

Public Health Commissioning Plan

Consultation findings

1. INTRODUCTION

This report summarises the key findings from the Strategic Plan to 2020 consultation from across the council as well as more detail on the findings from the Public health Commissioning Plan.

For more information on the background and method to the consultation you can read the full consultation paper [here](#)¹.

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.

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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 reductions 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.

Residents 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. PUBLIC HEALTH COMMISSIONING PLAN FINDINGS

a. Open Consultation

Public Health Priorities

The majority of respondents (6 out of 7) agreed with all of the priorities identified for public health, with 1 respondent disagreeing with each of the priorities.

- Give every child the best start in life
- Enable all children, young people and adults to have control over their lives
- Create fair employment and good work for all
- Create and develop healthy and sustainable places and communities
- Strengthen the role and impact of ill health prevention

2 respondents thought that there were missed priorities, stating that alcohol and obesity/unhealthy eating needed a more robust solution, whilst another emphasised the importance of exercise and healthy eating.

Public Health Outcomes

In terms of the proposed outcomes identified by public health, the majority of respondents (6 out of 7) agreed with all of the outcomes, with 1 respondent disagreeing with all the outcomes.

None of the respondents thought that any outcomes had been missed.

Public Health Approach

Respondents were asked how much they agreed with the approach that has been identified for public health. 'Maintain investments in public health programmes' was the most popular with support from 6 out of 7 (85 per cent) respondents in agreement and the remaining elements of the approach got agreement from 4 out of 7 respondents (57 per cent).

The only suggestion in regard to public health was around responsible eating and healthy home cooking.

Balance of savings

3 out of 5 respondents agreed that public health had identified the right areas for further investment. The same proportion did not have a view while the remaining respondent strongly disagreed.

No comments were made in response to 'If you disagree with any of these, please tell us below why and where you think we could make investment

b. Relevant Feedback from workshops

Although there was no workshop focused on public health, as the remit of public health covers a range of council services, the following comments and feedback are relevant to the Commissioning Plan

Prevention

Prevention and early intervention were a key theme throughout were themes throughout the workshops, being seen as beneficial to residents and cost effective for the council. The following comments were made as part of various discussions;

“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.”

“It’s one of those things that for very little cost really you can give people a much more positive; much better, start in life if you are looking after their mental health and wellbeing. That’s something as well that needs to be a joined up issue – looking at what the NHS is providing as well as the council. It is something that with money thrown at it the end result is a better Borough for everybody – a better place to live”

“I just think if we don’t deal with children now then we are going to have a bigger problem in the future. By the time they are adults they are going to have that problem 10-fold, probably. So, if we can do something younger And try to get to the bottom of the problem – why they’ve got these issues - as opposed to letting it develop and waiting until they are ostracized from society, can’t get a job and all sorts of things like that” (Childrens mental health)

“Prevention can be important. My experience is all my working life is that managers are very happy to pay a lot to put things right but not happy to spend money to prevent it in the first place.”

Early years

There was a positive discussion on Children’s Centres and the importance of giving children the best start in life;

“The early years are very important for young mothers...it’s not only the children but the mothers who need support”

“Again it’s preventative. Get to the problems early – stop them developing”

“I think again it comes down to early prevention. If you catch them from an early age and you invest when they are younger, that investment will pay off in the long term.”

“I moved to the area two weeks before I had my son and I didn’t know anybody and I started accessing one of the Children Centres. I don’t know what I would have done without it to be honest.”

Strengthen the impact of ill health prevention

When discussing the issue of troubled families’ residents saw alcohol and substance misuse as key issues as demonstrated by the comments below;

“I think substance abuse – both drugs and alcohol. It’s interesting the health person when he was giving his speech he didn’t mention anything about drugs or drug policy whatsoever and the burden on the NHS must be massive”

“Education and culture change with regard to alcohol that’s becoming a major drain on the NHS but I don’t know how effective that could be because that would take quite a bit of effort I would think.”

Public health and parks

The role of parks in keeping people healthy was raised by a number of residents, who stated;

“I think they are super – it’s healthy, it’s free, it’s social, it’s all good. Without parks there are fewer places to go that you don’t have to pay for”