

meeting **OVERVIEW COMMITTEE**

date **TUESDAY, 20 DECEMBER 2011** agenda item number 4

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING CONSULTATION ON THE 2012/2013 BUDGET CAMPAIGN

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To detail the consultation that has taken place as part of the budget formulation for 2012/2013 and invite Committee Members to comment upon the process, and make recommendations to Cabinet for consideration when finalising the budget proposals prior to submission to full Council.

2 Background

- 2.1 Each year the Council undertakes a budget consultation exercise with residents and stakeholder groups to help guide and inform the annual budget setting process. This year the consultation started on Monday, 26 September 2011 and will run until Friday, 27 January 2012.
- 2.2 Responses arising from this consultation will be considered by Cabinet before it makes its final budget proposals, which, in turn, will be debated at the County Council budget meeting on 23 February 2012.
- 2.3 To this end, processes have been established to ensure that all responses are captured and recorded on a central database and updates are provided to the Leader, Members of Cabinet and Corporate Leadership Team on a weekly basis.
- 2.4 At the commencement of the Budget Conversation campaign, the possibility of undertaking consultation jointly with other public sector organisation partners was considered, but unfortunately this proved to be impractical given the timescales involved. However, we are continuing to work with all our public sector partners, in particular NHS Nottinghamshire County, to ensure our consultations are undertaken in the most efficient and effective way. The results of our citizens' panel survey, which asked questions around panellists key priorities, including community safety, will be shared with our Police Authority colleagues.

3 Objectives

- 3.1 The aim of the consultation exercise is to:

- raise awareness and an understanding of the difficult financial challenges the Council is faced with;
- give the public and relevant stakeholders an opportunity to give their views on where they think budget variations should be made;
- encourage the public to consider and propose innovative solutions.

4. The Process

4.1 A key objective of the consultation process is to ensure that the budget proposals are made available to all residents and stakeholder groups across the county. It is crucial that the consultation exercise:

- demonstrates that the authority is committed to a meaningful and purposeful dialogue;
- involves residents and the wider community throughout the process;
- ensures that employees and their representatives are effectively engaged in the process;
- communicates the challenges inherent in setting the budget effectively, leading to an understanding of the constraints in which the authority must operate.
- complies with legal requirements

4.2 There are two strands to the consultation exercise:-

- i. The 'Budget Conversation', which is designed to gauge the public's views on their broad priorities;
- ii. Budget proposals, which are seeking the public and employee views on the more specific proposals.

Budget Conversation

4.3 The Budget Conversation campaign is taking place on-line and in libraries and county information points across Nottinghamshire. This year, the citizens' panel are included.

4.4 In addition to raising awareness of the financial constraints facing the Council, the campaign is also gauging public views on seven key questions which were agreed by the Leaders group -

- i. *With less money to spend on Council services, we need to prioritise spending. In your opinion, what is the biggest single challenge Nottinghamshire faces in the next few years?*
- ii. *What is the single most important thing you like about where you live and would want to see maintained and/or developed in the future?*
- iii. *In order to maximise the use of our library buildings, do you think any of the following services could be appropriately delivered through your local library – SureStart Children's Centres: Youth clubs: Clubs for older people: Local history groups?*
- iv. *Do you think there are too many road signs in our towns, or not enough to warn drivers of hazards?*
- v. *In times of severe weather would you be willing to help out in your neighbourhood by clearing snow at care homes or local schools, or*

are there any other voluntary activities you would be able to undertake?

- vi. Are there any services provided by Nottinghamshire County Council which you would like to see further improved?*
- vii. Your dealings/enquiries with the council, such as asking for information or applying for a service, cost on average – 27p per enquiry via the web(on-line) : £3.76 per enquiry via the telephone : and £9.34 per enquiry dealt with face to face. What additional services would you like to be able to do/access on-line?*

4.5 Particular attention has been given to accessibility and engagement to ensure the process is participatory and no one is precluded from taking part by:-

- Giving residents the opportunity to set their own budget by using the on-line budget simulator.
- Making available an on-line form for residents to complete.
- Making available a toolkit for residents/organisations to use if they want to run an event to discuss the budget. This is available to download from the public website or completing on-line.
- Residents can join the conversation in our discussion forums.
- Residents can complete a comment card in their local library, where help and advice is on hand.
- Making available a freepost address for residents to send in their own handwritten comments/letters.
- Providing a telephone number where our Customer Service Centre advisors will take down residents' comments over the phone.
- Providing a paper questionnaire for our citizens' panel to complete.

