

Appendix 2

CONSULTATION ON THE COUNCIL'S BUDGET PROPOSALS 2018-2021

JANUARY 2018

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Between December 2017 and January 2018, the Council undertook an eight week period of consultation on its budget proposals for 2018/19 to 2020/21, prior to making the final decisions on its budget.
- 1.2. The Council reported on its priorities, the budget setting context and local financial position and gave an outline of the proposals to balance the Council's 2018/19 to 2020/21 budgets. The Council asked for views on its proposals for delivering services in the future while achieving the savings needed.

2. Consultation Process

- 2.1. The Council hosted a survey on its website asking for people's views on the budget proposals. This survey was publicised through the Council website, Facebook and Twitter pages. There were a total of 104 respondents, of whom 29 left comments. The results of the survey are summarised in section 3.
- 2.2. In addition, a meeting was held with the Chamber of Commerce during February to understand the views of the Chamber on the Council's budget proposals. The issues raised during the meeting are summarised in section 4.
- 2.3. The Trade Unions were also consulted on the draft budget proposals at meetings held between November 2017 and January 2018. The Council continues to consult with the Trades Unions on the impact and implementation of the Council's budget.

3. Outcomes of the Consultation on the Council's Budget Proposals

- 3.1. The main issues that were raised through the public consultation on the Council's budget proposals are set out below. A table is included at the end of this report that provides a summary of the comments made during the consultation, grouped into subject areas
- 3.2. In addition to survey responses a written response was received from CYWU, ATL/NEU, NUT/NEU, UNITE and UNISON Trades Unions.
- 3.3. A full list of comments from the meetings, online survey and written feedback can be received by contacting insight@coventry.gov.uk.

Feedback from the on line survey and written feedback

- 3.4. There were comments from respondents (5) who expressed dissatisfaction with the level of the Council Tax increase and concern about the impact on the ability of Coventry citizens to afford this. Other comments from respondents (8) expressed support for the Council's plans including the decision not to include any new savings proposals for 2018/19 and for the overall priorities in the proposals including children's services and homelessness. There were also respondents (8) who expressed the need for the Council to continue to support the most vulnerable people in the city, with individual

comments proposing that more could be done in relation to SEN provision, Education, Housing, social workers to help families with complex circumstances, Social Care and the older people. A small number of comments expressed dissatisfaction with the Council's refuse collection service.

- 3.5. Comments from representatives of voluntary sector organisations reflected their view that proper funding levels could help them play a major role in combating some of the key challenges in the city and in overall terms, help save the Council money.
- 3.6. A range of comments (16) were received in relation to what the Council could do to reduce costs and find savings in the future. These reflected the need for the Council to generate income and be as self-sufficient as possible including by listening to new ideas and investing in income earning opportunities. There were concerns around the closure of car parks and selling of Council buildings. Other comments (8) included reviewing the Council's workforce including the number and salaries of senior managers and removing staff car park passes.
- 3.7. In relation to the Trades Unions written response there were a number of questions (to which answers were provided subsequently) in addition to the following main comments. There was recognition of the achievement for the city of gaining UK City of Culture status and of the hard times being faced due to the significant cuts from Central Government. Concern was expressed at what was viewed as a lack of transparency to the Budget process and plans to reduce Trades Union Facility Time. The response proposed that car park passes should be removed from employees who are not entitled to them in line with existing policies. There was also a proposal that income from the investment in Coombe Abbey Hotel should be used to offset other cuts. Concern was expressed that the Council had only budgeted for a 1% pay award in its Pre-Budget Report compared with the announcement of a 2% offer from local government employers. There was also concern expressed over the proposed Council Tax increase compared with real terms cuts in pay and rising inflation. There were comments around the rise in homelessness in the city and a suggestion that investment should be made in homes for the homeless to alleviate this. It was proposed that Central Government should be lobbied for an improved settlement for the city.

4. Feedback from Consultation Meeting with the Chamber of Commerce

- 4.1. A presentation was given, which generated discussion and questions on a number of areas. Comments were broadly supportive of the Council's proposals within the Budget, in particular its Capital Programme. Assurances were sought and given that there were opportunities to provide new hotel accommodation in the city and a hope was expressed that the Council would have a key role in the UK City of Culture arrangements. There was nervousness around the Council's ability to ensure that it had sufficient capacity to deliver functions such as inward investment and planning that are important in helping to generate economic growth. There were concerns with obstacles to the release of employment land and the displacement of business premises by student accommodation and officers were clear that the Council had limited influence on these issues. There was clear support for the Council's investment in a second building at Friargate and a statement that this would attract tenants. Members of the Chamber explained that any future Business Rates supplement via the WM Mayor would need to be backed by a business case but that where the case was made, the Chamber would provide a supportive role, with visible improvements in the city providing a clear stimulus for this support.

