
BUDGET COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY 2017/18

Report by the Chief Financial Officer

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL

9 FEBRUARY 2017

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. 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 5th September 2016 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.
- 1.3 As at the end of January 2016 the Dialogue Community Engagement tool generated 26 ideas and suggestions. This feedback has been considered as part of the 2017-2022 Financial Planning process. The Dialogue tool will remain open online therefore ongoing feedback will be considered during future Financial Planning cycles.
- 1.4 The Council also undertook a series of Live Question and Answer (Q&A) sessions on the Council's Facebook page and Twitter feed with over 60 responses from the public. This included sessions with the Council Leader and Members of the Council's Executive committee with responsibility for each of the Council's priority areas.
- 1.5 Feedback from Dialogue tool as well as the Q&A sessions are included in the form of a 'you said, we did' in Appendix 1.

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 Sessions and how the Council has used this feedback to inform the Financial Planning process (Appendix 1);**
- (c) the actual responses from the Dialogue tool with all comments available on the Council's website and a hard copy available in the Member's Library.**

3 BACKGROUND

3.1 As part of the financial planning process for 2017/18 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 which was based on the 8 Council priorities has been made available from the 5th September 2016 to all members of the public allowing the Council to gain valuable feedback on ideas and suggestion from local people on how the Council could do things differently to save money;
- A series of Live Question and Answer (Q&A) sessions on the Council's Facebook page and Twitter feed took place. This included sessions with the Council Leader and also with the relevant Executive Members for each of the Council's priority areas;
- Consultation with all Unions during the budget process;
- Stakeholder engagement meetings took place with a range of stakeholders including partners and staff.

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:

What is the budget challenge?

We are living in a difficult economic climate and on top of that, more demands are being placed on us than ever before.

This means we need to consider carefully how we can do things differently to allow us to continue to deliver high quality services into the future.

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 £29million over the next 5 years.

We need YOUR views

From 5 September 2016 we are seeking the views of the public on how we can continue to improve services during a time when less money is available.

How to give us your ideas

- 1. Listed below are our eight priorities and we want you to tell us how we can continue to deliver services in these areas with less money available.*
- 2. To submit your ideas, simply register (if you have not already done so), click on the challenges below then add your ideas.*
- 3. Even if you don't want to add your own idea, you can still comment on and/or rate other ideas.*

All of the feedback will be considered as part of the financial planning process.

- 4.2 The Dialogue tool has been available on the Council website from 5th September 2016 and remains available. Up to the end of January 2017 it has generated 26 responses since its launch.
- 4.3 The responses to date from the Dialogue tool as well as relevant feedback from the online Q&A sessions, which had over 60 responses, have been summarised in Appendix 1. Appendix 1 also shows how these responses have been considered as part of the 2017/18 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 also 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.

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 and Reporting 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 their comments have been incorporated into the report.

Approved by

David Robertson
Chief Financial Officer

Signature

Author(s)

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Background Papers: N/A

Previous Minute Reference:

Note – You can get this document on tape, in large print and various other formats by contacting us at the address below. In addition, contact the address below for information on language translations, additional copies, or to arrange for an Officer to meet with you to explain any areas of the publication that you would like clarified. Contact Suzy Douglas Council Headquarters on 01835 824000 X5881

2017/18 – 2021/22 Dialogue feedback

The online Dialogue community engagement tool generated 26 individual ideas. These ideas have been summarised below with narratives on how these ideas have been used to inform the 2017/18 – 2021/22 financial planning process. Actual responses from residents with all comments are available on the Council's website and a copy has been made available in the Member's Library.

You Said	We Did
Reduce the pay, pension and conditions of Council employees which are too high.	The Council has adopted a responsible policy over a number of years of restricting wage increases in line with public sector pay and only provides those benefits through pensions available through statutory provision. Public sector pay has over many years been restricted to the level of inflation or below. The Council recognises the need for value for money to the tax payer in the cost of employing staff.
Stop early redundancy packages only to re-employ someone else to do the same work in a new role.	The Council is constantly looking at ways to reconfigure to protect important front line services including redesigning jobs where posts are removed from the staffing establishment as part of the budget process. We do not give redundancy in order to allocate the same job to another person.
Reduce inequalities on employment and income by moving some well paid jobs in to other principle towns in The Borders.	The Council represents the whole region and the place where people work is not indicative of where they live or spend money in the local economy. The Council is developing its future response to locality planning and this may in the future see some movement in the location of staff bases in across the area. The Council is keen wherever possible to encourage flexible working and move away from the notion that staff need to be based in specific offices. This approach will also help with the future rationalisation of office accommodation and the impact of staff travel on the environment.
Sell-off surplus Council empty properties	The Council has significant savings proposals included in the Financial Plan which will be delivered through a review of Property & Assets. Capital receipts of £1.9m are anticipated through property disposals over the next four years of the 2017/18 Capital Plan.
Focus less on delivering opportunities in the Central Borders and spread opportunity more evenly throughout The Borders.	The Council has an extensive Capital programme which seeks to balance the need to maintain existing assets with new developments in communities. The Capital programme proposed over the next 10 years will deliver substantial new investment in key major towns in the area including Galashiels, Hawick, Eyemouth, Selkirk, Duns, Kelso and Peebles. Major investment in the Roads network will benefit the main connecting routes across the Borders.

