

'YOUR CITY, YOUR SAY' BUDGET CONSULTATION REPORT

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The 'Your City, Your Say' Budget Consultation aimed to engage local residents in the process of developing council budgets and priorities and to help identify potential cost and efficiency savings that may enable the Council to offset reductions in government spending and grant funding. Alongside this work, the Council also ran a 'Your Council, Your Say' consultation with its staff – giving them the opportunity to use their insight to identify solutions that may generate revenue or reduce inefficiency within the organisation. This report summarises the main findings of both consultations, which were undertaken between October 2010 and January 2011.

1. THE CONSULTATIONS

- Over 500 people used the online 'You Choose' budget calculator, of whom 334 could be identified as living within Southampton.
- 120 consultation postcards were completed by visitors to the market day consultation road shows in Bitterne, Shirley and the Town Centre. In addition, the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council spent 12 hours speaking with local residents and shoppers who dropped by.
- 13 'harder to involve' residents visited the civic centre for a 'Your City, Your Say' forum - which included a brief tour, presentation and discussion with the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council.
- 11 people submitted 'Your City, Your Say' feedback forms, available via the Council's website, or as hard copy on request.
- Local residents also shared their ideas with Councillors via one hour 'phone in' slots on Unity One and AWAAZ community radio stations.

246 council staff submitted consultation forms, with a further 26 staff attending Open Door sessions with the Leader of the Council, and 6 staff submitting suggestions by email.

In addition, this report considers aspects of the 'Your City, Your Say' survey, completed by 1,171 residents in Autumn 2010, which included questions on City priorities.

2. KEY FINDINGS - RESIDENTS

- No-one wants to see services lost or facilities closed. Participants would much rather see services reduced than stopped altogether.
- The Council should concentrate its provision on 'must have's', rather than perceived 'nice to have's'.
- In particular, participants valued services for vulnerable and older people, services that would encourage children and young people's development and services that keep people safe. They would also prioritise maintenance of roads and pavements, increasing employment, and locally accessible community services.
- Many of the participants felt that local communities could be encouraged and enabled to take responsibility for aspects of their area.

- Participants would broadly support opportunities to maximise the Council’s income, and felt that further efficiency savings could still be applied in a number of areas.

3. KEY FINDINGS – STAFF

In the light of the funding cuts and potential for reduced services over the next three years, staff responding to the consultation felt that the top priorities for the City Council should be to:

1. Maintain and refocus on core, and essential front line, services.
2. Support vulnerable people.
3. Reduce staff turnover.
4. Reduce crime and anti-social behaviour.
5. Support children, young people and families.
6. Encourage economic growth and job creation.
7. Increase educational achievement, and training for young people.

Respondents were keen that the Council should provide value for money services that met residents’ needs. The consultation also generated almost 800 ideas and suggestions as to how the Council could work more efficiently – the majority of which can broadly be grouped into nine areas:

Joint working	Human Resources	Terms and Conditions
Outsourcing and Procurement	Energy Saving	Administrative Resources
Revenue generation	ICT	Service Specific

N.B. A full list of suggestions can be reviewed internally, following the link on the front page of the Intranet.

4. RESIDENTS’ VIEWS - SERVICE PRIORITIES

Residents who visited the ‘Your City, Your Say’ Roadshows recognised and used a wide range of services provided by the Council. They placed particular value on:

- Community services: such as local libraries, community safety, SureStart centres and local contact points (e.g. housing offices, walk-in centres)
- Services that support elderly and vulnerable residents.
- Leisure facilities: including swimming pools, leisure centres, youth clubs and parks.
- Waste and recycling.
- Cultural facilities: such as museums, the art gallery and city events.
- Maintenance of roads and pavements.

Residents who attended the Civic Centre Forum discussed a wide range of Council services. They prioritised:

- Quality of education
- Maintenance of roads, pavements and cycle routes
- Human contact - being able to approach the Council and receive support to resolve issues.
- Support for vulnerable people.
- Assisting communities in taking responsibility for their local area.

