

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL**Report by Strategic Lead – Communications, Culture & Communities****West Dunbartonshire Council: 26 June 2019**

Subject: Budget Consultation 2020**1. Purpose**

- 1.1** This report provides an outline of a proposed approach to budget consultation for the 2020/21 budget onwards.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1** It is recommended that Members agree the proposal to carry out an early citizen consultation on broad priorities for future savings areas. This will inform officer activity when savings proposals are being generated.

3. Background

- 3.1** Since 2013 the Council has been refining its budget consultation including a focus on online tools for wider community engagement and more specific engagement with representative groups from across the community. This has led to consistent growth in the numbers taking part. The most recent budget consultation carried out through survey monkey engaged 2733 residents.
- 3.2** The Council's traditional approach to budget consultation can make it difficult to provide residents with a balanced overall picture of all the saving and investment activity taking place across the Council. The focus on the savings options can lead to single issue campaigning on specific options rather than inform priorities and what is most important to all residents in West Dunbartonshire. As officers we are keen that any consultation undertaken gives data to Elected Members that supports their decision making.

4. Main Issues

- 4.1** An exercise was undertaken last year to review the budget consultation approaches taken in other Council areas. One popular approach is to carry out an early consultation, typically over summer, on broad principles and priorities for citizens. This then informs the generation of savings options and decisions at the budget setting process later in the financial year.
- 4.2** This report proposes that this approach is adopted in West Dunbartonshire for the 2020/21 budget consultation. This would allow for a consultation which focuses on identifying the things that really matter to our citizens, and the services and provisions which are less of a priority. An early priority-based consultation such as this would allow us to work with citizens to build their

knowledge and understanding of the range of services provided by Council. This is in line with aspirations of Scottish Government to develop the capacity of citizens to have more input to budget setting at an organisational level – known as mainstreaming participatory budgeting.

- 4.3** Undertaking such a consultation on broad areas of priority for citizens would inform service design, planning and savings options for future years – not just a single year. It would also support delivery of the strategic priority on meaningful engagement with citizens. By consulting on priorities rather than specific options, a dialogue can be developed with citizens which builds an understanding of the challenges being faced in order to balance the budget and also those areas which are ‘hard lines’ for our local population. The outcome from a consultation on priorities would then inform savings options to be taken for the 2020/21 budget, and would ensure that options considered by Council fall within the areas highlighted by citizens as least important.
- 4.4** It is recommended that this priority based consultation replaces the previous model of consulting on specific savings options on an option by option basis. This allows for a more strategic and long-term approach to be taken to considering funding for non-priority services. It is advised that no further consultation would be required following a summer engagement around priorities. Elected Members would utilise the information from a priority-based consultation to make decisions on the available options presented later in the year for savings and investment.
- 4.6** A timeline has been provided below for a priority based consultation, which would require to be carried out in August / September to allow feedback to be utilised in the development and consideration of savings options.

Period	Activity	Lead
26 June	Update to Council on proposed consultation model	Strategic Lead - CCC
19 August	Consultation opens	Performance & Strategy Manager
w/c 2 September	6 public focus group events	Performance & Strategy Manager
27 September	Consultation closes	Performance & Strategy Manager
27 November	Consultation report presented to Council	Strategic Lead - CCC
26 February	Council budget setting – results from consultation considered	

5. People Implications

- 5.1** There are no people implications associated with this report.

6. Financial and Procurement Implications

- 6.1** There is no financial implication resulting from the decision to undertake a revised model of priority focused consultation.

7. Risk Analysis

- 7.1** It is important for Council to demonstrate that public opinion has been considered. In circumstances where Council propose to change service provision or reduce budget levels for a specific service, there is an underpinning reputational risk. This risk is mitigated by undertaking public consultation, ensuring the widest number possible of residents had an opportunity to express their views.
- 7.2** It is possible that a revised approach to consultation, where citizens are asked for views on priority areas rather than on specific savings options may cause initial queries. However the guidance and support information published alongside the consultation will explain the model and the anticipated benefits of this. Supports will also be provided to citizens through consultation focus groups, drop-in sessions and one-to-one advice and guidance as required.

8. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

- 8.1** To ensure the process is accessible to the widest range of stakeholders each element is planned to ensure maximum coverage and accessibility for residents. Additional support is made available on request to ensure it is specific to the requirements of the individual.

9. Consultation

- 9.1** This proposal has been considered by senior Council Officers. It describes a consultation process to be undertaken with residents over the summer period. Consideration and decision by Council will inform the approach taken.

10. Strategic Assessment

- 10.1** The outcomes of the priority focused consultation process will support decision making across each of the Council's strategic priorities. Specifically this consultation activity supports:
- Meaningful community engagement with active, empowered and informed citizens who feel safe and engaged; and
 - Open, accountable and accessible local government.

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Appendices: None

Background Papers: None

Wards Affected: All