

REPORT OF THE LEADER

BUDGET CONSULTATION 2016/2017

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To inform Policy Committee of the indicative timetable and approach for the 2016/2017 budget consultation process and to seek approval for the proposed methodology and protocol for dealing with correspondence.

Information and Advice

- 2 Budget consultation is a statutory requirement that aims to balance the various interests and needs of the council and its stakeholders, and to produce a soundly based financial plan for the future. The budget process is set against the background of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy, which, in turn, uses information from the Government's spending reviews.
- 3 It is imperative that anyone who lives, works or studies in Nottinghamshire is given the opportunity and engages in informing decisions about their local services. Consultation is undertaken to engage with and listen to as many local people as possible so that reliable and robust evidence can be provided to help the Council to make informed decisions on difficult and challenging issues.
- 4 The consultation process aims to deliver the following outcomes:
 - Raise awareness of the budget proposals that have been collectively put forward for consideration by elected County Councillors
 - Raise awareness of the financial pressures faced by the Council and the resources available to fund the public services it provides
 - Ensure residents and local businesses have a better understanding and appreciation of the vast range of services provided by the council and the need to balance public demand for such services against reducing budgets
 - Inform residents as to how the Council is dealing with budget reductions
 - Obtain views on both overarching and specific budget proposals
 - Generate new, innovative and perhaps unanticipated budgeting ideas

- Make decisions informed by public opinion
 - Ensure the public understands the challenges and subsequently supports the budget decisions and outcomes
 - Recognition that the Council listens, considers and responds to consultation feedback in its decision making processes
 - The Council meets its statutory obligations.
- 5 The consultation best practice principles of Integrity, Visibility, Accessibility, Transparency and Disclosure will be adopted at all times by all Councillors and staff.
- 6 The consultation programme will attempt to reach everyone who lives, studies or works in Nottinghamshire including (but not limited to):
- Young people
 - Older people
 - Families
 - Public Service organisations
 - Borough and District Councils
 - Town and Parish Councils
 - Disability groups
 - Business Community
 - Service users
 - Voluntary and Community sector
 - Nottinghamshire citizens' panel
 - Council employees
 - Hard to Reach groups
 - Black Minority Ethnic, and new communities making Nottinghamshire their home
- 7 Attention will be given to accessibility and engagement to ensure the campaign is participatory and no one is excluded from taking part. A proactive approach will be taken to consulting with the aforementioned through: regular media releases; features and articles on various digital channels (such as Internet, Intranet, Facebook and Twitter); information sheets; tapping into existing networks, and hosting local events to ensure a wide range of respondents from all age groups and backgrounds are engaged in the consultation.

Consultation Timetable

- 8 It is anticipated that the overall consultation campaign takes place between the 26 October 2015 and 5 February 2016, with the following stages:

Activity	Timescale	
	Commence	Close
Stage 1 - "It Matters to Me" budget campaign launched (duration of 14 weeks)	26 October 2015	5 February 2016
Stage 2 – <u>Specific</u> budget proposals launched after Policy Committee's approval (duration of 8 weeks)	9 December 2015	5 February 2016
Reporting:		
Consultation returns considered		w/c 8 February 2016
Budget proposals considered by Full Council		25 February 2016

Consultation Approach

- 9 Subject to message testing with residents, the key theme for this budget consultation will be “It Matters to Me” and there will be a focus on communicating what the budget proposals will mean for local people in plain language. One tactic to support this approach will be the use of ‘personas’ which are characters that have been created to represent groups of our residents. The use of the word “me” will help residents to make the emotional connection to their real life experience of using Council services. It is hoped that this will help promote engagement with the budget setting process and encourage residents to respond to the consultation. A visual ‘look and feel’ will be developed to ensure campaign recognition and to distinguish it from previous years.
- 10 The overall budget narrative will reinforce key messages about how the Council is rethinking the way it delivers its services. It will also include messages around savings and efficiencies the Council has already made and the planned investments taking place to improve local services, which will ensure a more balanced narrative around the budget setting process.
- 11 The proposals and options for the budget consultation will include changes in service delivery, income generation options along with innovative ways to deliver services in different ways for better value.

