

Environment Committee

Consultation findings

1. INTRODUCTION

This report summarises the key findings from the 2015/16 Budget and Strategic Plan to 2020 consultation from across the council as well as more detail on the findings from the Community Leadership Committee.

For more information on the background and method to the consultation you can read the full consultation paper [here](#).

The consultation involved three strands;

- General budget consultation on the 2015/16 budget
- Service specific 2015/16 proposals: SEN home to school transport.
- Strategic Plan to 2020: Corporate Plan Priorities, Theme Committee Commissioning Plans, and the overall MTFs from 2015 - 2020

A total of 333 people took part in the three strands – with 181 completing the various online surveys as part of the open consultation (61 for 2015/16 budget, 28 for Strategic Plan to 2020 and 92 for SEN Schools transport) and 149 taking part in the Strategic Plan to 2020 workshops.

2. FULL COUNCIL FINDINGS

STRAND 1: Open Consultation on 2015/16 Budget Savings

In total 61 questionnaires were submitted on the 2015/16 budget. Over two-thirds of respondents (34 of the 56 respondents) disagreed with the council's proposed savings in terms of balance between efficiency savings, income generation and cuts to services, with only 8 of the 56 respondents believing the council had got the right balance.

The key reasons for people disagreeing with the balance of savings were;

- Services cannot be reduced
- Council Tax should be increased
- Library service should not be cut.

In regard to Council Tax for 2015/16, the majority of respondents to the open consultation disagreed with the council's proposal to freeze Council Tax, with residents stating that a small increase could support services, with a particular focus on preservation of the library service.

In regard to comments on the balance of savings for each committee respondents felt;

- The council should increase Council Tax
- Cuts are too heavy, with a particular objection to reductions in the Adults and Safeguarding budget and the Library service.

Both the 2015/16 Budget savings and Strategic Plan to 2020 consultation were open at the same time as other major consultations such as the Library Strategy Consultation. It is reasonable to assume that some residents have responded to the three strands of this consultation programme as well as the individual service specific consultations.

From the comments received as part of the consultation it is evident residents have used the vehicle of these consultations to make clear their feelings on the proposed reduction in funding to the library service.

Strand 2 is not included as it is a service specific consultation for Special Educational Needs Transport.

STAND 3: Workshops for Strategic Plan to 2020

The workshops found that when residents had to prioritise services in the context of the financial restraints the council is under, residents' priorities broadly matched the council's current proposals for savings up to 2020.

It was clear from the workshops that residents prioritised targeted support for vulnerable children and adults over universal services such as waste collection and libraries. In general, residents wanted the council to make less reduction to adults and children's service budgets and slightly more savings for Environment Committee.

The findings of the workshops stand in contrast with both the open consultation and the Residents' Perception Survey, where the larger numbers of users of universal services naturally leads to these services being given greater importance in quantitative surveys.

The greater review and discussion of services in the workshops, and the prioritisation of services and funding that the workshops demanded led residents to accept compromises in universal services in order to protect services for the most vulnerable.

a. Key Themes

Support to the most vulnerable is a priority

Across all workshops there was a strong belief that the council should target support at the most vulnerable, findings which match those from the first round of the Priorities and Spending Review in 2014. The majority of residents' priorities can be

summarised by the following comment on emergency temporary housing for the homeless;

“These are the most vulnerable people in our society. If we can’t help them what’s the point?”

Prevention is a good use of resources

The workshops which focused on services for adults and children saw residents prioritise services that supported the prevention agenda as well as the most vulnerable;

“Prevention is better than cure. I think the more one can support those families to get through the year, the better the outcome, the less will be required from the council.”

Prevention proved popular in the context of potential cuts as residents thought that prioritising prevention services could reduce the cost to the council in the long term and improve the outcomes for those supported. This was felt to be both just, and a good use of resources.

The importance of a safe environment

Safety was an underlying theme of why many residents prioritised services. This was especially evident in the learning disability workshop. Safety was an issue in regard to safeguarding of vulnerable adults and children as well as safety for all residents through universal services such as street lighting and street cleansing.

