

CONSULTATION ON THE COUNCIL'S BUDGET PROPOSALS JANUARY 2013

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Between December 2012 and January 2013 the Council undertook an extensive round of consultation on its budget proposals for 2013/14, prior to making the final decision on its budget.
- 1.2. The Council reported on its priorities, the national and policy context, the pressures on its services and how the reduction in public sector spending was impacting Coventry. This was followed by an outline of investment and savings proposals for the next financial year. The Council asked consultees for their views on the Council's priorities and on the budget proposals.

2. Consultation process

- 2.1. Meetings were held between November and January, the consultation process was led by the Deputy Leader of the Council and supported by members of Management Board and other senior managers. Wherever possible, the opportunity was taken to attend existing meetings held by local organisations and groups to maximise participation in the consultation process. The timescales did not allow for the consultation to be taken to all of the Council's Neighbourhood Forums and as a result an invitation was sent to all residents registered with the forums to attend a central meeting.
- 2.2. The consultation involved the following:
 - Coventry Youth Council
 - Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce
 - Local Business Community
 - Public and Private Partner organisations
 - Voluntary and Community Groups
 - The Council's Trade Unions
 - Local Residents
- 2.3. Representatives from organisations and residents who were unable to attend the meetings were given the opportunity to receive the related reports and to send their comments directly to the Council. In addition to the public meetings the Council hosted a survey on its website asking for peoples views of its budget proposals. The results of the survey have been incorporated into these findings.
- 2.4. The Council consults with the trade unions on an ongoing basis on the implications of the specific reviews under the abc Programme. Comments and issues raised by the trade unions on the individual reviews are addressed at project level. The trade unions were also consulted on the draft budget proposals at a series of meetings held between November 2012 and January 2013. The Council continues to consult with the trade unions on the impact and implementation of the Council's budget.

3. Outcomes of the public 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 appendix that provides a summary of the comments made during the consultation, grouped into subject areas.

3. Council Priorities

Jobs and Growth

- 3.2 Whilst recognising the current financial climate and the Council's reduced resources, most respondents felt that it was vital for the Council to continue investing in the city, in order to support the city's economy and stimulate growth. All groups commented on the importance of creating jobs and recognised that regenerating the city was an important factor in achieving this. In particular providing job opportunities for young people was seen as a key priority.
- 3.3 The need to support industry and develop relevant skills in the city was a consistent theme across all of the meetings. It was acknowledged that there was now a shortage of engineering skills to support the growth of industry and that the education sector was not able to address this shortage alone. The Council, business sector and education sector needed to work together to address this. There was interest in the recent City Deal bid which if successful would help partners to work together to support industry and develop engineering skills in the sub region.
- 3.4 There was a more varied range of views on the development of the City Centre. Members of the Chamber of Commerce noted that some development such as Bishopsgate had appeared to slow down and that this could be due to the recession and the closure of some major companies. They felt that the City Centre needed to have a main store offer as well as other services such as doctors and dentists, restaurants and tourist attractions to encourage footfall. This view was supported by residents although some said that we should not try to make it an upmarket shopping centre and focus on what Coventry is good at. Whilst most people recognised that the development of the City Centre would in the longer term help to generate income through increased rental values and business rates, in the short term some residents asked whether shop rents should be reduced to help local retailers. They also suggested that the Council could consider short term lets for vacant properties to help new businesses to establish.
- 3.4 There were mixed views about promotion of the City Centre. Business partners saw the effective promotion of the city including events such as those in Broadgate as an important factor in helping to increase the number of people visiting the City Centre. On the other hand a view from a resident was that it seemed frivolous to spend money on such events given the level of spending cuts that the Council was having to make.

Better Pavements Streets and Roads

- 3.5 A number of local residents confirmed that the improvement of pavements, streets and roads was still a priority and in particular making pavements safe for vulnerable and older people. A few residents commented that some roads had still not been improved whilst other roads were deteriorating again and that in their view the impression was that some roads were being worked on repeatedly whilst others had not yet been started.

Support and Celebrate Our Young People

- 3.6 A consistent theme across most of the meetings was the importance of creating jobs and opportunities for young people. The Coventry Youth Council focused upon this issue as an area of most concern for young people at the present time. Some of the specific priorities raised by the young people included; providing more categories of good quality work experience (this was seen as the main barrier to obtaining more permanent

employment), helping local businesses to employ young people and promoting the city to bring in more jobs through new businesses.