Budget proposals

4.6 The second strand to the budget consultation concentrates on the 27 specific budget proposals put forward by Cabinet. These were published in advance of the Cabinet meeting on 9 November 2011 and Nottinghamshire residents and employees were given the opportunity to respond via completing the on-line form on the Council's website, calling the Customer Service Centre who would complete the on-line form for them, filling in the survey in County News and handing it in at the local library or sending it through to the Council, or by writing in using the freepost address.

4.7 Consultation is also taking place with the recognised trades unions. Trades union representatives have received an initial briefing on the overall budget proposals and further discussions are planned. Formal consultation is also taking place as required by law in relation to the potential staffing reductions arising from the proposals.

4.8 Staff will be consulted in detail and have the opportunity to respond to proposals which affect their specific area of service. This will be via the intranet and face to face meetings with managers.

4.9 A meeting with representatives of the business ratepayers community has been arranged for 17 January 2012.

5. Responses to date

- 5.1 As at 28 November 2010, a total of **3,476 consultation responses** have been received - 395 via the budget conversation, 86 via the budget simulator, 2,800 via the citizens' panel and 195 via the budget proposals.
- 5.2 The comments below, excluding the finding from the citizens' panel survey which are expected later in December, reflect the responses received.

Budget Conversation

- 5.3 The on-line budget consultation form, containing the seven key questions, has yielded 395 responses, with 182 of these coming from comments cards. Specific key comments in relation to the questions are as follows:-
- i. *With less money to spend on Council services, we need to prioritise spending, In your opinion, what is the biggest single challenge Nottinghamshire faces in the next few years?* Employment : Keeping the level of current services : Safeguarding adults and children.
 - ii. *What is the most important thing you like about where you live and would want to see maintained/developed in the future?* Green space : Local libraries : Community services and community spirit.
 - iii. *In order to maximise the use of our library buildings, do you think any of the following could be delivered through the local library (Sure Start: Youth clubs: Clubs for older people: Local history groups).* A total of 55% respondents say they would like to see SureStart delivered in the library building : 46% say they would like to see Youth Clubs delivered through the library building : 88% say they would like to see clubs for older people delivered through the library building : and 90% said they would like to see Local History groups delivered through the library building.
 - iv. *Do you think there are too many road signs in our towns, or not enough to warn drivers of hazards?* A total of 57% of respondents say there is the right amount : 38% say there are too many : and 5% say there are not enough.
 - v. *In times of severe weather would you be willing to help out in your neighbourhood by clearing snow at care homes, local schools or are there any other voluntary activities you would be able to undertake?* A total of 47% of respondents said Yes, they would be willing to help out in their neighbourhood by clearing snow : 41% said No : 12% said Don't know.
 - vi. *Are there any services provided by Nottinghamshire County Council which you would like to see further improved?* Schools : Childrens Centres : Help for new parents: More help for the most vulnerable : Maintaining the highway infrastructure : Community safety : Libraries and country parks.

- vii. *Your dealings/enquiries with the council, such as asking for information or applying for a service, cost on average – 27p per enquiry via the web(on-line) : £3.76 per enquiry via the telephone : and £9.34 per enquiry dealt with face to face. What additional services would you like to be able to do/access on-line? Disabled parking applications.*

5.4 The on-line budget simulator is being used by the Council as a means of consulting residents on their spending and budgetary priorities for the forthcoming year. Participants are required to balance the budget to achieve a 0% increase in council tax and have the opportunity to have their say by increasing or reducing expenditure within six service headings.

These are:

- Your Council: Support Services
- Your Family: Adult Social Care & Health
- Your Family: Children & Young People
- Your Neighbourhood: Community Safety and Registration
- Your Neighbourhood: Culture and Community
- Your Neighbourhood: Transport and the Environment

In addition, respondents are able to choose to save money through certain efficiencies and to bring income into the council by charging for specified services.

To date (28 November 2011) 86 individuals completed the budget simulator with the majority being from the under 18 age group. In order to engage with young people and to raise their awareness of the difficult financial decisions the council is having to make, a number of young people consultation workshops have taken place. Four workshops have been held in schools across the County where Years 10 and 11 students used the budget simulator to set their own budget. Students said they found the experience both informative and enlightening and began to understand the complexities and difficulties of having to make priority decisions in such important service areas.

The highest percentage *increase* people would prefer to see relates to Culture and Community (21% increase [79% reduction]) - this section relates to expenditure on libraries, archives and information; sports, arts and tourism; country parks and conservation; and, regeneration. £15.55m is currently spent in this area. Just over one-third of the suggestions put forward by respondents to the budget simulator related to increasing spending in this area, especially in libraries, and not just for books but for cultural activities.

