

Southampton City Council 2016-2017 budget phase two – Consultation report

Introduction

1. Southampton City Council undertook consultation with staff, service users and stakeholders regarding the second phase of proposals to set balanced General Revenue Account budget for 2016/17, between 10 February 2016 and 20 April 2016.
2. 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.
3. 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. This approach has been adopted for both of the phases of budget consultation used to set the 2016/17 council budget.
4. The consultation on the proposed 2016/17 budget has built on the approach used in the two previous rounds of consultation. Improvements were made that condensed the information and reduced duplication across documents in line with feedback from last year's consultation.
5. The proposed budget was discussed at Cabinet on 9 February 2016 and Members agreed that the draft budget should be consulted on with key stakeholders and the public before a final decision is taken.

Aims

6. 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 was to:
 - Communicate clearly and make residents aware of the financial pressures the council is facing
 - Ensure residents understand what is being proposed in the draft 2016/17 budget and are aware of what this will mean for them
 - 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
 - Ensure that the results are analysed in a meaningful, timely fashion, so that feedback is taken into account when final decisions are made
 - Provide feedback on the results to the consultation and how these results have influenced the final decision
7. This report summarises the processes and activities undertaken by Southampton City Council to achieve these aims and includes a summary of the consultation responses both for the consideration of decision makers and any interested individual or organisation.

Consultation principles

8. The council takes its duty to consult with residents and stakeholders on changes to services very seriously. The council's consultation principles ensure all consultation is:
 - Inclusive: so that everyone in the city has the opportunity to express their views.
 - Informative: so that people have adequate information about the proposals, what different options mean, and a balanced and fair explanation of the potential impact, particularly the equality and safety impact.
 - Understandable: by ensuring that the language used 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.

- 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.
 - Meaningful: by ensuring decision makers have the full consultation feedback information so that they can make informed decisions.
 - Reported: by letting consultees know what was done with their feedback.
9. Southampton City Council is committed to consultations of the highest standard, which are meaningful, and comply with the following legal standards:
- Consultation must take place when the proposal is still at a formative stage
 - Sufficient reasons must be put forward for the proposal to allow for intelligent consideration and response
 - Adequate time must be given for consideration and response
 - The product of consultation must be carefully taken into account.
10. The city of Southampton also has a compact (or agreement) with the voluntary sector in which there is a commitment to undertake public consultations for a minimum of 12 weeks wherever possible. This aims to ensure that there is enough time for individuals and voluntary organisations to hear about, consider and respond to consultations. This time period is also in line with national government guidance.
11. In this case it was agreed that, given the timescales a ten week period of written consultation would be used with a further two weeks when analysis and reporting was taking place when additional comments could be received and included within the reports.

Approach and methodology

12. The consultation on the 2016/17 draft budget sought views on the proposal from relevant staff, residents, stakeholders and partner organisations. The formal written consultation ran from 10 February 2016 to 20 April 2016 with an extended period where responses and comments could still be received to enable as many people to respond on the proposal as possible.
13. Deciding on the best process for gathering feedback from stakeholders when conducting a consultation requires an understanding of the audience and the users of the service. It is also important to have more than one way for stakeholders to feedback on the consultation, to enable engagement with the widest range of the population.
14. The agreed approach for this consultation was to use a combination of paper and online questionnaires. This approach enables an appropriate amount of explanatory and supporting information to be included in a structured questionnaire, helping to ensure that residents are aware of the background and context to each of the proposals. It is therefore the most suitable methodology for consulting on a complex issue such as the whole draft council budget.
15. In addition to the main questionnaire, a general response email and postal address was also advertised. This was to allow for respondents who, for whatever reason, would not wish to use the questionnaire.

