

Budget 2014/16 Your Views Count

Feeding back to you

Why we consulted

As a result of significant cuts in local government funding, the Council is facing an estimated funding gap of £45 million over the next two years.

We therefore asked for local people's views on a number of budget choices, which could mean stopping doing some things, doing less, or delivering services differently, asking local people to pay more, or working with partners or local communities to support local services.

When we consulted

15 October 2013 to 17 December 2013.

How we consulted and who responded

The public consultation was based on two main themes: Universal Services – those which are provided to all or can be used by all and Targeted Services – those which are provided to people who need the Council's help or relate to a certain group of people or circumstance:

- Universal Services covers the Environment, Local Economy, Communities, Culture and Leisure, Information, Advice and Income
- Targeted Services covers Adult Services – Social Care, Children and Young People's Services and Health

In addition, 'Efficiency, Effectiveness and Savings' is a theme that cuts across all areas of the Council's work.

Budget Surveys "Your Views Count" based on the above themes were posted on the Council's on-line consultation system and the consultation was promoted in Council News. Paper versions of the survey were also made available in Council buildings and in other accessible formats. The full Budget Consultation report was available on the Council's website, which provided details of all the budget choices.

An email including the link to the survey was provided to Viewpoint panel members and all residents who have registered to receive email alerts of new consultations.

Various meetings were held with partners and community and voluntary groups to inform and/or consult on the budget choices.

In total, 3,042 responses were received to the survey - 2,121 or 86% of these live in Gateshead. 1,235 or 53% work in Gateshead.

Feedback

The feedback received is summarised under each consultation theme, as follows:

Environment

Budget Choices	Agree	Disagree	No view
Reduce Mechanical Sweepers	48%	49%	3%
Increase town centre/Introduce countryside site Car Park Charges	56%	41%	2%
Reduce/Involve others in management of bowling greens and sports pitches	79%	19%	2%
Charge for Garden waste collection	35%	62%	3%
Close a waste recycling centre	37%	58%	4%
Switching off some street lights (not in residential areas)	78%	20%	1%
Reduce flower beds	66%	31%	2%
Community help to maintain flower beds	87%	10%	3%

Key points and suggestions raised in consultation responses included:

- the potential for increased fly tipping was highlighted should some of the budget choices be implemented
- concerns expressed around community safety in relation to dimming/turning off street lights overnight
- litter picking could be done by others to assist the Council's operations
- could the Council attract sponsorship for Flowerbeds etc
- could less frequent green waste collection reduce the financial burden on the Council

Local Economy

Budget Choices	Agree	Disagree	No view
Employment support only to people living in high unemployment areas	48%	48%	4%
Reduce Events and community organisation events support	38%	59%	3%
Stop all events	21%	76%	2%
Stop supporting development of self employment/social enterprises	32%	64%	4%
Reduce funding to promote NewcastleGateshead	54%	43%	3%
Stop supporting people to access financial services/products including debt and benefits advice	36%	61%	3%

Key points and suggestions raised in consultation responses included:

- the Council should consider the true effect of visitor spending, especially from cultural and sporting events
- positive impact of local cultural events within communities should be noted
- the Council attracting sponsorship for events
- a small charge could be introduced for events held at venues like Baltic and Shipley Art Gallery
- could financial advice and employment support be provided elsewhere

Communities, Culture and Leisure

Budget Choices	Agree	Disagree	No view
Reduce leisure facilities or activities	37%	58%	4%
Introduce an alternative way of delivering leisure facilities	62%	32%	5%
Reduce funding to Sage, BALTIC and Shipley Art Gallery	56%	42%	3%
Reduce funding to Community Centres	35%	62%	3%
Reduce Local Community and Capacity Building funds	42%	52%	5%
Reduce level of sport and healthy lifestyle service provision	41%	56%	3%
Reduce level of arts projects with communities and schools	55%	43%	3%
Further review of libraries	52%	44%	4%
Reduce support to property owners to bring empty properties back into use	46%	49%	5%

Key points and suggestions raised in consultation responses included:

- the Council's focus should be targeted more towards building capacity amongst groups to be as self sufficient as possible
- the value of the Capacity Building Fund and Local Community Fund should not be underestimated
- reducing expenditure elsewhere to minimise reductions in funding to the Shipley Art Gallery
- increasing leisure charges but with subsidies
- working with others to shape new service delivery within sports and leisure activities
- the benefits of the licensed landlord scheme in regulating landlords and improving private sector housing.

