

# **WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL**

## **Report by the Executive Director of Corporate Services**

**Community Participation Committee : 27 February, 2013**

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### **Subject: Public Budget Consultation Arrangements**

#### **1. Purpose**

- 1.1** The report outlines the approach to public budget consultation for the 2013/14 budget and invites comment and feedback.

#### **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1** Committee is asked to note the contents of this report

#### **3. Background**

- 3.1** Following a disappointing response to last year's public meetings, with only 48 attendees over three meetings, Council officers have developed new ways to strengthen the budget consultation process, both with the public and with employees. The methods used included:
1. An on-line survey for members of the public, advertised on social media
  2. A budget bus visiting town centre/supermarket locations, inviting people to complete the survey (on paper or on-line)
  3. A Special Budget Consultation Event aimed at representatives of key community groups and interested members of the public.
- 3.2** The consultation process was publicised through direct mailings to groups, press releases, flyers to 12,000 schoolbags, and on the Council website and social media (facebook and twitter). Banners were used to publicise the bus on site.

#### **4. Main Issues**

- 4.1** The budget bus was used as a way of getting views from people who wouldn't normally get involved in budget consultation exercises. Y Sort it youth project provided the use of their bus and their workers for this process. A total of 73 people participated in this way.
- 4.2** The budget consultation event was hosted by the Council Leader and Chief Executive, accompanied by the Convenor of Finance, the Head of Finance, the

Executive Directors, the Head of Customer and Community Services and other senior staff who acted as facilitators. 86 members of the public participated. The event outlined the budget challenges and invited groups to discuss the savings options. Each community member was invited to complete a survey and each table to agree a question for the final question session.

- 4.3 The on-line survey was the main element of the consultation exercise and was advertised on the Council's twitter, website and facebook pages. It stimulated an unprecedented level of responses. The final number of surveys completed was 842.
- 4.4 The analysis of the survey responses was reported to the Budget Setting meeting of Council on 6 February for elected members to inform decisions on budget savings.
- 4.5 The total cost of budget consultation this year was £2229. This compares favourably with consultation in 2012 which cost £2526.
- 4.6 Budget sessions have also been run with Council employees, inviting them to complete the survey.

#### Future Improvements – Citizens' Panel

- 4.7 While this year's response represents a big increase in numbers of the public taking part in the consultation, the Council could greatly increase the number of responses by using the Citizens' Panel. For example, the last two Panel surveys have generated over 1090 and 1040 responses.

This would require savings options to be identified for consultation purposes around September/October 2013 for the 2014/15 budget.

- 4.8 Future Improvements on Survey – Language and Background Information

Feedback received from this year's process has highlighted the need for the Council to use clearer language and provide improved background information when consulting. This will help members of the public to respond on a better informed basis.

## **5. People Implications**

- 5.1 There are no personnel implications.

## **6. Financial Implications**

- 6.1 There are no additional financial requirements as budgets are already in place to carry out budget consultation.

## **7. Risk Analysis**

- 7.1** The proposals within this report are intended to reduce the risks associated with failing to consult widely on the Council Budget.

## **8. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)**

- 8.1** Any widening of the budget consultation process will help to fulfill equalities obligations. We will use demographic information from the survey to identify gaps in the stakeholder consultation and how we can address these. An EIA is not required at this stage however a screening and / or EIA will be undertaken prior to any future change to the Budget Consultation Process. Additionally, it should be noted that an Equalities Impact Assessment has been carried out in relation to the Citizens' Panel.

## **9. Consultation**

- 9.1** This report describes the outcome of a consultation process.

## **10. Strategic Assessment**

- 10.1** This report contributes to the strategic priority relating to improving the wellbeing of communities by making proposals to strengthen budget consultation.

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**Angela Wilson**  
**Executive Director of Corporate Services**  
**Date:**

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**Appendices:** None

**Background Papers:** Equalities Impact Assessment, West Dunbartonshire Citizens' Panel

**Wards Affected:** All wards

