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## **BUDGET COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY 2020/21**

**Report by the Executive Director Finance and Regulatory**  
**SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL**

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**26 FEBRUARY 2020**

### **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 Scottish Borders Budget Challenge. This feedback has been considered as part of the 2020-2025 Financial Planning process.
- 1.3 As part of the budget consultation exercise on the Council's updated Financial Plan, the Scottish Borders Budget Challenge was made available from 30 September 2019 to 31 January 2020 to members of the public on the Council website. Members of the public were reminded that the Council has limited resources and that going forward we cannot do everything in the same way as we do now. The public were then asked to use the online Points Simulator tool to let the Council know what the priorities are in each local area so the Council can use this information to inform what services communities want to be protected. As at the 31 January 2020, 953 members of the public completed the Simulator and gave us their views on prioritisation of local community based services. The number of people taking part in the Budget Challenge has increased significantly compared to those participating in previous years.
- 1.5 A summary of the public feedback from the Scottish Borders Budget Challenge is detailed per locality and for the Scottish Borders as a whole in Appendix 1.

## **2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

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

- (a) the budget Communication Strategy used; and**
- (b) the feedback from the Scottish Borders Budget Challenge (Appendix 1).**

### **3 BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 As part of the financial planning process for 2020/21, the Council committed to engaging with staff, partners, stakeholders and the Scottish Borders community.
- 3.2 The forms of engagement have included:
- An online Points Simulator tool, made available from 30 September 2019 to all members of the public, allowing the Council to gain valuable feedback on how each Community within the Scottish Borders prioritises local services;
  - Consultation with all Trade 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.

### **4 DIALOGUE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TOOL AND AREA PARTNERSHIP MEETINGS**

- 4.1 As part of the budget Communication Strategy, the Points Simulator tool was developed as a new way of engaging with communities on their spending priorities. The Simulator was made available to members of the public via the Council website with the following aims of:
- taking a locality focus in order to open up the conversation and inform engagement with localities going forward
  - encouraging our residents and communities to consider where they would like to see Council expenditure prioritised in their area
  - allowing communities to also think about how they could contribute to the *#yourpart* campaign and contribute to the upkeep of local areas in a more proactive way.
- 4.2 In practical terms the approach taken to collecting feedback on locality priorities was to launch the budget simulator with the requirement for participants to move dials up and down with 35 points to allocate across a number of areas. This meant that each person could go in and quickly select their local area and spread their points across the services providing a prioritised list from higher priority to lower priority for each locality for those services included in the consultation. Participants also had the facility to add additional comments if they wished.

The areas selected for prioritisation were areas that have a high impact on people's perception of the quality of life in an area as follows:

- Potholes and resurfacing
- Public Toilets
- Litter collection, fly tipping and dog fouling
- Allotments and food growing
- Grass cutting
- Open spaces, play parks and sports pitches
- Street lighting
- Parking
- Winter gritting
- Providing grit bins
- Supporting biodiversity and making our area look nice
- Cemeteries
- Community Recycling Centres

4.3 Up to the date the consultation closed on the 31 January 2020, 953 respondents gave feedback on prioritisation of services in their area. The summarised results were made available to Elected Members for consideration in forming the Council's budget proposals. The consultation has been considered a worthwhile exercise and the significant increase in the number of people getting involved and giving their views on the budget has been particularly encouraging. The ease and speed of completion seem to be a key driver in increasing participation.

4.4 As shown in Appendix 1 the output from the budget simulator has provided very consistent responses across all localities in the Scottish Borders. The highest 4 priority area across all localities are:

- Potholes and resurfacing
- Winter Gritting
- Litter collection, fly tipping and dog fouling
- Community Recycling Centres

(the only exception is Teviot and Liddlesdale who ranked Open Spaces and Play Parks and Sports Pitches 3<sup>rd</sup> which pushed Litter Collection and Community Recycling Centres in to 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> place)

The lowest ranked service areas in the overall SBC ranking were:

- Toilets
- Allotments and Food growing

## **5 IMPLICATIONS**

### **5.1 Financial**

There are no direct financial implications resulting from this report.

### **5.2 Risk and Mitigations**

By conducting various engagement programmes regarding the Financial Plan, the Council demonstrates a commitment to gathering stakeholder views to inform decision making. This helps mitigate risks around stakeholder resistance which could delay the delivery of proposed strategies and associated savings.

### **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 Chief Legal Officer (Monitoring 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**  
**Executive Director,**  
**Finance & Regulatory Services**

**Signature.....**

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**Background Papers:** N/A

**Previous Minute Reference:**

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