

BUDGET CONSULTATION PROCESS

1. Cheshire East Council completed the Budget Consultation Events for the 2010/2011 Budget in January 2010, where it was able to share budget proposals 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, the Council chose to consult other groups, including social care users / carers, third sector organisations, Trade Unions, Primary Care Trusts, members of the Local Strategic and Local Area Partnerships (LSPs/LAPs), Cheshire Police Authority and Cheshire Fire Authority.

Business Planning Process

3. In July 2009, the Cheshire East Cabinet agreed a comprehensive Business Planning Process, designed to align priorities with resource allocation. The process acknowledged the commitment to improving consultation arrangements over the next few years. A two stage approach was confirmed for 2010/2011:

Round 1 – held in November 2009

Round 2 – held in January 2010

4. The strap line of **‘Shaping Our Services’** was chosen for the events and further work was undertaken throughout the year to develop the format and content of the events.

Round 1

5. Round 1 of the Shaping Our Services consultation exercise was held in November at the following venues:

23rd November - Knutsford High School

24th November - Congleton Town Hall

26th November - Nantwich Civic Hall

It was agreed these meetings would be used to ask stakeholders for their views on service priorities. Therefore, they were presented with a list of 24 service areas (attached at **Annex A**) and asked to collectively and individually select:

3 service areas where we could “Do more”

7 service areas where we could “Do less”

4 service areas where we could “Stay the same”

6. The events were well attended and prompted some lively debates when opposing view points came together. In all 100 feedback forms were collected

from the first round of “Shaping our Services” consultation events; 50 from the event in Nantwich, 26 from the event in Congleton and 24 from the event in Knutsford. A detailed analysis of the results is shown at **Annex B**.

Round 2

7. Round 2 of the Shaping Our Services Consultation took place in January 2010 as follows

Tuesday 12th January – Schools Forum.

Wednesday 13th January – Business Breakfast

Monday 18th January – Town and Parish Councils

Wednesday 20th January – General People & Places event

Wednesday 20th January – Corporate Trade Unions

Thursday 21st January – Cheshire East Councillors

Friday 22nd January – Cheshire East Councillors

January Consultation Material

8. The key purpose of the January round was to consult on the Council’s first Pre Budget Report. This document goes some way to address the request of stakeholders for more detailed information and enables the Council to inform stakeholders of the expected service performance and delivery levels in 2010/2011. The Pre Budget Report was circulated in advance of the meetings and made available to delegates at each event.
9. The Pre Budget Report was placed on the Cheshire East Council website on 8th January and subsequently placed in libraries and the public areas of Council buildings. The document (at Chapter 6) and website included details of how to comment on the issues.

Format of the January Meetings

10. The three headline events took a similar format with presentations relating to:
- The profile of Cheshire East and achievements in its first year.
 - The financial issues, budget process and key policy proposals for revenue and capital
11. The Cheshire East Council Cabinet and Management Team were well represented, with the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive attending most of the events.

Feedback

12. A summary of feedback from the events is attached at **Annex C** in the format of “You said : We did”.

Where Next?

13. Cabinet Members have given a clear undertaking to further improve consultation arrangements for the 2011/2012 budget and planning for this will start early in the new Financial year.

Conclusion

14. Cabinet Members reviewed all the feedback from the events and, where possible, have factored these into their detailed budget deliberations. Some of the feedback will assist with setting out proposals for the 2011/2012 Budget.

November 2009 - List of Services

- Collecting, recycling and disposing of waste
- Controlling car parking
- Educating our children and young people
- Helping carers
- Helping people on low incomes
- Improving housing conditions
- Maintaining and improving highways
- Maintaining and improving parks and open spaces
- Preventing anti-social behaviour
- Preventing homelessness
- Promoting active participation in local communities
- Promoting visitors and tourism to Cheshire East
- Protecting and caring for children
- Protecting and caring for vulnerable adults
- Protecting footpaths
- Protecting our towns and markets
- Providing activities for young people
- Providing one-stop service access for customers
- Providing reading and learning resources through libraries
- Providing sports and leisure opportunities
- Supporting businesses to grow
- Supporting lifelong learning
- Supporting people to maintain independence
- Taking care of our streets and towns

Council Spending

The three top services that respondents felt the Council should contribute more spending to, were:

1. Supporting people to maintain independence, 65%
2. Helping carers, 59%
3. Maintaining and improving highways, 54%

The top seven services that respondents felt the Council should contribute less spending to, were:

1. Controlling car parking, 68%
2. Providing one-stop service access for customers, 62%
3. Providing reading and learning resources through libraries, 55%
4. Supporting lifelong learning, 43%
5. Improving housing conditions, 41%
6. Protecting our towns and markets, 41%
7. Maintaining and improving parks and open spaces, 38%

The top four services that respondents felt the Council should contribute the same amount of spending to, were:

1. Collecting, recycling and disposing of waste, 76%
2. Educating our children and young people, 60%
3. Providing activities for young people, 54%
4. Providing sports and leisure opportunities, 50%

Council Tax

Over two thirds of respondents (68%) would be prepared to pay an increase in Council tax to protect or improve high priority services. Just over half of respondents (51%) would be prepared to pay an increase of 1-2%.

Comments from those who would not be prepared to pay any increase in council tax (23 respondents) included those who felt that they could not afford it, they pay too much already or that the money would just go to waste.

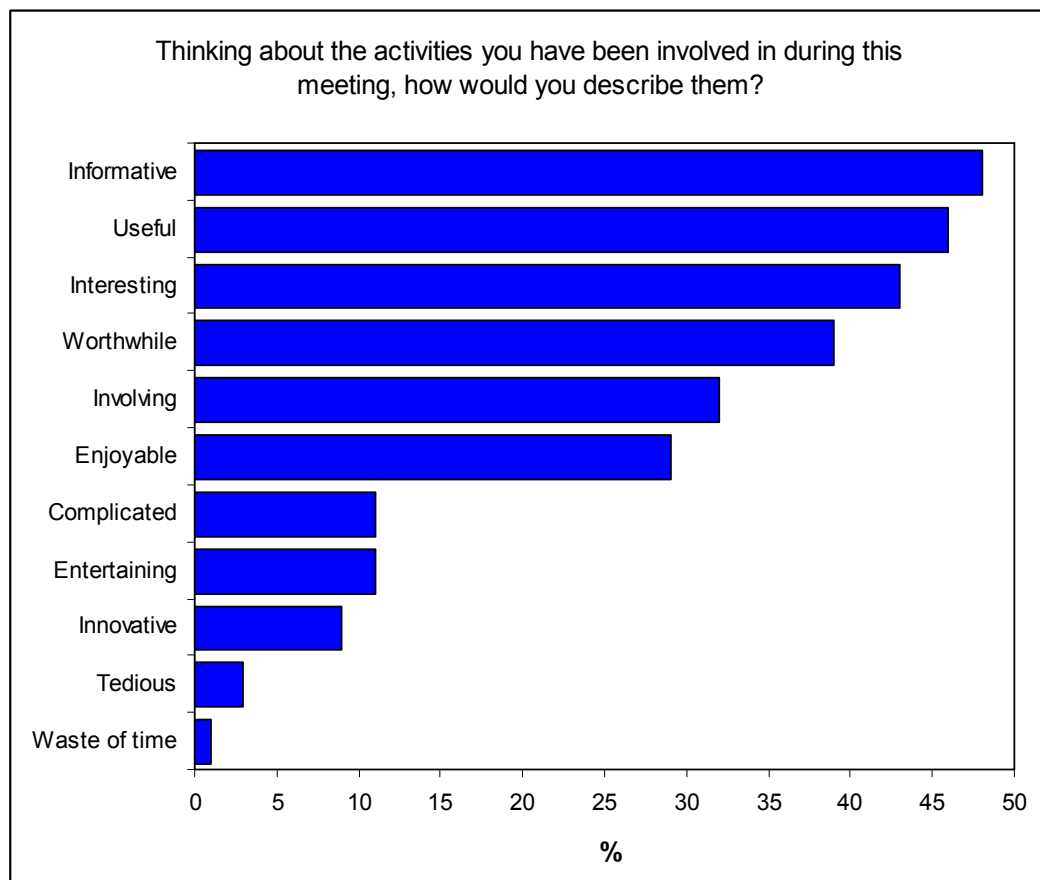
What did participants think about the events

When asked their views on the events, 74% thought it showed the difficulty of making decisions, 51% thought it helped them show their priorities and views about Council spending and 45% felt they had improved knowledge of Council spending.

