

Appendix A Budget Consultation

Budget Communications and Consultation

In order to comply with the legal requirement on the Council to consult with council tax payers and non domestic rate payers on its revenue budget and council tax options, a plan for communications and engagement has been developed.

The plan includes three phases of activity; market research, consultation and feedback.

The Market Research Exercise

This exercise sought feedback from the community on local priorities and attitudes towards council tax and efficiency.

The feedback was gathered through two discrete exercises.

Firstly, a survey was distributed to all households via the autumn edition of News Central. Copies of this survey were also distributed to key service outlets such as Libraries, Leisure Centres and Customer Service Centres. Members took an active role in promoting the survey through their surgeries and the exercise was highlighted in the local media and via our own website.

During the same time period a representative group of residents were invited to respond to the same questions via a telephone survey.

By conducting both exercises, it is possible to report reactions from the public in general and a sample which reflects the broader community in terms of age, gender and other demographic characteristics.

The Results:

In total some 2,500 Central Bedfordshire residents participated in the market research.

1,286 responses were received through the Budget 2015 survey that was distributed to the community in general.

A further 1,211 residents took part through a telephone survey conducted by an independent research company.

Whilst there was some variation in the results from the two exercises, there was broad consensus on attitudes to council tax, efficiency measures and community priorities.

On Council Tax, 68% of respondents to the telephone survey indicated that they would wish for a freeze, (compared to 60% of those who responded to the general survey).

22% of respondents to the telephone survey indicated that they would support an increase in council tax (compared to 27% of those who responded to the general survey) and 10% favoured a reduction in council tax (compared to 13% of respondents to the general survey).

With regard to **efficiency measures** the most support was given to the option of getting better value from our contracts (87% of phone survey respondents supported this and 80% of respondents to the general survey).

Other well supported options were sharing services across the public sector (80% support from the phone survey and 69% from the general survey) and generating income from our assets (72% from the phone survey respondents and 58% of respondents to the general survey).

Less supported efficiency options were changing eligibility criteria (supported by 35% of phone respondents and 26% of respondents to the general survey) and introducing or increasing charges (favoured by 32% of phone survey respondents and just 17% of those who responded to the general survey).

Finally, residents were invited to indicate those issues which they felt were most important in making an area a good place to live.

The most selected issues were:

- Clean streets
- Levels of crime and anti social behaviour
- Parks and open spaces
- Shopping
- Education
- Road and pavement repairs
- Sport and leisure facilities.

The least selected issues were:

- Decent/affordable housing
- Job prospects
- Libraries
- Community spirit
- Traffic congestion.

And the issues that were most frequently cited as being in need of improvement were:

- Road and pavement repairs
- Levels of crime and anti social behaviour

- Shopping
- Public transport
- Sport and leisure facilities
- Clean streets.

A detailed analysis of the full surveys was presented to the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 16th December 2014.

Next Steps:

The second phase of this plan will be to consult on the draft budget. Once this has been prepared and published, the draft budget report will be extensively promoted to the community including local business, the media, the equalities forum and other stakeholder groups in order to elicit further feedback on the proposals within it. Feedback from this phase of activity will feed into the Executive and Full Council consideration of the budget in February 2015.

The final phase of activity will be to feed back to the community and stakeholders, the decisions of the Council through a range of communication channels and activities including the conventional leaflet together with social media, our website and face to face opportunities.