Consultation Methodology

- 12 A detailed methodology together with anticipated outcome of each aspect is detailed in **Appendix A**.
- 13 The first stage of this year’s consultation aims to set the scene, raise awareness and inform the public about the budget challenge ahead and seeks views on the key issues and potential changes to the council tax that should be pursued by the Council to achieve a balanced budget. This will be similar to previous years with the provision of background information (both online and offline) and seeks views on key issues that will help inform the budget deliberations. Background information and consultation postcards would be distributed to all the County’s libraries and through other public buildings and organisations. This provides opportunities for wider engagement and adds value by explaining to residents the services that matter to “me” and will help contextualise and explain the proposals in stage two.
- 14 An extensive digital campaign utilising key channels such as the website, social media and email will be used to increase exposure. This year’s consultation will use more digital promotion than ever before as it is cost effective, more targeted and easier to evaluate. This will also be the first opportunity for many residents to test the new County Council website www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk which is now easier to use on mobile or tablet devices, thanks to the responsive design that changes according to the screen size. Digital marketing tactics will be used to share content, create debate and ultimately help encourage responses to the consultation. The Council will ensure that residents that do not have electronic and digital access can still participate in the consultation through offline methods (e.g. calling the Customer Service Centre, taking part in community events or completing paper surveys).
- 15 The County Council has a specific statutory duty to consult with the Business Community regarding expenditure plans for the coming financial year. It is proposed that this is conducted through: the Business Engagement Group (which includes the Federation of

Small Businesses and the Chamber of Commerce); Business Clubs, and a range of digital channels.

- 16 It is important to capture all consultation returns and apply a standard approach/response to comments and or questions received by the Council. Therefore, as in previous years, there is an agreed “Internal protocol for responding to correspondence” that will be issued internally to all Councillors, the Corporate Leadership Team and relevant officers. The ‘tried and tested’ protocol is the same as in previous years.

Other Options Considered

- 17 The County Council has a legal duty to consult on the setting of its budget.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

- 18 To outline and obtain approval on how the Council will meet its statutory obligations with regard to consultation on the annual budget.

Statutory and Policy Implications

- 19 This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, the public sector equality duty, 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.

Financial Implications

- 20 It is envisaged that the 2016/17 budget consultation can be undertaken at a maximum cost of £7,000 and will be met from the 2015/2016 Communications and Marketing budget.

Equalities Implications

- 21 Equalities implications have been considered as part of compiling this report. As there are no negative impacts on any protected group, an Equality Impact Assessment has not been deemed necessary. However, all individual budget proposals will be considered on their own merits, and where appropriate specific Equality Impact Assessments will be undertaken.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Policy Committee:

1. Endorses the consultation timetable and approach
2. Approves the proposed methodology, and protocol for dealing with correspondence

Councillor Alan Rhodes
Leader of the Council

For any enquiries about this report please contact:
Martin Done, Service Director, Communications and Marketing

Constitutional Comments (SLB 16/09/2015)

Policy Committee is the appropriate body to consider the content of this report.

Financial Comments (SES 16/09/15)

The financial implications are set out in 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.

Internal protocol for responding to Budget Consultation Correspondence

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected:

All

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Appendix A – Consultation Methodology

