

Annex 6

Budget Consultation Update

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This annex is to present final findings and recommendations of the 2023-27 MTFP budget consultation.
- 1.2 Consultation on the Council's developing Medium Term Financial Plan 2023-27, including budget proposals for 2023/24 launched on the 20th December 2022 and concluded on 25th January 2023 (with allowances for submissions and paper copies until 27th January). This paper reports the results of that consultation, including a summary of the findings from the survey and in-person and online engagement events and submissions, and option recommendations based on those findings.

2. Budget consultation methodology

2.1 Budget consultation has been carried out in the following ways:

- An online survey promoted through various channels inviting respondents to review the developing MTFP and proposed budget proposals.
- A range of targeted and general on-line and in-person engagement events with staff, faith and community & voluntary sector organisations, partners, businesses and citizens. Nine engagement events were held, of which five were in-person and four online.
- Written submissions including from Overview and Scrutiny committees, cultural and community organisations, and the Chair of the Crime and Drug Partnership.
- All responses have been consolidated and subject to thematic analysis.

3. Participation and survey responses

3.1 Combining survey responses and public and stakeholder engagement participation, through the consultation period we heard the views of just over **450 people**. This is down on the previous year, which attracted around 1,000 survey and engagement responses. The lower rate, however, is indicative of the less controversial nature of the budget proposals for 2023/24.

3.2 Below is a summary of the responses received:

- **371** responses came through the online survey. Of these, 21 were responses from organisations and 350 were from individual citizens.
- **81** people attended the various engagement sessions
- In addition, but not counted for this purpose, **304** staff attended internal engagement events

4. Consultation Findings

4.1 The on-line survey invited respondents to tell us their views on the **50** budget proposals that were deemed to be subject to public consultation. **Table 1** below provides a breakdown of the most commented on proposals and a classification of the response in terms of whether it was in support (positive), neutral or opposed (negative).

Table 1: Breakdown of the most commented budget proposals					
Area of proposal	Responses Total, Positive (+Green), Neutral (0Amber) and Negative (-Red)				Paragraph reference
	Total	P+	N0	N-	
Council Tax	51	3	5	43	4.3
Short-term mothballing of two floors of Loxley House	25	8	12	5	4.4
Car Parking (On Street and Off Street)	18	1	4	13	4.5
Implement existing policy on Waste Collection	18	9	5	4	4.6
Voluntary, Community Sector & Cultural Grants	17	4	2	11	4.7
Adult Social Care	17	3	7	7	4.8
Stop provision of Shopmobility service	10	3	4	3	4.9
Sport & Leisure	10	1	3	6	4.10
Bereavement Services	8	0	1	7	4.11
Increase to Tariff – Enviroenergy	6	0	0	6	4.12
Reduction in budgets to Ward Councillors	2	1	0	1	4.13

It is not always possible to pinpoint which proposal people are referencing so all figures are approximate based on best reading

4.2 In the following summary of comments and recommendations, all quotes and comments from respondents are either in quotation marks and/or in italics. Quotes are not always verbatim.

4.3 Council Tax

Proposal: To raise Council tax by the maximum 4.99% (£6.7 million saving)

Summary: This was the most commented on proposal. All responses were negative with the most frequent argument being that with the current cost of living crisis, residents would struggle to find the additional funds. Some respondents claimed that residents are being made to pay for Council mishaps. Some other comments included:

- *Being in the wrong band but unable to get it changed*
- *People won't pay, because they can't*
- *Nottingham is one of the poorest cities in the UK but has one of highest Council taxes*
- *We need to find a way to tax students*

"I think it is an absolute disgrace that the Council is proposing to increase charges for council tax and other services for the residents of Nottingham, considering the current financial and economic impact residents are affected by."

Recommendation: Following confirmation of the Local Government Settlement and in light of its constraints and Best Value requirements to ensure the continued financial sustainability of the Council it is recommended to proceed. However, the council should promote the council tax support scheme and support available to those experiencing hardship, and consider the availability of sources of advice to maximise income residents. In regard to the additional 2% Adult Social Care element, we should consider how this can be shown separately to the 2.99% Council tax increase so that people understand it is the Government's recommended surcharge and not part of increased charges imposed by the Council for non-Adult Social Care spend.

4.4 Short-term mothballing of two floors of Loxley House

Proposal: Short-term mothballing of two floors of Loxley House pending the review of options for our offices and depots (£200k saving)

Summary: The largest theme was that the pandemic showed that staff were able to work remotely therefore the proposal was supported on the basis that money can be saved by mothballing two floors or even selling Loxley House. Several commenters casted doubt on the proposed saving that being suggested by closing two floors. Some other themes included:

- *This will make onboarding new staff difficult.*
- *It is challenging for teams to be consistently moving*

Additional discussion through engagement events showed enthusiasm for Loxley expanding its role as a hub for voluntary, community & business sector partners through which it could achieve an increase in revenue for letting out desk space and also enabling Council partners to have better access to each other and the Council.

