

CABINET

Budget Community Engagement 27 July 2010

Report of Corporate Director (Regeneration)

PURPOSE OF REPORT				
To seek Cabinet's views on the budget community engagement proposals to inform the 2011/12 budget process.				
Key Decision	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Non-Key Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	Referral from Cabinet Member
Date Included in Forward Plan	1 July 2010			
This report is public				

RECOMMENDATIONS OF COUNCILLOR STUART LANGHORN:

- (1) To build the budget community 2011/12 engagement plan into the budget and policy framework timetable
- (2) To deliver the budget community 2011/12 engagement plan as outlined in this report
- (3) To hold the community listening/have your say days at the end of September/early October 2010 in order to inform the priority setting process
- (4) To support a Total Place approach, as set out in the report, where possible

1.0 Introduction

Background

- 1.1 Last year the council carried out a high profile and engaging external budget consultation which aimed to:
 - raise the profile and educate people about what the council does
 - engage citizens and stakeholders in the financial pressures facing the council
 - and from this gain insight into where those participants felt savings could be achieved to inform the budget process
- 1.2 This linked with the objectives of the Making Every Penny Count campaign.
- 1.3 It comprised three main elements:
 - 1) Town centre exhibitions
 - 2) Registered workshops
 - 3) Budget consultation booklet and questionnaire (online and printed copy)

Feedback

1.4 Town Centre exhibitions

Feedback from local people and organisations was positive in terms of the opportunity to get involved and have their say. Officers and members had also found the exercises positive and useful.

1.5 The debrief officer/member group suggested that the council could carry out town centre engagement/have your say/community listening events on a regular basis.

1.6 Feedback from corporate priorities/budget consultation

The consultation debrief provided a range of issues and learning for consideration. A summary of issues is provided below.

- Timing – the run up to Christmas and the first week of New Year is not ideal as it is a busy time for residents, a holiday period and likely to be poor weather conditions. An earlier engagement process would ensure information is provided to support the decision making process
- Questionnaire needs to provide more detail or be simplified – what is important to residents or ranking of city council or community priorities
- Format of discussion groups needs to be changed

1.7 The debrief group also advised that consideration should be given to organising the budget consultation in partnership with other public sector agencies as resident queries and comments covered all partner services. A joint consultation would create a more co-ordinated approach, help to cut costs and reduce duplication and be of greater benefit to customers who don't necessarily know which organisation provides which service. This approach would need to focus on the district/place and partnership issues rather than the council.

2.0 Proposal Details

2011/12 budget/community priorities engagement

2.1 Key considerations

- Given the latest government announcements (22 June) the pressure on council budgets is extreme – savings will need to be made.
- The new government has also placed a greater focus on spending decisions being more transparent for local people and implementation of the Sustainable Communities Act 2007, so citizens know how their money is being spent and can have a greater say on expenditure (For information, appendix A is a SOLACE paper on questions for senior managers to consider before consultations).
- Working in partnership is now a council priority and the budget communications plan, which would run in tandem with the engagement plan, encourages a joined up approach to public sector messages and engagement around budget decisions.
- More and more local people and organisations now seek their information and opportunities to engage through online mechanisms such as Facebook and Twitter.

2.2 This year's budget engagement plan would therefore be to:

- Seek views on council priorities/community priorities consultation at the end of September/early October
- Where appropriate, take a Total Place approach to budget consultation, working with key partners to plan
- Utilise appropriate online engagement channels
- Invite local people's/organisations' suggestions for more efficient working

Key messages

2.3 These would mirror those of the communications budget communications plan, and support the need to make our spending decisions transparent for local people.

- The council's finances have been affected as part of the economic downturn. There is less money and we need to make savings, thereby reducing service provision
- The Government has said it will reduce public spending by 25% over the next four years. The council is planning in anticipation of this reduction and will be in a better position to provide efficient and effective services in the future by starting the process now
- This is not just something which affects the council – all public bodies face funding cuts and we therefore all have to make savings
- We can't keep doing all we are doing. We want your (stakeholder) input into the decisions we need to take
- We are committed to our priorities – reminding people what they are - and will continue to provide VFM across hundreds of services. We want to improve the services that we do continue to provide
- The city council only takes 13% of the overall Council Tax bill, which equates to £3.70 a week (example of what this equates to in real terms)
- Promoting our community leadership role – by supporting and working with others we can help our partners to find new ways of doing things
- We are working closely with partners and other local authorities to pursue joint working arrangements
- What can you do – engaging with our citizens and partners to share their ideas of where the council can save money and how they can play their part (eg downloading a brochure from the internet rather than picking up a paper copy)

Plan and timetable

2.4 Community listening/have your say day

A community listening/have your say day would take place at the end of September/early October in Lancaster, Morecambe and Carnforth and be promoted as opportunities for people to speak to council officers and ward councillors face to face and ask questions or make comments. NB. Other public sector partners would be invited to be part of this event and if they are able to attend it would be promoted as a chance to have your say on public services in your area.

