

Budget Consultation Feedback

- 1 The council's budget has been widely consulted on. The forms of consultation included the following
 - 1) the postal and web based survey of citizen's priorities for budget growth and savings
 - 2) budget forums held separately for citizens and the business community, where an in-depth analysis of the situation and options were discussed
 - 4) Scrutiny Management Committee
 - 5) Executive Member Decision Sessions where budget proposals, options and details including Service Plans were presented
- 2 The main form of consultation was the postal and online survey of citizen's views. The information in this report is based on a total of 12,694 responses, an exceptional level at 14.6% return. This is an excellent response rate for this type of survey, and up almost 64% on the 2009 consultation .
- 3 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 none of the consultation options are included in the budget proposals in this report and that the aim is for members to propose the ones they wish to approve, whilst ensuring that the overall budget still balances.
- 4 Some key messages are that respondents would prefer to see increases in fees and charges above average to help the Council balance its budget in this difficult economic climate, and there is support to increase financial help for social care in the community; helping residents to separate their recycling prior to collection; and to pay bills electronically, over the phone or at local shops, rather than at council receptions.
- 5 In particular an analysis of the returns shows that respondents:
 - favour long term energy efficiency measures, including closing some reception points and chasing people who haven't paid their bills
 - there is minimal support for increasing the subsidy on school meals
 - would welcome more investment in road and footpath maintenance, creating and maintaining jobs in the area and working with other organisations to reduce crime
 - think the council should not invest money on the fireworks display
 - think the council could make savings on arts and cultural events and reducing inequalities
- 6 Statistically the results show that:
 - Over half (56%) of respondents would prefer increases in fees and charges above average to help the council balance its budget in this difficult

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economic climate. This was the preferred option of three choices – providing fewer services was the second favoured option at 30% and an increase in Council Tax levels was the least favoured at 14%.

- Eight out of ten (80%) respondents support the council spending a greater share of the social services budget on social care and support in the community to help people live in their own homes for longer.
- Overall, 63% of respondents support separating recycling at home before collection. Considerably more (83%) are in favour of using three boxes as opposed to using existing boxes and bags (71%).
- 54% of respondents are in favour of increasing the fees the council charges for services like pest control and trade waste disposal, however, a sizeable minority (26%) oppose this proposal.
- 81% of respondents pay for council services by Direct Debit, via the website or over the phone and are happy to continue to do so. A further 5% would consider switching to these methods to pay bills.
- 70% of respondents support replacing council-run paying-in points with links through local shops and post offices to pay council bills.
- 63% of respondents support reducing the number of city centre reception points to save money.
- 83% of respondents think the council should invest in energy efficiencies to reduce energy usage and save money in the long term.
- 93% of respondents support the council's approach to chasing unpaid council bills.
- 64% of respondents are in favour of reducing the number of council staff in order to release money for front line services.
- Only 17% of respondents think the price of school meals should be reduced by providing additional subsidy from the Council Tax and reducing spending on other services. The majority (67%) oppose this idea.
- Around half of respondents would like the council to invest more on road and footpath maintenance, creating and maintaining jobs in the area and working with other organisations to reduce crime.
- Over two thirds of respondents think the council is spending the right amount on libraries (76%), parks and open spaces (71%) and schools (66%). There is also support for the current spending levels on keeping the streets clean (65%) and child care facilities (63%).
- Having a fireworks display on Bonfire Night was the least favoured option for spending (76%). Although a minority, sizeable proportions of respondents think spending could be reduced on arts and cultural events (38%) and reducing inequalities (33%).
- 39% of respondents are aged between 18 and 54 years and 59% are aged over 55 years.

7 A summary of the written and verbal representations made to each EDMS is held in the Members' Library.