

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET
16th FEBRUARY 2010

Results of Budget Consultation

OPEN	
SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY THEME	Economic Success Shared by All
CORPORATE PLAN AIM:	A Well Run and Responsive Council
CABINET MEMBER:	Councillor Nathan Desmond
DIRECTOR:	Director Of Resources
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APPENDICES	None

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To consider the results of the budget consultation exercise launched following the presentation of the Financial Strategy 2010/13 to Cabinet on 22 December 2009.

2. RECOMMENDATION

The CABINET is asked NOTE:

- 2.1 The results of the budget consultation exercise as detailed within this report.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Following the approval of the Financial Strategy 2010/13 on 22 December 2009 there has been extensive consultation on the proposals. The purpose of this report is to feed back to the Cabinet the results of the consultation ahead of the final recommendations to Council. The four main groups which have been consulted are:

- Council Tax payers;
- Other Members of Council;
- Staff and Trade Unions;
- Parish and Town Councils.

- 3.2 This report will summarise the responses from each of the groups detailed shown above.

3.3 Council Taxpayers

- 3.3.1 In October 2008, the Council undertook a major consultation exercise in relation to the budget priorities for the Council. This exercise involved a questionnaire which was sent to 2,000 properties within the District. The Council received back valuable information from over 400 properties on the ranking of Council services.

- 3.3.2 The information from the 2008 exercise informed the prioritisation exercise which was undertaken by the Budget Review Panel during October 2009, which in turn informed the Cabinet proposals which were presented to the Cabinet in December.

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3.3.3 To determine public reaction to the Cabinet Proposals an on-line questionnaire was developed and placed on the Council's website. This questionnaire summarised the specific Cabinet proposals and increases in Council Tax.

3.3.4 36 responses were made to the consultation exercise, and the selected results are shown below.

Question in relation to Council Tax increases	Responses	Percentage %
Would you prefer		
Higher than 2.5% and have more or improved services	8	23
Around 2.5% as proposed	14	40
Lower than 2.5% and have fewer services	13	37

From this response 60% suggest that an increase of 2.5% in Council Tax or higher would be acceptable to protect services. Responses to specific questions:

I think the Council should introduce new working practices and review staff benefits. (£210,000)	Responses	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	11	36
Agree	12	39
Neither agree or disagree	4	12
Disagree	3	10
Strongly Disagree	1	3

I think the Council should join up with other authorities to deliver services. (£200,000)	Responses	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	10	33
Agree	7	23
Neither agree or disagree	5	17
Disagree	6	20
Strongly Disagree	2	7

I think the Council should use its savings rather than borrow money to introduce new technology. (£630,000)	Responses	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	14	47
Agree	11	37
Neither agree or disagree	3	10
Disagree	1	3
Strongly Disagree	1	3

I think the Council should spend an extra £100,000 to help improve the cleanliness of streets.	Responses	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	7	24
Agree	14	47
Neither agree or disagree	4	13
Disagree	1	3
Strongly Disagree	4	13

3.3.5 The full results of the questionnaire can be found at Appendix 1.

3.4 Other Members of the Council

- 3.4.1 Following the meeting of Cabinet the Budget Review Panel have met on two occasions to consider the budget in greater detail. On each occasion there was debate on specific proposals and further information provided to assist in the decision making process.
- 3.4.2 At the meeting of the Budget Review Panel on 4 February 2010, alternative proposals to the Cabinet's were presented from the following groups:
- The Labour Party (Appendix 2);
 - The Independent Community and Health Concern Party (Appendix 3);
 - Joint submission from the Liberal and the Liberal Democratic Parties (Appendix 4).
- 3.4.3 On all of the Appendices 2-4, those proposals which differ from the original Cabinet proposals are shaded. In addition wherever the proposals would result in additional expenditure for the Council the source of the relevant financing is shown. All of the proposed budgets were discussed by the Corporate Resources Scrutiny Committee on 11 February and recommend for consideration to Cabinet.

3.5 Staff and Trade Unions

- 3.5.1 On 22 December a special edition of Wyred Weekly (staff newsletter) was distributed to all staff within the Council. This newsletter identified the most significant of the proposals and also identified the particular issues which affected the staff term and conditions of employment. In relation to the WETT proposals this issue has been subject to a separate consultation exercise, the results of which have already been considered by Cabinet.
- 3.5.2 The deadline for responses from staff was the 15 February 2010. A number of responses have been received in relation to the proposals which affect staff benefits. The most significant issue relates to the proposal to withdraw the payment of Professional subscriptions, the responses on this issue can be summarised as follows:
- Concern relating to the credibility of professional officers in their roles i.e. attendance at court, professional standing in the community.
 - Requirement of their job as per their job description and contract of employment to be a member of the appropriate professional body.
 - Potential cost the authority of recruitment to specialist areas if officers leave.
 - Professional Officers will be taking a pay cut if professional subscription is not paid in addition to the pay freeze.
 - Impact on career linked salary grades.

If the budget proposal is approved it may have an adverse impact on employee morale, motivation and commitment at a time when morale is already low.

- 3.5.3 In addition responses were received specifically in relation to the proposal to reduce capacity within Print and Design. The concerns raised suggested that the move could increase the cost to the Council, and reduce capacity for Directorates. Implications arising from this could result in other officers attempting to undertake design work themselves.

- 3.5.4 Attached at Appendix 5 is a summary of the other items raised by staff.
- 3.5.5 In addition a response was also received from the GMB union, which can be summarised as follows:
- Concern at the impact to the Council in relation to investment income from both returns and the availability of investment deposits;
 - Concern at the assumption in relation to the pay inflation over the three years of the strategy;
 - Concern that the forecast reduction in government grant is leading to decisions on budgets when this position is not certain;
 - Several concerns about the WETT proposals and the impact that this may have upon staff and service provision.

3.6 Parish and Town Councils

- 3.6.1 Specific consultation was undertaken with each on the Parish and Town Councils which are currently in receipt of "Grant Aid to Parish Councils". Within the 2009/10 is an allowance of 15% of the value of the Parish precept to be paid by the District Council, however, the Financial Strategy 2009/12 suggested the withdrawal of these grants in 2010/11.
- 3.6.2 Subsequently the Financial Strategy 2010/11, proposed to reinstate 50% of the value in 2010/11.
- 3.6.3 Responses have been received from the Town and Parish Councils requesting that this decision is reviewed (most notably Stourport and Bewdley). Schemes which are cited as examples of how this funding is applied includes:
- Recreational facilities
 - Cemetery provision
 - Bus Shelters
 - Allotments
- 3.6.4 The full responses are available upon request.
- 3.6.5 It should now be noted that the final recommendations to Council allow for a reinstatement of 90% of the funding in 2010/11, equivalent to a grant of 12.75% from the District Council.

4. KEY ISSUES

- 4.1 In making the final recommendations to Council on the Financial Strategy 2010/13 the Cabinet has considered the results of the budget consultation exercise.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct Financial Implications.

6. LEGAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

None.

7. EQUALITY IMPACT NEEDS ASSESSMENT

An Equality Impact Assessment screening has been undertaken and it is considered that there are no discernable impacts on the six equality strands.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 8.1 It is good practice to determine the views of Council tax payers in making determinations on budgets.

9. CONCLUSION/FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- 9.1 The Council continues to engage with the public, staff, other Members and various stakeholders in setting the direction of the Council. In these times of financial austerity difficult choices will be required on selective reductions in costs in line with the Council's stated aims and objectives.

10. CONSULTEES

- 10.1 Leader of the Council/Cabinet/CMT.