Appointment of contractor

16. A decision was taken to appoint an external contractor to undertake this consultation. This was in recognition of the fact that any proposed changes to council services creates significant public interest. It was also recognised that the small in-house Research and Consultation team did not have the capacity to deliver this work.
17. The other main benefit of using a third party for the management and analysis of consultation responses is they are impartial and completely independent from Southampton City Council.
18. As part of the procurement process, a specification was drawn up by the Southampton City Council Research and Consultation team. The scoring criteria within the specification allocated 50% of points for quality, broken down equally into: understanding the brief, being able to deliver in the correct time

scales, and experience of similar projects. The remaining 50% was allocated according to the cost of the proposal. Once agreed, it was advertised through the UK SBS Market Research Purchasing Framework. This is a national government framework that enables a group of (80) research providers who have met all the technical and organisational requirements for working with government bodies to compete for projects under an agreed set of rules.

19. There was an opportunity for all the providers within Lot 2 'Quantitative and Qualitative' specialism (53 providers) to express an interest in seeing the full project research specification. In total, three submitted a tender for the project.
20. The tenders were carefully evaluated using scoring criteria laid out in the research specification. The council appointed the highest scoring tender, ICM Unlimited. Once the appointment was made, a project inception meeting was held which began the process of jointly developing the consultation materials.

Promotion and communication

21. Throughout the consultation, every effort was made to ensure that as many people as possible were aware of the proposed budget and had an opportunity to have their say. Particular effort was made to communicate the proposals in a clear and easy to understand way. This was achieved by using an easy to read background to the proposal at the start of the questionnaire, grouping the proposals into themed groups with information sheets, a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) document, the Equality and Safety Impact Assessment and a Cumulative Impact Assessment. All of these were available on a dedicated council webpage.
22. The consultation was promoted in the following ways:
 - E-alerts, sent to subscribers of the council's email marketing service via a range of bulletins. These featured hyperlinks to further information about the consultation and the questionnaire itself.
 - A link to the Budget consultation web pages was included on the council website 'have your say' page for the duration of the consultation.
 - Emails were sent to a range of support organisations and stakeholders.
 - The council's Facebook and Twitter accounts were used to signpost people to the consultation information and questionnaire.
 - Paper versions of the budget questionnaire and information were available in libraries and council offices.

Previous Consultation Respondents and Results (Budget Consultation 2016 Phase One)

23. In total there were 544 responses to the consultation on the first phase of the budget proposals for the 2016-2017 financial year. They were received as online or paper questionnaires, letters and emails.
24. In terms of demographics:
 - Age: The least represented groups were under 16 and over 85s. The group represented the most was the 55-64 year olds. This was seen as in line with expectations based on previous experience and consultations
 - Gender: The breakdown of respondents was 52% male and 44% female
 - Ethnicity: The most represented group was white. The remaining ethnicities had a breakdown of less than 3% of total respondents
 - Employment at Southampton: The breakdown within the consultations was that only 12% of those who responded were employed by Southampton City Council.
25. Budget Consultation Phase One was broken down into six sections.
 - Internal efficiencies – savings from redesigning and restructuring services, and reducing other internal costs
 - Digital (using technology to improve services) – improvements to online services and mobile working
 - Adult social care – changes in the way Adult Social Care services are provided
 - Housing – changes in the way services are provided to Council tenants
 - Services for all – changes to services everybody uses, such as parking and bus transport
 - Income and charges – increases and changes to charges for some Council services

26. For each of these sections the general combined agreement and disagreement with each of the proposals was given. These are listed below

- Internal Efficiencies – 59% agreement vs. 18% disagreement
- Digital – 74% agreement vs. 17% disagreement
- Adult social care – 48% agreement vs. 32% disagreement
- Housing – 66% agreement vs. 18% disagreement
- Services for all – 54% agreement vs. 30% disagreement
- Income and charges– 57% agreement vs. 25% disagreement

27. Finally an overall ten point scale was given at the end of the consultation to ascertain the overall view on the proposals being consulted on. The average response was six which is on the more favourable side of neutral. The combined total for favourable responses (7-10) is 42%.