The service areas where Southampton residents using the ‘You Choose’ budget calculator applied the lowest budget cuts (below 7%) were as follows:

- Services for Adults With Mental Health Needs
- Support for Children & Young People in Schools
- Services for Children & Young People
- Support for Children With Special Educational Needs
- Services for Adults With Physical or Sensory Disabilities
- Homelessness, Advice & Enforcement
- Services for Adults With a Learning Disability
- Children's Social Care Services
- Services for Older People (Age 65+)

The following challenges were identified by City Survey respondents as the most important priorities for Southampton, and also those most in need of improvement.

Most Important	Most Needs Improving
1. Increasing job growth and employment	1. Increasing job growth and employment
2. Reducing crime and antisocial behaviour	2. Reducing crime and antisocial behaviour
3. Keeping children safe	3. Improving roads, pavements and street lighting
4. Improving roads, pavements and street lighting	4. Keeping children safe
5. Supporting vulnerable people	5. Supporting vulnerable people

1,171 respondents. Priorities chosen from a list of 18 challenges, plus an option to suggest their own.

5. RESIDENTS’ SUGGESTIONS FOR CHANGE – ROADSHOWS, FEEDBACK FORMS AND FORUM.

a) In General

There was a broad recognition and acceptance amongst participants that the majority of savings would impact on universal services, as opposed to those used by fewer, but more vulnerable residents. Road show participants also tended to

comment on the services they used directly. Therefore, very few of the savings suggestions encompassed services provided by the Children's Services and Learning, or Health and Adult Social Care directorates.

The one key message that was clear across the consultation, was that no-one wanted to see services lost or facilities closed. Participants would much rather see services reduced than stopped altogether. They reasoned that people would adapt to (e.g.) shorter contact hours or slightly longer journeys, but feared that once a service had stopped, it would be very difficult for it to return.

The Forum participants, in possession of more detailed information, were particularly keen that the required 2011/12 savings of 7%¹ should be applied equally across the board. They felt strongly that a small reduction in all services was preferable, and suggested that even statutory services could look to operate more efficiently.

Generally, participants were also keen to preserve the opportunity for direct local contact with the Council. Those who had used Gateway or community facilities such as housing offices found it reassuring to be able to speak directly with council staff when problems arose. However, if value could be added or savings made through shared provision of non front facing services with other councils then they were happy for this to be considered.

b) Service Reductions

When deciding where the reduction should apply, participants asked that the Council concentrate its provision on 'must have's', rather than perceived 'nice to have's'.

For example, they would much rather that existing roads and pavements were properly maintained and repaired, than money spent on new traffic light junctions or gyratory systems. Similarly, flower pots, community artwork and new museums were seen as desirable, but not essential in the current climate.

Given the extent of the cuts required, most of the residents consulted were not adverse to alternate weekly collection of household waste. However, they felt that should this be adopted, alternative provision should be made for families and residents in larger households – for example by providing them with larger bins. Participants also felt that the green waste collection service should be suspended during the winter months, arguing that the amount they generated dropped markedly at this time. Some suggested that staff could be transferred to seasonal jobs of higher priority, such as road and pavement gritting.

Street lighting was another key area where participants felt that savings could be made. They were broadly in favour of street lights being dimmed or switched off at night – provided crime levels were taken into consideration and monitored.

Libraries were an often mentioned area. Although not always regular users, participants recognised the value of a local service, and would rather see opening hours reduced by one day a week than branches close. To maintain the service, they also suggested that the libraries could be better utilised – incorporating more community groups or book clubs; or that some services – for example reading groups or even internet usage - could attract a fee. If branches were to close, some proposed using a mobile library to maintain the service.

Council tenants who took part in the consultation suggested that the Council should use good quality fittings that will last longer when fitting out council properties, rather

¹ This was the extent of the known savings requirements at the time.

than making false economies. They noted that more could also be done to encourage tenants to look after their properties.

Whilst participants understood the value of City View Magazine, some did question whether savings could still be made – perhaps via less regular publication, by investigating online publication options, or through increased advertising revenue.

c) Community Involvement

Many of the participants felt that local communities could also be encouraged and enabled to take responsibility for aspects of their area. Where services had to be cut, rather than losing them altogether they would prefer that the Council provide support to help local residents and volunteers maintain provision. With the consultation being undertaken during the winter months, gritting was often used as an example – wherein residents noted they would be happy to undertake the spreading on local roads and pavements, if only grit bins were made available to them. Others suggested maintenance of local play parks and outdoor space, litter picking and organising local activities could be undertaken by the local community.

