

Cabinet – 9 November 2011

Budget Consultation Feedback 2012/13

Portfolio: Councillor Towe – Finance and Personnel

Service: Finance – council wide

Wards: All

Key decision: No

Forward plan: Yes

1. Summary

- 1.1 The council's corporate plan sets out intentions to build upon successes and meet the existing and emerging challenges being faced. It focuses on three priority areas - neighbourhoods and communities, the economy, and health and well-being.
- 1.2 With a shrinking economy, rising costs and unavoidable cuts in public spending, listening to the views and opinions of local people and working to meet these needs is vital to the council's purpose; to maintain and improve the physical and economic environment for the health and well-being of all our residents within financial constraints. Operate efficiently and collaboratively within a one council model and with partners to ensure value for money for tax payers and other funders.
- 1.3 Part of our commitment to listen to local people is to consult people on what they think about council services and spending priorities and how this should be reflected in the annual budget.
- 1.4 Through the use of qualitative and quantitative research methods the views of more than 250 residents have been gathered. Through the use of various approaches people were able to have their say on what they think should be the council's spending priorities for the coming financial year and what matters to them most. This report also contains results of the Budget Simulator - an interactive online tool which allows people to set their own budget against 17 council spending areas. The budget simulator was used to collect data in two waves. Wave one ran from 10 August to 16 October and wave two 31 October to 14 November 2011. Results from wave one are reported here whilst results from wave two will be reported to Cabinet on 14 December. The additional 2 week extension was agreed in order to give as many people as possible the chance to have their say.

- 1.5 This report to Cabinet summarises the findings from budget consultation to support decision making regarding the council's draft budget proposals for 2012/13. **Appendix 1** reports the recommendations from each scrutiny panel on the budget proposals, and **Appendix 2** reports the findings from resident and stakeholder consultation to date. The final budget, including any changes arising from consultation arrangements and final allocation of formula grant, will be presented to Cabinet on 8 February 2012 for recommendation to Council, and will be considered by full Council on 23 February 2012.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the findings from the budget consultation, set out in this report, be used and evidenced alongside other feedback and available data by Cabinet as it develops the council's 2012/13 draft corporate revenue and capital budget.
- 2.2 That the Borough Leadership Team and Corporate Management Team use these findings to inform priorities and service delivery for 2012/13 onwards.
- 2.3 Cabinet approve this report and its appendices to be published on the council's public website along with feedback of outcomes.
- 2.4 Cabinet refer this report to all scrutiny and performance panels for consultation, to enable their comments to be considered by Cabinet on 14 December 2011.

3. Report detail

- 3.1 Each year the council consults residents and stakeholders as part of its budget process. This year consultation has gathered the views of local residents, the community and voluntary sector, children and young people, older people, representatives from the business community and others. This report presents findings from consultation with these groups with a focus on the council's spending priorities for 2012/13.
- 3.2 Results from the budget simulator show that;
- Leisure, sport and recreation is the priority spending area
 - Respondents also increased spending for roads and maintenance and public safety
 - Respondents reduced spending in all other areas, with the greatest reductions in benefits, housing, planning and building control and libraries and heritage
- 3.3 Businesses and the community and voluntary sector support proposals for investment in job creation and agree that investing in children and young people and developing and retaining talent in the borough is paramount. Many were keen to sign up apprentices.
- 3.4 Developing the local economy, reducing unemployment and increasing employment prospects is a key priority for many and is a common concern.

- 3.5 Increasing the number of council contracts awarded to Walsall based businesses is welcomed, along with encouraging a culture of 'social consciousness' within the business sector to ensure as much business is retained within the borough as possible. However, the council's procurement process is perceived to be a barrier and in need of streamlining and simplifying, so not to preclude small local organisations from tendering and thus enabling growth.
- 3.6 Increasing the range and number of positive activities for children and young people is seen as an important diversionary approach to reducing anti social behaviour. Young people call for a range of exciting and varied activities. Encouraging volunteering and creating volunteering opportunities is thought to bring a range of benefits to communities and those undertaking the volunteering.
- 3.7 Investing in children and young people is seen as critical to the future of the borough.
- 3.8 Ensuring children, young people and adults are educated and possess the basic skills to ensure their employability is seen as a priority for the future prosperity of the borough. Ensuring there is the right mix of jobs to fulfil the local employment market is critical. Encouraging inward investment and supporting businesses and supporting people into jobs during the economic downturn is important to young and old alike.
- 3.9 Libraries are important to those who use them and can provide a valued social lifeline to people. Residents feel that libraries could do more to increase usage and have an important role to play in education and tackling unemployment through things like support for job seekers and developing basic skills. Non library users do not see them as a priority.
- 3.10 Vibrant, clean town and district centres are important for raising pride in the local area. Many people talk negatively about their local area describing it as 'run down' and 'dirty'. Systematically fining people who litter the streets is suggested by a number of people.
- 3.11 Car parking charges continue to be an issue for residents and businesses. People are baffled by the perceived high charges imposed and call for a different strategy to be applied. Many believe car park charges are counter productive.
- 3.12 Maintaining roads remains a priority, however people don't want to see money wasted on ineffective, poor quality repairs or unnecessary schemes.
- 3.13 Maintaining an effective and accessible public transport system is important to people particularly young people, those with disabilities and older people. Young people in further education feel that some young people would be encouraged to remain in education if transport was free or subsidised. It is important to ensure that services meet the needs of local people, with services running to and from locations at the times they need it.
- 3.14 Although older people and people with disabilities are eligible for free bus passes it was highlighted that they cannot be used on services like Ring and Ride which charges users. For those who cannot use public transport and are on low incomes, it can mean they are unable to get out and about leading to isolation.

- 3.15 Users of adult social care services are fearful that the services they rely on and value will be cut. Maintaining and increasing the provision of quality care in the borough is a primary concern for them and their families.
- 3.16 Residents identify the benefits of encouraging healthy lifestyles and its link to reducing costs in healthcare, reducing the number reliant on benefits and maintaining a fit and healthy workforce in the borough. Some people think that more needs to be done to communicate the services and facilities on offer in leisure centres and to encourage take up. Developing and encouraging people to exercise for free is suggested as an alternative to expensive leisure centres and appropriate for those on low incomes.
- 3.17 Sport and leisure is seen as important in strengthening communities and providing a source of positive activities for children and young people.
- 3.18 Children and young people hanging around are commonly identified as a problem. Intimidating behaviour, drinking, damaging property and generally causing a nuisance cause concern. Some issues appear to be localised e.g. metal theft and people riding motocross bikes on public land. Some people feel that better parenting, discipline in schools and tougher penalties for those who commit crime and anti social behaviour are needed.
- 3.19 Residents would be reassured by a greater police presence.
- 3.20 Residents are very clear that they do not want the council to waste money on unnecessary 'luxuries', projects or schemes. Mistakes, mis-management or poor decision making in the current economic climate would not be well received at all.
- 3.21 Whilst there are no proposals in the draft budget to cut funding in the community and voluntary sector, representatives from this sector express concerns about potentially having to meet shortfalls should other statutory services may be cut.
- 3.22 The perception exists that the council employs too many highly paid managers and that councillors are 'paid' too much. Although not asked, feedback indicates that residents are unlikely to feel that they receive value for money, which can be directly linked to driving levels of satisfaction.
- 3.23 People are generally mindful of the competing priorities and growing demands on the council, however residents do not want cuts to impact on frontline service delivery in any way.
- 3.24 Draft budget proposals as reported to Cabinet on 14 September have been noted by all scrutiny and performance panels with additional comments raised by Social Care Scrutiny panel as outlined in Appendix 1C and Health Scrutiny panel as outlined in Appendix 1F.

4. Council priorities

- 4.1 The budget process follows council priorities, including the agreement to use a VFM strategy to drive through savings proposals linked to working smarter and service redesign. Consultation is key to this, by ensuring the priorities of the council meet the needs of our customers.

5. Risk management

- 5.1 Actively listening and acting on the feedback from local people, including feedback gathered through budget consultation is critical to the effective decision making of the council. The council must make it clear how the views of local people have been used to influence decisions.

6. Financial implications

- 6.1 Consultation undertaken was funded from existing revenue budgets.

7. Legal implications

- 7.1 The council has a legal duty to set a balanced budget and to consult with Non Domestic Rate Payers (NNDR). Business representatives were consulted at a meeting on 20 October 2011.

8. Property implications

- 8.1 There are no direct implications from this report.

9. Staffing implications

- 9.1 There will be some staffing implications arising from the budget proposals, and consultation with employees and unions will be undertaken in accordance with required procedures.

10. Equality implications

- 10.1 None directly associated with this report. An equality impact assessment is undertaken on all policy items and on the overall budget.