Consultation respondents (phase 2)

28. In total, 158 people responded to the consultation on the Budget 2016/2016 (part two), either through a paper or online questionnaire, or a general letter or comment. All the questionnaire submissions that had at least one question completed were included in the analysis, to ensure every piece of feedback was considered.

29. This section shows the demographic makeup of respondents to the main questionnaires, enabling us to see which groups were represented in terms of age, gender, whether they consider themselves to be disabled and whether they are currently in receipt of care. It is important to note that:

- As consultations should be open for anyone to answer, they will not necessarily be representative of the whole population of Southampton. It is however important that as wide a range as possible are engaged and are given the opportunity to share their views on the proposal
- The analysis provided below does not cover all respondents, as some did not complete this section.

30. Figure 1 shows the age breakdown of the consultation respondents. Two groups were not represented at all within the consultation. These were the under 16s and over 85s. The groups with the lowest representation (with at least one respondent) were 16-24 and 75-84, both with 2% fitting into both of these age categories. The most represented group was the 55-64 year olds, with 26% of the overall respondents belonging to these age categories. This is in line with normal expectations as the over 45s tend to participate in greater numbers. As an example, in Southampton City Council's budget consultation for 2014/2015, 48% of respondents were between 50-69 years old and 7% were between the ages of 17 and 29. Within this particular questionnaire, 65% of those who engaged with this consultation were over the age of 45, and 29% were 44 or under. The remaining 6% preferred not to state their age. However the age group of 25-34 contributed 16% of the total respondents: this was the third highest represented group. See Figure 1 for the full breakdown.

