

2016-17 BUDGET PROPOSALS – CONSULTATION PROCESS – February 2016 proposals

Introduction

1. It is vital that the council agrees and implements a transparent, comprehensive and co-ordinated process to consultation on the proposed 2016/17 budget. This will help stakeholders better understand the proposals and therefore make the consultation more meaningful. It is important that feedback received on previous year's budget consultations is taken into account when developing subsequent consultations.
2. Over the last few years, Southampton City Council has developed an approach to consultation that includes the use of more pictorial and accessible explanations of the background to the budget situation, themed information sheets, frequently asked questions and consultation questionnaires that include highlights of the relevant information.
3. The consultation on the proposed 2016/17 budget will build on the approach used in the two previous rounds of consultation, as positive feedback has been received on this approach. Improvements will be delivered that will condense the information and reduce duplication across documents in line with feedback from last year's consultation. As the February proposals are also savings for the 2016/17 financial year, the approach to this consultation will be directly derived from the proposals that went to the November 2015 Cabinet meeting.

Aims

4. Southampton City Council is in a challenging financial position with significant reductions in its funding from central government, at a time when demand for certain services such as adult and children's social care continues to increase. Therefore the aim of this consultation is to:
 - a. Communicate clearly and make residents aware of the financial pressures the council is facing
 - b. Ensure residents understand what is being proposed in the draft 2016/17 budget and are aware of what this will mean for them
 - c. Enable any resident, business or stakeholder who wishes to comment on the proposals the opportunity to do so, allowing them to raise any impacts the proposals may have
 - d. Ensure that the results are analysed in a meaningful, timely fashion, so that feedback is taken into account when final decisions are made
 - e. Provide feedback on the results to the consultation and how these results have influenced the final decision.

Principles

5. Southampton City Council seeks to conduct every consultation in line with the following principles:
 - a. Inclusive: so that everyone in the City (or involved in the consultation) has the opportunity to express their views
 - b. Informative: so that people have adequate information about the proposals, what different options mean, and a balanced and fair explanation of the potential impacts, particularly the equality and safety impacts
 - c. Appropriate: by targeting people who are more likely to be affected and using a more tailored approach to get their feedback, complemented by a general approach to all residents, staff, businesses and partners
 - d. Meaningful: by ensuring decision makers have the full consultation feedback information so that they can make informed decisions

- e. Understandable: by ensuring that the language we use to communicate is simple and clear and that efforts are made to reach all stakeholders, for example people who are non-English speakers or disabled people
 - f. Length: where possible the overall period of consultation should be for at least 12 weeks as there is a compact with the voluntary sector
 - g. Reported: by letting consultees know the results and what we did with their feedback.
6. Southampton City Council is committed to consultations of the highest standard, which are meaningful, and comply with the following legal standards:
- a. Consultation must take place when the proposal is still at a formative stage
 - b. Sufficient reasons must be put forward for the proposal to allow for intelligent consideration and response
 - c. Adequate time must be given for consideration and response
 - d. The product of consultation must be carefully taken into account.

Approach

7. The full consultation period for the 2016/17 budget will run from 10 February 2016 until the final decision is made at Full Council in July 2016. Within that time, there will be a period of formal written consultation where responses to the questionnaire can be made. The period of written consultation will run from 10 February 2016 to 20 April 2016. In addition to the formal written consultation, there will be opportunities for the public to engage through the forward plan and decision making processes at meetings. Any feedback received outside the written period of consultation will be given as a verbal update at the decision making meeting.

Process

8. Southampton City Council will consult on the draft 2016/17 budget with: Elected Members, Overview and Scrutiny, staff and Trade Unions, residents and stakeholders, partners, contractors and affected service users.
9. The consultation will involve a range of activities to ensure all relevant groups are engaged with, including but not limited to:
- a. Internal consultation with Trade Unions through formal meetings
 - b. Staff consultation:
 - i. On the proposals as a whole through the main questionnaire
 - ii. On individual impacts through formal consultation processes and meetings with managers
 - c. Partner and external organisation consultation:
 - i. Letters to partner organisations inviting feedback
 - ii. Letters to any affected contractors inviting meeting or feedback
 - iii. Discussion at Southampton Connect
 - d. Consideration by Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee and Heath Overview and Scrutiny Panel
 - e. Affected service user consultation will take place on a service by service basis led by respective service managers and will be conducted in a way that is proportionate and appropriate to the budget proposal and service
 - f. Resident and stakeholder consultation:
 - i. Online information and consultation questionnaire
 - ii. Printed consultation questionnaire with integrated information available on request and in libraries, GP surgeries, housing offices, Civic Centre reception and Gateway.

g. Throughout the consultation there will be regular communications via a range of channels to ensure a wide range of respondents.

10. The key dates for the consultation are included in the timetable for the whole budget process which is included as a part of this report.