

ROTHERHAM METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1.	Meeting:	Cabinet
2.	Date:	4 th February 2015
3.	Title:	RMBC “Facing the cuts, delivering Rotherham’s priorities” 2015/16/2016/17 – Public/Employee Consultation findings
4.	Directorate:	EDS

5. Summary

This report provides key headlines from the recent ‘Facing the cuts, delivering Rotherham’s priorities’ consultation that took place to help inform the Council’s Budget for 2015/16 and 2016/17. The consultation has been active since 1st November 2014 and was completed on 31st December 2014.

6. Recommendations

That the Cabinet:

- Note the headline messages arising from the analysis of the Budget consultation.
- Consider how the consultation findings align with and can / should influence the Council Budget for 2015/16 and 2016/17
- Support the development of a communications plan to ensure that the Council is proactive in communicating both the results and the impact on decision making to the public and employees.

7. Proposals and Details

The Council has historically undertaken a major consultation exercise to help inform the development of the annual budget. The broad aims of these public and employee consultation exercises have been to:

- Identify the views of residents on their spending priorities for the Council.
- Raise awareness of how the Council sets and agrees its spending priorities.
- Demonstrate to citizens that the Council wants to listen to their views.
- Inform Council decision making.

7.1 Methodology

Public Consultation

The consultation exercises have been undertaken through input from a number of teams across the council including Corporate Finance, Housing & Neighbourhood Area Partnerships and Engagement Service, and Communications and Marketing.

Rotherham residents and partner organisations were asked to give their views on how Rotherham Borough Council's budget should be spent – and where reductions should be made.

The consultation took place during November and December and the Council proposed three priority areas for the budget over the coming year:

1. Protecting our most vulnerable children and adults
2. Getting people into work and making work pay
3. Making our streets cleaner and better

Within these 3 priorities, the council asked people which areas they should focus on within these priorities. And how do we support communities to help themselves.

We also asked whether people would support an increase in council tax.

The consultation invited members of the public and partners to go online at www.rotherham.gov.uk/budget which provided more information and how people can get involved and contribute to the online forum.

- A flyer was produced to promote the online consultation and circulated appropriately and displayed in public buildings.
- It was promoted on screens in Riverside and GP surgeries.

The **Online Forum** went live on November 10th and below is an update on the progress so far.

- We have had 49 posts and 1756 views.
- Our main priorities (30 posts)
- Helping people and communities to help themselves (5 posts)
- Budget Saving Ideas (14 posts)

The Community Engagement Team has been moderating the Forum during the day, evenings and weekend. On a couple of occasions, posts have been deleted where they have been discriminatory or abusive. When there have been queries, we have responded promptly and where appropriate have asked services for the information. The Forum will be a useful sustainable tool for the Council to use for future consultations providing it is moderated successfully. A few individual suggestions have also been submitted too.

Consultation with Partners.

A successful consultation workshop took place with the VCS hosted by the Deputy Leader at Voluntary Action Rotherham on 15th December with 19 organisations represented.

There was attendance at Area Assembly, Area Housing Panel Meetings, Rother Fed Board Meeting and Parish Council Network meetings to promote the consultation and take views from the attendees.

Staff Consultation

As part of the budget and priorities consultation Corporate HR undertook an internal exercise to engage employees in the process. This ran from 13 November 2014 until 31 December 2014. The questions for this consultation mirrored those asked of the public on the online forum. The internal consultation took the form of a questionnaire via an online survey tool which allowed us to customise the link and only make it available to employees. Promotion of the consultation was via employee briefings, bulletins and the intranet homepage.

Findings

7.2 Summary of findings (Public Consultation)

Online Forum

Priorities

- Review Member Allowances to make savings
- Improve the Town Centre for example, through addressing cleanliness and appearance, and its image as a visitor and shopping destination.
- Rebrand Rotherham's image
- Address poor civic leadership
- Publicise what savings we have made so far?
- Provide more information on how the public can contribute to priority 2 – "Getting people into work and making work pay".

Helping people and communities to help themselves

- Encourage volunteer community clean up campaigns
- Provide free local skips to reduce fly tipping, save clean up and enforcement costs, and promote a sense of self-help and local pride

Increase in Council tax

- A rise in Council Tax in line with inflation would be acceptable provided detail was given on how the extra money raised would be used.

Budget Saving Ideas

- Asked for Top 10 spend areas to contribute more effectively towards the consultation.
- How often do we renegotiate with our energy providers?
- Staffing - encourage over 55's to take redundancy
- Staffing – any vacancies should be filled by internal candidates through skills matching against the jobs
- Use google maps and street view when dealing with applications for drop kerbs instead of a site visit

Email suggestions/comments

- Prioritise the roads
- LED and dim lighting is dangerous
- Need more investment on country footpaths
- Why are we wasting money on a 'Dead' Town centre

7.3 Summary of findings (Partner Consultation)

These are some of the comments and suggestions that have been made by Area Housing Panels, Area Assemblies, and Rother-Fed:

Priorities

- Why have green bins at terrace houses without gardens, people just fill them with household waste which never gets picked up and left on streets.
- Should only maintain walking areas, should let some grass areas blossom especially where flowers look nice.
- Worried about the impact the cuts will have on vulnerable and disabled people who are becoming more isolated.
- Would like more information about the budget saving proposals to enable them to influence any decisions.
- Need more detail on how we will make work pay?
- Priority area 2 – “Getting people into work” is the responsibility of the DWP and Job Centre Plus. We should leave it to them to address as we don't have the expertise to make a meaningful difference.
- Need to ensure people are skilled appropriately to take up jobs.
- Need to assess what we are legally obliged to provide.
- Need to have a clear vision for the council and make it a flagship council for good practice again by taking risks if necessary.