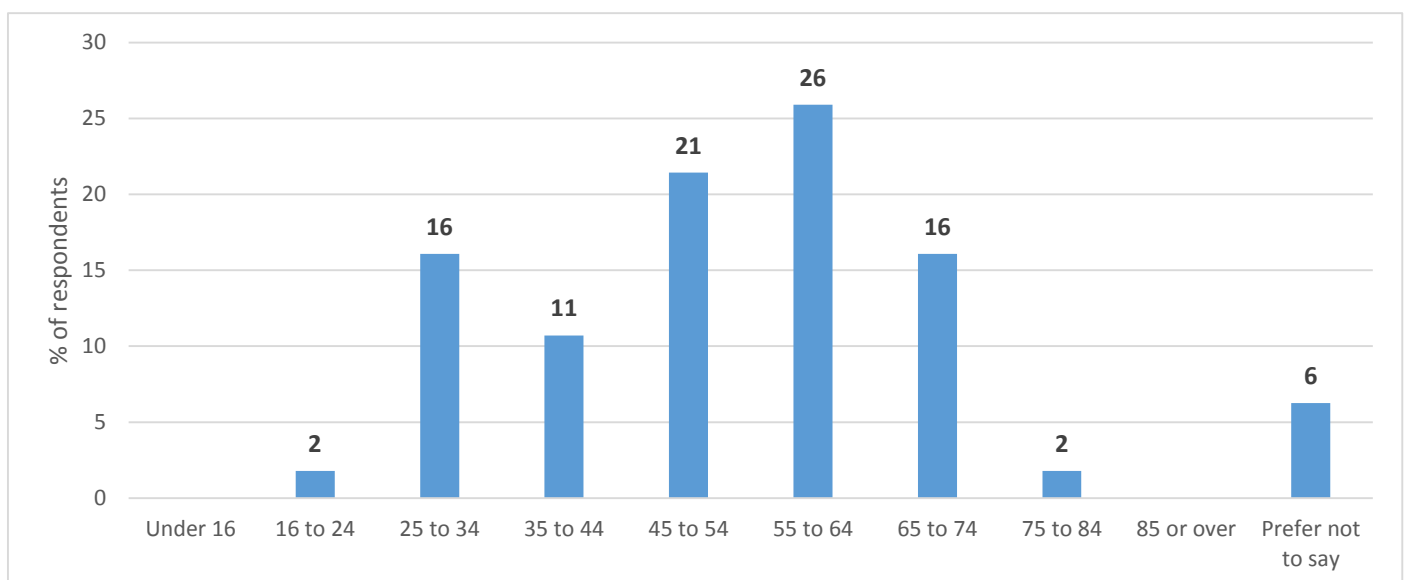


Figure 1

31. The gender breakdown of consultation respondents was 53% male, 40% female and 7% preferring not to say.
32. The ethnicity breakdown of consultation respondents was 86% White, 3% Mixed/multiple ethnic groups, 2% Asian/Asian British and 1% Black/African/Caribbean/Black British. 8% of respondents preferred not to state their ethnic group.
33. The majority of respondents stated that they were not employed by Southampton City Council (76%), 15% are employed by Southampton City Council and 9% preferred not to say.

Consultation results

34. Respondents were asked for their views on four main areas of the Budget and were then given the opportunity to state concerns, impacts and alternatives. The four main areas were: Internal Efficiencies, Adult Social Care, Education and Children’s Social Care, and Income, Investment and Charges. Within each of these areas, respondents were asked about their general agreement with the proposal. If, in any proposal, respondents answered in the negative (disagree or strongly disagree), they were asked to state which specific parts of the proposal they disagreed with and which part they disagreed with the most.

Internal Efficiencies

35. Figure 2 shows the breakdown in the level of agreement of the following statement; “To what extent do you agree or disagree with the internal savings proposals?”. Within the consultation document (whether it was conducted online or on paper) details were provided about the Internal Savings proposal, so that respondents were able to make an informed decision.
 - 52% of the total respondents who completed this question answered in the positive, stating that they either strongly agreed or agreed with the proposal (17% and 35% respectively).
 - 30% of the total respondents who completed this question answered by stating that they were neutral about the proposal
 - The remaining 19% of the total respondents who completed this question answered in the negative, stating that they either strongly disagreed or disagreed with the proposal (5% and 14% respectively).

