

REPORT OF THE LEADER

BUDGET CONSULTATION 2014/2015

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To inform Policy Committee of the indicative timetable for the 2014/2015 budget consultation process and seek approval of the methodologies put forward.

Information and Advice

- 2 The aim of the budget consultation process is 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 (MTFS), which in turn uses information from the government's spending reviews.
- 3 Budget consultation is a very important process, and it is imperative that the public (as well as council staff and councillors) are, and feel to be, fully engaged in the process. 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 inform decision making.
- 4 The consultation process aims to deliver the following outcomes:
 - Raised awareness of the financial pressures the Council is under and the limited resources available to fund public services;
 - Residents and local businesses have a broader understanding and appreciation of the many diverse community needs and competing demands placed upon the County Council;
 - The views of Nottinghamshire residents on specific proposals;
 - New and perhaps unanticipated budgeting ideas generated;
 - Decisions informed by a range of public opinion;
 - Understanding and support for the budget decisions which are ultimately made;
 - The Council is recognised as listening and responding to consultation feedback.
- 5 Consultation best practice principles will be adopted, namely Integrity, Visibility, Accessibility, Transparency and Disclosure.

- 6 The consultation programme will attempt to reach the following audiences:
- Nottinghamshire residents
 - Young people
 - Older people
 - Town and Parish Councils
 - Black Minority Ethnic communities
 - Disability groups
 - Business Community
 - Service users
 - Voluntary and Community sector
 - Nottinghamshire citizens' panel
 - Council employees
- 7 Attention will be given to accessibility and engagement to ensure the budget challenge campaign is participatory and no one is precluded from taking part. A proactive approach will be taken to consulting with voluntary and community organisations. This will include articles in community information sheets, tapping into existing networks and hosting local events to ensure a wide range of respondents from all age groups and backgrounds have been engaged.

Consultation process for 2014/2015

- 8 For the first time, a consultation document has been produced which sets out the challenge ahead and how residents can get involved (appendix A). This document will be available on line, reference copy available in libraries and paper copies available on request.
- 9 It is proposed that the 2014/2015 consultation process be conducted in three stages:

Stage 1:

Objective: To set the scene, raise awareness and inform the public about the budget challenges ahead. To seek views on how residents would deal with the challenges.

Questions:

- "Having read the consultation document, do you feel more informed about the Council's budget challenge?"
- "Given that the Council has to reduce its budget, if you were in charge of the Council which services would you stop or reduce?" (*list of services provided*)
- "Given the severity of the Council's budget situation and the inevitable impact on services, what would you be prepared to do?" (*list of options provided*).

Stage 2:

Objective: To promote and seek local people's views on the values (overarching principles) and strategic priorities detailed in the County Council's draft new Strategic Plan.

Questions:

- "To what extent do you agree that the five key priorities in the draft new Strategic Plan are the correct priorities for the Council to focus its budget and resources on?" (*written explanation of each priority to be provided*)

- “Are these the right priorities against which the difficult budget decisions should be made?”
- “What do you consider to be the most important priority?”
- “Having considered the five priority areas – do you think there is anything else the Council needs to focus on over the next 12 months?”

Stage 3:

Objective: To seek the views of residents on the proposals for service reductions.

- 10 The County Council has a 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 on-line.
- 11 The cost of publicity for the 2014/2015 budget consultation will be approximately £6,000 and will be met from the 2013/2014 Communications and Marketing budget.
- 12 The table below details the different approaches for consulting with residents as part of the 2014/15 budget consultation process:

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 three stages of 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 or by contacting the Customer Service Centre. Information will also be cascaded through schools, childrens centres, colleges, public information points etc. Members of the public will be able to request information in other formats by telephoning the Customer Service Centre.</p> <p>Face to face engagement with Nottinghamshire residents’ will take place through the Nottinghamshire annual residents survey and via 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>	<p>Social media will support the budget challenge campaign throughout all stages of 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</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Twitter • Facebook • Pinterest • Flickr • YouTube • Google+ • Search optimisation • Consistent use of a publicised hashtag 	<p>be just one of the methodologies used as part of the consultation process.</p> <p>Google+ will be used as a way of boosting search optimisation (a Google+ community can be set up specifically about the budget challenge to link with the discussion forums, particularly at stages 2 and 3). As an alternative to the live twitter chats, a Google+ 'hangout' (essentially an online video chat) could be offered.</p> <p>Work will be undertaken to optimise the ranking of key terms like 'Nottinghamshire County Council budget challenge' etc to make sure people are being directed to the right web pages when searching online.</p> <p>Live Q&A Tweet/webchat sessions/public discussion forums with Leader/Committee Chairs about specific service areas will be considered.</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 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.</p> <p>The campaign will also be promoted via local community newsletters/community information sheets and promoted via Networking Action Voluntary Organisation (NAVO) who has connections with Hard to Reach groups across the county.</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 peoples' 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 with OPAG and other stakeholders will continue to be used.</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 who prefer to engage on a face-to-face basis.</p>
Budget workshops in schools across the county / engaging with young people	
<p>For the past few years, in order to engage with young people, budget workshops have taken place in schools across the county. 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</p>	<p>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 and young people.</p>

<p>taking part.</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 take place at a meeting of the Young Peoples Board (date to be arranged) followed by a question/answer session aimed at exploring young people's priorities.</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 (OPAG) 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>
On-line Budget simulator	
<p>A free version of the budget simulator designed by the London Borough of Redbridge (in partnership with the Local Government Group and YouGov) has been used previously to enable respondents to make choices on which services they would allocate funding to. It is suggested that this methodology be used again during this year's budget challenge campaign.</p>	<p>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.</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>Budget challenge key messages will also be displayed on the Council's video screens in libraries, and Mansfield bus station 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>
DIY downloadable engagement toolkit	
<p>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.</p>	<p>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.</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 2014/15 budget challenge campaign by officer attendance at scheduled meetings throughout November 2013 and January 2014.</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	
<p>It is suggested posters be displayed on parish notice boards informing residents how they can get involved in the budget challenge campaign.</p>	<p>By posting notices on parish notice boards it is hoped that we can encourage more residents to get involved.</p>

Engagement with communities via planned Marketing Campaigns	
Various Council campaigns are taking place across the county during November, December 2013 and January 2014. It is suggested that officers attending these campaigns take the opportunity to promote the 2014/15 budget challenge 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.
Engagement with Nottingham citizen's panellists who have provided email addresses	
Just under 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 a way of contacting residents at little cost.

- 13 Consultation on the 2014/15 budget challenge campaign will take place between 2 September 2013 and 17 January 2014 (20 weeks).

Activity	Timescale	
	Commence	Close
Stage 1: 2014/15 Budget challenge campaign launched.	2 September 2013	17 January 2014
Stage 2: Policy Committee - approval to consult on draft new Strategic Plan (overarching principles and priorities)	18 September 2013	25 October 2013
Consultation returns considered by Members	28 October 2013	1 November 2013
Stage 3: Policy Committee - approval to consult on specific budget proposals	13 November 2013	17 January 2014
Consultation returns considered by Members	20 January 2014	24 January 2014
Reporting:		
Policy Committee - budget proposals considered	5 February 2014	
Full Council – budget proposals approved	27 February 2014	

Other Options Considered

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

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

15 To set out how the Council will meet its statutory obligations with regard to consultation.

Statutory and Policy Implications

16 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

17 These are set out in paragraph 11 above.

Equalities Implications

18 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.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Policy Committee:

- i) Approves the consultation strategy as detailed in the report.
- ii) Notes the programme timetable for the 2014/15 budget consultation.

COUNCILLOR ALAN RHODES Leader of the Council

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Constitutional Comments [SLB 30/08/2013]

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

Financial Comments [PS 2/9/13]

This consultation covers the whole of the Council's budget for 2014/15. The consultation itself will cost approximately £6,000 and will be met from the 2013/2014 Communications and Marketing budget.

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.

Budget Challenge Consultation Document

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All