
BUDGET COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY 2019/20

Report by the Chief Financial Officer

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL

28 FEBRUARY 2019

1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform the Council of 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 Area Partnership meetings. This approach is being developed within the Council's new Corporate Plan (Our plan – and your part in it). This feedback has been considered as part of the 2019-2024 Financial Planning process.
- 1.3 As part of the agreed budget consultation exercise on the Council's updated Financial Plan, the Dialogue Community Engagement tool was made available from 25 October 2018 to 31 January 2019 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 and improve services, in a challenging economic climate, as well as allowing them to comment on other contributions already made on the system. As at the 31 January 2019, 30 differently themed discussion threads were recorded using the Dialogue Community Engagement tool, with further 48 comments.
- 1.4 The budget was also discussed at all 5 Area Partnership meetings during November and December 2018. These meetings allowed attendees to bring forward proposed solutions to questions, issues and challenges faced by the community.
- 1.5 A summary of the public feedback from the Dialogue tool is detailed in Appendix 1 and a summary of the feedback from the Area Partnership meetings is detailed 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 feedback from the Area Partnership meetings (Appendices 1 and 2);**
- (c) the actual responses from the Dialogue tool; all comments are available on the Council's website and a hard copy is available in the Elected Member's Library; and**
- (d) the Council's responses to the issues raised in the form of a 'you said, we did' analysis.**

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 As part of the financial planning process for 2019/20, 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, made available from 25 October 2018 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;
 - The budget was discussed at the Area Partnership meetings;
 - 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 AND AREA PARTNERSHIP MEETINGS

- 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 input 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 shown below was provided:

We need you

We are now starting our budget-setting process for 2019/20 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, and if we spend more in one area we have to reduce it in another.

Considerations

*The requirement to 'balance the books' each year requires us to save money and 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, or that communities could take responsibility for to maintain them in the long term?*
- **Increased charges to service users** – *should we be charging more for some services?*
- **Using other funding options** – *what services in your area do you value most which could be retained/expanded/enhanced through the use of additional funds e.g. Localities Bid Fund, Quality of Live Fund etc.*

Please give us your ideas and feedback.

The consultation will remain open until end of January 2019 and all responses will be fed into the budget planning process before the final proposals go to the Council meeting on 28 February 2019.

- 4.2 The Dialogue tool has been available on the Council website from 25 October 2018 to 31 January 2019. Up to 31 January 2019, 48 comments had been made, following 30 differently themed discussion threads. 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.
- 4.3 Opportunity was given at the five Area Partnership meetings held in November and December 2018, to allow the community to play their part and contribute their thoughts and ideas, including what the spending priorities should be, where additional income could be made and how savings could be achieved.
- 4.4 The Area Partnership meetings generated comments about the budget under specific headings; Efficiencies, Identifying priorities, Different models of delivering services, increased charges to service users and Other funding options.
- 4.5 The responses to date from the Dialogue tool, together with feedback from the Area Partnership meetings, have been summarised in Appendices 1 and 2. These appendices also show how these responses have been considered as part of the 2019/20 Financial Planning process.

- 4.6 The Corporate plan (Our plan – and your part in it) promotes the 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, and is now “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

Author(s)

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Background Papers: N/A

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