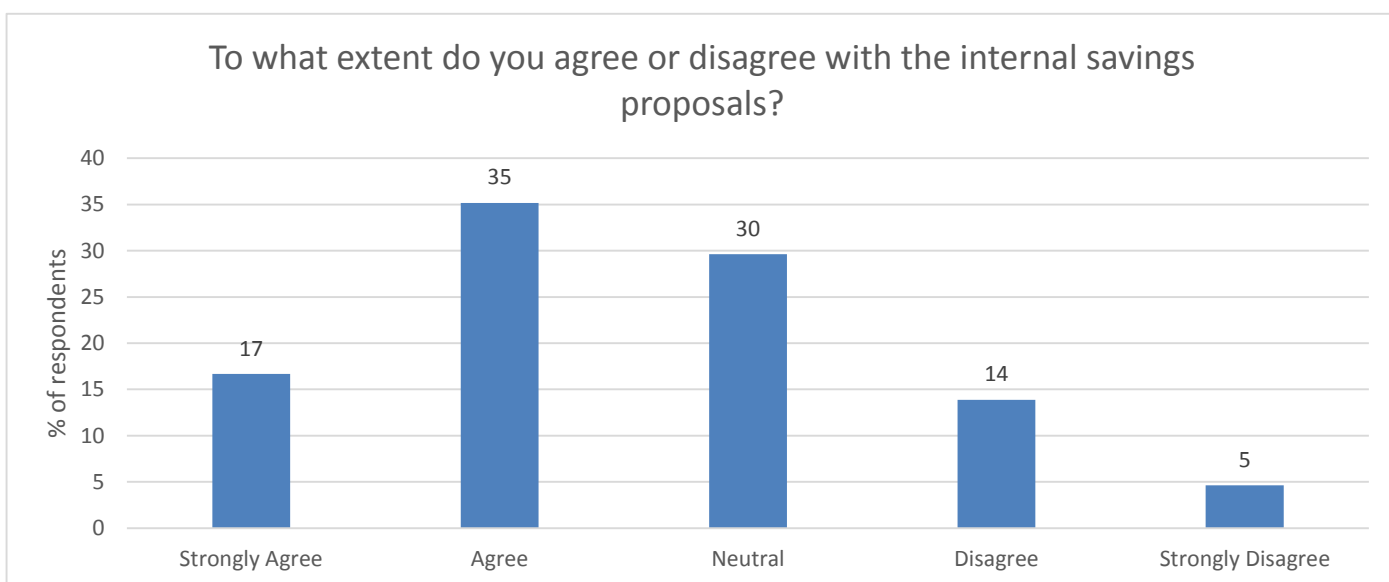


Figure 2

36. If respondents stated that they disagreed with the proposal (strongly or otherwise), they were given the opportunity to say which areas of the proposal they disagreed with.
 - The most common area of the proposal that respondents disagreed with was the contract renegotiation and decommissioning: additional domiciliary care savings (eight respondents).

- The least common areas of the proposal that respondents disagreed with was the Minimum Revenue Provision adjustments and the Phase 2 Operating Model. Both of these areas were selected by only one respondent.

37. Once respondents have outlined which proposals they disagreed with, there was an additional question which let them select the individual proposal they disagreed with the most.

- The proposal in Internal Efficiencies, with which respondents disagreed with the most was Procurement (four separate responses)

Adult Social Care

38. Figure 3 shows the breakdown in the level of agreement of the following statement; “To what extent do you agree or disagree with the Adult Social Care savings proposals?”. Within the document itself (whether it was conducted online or on paper) details were provided about the Adult Social Care savings proposal, so that respondents were able to make an informed decision.

- 45% of the total respondents who completed this question answered in the positive, stating that they either strongly agreed or agreed with the proposal (9% and 36% respectively).
- 17% of the total respondents who completed this question answered by stating that they were neutral about the proposal
- The remaining 38% of the total respondents who completed this question answered in the negative, stating that they either strongly disagreed or disagreed with the proposal (11% and 27% respectively)