Summary of Responses from the Council's Public Budget Consultation – January 2017

| Priority / Theme | Comments | |
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| Tell us what you think about the proposed budget plans for 2018/19? | | |
| Council Tax | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree with not further reducing the level of Council Tax Support but concern with the intention to increase Council Tax and the ability of Coventry citizens to afford this. • Impact of a 4.9% increase Council Tax on ordinary working people across the city, many of whom are struggling to make ends meet. • The decision to hike Council Tax yet again seems to me to be in very poor judgement and illustrates possible failures within the Council in terms of managing and planning across Social Services. • The impact of raising Council Tax could cause people to fall into the category of or voluntarily opt to become 'vulnerable', given the increasingly apparent benefits of being so. • Many of us are sick of hearing about 'vulnerable people' and the cost of footing the ever-increasing bill for 'vulnerability'; unapologetically demanding more money from the general populous is unlikely to improve perceptions, the figure of 4.9% is provocative indeed and shows that the Council seems intent on denying the citizens of Coventry the opportunity to reject this increase. • Don't mind paying a bit more council tax, but want to feel that I'm getting what I pay for. • People are sceptical of the council - you've just built Friargate and people feel as though they've paid for that by losing something else. Increasing Council Tax will fuel that resentment. • My only objection is with Council Tax. We are looking at almost a 15% rise in Council Tax rates in the last 3 years. Households will not be able to cope eventually if the rates are going to continue rising. | Residents/Organisations |

| Priority / Theme | Comments | |
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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A 4.9% increase - inflation is 2.8%, so this is a very large increase, especially when most working residents are lucky to get a pay rise at all in the last few years compared to councillors and council staff. | |
| Advice Agencies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proper funding of advice organisations can help them to play a major role in combating homelessness, the rise in looked after children numbers and the roll-out of universal credit. Not only these concerns but also the potential negative consequences expected from the roll out of full service Universal Credit. | Organisations |
| Efficiency & Income Generation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The closure of income generating areas, (Council owned Car Parks) needs to be heavily reconsidered. Instead of closing the Civic Centres and selling them off was an option to have them rented out? Does not seem to go far enough in terms of long term savings plans and making Council self sufficient | Residents |
| Refuse Collection | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A little bit of snow and the bins aren't collected correctly for a month New bin system is not working at present. I understand why it was done, but don't think things are thought out properly or implications fully considered. | |
| Overall proposals | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support expressed for taking "tough" decisions. Good to know that no services are going to be cut/Not happy about the cuts made in 17/18 and think they should be corrected in 2018-19/ No new cuts is great news. I agree with the priorities identified relating to helping and supporting people at risk - children's services and homelessness. Shameful, you spend OUR money like it's your own wasteful and deceitful More money needs to be spent on SEN provision and education/Housing /social workers to help families with complex circumstances/social care. The focus on tackling homelessness is excellent, as there is a considerable rise in rough sleepers in Coventry. Perhaps more can be done to help the elderly/I think more services should be provided for the elderly and infirm. | Residents |

| Priority / Theme | Comments | |
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| In view of the difficult financial situation, what do you think the Council could do differently to reduce costs and save money in the future? | | |
| Advice Agencies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We urge the council to note the increasing value of its third sector in preventing and relieving family crisis and the positive monetary impact this has to both the council's own expenditure and on the local economy. Money spent supporting these services needs to be seen as an investment in the community which has a proven financial return rather than a 'good deed' for its own sake. Supporting these agencies saves the council money. | Organisations |
| Reserves | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using reserves is one option, but it is finite. You can only spend them once. | Residents |
| Income Generation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Managers need to listen to employee ideas and not be afraid to try new things. The closure of income generating areas, (Council owned Car Parks) needs to be heavily reconsidered. Instead of closing the Civic Centres and selling them off was an option to have them rented out? Need to re-invest in our investments, upfront cost, for long term gain. Focus on eco-friendly initiatives, such as reducing printing, paperless offices. Rent out office space where not used, eg semi-empty floors in Friargate. Look to fill the Friargate cafe space with a local eco-friendly company or not for profit/Community Interest Company who could channel profits back into the Council. Look at income generation ideas. Become more commercially minded and look at ways to generate income. | |
| Savings Proposals | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Look at maintenance contracts and ensuring that it is possible to get out of them without financial penalties if they prove too expensive. Turn the lights off in the Council House/Energy saving in all offices. Reduce the number of councillors to two per ward The Council should stop all interpretation services which is a huge burden/Cut back on providing interpretation and translation services - close the unit down and outsource. Similar to what the NHS has done. | Residents/Trade Unions/Organisations |

