes of your consultation fed into and influenced your budget plans?

Feedback from stakeholder groups has, in the past, resulted in savings proposals being amended or even withdrawn completely.

4. What involvement has there been from external consultants/advisers in your budget planning, and what influence has this involvement had on your final plans?

The Council engaged a consultant to facilitate a Service Prioritisation exercise, as part of the Changing for the Future Programme. This exercise formed the basis of the Council’s plans to shape the future delivery of Council services in the medium term and deliver a significant proportion of the savings required to set future balanced budgets within the context of a continuing Council Tax freeze and actual / real terms reductions in government funding.

Marjory Stewart
Director of Corporate Services
28 May 2013