

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. The ResOp results are not yet available. 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 counted survey returns totalling 5,757 (5,188 postal and 569 on line). This is almost a 7% return which is quite good for this type of survey. Full final figures will be included in the Full Council budget report, but returns from 5,757 people are more than sufficient to provide statistically significant results.

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.

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.

It should be noted when considering the results that the % 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 so far are as follows with postal percentage shown first and on line % shown in brackets. For the final results these will be combined but for the purposes of this report the postal votes are the dominant figures:-

Top priorities for spending (highest first)

- 1) maintain highway and footpath maintenance at current levels allowing for inflation 43.7% (35.6%)
- 2) pay enhanced fees to private sector residential and nursing homes for the elderly 33.1% (24.6%)
- 3) Invest more in improving highways drainage 30.4% (19%)
- 4) Pilot the extension of door step recycling to terraced properties 25.3% (34%)

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 12.1% (16.7%)
- Invest in waste minimisation and recycling advice 10.4% (17.2%)

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 parking charges for visitors by 20p to £1.50 per hour, residents charges stay at £1 per hour. 63.3% (73.5%)
- 2) Discontinue free travel tokens for the over 60's leaving them with free bus passes. 51.1% (53.6%)
- 3) Start free busd travel for the over 60's at 9.30 rather than 9am. 50% (59.6%)

There was a significant gap between support for these three options and the next 7 options

- 4) Increase the entry charge to Union terrace car park toilets from 20p to 30p. 32.8% (35.6%)
- 5) Close the Central Library and City Archives for one day each per week. 32% (27.6%)
- 6) Relocate Burton Stone Lane Flexible Learning Centre to Clifton Library. 27.55 (23.6%)
- 7) Reduce the amount spent on removing chewing gum from footpaths. 25.5% (24.3%)
- 8) Withdraw the Council contribution to York-England.com. 22.5% (21.3%)
- 9) Cease funding City of Festivals etc. 21.4% (14.1%)
- 10) Cease funding some bus services. 20.3% (20.6%)

There was a significant gap between the options above and the remaining 11 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. 62.5% (58.2%)
- 2) Closure of Council Drop in centre at Sycamore house for people with mental health issues. 39.4% (44%)
- 3) Reduce the numbers of social workers working with children. 38.9% (43.1%)
- 4) Reduce the level of Highway and footpath resurfacing work by 5%. 39.4% (30.2%)
- 5) Close swimming pools on Bank Holidays and hours of Sunday opening. 33.1% (27.2%)
- 6) Cease contribution to NSPCC domestic violence service. 29.2% (30.1%)

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

- 7) close a branch library. 24.6% (28.5%)
- 8) close the Council's 3 young people's Performing Arts Centres. 21.4% (33.4%)
- 9) Close the Central Library and City archives for one day per week each. 20.25 (24.8%)

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