Some people also suggested that means testing should be applied more widely to council services, so that people who could afford to contribute would do so.

d) Staffing

Participants sympathised with staff facing wage cuts, but accepted that this was required. However, there was some feeling that the highest paid senior managers should face larger reductions.

Some also perceived that the Council was overstaffed and could become a leaner organisation. However, whilst a small number mentioned staff cuts, more felt that the amount of Councillors could be reduced. They queried why, if the Council could become more efficient, its political representatives could not do likewise. A reduction to two Councillors per ward was regularly suggested, and participants were in favour of the currently proposed reduction in expenses.

6. RESIDENTS' VIEWS - THE 'YOU CHOOSE' BUDGET CALCULATOR

334 Southampton residents completed the 'You Choose' online budget calculator. Respondents were asked to set a budget from a range of service, income and savings options in order to limit the local Council Tax increase to less than 3%. The table below shows the average reductions in service budgets applied, and the proportion of residents who applied a decrease, rather than an increase, to each service area budget.

Service Area	Average reduction £	Reduction %	Current Service Budget	New Budget if Reduction Applied	Respondents Applying a Decrease %
Art Gallery & Museums	286,971	15.0	1,916,354	1,629,383	94
Legal and Democratic Services	623,371	14.6	4,276,300	3,652,929	98
Sports & Recreation	460,077	14.4	3,195,554	2,735,477	94
Customer Services, Communication and Public Information	419,152	13.5	3,099,400	2,680,248	98
Libraries	393,010	13.5	2,911,592	2,518,582	93
Parks & Open Spaces	481,992	12.8	3,759,300	3,277,308	92
Economic & Community Development and Support to Voluntary Groups	487,378	11.5	4,250,200	3,762,822	90
Land and Buildings	875,506	11.4	7,702,500	6,826,994	94
Support Services	2,563,175	10.9	23,468,900	20,905,725	97
Highways and Parking	549,671	10.3	5,331,200	4,781,529	88
Payments and Benefits	222,831	10.1	2,212,900	1,990,069	94
Community Safety	162,151	9.9	1,636,600	1,474,449	88
Planning and Building Control	695,267	9.5	7,344,400	6,649,133	88
Protecting the Environment	66,005	9.3	709,200	643,195	89
Environmental Health and Consumer Protection	218,137	9.3	2,355,500	2,137,363	86
Refuse and Recycling	1,040,084	8.6	12,057,700	11,017,616	88
New Affordable Homes	47,485	8.3	568,900	521,415	84
Street Cleansing and Enforcement	98,350	7.8	1,260,700	1,162,350	88
Services for Adults With Mental Health Needs	345,756	6.4	5,400,750	5,054,994	87
Support for Children & Young People in Schools	315,835	6.2	5,074,601	4,758,766	84
Services for Children & Young People	57,245	6.1	937,801	880,556	83
Support for Children With Special Educational Needs	75,381	5.8	1,292,048	1,216,667	82
Services for Adults With Physical or Sensory Disabilities	321,250	5.7	5,602,110	5,280,860	86
Homelessness, Advice & Enforcement	66,968	5.7	1,174,300	1,107,332	84
Services for Adults With a Learning Disability	777,839	5.5	14,065,250	13,287,411	88
Children's Social Care Services	838,007	3.8	21,958,050	21,120,043	81
Services for Older People (Age 65+)	147,970	0.5	27,665,790	27,517,820	87
Total Budget Reduction	12,636,864				

7. 'YOU CHOOSE' INCOME OPTIONS

The table below shows the proportion of respondents who felt that the Council should be maximising the proposed income options in the 'You Choose' budget calculator.

Income Option (Base: 334 Southampton Respondents)	%
Maximise Income from Property Portfolio	68
Refuse Collection Charges and Fines	52
Increase Fees & Charges	52
Increase Adult Social Care Client Income	38

8. 'YOU CHOOSE' SAVINGS OPTIONS

The table below shows the proportion of respondents who felt that the Council should apply each of the proposed savings options in the 'You Choose' budget calculator.

