

Report of	Meeting	Date
Director (Policy and Governance)	Special Council	28 February 2017

BUDGET CONSULTATION 2017/18

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. This report provides the Council with the results of the public consultation carried out on the Executive’s draft budget investment proposals for 2017/18.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

2. That Members use the results which highlight the views of residents to inform their decisions on setting the budget for 2017/18.
3. That members note the changes to the household waste collection service in response to the consultation feedback

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF REPORT

4. Consultation on proposed budget principles for 2017/18 received a total of 540 responses to the online survey and also significant interaction online through social media. The open question format enabled individuals to give detailed feedback on the proposals and their views as to how the council might improve, supporting more meaningful engagement.
5. Content analysis of the comments showed a relatively even distribution of positive, negative and neutral feedback with more positive view points overall. The majority of negative comments related to changes to waste collection, approved by Council prior to the consultation commencing; a number of changes have been made in response to the feedback.

Confidential report Please bold as appropriate	Yes	No
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CORPORATE PRIORITIES

6. This report relates to the following Strategic Objectives:

Involving residents in improving their local area and equality of access for all	✓	A strong local economy	✓
Clean, safe and healthy communities	✓	An ambitious council that does more to meet the needs of residents and the local area	✓

BACKGROUND

7. The 2017/18 budget consultation process started following approval of the budget position paper by Executive Cabinet on the 10 January 2017, which set out the budget forecast and guiding principles for application of the budget over the next 3 year financial period.
8. The consultation question format set out the key principles of the budget proposals along with a summary of the current context and challenges facing the council in future years. Proposals included:
 - Increase in council tax by 2%
 - Continuation of major investment projects to be delivered this year: Market Walk extension £17m; Chorley Youth Zone £4.8m; Primrose Gardens Retirement Village £9.7m; and Digital Health Park £8.1m
 - Continuation of investment in retail grants, developing the award-winning events programme and funding PCSOs
 - A balanced budget
 - Preservation of priority services
9. Respondents were asked to review the proposals and provide their comments in response to an open question, with the intention of gaining more qualitative feedback to gain a deeper insight into views and opinions. This approach avoided using closed questions to gather residents' views on issues and decisions that were being made based on other factors such as the budget deficit over the next three years.

BUDGET CONSULTATION RESULTS

10. Consultation on the 2017/18 budget response ran from the 20 January to the 10 of February 2017. The consultation was publicised through a structured digital campaign including 18,689 emails delivered to residents signing up to receive communications via the MyChorley account feature on the council website, as well as traditional media and awareness raising through local networks.
11. The formal consultation received 540 qualitative responses through an open ended question format which provided detailed feedback. This is a significant increase in the level of feedback compared to last year's survey where only 243 respondents offered additional views or comments.
12. As well as completing the online survey, residents were also invited to share their views and comments using social media. Posts to Facebook received a total 24,813 views and 85 comments reaching a wide representation of the population and generally younger demographic aged 25-34.
13. The responses have been collated and analysed to identify the main key words or phrases and then grouped together based on whether they indicated a positive or negative response to the proposals. A proportion of the comments offered suggestions for improvement or highlighted concerns, rather than a definable positive or negative view point and these have been grouped together as 'neutral' with further analysis by theme. It should be noted that responses often included more than one comment or suggestion, covering more than one area. Where this occurred, the main area of comment was selected.
14. The following table shows the distribution of positive, negative and neutral viewpoints.

Positive view of the proposals	43%
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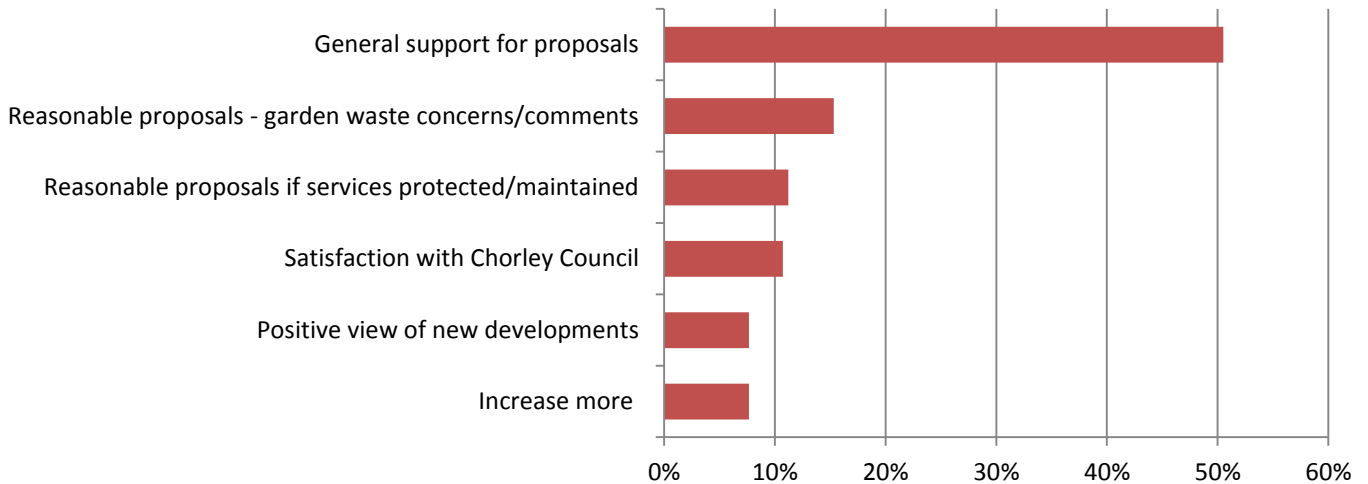
Negative view of the proposals	38%
Neutral view point	19%