CONSULTATION METHODOLOGY FOR 2016/17 BUDGET PROPOSALS

Methodology	Output
General information/awareness raising	
<p>Using the Council's web site is the simplest way to raise awareness. Along with the main consultation document, web pages and on-line forms will be designed to cover the campaign. The Council's web pages will be kept up to date with the latest information and developments.</p> <p>Nottinghamshire residents who do not have access to the internet will be able to access information via libraries and/or by contacting the Customer Service Centre. Information will also be cascaded through schools, children's centres, colleges, public information points etc. Members of the public will be able to request information in other languages and/or formats by telephoning the Customer Service Centre.</p> <p>Face to face engagement with Nottinghamshire residents' will take place through various community/neighbourhood meetings.</p>	<p>The Council needs to show residents it is faced with conflicting challenges - an ongoing reduction in available resources set against increasing demand for services as well as increasing costs.</p> <p>The Council also wants to seek residents' views on its strategic priorities and give them an opportunity to have their say on specific budget proposals.</p>
Social media	
<p>The advantages of using social media are that we are engaging in a space where people are already talking. It is proposed that the following channels will be maximised to engage people in the budget challenge debate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Twitter • Facebook • Pinterest • YouTube • Search optimisation • Consistent use of a publicised hashtag 	<p>Social media will support the budget challenge campaign throughout the consultation. However, it is acknowledged that not all residents may have access to social media or use it. Therefore, 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.</p> <p>Work will be undertaken to optimise the ranking of key terms like '<i>Nottinghamshire County Council budget challenge</i>' etc. to make sure people are being directed to the right web pages when searching online.</p>
Local community groups/community organisations/voluntary sector/other agencies	
<p>Council 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 considered to be 'hard to reach'. It is suggested these officers use their established links to encourage these communities to get involved in the budget setting process.</p> <p>The campaign will also be promoted via local community newsletters/community information sheets and promoted via Bassetlaw Council for Voluntary Service (that provides a Countywide information service to voluntary and community organisations also includes Hard to Reach groups).</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>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 that prefer to engage on a face-to-face basis.</p>

<p>There are a large number of community groups and local neighbourhood meetings (including luncheon clubs / Sure Start parents' groups / neighbourhood watch groups and older people's groups) which already meet on a regular basis out in communities across the county. These existing networks can be used to promote this year's budget consultation.</p> <p>Existing networks and other stakeholders will continue to be used.</p>	
Budget workshops in schools across the county / engaging with young people	
<p>All schools will be encouraged to take part via the 'schools portal'.</p> <p>Engagement with young people will also take place via posters in youth centres, directing them to the Council's website.</p> <p>It is also suggested a presentation on the budget proposals takes place at a meeting of the Youth Parliament followed by a question/answer session aimed at exploring young people's priorities.</p>	<p>As well as raising awareness of the challenges facing the Council, this is an opportunity for Councillors and Officers to be on hand to answer questions and encourage discussion with students and young people.</p>
Engaging with older people	
<p>It is proposed that engagement with older people take place through the Council's existing networks such as the Older People's Advisory Group and 'Ageing Well' Group, in addition to engagement through local community groups.</p>	<p>As well as raising awareness of the challenges facing the Council, this is an opportunity for older people to collectively discuss the issues affecting them and respond as a collective group.</p>
Engaging with Hard to Reach Groups	
<p>It is proposed that engagement with people from Black and Ethnic Minority Communities; new communities from Eastern Europe; and those that are less likely to access local services should take place through the Council's various databases and directly through local groups that receive grant aid from the County Council.</p>	<p>As well as raising awareness of the challenges facing the Council, this is an opportunity for these communities to collectively discuss the issues affecting them and respond as a collective group.</p>
Comment cards in libraries, public information points and at community events	
<p>This method is very successful in engaging residents who don't have/want computer access.</p> <p>"It matters to Me" key messages will also be displayed on the Council's video screens in libraries, and at Mansfield and Worksop bus stations, etc.</p>	<p>Quick response comment cards can be distributed at libraries and public information points etc. They can be collected in boxes positioned in libraries etc.</p>
Engagement with Business Community	
<p>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 2016/17 budget challenge campaign by officer attendance at scheduled meetings during the consultation period.</p>	<p>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 challenge campaign. Also by providing links on LinkedIn (social network used by the business community) we are able to reach over 10,000 members.</p>

Engagement with Town and Parish Councils	
It is suggested posters be displayed on parish notice boards informing residents how they can get involved in the budget challenge campaign. The consultation documents will also be sent to all Town and Parish Councils.	By posting notices on parish notice boards it is hoped that residents living in rural and isolated areas of Nottinghamshire will get involved.
Engagement with Nottinghamshire citizens' panellists who have provided email addresses	
Just fewer than 1,500 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 challenge web pages.	Emailing panellists and directing them to the Council's website is a way of contacting residents at little cost.
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	
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 challenge web pages.	Emailing residents and directing them to the Council's website is an effective and cost efficient way of contacting residents at little cost.