

BUDGET CONSULTATION – SUMMARY OF OUTCOMES TO DATE

INTRODUCTION

1. Budget consultation was begun later than usual, in late 2015, due to the necessity for the council to understand and communicate the position faced following the announcement of the provisional local government financial settlement of 17 December 2015. It was then agreed to delay post-Christmas, as messages would be lost. The consultation was formally launched on 7 January and will close on 12 February 2016, to enable to report on the final findings to be brought to Full Council on 24 February.
2. This summary demonstrates the consultation feedback as at 27 January 2016.
3. As in previous years, budget consultation has been undertaken with a range of audiences and using a variety of channels and mechanisms, to establish a broad understanding of opinion.
4. Fewer stakeholder workshops than previous were undertaken (in December 2015) to maintain an efficient approach to the consultation. Two workshops, one with businesses/voluntary sector partners and one with unions. The budget was also included upon the agenda of a monthly town and parish council meeting. One large public meeting was held at Medina Theatre, given the previous low turnout from alternative approaches to public consultation events across the Island
5. Two formal online forums were available to capture feedback; an interactive online simulator tool that has been used previously, and a simplified online questionnaire.
6. Attendees of the public meeting were asked to complete a prioritisation list of the items offered as potential choices in the Full Council paper (appendix D) from 20 January 2016, also.
7. Further conversation has been captured via the council's social media channel, Facebook, where engagement was high.

GENERAL FEEDBACK

8. It should be noted that there has been a very tangible, colloquial, shift in public perception of the council and its position in relation to its budget position. Although much has been said in the media and in local conversations, the focus of attention is on the pressure on the council, the challenges that the council faces, and not on potential cuts to be made or blaming the council. General public mood is one of empathy with the council and its situation.

9. Key messages have been understood through all consultation methods and communications with the public; savings to be made, limited options for making savings, and difficult decisions to come.
10. Local media have been very effective and supportive in portraying an accurate message around the council's budget position.

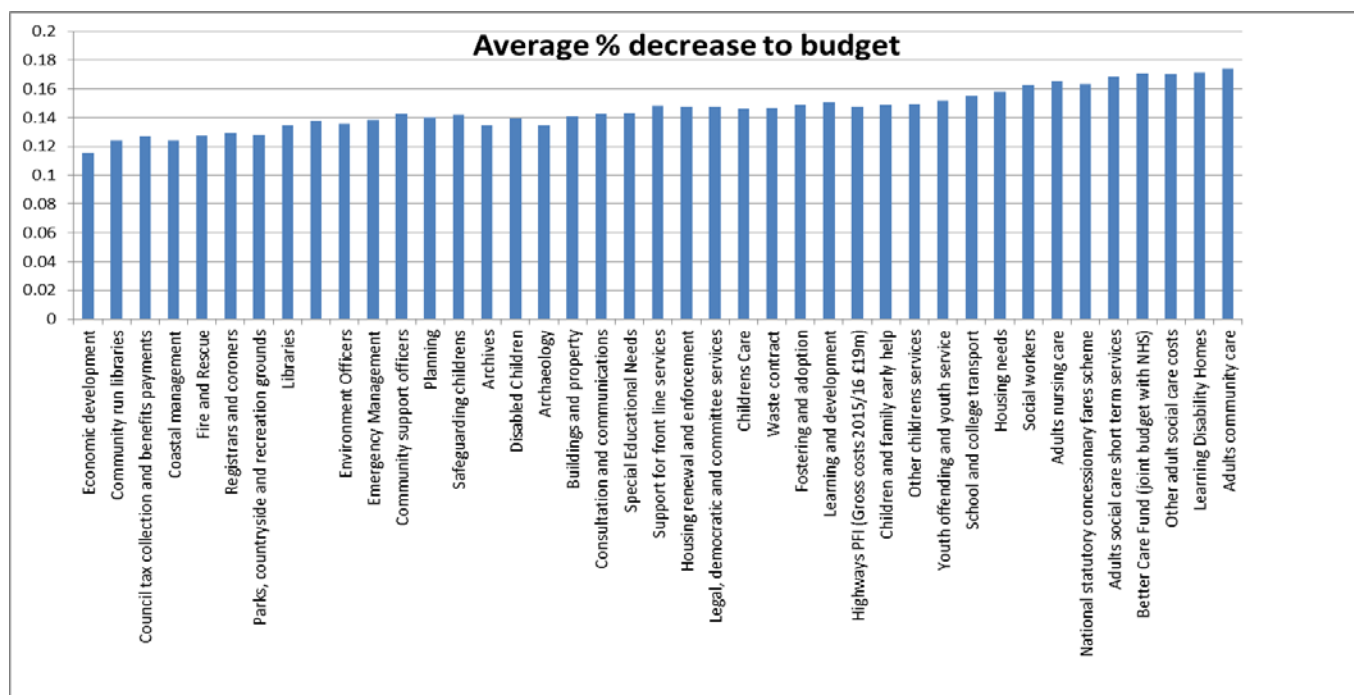
STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

