
BUDGET COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Report by the Chief Financial Officer

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL

12 FEBRUARY 2015

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 consultation exercise on the budget.**
- 1.2 The paper highlights the budget Communication Strategy used and provides feedback gathered from the Budget Simulator. As part of the agreed budget consultation exercise on the Revenue Financial Plan a Budget Simulator was made available to members of the public on the Council website. This interactive Simulator allows residents and other stakeholders to provide feedback on how they would like the Council's revenue spending prioritised.
- 1.3 The Budget Simulator generated 216 responses with 70 comments. This feedback has been considered as part of the 2015-20 Financial Planning process. The Simulator will remain open online therefore ongoing feedback from the Simulator 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 Budget Simulator.**

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 As part of the financial planning process for 2015-2020 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:
- An online Budget Simulator which has been made available to all members of the public allowing the Council to gain valuable feedback on the spending priorities of local people;
 - Consultation with all Unions and the Employee Council during the budget process;
 - Stakeholder engagement meetings were attended by 33 people, including representatives from the NHS, SBHA, Waverley, Eildon & Berwickshire Housing Associations, Trade Unions (GMB & Unite) and eleven Community Councils.
 - Budget proposals issued by the Council in December 2014 have been widely publicised on the Council's website and through the local press.

4 BUDGET SIMULATOR

- 4.1 As part of the agreed budget Communication Strategy a Budget Simulator was made available to members of the public on the Council website. This interactive Simulator allows a person to give the Council feedback on how they would like Council spending prioritised.
- 4.2 The Simulator has been available on the Council website from 17th December 2014 and remains available. The Simulator has generated 216 responses with 70 comments since its launch on 17th December 2014 until early February 2015.
- 4.3 The responses to date from the Simulator have been summarised in Appendix 1. Appendix 1 provides a summary of both the responses from the public and also how these have been reflected in the 2015/20 Financial Planning process. It is evident from the feedback that many of the Council's spending priorities for the budget align with the priorities of respondents.
- 4.4 The Budget Simulator has been considered a worthwhile exercise. It is proposed therefore the Budget Simulator will remain a feature of subsequent budget processes to ensure the public continue to have the opportunity to give their views on spending priorities. These 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 Service Director Strategy and Policy, 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:

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2015/16 – 2019/20 Budget Simulator

The budget simulator exercise generated 216 responses with 70 comments

You Said	We Did
Respondents suggested an increase in expenditure on our Children & Young Peoples Services.	We are investing £2.2m to deliver the provisions of the Children & Young Peoples Bill to provide 600 hours nursery provision for 3 and 4 year olds, looked after children and eligible 2 year olds.
More should be done to encourage economic activity, job creation and tourism in the Borders.	The Borders Railway will open in 2015 providing significant economic opportunities to the Borders. We are investing £6m in a building to house The Great Tapestry of Scotland, £5m in creating a Central Borders Business Park, £2.75m to refurbish the Sir Walter Scott courthouse in Selkirk and £4.2m to complete a £8.4m project to roll out superfast Broadband in the Borders.
We should support more affordable housing in the Borders.	We are providing £3.8m in private sector housing grant and £10.1m for supported care housing in Berwickshire along with £22.3m investment in 200 new homes through the Council led National Housing Trust (NHT) project.
Many respondents suggested reduced expenditure on support services to front line services.	Following a corporate restructure and changes to service delivery requirements a full review of Management and Administration will be undertaken to explore more integrated and streamlined professional, managerial and administrative support for front line services and ensure the optimum deployment of staff across all services.
It was suggested by many respondents that greater provision required to be made for older people in the community.	Provision has been made for additional budget of £2.9m to fund additional pressures arising from older people demographic increases.
Increased investment in our schools was an area highlighted by respondents.	The ten year capital plan being presented to Council details a total investment of £94.8m in our school estate, including £33m in Galashiels, £19.4m for the new Kelso high school, £4.6m for Duns Primary school, £12.1m for Langlee Primary school, £8.2m for Broomlands primary school, and £17.4m for general school refurbishment and capacity projects.
Respondents indicated we should rationalise the Council estate, disposing of surplus buildings, and reducing the Council's footprint and reducing spend on under-utilised decaying buildings.	There has already been a significant relocation of staff from former area offices to Council HQ to facilitate property rationalisation. Capital receipts of £7.7m are forecast in the next 4 years to contribute to the funding of the Council's capital programme. Recurring savings of £216k p.a. are forecast to be delivered as a result of the property rationalisation programme.