

# WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

## THE BUDGET CONSULTATION STRATEGY

### **1. The Consultation Strategy**

- 1.1 The Council's Consultation Strategy was approved by Council as part of the 2003/2004 Budget and takes into account Guidelines issued by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in June 2002, entitled Council Tax Consultation Guidelines for Local Authorities.

### **2. Overall considerations**

#### **2.1 Outcomes**

- a. To successfully set the Council's Budget.
- b. To involve key partners, employees and the residents of Wyre Forest in developing its spending plans.
- c. To provide sufficient information to enable the public to understand the issues and make informed comments.
- d. To develop a framework for future budget consultation.
- e. To promote a positive approach to public engagement.

Achieve the desired outcomes by:

- Using a range of communication and consultation techniques.
- Engaging and informing the local media about the budget, financial pressures and decisions to be made.
- Ensuring that the messages communicated to all audiences are consistent.
- Positively address inaccuracies or uninformed comments as soon as they are made.

#### **2.2 Key Audiences**

- Wyre Forest residents including 'hard to reach' groups
- District Council Employees
- District Businesses
- Elected Members
- MPs and MEPs
- Local News Media
- Voluntary Agencies
- Partner Organisations

## 2.3 Key Messages

- There are increasing demands on the Council's resources, many of which are outside the control of the Council.
- The Council is committed to providing quality services that are affordable, efficient, economic, effective and sustainable.
- The Government have in place Reserve Capping Powers to limit excessive increases in Council Tax. The Government have made it clear given the substantial investment in Local Government, it expects authorities to deliver a Council Tax increase of less than 5% for 2007/2008.
- High priority will be given to statutory services.

## 2.4 Framework

Research shows that the public generally mistrust and are cynical about consultation and are of the opinion that decisions have already been made. Government research suggests that consultation exercises must convince the public that their views will be taken seriously.

In carrying out the consultation :-

- The approach needs to be inclusive, involving and open.
- The information needs to be informative, impartial and understandable.
- The research needs to be appropriate, timely, professional and resourced.
- The results need to be listened to and reported back.

## 3. **STAGES IN BUDGET CONSULTATION**

Stage 1 : January                      Draft Budget Strategy  
Stakeholder Consultation/Corporate Consultation/Scrutiny

Stage 2 : February                      Assessment of feedback  
Key decisions and recommendations based on results

## 4. **METHODS OF CONSULTATION**

- 4.1 Suggestions for engaging and informing key audiences are attached in the Annex to this report. The suggestions given are not exhaustive. The Cabinet/Budget Scrutiny Panel will carry out consultations as it considers appropriate. These will be in accordance with the prevailing legislative requirements, together with key issues, having considered the costs and benefits associated with each type of method of consultation.

## **5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 Wherever possible, consultations will use existing avenues of communication.
- 5.2 Consideration will be given to the costs of proposed consultations, including such items as leaflet and notice production and printing and postage. Costs depend on the approach taken and each approach will require a financial appraisal to establish whether costs can be met from the existing Consultation Budget.

## Communications/Consultation Techniques

Methods for engaging and informing key audiences are :-

	Residents	Employees	Businesses	Members MPs MEPs	Local News Media	Voluntary Agencies/ LSP
1. Public consultation Questionnaires/ Referendum	✓					
2. Public Meetings	✓				✓	✓
3. Local Press	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4. Press Release	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
5. Newsyre	✓	✓				
6. Leaflets/Notices/Bookmarks in libraries	✓	✓				
7. Ward Members	✓			✓	✓	✓
8. Local Focus Groups	✓			✓		✓
9. Joint Consultative Meetings/Citizens Panel				✓		✓
10. Verbal briefings		✓		✓		✓
11. Internet/Text	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
12. Radio Interviews	✓		✓		✓	✓
13. Radio Q/A Sessions	✓		✓		✓	
14. Employee Q/A Sessions		✓				
15. Attendance at established groups/ meetings	✓		✓			✓
16. 1 to 1 Meetings (where appropriate)				✓		✓
17. Council Tax Leaflet/Business Rate Leaflet	✓		✓			