

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.

Phase 1**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.

Phase 2

This phase of activity was launched on January 6th and has been widely promoted to stakeholders and the wider community. Consultees have been invited to give feedback via an on line (and hard copy) questionnaire.

385 responses have been received at the point at which this appendix has been prepared for publication.

The questionnaire included four questions about the Council's proposed savings options and spending plan. There was also an open field question which invited any further comments.

A further six questions related to demography.

The Sample

This second phase of work is essentially an open consultation exercise through which the whole population are given the opportunity to give their feedback. This means that the respondents will not necessarily be representative of the wider community.

The data collected on demography indicates that

Older people aged between 60-74 years were the largest group to respond to the budget consultation and views of this group are also overrepresented with 37% of respondents being between 60 to 74 years old compared to the Central Bedfordshire average of 15%

Conversely the views of younger people are underrepresented. For example nobody under 19 responded to the consultation and whilst we know that approximately 11% of our population are young working age people, only 4% of respondents to the survey were from the 20-29 years age group.

The number of respondents aged 30-39 was 13% that is equal to the Central Bedfordshire average for this age group. The number of respondents aged 40-49 was 17% that is broadly in line with the Central Bedfordshire average for this age group of 16%.

People with disabilities were somewhat underrepresented in the consultation with 10% indicating that they had a disability compared to the Central Bedfordshire average 14%.

The ethnicity profile of respondents was broadly in line with the Central Bedfordshire demographic profile of residents.

Information Sources:

Gender: 2011 Census Table KS101EW, Usual resident population

Age: Office for National Statistics, 2013 Mid Year Estimate

Disability: Office for National Statistics, 2011 Census, Table QS303EW, Long-term health problem or disability

Ethnicity: Office for National Statistics, 2011 Census, Table KS201EW, Ethnic group

The Results

In response to a question seeking views on the Council's proposed approach to **investment**:

63% of respondents agreed (either tended to agree or agreed strongly)
26% were not in agreement (either tended to disagree or strongly disagreed).
The remaining 10% refrained from commenting or suggested they did not know.

In response to a question seeking views on the Council's proposed approach to **cutting overheads and reducing running costs**:

92% of respondents were positive (either tended to agree or agreed strongly)
8% who were not in agreement (either tended to disagree or strongly disagreed).

In response to a question seeking views on the Council's proposed approach to **adopting a more commercial focus**:

91% of respondents were positive (either tended to agree or agreed strongly)
6% were not in agreement (either tended to disagree or strongly disagreed).
The remainder refrained from commenting or suggested they did not know.

In response to a question seeking views on the Council's proposed approach to **delivering services differently**:

93% of respondents were positive (either tended to agree or agreed strongly)
7% were not in agreement (either tended to disagree or strongly disagreed).

In response to the invitation to make a further comment about the budget proposals, 216 respondents chose to do so.

The most frequently cited comment related to highways, seeking improvements (x24 residents). NB a further 6 respondents suggested pavements and footpaths need to be improved.

Other relatively frequently mentioned comments included:

Prioritising care and services for older people (x11 respondents).

Reducing corporate overheads (x11 respondents).

Reduce social care and housing funding (x 10 respondents).

