

Budget consultation - feedback report

1. Introduction

As part of the annual budget setting process for 2009/10, the Cabinet undertook consultation on its budget proposals. The consultation areas and approach was agreed by the Cabinet on 27 October, and was followed by a range of consultation activities throughout November and December.

This report outlines the methods used to consult with a range of people and the feedback received, which has been taken into account by cabinet when reviewing their budget proposals.

2. Activities to promote consultation process

The communications focused initially on directly affected groups and staff following the publication of the cabinet papers on 17 October 2008. Managers spoke directly with affected staff, letters went to directly affected organisations including those voluntary organisations funded by the council, a pre and post paper media release went to the media with an offer of a briefing. At the same time, an email went to council staff and partners. The budget web pages also went live with details of the budget process on 17 October 2008.

Following the cabinet decision on 27 October 2008 to consult on the budget proposals, an online feedback survey went live and a news link went up on the council's home page. An email address was published for public feedback.

A four page feature was published in the council magazine City View which went to all homes and business in the city during November. The feature outlined details of the budget process, 12 main areas for the public consultation and included the feedback survey.

Information went out to staff through emails, October In View and November Core Brief which also outlined the feedback mechanisms

Letters went to a number of affected and indirectly affected groups outlining the proposals and outlining the process for responding to the proposals. A consultation meeting with businesses was held on 26 November, with businesses given the opportunity to discuss the proposals with cabinet members.

3. Summary of feedback received

During the consultation process feedback was mainly received through the online survey and the City View questionnaire. Individual letters and emails were also recorded. The feedback period officially ended on 21 December 2008 when the web link to feedback came down and a message was added to thank people for their comments.

In total 236 responses were received. These included:

- 177 paper surveys / letters
- 59 online surveys / emails

A petition with 75 signatures was received on 9 January after the deadline of 21 December. The petition was to oppose the relocation of the neighbourhood advice centre.

Formal presentations from representative organisations

Formal responses were received from a range of organisations representing themselves or others in the city. A summary of their issues is outlined below:

Organisation	Issue/s
Southampton Primary Care Trust	<p>Opposed to the cuts of the senior practitioner role from Jigsaw Team Service (CS 21), which will impact on the effectiveness of the team to support families with disabilities and complex health needs.</p> <p>Concerned about the savings proposed through reduced use of external care placements (CS 7), given the increasing costs for placements and increasing numbers of children with disabilities.</p> <p>Urged to reconsider the recommendations to cease funding to Southampton Voluntary Services Family Project (CS 13). The project has a strong track record of effective early intervention and preventative work with hard to reach families with very complex needs who might otherwise slip through mainstream services.</p> <p>Concern about the general reduction of funding for Social Care and the impact this might have on social workers caseloads that are already reported to be above the national average.</p> <p>Support the proposal for closer working between Children Services and Family Centres. Concerned about the changes to Domiciliary care providers (ASCH 1 & 5) which has already commenced and due to the reduction in packages is delaying discharges from</p>

Organisation	Issue/s
	<p>SUHT and Community Hospitals.</p> <p>Concern that the reduction of Older Peron's Day care will have a knock on to nursing home capacity.</p> <p>Concern that the reduction of free swimming for under 12s will contribute to an increase in obesity and the PCT are willing to contribute £50,000 to increase the free swimming offer to under 16s.</p>
Schools Forum	<p>The Forum requested the following areas be given further consideration as these were the least desirable to receive a budget cut or become income generated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CS 19 (Income generation from schools and reconfiguration of Behaviour Intervention Support Team) • CS 25 (Social inclusion funding to schools)
Southampton Voluntary Services	<p>Case for not cutting funding to the Family Project, included eight letters from customers whose lives have been changed by the service who endorse the need to continue the project</p>

Summary of public responses

The following is a summary of the returned questionnaires following the public consultation.

The new cabinet priorities were published to see which the public agreed with and felt were important. All six cabinet priorities are perceived by the majority (58% and above) of the respondents to be of importance. The cabinet priorities that received the highest levels of agreement were reducing crime and antisocial behaviour, improving the wellbeing of those in most need and raising educational standards.

People were also asked what local issues they felt were most important. The top five local issues identified were crime levels, health services, road and pavement repairs and public transport.

The 12 main proposals for consultation were published and the main areas highlighted for concern were the family projects and bus transport. 23% of respondents made no comment in this area.

The questionnaire also asked whether the council offered value for money, with 27% agreeing the council provided value for money and 29% disagreeing. 31% were not sure.

4. Changes to the budget

Throughout the consultation process, work has been ongoing to ensure that the budget balances and that the impact on key priority services is minimised.

Discussions have been held with a range of partners to see how some services, highlighted by the feedback from the consultation can be supported more fully.

In light of this, the cabinet is keen to continue free swimming for U12s and is pursuing external funding to expand the free swimming programme to all under 16.

The council has now secured £50,000 for 2009/10 and £70,000 for 2010/11 from the Department of Communities and Local Government to continue with the handyperson service in the city as it was recognised that this service provided essential support for residents and was extremely popular.

Following an overall review of services that safeguard our residents there will be an increase in the budget for social work of £806,000, from the originally budget proposal in October.