

Budget Consultation 2011: Executive Summary

The Council undertook an innovative budget consultation exercise in June and July 2011 to inform the development of the Council's new Corporate Plan 2012 to 2016 and Medium Term Financial Strategy for the same period. As part of this process, the Council needs to identify up to £1.5 million of savings over the next three years. The results of the consultation identify residents' views on where savings can be made, where income can be generated and other money saving ideas.

203 residents completed the online consultation tool. 73 of these respondents provided additional comments and combined with the 138 suggestion card responses received [through the suggestion boxes around the Borough], a total of 211 comments from individuals have been analysed. Whilst a response rate of 203 is not untypical for a small district council, the data has been weighted by YouGov to ensure that it is representative of the population of the Borough as a whole. The Council should not view the results as a mandate for future decisions, but it does however provide a very useful snapshot of residents' views on how the Council should manage future funding pressures and can be used in conjunction with other consultation results to inform its choices over the next four years.

Highlights of the results include:

- On average, residents chose a reduction in service funding (without taking into account efficiencies and income) of 13%, which equates to a saving of approximately £1.1 million.
- Reductions in service funding ranged from 7% (housing and homelessness service), 8% (refuse and recycling) to 25% (Epsom Playhouse) and 33% (Borough Insight magazine).
- Residents are less inclined to reduce funding for services for the vulnerable (for example housing and homeless service and services for the elderly).
- Residents feel the Council should be achieving efficiency savings (through for example considering the way in which it operates) and generating income (through for example better enforcement of parking).
- Residents being more reluctant to reduce funding for services to protect the vulnerable (for example, housing and homeless service, services for the elderly etc.)

Residents have some potentially interesting ideas for the Council to consider to achieve monetary savings. More popular ideas suggested included:

- Getting rid of the Mayor and / or the Mayor's car.
- Reviewing the planting policy (hanging baskets, flower beds and planting).
- Looking at efficiencies around staff and Council structure.
- Stopping the production of Borough Insight (or making it more cost effective by having it in a non-glossy format).
- Improving procurement and contract management.
- Stopping / reducing Councillors' expenses.

Suggestions for income generation included:

- Better enforcement of parking [to generate income].
- Enforcement of fines to people who drop litter.
- Replicating the success of the Rainbow Centre to other venues.
- Operating Hook Road Car Park 24 hours per day and introducing resident season tickets.
- Divesting of assets such as one or more of the venues and even the Town Hall.

"Hard choices, I know, but necessary." "There are some 'must haves' and some 'nice to haves'. That is basically how your choices break down re costing." One letter received from a local resident used the phrase: *"A few seeds may grow into strong plants if taken seriously and given the right care and attention."*