

Appendix F

Budget Engagement

Overview

This year's budget engagement ran from 29 November 2023 until 21 January 2024.

There have also been two consultations running in parallel to this engagement which concern two of the project proposals in the budget:

- Adult Social Care review of charges (consultation ran from 29 November 2023 to 7 January 2024 and had 425 responses, the results are being presented to Cabinet on 29 January 2024)
- Review of home to school transport policy and post 16 transport (consultation is running from 14 December 2023 to 8 February 2024 and there have been 190 responses up to 23 January 2024)

The Authority has been able to offer a wide range of ways for residents and key stakeholders to get involved and have their say on the budget proposals. An overview of the methodology used and the responses received is set out below.

Methodology

There has been a mix of face to face and on-line or digital engagement in order to maximise the ways in which people and stakeholders can have their say. This has included:

- Online survey via the Council website (237 responses).
- Face to face engagement via 14 focus groups and meetings involving 536 people.
- Email communications to 600 community groups and organisations, the Business Forum, 768 members of Our North Tyneside Voice (a group of residents and tenants) and all North Tyneside Council staff
- Digital communications via North Tyneside Council social media channels, website and local news media (with an estimated reach of 8,273 people).
- Posters and printed surveys on display at the Have Your Say display boards in all four Customer First Centres (Whitley Bay, Wallsend, North Shields and the White Swan Centre in Killingworth), along with the Oxford Centre in Longbenton and the John Willie Sams Centre in Dudley.
- Printed surveys went to 25 North Tyneside Living schemes and were sent directly to 43 members of Our North Tyneside Voice who do not use digital means of communication. Printed surveys were also delivered to residents who requested paper copies. 17 of these were returned.

- Posters were displayed in libraries and leisure centres.
- Information to promote the engagement was included in the winter edition of Our North Tyneside magazine, delivered to 97,527 households.

Feedback from face-to-face engagement

People are more aware this year of the financial pressures facing councils generally. They were generally supportive of the budget proposals but had some concerns about rising living costs in the context of a rise in Council Tax. People were concerned about those struggling with the cost of living and there was a real emphasis on the need to support people and organisations through change.

Feedback from the survey

There were 237 responses received to the budget engagement survey.

Respondents were asked whether the Authority's focus on the thirteen areas it has identified savings can be made to help achieve a balanced budget is reasonable.

- 67% of respondents agreed that the approach is reasonable.
- 13% disagreed.
- 20% said they did not know.

Those respondents who did not believe the approach was reasonable were asked what alternatives they would suggest. Only 19 responses were received. They focused on areas such as: reserving Council Tax increases for those who were more financially well off than others (2 responses); reducing the creation of cycle lanes (2 responses); reducing spend on a range of different areas (each one only received 1 response).

Respondents were also asked whether or not the proposal to raise Council Tax was reasonable.

- 58% of respondents agreed that the proposal was reasonable.
- 34% disagreed.
- 8% did not know.

Those who said it was not reasonable were asked to make alternative suggestions. 61 comments were received, the majority of these focused on: not raising Council Tax, reviewing and reducing staffing, reducing spend on certain services or projects.

Finally, respondents were asked to outline any other actions they thought the Authority should take to help balance its budget for 2024/25.

152 respondents contributed their views, generating 198 separate comments. The majority of these centred on: reducing unnecessary spending, staffing efficiencies, reducing the number of councillors, reducing certain projects and reducing the number of council buildings.

Survey respondent profile – while balanced for sex, ethnicity and religion, people aged 45 years and over, and those with disabilities were more likely to have participated.