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## **BUDGET COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY**

**Report by the Chief Financial Officer**

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### **SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL**

**11 FEBRUARY 2016**

#### **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 Revenue Financial Plan the Dialogue Community Engagement tool was made available for a 13 week period 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.
- 1.3 As at the end of January 2016 the Dialogue Community Engagement tool generated 34 ideas and suggestions with 91 comments on these ideas. This feedback has been considered as part of the 2016-21 Financial Planning process. The Dialogue tool will remain open online therefore ongoing feedback will be considered during future Financial Planning cycles.

## **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 how the Council has used this feedback to inform the Financial Planning process;**
- (c) that 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.**

### 3 BACKGROUND

3.1 As part of the financial planning process for 2016-2021 the Council is committed to engaging with staff, partners, stakeholders and the Scottish Borders community.

3.2 The forms of communication used to engage have included:

- Attendance at Area Forum meetings during November and December 2015 to deliver a presentation on the approach to the Financial Planning process, the financial environment the Council is currently operating within and publicising of the Dialogue Community Engagement tool;
- An online Dialogue Community Engagement tool which has been made available 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;
- The Leader of Scottish Borders Council, David Parker taking questions in an online question and answer session;
- Consultation with all Unions and the Employee Council 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 on 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 are living in a difficult economic climate and on top of that more demands are being placed on the Council than ever before.*

*As a result of this, we need your help to shape the future of Scottish Borders Council.*

***Do you have ideas on how the Council could do things differently to save money? Add your ideas below.***

*All the feedback received will be considered as part of the Council's budget-setting process.*

4.2 The Dialogue tool has been available on the Council website from 3rd November 2015 and remains available. Up to the end of January 2016 it has generated 34 responses with 91 comments since its launch.

- 4.3 The responses to date from the Dialogue tool have been summarised in Appendix 1. Appendix 1 provides a summary of both the responses from the public and also how these have been considered as part of the 2016/21 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 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

## 2016/17 – 2020/21 Dialogue feedback

The online Dialogue community engagement tool generated 34 individual ideas with 91 comments on these ideas from other members of the public. These ideas have been summarised below with narratives on how these ideas have been used to inform the 2016/17 – 2020/21 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
Increase outsourcing to drive efficiencies.	Included in the Revenue Financial Plan are proposals around developing alternative service delivery models to drive efficiency which will include outsourcing options.
Reduce the number of Councillors and payments to Councillors.	The number of Councillors and Payments to Councillors are set nationally in Scotland therefore the Council has no opportunity to reduce costs in this area.
Turn off all street lights after midnight.	This opportunity was considered by the Administration 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.
Use of Solar Panels / reduce heating levels in Council buildings.	The Council is committed through its Capital and Revenue Financial Plans to develop energy efficiency options to maximise benefits to the Council.
Using derelict buildings instead of building new.	Options appraisals will continue to be undertaken during the planning stage of all building works to determine whether the refurbishment of existing buildings or building new is the most efficient and effective option.
Plant wild flower beds.	As part of the Parks and Open Spaces review we are currently engaging with local community groups to identify and establish where we can reduce our grass cutting and maintenance regimes and introduce things like wild meadows and wild planting and encourage biodiversity.
Plant food crop trees, shrubs and herbs on public land.	As part of the Parks and Open Spaces review we are exploring this option, we do already have an example of this in Chirnside, Berwickshire where we have piloted a reduction in the frequency of grass cutting and have planted fruit trees.
Save on fuel.	The Council has included proposals within the Financial Plan around mileage efficiencies and more effective and efficient use of vehicles. (£0.215m)
Stop salting Roads.	<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>
Reduce Overtime.	<p>The Council has included proposals within the Financial Plan around reviewing Working Practices which will include ensuring overtime is deployed in the most efficient and effective way.</p>
Reduce the cost of Pensions.	<p>The Council sets the minimum contribution level necessary to ensure that the pension fund and the 9,500 pensioners, scheme members and their dependants have access to a pension on retirement. The Council reduces the cost of the scheme by investing in a range of asset classes to maximise returns for the fund and minimise the burden on the taxpayer.</p>
Invest in HR team.	<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 to enable Transformational change.</p>
Reduce the media/Corporate identity.	<p>Savings are being made in the current year to reduce spend on media branding and printing costs.</p>
Cancel the Tapestry project.	<p>The Council is committed to the Tapestry project and believes it will provide a focal point for the development of the Rail head and the wider development of the Tweedbank business park and will lead to significant economic benefits including increased visitor numbers for the Scottish Borders.</p>
Reduce back office functions	<p>The Council is committed to reviewing back office support services as reflected in the Council's Financial Plan. This will include developments through the use of ICT and business process re-engineering to maximise efficiency.</p>
Prioritise Outdoor Education.	<p>As reflected in the Financial Plan the Council is maintaining an investment of £152k in Outdoor Education with no budget savings from this area currently included in the Plan. The Service provision includes providing the Bikeability scheme for P5-7 pupils, access to Whiteadder Sailing Centre, Mountain Biking, the Duke of Edinburgh scheme, canoeing, walking expeditions and outdoor learning residential opportunities.</p>
Review Property & Assets	<p>The Council have significant savings proposals included in the Financial Plan which will be delivered through a review of Property &amp; Assets. Capital receipts of £8.113m are anticipated through property disposals over the 10 year life of the 2016/17 Capital Plan.</p>