| Priority / Theme | Comments | |
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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We need to do more preventative work with our citizens and assist co-ordinate communities to be more self-sufficient. Provide more supportive low level services to prevent dependency upon high level services in the future. • The Council could take advantage of the skills that people have in the organisation. • We have too many people working in posts that could be re-assessed and re-assigned. Customer Services alone has more Team Leaders than any other department. They could be used to cover services in other areas, for example Social Services and Prevention Services. HR could do a mandatory skills questionnaire and based on that you could re-assign employees. • Reduce number of managers - very top heavy structure/Review salaries of Council management/Review all posts at grade 7 and above - This level sees major duplication and pointless tasks such as one to ones every month for the sake of it. • Stop putting in islands in roads that don't need them. Stop building Council buildings. • Better networking across health and social care and a shared budget between the two services. Help with bed blocking and to enable a revolving service. • Bring public transport in house. Push ahead with Landlord Licencing. Switch the mentality of homelessness services from crisis management to homelessness prevention. • Car park passes should be withdrawn for most staff as a lot of staff do not go out of the office/Scrap car passes for all staff. This is heavily abused and it is the most well paid who benefit/I work in Coventry and I am having to pay more to park. All the cars that are parked next to me have passes in them so must be working at the Council. These cars do not move all day Why do I have to pay and they don't?/ The Council should take the parking passes off of all members of staff as many of these people are using these passes for personal use and the council is losing revenue as a result. • More unpaid holiday or option to do part time or reduced hours for staff. • Chase arrears - Tax students - Tipping penalties | |

| Priority / Theme | Comments | |
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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We are soon going to be little more than a student campus that will be a drain on our council tax budget as students do not contribute but use the services our contributions provide such as refuse removal and police etc. I would like to see the curtailment of new student buildings in the future. Projects such as friar gate should be scaled back and existing buildings regenerated instead of building more which will also probably stay empty. Allocate community recycling skips, especially towards the Christmas period. This would reduce the need for more bin collections, but will also help towards preventing fly tipping and waste left everywhere. Do not give staff an automatic increment - Any increment should be performance related. | |
| Overall Comments | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Council ought to face reality and begin to cut services until it is in a position to do otherwise rather than asking for more money from ordinary working people Encourage people to take responsibility for their own actions rather than continually asking other people to fund other peoples' poor social and financial decisions. Stop wasting it on silly projects, Friargate being one example. | Residents/Trade Unions/Organisations |
| Overall Comments | | |
| Do you have any other comments you would like to make? | | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coventry Citizens Advice recognises the financial and political environment in which the city council has to operate. We are more than willing to make whatever positive contribution we can to help the city council address social issues facing Coventry Citizens in the most cost effective way. We understand the drivers for and the impact of 'devolution' in areas of social welfare (social care, housing and homelessness, localised welfare assistance). But we can help. Staff morale is low. Employees are not paid market rate and are leaving, meaning that those who remain are being asked to pick up more and more work. There is only so much that they can take before they start going off sick | Residents/Organisations |

| Priority / Theme | Comments | |
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| | <p>themselves. Keeping salaries low is an obvious money saver, and is not seen by the public, but the knock on effects will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Please freeze the domestic rates. • Really unhappy about the bin collections it's a joke • If it meant increasing tax to help fund this then I'm sure the general public would be more understanding of this to protect our NHS and social care funding. • It's understandable that the vulnerable in the city continue to suffer as funding to the local authority continues to tighten. It would be comforting to know that, given a highly likely injection of wealth coming into the City, that the local authority pledge to ring fence at least a percentage of that into boosting local services for vulnerable adults and children. • Coventry is an up and coming place to live but more needs to be done to secure its council and long term vision • Please stop focusing on the student population and remember the citizens of Coventry when planning the budget • It would be nice to have some recycling and food waste bins in and around the city centre, as well as regular bins. This could reinforce the concept of separating rubbish and also reduce waste overall. • Ideally, it would also be great if the council can work with all local and larger businesses to be able to distribute any unsold products to the more struggling individuals. E.g fruit and vegetables that are left unsold at the end of the day or cake trimmings etc. As these items are more perishable, these could be given to anyone to eat for that day with a disclaimer that it should not be kept for longer than 24 hours • yes, you should set bench marks as they do the private sector. Sickness - if you reach a trigger this is review and if necessary give a verbal which stays on her record for a year, and another trigger in that year and you are taken to a stage 2 verbal and so on. This should also be the case for performance. I find the council rewards service to the organisation more than it does those who do more and outperformed. | |

