

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1.	Meeting:	Self Regulation Select Commission
2.	Date:	19th April 2012
3.	Title:	2012/13 Money Matters Budget Consultation Findings
4.	Directorate:	Resources

5. Summary

This report provides key headlines from the recent Money Matters Budget Consultation that took place to help inform the Council's Budget for 2012/13. The Money Matters Budget Consultation has been active since 11th October 2011 and was completed on 23rd December 2011.

6. Recommendations

The Self Regulation Select Commission is asked to:

- **Note the headline messages arising from the analysis of the Money Matters Budget consultation.**
- **Consider how the consultation findings align with, and can help to shape, the Medium Term Financial Strategy and allocation of resources moving forward.**

7. Proposals and Details

The Council has carried out a Budget Consultation exercise – “Money Matters” for the second year running. This paper discusses the findings from the consultation with the Public about the 2012/13 budget. This consultation is particularly important in the context of significant change in the Local Government environment in terms of policy and reductions in Local Authority budgets and will help us to ensure that we protect those services which matter most to local people and to align spending with public priorities.

This report provides analysis of the results that have informed the budget setting process. In general this analysis shows that there is a strong correlation between the results from the different types of consultation. Clear messages are emerging about those service areas which are viewed as highest priority. There is also strong consensus on the areas where there is most support for spending more, or protecting current spend and areas where the Council should consider reducing spending.

The following sections of the report provide a summary of the different types of consultation being undertaken and the headline results from the e-survey, budget simulator and the communities of interest workshops.

Consultation programme

A combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies was needed to ensure the approach is robust. There is value in getting both people’s initial perceptions and more considered views given the competing priorities and complexities of the budget. This ensured the approach is more inclusive, as different people will prefer to be consulted in different ways.

The consultation commenced with an Area Assembly workshop in October and ended with the close of the e-survey and budget simulator on December 2011. The publicity for this consultation began at the Rotherham Show last September where over 160 people expressed an interest in participating in this consultation and provided email addresses.

When we hosted the consultation via the e survey on our website, we used the Budget Simulator for the first time. The budget simulator allows people to make suggestions about what proportion of the council budget they would like to see spent in a particular service area. One feature of the budget simulator is that it tells you the possible negative and positive consequences of reducing or increasing spending in a particular area, meaning respondents are able to make a more informed decision. .

The online consultation has been complemented by workshops with communities of interest (BME, Older People, Young People, LGBT, Faith, Carers and Women) and communities of place (via area assemblies) to enable more qualitative discussion to take place..

Summary of findings

The headline messages below are based on an amalgamation of the outcome of the various consultation methods deployed. .

The statutory services which in relative terms should be given lower budget protection were

- Asset Management
- Planning
- Day Care
- Grounds Maintenance
- Information, advice and support
- Waste Services
- Libraries, Arts and Heritage

The non statutory services which in relative terms should be given lower budget protection were:

- Promoting Rotherham – events & marketing
- Managing large scale building projects
- Faith school & 16+ students travel costs
- Help and advice about energy bills
- Area Assemblies
- Promoting the Borough through archives & arts
- Hospitality and Catering
- Pest Control
- Dealing with Motorbike Nuisance

Who should deliver the services?

Whilst some differing views emerged, overall there was clear support for the Council to continue to deliver almost all the services consulted upon. This recognises the trust that the public has in the council and the quality of services provided.

The strength of working in partnership was also recognised, particularly with voluntary organisations and/or social enterprises. Advice, Support and Information services were an area identified as potentially suitable for partnership working. .

The Council already works in partnership with a variety of agencies on the delivery of a wide range of council services. The consultation responses have reaffirmed this is appropriate but has not drawn out areas where partnership working is not already evident.

Areas for Improvement

We can continue to refine the way we consult in future years. We have opted for an exercise that is low cost, but enables us to assess trends in opinion. Some respondents fed back that there were too many questions in the survey. Also having the e survey and the budget simulator both on the online page probably affected the response rate for both; it would be more effective to just have one of them in the future.

8. Finance

The total cost of the consultation is £2,536 which includes the Budget Simulator.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

The main concern would be the failure to consult at all as we would not be able to demonstrate to the public that we understand and act upon their views.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

We currently have a revised Corporate Plan which provides detail of the key priorities we aim to deliver. We therefore need to ensure that funding is aligned to the priorities. This consultation is also intended to inform the mid term financial strategy and budget matrix, to help us identify where we could potentially make the savings.

11. Background Papers and Consultation

Consultation Findings (Appendix 1)

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Appendix 1

Consultation Results

Overall there were 434 responses for the E Survey. This compares with the total number of 598 responses in 2010, over a much longer period.

The age of respondents is similar to last year's consultation, with few under 25 or over 65. There was an equal gender split amongst the public. 18% of the public considered themselves to be disabled (lower than expected). 13% of public were BME (similar to the 2010 survey).