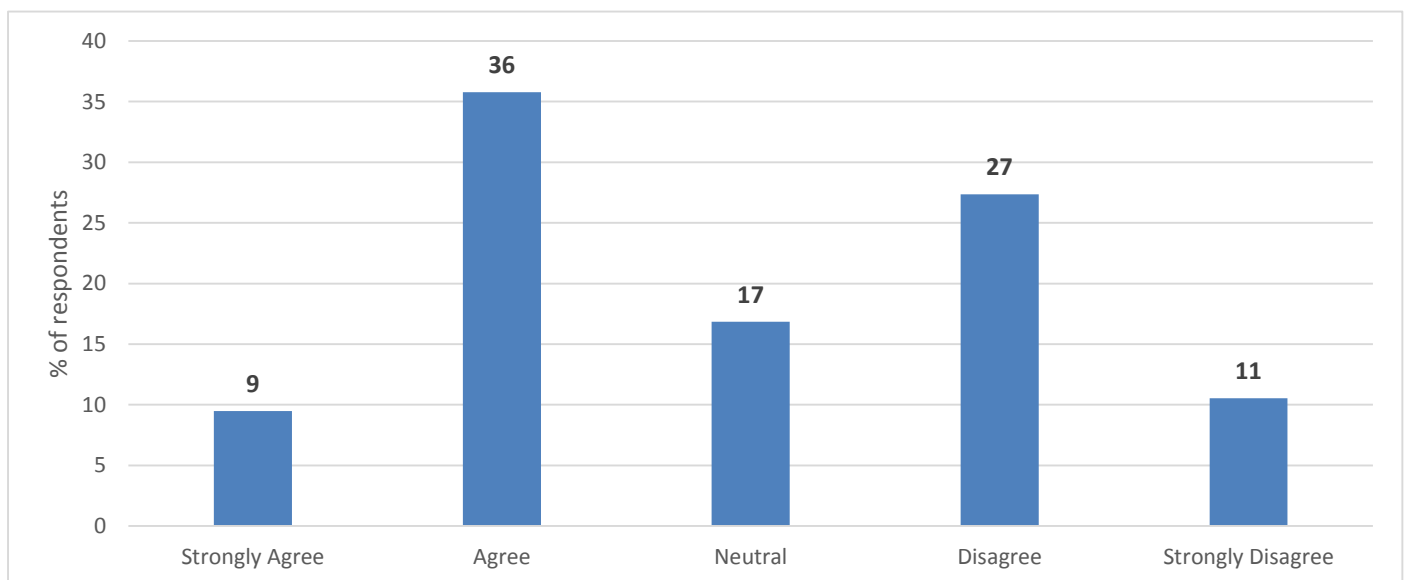


Figure 3

39. If respondents stated that they disagreed with the proposal (strongly or otherwise), they were given the opportunity to say which areas of the proposal they disagreed with.

- The most common area of the proposal that respondents disagreed with was all of the proposals (15 respondents). More specifically, the single proposal that was disagreed by most of the respondents was Residential and nursing care market shaping (10 respondents).
- The least common area of the proposal that respondents disagreed with was the Impact on LD package spend (6 respondents).

40. Once respondents have outlined which proposals they disagreed with, there was an additional question which let them select the individual proposal they disagreed with the most.

- The proposal in Adult Social Care, with which respondents disagreed with the most was Residential and nursing care market shaping (12 separate responses)

Education and Children’s Social Care

41. Figure 4 shows the breakdown in the level of agreement of the following statement; “To what extent do you agree or disagree with the Education and children’s social care savings proposals?”. Within the

document itself (whether it was conducted online or on paper) details were provided about the Education and children's social care savings proposal, so that respondents were able to make an informed decision.

- 53% of the total respondents who completed this question answered in the positive, stating that they either strongly agreed or agreed with the proposal (13% and 40% respectively).
- 18% of the total respondents who completed this question answered by stating that they were neutral to the proposal
- The remaining 28% of the total respondents, who completed this question, answered in the negative, stating that they either strongly disagreed or disagreed with the proposal (5% and 23% respectively)