- 3.7 A number of respondents were concerned that there may be loss of some of the early intervention services which currently have an important role in helping to keep children safe. Support for disabled children and providing support for parent carers was also seen as an important priority.

Protect Our Most Vulnerable Residents

- 3.8 There was general concern over the impact of the budget cuts on some of the most vulnerable people in the City. There were a number of comments made about the definition of vulnerability which could be determined by a variety of individual circumstances. Added to this was concern over the as yet unknown impact on individuals of Welfare Reform and changes to benefits. The Voluntary and Community Sector saw the importance of inter agency working and partnership working with voluntary organisations as a priority for supporting vulnerable people in particular through early intervention and advice services.

4. Delivering Efficiencies

- 4.1 A number of voluntary organisations welcomed the Council's continued support for the sector and their commitment to working with partners to deliver services for vulnerable residents, despite the financial challenges. The amount of positive dialogue already taking place in many areas was acknowledged and whilst it was recognised that there could sometimes be sensitivities with involving partners the request was made for genuine involvement in some of the larger reviews such as Community Services, Commissioning and Procurement and Neighbourhood Services. In particular the sector felt that there needed to be recognition of the role that they have in delivering some of the early preventative services which in turn could help to manage the demand for Council services.

5. Budget Proposals

- 5.1 A number of residents said that the budget proposals were so broad that there was insufficient detail in the investment and savings proposals upon which to comment. They were interested to understand what further consultation would take place when more detailed proposals emerged from the abc Programme.
- 5.2 Partners and residents expressed concern that a reduction of jobs at the City Council could impact on the efficiency of the services provided. The reduction in posts would also mean fewer job opportunities in the future particularly for young people. Partner organisations said that they may be able to help Council employees to find alternative employment by making sure that any vacancies that they had were advertised to Council employees.
- 5.3 A number of written responses were received from residents expressing concern over the proposed Council Tax increase in particular by those people on pension or low incomes. The perception was that this could not be justified at the same time as spending cuts were being implemented.
- 5.4 Even though the Council is required to set a balanced budget a few residents expressed their view that the Council needed to do more to fight the scale of spending cuts coming down from the Government. Partners suggested that professional networks had an important role in feeding back issues and concerns at a national level.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 All consultees recognised the scale and very difficult decisions that the Council was facing in planning its finances and setting a balanced budget for 2013/14, although some were concerned that the budget proposals did not contain sufficient detail to be able to comment upon the decisions. There was continued support for the Council's priorities and an across the board recognition of the importance of regenerating the city and creating more jobs, thus reinforcing the Council's decision to invest in this area. There was widespread concern that the impact of public spending cuts was likely to impact most on the most vulnerable people in the City, especially in view of the likely impact of Welfare Reform. Recognising the scale and ongoing nature of the Council's reduced funding, partners said they wanted to work with the Council to increase jobs and growth and to be involved in future service reviews.

Summary of Responses from the Council's Public Budget Consultation – January 2013

Priority / Theme	Comments	Sector
Priorities – National and Local Context		
Jobs and growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most important to create jobs, without this people will not have money to spend in the City Centre. • Coventry was good at getting out of the recession in the past, it had industry. Now the City Centre does not have people and there is more need for social services. How are jobs being developed? • The priority for jobs and growth is a contradiction given the proposed reductions to Council staffing levels. • Stop trying to turn the City Centre into an upmarket shopping destination. Identify what it does well and promote that. Seems frivolous to put on city events when making cuts in other areas, • Support for local businesses, putting rent and rates down would help to get retailers into shop premises. Promote short term lets of empty shops to help new businesses. • The proposed High Speed 2 train route appears to focus on Birmingham does this mean that Coventry will miss out? • Assurance that the Council was wise in putting money into the Ricoh Arena and had guarantees for its security. • Looking at the post-war development of Coventry -- concern that Coventry tries to do things first while other places look at us, and pick up things that we have done well. <hr style="border-top: 1px dashed black;"/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investing in the city – Role of Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), City Deal, Ensuring High Speed 2 benefits Coventry Nucleus • City Centre needs a different offer from retail parks, providing a personalised shopping experience • Higher education / further education sector very important to city – but falls under different jurisdiction and (on the whole) does not generally contribute to business rate growth • Provision and availability of affordable housing to improve economic prospects: not a large amount of hinterland for development and Coventry needs to look at utilising existing sites; 	<p>Residents</p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dashed black;"/> <p>Public and private partners</p>

