

Report of	Meeting	Date
Assistant Chief Executive (Business Transformation and Improvement)	Executive Cabinet	12 February 2009

## BUDGET CONSULTATION 2008

### PURPOSE OF REPORT

- To update Members on the results of the consultation carried out around the draft budget.

### RECOMMENDATION(S)

- The Executive note the consultation responses.

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF REPORT

- Consultation on the draft budget 2009/2010 was carried out by undertaking a straw poll in the Council's One Stop Shop to gain a broad understanding of the views of members of the public and having a discussion with small focus group consisting members of the Making Chorley Smile panel. In order to ensure that the Council takes into account the views of all its residents, local school children were asked for their views on the Council's spending priorities during local democracy week in October 2008. In addition, the Council invited comments from the borough's parish Councils and the Overview and Scrutiny committee.

The results of the consultation were broadly supportive of the proposals made by the Council, that Council Tax rises should be kept as low as possible and the delivery of core services protected. Other comments received asked the Council to ensure that, where additional investment was possible, it concentrated on sustaining and improving the Town Centre and the helping to deal with the impact of the economic downturn and provision of activities for young people.

### REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)

(If the recommendations are accepted)

- N/A

### ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

- N/A

## CORPORATE PRIORITIES

6. This report relates to the following Strategic Objectives:

Put Chorley at the heart of regional economic development in the Central Lancashire sub-region		Develop local solutions to climate change.	
Improving equality of opportunity and life chances		Develop the Character and feel of Chorley as a good place to live	
Involving people in their communities	✓	Ensure Chorley Borough Council is a performing organisation	

## BACKGROUND

7. Consulting on the budget, and taking in consideration the views of the public and other stakeholders is an important process in ensuring the Council is able to take account of the views and needs of the community it serves. The consultation that has been undertaken provides information that Members can use when making their decisions in the budget setting process.
8. This report contains details of the results of the consultation carried out for the 2009 / 2010 budget cycle. It has included; taking a straw poll in the one stop shop about how people would like to see the Council respond to the recession, a workshop with representatives from the Making Chorley Smile panel, a session with local school children to ask what they saw as a priority for Chorley, a meeting with the overview and scrutiny committee, comments invited from parish Councils, and publishing the proposals on the Council's website.

## INTRODUCTION TO THE CONSULTATION

9. During the current recession, and financial pressures that the Council faces, the administration proposed that the budget for 2009/2010 should concentrate on protecting services to the public and protecting them from the affects of the recession while keeping Council Tax rises as low as possible. Therefore, during each public consultation, people were asked to comment on whether they felt this was the right approach, or whether Council Tax should raised or cut, with the corresponding changes in service levels. They were also asked for other suggestions about priority areas.
10. The results of the consultation are set out below, and include suggestions made by the public for priority areas and possible alternative approaches that could be taken by the Council.

### **The level of Council Tax**

11. The majority of respondents felt that the current proposal, to increase Chorley's element of the Council Tax below inflation was appropriate. The reasons given by respondents centred around the importance of not increasing pressures on households already suffering from the recession by unduly increasing Council Tax, while ensuring that the Council has sufficient resources to continue core services.
12. During the discussion with the Making Chorley Smile panel, some representatives expressed the view that they would be happy to have a slightly higher increase in Council Tax if this was used to fund investment in the local economy and town centre.
13. In the straw poll carried out in the one stop shop, the majority of votes were cast for the current proposals, to have a below inflation increase in Council Tax.

### **Priority areas for investment**

14. The consultation also asked what area respondents would like to see investment to see the biggest improvement in the area.
15. Pupils taking part in the local democracy week events were asked to identify the priorities they thought were important for the Council to invest in. During both the primary school and secondary school sessions, the main area they felt could be invested in was activities for young people. Other comments received indicated that it is not just more activities that young people would like, but a wider variety that cover more age groups, particularly teenagers.
16. Members of the focus group drawn from the Making Chorley Smile panel asked the Council to continue to examine ways to improve and sustain the town centre. Suggestions included looking at imaginative ways of stimulating the local economy.
17. Feedback from a parish council and a member of the public also raised issues around the free swimming initiative and how this could be made more accessible for residents in rural parts of the borough.

### **Response of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

18. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee have considered the budget proposals for 2009/2010 and made a number of recommendations for Executive Cabinet to consider:
  - Making assurances that there will not be a diminished service following the proposed reductions in budget for planning enforcement and CCTV service.
  - That the reduction in core funding programme be reconsidered, and that consideration be given to reducing the funding to the LSP is reduced by £15k and redirected to the core funding programme.
  - That the Treasury Management Strategy be reviewed, and that the Council invests only in institutions backed by the British government for a period of six months.

### **Conclusion**

19. The majority of respondents through the various consultation channels used expressed the view that the current proposals were the most appropriate in the current circumstances, to increase Council Tax below inflation and concentrate on protecting core services.
20. Popular areas for investment were; a greater range of activities for young people and improving and sustaining the town and centre and local economy.

### **IMPLICATIONS OF REPORT**

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

Finance	✓	Customer Services	
Human Resources		Equality and Diversity	
Legal		No significant implications in this area	

### **COMMENTS OF THE ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE (BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION AND IMPROVEMENT)**

22. As this report will influence the budget setting process, it has financial implications. The implications of any decisions made by Members will be covered in budget setting meetings.

GARY HALL  
ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE (BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION AND IMPROVEMENT)

There are no background papers to this report.

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