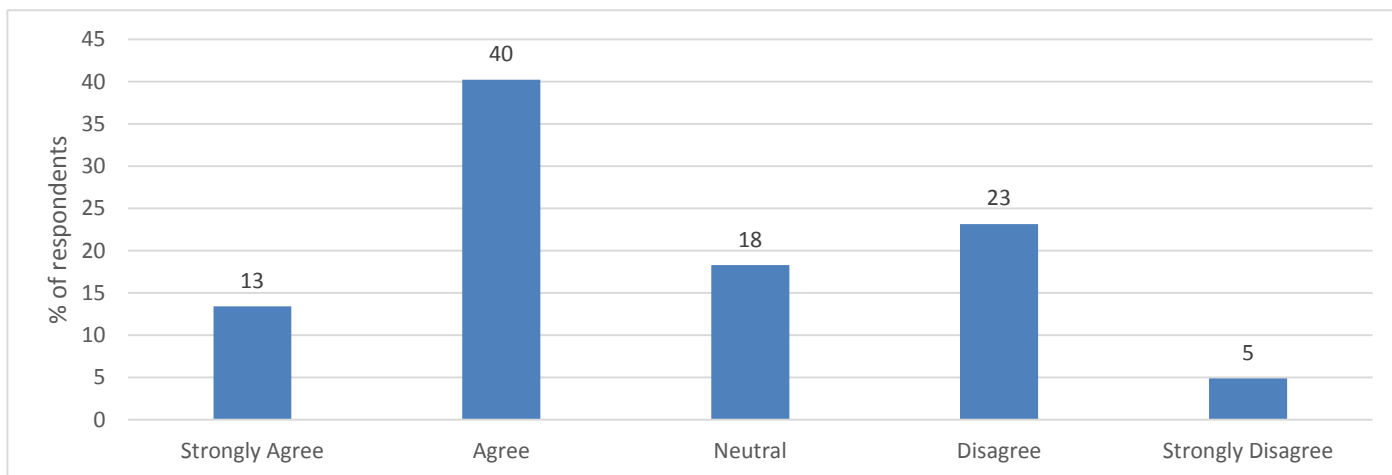


Figure 4

42. If respondents stated that they disagreed with the proposal (strongly or otherwise), they were given the opportunity to say which areas of the proposal they disagreed with.

- There were only two proposals in the Educations and Children's Social Care section, Children's Services efficiencies and Review of Looked After Children services, both proposals had 15 respondents stating they disagreed with each one.

43. Once respondents have outlined which proposals they disagreed with, there was an additional question which let them select the individual proposal they disagreed with the most.

- The proposal in Education and Children's Social Care, with which respondents disagreed with the most was Review of Looked After Children Services (5 separate responses)

Income, Investment and Charges

44. Figure 5 shows the breakdown in the level of agreement of the following statement; "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the Income, Investment and Charges savings proposals?". Within the document itself (whether it was conducted online or on paper) details were provided about the Income, Investment and Charges savings proposal, so that respondents were able to make an informed decision.

- 56% of the total respondents who completed this question answered in the positive, stating that they either strongly agreed or agreed with the proposal (18% and 38% respectively).
- 16% of the total respondents who completed this question answered by stating that they were neutral about the proposal
- The remaining 29% of the total respondents who completed this question answered in the negative, stating that they either strongly disagreed or disagreed with the proposal (6% and 23% respectively)