11. The general view of the stakeholder meetings was that the Council needed to continue to invest in education as its main priority and to seek effective partnerships to increase inward investment to the Island especially for improvements in infrastructure.
12. There was overall recognition of the Council's challenging budget position and the need to make cuts in the more publicly visible services in order to continue to meet its statutory obligations.

SIMULATOR FEEDBACK

13. 226 responses have been received, with 103 suggestions made.
14. The simulator was set up with the following tolerances:
 - Budgets which could be reduced or increase by max 20 per cent - £109,977,563
 - Income which could be generated - £716,010
 - Savings which could be made - £1,189,360
 - Total savings to be made - £17.386m
 - Total savings possible - £23.9m
 - Max council tax increase of 4 per cent allowed
15. Budget could be increased or decreased by up to 20 per cent by each element included [Figure 1]. The service areas with the lowest percentage reductions were: economic development, coastal management, community run libraries, council tax collection and benefit payments, and the fire service. Service areas with the highest percentage reduction were adults social care short term services, the better care fund, learning disability homes, adults community care and other adult social care costs.

Figure 1: Average percentage decrease to budget



Similarly, when considering any possible increases to budgets, the results reflected those above, with those service areas that could be changed economic development, parks countryside and recreation, community libraries and coastal management had the highest number of people choosing to increase their budgets, whilst adults community care, adults nursing care, learning disability homes, better care fund and other adult social care costs had the highest numbers of decreases to the budgets.

16. The simulator also listed 12 *specific* saving proposals including increasing income or cutting services. The reduction of the concessionary fares scheme to the national minimum and the increase of harbour fees were the most popular, with the fewest number of people selecting the closure or transfer of public conveniences and removal of funding for school crossing patrols. Most people supported increases in harbour charges and leisure charges, and reductions to concessionary fares.

17. Of the 103 comments received, the general areas of suggested focus to meet the financial challenge and support the future of the Island, were:

- staffing/internal; freeze council wages and benefits, reduce staff working hours, cut senior management salaries, performance related pay initiatives, reduce sick leave, reduce numbers of council staff.
- democratic processes and governance arrangements; make the Island a district of Hampshire/merge with Hampshire, reduce number of councillors, reduce/remove councillor allowances/pay, reduce committee meetings.

- supporting economic development and tourism; cut red tape, offer reduced rents, invest in commuter facilities.
- increasing income; remove second/empty home discounts, introduce visitor/festival goer tax, introduce land and development tax, charge for concessionary bus use, levies for roads/HGVs, increase business rates.
- savings; renegotiate contracts, reduce consultancy fees, increase flexible working/close office buildings, remove grants, reduce social care to statutory minimum, focus on key strategic areas and use officer time effectively, use Asda receipt to cover budget gap.

BASIC SURVEY FEEDBACK

18. 98 people have completed the basic survey online.
19. When asked which services should remain at current cost, charge more or partner with other providers; of 94 people answering the question, over half of these felt that the council should continue to provide the following services at the current cost: Bereavement, Emergency Management, Public Conveniences, Recreation Grounds and Public Spaces, Parks Countrywide and Beaches.
20. Most respondents felt that the council could charge more for: Archives, Coastal Management and Planning.
21. Although fewer responses, around a third of respondents felt that the council should consider partnerships with other funding streams for: Archaeology, Medina Theatre, Newport Roman Villa and Museums and Collections. Suggestions included partnerships with charities, other mainland councils/service providers, voluntary sector and town and parish councils.
22. When asked about reducing services to a statutory minimum or increasing charges, around two thirds of respondents felt that some services should be reduced to statutory minimum spending: Capital Financing (61 per cent), Housing Benefits 67 per cent), Legal, Committee and Democratic Services (73 per cent) and Highways 56 per cent).
23. Most respondents who felt charges could be increased, identified Adult Social Care (40 per cent felt this service should remain unchanged), School and College transport (50 per cent state that this service should be reduced to statutory minimum and 25 per cent think charges should be increased), and Concessionary Fares (only 16 per cent of respondents felt this service should remain unchanged) as the areas for this focus.
24. Overall, services related to children and young were deemed to be the ones requiring the most protection from any service reductions. An average 57 per cent of survey