Resident’s emphasised the importance of street lighting because: *“If you have lights on you are actually saving lives”*.

b. Theme Committee Priorities

The focus of the workshops was on those services which most impact on residents, these were generally services within the remit of Children, Education, Libraries and Safeguarding; Adults and Safeguarding; and Environment Committees.

Children, Education, Libraries and Safeguarding

As part of the workshop focused on Children, Education, Libraries and Safeguarding Committee, residents prioritised the following services;

- Children’s mental health
- Short Breaks
- Support for young adults leaving care.

Those services which attendees felt, within the context of council’s reductions, had the most potential for savings were;

- Educational support to schools

- Special Educational Needs transport
- Libraries
- Children's Centres.

In later discussions residents still emphasised the importance of these services, but in context they were seen as more palatable options to reduce costs.

For example, although people in the workshops were supportive of libraries as a service, they were not seen as a priority when compared to targeted services which supported the vulnerable. This was a theme not only when focusing on the **Children, Education, Libraries and Safeguarding Committee** but also in the context of wider council services.

As each specific proposal within the remit of the CELS committee is brought forward, individual consultations will be conducted. The library proposal is currently under active consideration and the outcomes of the library consultation will be reported to the CELS committee in June.

Resident's preference within the workshops was to make less service reductions in the remit of the Children, Education, Libraries and Safeguarding Committee than the council has proposed.

Adults and Safeguarding

As part of the workshop focused on the Adults and Safeguarding Committee, residents prioritised the following services;

- Support offered to carers
- Preventative work for people with learning disabilities
- Short term and residential care for people with mental health issues
- Support to community/voluntary groups for the elderly
- Direct payments for people with physical disabilities
- Leisure centres.

Those services which attendees felt, within the context of council's reductions, had the most potential for savings were the more expensive services of;

- Supporting older people in their homes
- Residential care for older people.

Again there was an emphasis on prevention, with one resident stating that (in regard to short term mental health support): *"It's much better in cost terms than rehabilitation. Short term they can improve and get better rather than, possibly, being institutionalised"*.

Resident's preference was to make less service reduction in the remit of the Adults and Safeguarding Committee than the council has proposed.

Environment Committee

As part of the workshop focused on Environment Committee, residents prioritised the following services;

- Street lighting

Those services which attendees felt, within the context of the council's reductions, had the most potential for savings were the more expensive services of;

- Rubbish and recycling collection
- Town centre cleaning
- Green waste
- Management of the council's bowling greens.

Residents, on balance, prioritised residential street cleaning over town centres, whilst the main reason for prioritising street lighting was to protect safety. Residents saw the commercial benefit of increasing the number of events in parks but would be worried if a lot of access to parks was not available to the general public.

On balance, the view seemed to be that a fortnightly rubbish collection was good idea, but a weekly collection of recyclables should remain. It was felt by many that this policy may encourage more recycling.

Residents preferred was to make slightly more savings from the Environment Committee budget than the council has proposed, with residents preferring to prioritise services which supported vulnerable children and adults.

c. Barnet's 'Commissioning Council' Approach

Participants were asked to give their views on the council's 'Commissioning Council' approach. This means that the council's primary concern is about the quality of local services, whether they achieve stated outcomes and whether they are value for money, rather than how services are delivered and by whom. Generally as part of the workshop there was an acceptance (rather than endorsement) of the concept, but with a concern about whether the council would have the management capacity or skills to manage a broad and range of contracts.

There was a general agreement with the principle of the Commissioning Council model and the following comments give a good summary of the discussion and opinion;

"It's all right by me as long as it's done properly with proper controls and transparency"

"I think that's completely unrealistic. In principle, in theory, if it's done to the same quality, yesbut that's not what happens."

“As long as the service remains the same it’s not detrimental”

Key concerns were about accountability, especially in regard to private sector organisations with a level of mistrust about large businesses being involved in the delivery of core council services.

In contrast to the workshops, respondents to the open consultation appear to be more negative about the commissioning approach, with 13 out of 23 respondents being strongly opposed to this approach, with only 6 out of 11 respondents either strongly or tended to support this commissioning model.

d. Council Tax

Within the workshops, the majority of respondents attended from the Citizens’ Panel were supportive of increasing Council Tax, compared to only a third of the service users who attended workshops, where the majority of attendees preferred a freeze on Council Tax.