Information, Advice and Income

Budget Choices	Agree	Disagree	No view
Introduce self service facilities	61%	35%	4%
Reduce the number of Council News editions	86%	13%	2%
Replace Council News with online version	71%	28%	2%
Introduce Council Tax charge for properties empty 2+ years	78%	16%	6%
Charge full Council Tax for empty properties	65%	31%	4%
Increase fees and charges by inflation rate	53%	37%	10%
Increase fees and charges above inflation rate	25%	66%	9%

Key points and suggestions raised in consultation responses included:

- ensuring people were still able to access council services
- Council News only being available in council buildings or residents could opt in to receive the magazine
- a gradual increases of fees and charges in relation to Allotments and Bowling Greens
- could the Council consider special circumstances in relation to the removal of Council Tax discounts

Adult Services – Social Care

Budget Choices	Agree	Disagree	No view
Continue to meet social care needs at both critical and substantial levels	59%	35%	5%
Reviewing and potentially reducing the scale of social care services in a range of early intervention, prevention and statutory services	32%	62%	6%

Key points and suggestions raised in consultation responses included:

- meeting social care needs at just the critical level was considered a false economy
- the Council needed to consider the implications of the Care and Support Bill
- the engagement with Voluntary and Community Sector would be important if budget choices were taken forward
- reducing preventative social care services could increase risk in a number of areas

Children and Young People

Budget Choices	Agree	Disagree	No view
Review free transport to faith schools	85%	13%	2%
Request contributions from learners aged 16+ with special educational needs towards costs of transport to college	70%	28%	2%
Reduce or withdraw funding for child mental health organisations	27%	69%	3%
Reorganise children and families services into fewer multi-agency centres	47%	48%	5%
Target Connexions support for young people 'Not in Education, Employment or Training' and those with Special Educational Needs	61%	35%	4%
Reduce/withdraw support for youth club activities	32%	65%	4%
Focus youth work in areas of deprivation and for adolescents with the greatest challenge	59%	36%	4%
Operate the play service as a traded service	35%	61%	4%
Reduce funding to support teenage parents	59%	37%	4%
Reduce school crossing patrols	39%	58%	3%
Stop school crossing patrols	29%	68%	3%

Key points and suggestions raised in consultation responses included:

- positive comments in support of current Early Years and Children's Centre services, including a petition and MP support
- support for protecting services rather than buildings
- the outcome of the specific Home to School Transport consultation undertaken with schools, religious leaders and recipients of the initiatives did not agree with the proposal
- a review of the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service should be undertaken
- general disagreement to the budget choices in relation to the Youth Service and support to teenage parents
- differing views on whether Council should provide school crossing patrols

Health

Key points and suggestions raised in consultation responses included:

- acknowledgement of other consultations underway – sexual health services, drug and alcohol services, wellness model
- anticipated national changes including the Care and Support Bill
- exploring savings and efficiencies between the NHS and Council

Efficiency, Effectiveness and Savings

Key points and suggestions raised in consultation responses included:

- reviewing the Council's organisational structure
- support for continued work on exploring joining up services to achieve economies of scale
- better use of technology and council property
- achieving more efficiencies from employment costs such as car usage

Next steps

The outcome of the consultation, which was reported to Cabinet on 21 January 2014, is helping to inform our thinking in terms of preparing the Council's Budget for the next financial year 2014/15, which will be presented to Cabinet on 25 February 2014.

The next edition of Council News will also provide information in relation to the Council's Budget.