

Cabinet – 7 February 2007

Budget Setting Process 2007/08 – consultation further report

Portfolio: Councillor John O'Hare – Resources

Service Area: Corporate Finance

Wards: All

Key decision: No

Forward Plan: No

Summary of report

This report provides further feedback from the final stages of budget consultation in relation to the 2007/08 draft budget; specifically the follow up meetings held with the business and community and voluntary sectors on 22 and 24 January.

Recommendations

- (1) That the outcomes from budget consultation set out in this report be considered by Cabinet in finalising the council's 2007/08 revenue budget and capital programme.
- (2) That the valuable input into the process by the various consultation fora be acknowledged, and that written feedback addressing the key issues raised be provided by officers.

Resource and legal considerations

The programme of budget consultation has been funded from existing resources.

Citizen impact

The consultation process enables residents' and partners' views about the draft budget to be considered and the council to learn about residents' and partners' own priorities for expenditure. The feedback will also be used by council services alongside other sources of information in service planning and in continued implementation of the Council's vision.

Community safety

The consultation process has raised a number of issues relating to community safety.

Environmental impact

The consultation process has raised a number of issues relating to the local environment.

Performance and risk management issues

The outcomes of these budget consultations will be used in service planning.

Equality implications

The process is designed to be broadly representative of the local community. Consultation also included particular focus on the views of young, older and disabled people and organisations, carers, and BME residents. Feedback was provided on a range of diversity, equality and access issues.

Consultation

The process is an example of how the Council continues to use innovative methods with residents and partners as part of a council wide strategy for consultation and engagement. Consultation has been inclusive (as set out above) and also included local businesses, and the voluntary and community sector.

Vision 2008

“Listen to what local people want” is one of the strands in the Council’s vision. Budget setting is an integral part of this whereby objective views are obtained and fed into the process. This effectively underpins the council’s policy-led, medium term approach to financial planning, by targeting funding at those areas that are the highest priority.

Background papers

Correspondence with the business sector and organisations representing the community and voluntary sector regarding arrangements for these meetings.

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Signed:

Portfolio Holder: Councillor J O'Hare
25 January 2007



Signed:

Executive Director: Carole Evans
28 January 2007

Business Sector

The main outcomes from a meeting with representatives of the business sector on 5 December were set out in a Cabinet report on 20 December. The main points raised at a follow-up meeting on 22 January were:

- The need to spend money, especially external funding, to very tight deadlines was unhelpful and inherently inefficient. The council's commitment to a rolling three year budget programme was welcomed
- The commitment to focus on customer needs and expectations was welcomed; eg: the 25 January meeting on customer experience of front line services
- The council and the wider partnership must continue to fight the borough's cause in respect of government and other external funding allocations, and ensure that we can demonstrate the relevance of our proposals to current and emerging national priorities such as climate change
- The council should work to reduce slippage and delay in capital projects
- The council should work with business to develop innovative approaches to deal with key issues; eg: greener solutions to waste collection and disposal
- Proposals for increased car parking charges should apply equally to council staff
- The council should continue to question its direct provision of non-core activities such as print & design - a business case should be developed which includes all costs including accommodation and other overheads

Community and voluntary organisations

The main outcomes from a meeting on 28 November for representatives of local community and voluntary organisations were reported to Cabinet on 20 December. A summary of the further meeting of 24 January is set out below:

- Proposed reduced funding to Age Concern for commissioned services would impact on older people when the numbers of elderly residents is increasing and the council was seeking to reduce isolation; the impact of such decisions should be given greater consideration before being finalised
- The voluntary sector has a reputation for meeting demands economically; the council should review its commissioning arrangements to focus then council-wide rather than on individual services. A recent workshop on this was welcomed as apposite step
- The move away from traditional grants to commissioning was welcomed but the council should address the needs of voluntary organisations in the transitional period, as the changes would directly impact on a significant proportion of local organisations
- A strategic debate is needed involving the council, other statutory services, and the third sector, on the future role of the sector in the borough. This could be led by the WBSP and use the framework and incentives offered through the LAA
- Removal of duplication within and between sectors would bring better resource usage.
- The over use of the terms 'voluntary sector' and 'statutory sector' is unhelpful; we are all service providers and partners working for the borough. The challenge for the council is to see the third sector in this light, rather than as recipients of grant aid
- Community engagement sometimes seems a 'bolt on'; it should drive service delivery

- Council financial support for the sector has reduced in the past 2-3 years and the council and tPCT appear to have taken a greater proportion of external funding programmes, leaving less for community and voluntary groups
- The council should consider arrangements where funding for organisations ends, and provide sufficient notice to allow the organisation to plan for this loss of income
- The proposed council tax increase of 3.94% may be difficult for those on fixed income
- Would recent compensation payments, and increases in Member allowances have an impact on council tax levels
- The council now employed many more staff in higher income bandings.