

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Chief Executive

Special Meeting of Council: 26th January 2012

Subject: Outcomes of public consultation on budget proposals for 2012/13

1 Purpose

- 1.1 This report provides Council with an overview of the public consultation process and feedback on the budget proposals for 2012/13. Members are invited to consider the public response and feedback as part of the 2012/13 budget setting process.

2 Background

- 2.1 Local communities within the three central areas were invited to participate in consultation forums with the purpose of gaining the public's perspective and assessment of the Administration's budget proposals for 2012/13. Three forums were held over consecutive evenings (16th – 18th January) in Clydebank, Alexandria, and Dumbarton respectively. The consultation questionnaire could also be completed online via the Council's website.
- 2.2 The Administration presented draft budget proposals ahead of the consultation process to the Special Council on 15 December, to allow greater opportunity for the public to fully consider the proposals, provide their input and perspective, and enable public opinion to shape and influence the decision making process.
- 2.3 Each forum included presentations on the financial context and future challenges faced by the Council. The Administration also provided an overview of the key priorities they wished to address through the budget proposals and which aim to support local economic growth and continued improvement to service delivery. Each session included group discussions which allowed participants to review and discuss the proposals in more depth, record their agreement or disagreement for each option, and put forward alternative suggestions or ideas for service delivery and expenditure priorities.
- 2.4 The group discussion was followed by a facilitated question and answer session with the panel (comprising Elected Members and senior managers) allowing the public to put forward their views and ask specific questions on key proposals and issues. The panel provided direct responses to the public views and were supported with additional input from the Executive Directors on specific areas of expertise.

3 Main Issues

- 3.1 Attendance across the public consultation was significantly lower than previous years with only a total of 48 people attending and the Dumbarton forum particularly continuing to attract a minimal turnout of four members of the public.
- 3.2 Consideration may need to be given within future public consultations on different ways to either attract alternative stakeholder and consultation groups or bring together key areas to ensure a wider debate and that the outcomes suitably represent the widest possible views. However it should also be acknowledged that this year's proposals identified areas for enhancement to planned expenditure rather than savings options and service cuts and this may have influenced the degree of public reaction and concern and participation levels.

Key results

- 3.3 47 questionnaires were completed over the three events and through the website and a summary of the collective results and feedback comments is provided in Appendix A.
- 3.4 Overall the results indicate that the public agreed strongly with the proposals presented by the administration, with only 2 of the administration's 12 proposals receiving less than 75% agreement: Proposal 7: Tourism and Commonwealth Games (59% agreed) and Proposal 9: Police Investment (64% agreed).
- 3.5 The suggestions put forward by the public on alternative options, priorities, or new initiatives are generally closely aligned to the service areas and initiatives contained within the budget proposals and do not highlight any significant deviation from the Administration's proposals. Similarly the areas identified for future investment or expenditure reduction mainly correlate with the initiatives outlined within the proposals.

Forum evaluation

- 3.6 Participants were also asked to evaluate the format of the consultation process to assess how this adds value in helping the community understand the Council's financial planning and equally to support improvement on the format for future events. A summary of the feedback is given in Appendix B.
- 3.7 Overall the format continues to be well received and the public generally feel well informed, consulted, and involved in the budget planning and decision making process through these consultations.

4 People implications

- 4.1 Any personnel issues will relate to the proposals taken forward and will be addressed separately through relevant development and implementation plans.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 Any financial implications will relate to the costs identified within each proposal.

6. Risk Analysis

- 6.1 The risks related to each proposal have been considered and the impact highlighted through further information and discussion provided to the public.
- 6.2 In relation to the process itself, consultation of this kind is very challenging considering the complexities of the budget planning process and expectations that the public are likely to have conflicting priorities on service provision and how the Council should spend its budget. Nonetheless it is important that the principles of public consultation are applied and the process is viewed as genuine and meaningful with opportunity to influence future decisions by Council.
- 6.3 It will be important for Council to demonstrate that public opinion has been considered and that the inclusion or exclusion of their views in any future decision on the budget proposals is reflected through a clear business rationale aligned with the Council's priorities.

7 Equalities, Health & Human Rights Impact Assessment (EIA)

- 7.1 All initial proposals have been equality screened and where required have been the subject of an equality impact assessment.
- 7.2 To ensure the process was accessible to the widest range of stakeholders within the communities, the consultation forums were planned as local evening events within the three main areas of West Dunbartonshire. In addition all information and questionnaires were available online ensuring maximum coverage and accessibility for residents, particularly minority groups who may have been unable to attend the discussion events. All venues were assessed for suitable access and facilities and additional support was made available to help with transport and childcare requirements.

8 Strategic assessment

- 8.1 Strong financial planning is at the forefront of enabling the Council to address many of the future complex challenges both in terms of maintaining high quality local services and equally delivering ambitious improvement plans which support local economic growth. Community support and buy-in to the

Council's proposals, plans, and initiatives will be vital to increase community cohesion and local goodwill to address future budgetary challenges.

9. Conclusions and officer's recommendations

9.1 The forums facilitated positive discussion and debate on the proposals presented and provides elected members with an appropriate gauge of the public's assessment of the budget proposals presented for 2012/13.

9.2 Council is invited to:

- Consider the public assessment and feedback contained within Appendix A when making decisions in relation to the 2012/13 budget.

Joyce White
Chief Executive
Date: 19th January 2012

Person to Contact: Angela Terry
Manager of Organisational Development
Tel: 01389 737590
angela.terry@west-dunbarton.gov.uk

Appendices: **Appendix A:** Collated results of budget questionnaire and public feedback

Appendix B: Collated evaluation feedback

Background Papers: **None**

Wards Affected: All wards