A selection of comments is available at appendix A.

Positive Responses

15. Of those comments indicating a positive view point, the following themes can be identified:

Positive response themes

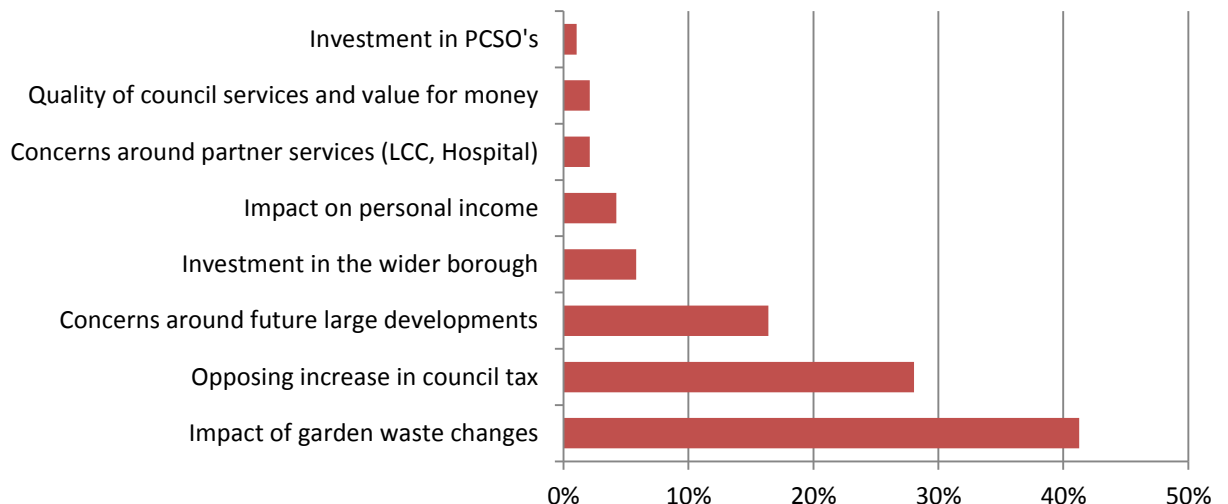


16. The majority of positive comments (51%) indicated general acceptance of the proposals, with many stating that they were 'reasonable' and 'fair'. Some positive comments also referenced garden waste changes and around 11% of comments highlighted strong satisfaction with the council and its budget strategy; 8% said they would be prepared to pay more in return for greater level of investment and improvement.

Negative Responses

17. Of those comments expressing a negative view point, the following themes can be identified:

Negative response themes



Household Waste Collection

18. The majority of negative comments (41%) relate to changes to waste collections and specifically the charge for garden waste collections, agreed by Council prior to consultation on the budget commencing. In response to the feedback provided, a number of changes will be made to the garden waste collection scheme with more detail included in the table at appendix B which provides a brief note of action being taken or planned by the council for each negative theme.
19. Regarding the changes to the waste collection service, the suggested actions based on the consultation and wider feedback are:
- to reduce the impact that the changes have on low income households by offering free home compost bin, on request, for those entitled to passported benefits
 - to offer the choice, on request, of a smaller 140 litre grey garden waste bin where in special circumstances the standard 240 litre bin would be unsuitable

Neutral Responses

20. Of those comments expressing a neutral view point and providing comments or feedback, key themes include:

Alternative budget strategies	Suggestions to reduce funding in other areas e.g. arts, business grants, PCSO's
	Consideration to increase funding for particular service areas e.g. buses, other public services including health services, wellbeing facilities and children's centres
	Options to identify further efficiencies through reduced council costs such as the mayor and senior officer pay
Comments on specific aspects of future developments	Design of the Youth Zone, retail offer for Market Walk, clarification of plans for Primrose Gardens Retirement Living
Comments on specific aspects of garden waste scheme	Clarification on the process, uses for waste receptacles and concerns around fly tipping.

21. Social media feedback also provides an indication of views; comments generally showed a mix of people who did not want to see any increase, those that were happy to do so as long as the council carried on the good work in improving Chorley and some referring to the garden waste collections as a cost they would not be willing to pay.

IMPLICATIONS OF REPORT

22. This report has implications in the following areas and the relevant Directors' comments are included:

Finance	X	Customer Services	
Human Resources		Equality and Diversity	
Legal		Integrated Impact Assessment required?	

No significant implications in this area		Policy and Communications	
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COMMENTS OF THE STATUTORY FINANCE OFFICER

23. The financial implications of this report are contained in the main budget setting report in the pack. In particular the changes to the waste collection in response to this consultation are outlined in the main budget report.

COMMENTS OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

24. There are no comments.

GARY HALL
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

There are no background papers to this report.

Report Author	Ext	Date	Doc ID
Vicky Willett	5248	14 th February 2017	Budget Consultation Council Report 2017

APPENDIX A: SUMMARY OF COMMENTS

POSITIVE
Doing a good job despite hardship. Other areas don't seem to be doing all that well, but Chorley seems to be keeping on top with limited impact to costs to tax payers
I am all for improvement in services and I don't think the increase is unreasonable.
Making the best of the situation
I agree to the proposals, I think a lot of progress has been made in Chorley over the last few years.
Balanced budget, fantastic. Improving Market Walk, great!
7p per week increase seems like a bargain to me for all the changes and maintained services.
NEGATIVE
You say there are no plans to cut services yet you are introducing a charge for bins
Things are tighter everywhere and I don't think an increase is warranted
Added to Lancashire CC increase we are now 69 pence per week worse off. Has our income increased? No, in fact the opposite is true
I believe that charging for removal of garden waste will encourage an enormous amount of fly tipping. It will also discourage people to sweep up leaves etc outside their homes. The extra amount placed into the general collection will be significant.
Would rather no uplift for these projects and more put to government areas that will protect our NHS' future. Care in the community etc... Don't increase taxes for your proposals!
Charging for garden waste will result in fly tipping most houses do not have room for another bin
NEUTRAL (No definable positive or negative view point, or mixed. Includes no comment)
I would rather have better hospitals and safer streets than a digital health park, or better shops. I believe a better hospital, quicker emergency treatments, shorter waiting lists etc would be a much better choice.
Not sure about some of your developments.
Cut funding to all public art projects.
I am all for protecting the environment but we also need to protect road users by dealing with pot holes which damage vehicles.
An increase was always inevitable, will be closely monitoring 2018/19 budget!

Appendix B - Current and planned activity in response to negative themes

Category	Details	Notes
Impact of garden waste changes	Comments included concerns around the additional charge for garden waste collections, extra recycling container (cost and storage) and potential for fly tipping	From April 2018 the Council will no longer receive waste cost share funding from LCC, currently £930k per year. Changes to the waste collection service were agreed at Full Council in January 2017. In response to feedback, a number of changes have been made to the scheme including options for smaller bins and composting containers for people receiving passported benefits. The associated Integrated Impact Assessment includes actions to ensure the scheme is implemented fairly.
Opposing increase in council tax	Comments stated a preference for no increase in council tax	The proposed increase in council tax is needed to help address the budget deficit, avoid cuts to frontline services and enable investment in priorities. It is also in line with central government assumptions to reduce the impact of grant reductions. Chorley continues to have one of the lowest precepts in Lancashire.
Concerns around future developments	Comments referred to the potential risks of large investments including Market Walk and the Youth Zone	New developments will provide vital services and future income schemes for the council to help ensure that it is fully self-sufficient when central government grant ends. We will continue to engage with residents on future developments to ensure that proposals are well communicated with opportunities to provide feedback.
Investment in the wider borough	Comments highlighted concerns around funding for services in rural areas including community facilities and bus routes	The council continues to invest in initiatives that will benefit the whole of the borough and has also recently made funding support available to protect a number of community facilities and bus routes serving rural areas.
Quality of council services and value for money	Comments highlighted particular council services that should be improved including street sweeping for estates and tree cutting.	The council monitors performance across all services to ensure continued value for money. The recently approved Streetscene Strategy sets out a clear plan for improving the effectiveness and efficiency of street and neighbourhood services over the next 3 years.
Impact on personal income	Comments indicated concerns around impact on personal income and ability to meet the increase as well as other living costs when wages may not have increased.	A key corporate priority for the Council is to ensure access to high quality employment and education opportunities. A number of support schemes are available to provide assistance to those who may not be able to meet the cost of living.
Concerns around partner services (LCC, Hospital)	Comments noted concerns linked to funding for the hospital and also Lancashire County Council services such as street lights and pot	The Council will incorporate this feedback in its response to Lancashire County Council budget proposal and continue to work with our partners including the hospital to protect and improve services.

	holes.	
PCSO's	Comments suggested reducing funding for PCSO's	The Council will make a contribution of £110k towards part-funding PCSO posts in the borough, although further discussions and agreements need to be reached with the police and crime commissioner to ensure value for money.