

**REPORT OF THE LEADER****BUDGET CONSULTATION 2013/2014****Purpose of the Report**

- 1 To inform Policy Committee of the indicative timetable for the 2013/2014 budget consultation process and seek approval of the methodologies put forward.

**Information and Advice**

- 2 The Duty to Consult is a statutory requirement which includes all County Councils. It obligates them to consult representatives of council tax payers, those who use or are likely to use services provided by the authority, and those appearing to the authority to have an interest in any area within which the authority carries out functions.
- 3 The Council's budget decisions are fundamental to the services which will or will not be delivered to residents. Budget consultation is a very important process, and it is imperative that the public (as well as council staff and councillors) feel fully engaged with the process. We undertake consultation to engage with and listen to as many local people as possible so that we can provide reliable and robust evidence to help inform decision making.
- 4 The process followed for the 2012/2013 budget consultation was extremely successful. The consultation was accessible to everyone, with all channels open for response. As part of the overall review, the following issues were identified as working well –
  - Awareness raising and opportunity to get involved via the 'Budget Conversation'
  - Engaging with young people through workshops in schools across the county
  - Engaging the business community early on in the process
  - Using the Council's newspaper 'County News' for publishing the budget proposals
  - Having mechanisms in place to respond via online, telephone, face to face, in writing
  - Making a 'freepost address' available
  - Weekly print-outs of response / findings to Leader, Cabinet Members and CLT

**Consultation process for 2013/2014**

- 5 The previous years' two-pronged approach to budget consultation proved successful and more residents have been involved for less cost. Therefore, it is suggested that this process be replicated for 2013/14 -

**Phase 1:** Budget Conversation campaign (designed to raise awareness of council services and set out the financial landscape that we are in).

**Phase 2:** Budget proposals (designed to seek the public's views on the more specific budget related proposals).

6 As well as raising awareness of the difficult decisions that arise from budget reductions, in previous years the budget conversation included questions around volunteering and what ideas do residents have to help us cut costs. It is suggested this year's key questions include -

- i. On a scale of 1:5 how willing would you be to take on more responsibility for what happens in your neighbourhood?
- ii. Do you think the County Council is doing too much/too little/about right to provide services to support you and your community?
- iii. When looking at the following list of County Council services, where would you least like to see savings made?
- iv. When looking at the following list of County Council services, where do you consider are the greatest opportunities to make savings, with least impact?

*List of services may include –*

- Services to improve road safety
  - Services to manage and reduce levels of traffic congestion
  - Trading standards and consumer protection/advice
  - Services aimed at protecting the environment (e.g. improving air quality)
  - Subsidies for local bus and community transport services
  - Services aimed at creating job opportunities and economic growth
  - Services supporting parents and families with young children (e.g. affordable childcare support and/or free early years provision for 3 & 4 year olds)
  - Management and maintenance of country parks, open spaces, country paths and rights of way
  - Services to tackle drug and alcohol misuse
  - Libraries
  - Working with schools to improve education
  - Recycling
  - Adoption and fostering services
  - Providing activities for children and young people e.g. youth centres
  - Management and maintenance of pavements
  - Management and maintenance of roads
  - Services to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour
  - Street lighting
  - Services to support children with disabilities
  - Services to help and protect vulnerable children
  - Residential care for older people
  - Services to support older, disabled or vulnerable people to stay in their homes
  - Day centres and support for older, disabled or vulnerable people
- v. What services should the County Council stop providing?

- vi. Which of the following ways of providing County Council services would you support?
- Town and parish councils providing some council services
  - Asking individuals to do more for themselves
  - Encouraging residents to contact us by internet (on-line) instead of by phone or in person
  - Volunteers providing some services rather than paid Council employees
  - Charities or voluntary community sector organisations providing some council services
  - Private sector organisations providing some Council services
  - Introducing and/or increasing charges for some council services
- vii. What one change or improvement to County Council services would make a real difference to you or your family?

