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## **BUDGET COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY 2018/19**

**Report by the Chief Financial Officer**

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### **SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL**

**20 FEBRUARY 2018**

#### **1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform the Council of the steps taken to engage with stakeholders as part of a consultation exercise on the budget.**
- 1.2 The paper highlights the budget Communication Strategy used and provides feedback gathered from the Dialogue Community Engagement tool and the social media Question & Answer session with the Council Leader and the Executive Member for Finance. As part of the agreed budget consultation exercise on the Council's updated Financial Plan the Dialogue Community Engagement tool was made available from the 16<sup>th</sup> November 2017 to members of the public on the Council website. This interactive tool allows residents and other stakeholders to provide ideas and suggestions on how the Council could do things differently to save money in a challenging economic climate as well as allowing them to comment on other ideas already logged. This approach is being developed within the Council's new Corporate Plan (Our plan – and your part in it).
- 1.3 As at the 31<sup>st</sup> of January 2018, the Dialogue Community Engagement tool was contributed to by stakeholders across 27 differently themed discussion threads. In total, 74 suggestions and follow up comments were made. This feedback has been considered as part of the 2018-2023 Financial Planning process.
- 1.4 The Council also undertook a Live Question and Answer (Q&A) session on the Council's Facebook page and Twitter feed with the general public. This was a session with the Council Leader and the Council's Executive Member for Finance.
- 1.5 A summary of the public feedback from the Dialogue tool is detailed in Appendix 1. A summary of the social media discussions is included in Appendix 2.

## **2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **2.1 It is recommended that Council notes:-**

- (a) the budget Communication Strategy used;**
- (b) the feedback from the Dialogue Community Engagement tool and the Q&A Session and how the Council has used this feedback to inform the Financial Planning process (Appendices 1 and 2);**
- (c) the actual responses from the Dialogue tool with all comments are available on the Council's website and a hard copy is available in the Elected Member's Library.**

### 3 BACKGROUND

3.1 As part of the financial planning process for 2018/19 the Council committed to engaging with staff, partners, stakeholders and the Scottish Borders community.

3.2 The forms of engagement have included:

- An online Dialogue Community Engagement tool was made available from the 16<sup>th</sup> November 2017 to all members of the public allowing the Council to gain valuable feedback on ideas and suggestions from local people on how the Council could do things differently to save money;
- A Live Question and Answer (Q&A) session on the Council's Facebook page and Twitter feed took place. This was a session with the Council Leader and the Council's Executive Member for Finance;
- Consultation with all Unions as part of the budget process;
- Stakeholder engagement meetings took place with a range of stakeholders including partners and staff prior to this report made to Council.

### 4 DIALOGUE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TOOL

4.1 As part of the agreed budget Communication Strategy the Dialogue Community Engagement tool was made available to members of the public via the Council website. This interactive tool allows a person to give the Council their views and ideas, it has been used as part of the financial planning process to gain views on how the Council could do things differently to save money. The tool also provides the facility for members of the public to comment on other people's ideas and also rate ideas. This has allowed a broader range of views to be considered as part of the Financial Planning process. The following context and question was provided:

#### ***We need you***

*We are now starting our budget-setting process for 2018/19 and want YOUR ideas on what our priorities should be for our budget.*

*Where should we prioritise funding, do things differently and improve services, whilst still addressing our priorities for the Borders, including economic growth, attainment and care?*

*Like household budgeting, there are limited funds available. To put this into perspective, if the Council were to continue delivering services in the same way as we do now there will be a funding gap of approximately £26million over the next five years.*

#### ***Considerations***

*The requirement to 'balance the books' each year requires us to save money, generate additional income and prioritise spending. We need to make a number of difficult choices which may not be popular with all people. When submitting your ideas, you **may** want to consider the following themes:*

- **Efficiencies** – can we do things in a more streamlined way?
- **Removal or reduction of services** – are there services, which in your view, could be removed, or reduced?
- **Different Models of delivering services** – are there services which we could deliver differently?
- **Increased charges to service users** – should we be charging more for some services?

***Please give us your ideas on how the Council can save money through annual revenue savings over the next 5 years. Please also give us your ideas on how we can prioritise spending and/or generate additional income.***

*The consultation will remain open until end of January 2018 and all responses will be fed into the budget planning process before the final proposals go to the Council meeting on 8 February 2018.*

- 4.2 The Dialogue tool has been available on the Council website from 16<sup>th</sup> November 2017 to the 31<sup>st</sup> January 2018. Up to the 31<sup>st</sup> of January 2018 it generated 74 comments and suggestions across 27 differently themed discussion threads.
- 4.3 The responses to date from the Dialogue tool as well as relevant feedback from the online Q&A session, which generated 244 comments, have been summarised in Appendices 1 and 2. These appendices also show how these responses have been considered as part of the 2018/19 Financial Planning process.
- 4.4 The Dialogue Community Engagement tool has been considered a worthwhile exercise. It is proposed therefore that this tool will not only remain a feature of subsequent budget processes but will continue to be used by the Council to engage on other topics to ensure the public continue to have the opportunity to give their views. Further budget responses will be considered as part of future Financial Planning cycles.
- 4.5 The new Corporate plan (Our plan – and your part in it) proposes a new approach to engaging individuals, communities, businesses and partners on an ongoing basis. This concept, therefore, of asking people to play their part is not new, but needs to now extend into "business as usual".

## 5 IMPLICATIONS

### 5.1 Financial

There are no direct financial implications resulting from this report.

### 5.2 Risk and Mitigations

There are no risks, issues or mitigating actions associated with this report.

### 5.3 Equalities

All forms of budget communication have been inclusive, easily accessible and available in a range of formats.

### 5.4 Acting Sustainably

There are no economic, social or environmental effects from this report.

### 5.5 Carbon Management

There are no effects on carbon emissions resulting from this report.

### 5.6 Rural Proofing

This report contains no implications that will compromise the Council's rural proofing policy.

### 5.7 Changes to the Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation

This report does not result in any changes to the Scheme of Administration or the Scheme of Delegation.

## 6 CONSULTATION

- 6.1 The Monitoring Officer, the Chief Legal Officer, the Chief Officer Audit and Risk, the Chief Officer HR and the Clerk to the Council have been consulted and any comments have been incorporated into the report.

### Approved by

**David Robertson**  
**Chief Financial Officer**

**Signature**

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**Background Papers:** N/A

**Previous Minute Reference:**

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