Helping people and communities to help themselves

- Would welcome the opportunity for us to help communities help themselves e.g. volunteers running services such as libraries following good practice in Sheffield and America.

- Affluent communities tend to be more skilled to volunteer and run services; we need to do more in deprived areas where skills and capacity are short.
- Need to outsource some services to the private sector and voluntary sector.
- Need to help entrepreneurs with business start-ups to get more investment into Rotherham.

Increase in Council tax

- Some would agree with a rise in council tax if budgets became further reduced.

7.4 Summary of the findings from the consultation with the VCS

The emerging themes from the wider voluntary and community sector were to prioritise:

- Increase Town Centre regeneration
- Promote Volunteering and enable community self-help
- Review the councils approach to commissioning services to make it fairer, less bureaucratic, and more user friendly
- Promote and actively engage voluntary sector as an equal partner
- The voluntary and community sector is very creative so use the sector to scrutinise and suggest solutions for saving money.

Overall, there were no voices of dissent regarding our Council proposed priorities.

7.5 Summary of findings (Consultation with Employees)

203 responses were received in total with the summary findings below.

Question 1: The Council's main priorities have been revised as follows. Do you agree or disagree with these? The ratings were:

- Protecting our most vulnerable children and adults – **99% agree**
- Getting people into work and making work pay – **88% agree**
- Making our streets cleaner and better – **78% agree**

Question 2: Within the three priorities outlined above, which areas do you think we should focus on?

The majority of respondents chose to focus on the priority they deemed as the most important.

- More than half of these stated that protecting our most vulnerable children and adults should be the top priority (95 responses).
- 25 respondents thought getting people into work and making work pay should be the top priority,
- 13 respondents thought making our streets cleaner and better should be most pertinent.
- 10 respondents stated they thought all three priorities should be of equal importance.

The remaining responses focused on areas they thought were important to bring the priorities to life. Common areas of response included roads maintenance and repairs, and a focus on education and training, both within schools and communities.

Question 3: If you disagree with the priorities or would like to add to them please comment below:

- 4 respondents gave more information on the focus they thought was important for protecting vulnerable children and adults.
- 6 comments were around getting people into work.
- 20 comments were around making our streets cleaner and better.
- A further 20 comments received gave other ideas for priorities such as housing, customer services and education.

Question 4: How can we support individuals, families and communities to help themselves?

- The main areas of focus included methods of educating and training the community, more community involvement and engagement initiatives to encourage communities to look after themselves in terms of street cleaning, signposting and making more support available in the first instance and more staff and visibility in the locality areas.

Budget Savings Suggestions

The budget saving suggestion initiative was promoted at the same time as the employee consultation. The initiative was introduced by the previous Chief Executive and Leader a few years ago as an addition to the Employee Suggestion Scheme, and has been continued to be maintained. Since September 2014 we have received 28 suggestions – some examples of ideas received are:

- Claim VAT back for mileage – this is being investigated and it is hoped can be implemented subject to HMRC requirements
- Change from electing by thirds to four-yearly cycle – this has been previously considered and discounted
- Provide social workers with iPads – this is already being addressed as part of CYPS work streams
- Review of sickness policy – this is reviewed regularly as part of budget saving proposals, in conjunction with trade union representatives

Relevant officers are contacted for their views on the feasibility of implementing the suggestion and the responses are scrutinised by Phil Howe, Director of Human Resources. A response is then sent to the person who submitted the suggestion. Following this it is posted on the intranet page for others to see and add any further comments.

8. Finance

The costs of this consultation exercise have been approximately £500 which has been met from existing sources.

Officer time has been required to carry out the consultation utilising officers from a number of teams across the authority as part of a council wide approach.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

All consultation has inherent risks that impact on the findings for example:

- The different methods proposed in the consultation did produce some disagreement about priorities.
- Public views vary depending on personal situation and characteristics, and also the amount of consideration given to the priorities.
- The views of interest groups can disproportionately affect results.
- Consultation done during busy Christmas period.

The impact of the above will be mitigated through robust research methodology and analysis of findings, balancing qualitative and quantitative research methodologies, distinguishing between respondents (such as council employees, businesses, voluntary sector, and the public), and a communication strategy that supports the consultation exercise.

Moving forward all services will be encouraged to use the online forum as an integral part of their public consultation to ensure the momentum from the last two years is maintained. This will ensure that the response rate rises and improves as the some momentum was lost between the last two budget consultation exercises when the online forum was closed down.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

We currently have revised priorities and Budget principles 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 budget for 2015/16 and 2016/17.

11. Contact Names:

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