- 7 The County Council has a statutory duty to consult with the Business Community under the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (section 65) regarding the authority's plans for expenditure in the financial year. In the past this duty has been fulfilled by holding a specific meeting with the representatives of the business community. However, attendance at these meetings has been very low, therefore, this year it is proposed that we change the methodology and instead of a separate meeting, we consult with members of the business community via the Business Engagement Group (which includes the Federation of Small Businesses and the Chamber of Commerce), through Business Clubs, and on-line. This will fulfil our statutory duty. We will inform members of the Business Engagement Group of our proposal.
- 8 The cost of publicity for the 2013/2014 budget consultation will be under £5,000 and will be met from the 2013/2014 budget for Communications and Marketing.
- 9 The 2013/2014 budget consultation process will be managed by the Communications & Marketing team with input from Finance and the Customer Service Centre.

## The 'Budget Conversation' Campaign

- 10 The table below suggests a variety of methodologies for consulting with residents as part of the 2013/14 budget consultation process.

| Methodology   | Output  |
|---|---|
| <b>1. General information/awareness raising on the Council's web site</b>   |   |
| Using the Council's web site is the simplest way to raise awareness. Along with web pages, an on-line form will be designed which will include the key questions suggested above.                                 | We want to show residents that the County Council is faced with conflicting challenges - an ongoing reduction in available resources set against increasing demand for our services as well as increasing costs. And give them an opportunity to have their say on budget priorities.   |
| <b>2. Social media</b>  |   |
| The advantages of using social media are that we are engaging in a space where people are already talking. There are 30 million Facebook users in the UK (49% of the UK population) and 10 million Twitter users. | Twitter and Facebook can be used to provide links to the Council's budget consultation campaign. The risk of using social media is that not all residents have access or use it. However, the Council will not be using social media in isolation; it will be just one of the methodologies used as part of the consultation process. |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>3. Workshops in schools across the county</b>  |  |
| Last year workshops took place with students at Brunts School : Valley School : Magnus School: Beckett School. These workshops were extremely successful in engaging students in the tough decisions the Council has to make. It is suggested that more workshops take place this year and we invite all schools, via 'Wired', to express an interest in taking part.               | As well as raising awareness of the challenges facing the Council, this is an opportunity for Members and Officers to be on hand to answer questions and encourage discussion with students.   |
| <b>4. On-line Budget simulator</b>  |  |
| A free version of the budget simulator designed by the London Borough of Redbridge (in partnership with the Local Government Group and YouGov) was used last year to enable respondents to make choices on which services they would allocate funding to. It is suggested that this methodology be used again as part of this year's budget campaign.                               | This tool is designed to raise awareness and engage citizens in the difficult decisions that arise from budget reductions. The tool gives an understanding of broad budget choices which help the Council identify priorities.   |
| <b>5. Comment cards in libraries</b>  |  |
| This method is very successful in engaging residents who don't have/want computer access. Over 60% of responses to last year's ' <i>budget conversation</i> ' campaign came from comment cards.   | Quick response comment cards can be distributed at libraries and Council contact points. They can be collected in boxes positioned in libraries. NB: There is a cost associated with the production of the comment cards; this is likely to be in the region of £135.  |
| <b>6. DIY downloadable engagement toolkit</b>   |  |
| This option provided popular last year as a way of providing a framework for groups to conduct their own discussions at a time and place that suits them. NB: There was a total of 147 downloads last year.   | Developed to gather deeper insight than the quick response comment cards, the toolkit is aimed specifically at community groups to engage and consult with those groups who may otherwise be missed.   |
| <b>7. Engagement with Business Community</b>  |  |
| It was useful last year to engage with the business community early in the process through the Business Engagement Group and Business Clubs. This year it is suggested that we build on these links and promote the 2013/14 budget campaign by officer attendance at scheduled meetings throughout November and January 2013.   | Attendance at the Business Engagement Group and Business Clubs to promote and cascade information to the business community is a way of raising the profile of the Council's budget consultation campaign. Also by providing links on LinkedIn (social network used by the business community) we are able to reach over 10,000 members. |
| <b>8. Engagement with Town and Parish Councils</b>  |  |
| Although Parish Councils are contacted every year by email/letter informing them of the budget consultation, unfortunately very few actually engage or take part and it is not known how many cascade information to residents. Therefore, this year it is suggested posters be displayed on parish notice boards informing residents how they can get involved and have their say. | By posting notices on parish notice boards it is hoped that we can encourage more residents to get involved. NB: There is a cost associated with the production of the posters; this is likely to be in the region of £300.  |
| <b>9. Engagement with communities via planned Marketing Campaigns</b>   |  |
| Various Council campaigns are taking place across the county during November, December and January 2013. It is suggested that officers attending these campaigns take the opportunity to promote the 2013/14 budget campaign.   | Having a presence at campaigns such as the Aurora Lights Festival and Rufford Craft Fair may encourage residents who otherwise might not get involved to take part.  |