Priority / Theme	Comments	Sector
	<p>seeking to make better use of the New Homes bonus; BUT dealing with the legacy problems of cheaply developed 1950s-60s estates</p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Important not to lose skills in the City in particular engineering skills. Make improvements using industry expertise, there are a lot of active retired people in the City with engineering skills, Coventry University is key to this. • The local economy in Coventry is weathering better than some other areas. Important that local authorities continue to network and stand up to future government spending proposals. • Lack of clarity on the impact of Welfare Reform on the local economy. • Consider adding Impact on the Economy as a paragraph for all Council reports. 	<p>Voluntary and Community Sector</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is retail still a viable option for the City Centre given the recent closure of some key companies, need to consider including other services to encourage footfall. • Growth of internet and out of town shopping, the city needs a fantastic tourist attraction and restaurants to draw people. • The Bishopsgate Development appears to be taking longer than planned. • Regeneration of the City Centre will in the longer term help to drive up rental values and business rates. • Need to work together in partnership to address the issues of business rates. • Small medium businesses could be the future of Coventry – with the support of both the Council and the Local Enterprise Partnership • Need to make space for industry and manufacturing; the City Deal will help to focus upon engineering skills. 	<p>Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide good quality and broader categories of work experience for young people. • Help local businesses employ young people • Promote the city to bring new businesses into the City who can provide more jobs. • Provide more Council apprenticeships. • Help young people to find part time jobs. • Offer skills/ work training for young people. • Value of careers advice both in schools and youth clubs. 	<p>Coventry Youth Council</p>	

Priority / Theme	Comments	Sector
Better streets and pavements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making roads and pavements safe is important in particular for older people and disabled people. • Some streets have not yet been repaired and others appear to have been done more than once. • After some much needed repairs and re-surfacing of the roads in Coventry they are starting to deteriorate again. The budget for road maintenance needs to be increased in the future year. • Clearing roads in the snow is particularly important for vulnerable people. Young people could be involved by helping residents to clear paths. • Gritting of roads is important to keep things moving. 	Residents
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address congestion issues. • Improve lighting in residential areas. • Ensure that work done is well planned and robust and does not require repeat attention. • Cut things that are wasting money like pointless road works. 	Coventry Youth Council
Support and celebrate our young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Important to reduce youth unemployment. • The loss of jobs in the Council will mean there will be less jobs available for young people in the future. • Community Education has already been lost, it's important to appreciate schools and teachers. • More should be done to help with Housing in the city especially for larger families. • The Core Strategy provides for a specific number of houses to meet shortfall. It sets out the provision for housing, but what about the building of new schools or additional school places to meet the additional demand for schools? • Concern about the reduction to early intervention services. They provide valuable support in safeguarding, quality, meeting Ofsted requirements. • More support for disabled children. 	Residents

Priority / Theme	Comments	Sector
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to support economic vitality in the city – gap for young people aged 14-16, in terms of linking them together with future jobs -- Potential for the Council and partners to work together and create a shared 'offer' for young people aged 14 and over – e.g. to address the engineering shortage reported by employers 	Public and private partners
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a city wide awards scheme aimed at young people specifically, like young citizen of the year. • Promote young people in the local media. • Maintain and better promote the youth service • More support for young people experiencing particular issues such as eating disorders. 	Coventry Youth Council
Protecting most vulnerable people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will the Council define 'vulnerability' in different circumstances, when talking about protecting the most vulnerable people? 	Public and private partners
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who do you classify as vulnerable people? • How do we make sure that population predictions are right particularly in relation to the potential number of vulnerable people? • Austerity measures are being driven nationally in particular impacting on vulnerable older people. • Importance of inter agency working to tackle anti social behaviour in specific areas. • How will you make sure you are not going to affect the most vulnerable people? Particularly older people? • How do you ensure people who are struggling in their homes are going to get the help that they need, to keep them out of residential homes and hospitals? • Giving people in the city less help may lead to more issues further down the line that may be more expensive. Preventative services for all citizens are better than reactive ones in the long run. • Withdrawing services for disabled people is short-sighted and may lead to ongoing problems in the future. • It is crucial for local authorities to find ways to protect those who cannot protect themselves, those with the quietest voice and the least economic muscle. 	Residents