Recommendation: In light of low impact on citizens and services and general support it is recommended to proceed with the proposal in the short term, whilst undertaking further work to explore the viability of sub-letting the floors proposed for mothballing and consideration of the wider corporate estate (e.g. Byron House) for further saving opportunities.

4.5 Car Parking (on and off street)

Proposal: Review of tariffs across the parking estate to aid free movement of traffic, including (£349k saving):

- *Early bird tariff*
- *Business parking tariffs*
- *Inflation related increases*

Summary: Respondents were unanimously against this proposal. The reason given the most was that it would reduce footfall in the City which was already down and be detrimental to businesses.

Other comments included:

- This will cause more people who work in town to park outside in residential areas.
- Public Transport is expensive so getting into town via any means is becoming unaffordable.

- There will be less visitors to the City.
- Legislation states that income from on street parking is only able to cover the operating costs and that any excess can only be spent on specific activities.
- Parking charges are already expensive in Nottingham.

“I don’t think parking charges should be increased. It will reduce footfall into the centre to the detriment of businesses in the city when they have already suffered enough financially because of lockdown.”

Opposition to the proposed increase in tariffs was to be expected, the number of respondents is relatively low and no alternatives for raising revenue through other means have been put forward.

Recommendation: In light of the constraints presented by the Local Government Settlement and Best Value requirements to ensure the continued financial sustainability of the Council it is recommended that the above responses are noted but to proceed as planned in order to protect services.

4.6 Implement existing policy on Waste Collection

Proposal: Service will cease providing additional collections where residents have not presented the bins on the right day (£100k saving)

Summary: This proposal was generally well received with some respondents fully in support of this proposal and a number expressing surprise to hear that we were doing this currently. The three concerns which came up were:

- *This could bring an increase of illegal fly-tipping.*
- *Sometimes the bin lorry misses certain roads.*
- *This could discriminate against the elderly or those with bad memories.*

“I agree with this suggestion, in fact I was under the impression that this didn't happen anyway”

The proposal was broadly well received and supported.

Recommendation: Following consideration of the views expressed and the broad support it is recommended that this proposal is implemented.

4.7 Voluntary, Community & Cultural Sector Grants

Proposal: 15% reduction to Strategic Voluntary, Community and Cultural Sector Grants (£152k saving)

Summary: Responses to this proposal were varied with one substantial reply explaining how this will feed into a loop of poor finances and mental health, putting strain on the NHS and other services. Some argued that the Council shouldn't be funding politically motivated projects and should cut all funding.

There were some concerns voiced from VCS partners at the One Nottingham event that the top slicing of budgets to achieve the desired savings were too blunt an instrument. A more

detailed process was needed to evaluate the specific needs and reach of voluntary organisations in order to properly understand the impact of the 15% cut to their grant funding.

The grants that are within scope of this proposal are the area based grants, the communities of identity grants and three specific grants provided to individual organisations. The lead grant providers that receive the grants from the council have all been engaged and are aware of the proposed revised budgets from 23/24. The lead providers are working with the council on how the revised budgets will be managed and to ensure that any impacts on any protected groups can be resolved. A revised EIA will be undertaken at that stage to support that process.

The Council, therefore, notes the concerns raised about how the impact of cuts may disproportionately affect some communities over others. In response, the Council commits to working with the lead grant providers for these grants to ensure potential impacts are fully understood and mitigated wherever possible.

Recommendation: Following consideration of the views expressed, the constraints presented by the Local Government Settlement and Best Value requirements to ensure the continued financial sustainability of the Council, it is recommended that the council proceed with the implementation and mitigate the impact where possible.

4.8 Adult Social Care

Proposals (£17.59 million savings):

- Adults prevention & independence – Community interventions
- Adults prevention & independence – Developing strength-based practice/workforce
- Adults prevention & independence – assistive technology
- Adults prevention & independence – occupational therapy & adaptations
- Adults prevention & independence – mental health reablement
- Adults transformation – supported living
- Adults transformation – older adults

Summary: Due to low response rate on specific proposals there were not any discernible themes, however the idea of helping adults with supported living was well received, albeit that it is not always easy or possible. A concept that came up on two occasions was the idea that we should be looking to our biggest budgets to make savings as a 1% saving on a £50m service budget is the same amount of saving as a 10% saving on a £5m service.

Some more individual suggestions included:

- *Investing in residential care homes as private residential care homes exist only to drain money from local authorities.*
- *Petitioning to central government alongside other local authorities to state that adult and child services, as statutory obligations, should be centrally funded and not funded from local taxation.*
- *Finding cuts to community protection to offset cuts to adult and children's services.*
- *There needs to be more day service provider to enable adults who are not able to work to access meaningful activity during the day, this will help with your goal of independent living rather than residential.*

Much of the commentary received is either supportive of planned transformation in Adult Social Care or not actionable in the context of Adult Social Care budgets.

The Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee's opinion is that after having seen the benefits of the transformation projects already underway, the Committee is supportive of the proposals for the MTFP as both benefitting and improving outcomes for citizens and achieving financial savings.

Recommendation: In light of the constraints presented by the Local Government Settlement, Best Value requirements to ensure the continued financial sustainability of the Council and the need to transform and improve how services are delivered it is recommended that these proposals are implemented.