| <b>10. Engagement with Nottingham citizen's panellists who have provided email addresses</b>   |   |
|--|---|
| Just under 2,000 panellists have provided the Council with their email addresses and said they are happy to be contacted this way. It is suggested these panellists be sent an email directing them to the Council's budget consultation web pages.  | Emailing panellists and directing them to the Council's website is a way of contacting residents at little cost.  |
| <b>11. Engagement with members of the public who have provided us with an email address and expressed a wish to be informed of Nottinghamshire County Council events and campaigns</b>   |   |
| As part of our evaluation process following Council events and festivals, a number of residents have provided their email addresses agreeing to be contacted about future Council events and campaigns. It is suggested these residents be sent an email directing them to the Council's budget consultation web pages.                            | Emailing residents and directing them to the Council's website is a way of contacting residents at little cost.   |
| <b>12. Engagement with communities via community engagement officers</b>   |   |
| Community engagement officers are involved in a variety of community activities on a daily basis and have established dialogue and networks with a number of communities and groups we consider 'hard to reach'. It is suggested these officers use their established links to encourage communities to get involved in the budget setting process | These officers are well placed to engage with the community in a variety of ways, making use of the numerous community resource centres across the county. Using established networks will encourage residents who do not normally engage to get involved.                |
| <b>13. Engagement with community based organisations, voluntary sector and other agencies</b>  |   |
| As well as community based organisations and the voluntary sector, there are a number of groups with whom we haven't previously engaged, including the WI, Rotary Club, University of the 3rd Age etc etc. It is suggested, where possible, we email these groups, or meet with them on a face to face basis, to encourage them to get involved.   | Emailing community based organisations and voluntary groups in Nottinghamshire directing them to the Council's website is a way of communicating at little cost. Where appropriate meetings will be held with organisations who prefer to engage on a face-to-face basis. |

## Phase Two : The 'Budget Proposals

11 It is proposed that the methods of engagement used for consulting on the specific budget proposals for 2013/2014 will replicate those used last year i.e.–

- On-line survey with the specific budget proposals
- Paper survey in County News
- Face to face meetings with service users directly affected
- Engagement with the Business Community – *as set out in paragraph 7*

## Timescale

12 The following timescale is proposed -

| Phase                         | Timescale                      |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Phase 1 (Budget Conversation) | 5 November to 25 January 2013  |
| Phase 2 (Budget Proposals)    | 14 November to 25 January 2013 |

- Response to the budget consultation will be fed back to Policy Committee on 13 February 2013.

- The budget proposals will be taken forward to Full Council on 28 February 2013, for decision.

### **Reason/s for Recommendation/s**

1. To set out how the Council will meet its statutory responsibilities for 2013/14.

### **Statutory and Policy Implications**

2. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, equal opportunities, human resources, crime and disorder, human rights, the safeguarding of children, sustainability and the environment and those using the service and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that Policy Committee:

- i) Note the timetable for the 2013/14 budget consultation.
- ii) Approves consultation methodologies put forward.

**Councillor Kay Cutts**  
**Leader**

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### **Constitutional Comments [NAB 28.06.12]**

3. Policy Committee has authority to approve the recommendation set out in this report.

### **Financial Comments [MB 29.06.12]**

4. The financial implications are set out in paragraph 8 of the report.

### **Background Papers**

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

None

### **Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected**

All