

**WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL****Report by Chief Officer – Citizen, Culture & Facilities****Council: 25 October 2023**

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**Subject: Budget Conversation 2024/25 - Engagement Results****1. Purpose**

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of the key results and feedback from the recent budget prioritisation 2024/25 engagement.

**2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 It is recommended that Council notes the results and feedback from early citizen consultation on broad service areas and delivery priorities as part of the 2024/25 budget setting process.

**3. Background**

- 3.1 Over the last 10 years the Council has refined and adapted its budget consultation model. The approach has included both option-based and priority-based consultation models and incorporated online tools, focus groups, in-person events with live voting and more specific engagement with representative groups from across the community.
- 3.2 The last budget consultation exercise was undertaken online in September 2019 to inform the 20/21 budget setting process. This was a new approach in West Dunbartonshire, moving away from asking residents for their views on individual savings options and the impact of these and instead inviting them to prioritise services. Individuals were asked via an online priority-based survey to rank services such as schools, roads, libraries, sport and leisure on their importance to them.

**4. Main Issues**

- 4.1 Early engagement was undertaken with citizens over six weeks in August and September 2023. The online budget conversation asked residents to rate activities of services based on their importance to the individual. This has generated detailed information on which activities were more of a priority or less of a priority to the respondents.
- 4.2 The engagement also sought feedback on any areas of service where respondents would target savings and any services they felt should be protected as well as seeking views on wider service delivery options such as increasing fees/charging or reducing service standards.

Methodology

- 4.3** As in previous years, to ensure broad coverage, the budget engagement targeted the views of residents, employees and wider stakeholders in a range of ways to improve accessibility and participation in the process. The primary method was to invite respondees to express their views on the priority of a range of services through an online survey. This online survey was open from 18 August – 30 September 2023. The survey was promoted through the Council website and regular social media posts during the live period. The consultation was also highlighted to employees, Citizens Panel members, and community contacts for wider dissemination. A dedicated web page was created to provide detailed information around the Council budgets.
- 4.4** As with previous consultation exercises, all Council libraries and Working4U learning teams offered support to any resident who required assistance to access and complete the form online. The Budget Conversations were also promoted at a range of facilities including libraries and community centres with paper copies of the survey available at these locations.
- 4.5** Additionally, to supplement the online consultation, five focus group sessions took place with a range of representatives from local community organisations, within Dumbarton/Alexandria and Clydebank as well as with the West Dunbartonshire Equality Forum and the Trade Unions. Sessions were offered at varying times of the day and evening to ensure as wide a range of participation as possible. Community groups were proactively contacted by email and encouraged to send up to two members to any of the sessions.

#### Social media engagement

- 4.6** Alongside the responses received to the consultation there has also been debate and discussion on the Council's social media accounts, with many people commenting and sharing information. On the Council's Facebook page alone the various posts regarding budget consultation have reached just over 57.6k people, with over 382 shares, likes and comments and almost 2690 post clicks.

#### Engagement

- 4.7** The online method of consultation engaged a broad range of stakeholders across West Dunbartonshire with 771 people completing the prioritisation and investment questions in the survey. The 2023 survey response equates to approximately 136 responses per 10,000 adult population or 1.36% of the adult population (15 years +). Industry standards confirm this represents a statistically significant response level and a small statistical margin of error; this means that we are able to be confident that the results are able to be representative of the population.
- 4.8** The majority of those who responded to the online consultation identified themselves as living in West Dunbartonshire (91%), a further 4% of

respondents stated they were business owners within the area, 10% stated they were part of a community organisation and 32% stated they were parents or carers of school age children in West Dunbartonshire, while 39% stated they were employees of West Dunbartonshire.

- 4.9** Based on the responses provided by those who took part in the online survey, a relative ranking of all key statements has been compiled and arranged by strategic priority area. This ranking, shown in Appendix 1, is based on ranking each statement with one being the highest. As can be seen from the tables in Appendix 1, the following were ranked as the top priorities:

Online survey top ranked responses

Priority 1: Our communities

- Reducing antisocial behaviour and improving feeling of safety in the community
- Investment in community events (i.e. book bug, wellbeing sessions, art classes),
- Maintain level of investment and funding for primary schools including staffing and range of learning in formal and extra-curricular activities
- Maintaining investment in care services for those with additional support needs and older adults such as day care and home care

Priority 2: Our Environment

- Investment is focused on refuse collection and recycling facilities
- Investment is focused on road maintenance and lighting, including (potholes, road markings and signage)

Priority 3: Our Economy

- Regeneration of town centres and neighbourhoods
- Target investment in areas with the highest child poverty rates

Priority 4: Our Council

- Maintaining the number and location of public buildings including offices, depots, libraries and community facilities

- 4.10** Respondents were asked to provide any relevant comments on each priority area as well as to specify a service area for investment or disinvestment. A summary of the representative comments is included in the findings in Appendix 1. In the main, comments focus on a desire the Council ceases making service cuts (particularly in areas such as health, education, road and environmental improvements) and a feeling of a general decline in the appearance of the area.

