

Report of	Meeting	Date
Director (Policy and Governance)	Special Council	26 February 2019

BUDGET CONSULTATION 2019/20

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 2019/20.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

2. That Members use the results which represent the views of residents, to inform their decisions when setting the budget for 2019/20.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF REPORT

3. Consultation on proposed budget principles for 2019/20 received a total of 476 responses to the online survey and also significant interaction online through social media.
4. The open question format enabled individuals to give detailed feedback on the proposals overall and their views on council investment including the current allocation of £110,000 for the provision of Police Community Support Officers.
5. Content analysis of the comments showed a relatively even distribution of positive, negative and neutral feedback with more positive viewpoints overall. Of the positive comments received to the online survey, the majority support the budget proposals. Second, to overall support for the budget proposals, was positive support for the council tax increase. However, it is worth noting that the council tax increase also featured as the primary negative theme.
6. Analysis of comments in response to investment in PCSO'S also showed fairly balanced feelings with just over half of people responding to say they support the council's continued funding, highlighting the desire for a visible police presence and perceived increase in safety. Nearly as many opposing views indicated that the funding does not provide value for money, instead preferring investment in alternative priorities.

Confidential report Please bold as appropriate	Yes	No
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CORPORATE PRIORITIES

7. 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

8. The 2019/20 budget consultation process started following approval of the budget position paper by Executive Cabinet on the 17th January 2019, which set out the budget forecast and guiding principles for application of the budget over the next 3 year financial period.
9. 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:
 - Continued investment of approximately £1m that will deliver corporate strategy priorities
 - Maintaining and further improving services
 - Mitigating the reduction in Government funding by increasing Council Tax by 2.99% in 2019/20 and including a forecast 2% increase in Council Tax in 2020/21 and a further forecast 2% increase in 2021/22 as part of the medium term budget strategy
 - Delivering major projects to make the borough a better place to live, work and invest will continue including Strawberry Fields Digital Hub and Primrose Gardens Retirement Village.
 - Investing in corporate priorities including extending support for digital skills, community transport and improving local facilities such as playing pitches.
 - A budget that is consistent with the Medium Term Financial Strategy.
10. Respondents were asked to review the proposals and provide their comments in response to the budget, with the intention of gaining more qualitative feedback to gain a deeper insight into views and opinions.

BUDGET CONSULTATION RESULTS

11. Consultation on the 2019/20 budget response ran from the 21st January to the 10th of February 2019. The consultation was publicised through a structured digital campaign including 26,029 emails delivered to residents signed up to receive communications via the My Account feature on the council website. The emails received 8,680 unique views (33.34%) and 2,413 link clicks (8.31%). Awareness was also raised through traditional media outlets and local networks including In The Boro, and local newspapers.
12. The formal consultation received 476 qualitative responses through an open-ended question format using two questions, via an online survey which provided detailed feedback. This is a lower level of feedback compared to last year's survey where 780 individuals responded to the online survey which only included one open question. This decline could be due to a number of factors such as the effect of GDPR.
13. As well as completing the online survey, residents were also invited to share their views and comments using social media. From two posts and an advert on Facebook, we received a total of 3,018 post clicks and 203 comments reaching a wide representation of the population. Analysis of Social Media responses is included in this report from paragraph 24.

14. The responses have been collated and analysed to identify the main keywords 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 viewpoint 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.