Priority / Theme	Comments	Sector
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase support for Advice Services, delivers benefits at relatively low cost and removes significant burden from statutory services. 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priority will need to be minimising the impact on vulnerable people while achieving savings. 	C&W Chamber
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The voluntary sector has a role in early service provision and reducing demand. The voluntary sector can contribute and help to create more self reliance for service users. • Support for carers is a high value prevention service. • With respect to the savings in the Early Intervention Grant, the adverse effect on parent carers if Short Breaks for disabled children are reduced needs to be considered. 	Voluntary and Community Sector
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in victim support and criminal procedures for vulnerable people. • Improve access to citizen's advice and support services. • Work in partnership with victim support groups and interest groups. 	Coventry Youth Council
Equality / Inequality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact of equal pay legal challenges on budgets • Accepting that cuts / reforms will worsen equality in the city • Some stigma attached to taking targeted / means-tested benefits, universal services / benefits are often a good method of reaching the most vulnerable 	Public and private partners
Council's Budget Proposals		
Efficiency Savings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has there been an impact on efficiency arising from the level of Council job cuts? • Impression that the Council has a lot of managers, often people want to speak to operational staff on the ground. • Understand Council needs to save money but also needs to spend sensibly: the Council spent a lot of money on a Contact Centre that is not efficient. • Move offices out of town centre so that High value rental income can be achieved. • The Council is the biggest employer in Coventry, proposals are removing good quality people from the employment pool. • Avoid the use of private consultants 	Residents

Priority / Theme	Comments	Sector
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact of voluntary redundancies on services – resulting shortages of skills. Opportunity for joint recruitment / recruitment of City Council staff to non-Council jobs by other organisations. 	Public and private partners
Improve the way we work and deliver value for money	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concern over cuts to Neighbourhood Services. Neighbourhood Action provides contacts and gateways to other services enabling the voluntary sector to deliver more. • Important to maintain the vibrancy of the voluntary and community sector. There are a number of reviews coming up that will impact on the sector including Commissioning and Procurement, Community Services and Neighbourhood Services. • Involve the voluntary sector in Bolder Community Services. • Consider different ways of delivering services and not just shaving services. • Tendering for services can be expensive for both the Council and service providers, there may be better ways of commissioning services. • Provide more services through the not for profit sector. 	Voluntary and Community Sector
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Centres have many people coming in seeking advice – e.g. in filling in very long forms to apply for benefits – would be useful if advice-givers themselves were given advice to point people in the right direction • Need to grasp opportunities to provide advice services in local areas where advice services is currently unavailable • Support for the reduction in Community Services and making people more responsible for themselves 	Residents
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some minimum wage jobs could be ring fenced for young people as they are cheaper to employ. 	Coventry Youth Council
Managing Demand For Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The voluntary sector has a role in early intervention and reducing demand on services. The voluntary sector can contribute and help to create more self reliance for service users. • Research shows support to family carers reduces the need for costly social care intervention. 	Voluntary and Community Sector
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More opportunities for young people to be involved. • Encourage young people to volunteer. • More work experience and part time jobs for young people. 	Coventry Youth Council

Priority / Theme	Comments	Sector
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More advice information and support for young people. 	
Income generation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raising funds by charging Council Tax on empty properties 	Public and private partners
Budget proposals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We want to see the Council making more opposition to the spending cuts, like other Councils have done. There is a lot of need for services in the City. • Only ball park figures in the budget consultation document – not enough detail. • Concern that the Council is trying to cover debts from other people who are not paying their Council Tax. • Aim for zero percent rise. Council tax rises hurt those who are just coping and staying off benefits the most • Maintain capital budget so that Coventry is seen as an attractive city to work in. 	Residents
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the Council considered raising Council Tax above 2% and holding a referendum? • Police & fire precept not bound by 2% limit for Council 	Public and private partners