Results from the General Public

The following results suggest that people understand that the Council needs to reduce its spending and show a willingness to contemplate reductions in a number of service areas. Of members of the public who participated, 66% agreed with the Council's approach of protecting services for the most vulnerable.

Question 1 – Priority Services

People were asked to name the 5 services they felt were most important to protect

Public Safety inc. Health & Safety and Env. Health	56%
Road Maintenance & Transport Management	54%
Waste Services	46%
Learning and Education	40%
Children's Social Care	32%

The 5 services that were felt to be less important to protect:

Asset Management	5%
Planning	21%
Grounds Maintenance	22%
Community Safety	22%
Day Care	23%

Universal services which deliver a tangible benefit to residents are seen as the key priorities, followed by services aimed at children. There was general agreement about relative priorities when public funding is getting tighter.

Question 2 – Reducing Spending

People were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with reducing spending on a number of service areas. There was support for reducing spending in many areas as illustrated below:

Highest level of agreement to reduce spending:

Managing large scale building projects	79% (28% strongly)
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Hospitality and catering	77% (30% strongly)
Help and advice about energy bills	76% (31% strongly)
Faith school & 16+ students travel costs	75% (30% strongly)
Promoting Rotherham – events & marketing	72% (37% strongly)

Other services where over two thirds agree to reduce spending

Support to Area Assemblies	67% (32% strongly)
Promoting the Borough through archives & arts	66% (23% strongly)

Services where the majority disagree with reducing spending

Pest Control	77% (46% strongly)
Attracting new businesses & investment	55%
Public safety such as CCTV & school crossing	53%

The willingness of participants to contemplate reduced spending across many service areas is striking and may reflect a realisation that there is now far less money available to support service delivery. There was a good level of agreement about where to reduce spending. In only 3 out of 17 services covered by the survey did the majority of the public participants disagree with reducing spending. Of these, only Pest Control showed a particularly high level of disagreement with any reduction. As this is a low cost service even if savings were supported it would not be able to make a significant contribution to the budget.

Question 3 - Who Should Deliver Services?

There is clear support for the Council to continue delivery of almost all the services consulted upon. However, there is also strong support for the council to continue to work with voluntary organisations and/or social enterprises and other partners to deliver services.

Results by Service Area

Service	Council	Voluntary Sector	Social Enterprise	Private Sector
Adult Social Care	90%	33%	20%	8%
Residential Care	72%	33%	37%	12%
Day Care	60%	38%	47%	7%
Housing	70%	3%	22%	30%
Advice, Support and Information	38%	63%	42%	3%
Learning & Education	93%	17%	20%	12%
Children's Social Care	93%	32%	17%	5%
Young People's Services	62%	48%	33%	7%
Libraries, Arts and Heritage	67%	23%	25%	10%
Roads & Transport Management	88%	0%	5%	30%
Public Safety	85%	20%	23%	13%
Planning	75%	8%	12%	18%
Regeneration	60%	18%	25%	25%
Waste Services	78%	5%	15%	28%

Green Spaces	57%	28%	37%	12%
Asset Management	62%	7%	17%	32%
Leisure, Sport & Recreation	58%	27%	48%	18%
Community Safety	92%	28%	28%	7%

Results from the Budget Simulator

A total of 96 participants successfully completed the budget simulator exercise by reducing spending by at least £20 million. Only 7 people managed to reduce spending by exactly £20 million with 89 people reducing spending by more than £20 million, sometimes considerably more. The average (mean) reduction was £22.4 million although this was inflated by a small number of participants who made very large reductions.

Most people made reductions in service budgets or kept them the same. In a small number of cases, spending was increased on some services which meant that others had to be cut more as a consequence.

The collective view of participants is that all services should see spending reduced by between 10.3% and 21.3%. The average suggested reduction in spending per service area is as follows:

	% Reduction	Amount saved
Leisure, Sport and Recreation	21.3%	-£1.43 m
Library, Arts & Heritage	20.7%	-£0.89 m
Advice, Info & Support to Communities	20.2%	-£0.41 m
Asset Management	19.2%	-£0.50 m
Residential Care	16.6%	-£4.92 m
Planning	16.4%	-£0.11 m
Day Care	15.9%	-£1.06 m
Adult Social Care	15.9%	-£6.04 m
Regeneration	15.7%	-£0.15 m
Public Safety (Env. Health etc)	15.1%	-£0.42 m
Grounds Maintenance & Greenspaces	14.8%	-£0.06 m
Community Safety	14.6%	-£0.25 m
Children's Social Care	14.0%	-£3.30 m
Access to Housing	13.7%	-£0.03 m
Waste Services	12.2%	-£1.22 m
Young People's Services	11.8%	-£0.30 m
Learning and Education	10.8%	-£0.31 m
Road Maintenance & Transport Mgt	10.3%	-£0.96 m
All Services	15.4%	-£22.38 m

Caution is needed in interpreting the results above which are based on only 96 participants. However, the results give some indication about budget priorities.