CONSULTATION FINDINGS

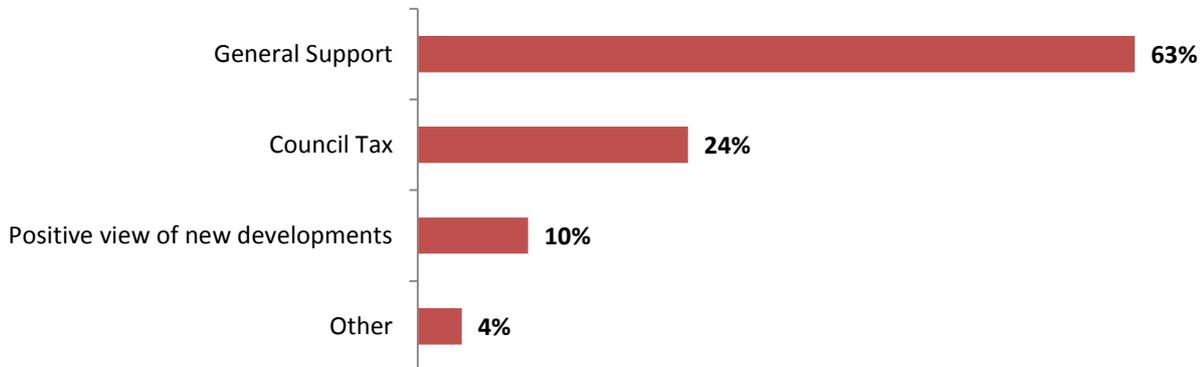
15. The following table outlines the distribution of positive, negative and neutral viewpoints from respondents to question 1 which asked for comments on the overall proposals.

Positive view of the proposals	43.70%
Neutral point of view	11.97%
Negative view of the proposals	39.71%
Non-applicable comments	4.62%

Selections of comments are available at appendix A.

16. Of those comments indicating a positive viewpoint, the following themes can be identified:

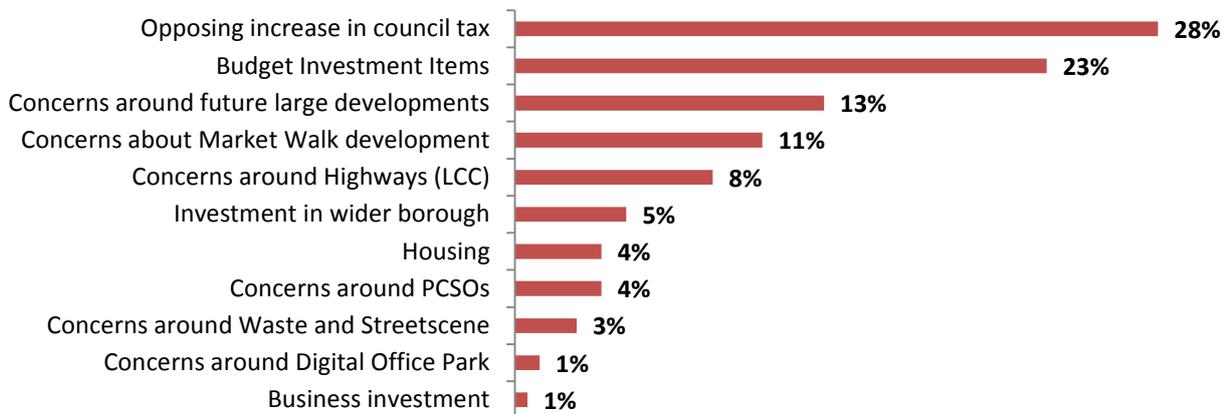
Positive response themes



17. The majority of positive comments (63%) indicated general acceptance of the proposals, with many stating that they were 'reasonable' and 'fair'. Comments also referenced a positive view of new and current developments with 10% of residents feeling positive towards the new developments within the borough. In addition to this, around 24% accept the rise in council tax if it meant the proposals are met and services are maintained.

18. Of those comments expressing a negative viewpoint, the following themes can be identified:

Negative response themes



19. The majority of negative comments (28%) relate to the increase in council tax. A large number of respondents (23%) have concerns regarding the overall budget investment items and 13% indicated that they would prefer investment in large developments to be directed towards other priorities. In addition to this, concerns were highlighted regarding partner delivered services such as highways (8%) with respondents urging the council to lobby these partner services to operate more efficiently. More detail is 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.
20. Of those comments expressing a neutral viewpoint and providing comments or feedback, key themes include:

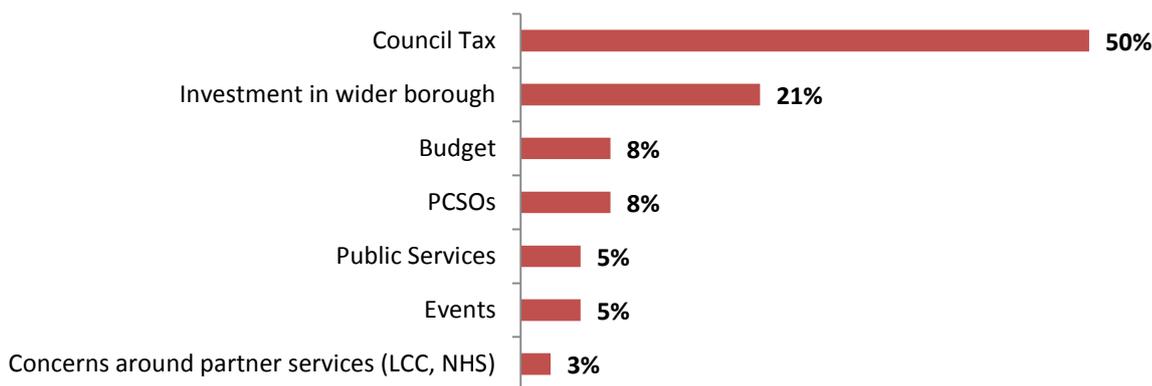
Alternative budget strategies	Suggestions to reduce funding of major developments e.g. Strawberry Fields Digital Office Park and Market Walk.
	Consideration to increase funding for particular service areas e.g. other public services including health services, wellbeing facilities, and children’s centres.
	Options to identify further efficiencies through reduced council costs such as councillor funding and staffing costs.
Comments on specific aspects of future developments	Development of Market Walk, clarification of plans for Primrose Gardens Retirement Living, and affordable homes strategy.
Comments on specific aspects of partner services	Concerns regarding partner delivered services, such as highway related issues. There was also confusion present in terms of what services are provided by partners and by Chorley Council, in particular Highways and the funding allocation towards PCSOs.

21. A second open-ended question requested views on the current investment of £110,000 in Police Community Support Officer (PCSO's) and whether this should continue or be put towards other priorities. More detail is included in the table at Appendix C which provides a brief example of comments received for the themes identified.
22. Of 244 comments showing support for continued funding:
 - 57% gave no specific reason
 - 17% feel it provides a visible police presence
 - 15% indicate a perception of increased safety
 - 10% feel it's necessary to top up Police funding.
23. Of 232 remaining comments:
 - 37% cited alternative priorities for investment.
 - 34% queried effectiveness and value for money.
 - 29% felt the Police should fund local policing.

Social media

24. Social media feedback also provides an indication of views; comments were in the main about council tax increases, generally showing a mix of people who did not want to see any increase to council tax, despite this some respondents accepted the increase.
25. Of those comments expressed on social media, the following themes can be identified (this includes both positive and negative comments):

Social media themes



26. The majority of social media comments (50%) relate to Council Tax rises, with users expressing their unhappiness with another rise. Of those respondents, 63% expressed their worries over the impact it would have on their personal income and concern over how the money was being spent. Despite this, there were a number of residents who felt positive about the investments being made into the wider borough, and also expressed positive feedback in relation to the delivery of the events programme.

IMPLICATIONS OF REPORT

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

Finance	✓	Customer Services	
Human Resources		Equality and Diversity	
Legal		Integrated Impact Assessment required?	
No significant implications in this area		Policy and Communications	

COMMENTS OF THE STATUTORY FINANCE OFFICER

28. The financial implications of this report are contained in the main budget setting report in the pack. In particular, the changes to council tax in response to this consultation are outlined in the main budget report.

COMMENTS OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

29. There are no comments.

GARY HALL
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

There are no background papers to this report.