Build an Aqua (Water) Park	The Council has a restricted Capital budget and as such must prioritise programmes of work. There are currently no plans included in the Capital Plan to invest in an Aqua Park.
Invite voluntary tax contributions.	No plans are in place to introduce voluntary tax contributions.
Examine cost/benefit of recycling garden waste.	The withdrawal of the garden waste service has contributed a net £450,000 per annum to the Council's overall budget deficit and a cost/benefit analysis was done at the time the Council took the decision to remove the service.
Stop the food waste collection scheme.	The Council has a statutory duty to provide food waste collections in accordance with the Waste (Scotland) Regulations 2012. If the Council were to stop the food waste collection service it would likely face legal action, potential fines and the requirement to reinstate the service.
Amalgamate jobs.	As reflected in the Financial Plan the Council has plans in place to make the best of use of its staff thus increasing efficiency. This will include ensuring professional and support services are more integrated and streamlined and ensuring the optimum deployment of staff across services.
Clean out all drains in the late autumn.	We clean out the gullies within the Scottish Borders once a year. Blockages can occur all year round although known areas that are susceptible to blocking are inspected regularly and cleared when necessary.
Do not spend £1.7million on a 3g pitch in Peebles	The Council is committed to the development of a synthetic pitch in each main town in the Borders. Sports Scotland will provide £300k external funding towards the £1.6m total cost of the project.
Revise school transport arrangements.	Transportation is provided to mainstream primary children to and from school where the walking distance is in excess of 2 miles and for secondary children where the walking distance is in excess of 3 miles. Taxis are provided where a connection is required or where it is more appropriate to meet the needs of the area i.e. low number of pupils in the area. For Additional Needs children the transport provision is based on the individual pupil plans and needs as per the Integrated Children's Services Transport Policy. The pupil plan is agreed by the relevant Social Worker, Teacher and parent and is reviewed at least three times per year.
Correct placement of signage on roads.	New signs are installed by the Council's Network department in line with Statutory guidance as laid down in "The Traffic Signs and General Directions 2002", any specific issues around signage should be reported to the Council to allow options to be considered.
Prioritisation of the budget.	The Council approaches Financial Planning through a process which considers prioritisation of Services, as such budgets are increased to cover pressures where appropriate.



<p>Sponsored litter and environmental clean up</p>	<p>Locally, we regularly support community groups including resilient community groups, community councils, in bloom groups and others wishing to undertake litter picks providing tools, safety equipment and help with collection and disposal of collected litter. We recognise and reward community involvement in litter clearing as part of the annual Scotland's Floral Gateway competition, which saw Melrose recognised in particular for its efforts in tackling litter within the community. Nationally, we regularly monitor and assess our cleanliness standards and compare favourably with other similar authorities in Scotland, reporting our monitoring results to Keep Scotland Beautiful (KSB). In the Borders, KSB had 17 individual community initiatives registered with them in 2015 involving over 460 local people, which SBC supporting through the provision of tools and safety equipment as well as with collection and disposal of litter. SBC recognises the challenge and would welcome greater business and community involvement in litter maintenance.</p>
<p>Collect fines</p>	<p>It is Council policy to recover fines when it is economically viable to do so and where there is a realistic prospect of recovery. The Council performs well when compared to other Scottish Local Authorities with respect to the management of debts and the collection of income.</p> <p>Administration and collection of fines is regulated by Scottish Government and Councils have the powers to increase the initial fine by 50% where it remains unpaid after 28 days (which SBC do). The Scottish Government have plans to increase the amount that can be charged, however, a substantial number of those who receive fines have limited means and collecting a larger fine would not be any easier than collecting a smaller one. Increased fines may act as a deterrent, but only if powers were in place to ensure the bulk of these could be collected and this would require Government legislation to enable Councils to recover from Benefit income, for example, to improve collection rates.</p>