<p>Stop committing funding to the Tapestry Project.</p>	<p>The Tapestry project is proceeding in a new location in Galashiels and will lead to significant economic benefits including increased visitor numbers in Galashiels and the wider Scottish Borders. The development of the Tapestry provides the opportunity to capitalise on major investment already made in the Borders Railway and through the Railway Blueprint plan.</p>
<p>Reintroduce the garden waste collection service to improve recycling rates.</p>	<p>The council continues to develop its waste management strategy. Green waste collection was a non-statutory, partial service delivered to certain communities in the Borders. Officers continue to explore ways of increasing recycling rates for example a review of the Council's kerbside collection services is currently being undertaken that will assess the pros and cons of a variety of alternative collection scenarios. The aim of the review is to ensure the kerbside services provided by the Council in the future are 'fit for purpose' and financially sustainable in the long term and maximise recycling.</p>
<p>The end mobile library service as it not well used and less relevant in the internet era.</p>	<p>Cultural Services including Libraries were transferred to Live Borders in April 2016. Live Borders are currently reviewing their structures and how they deliver services to the community; Library Services will be part of this review.</p>
<p>Use spare public land for advertising.</p>	<p>This is a good suggestion if treated sensitively. The Council is acutely aware of the need to maximise income but also to protect our built and natural environment. We would not wish to see the character or appearance of this very scenic area damaged by inappropriate large scale advertising in rural or urban settings.</p>
<p>Turn-off street lighting overnight.</p>	<p>This opportunity has been considered but was discounted as a feasible option to reduce costs due to negative feedback from other Local Authorities who have already implemented this change and concerns over perceived community safety.</p>
<p>Don't grit the roads when they are dry and there is unlikely to be any precipitation.</p>	<p>The Council has a duty, under The Roads (Scotland) Act 1984, to provide a winter service across its road network and Section 34 states:</p> <p><i>"A roads authority shall take such steps as they consider reasonable to prevent snow and ice endangering the safe passage of pedestrians and vehicles over public roads."</i></p> <p>This clearly intimates that Scottish Borders Council has a responsibility to apply winter treatment to its adopted road network when a weather forecast predicts that frost/ice or snow conditions will occur to its road network. Rock salt is one of the most recognised de-icing materials available to prevent ice forming on road surfaces during freezing winter weather. The decision to apply salt to the Council's primary road network is taken based on a specific weather forecast provide to the Council daily by the Met Office. This forecast provides predicted minimum road temperatures throughout the 24 hour forecast period and the resultant road conditions which will occur, resulting from these temperatures. It is on this information that the decision on whether or not to apply salt to the roads is based.</p>

Take learning outside the classroom to free up capacity in schools that are full.	There are currently no schools in the Scottish Borders operating at full capacity.
Close small schools which are expensive to run and do not provide the opportunities of larger establishments.	The council is currently examining the provision of education in a number of buildings. A School estate review is currently underway and this may result, following a statutory consultation process, in a reduction in the number of school buildings.
Sell-off additional school playing fields which are surplus to requirements.	All such facilities are under consideration as part of the property rationalisation review.
Fair investment in the school estate. Suggest condensing the 6 poor quality schools in Hawick into a single 21 st century education facility.	The council is currently examining the provision of education in a number of buildings. A School estate review is currently underway and this may result, following a statutory consultation process, in a reduction in the number of school buildings.
Schools and head-teachers to take part responsibility for funding for example by selling advertising space and using money raised to upgrade equipment.	Schools currently raise funds in a variety of ways.
Reduce school days by 1 day per week to save on heating and transport costs.	There is a statutory minimum number of 190 days per calendar years when education must be provided.
Improve Bordercare Alarm system and employ fully trained persons who can make informed client assessments.	The Council employs fully trained people to undertake assessments and is looking at ways that aspects of the assessment process for Bordercare alarms can be joined up more effectively to provide a more streamlined service. This review is currently being undertaken by our Home care provider SBcares.
Close most or all of the Adult Day Centres.	As part of our financial plan a full review is planned of the Councils day centres. This will look at utilisation rates to ensure best use of available resources. The plan is for savings in this area to be delivered in 2018/19 and 2019/20.
Reduce the recycling (Blue Bin) collection from every two weeks to once per month.	A review of the Council's kerbside collection services is currently being undertaken that will assess the pros and cons of a variety of alternative collection scenarios. The aim of the review is to ensure the kerbside services provided by the Council in the future are 'fit for purpose' and financially sustainable in the long term.