What participants thought about the activities involved during the events

Just under half of respondents described the activities as informative (48%), useful (46%), and interesting (43%). Just 1 respondent felt they were a waste of

time and 3 respondents that it was Tedious, 10 respondents found the activities complicated.



Venue and Facilities

Overall, participants at the events agreed that the venue was easy to get to (77% agreed) and that the event was easy to understand (73%). 53% agreed that the refreshments were satisfactory and 76% disagreed that the venue was too small.

Shaping Our Services – Budget Consultation

Summary of Actions and Responses

This table sets out how the feedback the Council received through the two rounds of consultation has been actioned.

You Said	We Did
Format Issues	
There needs to be a stronger link between the local people, local places and supporting service delivery text and the detailed policy proposals.	This has been addressed for the Budget Report. The text has been enhanced in the service chapters.
The background to the development of the policy proposals set out in Appendix 2 of the Pre Budget Report needs to be clear.	The section has been improved for the Budget Report and a table has been added to summarise the position.
Please provide more details on the Budget policy proposals	Where possible, the text has been improved to improve clarity and add detail.
Please circulate the slides from the consultation events.	The slides were placed on the Cheshire East website on 29 th January 2010.
Please extend the Consultation deadline.	The deadline of 29 th January was set for administration purposes. Feedback can be received up to the Council Meeting on 25 th February. The website was updated to reflect this on 1 st February 2010.
Schools Forum Issues	
It is acknowledged the Dedicated Schools Grant for Cheshire East is low.	Committed to continued lobbying of the Government for greater funding.
Raised concerns over funding levels in the Children and Families Service.	Additional funding of £0.8m has been made available to the service.

You Said	We Did
Could Council Tax be increased but with protection for those on fixed income?	Council Tax has been increased below inflation with specific additional funding for Children and Families. A targeted campaign will be funded to improve take up of eligible benefits.
Business Breakfast Issues	
Take on board feedback from round one of the Budget Consultation process and from residents over car parking charges.	The Cabinet has issued a press release to set out the way forward. This includes no changes in the areas of Alsager, Holmes Chapel, Middlewich and Sandbach.
Work with the East Cheshire Chambers Group to communicate tendering opportunities to local businesses.	This will be addressed by the Regeneration Service and the Procurement Team.
Regeneration Service to organise repeat event to advise businesses on tendering for Cheshire East work.	This will be organised by the Regeneration Service in April / May 2010.
Please consider local companies and the advantages they bring when awarding contracts.	While it is not possible to favour local companies they should set out advantages in tender documents.
Please keep Council Tax low.	Council Tax increases are below inflation.
Not an appropriate time to introduce a Supplementary Business Rate.	No Supplementary Business Rate has been put forward.
Town and Parish Council Issues	
What will happen to Double Taxation payments?	Payments have been continued for 2010/2011 in line with the 2009/2010 policy. Evidence of further Double Taxation should be sent to Councillor Keegan.
Please set out details of the Council Tax, Tax Base and Bandings in the report.	This information has been included in the Budget Report.

You Said	We Did
People and Places Issues	
Communication should be an ongoing process, not an event.	This will be addressed by the People and Places Directorates and consultation will be improved for the next Budget setting cycle.
There is a need to clarify the relationships between the Council and the third sector.	This will be addressed in 2010/2011.
Can additional funding raised through Council Tax be ring fenced to specific issues or used to close the funding gap?	This approach has been adopted with the gap being closed and £0.8m being made available for Children and Families.
There is a need for integration with the Health Service for Budget setting and procurement.	These issues will be fed into the development of the next Budget Setting Process for 2011/2012.
Please provide reassurance to the third sector there is long term business.	This will be reviewed by the People Directorate.
Talk to the third sector about improvements, better co-ordination and targeting funds.	This will be addressed in 2010/2011
Please respond quickly to basic road maintenance issues and ensure the repairs last.	Discussions are underway with our Contractors.
There is a need to tackle inequalities of the highways service across the Borough.	Discussions are underway with our Contractors.
Support for a review of discretionary activities.	The area will be explored in detail in the next Budget setting cycle.
Feedback received through the Website	
Please do not reduce the Supported Employment Service	The proposal relates to an increase in income levels rather than a service reduction.