4.9 Stop Provision of Shopmobility Service

Proposal: Due to changes in consumer behaviour the demand for Shopmobility at Victoria Centre has declined over time, meaning the service is no longer cost effective. Therefore, the proposal is to withdraw services completely (£41k saving).

Summary: There were mixed responses to this proposal, with some fully in support of discontinuing the service. Others stated that this will create a societal barrier for socialising and shopping to those who need the service. Other suggestions included:

- *Reducing the hours that the service is available*
- *Charging for the service*
- *Advertising the service more widely*

Consultation also took place directly with members of the service, with a questionnaire sent out and speaking to members when they used the service, and 42 responses were recorded. A meeting was also held with the Disability Involvement Group. Key points included;

- It allows users to enjoy a day out in the city centre; and it is the only means, or it makes it easier, for users to access the city centre.
- Its withdrawal would mean users would lose some independence, increasing isolation and affecting mental health.
- Approximately half of users said they do not have their own equipment, with reasons cited including cost and practical reasons, including weight of vehicles.

A general feeling, even amongst those who wished the service to continue, was that this is not a service that the council should be responsible for funding. Overview and Scrutiny Committee have requested that the possibility of transferring Shop Mobility a voluntary organisation or charity be investigated. The Disability Involvement Group proposed a similar suggestion in exploring different models for delivery involving volunteers and charged services, in line with other local authorities.

Recommendation: In light of the constraints presented by the Local Government Settlement and Best Value requirements to ensure the continued financial sustainability of the Council it is recommended that the proposal be implemented whilst exploring the above options where viable.

4.10 Sports and Leisure

Proposals (£600k savings):

- Pricing review across fees and charges
- Redesign of community assets

Summary: The common theme amongst these responses is that we should be encouraging people to be fit and healthy and this will only discourage people from signing up to use Leisure Centres.

Responses also suggested selling the leisure centres to private organisations as they are becoming increasingly expensive to maintain. They also blamed the fact that too many competing budget gyms had opened close-by, which offer things like 24hr access.

Other comments included:

- *This will include to more obese people, putting a drain on health services.*
- *Leisure Centres are a luxury and therefore I support this.*

“I don’t think the cost of using leisure centres should increase as it could deter people from exercising, thereby resulting in less healthy/overweight/obese city residents who could then become a drain on the health services”

The responses to these proposals was relatively low but any redesign of community assets will be subject to further consultation where required.

Recommendation: In light of the constraints presented by the Local Government Settlement and Best Value requirements to ensure the continued financial sustainability it is recommended to proceed as planned.

4.11 Bereavement Services

Proposal: Review of fees and charges for cremations and burials (£112k savings)

Summary: All respondents were against this proposal, with most stating that it is wrong to hurt people financially whilst they are already bereaving a lost friend/family member. There was a substantial submission from an organisation which own a burial ground, suggesting that the move would discriminate against those of the Muslim faith, however this argument did not seem to apply to proposed charges but more to specific cultural needs and training.

“An increase in burial and cremation costs will hit people when they are already suffering/bereaving a lost one”

Whilst small in number, the unanimous opposition to this proposal may be reflective of a wider opposition City-wide and therefore likely to be negatively received when implemented.

Recommendation: In light of the constraints presented by the Local Government Settlement and Best Value requirements to ensure the continued financial sustainability of the Council it is recommended to note the views expressed but to proceed as planned.

4.12 Increase to Tariff – Enviroenergy

Proposal: Enviroenergy Tariff increases (£719k saving)

Summary: Respondents alluded to the fact that they are not able to switch to another provider as its included in their lease. There were also complaints from two Enviroenergy customers that the service is poor and needs upgrading.

A submission was made by Nottingham Contemporary stating that proposed tariff increases would put their energy bill up by over £42,000 and this combined with the 15% reduction in grants to cultural, community & voluntary sector organisations would have a serious impact on their ability to both source additional funding and deliver projects on the scale that they have been.

“This means, if the grant reduction goes ahead, Nottingham Contemporary will be doubly impacted by the budget proposals in a way that other cultural organisations may not”

Recommendation: In light of the constraints presented by the Local Government Settlement and Best Value requirements to ensure the continued financial sustainability of the Council it is recommended that the council note the response but proceed as planned.

4.13 Reduction in Budget to Ward Councillors

Proposal: Reduction in level of ward budgets by 15% (£21k Saving)

Summary: One commenter questioned how Councillors could do crucial work to support community and cultural organisations without funding, alluding to the fact ward budget have already been slashed and Resident Development is already understaffed. The other commenter suggested ward budgets are not fair as some Councillors don't use theirs. They also suggested Councillors who don't turn up to meetings should lose all funding.

No significant opposition.

Recommendation: In light of the constraints presented by the Local Government Settlement and Best Value requirements to ensure the continued financial sustainability it is recommended to proceed as planned.

5. Recommendation

- 5.1 Following consultation the recommendation is to proceed as planned with all the budget savings as presented in the December Executive Board MTFP report, noting the points and comments raised throughout the consultation process.