2.5 People would be encouraged to complete copies of the questionnaire at these events and share their views on what is important to them/their priorities.

- 2.6 Key officers from front line services would be required to man the stands and answer questions.
- 2.7 The days would also provide an opportunity to promote the services provided and showcase public sector achievements, linking to our value for money campaign (Making Every Penny Count).
- 2.8 This would also be an opportunity to promote other ways that people can get involved and have their say throughout the year e.g. joining the community consultation register, registering to be involved in online consultation, registering to be involved in local development planning online consultation, compliments, comments and complaints system, ward councillors, attending committee meetings etc.
- 2.9 Key employers would be approached about the council holding similar days with their staff (local residents) e.g. British Energy, Lancaster University, University of Cumbria.
- 2.10 Consultation document
An information booklet and questionnaire would be created to provide context (set out in communications plan) and find out what is important to them and ask people to rank their priorities.
- 2.11 A decision would need to be made on whether the consultation events focus on Lancaster City Council services or all public services (Total Place approach). However each organisation would have a separate approach to the questions it asks and how it asks them.
- 2.12 The Place Survey and other customer insight related to the council priorities would be used to inform the list of community priorities.
- 2.13 Interactive public meetings
Local people would be invited to attend public meetings in Lancaster, Morecambe and Carnforth where presentations would set the context followed by breakout discussion groups on ranking community priorities and feedback. Similar but separate sessions will be organised for local organisations.
- 2.14 If the consultation is to be focused on a Total Place approach other public sector partners would be invited to be part of this event and if they are able to attend they would be promoted as a chance to have your say on public services in your area.
- 2.15 Ideally we would encourage a wide range of people to come along and ask for their demographics to check representativeness.
- 2.16 Online engagement
A Facebook page would be established to enable people to share their ideas and discuss ways in which the council could save money,
- 2.17 Suggestions scheme
Similar to the internal scheme, this would encourage residents to share their ideas of where the council could potentially save money. It would be online, but with an option to send/drop off hard copy suggestions at a range of council venues that are accessible to the public (this could be run via the council magazine, subject to the timing).

2.18 Snapshot surveys
Snapshot surveys would be completed prior to, during and following the budget consultation exercise to gauge the public mood and evaluate if key messages should be modified/changed.

2.19 Promotion and feedback
The promotion for the engagement opportunities would use the wide range of communication channels identified in the budget communication plan to encourage local people/organisations to get involved.

2.20 It would be vital to clearly communicate the outcomes of engagement activities with local people/organisations using a range of communication channels.

3.0 Details of Consultation

3.1 Feedback has been sought from the 2009/10 budget consultation feedback. Corporate Management Team has been consulted on the proposed approach.

4.0 Options and Options Analysis (including risk assessment)

4.1 Option 1

Provide all the opportunities for local people to have a say as highlighted in the report:

- Community listening/have your say days
- Consultation document
- Interactive budget meetings
- Online engagement
- Suggestions scheme
- Snapshot surveys

4.2 Option 2

Provide some of the opportunities for local people to have a say as highlighted in the report and outlined above in option 1.

5.0 Officer Preferred Option (and comments)

5.1 Option 1 as this provides increased opportunities for local people to engage in the process, assisting the council in its decision making process

6.0 Conclusion

6.1 That an engaging budget community consultation takes place to ensure that the council is capturing the feedback of its citizens and using this information to inform decisions and service delivery.

RELATIONSHIP TO POLICY FRAMEWORK

The budget/priorities engagement plan will help to inform future corporate priorities and budget decisions.

CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT

(including Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)

The budget/priorities engagement plan does not have an adverse impact on the community as it provides a number of opportunities for people to get involved and have a say. Targeted engagement and promotion may be considered to encourage seldom heard groups to take part although this will depend on capacity and resources.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Free/low cost venues would be used e.g. Marketgate, Lancaster Market Square, St Nicholas Arcade, Morecambe Arndale Centre and Carnforth Railway Station.

Other costs for the budget consultation would include staff time for planning and manning events, limited design and printing for promotion and any information documents. Small initiatives may be considered. Last year's event costs were approximately £1,000. It is not expected this year's would cost any more than this figure, possibly less. The cost would be met from within existing budgets (Corporate Consultation Budget).

SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS

Report amendments have been made following the section 151 officer's comments.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications directly arising from this report.

MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS

Report amendments have been made following the monitoring officer's comments.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

SOLACE paper for senior managers

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