

Dear Members

Scrutiny of the Corporate Recovery Plan

I am writing on behalf of the Chairmen of the three main scrutiny committees to let you know our intentions as to how scrutiny might effectively engage in the corporate recovery plan approved by Cabinet yesterday. The intention is to bring meaningful input and challenge to the Executive's proposals as they are developed and consulted upon over the coming months. Scrutiny has a role in reflecting the voice and concerns of communities and the public, and to act as the focus for non-executive member views. This was something that members felt particularly strongly about that was lacking when the issue was discussed at Council last week.

In response to this, I have set out below how we feel this engagement might work:

- (1) In the annual report of the Budget Process Scrutiny Task Group being published next month, recommendations will include:
 - (i) to increase its meetings to bi-monthly and receive the same budget monitoring information as Cabinet with a focus on challenging the progress in delivering the savings and efficiencies already built into the 2006-07 budget approved by Council – and now to include the further savings and efficiencies in the corporate recovery plan. It will take a “number-crunching” approach with the ability to recommend the relevant main overview and scrutiny committee to investigate further any particular service issues of concern.
 - (ii) the main overview and scrutiny committees will meet between Cabinet and Council each February in order to constructively challenge the Leader's recommendations for the following year's budget (the committee timetable is currently under review to facilitate this and other changes). Clearly this expands the remit of the committees and Task Group into areas of budget content and delivery as well as existing responsibilities for process.
- (2) The three main overview and scrutiny committees at their meetings early next month will receive a proposal to establish a joint task group to consider the details of the proposals in the recovery plan. It will primarily focus on options, service implications and impact on users; as opposed to the financial delivery of the plan which will be picked-up by the Budget Task Group, which will also continue its ongoing questioning of the financial management of the DACS budget. The new joint task group will meet in advance of Cabinet in June and July, and a commitment has already been given by the Leader that all available information will be provided and Cabinet members and senior officers as necessary will attend to answer questions. (The Leader is also reviewing how the advisory panels will engage in this process.)

The intention is to appoint 6 members from the non-executive membership of the Council to serve on the Task Group (2 to represent each of the three committees). Myself and the other chairmen are keen to hear from you if you are interested in being considered for appointment. It is expected that initially this will be an intense piece of work from early June to the end of July so please bear this in mind before putting yourself forward. We will also look to achieve some sort of geographic and cross-party spread in the make-up of the task group as far as possible.

I hope that you feel these intentions will deliver some of the concerns expressed over non-executive member input to the recovery plans and look forward to hearing from you in the next couple of days if you are interested in being involved.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J.R.O.", followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee