

### **Budget Consultation Feedback**

The Council's budget has been more widely consulted on, in a greater variety of ways than in previous years. The forms of consultation included the following:

- 1) the postal and web based survey of citizen's priorities for budget growth and savings
- 2) meetings of partners, the voluntary sector and the business community where an in depth analysis of the situation and options were presented
- 3) EMAP meetings where budget proposals, options and details including Service Plans were presented
- 4) The Residents Opinion (ResOp) survey, where questions about greater or lesser levels of investment were asked.

There was no significant consultation feedback to report from the EMAPs. In terms of the meeting involving partners, the voluntary sector, the business community etc the event was very well received and much positive feedback was given mainly about the opportunity it gave to gain greater understanding of the issues and the style and content and the clear presentation of the issues. The main consultation feedback issues were a general support for community focussed services, understanding and support for the need to raise Council Tax above inflation and support for ending travel tokens as part of the move to a national free bus pass.

The main form of consultation was the postal and online survey of citizen's views. The information in this report is based on survey returns totalling 6,595 (6,003 postal and 592 on line). This is an 8% return which is good for this type of survey.

At the Council meeting on 24 January 2008 a petition with 21 signatures was presented by Cllr Looker objecting to proposed cuts to Council services at Sycamore House. Copies of the petition can be made available to Members if they wish to see it. Members should consider this petition as part of the consultation process, but the budget report does not propose closure of Sycamore House.

Members are in no way bound by the consultation as it is not a referendum, but is a process to gather opinion and aid informed decision making. Members are reminded that the consultation options included in this report are those recommended by the Executive.

It should be noted when considering the results that the % quoted represents the % of respondent who placed that issue in their top 5 for additional investment, top 2 for savings or top 5 for protecting services from cuts, not the actual % in favour or against a particular option. The results are as follows:

**Top priorities for spending** (highest first)

- 1) maintain highway and footpath maintenance at current levels allowing for inflation 42.9%
- 2) pay enhanced fees to private sector residential and nursing homes for the elderly 32.4%
- 3) Invest more in improving highways drainage 29.3%
- 4) Pilot the extension of door step recycling to terraced properties 26.2%

There was a significant gap between the first four options chosen and the level of support for the rest, the main two of which were

- Increase grants to Voluntary Organisations 12.6%
- Invest in waste minimisation and recycling advice 10.9%

The remaining 5 options all scored below 9%. These were:- Fund the Out of Hours noise nuisance reduction service; fund better Christmas lights, fund an annual firework display; invest in developing an up to date planning framework,; help the Council understand and respond to the diverse needs of all communities in York, thus reducing inequalities

**Top priorities for making savings** (highest first)

- 1) Increase standard stay perking charges for visitors by 20p to £1.50 per hour, residents charges stay at £1 per hour. 64.1%
- 2) Discontinue free travel tokens for the over 60's leaving them with free bus passes. 50.8%
- 3) Start free bus travel for the over 60's at 9.30 rather than 9am. 47.5%

There was a significant gap between support for these three options and the next 8 options

- 4) Increase the entry charge to Union terrace car park toilets from 20p to 30p. 33.4%
- 5) Close the Central Library and City Archives for one day each per week. 33.1%
- 6) Relocate Burton Stone Lane Flexible Learning Centre to Clifton Library. 27.2%
- 7) Reduce the amount spent on removing chewing gum from footpaths. 25.4%
- 8) Withdraw the Council contribution to York-England.com. 22.6%
- 9) Closure of St George's Field car park toilets. 21.1%^
- 10) Cease funding City of Festivals etc. 20.2%
- 11) Cease funding some bus services. 20.1%

There was a significant gap between the options above and the remaining 10 options, none of which scored more than 15%

**Top priorities for protecting from cuts** (highest first)

- 1) Cease providing social services to elderly and disabled people with moderate needs, leaving provision in place only for those with substantial and critical needs. 62.2%
- 2) Closure of Council Drop in centre at Sycamore house for people with mental health issues. 39.8%
- 3) Reduce the numbers of social workers working with children. 39.8%
- 4) Reduce the level of Highway and footpath resurfacing work by 5%. 38.6%
- 5) Close swimming pools on Bank Holidays and hours of Sunday opening. 32.2%
- 6) Cease contribution to NSPCC domestic violence service. 29.4%

There was a clear gap between the level of support for those listed above and

- 7) Close a branch library. 25.1%
- 8) Close the Council's 3 young people's Performing Arts Centres. 22.6%
- 9) Close the Central Library and City archives for one day per week each. 20.5%

All of the other 12 options scored below 20% (i.e. less than one in five said they wanted to protect them)

**Resident Opinion Survey (ResOp)**

The ResOp has a section relating to the allocation of Council resources (see Appendix attached). This asks residents to indicate whether more, fewer or the same resources should be allocated to Council services. The results show considerable support for spending more on community care services, elderly residential homes, crime reduction, job creating, leisure activities and services for young people. The only areas where respondents on balance thought less should be allocated were Museums and Galleries and Local Assemblies.

**Executive**

At the Executive meeting a query was raised by Unison about the impact of savings in future years on staffing levels.

The savings will be achieved by a combination of bringing the number of hours on the establishment in line with the actual demand for the services and by efficiencies arising from some restructuring and by increasing the proportion of time staff spend directly on work with customers. There will be no reduction in the overall level of services to customers. Some savings are already being made as a result of not filling vacancies and the savings in 08/9 are based on a half year effect - so there is time to do much more detailed work on the staff implications. Discussions have begun with UNISON and representatives will be involved in the individual discussions with any staff who may be at risk. At this stage managers consider that the number of staff who may ultimately be at risk and for whom no alternative employment can be found

is likely to be in single figures. However, it is not possible to be absolutely certain about that until more detailed work has been done.

### **Scrutiny**

Under the constitution the Scrutiny Management Committee is entitled to request an annual budget for its work. At its meeting on the 28 January 2008 it determined this request to be £20k which is £14k higher than the existing budget of £6k. This request has been included in Annex 2 - items that require funding from the contingency fund and will be considered by the Executive early in 2008/09.