The key reason for choosing an increase in Council Tax was that they felt that it was value for money to pay slightly more per resident but minimise cuts to services. Those that chose to freeze or reduce Council Tax felt that Barnet Council Tax was higher than some neighbouring boroughs and was high enough already.

Residents taking part in the open consultation were heavily in favour of raising Council Tax, with the most common responses to open ended questions for each committee being about increasing Council Tax to protect services.

e. Open Consultation on Strategic plan to 2020

Those who responded online supported the council’s four proposed priorities as well as the majority of priorities and outcomes for all the Theme Committees. However, as with the 2015/16 Budget feedback, there was a clear emphasis from residents that service reductions were too large, libraries should be protected and that social housing was a priority.

3. ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE FINDINGS

This section covers the findings from the Strategic Plan to 2020 consultation. 12 residents responded to the open consultation online survey, whilst 149 residents took part in the workshops which covered services within the remit of the environment committee, with 18 residents taking part in the Environment committee focused workshop.

a. Open Consultation

Environment Committee's Priorities

The majority of respondents agreed with the priorities outlined by the committee, with 8 of 10 respondents agreeing with 'Driving an increase in overall resident satisfaction with Barnet as a place to live one of the highest of any outer London borough' and 7 of 10 respondents 'Facilitating economic growth and the success of residents, ensuring high quality infrastructure is in place, and removing any barriers or unnecessary costs of growth to successful businesses'.

4 respondents stated the council had missed priorities, stating that litter was a key priority whilst another respondent would like to see local priorities at ward level.

Environment Committee's Outcomes

In terms of outcomes over two-thirds (10 out of 13 respondents) agreed with all the outcomes, with 'increasing recycling rates and minimising tonnages collected to the best 10% compared with our statistical neighbours in London and nationally, focusing on encouraging behaviour change and waste minimisation.' And 'Making regulatory services like licencing and environmental Health high quality and efficient, while prioritising key risks to health and safety' the most popular, with 10 out of 13 respondents agreeing.

Of those who answered questions on Environment Committee 5 stated the council had missed outcomes, including protecting, preserving and enhancing greenspaces, lack of parking being an issue and wildlife and traffic pollution.

Environment Committee's Approach

The majority of respondents (6 out of 11) agreed with the approach of 'Target support to those who need it to allow opportunity for all', 3 out of 11 respondents agreed with 'Explore alternative ways to deliver services, in partnership with other organisations and residents', whilst only 2 out of 10 respondents agreed with 'Give people more choice and control over their service'.

One resident also emphasised the need to listen to local residents on a ward level.

Balance of savings

A third of respondents agreed the Committee had got the right balance in terms of savings and outcomes, with a third disagreeing and a third neither agreeing or disagreeing (4 respondents each).

Of those who felt there was not a balance residents commented that the cuts weren't necessary as well as a specific comment on the Greenwalk at Dollis Valley and the lack of consultation on the upgrade.

b. Workshop Findings

The highest priority for residents was for street lighting followed by residential street cleaning followed by protecting Summers Lane recycling centre and highways repairs.

Residents, on balance, prioritised residential street cleaning over town centres, whilst the main reason for prioritising street lighting was to protect safety. Residents saw the commercial benefit of increasing the number of events in parks but would be worried if a lot of access to parks was not available to the general public.

In order to protect the above services, residents preferred to increase the number of events in parks to make income, charge for green waste and have their residual rubbish collected fortnightly.

Rubbish and recycling collection invited heated debate and depended on family size and commitment to recycling. Although on balance the view was that a fortnightly rubbish collection was good idea and would increase recycling levels, there would still need to be a weekly collection of the brown and blue recycling bins.

In regard to savings residents' preference was for more than the allocation of savings to the committees from 2015 to 2020.

The services which were most protected by the Citizen's Panel members were;

- Street Lighting.

The services which, on balance, were seen as options for savings were;

- Recycling and rubbish collection
- Green waste
- Events in Parks
- Rationalisation of council costs.

The table below summarises discussion on each service as well as selected quotations from residents, which aim to give a flavour of the discussions.

