

Appendix C

Community Leadership 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:

<http://barnet.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s21538/Appendix%20B%20Consultation%20Headline%20Findings%20UPDATED.pdf>

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.

With 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.

Residents were asked whether they agreed with the proposed balance of savings for each Committee. Within the questionnaire, where questions asked for comments on the savings that have been identified and that were part of the general consultation, hyperlinks were provided to each of the detailed savings within each committee for the budget 2015/16.

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.

STRAND 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 fewer 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.

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. COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP COMMITTEE FINDINGS

This section covers the findings from the Strategic Plan to 2020 consultation. 7 residents responded to the open consultation online survey, whilst 149 residents took part in the workshops which included one service within the remit of the Community Leadership Community – CCTV.

a. Open Consultation

Community Leadership Committee’s Priorities

The majority of respondents (5 out of 7) agreed with all the priorities for the Committee:

- Ensure safe communities, supporting the police to address anti-social behaviour and crime
- Reduce the fear of crime and anti-social behaviour, especially for the most vulnerable members of the community
- Facilitate the council's community leadership role, encouraging community participation and supporting residents and communities to become more active, independent and resilient
- Ensure the borough is well prepared for any emergency that may arise.

1 person felt that priorities had been missed, but no respondents left any comments in regard to what priorities had been missed.

Community Leadership Committee's Outcomes

When asked how much they agreed with the outcomes that have been identified within the Community Leadership Committee, the majority of respondents (5 out of 8 or more) agreed with all of the outcomes for the Community Leadership Committee.

2 respondents felt that some outcomes had been missed, with 1 respondent stating that the council needs to support the delivery of local initiatives in close partnership with residents.

Community Leadership Committee' Approach

Less than half of the respondents (4 out of 9 respondents) agreed that the Committee had identified the right savings to achieve its priorities, with 3 out of 9 respondents disagreeing with this statement. Those that disagreed noted that the community charge should be put up, and voiced concern that privacy would be impacted upon if CCTV services were taken out of the council's control.

It should be noted that the savings proposed for the CCTV service are linked to the move to a revenue-neutral model and would not necessarily be linked to a reduction in the level of service. If respondents perceived this proposal as a reduction in service this may have had an impact on their answers.

Balance of savings

Respondents were asked how much they agreed that the Committee has identified the right balance of savings in order to achieve its priorities. There was a mixed response; 4 out of 10 agreed, while 3 out of 10 disagreed and the remaining 2 neither agreed nor disagreed.

Suggestions for savings included concerns that CCTV may be taken out of council control and impact on resident's privacy.

b. Relevant feedback from workshops

In the context of wider savings CCTV was seen as, on balance, a service where savings could be made.

Whilst some residents recognised the positive role of CCTV;

"In today's society, I'm sorry but with what's going on in the world you absolutely need CCTV. How many policemen do you see on the street?"

"Police use CCTV a lot. We have a CCTV camera that the police operate so the operator people looking at the images definitely make a contribution"

Others questioned their real value

*"It makes people **feel** more secure, it doesn't make them more secure, it just makes them feel more secure"*

"Ditch it – it doesn't seem to reduce crime, it's just intrusive, it wastes money. The footage when it's available is not very good. "It's a bad idea that doesn't work"

"Several local authorities are removing CCTV because it's been shown it doesn't reduce crime"

When residents thought about local businesses paying towards the cost of CCTV, there was some quiet approval

*"If you can persuade the business to pay, I wouldn't disagree with that"
But some local businesses may not value CCTV highly enough*

Residents felt not all business locations are covered by CCTV, some CCTV cameras are old and businesses may not be prepared to pay for CCTV as they already contribute with their business rates.

Some residents thought if businesses thought CCTV would be an asset, deter crime and help police apprehend offenders then they might pay to keep CCTV near their businesses. Businesses seemed positive about in store CCTV so should be (or are likely to be) happy to contribute to some high street surveillance.