Savings Option (Base: 334 Southampton Respondents)	%
Reduction in Councillors' Allowances	86
Improve Property and Asset Management	81
Better Purchasing & Outsourcing	76
Increased Electronic Service Delivery	74
Reduction in the Staff Car Mileage Allowance and Restructure of Essential User Car Allowance	69
No Progression Along Pay Scale for All Staff and Senior Managers for Two Years	52
Changes to Staff Terms and Conditions Including a Reduction in the Working Week by Two Hours	32

Overall, 41% of Southampton residents that completed 'You Choose' set a budget that would see Council Tax increase by 1%-3%, a quarter set a budget that would have no impact on Council Tax, and a third set a budget that would see a decrease in Council tax with the shortfall made up through additional expenditure cuts.

9. STAFF SUGGESTIONS FOR EFFICIENCY SAVINGS AND REVENUE GENERATION

Joint Working (112 comments): Both internal and external joint working were encompassed in the wide range of comments received. Respondents felt that the Council should consider integrating specialist services with neighbouring local authorities, as well as closer working with partner agencies. Externally, the concept of shared services was felt to be particularly relevant with regards to procurement, public health, recruitment, communications, housing support, sustainable transport and also venue space. Responding staff were also keen to work more closely with third sector organisations and voluntary groups – in order to enhance service provision where council resources were limited - and to encourage community responsibility.

Internally, respondents feel that the Council should adopt a more 'interdepartmental' approach to maximise resource, and avoid duplication and inefficiencies caused by silo working.

Human Resources (156 comments): Respondents felt strongly that the Council's staffing structure had developed too many layers. They favoured streamlining, so that the number of managers was proportionate to the amount of staff delivering services, in order to help reduce bureaucracy and enable more time to be spent on front line service provision.

Many also argued that non-managerial staff should be better empowered to share their experiences and ideas to improve service delivery. They noted that those working directly with service users could provide a different perspective on how efficiencies should be made – a resource currently felt to be underused, or worse, overlooked at the cost of hiring expensive consultants.

Some respondents questioned whether the number of Councillors in each ward could be cut from three to two, rationalising that efficiency savings should be made across the board.

Terms and Conditions (123 comments): Respondents were particularly anxious to avoid redundancies. Instead they suggested a range of alternative options that would spread the impact, including universal reductions in contracted hours or salaries, a review of overtime, sickness, travel and expense policies, pay rise suspension, increments subject to strict appraisal, and reductions in executive pay. Concerns were also raised regarding the impact of pay cuts on the lowest paid staff.

Outsourcing and Procurement (83 comments): A notable number of respondents felt frustrated by the current outsourcing and procurement arrangements that the Council had negotiated, and were unclear on how these were able to save the Council money. In the light of changed economic climate, they advocated a review of external suppliers and contracts, to ensure that these are efficient, offer the best possible value for money, meet local needs, and can be monitored effectively and held to account for under achievement.

Energy Saving (41 comments): Initiatives to save energy were felt to be a common sense and simple way to save money. Respondents gave a number of examples of wasteful lighting and heating of council buildings, as well as equipment being left on when not in use. Provision of bottled water was also seen as a luxury, rather than a necessity.

Administrative Resources (51 comments): Suggestions here encompassed a range of simple measures that, implemented across the Council, could generate a larger cost saving. These included restricting use of first class post and colour printing, encouraging reuse of internal post envelopes and recycling of equipment across divisions. Respondents also felt that savings could be made through the use of corporate credit cards, and by ending internal recharges, and the associated paperwork and administration.

Opportunities for revenue generation (33 comments): The comments in this section can broadly be grouped into four areas. Firstly, greater commercial exploitation of council services; secondly, realising the value of council assets (*in particular the underused art collection*); thirdly, proactively pursuing external funding and income; and finally enabling generated income to be used across the Council, rather than being ring fenced in certain areas.

ICT (42 comments): Respondents felt that many aspects of the Council's ICT system prevented them working efficiently. Strong concerns were raised about the significant amount of time wasted and stress caused due to unreliability, and it was suggested that

staff using new systems should be consulted prior to purchase to ensure service needs were met. Some respondents wondered replacing computers less regularly would save the Council money, whilst others felt the Council should be more open to embracing mobile technologies and online, open source, software.

