Dear Mr Stewart

Developing New Ways of Delivering Services - Local Authority Savings Plans

I refer to your letter of 5 February 2013 and would provide the following comments in answer to your questions:—

What is South Lanarkshire Council’s approach to short-term and long-term budget planning since the onset of the financial crisis?

Since 2008, the Council has prepared a long term financial strategy, with updates provided to elected members on an annual basis. These strategies have spanned a number of years which helps ensure that elected members can understand the financial environment that the Council is working within, including the level of savings that are required.

To supplement the formal strategy reports to the Council’s Executive Committee, Budget Seminars are held for elected members. These provide members with the opportunity to question savings proposals presented by senior officers of the Council.

The Council’s approach to budgeting does involve the presentation of options for savings. Underpinning the Council’s budget process for the past 15 years, has been a series of efficiency exercises. These have ensured that, on an annual basis, the costs of delivering services are scrutinised. Alongside programmes of scheduled service reviews, these have allowed a balanced budget to be approved by members.

What consultation is undertaken on the Council’s budget plans?

Consultation on budget setting and savings proposals takes place annually with face to face consultation events being held with members of the public representing both the Council’s geographic areas and specific groups representing the demographics of the Council area: members of the Citizens’ Panel; the Council’s employee forums; South Lanarkshire Youth Council; Seniors Together; Disability Groups and Lanarkshire Ethnic Minority Action Group. The Trades Unions are also consulted.

In addition, all members of the public were invited to comment on budget proposals through a dedicated e-mail address.
How have the outcomes of the consultation fed into and influenced the Council's budget plans?

The outcome of the Public Consultation events is advised to all elected members.

These events, coupled with the dedicated direct email facility to pose questions and suggest solutions on budgets, allow both officers and elected members to hear first hand the impact of budget proposals and to better appreciate how the public feel about proposed changes being made. The consultation process, and the contents of the resultant member briefing, are an integral part of the decision making process each year.

What involvement has there been with external consultants/advisers in the Council's budget planning?

For the coming years' budget preparations, there has been no involvement from external consultants or advisers on our budget planning exercises.

I trust this information is of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]
Lindsay Freeland
Chief Executive