

Budget Consultation Process 2010/11

Agenda Item 5b

Portfolio Area: Efficiency and Resources
Report Presented by: Councillor Lager

Background Papers: Part 4 of the Council's Constitution - Budget and Policy Framework Procedures Rules
Corporate Implications: Please refer to table at end of report
Options: To accept or amend, as appropriate, the Budget Consultation process for 2010/11
Risks: Consultation on priorities and the budget with stakeholders is a key requirement of the Use of Resources assessment.

Executive Summary

To consider a proposed process and timetable for undertaking consultation on the Council's priorities, which will inform the proposed budget, council tax and housing rent levels for 2010/11 to be presented to Full Council In February 2010.

In summary the budget proposals will be informed by:

An analysis of the information received from the Place Survey;
Results from surveys on value for money and with the People's Panel;
Consultation with the LSP and town and parish councils;
Consultation with the Business Council and local committees;
Consultation with residents by means of Cabinet on the Streets events; and
Consultation with residents by means of questionnaires completed at workshops or on the internet (subject to an assessment from the exercise being run as a pilot with the Cabinet).

Decision

Members are asked to accept the proposed process and timetable as presented in the Appendix to this report.

The proposed Budget Consultation Process for 2010/11 is provided on the attached schedule and in most respects follows a similar approach to the last few years e.g. involvement of local committees, Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Business Council, Cabinet workshop, 'Cabinet on the Streets', etc.

In addition to specific consultation on priorities and budgets, the schedule includes reference to other consultation and research with residents which has been undertaken recently or is currently being planned:

- a) Place Survey – Analysis of results of survey, undertaken September to December 2008, that provides information on people's perceptions of their local area and local public services.
- b) Value for Money survey - Research to understand how residents make a value for money judgement about BDC and how they rate individual services in providing poor/ok/good value for money and how they arrive at those judgements. The research will also explore ways to communicate value for money.
- c) People's Panel First Survey - A first general questionnaire has been developed to assess resident's views about Braintree District Council as a whole including how residents perceive us, how well informed they feel, how they find us when they contact us, levels of satisfaction with the council as a whole and with some of the services we provide.

With regard to consultation on service options and the budget implications, an additional method is proposed with the use of Simalto modelling from Research for Today. The approach is designed to answer the questions councils actually have rather than merely provide interesting information.

A series of costed options for savings and improvements for specific services is presented in a grid (see attached list of example options used by other councils). The grid is used with members, residents, and possibly staff, to determine which are the preferred options from their perspective.

The Simalto exercise can be run using three methods:

1. Personal in-home face-to-face one-on-one interviews. Research for Today provide a representative quota sample of residents which they recruit in terms of age, gender and ward population. Current costs are: 200 interviews £13,500; 250 interviews £15,500;; 500 interviews £26,000. Timescale is typically 5 to 7 weeks from Simalto grid agreement and sign off.
2. Forums/workshops. Research for Today facilitate workshops for up to 50 respondents which last approximately one hour. Each respondent fills in his/her own grid independently. The facilitator walks the floor to discreetly check the grids are being completed correctly. Costs are: £5,250 for grid design, subsequent data entry, analysis, modelling and reporting; cost per workshop is £700 but if two held on one day then cost is £1,200.
3. Web based. Council provides respondents with a link to the Research for Today website which contains the council's grid. The cost is £5,500 for collecting the data, writing a report and a presentation of the results. If the web approach is used in conjunction with the in-home interviews or the forums the cost for the web element would be £1,750.

It is suggested that this be adopted as a pilot process for this year and officers work with the appropriate Cabinet Members to develop an options grid (up to a maximum of 25). The process is tested internally prior to any external exercise.

If following the initial pilot with Cabinet Members it is decided to undertake the exercise with residents then the suggested approach is for a combination of the Forum/workshop and web methods. Assuming four workshops on two days the cost would be £8,320. This could be funded from the budget for surveys under Corporate Policy.

Cabinet on the Streets. Opportunity to seek views from members of the public to budget proposals. This would be run, after the Cabinet meeting of 7th December, in December 2009 or January 2010.

Consultation on proposals will also be undertaken, as in previous years, with the LSP, town/parish councils and other key stakeholders in December 2009/January 2010.

Corporate Implications				
Financial:	Costs of proposed budget consultation will be contained within existing budgets			
Legal:	Consultation with representatives of Business ratepayers on the budget proposals is a requirement under the Local Government Finance Act 1992.			
Equalities & Diversity:	Arrangements to consult with and encourage the participation of all sections of the community will be provided in accordance with equality policies.			
Customer Impact:	Impact on customers will be considered as part of the service options put forward for consultation.			
Environment & Climate Change:	Impact on the environment and climate change, if appropriate, will be considered as part of the service options put forward for consultation.			
Consultation/Community Engagement:	Local Committees	X	Partners	X
	Public	X	Staff	X
Key Decision:	No			
Public/Private Report:	Public			
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