10. SERVICE SPECIFIC SUGGESTIONS (160 COMMENTS)

Communications: Respondents felt that the distribution of City View Magazine to staff was wasteful. It was suggested that the magazine should instead be available via the intranet, as could the In-View staff publication. In terms of more general resource, there was concern about money being wasted on ineffective and duplicate internal and external communication.

Environment: Although recognised as not being politically popular, respondents still felt strongly that alternate weekly bin collections should be trialled in Southampton. Charges for garden waste collection, bin delivery and bulk collection were also suggested. In terms of transport, respondents suggested reviewing the quality and efficiency of road repairs and fleet transport.

H&ASC: The key saving here was to reduce over assessment of clients and repetition of referrals. Respondents also felt that a number of key processes in the directorate, such as safeguarding, Putting People First, RAS system, and processing of invoices, could be streamlined, making them more efficient.

Children's Services: Respondents recognised the importance of services in this area, so to make savings, were keen that initiatives should concentrate on core provision, at the expense of aspects like provision of laptops for school children, events, taxis for transport to/from school and even new capital programmes.

Neighbourhoods: Many comments in this area related to developing volunteering, encouraging community empowerment and improving cross directorate working as specified in earlier sections. Other comments encompassed scaling back large scale events, better use of unoccupied land for council housing, transferring management of council housing stock to an external provider, development of joint community facilities (e.g. libraries and housing offices), and reducing expenditure on the Sea City Museum.


11. ABOUT THE YOUR CITY, YOUR SAY BUDGET CONSULTATION

The 'Your City, Your Say' Budget Consultation was undertaken between October 2010 and January 2011. In accordance with the Council's statutory duty, its primary aim was to consult local residents about local priorities, prior to the finalisation of the 2011/12 budget.

The consultation was qualitative in nature – its objective being to provide people with the opportunity to express their views, to explore concepts and to generate ideas, rather than collate statistics. That said, it was important that as many residents as possible were given the opportunity to participate, should they choose to do so.

A series of wide ranging communications and media channels were therefore used, to extend the invitation. These included:

- Local and Community Radio Stations – a one hour 'phone in' slot on Unity 101 and AWAZZ stations, and news bulletins on Radio Solent.
- Written Press - articles in the Southern Daily Echo and press releases made available to all local media.

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- Lead article on the Southampton City Council website homepage throughout the duration of the consultation period. Further information on the website's consultation pages.
 - Consultation Roadshows in Bitterne, Shirley and Town Centre high streets on market day.

Further direct promotion of the consultation was also made via the following channels:

- 1,800 groups and organisations were contacted directly via the Communities database, and asked to encourage their members / contacts to take part in the consultation.
- 300 'harder to involve²' residents were directly invited by phone / post to attend the forum.
- Messages were 'tweeted' regularly to 1,637 Twitter followers and 'posted' on Facebook (111 friends).
- Council staff were notified of the consultation via the Weekly Bulletin, and asked to spread the word.

In addition, 3,600 residents were randomly selected from the LLPG to receive the City Survey, which asked respondents to prioritise the city's key challenges.

Residents were able to submit their ideas and suggestions in hard copy, online or by phone.

12. ABOUT THE 'YOUR COUNCIL, YOUR SAY' STAFF BUDGET CONSULTATION

The consultation employed an exploratory approach that enabled all staff to use their considerable professional insight and expertise, to highlight novel solutions. An online feedback form was emailed to staff, and sent in hard copy to those without online access, asking for written responses to a short set of 'open' questions, which were framed to meet the objectives and scope of the campaign. Forms were accompanied by a covering letter from the Leader of the Council, and time was also made available for staff to meet directly with the Leader at two 'open door' sessions. The consultation was undertaken during October and November 2010.

For further information, please contact Communications Research Manager, Communications Division, by telephone on 02380 834893, or email yourcity.yoursay@southampton.gov.uk

² Identified via analysis of the 2008 Place Survey – residents who are least likely to feel informed about decision making or how their council tax is spent, that they can influence decision making, or that the council provides value for money.