respondents would like to see no change to current cost of services to children and young people on the Island. Only 8 per cent feel that charges on these collective services should be increased, with 35 per cent inclined to reduce service to statutory minimum.

25. In relation to Council Tax changes, surprisingly almost 35 per cent of respondents suggest holding a referendum to increase council tax more than the 3.99 per cent maximum. This is, however, equal to those opting for a 1.99 per cent increase. The question of keeping council tax the same was not asked.

26. And, in respect of raising the council tax rate beyond 3.99 per cent (maximum) equates to £1.02 per week (based on a Band D property); 28 respondents answered the question thus:

- 2 per cent extra rise (to 5.99 per cent/52 pence per week) – 29 per cent
- 3 per cent extra (to 6.99 per cent/77 pence per week) – 39 per cent
- Other – 32 per cent

'Other' responses varied wildly, of the nine offered, from 'none – people are struggling to pay bills as it is', to 'increase it as much as we need to/whatever it takes', to '£2.50 per week', '10 per cent' and even '25 per cent'.

27. General feeling from free comments seems to be of empathy with the council situation and anger at government austerity measures. People are keen to do what they can to help, where they can, by paying more for services that they deem vital, for example adult social care for relatives.

28. Concerns are raised that reductions in some services that support families could have a detrimental effect and impact in other areas within the council.

29. Other views consider that adult and children's social care should be considered for reductions, where services are not statutory, and that adult social care costs should be passed to the NHS and/or government, in the way that government supports education for all.

30. Views also support a need to uphold economic development initiatives to maintain the Island as a desirable tourism destination as much as possible.

BUDGET CONSULTATION PUBLIC MEETING

31. 134 people attended the public meeting on 25 January 2016. The audience listened with interest to the presentation given, stating the council's financial position and challenges that it faces. A session for thoughts on the possible choices then followed, but as discussions became more focussed upon the general budget

position than that of the specific choices available (appendix D of Full Council budget paper, 20 January).

32. Feedback forms were, however, provided at the event and 33 were completed.

33. Written responses sought to make different points, largely based upon individual circumstances, such that no correlation was apparent beyond the desire to support essential services, in particular for adults and children's services. Most written responses felt that more information was needed in order to make an informed choice, and accepted that the council is in a difficult situation.

34. Of those that did feedback quantitative data, the 'top' three services to retain were: public conveniences, Adelaide and Gouldings resource centres. The 'top' three services that could be considered to be ceased were to: reduce grants to Short Breaks, cease Halberry Lane traffic management for the IW Festival and remove free travel for concessionary bus pass holders on the floating bridge.

SOCIAL MEDIA (FACEBOOK)

35. A number of posts and promotions were undertaken via Facebook throughout the period 7 January (launch) to 25 January (public budget consultation meeting). The comments, again, ranged in context and content, but largely showed support and empathy for the council's position, for example: 'this really is not easy to do at all', 'stop accepting budget cuts the government have forced on you', 'even if staff were cut it still wouldn't cover the deficit'. Users were encouraged to engage with the formal budget consultation via the simulator or through attendance of the public meeting.

36. Key topics for discussion/suggestions to be looked at included (much of which is already either being done or considered): reduce wages, building costs, concessionary fares/levy, increase income from new sources (turn unused council buildings into housing), tax second homes, toll charges, increase local taxes, more partnership working with towns/parishes, direct investment in business (i.e. Portsmouth CC Costa franchise), negotiate with Solent travel operators to reduce fares and encourage visitors, stop building houses/encouraging more people to move here, remove councillors/MP, introduce dog licences, reduce public realm services like grass cutting, stop using consultants, stop sick pay, bring empty homes back into use.