

BUDGET CONSULTATION PROCESS

1. Cheshire East Council has recently completed its first round of Budget Consultation for the 2009-10 Budget. This followed on from the processes operated by the County and District Councils to share their budget options with stakeholder groups and meet the relevant statutory and best practice requirements.

Background

2. Local authorities have a statutory duty to consult on their Budget with certain stakeholder groups such as the Schools Forum and businesses. In addition, other groups have been consulted by the existing Cheshire Councils including social care users / carers, Primary Care Trusts, members of the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), Police and Fire. Traditionally, this has taken the style of formal meetings and based around a document setting out draft budget and policy options in detail.
3. Given the scale of the task of local government re-organisation a detailed set of Budget options has not been produced. However, the budget and service redesign process has resulted in a number of headline budget issues set in the context of the new Corporate Plan priorities and the overall ambitions of the new Authority which could be shared with stakeholders for their views.

Agreed Approach

4. The Cheshire East Cabinet agreed that a practical level of Budget Consultation should be adopted for 2009-10 with a series of events taking place in January. They also made a clear commitment to improve the process and involve stakeholders at an early stage in the future as an integral part of the Financial Planning Process.
5. All current Stakeholders were invited and advised of the approach for 2009-10. This required existing address lists to be updated and disaggregated in the case of the County.
6. The following Budget Consultation meetings took place in 2009:

12 January Town and Parish Councils
13 January Trade Unions as part of the Staffing Committee
14 January People and Places, i.e. User / Carers, LSP members etc
19 January Schools' Forum
20 January Business Breakfast

Consultation Material

7. To provide a framework for the meetings a series of documents were produced, circulated in advance of the meetings and available to delegates on the day. These took the form of:

- a general background briefing and Cheshire East profile common to all consultee groups
 - a specific briefing tailored to the consultee group
8. A briefing document was also produced for members of the public and made available in libraries and public areas of the existing Councils' buildings.
9. All these documents were placed on the Cheshire East Council website. The documents and website included details of how to comment on the issues.

Outcomes

10. The Cheshire East Council Cabinet and Management Team were also well represented with the Leader and Chief Executive attending nearly all of the events.
11. The key consultation outcomes are as follows:
- Participatory budget pilot being undertaken
 - 3rd Sector funding confirmed for 2009/10
 - Shared Services being discussed with key partners
 - Business Portal will be developed working with the Chamber of Commerce
 - Initiatives to improve engagement with the local economy
 - Cheshire East Council team being established to engage with the community to address the impact of the economic downturn

Feedback

12. A summary of all the feedback is attached to this appendix in the form of minutes of the relevant meetings / discussion groups and feedback received via the website:

Group	Annex
Town and Parish Councils	A
Trades Unions	B
People and Places Discussion Groups:	
- Social Care	C(i)
- Health and Wellbeing	C(ii)
- Roads and Transport	C(iii)
- Waste and Other Services	C(iv)
Schools' Forum	D
Business Breakfast	E
Correspondence with members of the public	F

13. All delegates were asked to complete a questionnaire at the end of the meetings. The feedback from these forms has been analysed and the results are attached at Annex G. These will be used to inform future events.

Where next?

14. Cabinet Members have given a clear undertaking to improve consultation arrangements for the 2010/11 Financial Planning process and this will start early in the new Financial year.

Conclusion

15. Cabinet Members reviewed all the feedback from the events and, where possible, have factored these into their detailed budget deliberations. However, given the time and resource constraints it has not been possible to address all the issues and the debate over service levels, in light of the feedback received, will continue into 2009/10.