11. Consultation

- 11.1 The consultation process is an example of how the council is continuing to consult with stakeholders on key issues as part of a council wide strategy for consultation and engagement. Budget consultation has included residents, business representatives and the voluntary and community sectors. Employee consultation is being held via the trade unions.
- 11.2 Scrutiny and performance panels will receive and consider any revisions to the draft budget proposals during November / December 2011.

Background papers

Appendix 1 – Recommendations from Scrutiny and Performance Panels on draft budget proposals.

Appendix 2 – Budget consultation 2012/13 summary of findings.

Authors

Vicky Buckley, Head of Finance, ☎ 652349, ✉ buckleyv@walsall.gov.uk

Stuart Wootton, Financial Planning Manager, ☎ 653554 ✉ woottons@walsall.gov.uk

Anna Sansom, Corporate Consultation Officer, ☎ 653520

✉ sansomanna@walsall.gov.uk



James Walsh
Assistant Director – Finance (CFO)
31 October 2011



Councillor Towe
Portfolio holder – Finance & Personnel
31 October 2011

Appendices: -	1A	Children's Services Scrutiny panel recommendations
	1B	Regeneration Scrutiny panel recommendations
	1C	Social Care Scrutiny panel recommendations
	1D	Community Services Scrutiny panel recommendations
	1E	Environment Scrutiny panel recommendations
	1F	Health Scrutiny panel recommendations
	1G	Corporate Scrutiny panel recommendations
	2	Budget Consultation 2012/13 Summary of Findings

Draft Budget 2012/13: Recommendations of the Children's and Young Peoples Scrutiny and Performance Panel following Budget Consultation

Summary of report

This report presents the comments and recommendations from the Children's and Young Peoples Scrutiny and Performance Panel following consideration of the draft budget proposals 2012/13 at the panel's meeting on 20 September 2011. This will enable consideration by Cabinet on 9 November 2011.

All scrutiny and performance panels have received draft budget proposals in respect of the services falling within their remit, and will receive and consider the revised draft budget proposals during November/December 2011, providing an opportunity to make further recommendations to Cabinet. Cabinet may wish to consider the feedback contained within this report in formulating their draft budget proposals

The Panel Resolved:

That the financial plan 2012/13 to 2014/15 and draft revenue and capital proposals be noted.

Author

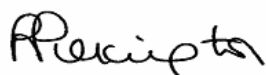
Craig Goodall

Scrutiny Officer

☎01922 653317

goodallc@walsall.gov.uk

Signed:



Pauline Pilkington
Executive Director

Signed:



Councillor Barbara Cassidy
Chair, Children's and Young Peoples Scrutiny
and Performance Panel

12 October 2011

Draft Budget 2012/13: Recommendations of the Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel following Budget Consultation

Summary of report

This report presents the comments and recommendations from the Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel following consideration of the draft budget proposals 2012/13 at the panel's meeting on 22 September 2011. This will enable consideration by Cabinet on 9 November 2011.

All scrutiny and performance panels have received draft budget proposals in respect of the services falling within their remit, and will receive and consider the revised draft budget proposals during November/December 2011, providing an opportunity to make further recommendations to Cabinet. Cabinet may wish to consider the feedback contained within this report in formulating their draft budget proposals

The Panel Resolved:

That the financial plan 2012/13 to 2014/15 and draft revenue and capital proposals be noted.

Author

Craig Goodall

Scrutiny Officer

☎01922 653317

goodallc@walsall.gov.uk

Signed:



Tim Johnson
Executive Director

Signed:



Councillor Ian Shires
Chair, Regeneration Scrutiny and
Performance Panel

17 October 2011

Draft Budget 2012/13: Recommendations of the Social Care and Inclusion Scrutiny and Performance Panel following Budget Consultation

Summary of report

This report presents the comments and recommendations from the Social Care and Inclusion Scrutiny and Performance Panel following consideration of the draft budget proposals 2012/13 at the panel's meeting on 6 October 2011. This will enable consideration by Cabinet on 9 November 2011.

All scrutiny and performance panels have received draft budget proposals in respect of the services falling within their remit, and will receive and consider the revised draft budget proposals during November/December 2011, providing an opportunity to make further recommendations to Cabinet. Cabinet may wish to consider the feedback contained within this report in formulating their draft budget proposals.

The Panel:

(1) Expressed the need for further information regarding the division of savings between care packages and the reduction in out-of-borough care packages and commented that it would not be possible to judge the impact on individual users and cases until further details became available.

(2) Was also concerned regarding the right of individuals to choose whether or not they continue to receive out-of-borough care.

(3) Noted the outline draft budget proposals.

Author

Matt Underhill
Scrutiny Officer

☎01922 652087

underhillm@walsall.gov.uk

Signed:



Paul Davies
Executive Director

11 October 2011

Signed:



Councillor Tim Oliver
Chair, Social Care & Inclusion Scrutiny and
Performance Panel

Draft Budget 2012/13: Recommendations of the Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel following Budget Consultation

Summary of report

This report presents the comments and recommendations from the Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel following consideration of the draft budget proposals 2012/13 at the panel's meeting on 18 October 2011. This will enable consideration by Cabinet on 9 November 2011.

All scrutiny and performance panels have received draft budget proposals in respect of the services falling within their remit, and will receive and consider the revised draft budget proposals during November/December 2011, providing an opportunity to make further recommendations to Cabinet. Cabinet may wish to consider the feedback contained within this report in formulating their draft budget proposals

The Panel resolved:

That the financial plan 2012/13 to 2014/15 and draft revenue and capital proposals be noted.

Author

Craig Goodall

Scrutiny Officer

☎01922 653317

goodallc@walsall.gov.uk

Signed:



Jamie Morris
Executive Director

Signed:



Councillor Louise Harrison
Chair, Community Services Scrutiny and
Performance Panel

21 October 2011

Draft Budget 2012/13: Recommendations of the Environment Scrutiny and Performance Panel following Budget Consultation

Summary of report

This report presents the comments and recommendations from the Environment scrutiny and performance panel following consideration of the draft budget proposals 2012/13 at the panel's meeting on 20 October, 2011. This will enable consideration by Cabinet on 9 November 2011.

All scrutiny and performance panels have received draft budget proposals in respect of the services falling within their remit, and will receive and consider the revised draft budget proposals during November/December 2011, providing an opportunity to make further recommendations to Cabinet. Cabinet may wish to consider the feedback contained within this report in formulating their draft budget proposals

The Panel Resolved:

That the report be noted.

Author

Neil Picken

☎01922 652018

pickenn@walsall.gov.uk

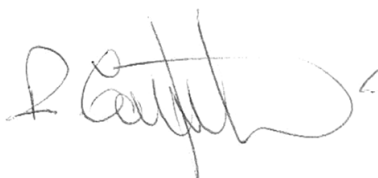
Signed:



Jamie Morris
Executive Director (Neighbourhoods)

21 October 2011

Signed:



Councillor Carpenter
Chair, Environment Scrutiny and Performance Panel

Draft Budget 2012/13: Recommendations of the Health Scrutiny and Performance Panel following Budget Consultation

Summary of report

This report presents the comments and recommendations from the Health Scrutiny and Performance Panel following consideration of the draft budget proposals 2012/13 at the panel's meeting on 24 October 2011. This will enable consideration by Cabinet on 9 November 2011.

All scrutiny and performance panels have received draft budget proposals in respect of the services falling within their remit, and will receive and consider the revised draft budget proposals during November/December 2011, providing an opportunity to make further recommendations to Cabinet. Cabinet may wish to consider the feedback contained within this report in formulating their draft budget proposals

Resolved:

That the following comments be considered by Cabinet in preparation of the 2012/13 budget and financial plan:

- a) **The concept of elderly residents and disabled adults being supported to live independently in the community is supported by the Health Scrutiny and Performance Panel, subject to there being sufficient checks and balances in the system to ensure their safety.**
- b) **Adequate support should be provided to elderly residents and disabled adults to make the correct decisions following delegation of personal budgets for care.**
- c) **The Health Scrutiny and Performance Panel considered the voluntary and community sector (VCS) as critical to ensuring as many elderly residents and disabled adults as possible are able to live independently. In view of this important role the VCS should be strongly supported by the Council and its partners through funding and capacity building.**

Author

Craig Goodall

Scrutiny Officer

☎01922 653317

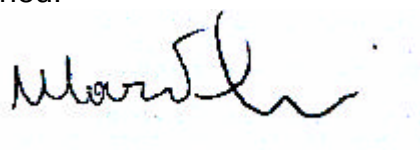
goodallc@walsall.gov.uk

Signed:



Paul Davies
Executive Director
1 November 2011

Signed:



Councillor Marco Longhi
Chair, Health Scrutiny and Performance Panel

Draft Budget 2012/13: Recommendations of the Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel following Budget Consultation

Summary of report

This report presents the comments and recommendations from the Corporate scrutiny and performance panel following consideration of the draft budget proposals 2012/13 at the panel's meeting on 27 October 2011. This will enable consideration by Cabinet on 9 November 2011.

All scrutiny and performance panels have received draft budget proposals in respect of the services falling within their remit, and will receive and consider the revised draft budget proposals during November/December 2011, providing an opportunity to make further recommendations to Cabinet. Cabinet may wish to consider the feedback contained within this report in formulating their draft budget proposals

Resolved

That the report be noted.

Author

Neil Picken

Senior Constitutional Services Officer

☎01922 652018

pickenn@walsall.gov.uk

Signed:



Rory Borealis
Executive Director (Resources)

28 October 2011

Signed:



Councillor S. Coughlan
Chair, Corporate Scrutiny and Performance
Panel



Walsall Council

Budget Consultation Financial Year 2012/13

October 2011

Summary of findings – FINAL

For more information please contact:

Anna Sansom
Corporate Consultation & Customer Feedback Officer
Communications & Marketing
Walsall Council, Civic Centre, Darwall Street, Walsall WS1 1TP

Telephone 01922 653520
Email sansomanna@walsall.gov.uk

Report contents

Section	Page number
1. Executive Summary	3
2. Budget Consultation Financial Year 2011/12 – the process	8
3. Summary of findings from Budget Simulator (quantitative)	11
4. Budget Consultation Financial Year 2011/12 - Budget Consultation feedback by theme (qualitative)	15
4.2 ▪ Litter and waste collection	15
4.3 ▪ Regeneration – town and district centres	16
4.4 ▪ A strong economy and doing business with the council	18
4.5 ▪ Car parking	19
4.6 ▪ Highway maintenance and transport	20
4.7 ▪ Adult Social Care	22
4.8 ▪ Leisure, health and well being	23
4.9 ▪ Services for young people	24
4.10 ▪ Libraries	25
4.11 ▪ Education and employment	27
4.12 ▪ Anti-social behaviour and community safety	28
4.13 ▪ Communication	30
4.14 ▪ Making savings and cuts	30
4.15 ▪ Difficult decisions	32
4.16 ▪ Working Smarter	33
5 Conclusion	34

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1.** During August, September and October 2011 feedback has been collected from residents and stakeholders to provide an insight into the spending priorities of local people. Naturally people think of the services they use, rely on and know of. It must be remembered that because services are not mentioned it does not necessarily mean they are not important.
- 1.2.** Each year Walsall Council undertakes public consultation in preparation for the budget setting process. Residents and other key groups including business leaders, community groups and voluntary organisations are given the opportunity to have their say on what they think should be the council's spending priorities for the coming financial year.
- 1.3.** The views of over 250 people were gathered. 147 of these were gathered through the council's online budget simulator (wave one 10 August to 16 October) which enabled people to balance their own budget by allocating money to different council services.
- 1.4.** The non scientific methodology used to conduct this research means that statistical reliability cannot be inferred, nor is it intended to be representative, however the information gathered can, when used alongside other data and intelligence, provide a rich picture of opinion and understanding.
- 1.5.** Results from wave 1 of the budget simulator show that;
 - Based on responses to the budget simulator leisure, sport and recreation is the priority spending area
 - Respondents also increased spending for roads and maintenance and public safety
 - Respondents reduced spending in all other areas, with the greatest reductions in benefits, housing, planning and building control and libraries and heritage
- 1.6.** Businesses and the community and voluntary sector support proposals for investment in job creation and agree that investing in children and young people and developing and retaining talent in the borough is paramount. Many were keen to sign up apprentices.
- 1.7.** Developing the local economy, reducing unemployment and increasing employment prospects is a key priority for many and is a common concern.
- 1.8.** Increasing the number of council contracts awarded to Walsall based businesses is welcomed, along with encouraging a culture of 'social

consciousness' within the business sector to ensure as much business is retained within the borough as possible. However the council's procurement process is perceived to be a barrier and in need of streamlining and simplifying, so not to preclude small local organisations from tendering and thus enabling growth.

- 1.9.** Increasing the range and number of positive activities for children and young people is seen as an important diversionary approach to reducing anti social behaviour. Young people call for a range of exciting and varied activities. Encouraging volunteering and creating volunteering opportunities is thought to bring a range of benefits to communities and those undertaking the volunteering.
- 1.10.** Investing in children and young people is seen as critical to the future of the borough
- 1.11.** Ensuring children, young people and adults are educated and possess the basic skills to ensure their employability is seen as a priority for the future prosperity of the borough. Ensuring there is the right mix of jobs to fulfil the local employment market is critical. Encouraging inward investment and supporting businesses and supporting people into jobs during the economic downturn is important to young and old alike.
- 1.12.** Libraries are important to those who use them and can provide a valued social lifeline to people. Residents feel that libraries could do more to increase usage and have an important role to play in education and tackling unemployment through things like support for job seekers and developing basic skills. Non library users do not see them as a priority.
- 1.13.** Vibrant, clean town and district centres are important for raising pride in the local area. Many people talk negatively about their local area describing it as 'run down' and 'dirty'. Systematically fining people who litter the streets is suggested by a number of people.
- 1.14.** Car parking charges continue to be an issue for residents and businesses. People are baffled by the perceived high charges imposed and call for a different strategy to be applied. Many believe car park charges are counter productive.
- 1.15.** Maintaining roads remains a priority, however people don't want to see money wasted on ineffective, poor quality repairs or unnecessary schemes.
- 1.16.** Maintaining an effective and accessible public transport system is important to people particularly young people, those with disabilities and older people. Young people in further education feel that some young people would be encouraged to remain in education if transport was free or subsidised. It is important to ensure that services meet the

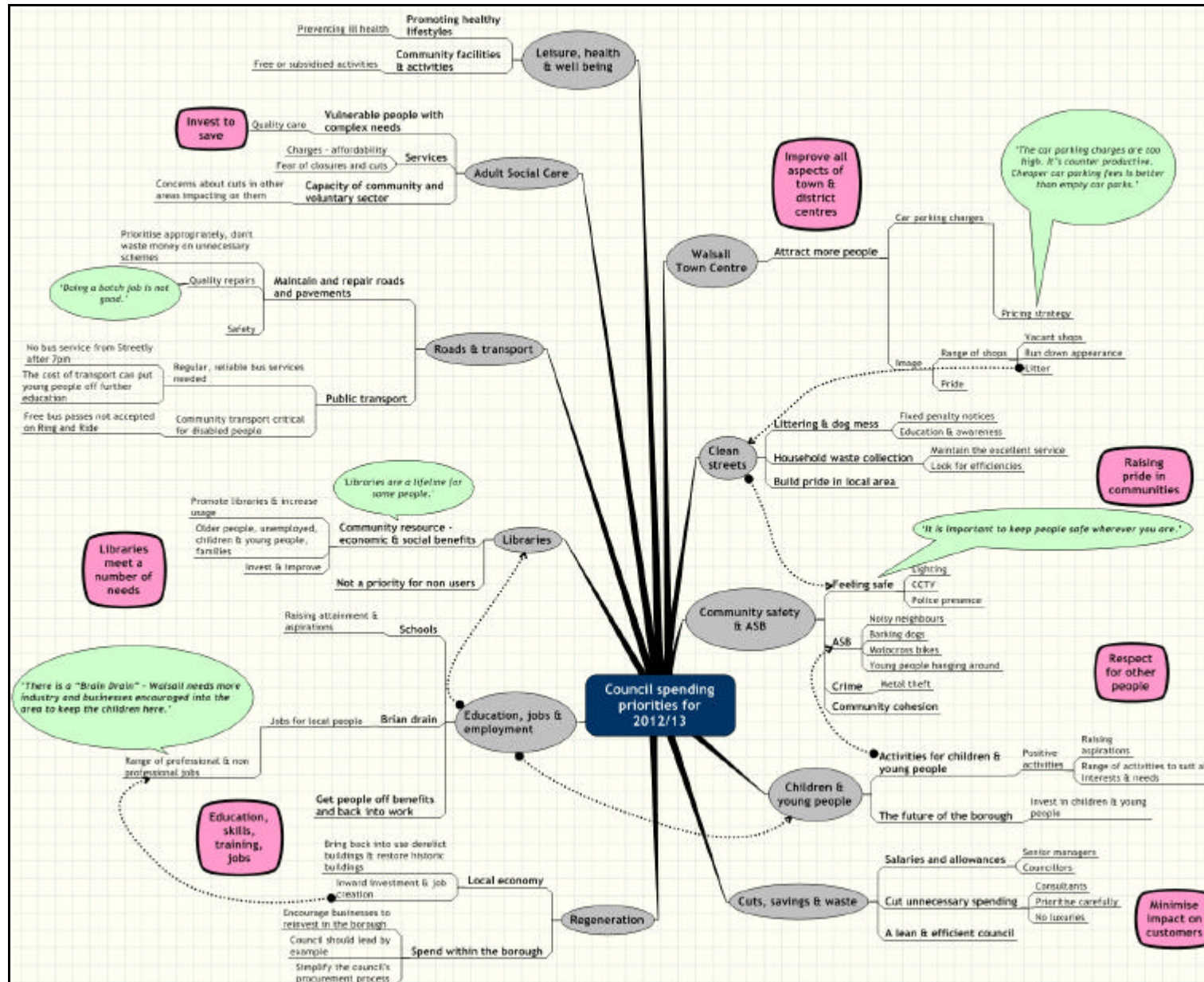
needs of local people , with services running to and from locations at the times they need it.

- 1.17.** Although older people and people with disabilities are eligible for free bus passes it was highlighted that they cannot be used on services like Ring and Ride which charges users. For those who cannot use public transport and are on low incomes, it can mean they are unable to get out and about leading to isolation.
- 1.18.** Users of adult social care services are fearful that the services they rely on and value will be cut. Maintaining and increasing the provision of quality care in the borough is a primary concern for them and their families.
- 1.19.** Residents identify the benefits of encouraging healthy lifestyles and its link to reducing costs in healthcare, reducing the number reliant on benefits and maintaining a fit and healthy workforce in the borough. Some people think that more needs to be done to communicate the services and facilities on offer in leisure centres and to encourage take up. Developing and encouraging people to exercise for free is suggested as an alternative to expensive leisure centres and appropriate for those on low incomes.
- 1.20.** Sport and leisure is seen as important in strengthening communities and providing a source of positive activities for children and young people.
- 1.21.** Children and young people hanging around are commonly identified as a problem. Intimidating behaviour, drinking, damaging property and generally causing a nuisance cause concern. Some issues appear to be localised e.g. metal theft and people riding motocross bikes on public land. Some people feel that better parenting, discipline in schools and tougher penalties for those who commit crime and anti social behaviour are needed.
- 1.22.** Residents would be reassured by a greater police presence.
- 1.23.** Residents are very clear that they do not want the council to waste money on unnecessary 'luxuries', projects or schemes. Mistakes, mis-management or poor decision making in the current economic climate would not be well received at all.
- 1.24.** Whilst there are no proposals in the draft budget to cut funding in the community and voluntary sector, representatives from this sector express concerns about potentially having to meet shortfalls should other statutory services may be cut.
- 1.25.** The perception exists that the council employs too many highly paid managers and that councillors are 'paid' too much. Although not asked, feedback indicates that residents are unlikely to feel that they

receive value for money, which can be directly linked to driving levels of satisfaction.

- 1.26.** People are generally mindful of the competing priorities and growing demands on the council, however residents do not want cuts to impact on frontline service delivery in any way.

Fig. 1 Mindmap of emerging themes and relationships from budget consultation. All topics were brought up unprompted.



2. Budget Consultation Financial Year 2011/12

2.1. The consultation process

Each year Walsall Council undertakes public consultation in preparation for the budget setting process. Through the use of surveys and informal discussion, residents and other key groups including business leaders, community groups and voluntary organisations are given the opportunity to have their say on what they think should be the council's spending priorities for the coming financial year. Views on spending priorities were collected between 10 August and 20 October 2011 (10 weeks).



Fig 2. A resident gives his views on council spending priorities

2.2. Ways to have a say

People could have their say via a range of methods including interactive tools, group discussions and social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Detailed descriptions follow here. Officers held discussions with younger people, service users, disabled groups and community and voluntary organisations.

2.3. Business Representatives

On 20 October 18 representatives from the business community attended a breakfast meeting to discuss priorities for the borough. Those attending represented a range of small and medium enterprises in and outside of the borough.



Fig.3 Business Breakfast Meeting held on 20 October 2011

The session began with a presentation on the council's financial outlook, its challenges for the future and an overview of the draft budget. Attendees then had the opportunity to ask questions followed by discussion.

2.4. Community and voluntary sector representatives

Following the business breakfast meeting on 20 October, a meeting was held for representatives of the community and voluntary sector. A range of organisations were represented covering health, children and young people, older people, disabilities, families, faith groups, community safety, housing, transport and community associations.

2.5. Budget Simulator

On 10 August 2011 the council launched its Budget Simulator www.walsall.gov.uk/budget_simulator, this online tool allows people to find out about the services the council provides and how much they costs each year. Respondents could then decide how to allocate the budget across 17 different services.

The budget simulator collected data in two waves. 147 people took part in wave one between 10 August until 16 October 2011. The second wave of data collection took place between 31 October to 14 November 2011 (results of wave two will be reported to Cabinet in December). Budget Simulator was publicised in the local press, on the council's website and staff intranet.

2.6. Other ways to have a say

People could also have their say in writing, by telephone, email or text message. Alternative formats were also available on request.

2.7. Qualitative and quantitative research methods

Qualitative research in the form of group discussions and interviews was used as a way of obtaining detailed, contextual and discursive information from local people, in an informal setting. Qualitative research is inherently different from its quantitative partner. Qualitative research derives data from observation, interviews, or verbal interactions and focuses on the meanings and interpretations of the participants. It is not about numbers, percentages, frequencies or significance but is primarily concerned with "Why"?



Fig 4. Members of the Youth Cabinet identify council services

Moreover, it must be remembered when interpreting the results that they are not based on quantitative statistical evidence. The findings are based on a small sample, which is designed to cover a cross-section of residents, this should not be confused with statistical representativeness.

Quantitative data was collected using the council's online Budget Simulator. Whilst this tool collected the views of 147 people it must be noted that the simulator was solely available online on a self selection basis and therefore represents the views of those with access to the Internet.

3. Summary of findings from Budget Simulator (wave one)



3.1. Walsall's budget simulator

This online tool collected peoples' views in a structured way. The Budget Simulator was tailored to reflect the council's 2011/12 budget and included 17 spending areas capturing the bulk of council services and spend. The simulator is a high-level approach to consultation on the budget and is informative and engaging for people, helping respondents understand the context within which the budget is set.

Results from the budget simulator should be used along side the information presented in sections 4 onwards of this report as well as other existing data and intelligence.

The budget simulator was used to collect data in two waves, wave one running from 10 August to 16 October and wave two from 31 October to 14 November 2011. Results from wave two of the budget simulator will be reported to the December 2011 Cabinet.

3.2. Spending areas

The following spending areas were included in wave one of the budget simulator, along with their respective budget. For ease and to keep the number of spending areas to a manageable number some services, along with their budget, were combined. A number of core support services were not included in the budget simulator.

The budget used in the simulator totalled £192,287,000, rounded to the nearest '000. The spending areas were;

- Libraries, Arts and Heritage
- Revenues
- Benefits
- Community Safety
- Children's Services
- Supporting Education & Attainment (excluding schools)
- Adult Social Care
- Street Cleansing
- Grounds Maintenance and Greenspaces
- Young Peoples' Services
- Waste Services
- Roads and Maintenance
- Planning and Building Control

- Housing
- Leisure, Sport and Recreation
- Economic Regeneration
- Public Safety

147 people took part in wave one of the budget simulator exercise and attempted to set their own budget for Walsall Council.

3.3. Key findings

- Respondents were most likely to increase spending on leisure, sport and recreation, roads and maintenance and public safety and are therefore spending priorities for respondents
- The spending area most respondents decreased was benefits, followed by housing, planning and building control and libraries, arts and heritage

Budget Simulator allocation - average % change from current year budget (wave one)	2012-13 % change
Benefits	-7.1
Housing	-5.1
Planning and Building Control	-4.7
Libraries, Arts and Heritage	-4.4
Revenues	-3
Supporting Education & Attainment (excluding schools)	-2.4
Waste Services	-2.2
Economic Regeneration	-1.9
Grounds Maintenance and Greenspaces	-1.9
Street Cleansing	-1.5
Adult Social Care	-0.6
Young People's Services	-0.3
Children's Services	-0.2
Community Safety	-0.2
Public Safety	0.7
Roads and Maintenance	0.7
Leisure, Sport and Recreation	0.9

All respondents (147)

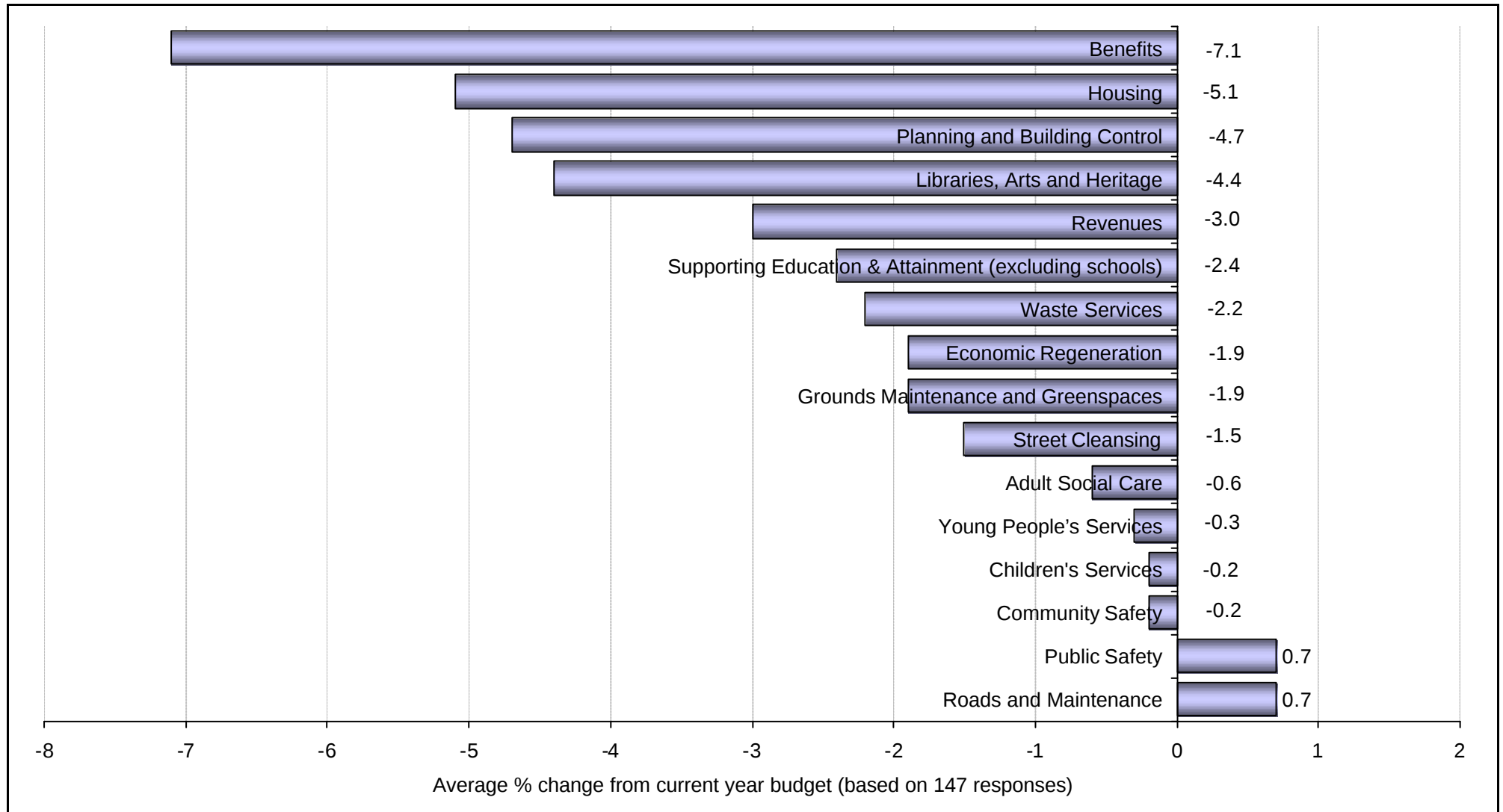
Fig 5. Budget simulator average % change in budget allocation by spending area (wave one)

Leisure, sport and recreation, roads and maintenance and public safety were the only spending areas where the average % change was positive, meaning collectively respondents feel spending in these areas should be increased and are thus most important to them.

Benefits, housing, planning and building control and libraries, arts and heritage received the largest average spending reductions. As in 2010 benefits was the spending which received the largest spending reduction in the simulator. Whilst supporting information explained that benefit payments do not come out of the council's budget, there still appears to be a misunderstanding about how benefits are funded.

Fig.6 Budget Simulator Results 2012/13 – Allocation of spending across council services (wave one)

Results from the council's budget simulator help indicate where people's spending priorities lie. Based on the responses of 147 people. Where minus numbers indicate reduction in spending against the current council budget for that spending area.



4. Budget Consultation Financial Year 2011/12 - Budget Consultation feedback by theme *(including those made on the budget simulator, in face to face interviews, group discussions and meetings)*

4.1. Please note that all verbatim quotes used in the following text are referenced according to the source. The abbreviations are as follows:

- BS Budget Simulator
- BUS Business representatives
- MOC Making Our Choice (disability group)
- NHS Expert Patient Conference
- PEL Face to face interviews conducted in Pelsall
- PHE Growing Older in Pheasey event
- SIG Safeguarding and Inspection Group (young people)
- STR Growing Older in Streetly event
- SUR Service Users Reference Group (social care group)
- UKYP Youth Parliament Cabinet (young people)
- VOL Community and voluntary sector
- WHG Walsall Housing Group Annual Conference

4.2. Litter and waste collection

Litter and untidy, run down areas are a particular gripe. Some people call for enforcement action through the issuing of fixed penalty notices for littering, which would also generate income, reduce expenditure on litter picking, which in turn could be diverted to other activities.

'Residents create litter hence stop cleaning up after them and force them to take responsibility for their actions.' BS

'Some people drop litter because they think they are keeping people in work.' UKYP

'...keep the streets clean and start prosecuting people for dropping litter out of vehicles and on the streets! Not enough of these penalty notices are given.' BS

'There is a lot of litter, could have more bins but people don't use them. Littering and dog fouling need to be tackled. Fines are not followed through and should be.' PHE

A cleaner more attractive environment is thought to have a range of benefits, particularly raising pride and making Walsall a nicer place to visit. As well as fines young people suggested using a mix of methods to try and educate and encourage people not to drop litter and to look after their environment.

'Make it a tidier place, it will benefit everyone and encourage people to visit.' SIG

'Fine people for dropping litter but also educate people. Do some

marketing in the street. Work with communities and schools to help.'
SIG

'I want to see more kids helping clean parks. There would be less crime if they valued their environment more.' STR

Cleaning up litter hotspots and tackling the problem of dog fouling is a reoccurring issue raised by residents. A cleaner greener environment can evoke a greater feeling of pride and safety.

'Walsall and surrounding areas is a dirty depressing place, a place where I feel unsafe just when walking my dog. The pavements are covered in dog mess, broken glass and litter.' BS

'There was dog mess right outside the shop door on the pavement. The dog warden said they could put up more notices. We need more dog poo bins and fines.' PEL

On a positive note, graffiti removal in Pelsall was described as 'swift and effective' and road sweepers in Willenhall 'are making a difference.'

The household waste collection service is particularly well received being described as 'exemplary', 'a great service' and '10/10'. However some thought that the service could be made more efficient, but did not make suggestions as to how. Moving to a fortnightly collection of grey bins was suggested by some, but strongly opposed by others.

'Waste collection is great. You should encourage people to reduce their grey bin content further. Help people recycle and compost more.' SUR

'Grey bins don't need collecting weekly.' PHE

'Important to keep weekly collections and fortnightly recycling.' SUR

Likewise the Household Waste Recycling Centres were seen as important, especially in their role in minimising fly tipping.

'The tips are important. People fly tip rubbish.' MOC

4.3. Regeneration – town and district centres

Many thought that tackling litter and those that drop it was important, however comments were often expressed alongside dissatisfaction with the general 'run down' appearance of the area, particularly Walsall Town Centre. Derelict buildings and empty shops do not portray the right image and thus puts people off visiting.

'The shopping arcade by Wilkinson's used to be really nice but now it's no longer attractive. Empty shops are a blight on the high street.' SIG

'Walsall Town Centre is scummy.' PEL

'There are a lot of vacant shops which put people off visiting.' SUR

'We need a good range of shops. It's not good having closed shops.'
MOC

'There is not much in the centre of Darlaston. Why pump money into Walsall and let the rest go downhill.' NHS

'Willenhall is a dump, the buildings are neglected.' NHS

Business representatives expressed concern about the vitality of Walsall town centre, specifically asking if a strategy had been developed to tackle its perceived decline and other issues.

'Town centre retailers are concerned. We need a strategy, what are we doing about it? The town centre is extremely important.' BUS

Dissatisfaction with Walsall town centre is a common complaint. Working with and learning from other areas is suggested as a positive way forward.

'The town centre is a mess, with any money being spent on new builds a waste of money because the end result is ugly i.e. the new waterfront flats look like Lego buildings, Butler's Passage is disgusting and a complete waste of money. Take a look at other towns where they care for their areas and then look at Walsall!' BS

'Look at West Brom, we don't want to be like that! Seen worse but Walsall could do better.' PEL

'Gangs of youths hanging around, it puts people off visiting. Also people drinking on the streets in Walsall town centre. Isn't drinking banned in Walsall town centre? If so this ban needs to be properly enforced and increased visible police / Community Support Officer presence to enforce it.' SUR

Some people made suggestions for how Walsall town centre could be improved and what needs to be tackled.

'I would like to see the regeneration of some of the old historic buildings, sympathetic to the history of the area.' PEL

'It would be good to remove the old fountain on The Bridge. It's defunct and has become a place for young people to hang around, intimidating people.' SUR

There were mixed views on the importance and role of regeneration with some respondents believing it to be very important to the local economy and

others feeling that the council's role should focus on enabling and encouraging inward investment and private development.

'The highest priority NEEDS to be in regeneration...that will reap the biggest long term benefits for local economy.' BS

'I don't think the council should be spending anything on regeneration, it should take an enabling role by encouraging private development rather than spending my taxes on expensive officers who don't actually do anything!' BS

4.4. A strong economy and doing business with the council

Ensuring that as much spending is retained in the borough is seen as important for growing the local economy. Increasing the percentage of council contracts awarded to Walsall businesses is seen as a major starting point and that the council should lead by example. Representatives from both the business and community and voluntary sectors were disappointed to hear that 54% of council contracts are fulfilled by Walsall based organisations.

'You need something to tempt businesses away from their existing suppliers. Bigger firms are able to offer 90 day credit agreements, small businesses don't have the capacity to do this. Can the council help with that?' BUS

'Companies with a social consciousness reinvest in the borough and more should be encouraged to do so.' BUS

'Ensure the council spends within Walsall. Many contracts have been lost outside of the borough.' BUS

Community and voluntary sector representatives were particularly critical and frustrated by the council's tendering process, feeling that the process excludes them from the start.

'Before tendering the council has already made its mind up who it will award the contract to. Contracts are disappearing outside of the borough.' VOL

'By awarding contracts outside the borough the voluntary sector is not enabled to grow.' VOL

'If you are not careful there won't be anyone left [in the community and voluntary sector] to deliver services.' VOL

'We are all trying to work as businesses and want the council to work with us. We are in this together.' VOL

Also some business representatives were critical of the council's tendering process, feeling 'it is biased towards companies who can tick boxes' and more need to be done to enable the local economy to tender for council contracts.

Representatives of the community and voluntary sector were jubilant to hear the council is committed to improving tendering process and making it slicker and were pleased to hear that the council is looking to increase spend within Walsall.

'The council is not easy to deal with. People have given up trying.' VOL

'Procurement is a nightmare when you are a small one man band. You don't have the necessary skills. People are excluded due to procurement processes.' VOL

Dyfed Council were given as an example where the procurement process had been made simpler and support in the form of training sessions on how to apply for grants was offered. Voluntary sector representatives are keen to be involved in helping redesign the procurement process.

'Dyfed got rid of the 50 page forms.' VOL

Business representatives want to see the council working to attract and build relationships with the 'strategic players'. Whilst Think Walsall are praised for their good work, businesses feel that more needs to be done to communicate this.

4.5. Car parking

Drivers and non drivers, including young people, believe that car parking charges in Walsall town centre are too high and it puts them and others off from visiting. People note that many of the town's car parks are empty, saying that people are opting to park in Tesco for free or on residential streets outside the town centre.

'The car parking charges are too high. It's counter productive. Cheaper car parking fees is better than empty car parks.' SIG

'Car park charges are too high and they charge on a Sunday now too. It is stopping people coming into the town centre.' SUR

'Free car parking in the town centre will bring people in.' MOC

Business representatives also raise concerns about the impact of car park charges, in particular on street car parking charges which they believe have negatively affected trade in Walsall town centre.

'After the introduction of parking charges Walsall businesses have suffered. Why do we do this? It hits people really hard, surely we can look at that? Biting the hand that feeds, it's counter productive.' BUS

Businesses were surprised to hear that free car parking provided in the run up to Christmas did not increase usage, some did not even know it was offered.

The general feeling is that lower car parking charges would encourage more people to visit the town and in turn would encourage retailers and employers to locate there, meaning the whole town prospers. Once a better town centre has been established with quality shops, restaurants, bars and entertainment, residents indicated that higher car park charges could be justified.

'Reducing charges would encourage more people to use the car parks and visit the town centre. Surely the council would make just as much money as they do now if not more because more people would use the car parks if the prices were lower.' SUR

'A more strategic pricing policy is needed to encourage more people to visit the town centre.' SIG

'I would not think twice about paying £7 to park all day at the Bull Ring.' PEL

4.6. Highway maintenance and transport

Maintaining roads and pavements remains a priority in terms of safety and image. Whilst people want the council to 'do a proper job' they don't want to see money wasted on 'unnecessary schemes' and resurfacing what some people think are perfectly good roads.

'You need to do a proper job with repairs as temporary measures don't work and are a false economy.' SUR

'Doing a botch job is not good.' STR

'You waste money on resurfacing / repairing good roads but not minor repairs.' PHE

'Cutting the speed limit on Sutton Road is just not necessary.' PHE

'Victoria Road in Pelsall, they resurfaced the ends but patched up the middle. They didn't do a proper full job, no idea why.' PEL

One resurfacing scheme in Pelsall was perceived to have been very poorly planned and managed which caused problems locally. The suggestion was made to better inform and involve local people in local road works planning.

'The road works on Station Road were mayhem, bad planning and not properly thought through. People were having road rage, shouting and swearing. Need better planning and consultation with residents.' PEL

Older people value their free bus passes, however older people are frustrated by reductions in bus services, that buses from Walsall to Streetly do not operate after 7pm and buses do not run on a Sunday. Likewise people in Bentley are critical of the bus service.

'Free passes are good.' SUR

'If you want to go out in Walsall in the evening on the bus you can't get back.' STR

'Bentley has a terrible bus service. It doesn't go to Willenhall and there is no service after 4pm meaning friends can't visit.' NHS

'The bus service in Streetly is important. We have an ageing population.' STR

Students think that free bus passes or subsidised public transport would help them, especially with Education Maintenance Grants being cut. In particular this would help and encourage poorer students to consider entering further education.

'Education Maintenance Allowance has stopped, there are student bursaries but poorer students can't afford to study. Free bus passes would encourage more young people to stay on.' SIG

'A good bus network is important.' UKYP

'Transport [community transport] is important so you can get to places. The public buses too.' MOC

A transport provider at the business meeting explained the problem that some people who are entitled to free bus passes cannot use them as their disability / infirmity prevents them from using public transport. Instead they use services like Ring and Ride which is chargeable. For people on low incomes this cost of transport can be a significant barrier. Additional funding would bridge this gap.

People with disabilities highlight the problem of people cycling on pavements and in pedestrianised areas and that they should be stopped. For those with visual impairments safe crossing routes are essential.

'Stop people riding on the footpaths, it's unsafe.' MOC

'For older people their vision is reduced so being able to cross the road safely is important.' STR

4.7. Adult Social Care

Quality care and support for vulnerable people including those with disabilities and the elderly was highlighted.

'Important to support vulnerable people.' WHG

'Bring people together to support and help one another.' WHG

'There are complex needs in the community.' WHG

'Older peoples' services are really important.' MOC



Fig 7. Members of a disabled advocacy group voted on their priorities (low level of crime, health services and community activities were top priorities for the group)

One person was worried about facilities for her husband who had suffered a stroke, whilst another was concerned about the provision of dementia care in the borough which she thought was 'seriously lacking'.

'He used to go to the Pinfold Centre but now he goes to the Stan Ball Centre which is further and costs a lot more.' PEL

'Walsall does not have enough quality care provision for people with dementia. Should do whatever is possible to keep people living independently in their own homes.' PEL

'There is so much fear and uncertainty in social care.' SUR

Those with disabilities are concerned about the possible closure of day centres and that personalisation of budgets may mean that people do not come together to socialise.

'If day centres close, people end up isolated and on their own. Don't discount the value of socialising.' SUR

'Own budgets don't bring people together in one place.' MOC

The introduction of charges for certain services worries some people who feel some older people won't be able to afford the services they need, and as a result suffer or be at increased risk. Having the flexibility to be able to pay for services in cash was also thought to be important, as some older people prefer this over other payment methods.

'The service used to be free but is going to be £12.50 a month. What about people who can't afford this service, those living on a pension?' WHG

'Being able to pay by cash is important. Older people prefer cash and don't use cards and banks or Direct Debit. It is difficult to go into the town centre and pay if you live on the outskirts of the borough.' WHG

Service users stress the importance of the services they use, with many people being dependent on these services, however they acknowledge the competing demands on reduced budgets.

'There are many essential services for vulnerable people who are dependent on them, but it's not a bottomless pit and you need to spend carefully.' SUR

One person who did not appear to use adult social care held a different view;

'I feel too much is spend on Adult Social Care and the more help you give people, the more they will rely on it and never do anything for themselves (same with benefits). BS

4.8. Leisure health and wellbeing

Links are made between the provision of sports and leisure facilities and the potential savings that can be avoided by ensuring people are active and look after their health. Some think that investment in this area would in turn help develop and strengthen communities.

'I can't believe how small the sport and leisure budget is. This should be made much bigger as it directly impacts and the health and wellbeing of our community. This in itself will save money on NHS treatment, economic losses from sick days, treatment of depression etc as well as keeping our children fit and healthy. Community sports clubs should also be a priority to receive support as they provide activities for children and adults from local communities and provide a voluntary focus for community spirit and togetherness which is surely what Big Society is all about.' BS

'Cheaper or free leisure services could help avoid costly illnesses in the future.' SUR

'Leisure services are important for a health lifestyle. Often only get used by a small minority.' SUR

'It's important to give young people something to do and provide exercise facilities for all ages.' SUR

'If leisure centres have to cut services put on and promote free stuff like walking.' MOC

One person suggested making better use of facilities already in the community which would increase provision, be 'more local' and save money on costly leisure centre provision.

'Make better use of school facilities out of hours. You could subsidise the school and activities it runs in the local community. You might not need leisure centres at all.' SUR.

Following the closure of the swimming baths, some Willenhall residents feel it is too far to travel to Darlaston or Walsall for swimming and that the area lacks any sort of social environment with nowhere to go, particularly for children and young people.

4.9. Services for Young People

Many of the respondents prioritised spending on services for young people believing this is crucial to the future of Walsall borough.

'It is imperative that the council invests in our young people, they are our future and whilst we need to continue to maintain other services, we need to remember that our children will be keeping us going when we get to old age.' BS

'There should be a focus on young people because they are the next generation. Need to prioritise spending on youth centres, schools and provision for young people' BS.

'Children's Services needs more funding to work on prevention rather than putting a plaster on the problem. Parents can learn to actually parent their children and in turn their children will be better citizens.' BS

'Young people must be helped, otherwise you get a generation feeling useless, vandalism, robbery and crime in general increases costing more in the long term. Today's youth are our future we must not let them down!' BS

'Need a greater focus on provision for older children and teenagers.' PHE

Investing in services for children and young people now is thought to save money in the future. The provision of positive activities is deemed important for keeping children and young people out of trouble and 'off the streets'.

'Need things for teenagers to do, they get bored.' STR

'There is nothing for teenagers to do. Not much recreation to keep them occupied. They need to exert their energy in something.' PEL

'More needs to be done for people who are disadvantaged/disabled, extra budget would help these people. Extra monies for libraries, leisure centres and young peoples services would keep more children off the street in poorer areas and give them something to do.' BS

Offering the right range of activities is important. Whilst some young people want to see youth clubs improved they highlight that they are not for everyone. Tailoring provision to needs and wants is important, for example in areas where motocross and quad biking on public / private land is a problem, look at providing a facility like a scramble track or a mechanics workshop / course in the area.

'Not all young people want to go to a youth club.' UKYP

'Youth centres need to be open and offer more activities. Live things up a bit!' SIG

'Run a mechanics course in Darlaston.' SIG

'It's important to raise the aspirations of young people. Things to do in the community such as community sports.' SIG

4.10. Libraries

There were polarised opinions regarding Walsall's library service, with some respondents keen to ensure that the service is maintained, made more efficient and developed, whilst others feel that there are too many libraries which are underused and out of date.

'Libraries are currently underused as centres of learning. They are integral in people increasing their literacy and opportunities, and in helping people find jobs or start up their own businesses. If Walsall wants to help its own economy and future prospects, libraries need to be valued and given many more opportunities to help Walsall citizens.' BS

'Make sure libraries are used.' SUR

'Libraries are I am afraid out of date and not providing services the majority of the public want or need. Not worth spending the amount which is young peoples services and sport and leisure combined.'

There has got to be a better, more efficient way of delivering this service. Order books and posted / delivered and collected via other council means - with recycling collection, neighbourhood drop off points?’ BS

‘Do we really need 16 libraries?’ SUR

Some view libraries as a crucial part of the community with mobile libraries being important for those who cannot get out easily and provide a place where people can meet and socialise and help with education.

‘Libraries are a lifeline for some people.’ SUR

‘Libraries are the heart and soul of the community.’ SUR

‘Don’t cut libraries for children and other residents. It is a social place to go.’ STR



Fig 8. Considering priorities

Some respondents suggested that libraries could play a greater role in providing services and recreational activities and improve learning and career opportunities for children and young people.

‘Libraries are well used, it’s a social thing. It’s good to encourage children to read and they provide activities for children.’ PHE

‘Libraries cater for those who are less well off and help people learn.’ UKYP

‘Extra monies for libraries, leisure centres and young peoples’ services would keep more children off the street in poorer areas and give them something to do.’ BS

'The logic behind my submission is that by investing money into children's services, libraries and leisure facilities is that we improve employment opportunities for young people hence increasing income into the council and local markets. By ensuring that leisure facilities are available then we can ensure there is recreation for people and address health issues as well.' BS

'Libraries should be central to all communities and I feel could be developed further for central contact points for many parts of the council and volunteer groups....' BS

Some people are unaware of the different services and facilities libraries offer, many view libraries in a traditional light.

'Everyone associates libraries with keeping quiet and reading a book. My daughter loves craft, I didn't know libraries did that. You just don't hear about it.' WHG

4.11. Education and employment

Education is seen as a priority by young and old alike. High levels of unemployment and Walsall's resilience to cope during the current economic climate clearly worry people, particularly young people.

'More job opportunities in the borough would encourage young people to stay in the area after university. Focus on highly skilled, professional occupations.' UKYP

'Kids are going to struggle enough getting jobs in the current economic climate, so they need a good start.' PHE

'Education is a priority because it is hard for young people to access jobs and further education. Need a good start to help them in the future.' UKYP

'It's important to have good schools and adult education.' MOC

Ensuring local people have the right skills to fulfil the needs of local employers was highlighted as a key issue. Business representatives were encouraged to hear that Walsall College and Walsall Adult Community College tailor their courses to meet local needs.

'It's important to get adults back into work and ensure people have the right skills.' BUS

Walsall needs the right jobs for local people. Young people talk of there not being the jobs they want in the borough and may once completed their studies be forced to move away, assuming they can afford it.

'Need jobs that young people are interested in.' SIG

'You won't get a job in Walsall and many people can't afford to move away for work.' SIG

'There is nothing to attract people to Walsall, particularly professional jobs for highly qualified people.' WHG

'There is a "Brain Drain" – Walsall needs more industry and businesses encouraged into the area to keep the children here.' WHG

'Graduates go to Wolverhampton University and never come back, the talent goes outside the borough.' VOL

One person highlighted all the work that is going on to support Neets (young people not in education, employment or training) however very little is thought to be done to retain and attract graduates to the borough.

Creating opportunities for all is important.

'Prioritise life chances, bring in more businesses and improve the transport network.' PHE

Community enterprises, apprenticeships and volunteering are suggested by some young people as a way to ensure young people can gain skills and experience. In the difficult economic climate people think supporting people into jobs is important.

'Young people could get involved in maintaining parks and green spaces as part of their Duke of Edinburgh Award. Volunteering to undertake tasks that will help them develop skills and experience that they can use on their CV or university application.' UKYP

'You could set up enterprises with apprenticeships in the community setting.' SIG

'Employment is important, run schemes to help people get off benefits and be supported into employment.' SUR

4.12. Anti-social behaviour and community safety

Young people hanging around and feeling safe when out and about appears to be the primary concern when talking about crime and anti-social behaviour.

'It is important to keep people safe wherever you are.' MOC

'CCTV is important, you feel safer.' MOC

'Young people hanging around, drinking and causing trouble.' PEL

'They [young people] just hang around on the benches and on the play equipment [Blakenall].' WHG

'The parks are really nice and the council spends a lot of money making them nice, but then the kids just trash them. There are no park wardens.' WHG

The availability of cheap alcohol causes problems and concerns for one person living in Blakenall and she questions the decision making of the council.

'Walsall Council granted a licence for another booze shop in Blakenall, there are now 12 in the area. The community objected to the licence but it was granted anyway. Young people hang around drinking and causing trouble, it will make the problem worse.' WHG

Metal theft is also highlighted as a particular problem in the Blakenall area with reports of residents running scrap metal businesses from their homes. Incidents of metal theft appear to be commonplace including the theft of metal railings and play equipment.

'Metal play equipment was stolen from the park near Coalpool Crescent and railings by the allotments, it's dangerous by the bridge now.' WHG

Within tight knit communities some people feel they can't report issues to the police for fear of reprisals and intimidation and thus it's better to 'keep quiet'.

'What can you do about it? The noise team came out to a party and the music was turned off but as soon as they go it goes back on again. The same with the police, as soon as they go it's back on again. The next day the people having the party were asking who reported them. You feel intimidated so that you can't say anything about the noise, trouble and scrap wagons. In close knit communities where people are related, people find out.' WHG

'No one reports it through fear or reprisals.' WHG

Trail bikes, quad bikes and motocross bikes cause a problem for some residents. Riding on public roads and on greenspaces, it causes a noise nuisance and safety hazard for other people.

'Riding trail bikes on the canal towpaths and quad bikes in the road doing handbrake turns. I don't think people mean to do it [cause anti-social behaviour], they just don't think.' WHG

'There is a problem with noise from motocross bikes on Valley Side. I have reported it to the police but it's no better. Someone is going to get hurt.' PEL

Better parenting, discipline in schools and harsher penalties for breaking the law are some suggestions given by residents to tackle anti-social behaviour.

'They get arrested and a £50 fine but it doesn't solve the problem, there are no real deterrents. There needs to be a heavy duty community payback scheme, litter picking is not harsh enough.' WHG

Building pride and community spirit are highlighted as in need of attention.

'More community spirit, people will care.' WHG

'Need more community activities to bring people together to support and help one another.' WHG

'Mossley needs a community centre, there is no where to go, it could be a place to meet and talk about problems, a focal point for the community.' WHG

'People used to know each other and could sort things out themselves rather than having to ring the council or the police which costs money. People need to talk more. More community spirit.' PHE

Business representatives were pleased to hear that total recorded crime and anti social behaviour is down, as well a rising detection rates. Business representatives shared concerns with the police about rising rates of business crime, particularly shoplifting, however were reassured by the extra police resources being allocated to this.

4.13. Communication

Communication was a particular issue in Streetly and Pheasey, both these areas having Birmingham postcodes do not receive the Walsall Observer or Chronicle free papers and instead receive Birmingham editions.

'I know everything that is going on in Sutton Coldfield and Birmingham but nothing in Walsall. I hear about things through word of mouth.' STR

'Can't the council do something to get the free papers delivered to us in Streetly? Surely it's in their interests and cheaper than other methods?' STR

4.14. Making savings and cuts

Residents are in agreement that the council must not waste money on unnecessary schemes and 'luxuries'. Communicating clearly about what is spent and why may help overcome perceptions of wastage – open data.

'Don't waste money on resurfacing good roads but not fixing pot holes (the one by Morrison's)' PHE

'Speed limits signage is good, but they are now spending too much money on electronic signage.' PHE

'Don't waste money on consultants' PHE

'Stop spending money on things we don't need.' MOC

Some comments made specific suggestions as to how costs could be reduced. Respondents are keen to see prudent decision making and no wastage on what they see as unnecessary luxuries.

'Outsourcing service delivery to the private sector to achieve efficiencies and economies of scale.' BS

'Can we have our swimming pools & leisure centres run by either Sandwell or Wolverhampton? They both have more, better, newer facilities like Tipton Sports Academy or Aldersley Leisure Village. Nothing in Walsall even comes close.' BS

'I would cut the services which will have least impact of safety, security or health and increase those that have most impact on those areas where there is currently a relatively low level of investment. The highest budget cost centres are left unchanged because they are the highest priority and because a minor increase will not make a significant improvement to services compared to those chosen.' BS

'Some cuts in the right places should see the council through the next couple years with very little impact to citizens. Far too much money is wasted on dreamy regeneration and niceties. Of course, this need looking at, but be practical and realistic. There isn't time or money in the current climate for ponderous luxuries.' BS

'Cuts don't help the economy. Too many cuts will add to the problem.' WHG

Many respondents express concerns about perceived high salaries and allowances paid to Councillors and senior managers within the council.

'My [simulated] budget revolves around trimming executive directors', assistant directors', strategic leads', service heads' and all the other senior managers..' BS

'Cut pay for senior managers.' BS

A number of the comments demonstrate a lack of awareness and understanding of councillor allowances and what they do in return. Doing more to actively communicate this information should be considered.

'Too many overpaid councillors and managers. It's a disgrace that councillors and managers don't have pay cuts or freezes but those at the bottom end of the structure have to.' BS

'Still spending too much on senior officers pay and on councillor allowances.' BS

As observed in 2010 many comments relate to streamlining management tiers within the council to ensure a more lean, efficiently run council, doing everything possible to avoid any negative impact on front line services.

Representatives from the community and voluntary sector were reassured that there were no specific proposals in the draft budget to cut funding for the sector. However concerns were raised and reassurances sought about cuts in other services, statutory services, that may indirectly impact on them, where the sector is expected to 'fill the gap'.

'The voluntary sector will be expected to fill the gap.' VOL

'What else is coming, I have concerns about cuts in other areas. I am worried about shifting costs to us and us not being able to do it.' VOL

4.15. Difficult decisions

A number of comments demonstrate the difficulty of balancing a budget with so many competing priorities. People don't want to see services cut and feel frustrated by the economic situation and government cuts.

'Don't want anything cut.' STR

'The government needs to provide more to support this budget and increase it. The services are all important.' BS

'Walsall Council do a lot and I am amazed about how much is done.' PHE

'I think the council does a good job.' STR

'There are some tough decisions to make and some things we can cut back on whilst other things really need to be maintained.' BS

'Nothing comes for nothing.' STR

Where cuts are necessary careful prioritisation is required based on need.

'I think that budget cuts should be considered in life and death situations. For example if it takes a little longer for planning applications

to be processed then so be it, but if a person requires care for end of life then this should be a priority.’ BS

4.16. Working Smarter

In Working Smarter representatives from the community and voluntary sector stress the importance of working with them to understand customer needs. Their daily work with customers means they have in depth understanding of customer needs, something they think the council should tap into.

‘We need those designing services in the council to talk to people delivering these services in the community.’ VOL

‘We are the only people who understand the voluntary sector.’ VOL

‘There needs to be a different working relationship with key partners.’ VOL

One comment reflects the council's Working Smarter objectives to cut out waste, improve services and collaborate with partners and other organisations to deliver services in a more joined up, efficient manner.

‘Where cuts have been made I believe other organisations will be able to support the majority of the saving areas. Maximising partnerships and exploring better ways of doing things is a key to budget cuts, which does not have to mean reduced services but the same services or better delivered in a smarter way.’ BS

5. Conclusion

- 5.1.** Whilst residents want universal services like roads, waste collection and clean streets to be maintained, and investments made in leisure and activities for children and young people, focussing on the economy, job creation and helping people back into work appears to be central to addressing many of the other issues and concerns raised.
- 5.2.** Raising attainment in schools and ensuring people have the right skills to meet the needs of local businesses is critical for the future of the borough and people recognise this.
- 5.3.** Investing in children and young people is perceived to be central to a strong and prosperous borough. Attracting and retaining talented people in the borough and supporting those who are unemployed or not in education and training, along with attracting inward investment, will help build a resilient and strong economy which is what local people want.
- 5.4.** There is a lack of pride, particularly in town and district centres which should be addressed through a range of approaches. Improving run down areas and litter hotspots should be a priority.
- 5.5.** Efforts to tackle anti social behaviour should continue and must be responsive to economic, social and demographic changes in communities.
- 5.6.** Vulnerable people are particularly concerned about cuts and particular attention may need to be paid to reassuring these groups.
- 5.7.** More needs to be done to convince residents that the council is striving to cut out waste, be more efficient and improve services.
- 5.8.** Understanding and responding to local needs is critical, perhaps more critical now than ever before. Maintaining dialogue and keeping in touch with communities and those organisations that serve them is paramount during this time of austerity. Informed decision making, along with effective communication is likely to improve services and raise levels of satisfaction with the council.