<p>Introduce a £1 per car/vehicle charge at Borders CRC's to make residents think about waste and its cost.</p>	<p>A number of Councils in England have started to charge householders an entry/exit fee. In the main this has been to keep facilities open which would have otherwise had to shut due financial pressures. This is not the case in Scotland.</p> <p>A review of the Council's Community Recycling Centres is being undertaken which is concentrating on the hours of operation with the aim of providing a more efficient service that meets the needs of the householder. This review will help inform if there is a need to charge householders an entry/exit fee. However at the current time it is important to highlight that this proposal has not been considered.</p>
<p>Reduce spending on Flood Prevention Schemes and replace with a loan scheme to help flooded property owners.</p>	<p>The major flood prevention schemes we undertake are assisted by Capital Subsidies from the Scottish Government as it is Government policy to reduce and eliminate the risk of flooding to householders in areas deemed to be at high risk. We believe that it is correct wherever possible to implement effective flood prevention measures that protect property, reduce insurance costs and spare our residents and businesses the misery and hardship that flooding can cause rather than simply treat the after-effects of flooding.</p>
<p>Get road maintenance teams to pick up litter when they are out patching.</p>	<p>There is an ongoing review of the Roads Service</p>
<p>Invest more in HR to help develop Council staff.</p>	<p>There are no proposals included in the Financial Plan to reduce the HR service as the Council has identified this as a key support area to enable Transformational change.</p>
<p>Keep current fortnightly waste collections but adjust it so that both collections are on the same day of the week.</p>	<p>A review of the Council's kerbside collection services is currently being undertaken that will assess the pros and cons of a variety of alternative collection scenarios. The aim of the review is to ensure the kerbside services provided by the Council in the future are 'fit for purpose' and financially sustainable in the long term.</p>
<p>Q&A Session Feedback</p>	
<p>Why do we need to spend millions on a Tapestry?</p>	<p>We're not spending millions on the Tapestry. We are investing in a visitor centre and associated facilities where the tapestry will be displayed. Any building will be designed flexibly for other community uses.</p>
<p>Let's have the Tapestry of Scotland housed within the museum in Wilton Lodge Park. Surely a better place than a post office in Galashiels; surely considerably cheaper than building a new venue and surely infinitely preferable to doing nothing.</p>	<p>The Tapestry has to be easily accessible from the Borders Railway, which limits us to Galashiels or Tweedbank. Whilst the Tweedbank option looks to be less expensive, we are trying very hard to see if we can make Galashiels work as a destination for the Tapestry as it will regenerate the town centre.</p>
<p>Will you commit to continue to fund youth work and further strengthen youth work and schools partnerships to raise attainment?</p>	<p>We're committed to youth services and no budget decisions have been made as yet. We will work with a range of partners to ensure that all multi funding arrangements continue, to support service delivery.</p>

<p>How much has Scottish Borders health and social care received from the Scottish government with regards to the rise in the minimum wage and how much of this is going into the learning disability services?</p>	<p>The NHS and the Council have received £2.5m this year from the Scottish Government to go towards the rise in the living wage. There are ongoing discussions with the learning disability providers to determine how much of this budget is required to support the £8.25 living wage hourly rate from October 16.</p>
<p>Is there any funding for resident associations to improve their community?</p>	<p>There may be a number of funding options available for constituted groups. Please contact the relevant team for more information. They can also advise on other options that may be available. Contact the Council's Community Grants Co-ordinator.</p>
<p>How much does SBConnect cost to print & deliver and would it not be cheaper to publish an online version instead?</p>	<p>Thanks for your question. The total cost to design, print and distribute SBConnect is on average, £12k per issue (13p per copy). It is delivered to every household in the Borders and remains a valuable method of communication for Scottish Borders Council. It is also available online via SB Connect. We have a statutory duty to publish performance information relating to Council Services and SBConnect plays a key role in this by providing information throughout the year and avoids the added cost of producing a separate publication. We also must ensure information is accessible to all residents – including those who do not have internet access. We are always reviewing the publication however and will put your views forward as part of the budget consultation.</p>
<p>We need a garden waste bin, I've spoken to my neighbours about this before & we've all said we wouldn't mind paying a small charge for someone to empty it every fortnight it's just our gardens are so big the compost bin is full in no time.</p>	<p>We have information on our website about private garden waste collection services should you want to make a private arrangement.</p>
<p>I would love to see kerbside garden waste collections again, is there any chance this will come back?</p>	<p>The removal of garden waste delivered significant savings and were it to be reinstated the money would need to be found from other areas of our budget.</p>
<p>Should we not be worried about the amount of staff that are being paid off in the council? Is this actually saving money and how do you make sure you don't lose the relevant expertise?</p>	<p>We are committed to minimising the impact of job losses on staff but in the current climate this is not always possible. We use a number of processes such as redeployment and retraining to offer options to staff. There is a rigorous process followed to ensure any staff leaving under the Early Retirement / Voluntary Severance programme, are affordable both financially and in terms of handover of experience and skills.</p>
<p>Will there be any more cuts to learning support staff in schools?</p>	<p>No further Learning Support staff reductions are planned for 2017/18.</p>
<p>If you are looking to save money could you reduce the number of council properties you have?</p>	<p>We are currently undertaking a property rationalisation programme and has already made significant progress in reducing the size of its estate.</p>

There is new lighting on a number of streets in Galashiels – is this project actually saving any money?

Yes, this is part of the programme which is being rolled out across the Borders area. It has been so successful that we have been asked to look at whether we extend it or use the money on other areas of energy efficiency.