Report Author	Ext	Date	Doc ID
Kieron Power	5035	12/02/2019	Budget Consultation Council Report 2019

APPENDIX A: SUMMARY OF COMMENTS – Question 1 (Budget Specific)

POSITIVE
I'm proud to live in Chorley and the investment into our town gets better each year. Thank you CBC Chorley really is becoming a thriving place to live
I support all investments to the town and an increase in council tax to support this.
As a resident of Chorley, I feel that the proposals outlined are of benefit to the populous of this region.
Given the financial pressures and constraints on the Council budget, I am very impressed at your commitment to maintaining services whilst continuing to improve the town both for residents and visitors
I have browsed the proposals. For the ten years, I have lived in Chorley I have been very happy with the Council and I remain so. Keep up the good work.
In challenging times for Local Authorities, this appears to be a well-balanced budget with good support for local services within what is available.
I support the council plans to continue to invest in both critical services and the future of the area, both business and leisure based.

NEGATIVE
Whilst I appreciate fees may go up and I will have no choice but to pay them. As a single parent homeowner, the rising costs have a major impact on our day to day life.
No more council tax increase. It's a joke how much we pay now!
A pity little or no mention of support for the rural community which continues to berate fodder for Chorley town.
2.99 % Council tax rise is above inflation. Some families will struggle.
The market walk extension has already proven to be a massive loss, the business going there is not what this town needs, and this town needs the high Street at its best, not another modern monstrosity.
Don't put our council tax up, as a working family I struggle to pay it as it, bills keep going up and up and so does cost of living but our wages just don't cover it all.

NEUTRAL (No definable positive or negative viewpoint, or mixed. Includes no comment)
Stop the present policy of providing more Retail Outlets when there are so many shops empty and not trading in the town. Despite this, items that are working well include refuse collection and grounds maintenance.
I don't mind a slight increase in council tax, but what annoys me is the neglect of pavements.
It's all well and good investing £5m but if you're considering taking away some of the PCSOs then it seems counter productive.
I don't mind the council investing in things if they work, but the number of councillors should be reduced.
I agree with the council tax rise but would rather see that money go to the police rather than the digital hub.

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

Category	Details	Notes
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, Strawberry Fields Digital Hub, and Primrose Gardens.	These developments will provide vital services and future income schemes for the council to help ensure that it can balance the budget when the central government grant ends in 2019/20. 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 invest more into the rural community.
Quality of council services and value for money	Comments highlighted particular council services that should be improved including street sweeping for estates and grass cutting.	The council monitors performance across all services to ensure continued value for money. Furthermore, the Streetscene Modernisation Strategy sets out a clear plan for improving the effectiveness and efficiency of street and neighbourhood services.
Concerns regarding Housing	Comments indicated concerns around the impact and availability of housing within the borough.	The recently approved Chorley Council Housing Strategy sets clear priorities to ensure that everyone living in the borough has access to the high quality, affordable and suitable accommodation and the action plan will ensure delivery against each priority area.
Concerns around partner services (LCC, NHS)	Comments noted concerns linked to funding for the hospital and also Lancashire County Council services such as street lights and potholes.	The Council will incorporate this feedback in its response to Lancashire County Council budget proposal and continue to work with our partners including the NHS to protect and improve services. Moreover, the public sector reform partnership provides a plan that works together with partners to integrate and reconfigure public services within Chorley to provide the best outcomes for residents.

APPENDIX C: SUMMARY OF COMMENTS – Question 2 (PCSOs Specific)

SUPPORT FOR STOPPING PSCO FUNDING AND INVESTING IN OTHER THINGS	
THEME	COMMENT
Alternative investment	I don't think Chorley should fund more PCSOs; the money could be invested on some more worthwhile investment.
Effectiveness and value for money	We don't see PCSOs in this area so no I don't personally feel an increase or continuation in a service we already don't seem to have is realistic
Police to fund	If the PCC is increasing taxes to fund additional officers, the borough council should invest this money elsewhere.

SUPPORT FOR CONTINUED FUNDING	
THEME	COMMENT
Perception of Increased safety	I think it is important to continue to make Chorley a safe place to live for all people and would like Chorley to continue its support of PCSOs.
Due to lack of police funding	I understand the idea, but there's a risk of it just being cheap policing. Policing should be responsible for dealing with crime. Community workers can observe and monitor and assist.
Visible presence	Please continue to fund PSCOs, they are reassuringly visible in the town