- 4.11** Four targeted focus group sessions were held for community organisations, in Clydebank, Alexandria/Dumbarton and online. In total, 18 representatives

attended these focused discussion sessions, drawn from community organisations representing Community Councils, Scottish Youth Parliament, citizen's advocacy groups and those representing young people, carers, environmental issues, and mental health. In addition to this a further focus group was held with the Trade Unions.

- 4.12** The focus group discussions centred on the impact savings options may have on the community, suggestions for areas where improvements to service delivery could be made. Attendees were also asked about their views on the service delivery options

#### Focus group summary responses

##### Priority 1: Our communities

- Health and Wellbeing/ lifelong learning was really important in the community, brought people together and helped tackle loneliness
- Local activity has not generated funding from out-with WDC – communities happy to do things for themselves however would like support to access funding etc.
- Health care services in the community are important, especially for people with disabilities
- Community cohesion important
- Community groups should work together to formulate joint bids for funding, this would help leverage other funding
- Volunteering could be encouraged and strengthened
- Public transport NEC cards are a welcome bonus which is inclusive to young people through their Young Scot Cards, however, accessibility to buses and trains for wheelchair users isn't great
- Cost of and access to facilities for young people could be improved
- Increase and signposting of life learning skills for young people

##### Priority 2: Our Environment

- WD was a good place to live and community action would make improvements, working with national groups such as Keep Scotland Beautiful
- Community safety was important and good lighting, well-kept roads and pavements were key priority areas, accessibility needs to be considered in all developments at the start (i.e. drop pavements for wheelchairs)
- Community vegetable plots in Faifley is a good example for working well within the community and involving young people – would like to see more of this
- Double parking and pavement parking is a problem in community areas and is not being monitored, parking charges should be considered.
- Community Planning should involve communities more – opportunities to have wider discussions around key areas
- Recent survey of young people found they felt safe in the area however poor street lighting was noted as an issue

### Priority 3: Our Economy

- Support for social enterprises is important
- Improve local tourism
- Progress commercialisation opportunities
- Better value for money for public work/repairs
- Local spend initiatives
- Community organisations depend on Council funding
- Support for digital inclusion is welcome – Wi-Fi hot spots
- Opportunities for young people to engage with further education, employment skills and employment opportunities
- Young people experiencing impact of cost of living, would like to see focus around supporting them to take part in activities within the local area

### Priority 4: Our Council

- Groups, would benefit from having a single point of contact in Council for dealing with queries
- Community Empowerment Act under utilised
- Explore community development trusts
- Website and Council materials could be more accessible
- Council should consider joint bids to Community Budgeting and increasing maximum grant for ‘combines’
- Develop cost/benefit analysis of proposed cuts, Strategic partners rely on funding to support vulnerable people and retain service
- More communication on Council achievements and initiatives, it can be difficult to know what’s going on
- Current methods of communication with young people are a bit dated, need to explore alternative avenues for communication with young people.

## **5. People Implications**

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

## **6. Financial and Procurement Implications**

**6.1** There are no financial and procurement implications associated with this report although the information within will contribute to the 24/25 budget setting process.

## **7. Risk Analysis**

**7.1** A number of risks were identified in relation to this activity:

- It is important for Council to demonstrate public opinion has been considered. In circumstances where Council proposes 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.
- There is a risk the sample size is not seen as representative of the views of West Dunbartonshire residents. However, as detailed in 4.6 above the sample size is statistically significant. Appendix 1 shows a breakdown of respondent information.
- There is a risk this largely online survey was not accessible to a number of residents in West Dunbartonshire and they were therefore excluded from participating and having their views heard. This was mitigated by the provision of support through libraries and digital teams and also the four focus group events across a range of days, times and venues to ensure accessibility.
- There is a risk that too much emphasis is placed on the findings of the focus groups which represent a very small number of those who participated. However the focus group discussion did not require participants to rank the services. Instead it focused on discussion on the risks and potential impacts of savings decisions.

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

- 8.1** To ensure the process was accessible to the widest range of stakeholders each element was planned to ensure maximum coverage and accessibility for residents. All venues were assessed for suitable access and facilities and additional support was made available on request to ensure it was specific to the requirements of the individual. Focus groups were carried out in four different venues and at different times to ensure they were as accessible as possible to residents, based on feedback from previous consultation and engagement activity. An EIA is attached as Appendix 2.

## **9. Consultation**

- 9.1** This report has been shared for consultation with Legal, Finance and Procurement as well as members of the Corporate Management Team.

## **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 delivery of the strategic priority 4 and underlying objectives:

- Our Council - Inclusive and Adaptable
  - Our residents are engaged and empowered
  - Our Council is adaptable and focused on delivering best value for our residents

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**25 October 2023**

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**Appendices:** Appendix 1 - Budget Consultation summary responses  
Appendix 2 - Appendix 3 - EIA (768)

**Background Papers:** None

**Wards Affected:** All