Area	Feedback and example comments
Rubbish and recycling collection	Rubbish and recycling collection invited heated debate and depended on family size and commitment to recycling. On balance the view seemed to be that for those that a fortnightly rubbish collection was good a weekly collection of recyclables was

	<p>required. For those that do not recycle – this policy may encourage more recycling.</p> <p><i>“My driver on this is that it’s quite good that people recycle so I would like to see a cut down on the number of rubbish collections but keep the same (weekly) collection for recycling – it would keep pressure on people to recycle”</i></p> <p>Larger families did not agree;</p> <p><i>“In my house both our bins are full but at one of my neighbours there’s only one person living at the house so he’s going to take 3 weeks to fill his bins.”</i></p> <p><i>“The bin collections are important because if your bins are not collected it will stack up and it will smell”</i></p>
<p>Green Waste</p>	<p>Comments varied according to which of these issues was the one causing most displeasure.</p> <p><i>“I don’t mind paying for it but I did not want it to be collected once a month”</i></p> <p><i>“If they cut that service I’ll just put all my green waste in my rubbish – frankly they’d get all my rose thorns and that stuff in my black bag on a Monday night” “It’s not in the spirit”</i></p>
<p>Changing the ownership and hours at recycling centres</p>	<p>The main concern with closing Summers Lane or reducing its opening hours was, indeed, the possibility of an increase in fly tipping.</p> <p><i>“Because I use it so often if they shut it down or they moved it away to make it quite inaccessible for me I would be devastated as I use it a lot. Plus if they did that you’d get a lot of fly tipping. We get that a lot around our way so that would double”</i></p> <p><i>“The worst scenario here is the increase in fly tipping. And that increases cost”</i></p>
<p>Increasing income from Park Assets</p>	<p>Resident comments, when made, were mostly favourable to the idea of commercial events in Barnet’s parks, providing they were well managed,</p> <p><i>“Yes, just get public awareness, people in the area, more revenue for the council, local businesses, local shops, regeneration”</i></p> <p><i>“As long as it (commercial activity) is just a little bit – not too much”</i></p>
<p>Park maintenance</p>	<p>There was remarkably little discussion about Park Maintenance. There was some positive comment about community involvement.</p>

	<p><i>"It's the smaller parks that become community led, which I think is quite a nice idea"</i></p> <p>Wild areas had some appeal</p> <p><i>"I wouldn't mind wild areas in parks" "Good for nature"</i></p>
Management of the council's bowling greens	<p><i>"I didn't know it still happens"</i></p> <p><i>"I assume they are clubs and if I belong to a tennis club I have to pay fees to maintain it. I imagine bowling club members have to pay fees to maintain it."</i></p>
The frequency of cleaning town centres	<p>Residents were slightly more concerned about cleaning residential streets than town centre streets. However some realised town centre cleaning was necessary;</p> <p><i>"I'm mindful about weekends because that's when it does get a bit dirty, 'cos that's where people are"</i></p> <p><i>"Keeping town centres clean encourages business"</i></p> <p><i>"Maybe there should be fines for those that litter"</i></p>
The frequency of cleaning residential streets	<p>Residential street cleaning was seen as more important than Town centres;</p> <p><i>"It's important because I live in those streets and I don't want to see them dirty"</i></p> <p><i>"If an area deteriorates then that encourages misbehaviour and vandalism"</i></p>
Street Lighting – borough wide	<p>The main reason for prioritising street lighting concerns about safety. In dark streets everyone was less safe – including drivers who had been drinking, young children out after dark, people crossing the street and people walking and driving in bad weather conditions.</p> <p><i>"If you have lights on you are actually saving lives"</i></p> <p>Dark streets were thought to encourage criminal behaviour.</p> <p><i>"It gives the 'ne'er do wells' an opportunity. It's dark now, let's go and get them. How can you describe someone in the dark – you can't"</i></p>
Highways repairs	<p>This is a top priority, especial the quality of the repair and materials used</p> <p><i>"I'm a driver and I'm always driving on the roads and they are awful"</i></p>

	<p><i>"It's crucial; you've got to maintain your highways and your access for all the traffic coming through"</i></p>
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"It's not about whether it's maintained – it's the quality of the materials"