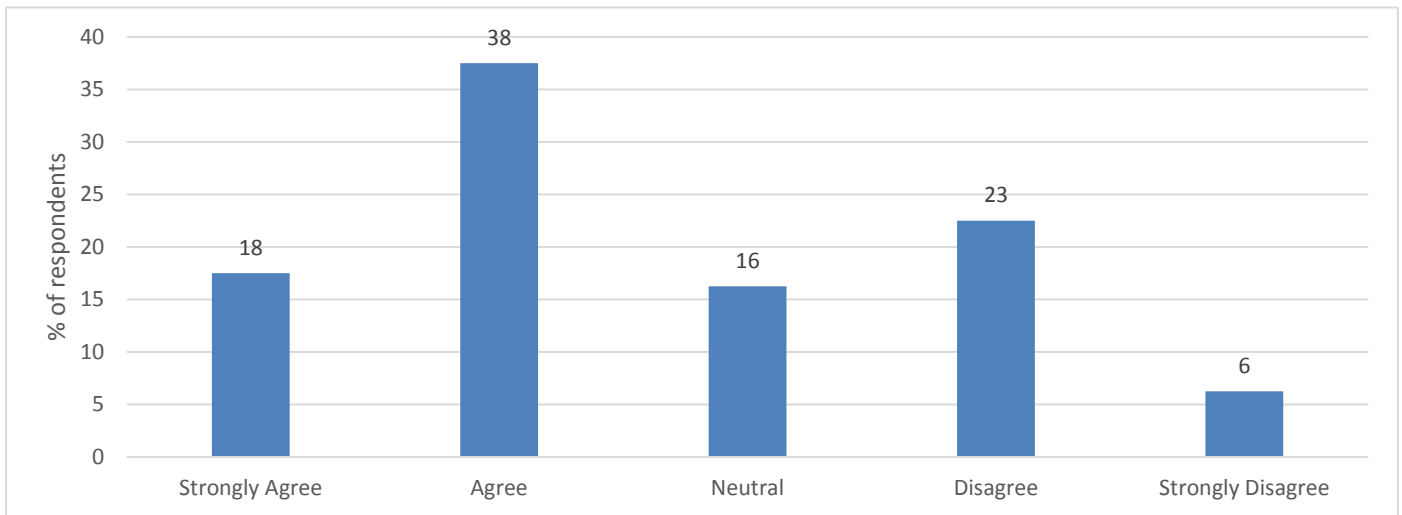


Figure 5

45. If respondents stated that they disagreed with the proposal (strongly or otherwise), they were given the opportunity to say which areas of the proposal they disagreed with.
- The most common areas of the proposal that respondents disagreed with were Increased fees and charges (regulatory and city services), Royal South Hants: On street parking and Borrow to invest (9 respondents for each)
46. Once respondents have outlined which proposals they disagreed with, there was an additional question which let them select the individual proposal they disagreed with the most.
- The proposal in Income, Investment and Charges, with which respondents disagreed with the most was Royal South Hants: On street parking (7 separate responses)

Overall opinions on the budget and the Impacts

47. At the end of the consultation respondents were given the opportunity to add their views about the Budget proposals overall, any impacts that should be considered and any alternatives that could be considered.
48. The majority of the overall comments linked directly to the impacts that the budget could have on a wide range of people. For this reason, the comments were amalgamated and analysed together. Below are the main themes that appeared within these comments.
- Some respondents sympathised that setting a budget is difficult in this environment and recognised that reductions need to be made. Others believe that the cuts that have been made could be pushed further, although few specifics are given as to how.
 - There was a broad concern that the proposals could affect the most vulnerable in society, specifically social care (both adult and children) and front line services. One example given is the issue of isolation felt by those with mental health issues.
 - Some comments also noted that proposals could be short sighted as reductions to the budgets of key services could cost more in the future, meaning the proposals will not have a positive long lasting effect. The following examples were given;
 - Charging more for refuse collection may lead to fly tipping. Once this occurs this would have to be policed.
 - Those who require support, such as the elderly or ill, may not get that support under the new proposals. This could then put more pressure on the NHS and increase the overall cost.

Alternatives

49. Finally respondents were given the opportunity to offer alternative ideas for generating income or areas where savings could be made. 37 suggestions of ways Southampton City Council could save or generate money were made. Below are the main themes that appeared within these comments.

- Reduce pay or positions, within the council, of top line managers
- Make sure large companies that reside within Southampton are paying their way within the city
- Increase council tax across the city as well as making students pay some form of council tax.

Feedback on the consultation process

50. The council is committed to make the whole consultation process as transparent as possible. As a part of this, any feedback on the consultation process itself received during the course of the consultation is gathered together here.
51. Overall, out of the 158 people who took part in the consultation, two commented on the consultation process itself, representing 1% of total consultation responses.
52. The comments made regarding the consultation process are shown in table 1.

It's difficult to agree or disagree with the proposed 'efficiencies', when it's not clear what they actually entail
The proposals are so general that the general public do not know what is actually happening to actual services, so maybe give a better idea of actual cuts that will be occurring and how this will definitely affect residents and users of services.

Table 1

53. The feedback on the consultation process suggested that some improvements could be made to the supporting information.

Conclusion

54. Over 158 stakeholders have engaged with the consultation process in this phase and given their views on the proposals. The consultation has engaged with a range of individuals through a variety of methods to allow residents in Southampton to give their views on the budget for 2016/17. As Figure 1 of this report has outlined, by looking at various demographic breakdowns of the respondents, while there were greater responses from older age groups there was still engagement across the board.
55. This consultation has ensured compliance with local and government standards. This report, the Cabinet report and appendices outline the full picture of the consultation results and will be used to inform decision makers.
56. The group of proposals with the highest level of engagement was Internal Efficiencies, the group with the least engagement was Income, Investment and Charges.
57. In total 702 residents and stakeholders have been engaged with throughout the two phases of the budget consultation.
58. In conclusion, this consultation allows Southampton City Council's Cabinet to understand the views of residents and stakeholders on the second phase of budget proposals. Therefore it provides a sound base on which to make a decision.