The highest percentage *reduction* people would prefer to see relates to i) Support Services (96% reduction [4% increase]) – this section relates to expenditure on democratic services; partnerships and policy development; corporate communications; access to services, finance, property and ICT; and, personnel and performance. £43.47m is currently spent in this area. And ii) Transport and the Environment (96% reduction [4% increase]) – this section relates to transport; waste management and energy; highways; planning. £85.41m is currently spent in this area.

- 5.5 Analysis has shown that to date (28 November 2011) the highest response to the Budget Conversation has been from Gedling residents (21%), with the smallest response from Ashfield residents (5%). More females (58%) have responded than males (36%). A total of 83% of respondents indicated they had no disability, a total of 86% of respondents indicated their ethnic group as white (English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British), and the greatest response was from the 26-44 age group (closely followed by the 65 or above age group).
- 5.6 The Budget Conversation has yielded responses from the following stakeholders –
- Health Educators Network
 - Newark & Sherwood Autism Support Group
 - Pedals (Nottinghamshire Cycling Campaign)
 - Open Minds
- 5.7 The key findings arising out of Budget Consultation to date can be summarised as:
- Don't cut front line services
 - Look after vulnerable adults and children
 - Protect libraries and green spaces
 - Retain spending levels on social care
- 5.8 The findings from the citizens' panel survey are expected in December 2011.

Budget proposals

- 5.9 As at 28 November 2011, 195 people had responded giving a total of 5,042 opinions on the different issues raised. A full breakdown of all responses, showing the number of respondents who agree/disagree with the individual proposals, is detailed in *Appendix A*.
- 5.10 A separate three month consultation is taking place on two specific proposals:
- i) Sherwood Industries – closure of Sherwood Industries offering re-deployment where staff want to retain their employment and providing additional support to disabled employees as required to find suitable alternative employment; and
 - ii) County Horticultural Work and Training services for adults with disabilities – to continue to offer a service to all current service users but with a reduction in the number of sites and staffing across the service.
- Groups being consulted on these proposals include -
- Staff groups and trade union representatives at Sherwood Industries and County Horticulture & Work Training
 - Service users of County Horticulture and their parents and carers
 - Key stakeholders: including DWP, The Shaw Trust, Sherwood Forest Trust, Forestry Commission and the Sutton Centre;
 - Advocacy groups: including British Association of Supported Employment, Disability Nottinghamshire (IAG), Southwell Care Project, Nottinghamshire Disabled People's Movement.

The consultation also includes a number of face to face meetings and is due to conclude in January 2012.

- 5.11 The highest response rate to the budget proposals has also been from Gedling residents (22%), with the smallest response from Bassetlaw residents (6%). Unlike the Budget Conversation, more males (25%) have responded than females (20%) with 55% preferring not to say. A total of 70% respondents indicated they had no disability, a total of 87% of respondents indicated their ethnic group as white (English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British), and the greatest response was from the 65 or above age group (28%).

6 Stakeholder consultation

- 6.1 Separate letters/emails have been sent by the Chief Executive to all Parish Councils and major stakeholders seeking views on the County Council's budget proposals.
- 6.2 Adult Social Care & Health have engaged with their User and Care reference groups and encouraged them to get involved in the budget consultation by holding meetings and distributing flyers and comment cards.
- 6.3 The budget conversation was discussed at the OPAG (Older People's Advisory Group) meeting in November. Discussions will also take place at the Voluntary Sector Older People's Network in January 2012.
- 6.4 Four workshops have been held in schools across the County where Years 10 and 11 students used the budget simulator to set their own budget. Students said they found the experience both informative and enlightening and began to understand the complexities and difficulties of having to make priority decisions in such important service areas.
- 6.5 The voluntary organisations have been engaged via NAVO (Networking Action for Voluntary Organisations) where links and details to the Councils website have been sent out via their mailing list and newsletters. They are also adding a link to our budget consultation on their website.
- 6.6 There has been considerable press coverage arising from the budget proposals and articles have appeared in County News, the Council's newspaper which is delivered to every home in the County. Further articles will be included in the next edition which will be distributed at the end of December.
- 6.7 The formal statutory meeting with representatives of the business community will take place on 17 January 2012 and the main points that arise from this meeting will be reported to a later meeting.

7 Statutory and policy implications

- 7.1 This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of personnel, finance, environmental, equal opportunities, and those using the service. Where such implications are material, they have been described in the text of the report.

8 Financial implications

- 8.1 The cost of publicity for the 2012/2013 budget consultation is just under £5,000 and will be met from the 2011/2012 budget for Communications and Marketing.

9 Recommendation

- 8.1 It is recommended that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider the report and offer comments to Cabinet.

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