

Consultation Summary

1. This Annex sets out the key messages from Oxfordshire County Council's public consultation exercises carried out to support the Council's Service and Resource Planning.
2. The Cabinet's proposals for the 2011/12 budget and the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2011/12 to 2015/16 take into consideration the outcomes of the public consultation exercises summarised in this Annex. In addition, the views expressed in the Oxfordshire Voice Survey and Big Debate exercises have been actively used by Senior Managers to develop the proposals contained in the Directorate Business Strategies considered by Cabinet on 20 December 2010.

Oxfordshire Voice Budget Consultation

3. Between 30 July and 3 September 2010 members of Oxfordshire Voice, the Council's residents' panel took part in a survey looking at priorities for local public services. In total, 1,273 panel members completed this survey.
4. In summary, the services where panel members were most likely to say they would reduce spending if they had to were street lighting (41%), support to the local economy (38%), education and childcare for children under 5 (35%), Park and Ride sites (35%) and the provision of infrastructure in new housing developments (33%). Transport for children was also mentioned by a significant proportion (31%).
5. Home support for older people and supported living schemes was the local public service which panel members identified they would want to *protect* the most from spending cuts (37%) if possible. A significant proportion also said they would protect spending for social care assessments and support for children and families at risk (23%) and Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service (19%).
6. As regards financial management, three-quarters of the panel believed that making Oxfordshire's public services more efficient could help the county cut spending without damaging local services. The survey results also showed that 80% of panel members favour prioritising the groups most in need of support; over half (52%) of the panel supported introducing more charges for those who use services; and whilst most panel members (73%) were willing to reduce the number of staff managing services, panellists were much less enthusiastic about reducing the number of staff *delivering* services. Finally, panel members were more likely to favour voluntary organisations managing services on behalf of the Council (52%) over private organisations (29%).
7. A full copy of this report is published on Council's consultation calendar available at www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/consultation.

Oxfordshire Big Debate

8. Through the Big Debate the Council invited people across Oxfordshire to tell us which services they value most, which ones they think we could save money on and how we could do things differently. The Big Debate ran from 9 July to 4 October

2010 and over a thousand people took part through public meetings, special events such as the Children and Young People's Debate, stakeholder meetings, completing an online form, submitting letters and emails, and speaking with Council representatives.

9. At our Big Debate events the Leader of the Council, Cabinet Members, Chief Executive and Directors responded to questions and comments about a wide variety of issues ranging from our approach to making cuts, to supporting carers, to the importance of youth services, to contesting road schemes, volunteering and to offering to pay more Council Tax etc.
10. Through the Big Debate written feedback people told us that the services they particularly value included services for the most vulnerable, including older people, children and young people and those with disabilities; heritage services, including museums; libraries; Oxfordshire's road system and ensuring it is well maintained; and schools and education services. Some of the service areas where people thought we could make savings included adult learning; education, particularly specialist roles and programmes; heritage services; highways maintenance, projects and infrastructure; libraries; road safety; Trading Standards; transport services, including subsidised buses, concessionary transport and charging; street lighting.
11. Through the Big Debate written feedback people told us they considered there were savings to be made by the Council slimming down; reviewing expenses, pensions and salaries; being less bureaucratic and addressing wastefulness; using technology better, thinking differently about how services are provided; and joining- up with others. People also challenged the Council to think about how we communicate by stopping magazines, leaflets and magazines and communicating more online.
12. A summary of the Big Debate is published on the Council's available at www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/consultation. A copy of the detailed report has been circulated to councillors via political group leaders.

Comments on Overall Budget Proposals

13. Between 10 December 2010 and 10 January 2010, Oxfordshire County Council invited comments on its 2011-12 budget proposals. A web page was created with a link from the 'Have your Say' item on the homepage of the County Council's website. A feedback form and Freepost Service were put in place to receive comments.
14. Three organisations/residents took up this opportunity to have their say. Comments are summarised below:
 - Expressing concern and regret about the Community Development Team proposals (stakeholder organisation)
 - Suggesting the Council needs to raise Council Tax in line with inflation (resident)
 - Submitting comments on elements of the Environment and Economy Directorate and the Children, Young People and Families Directorate Business Strategies that are likely to impact on the natural environment in Oxfordshire namely proposals regarding reduction in grants to external bodies; countryside team; funding from the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre; and proposals that outdoor education centres move to become self-funding (stakeholder organisation)

Consultation on Individual Proposals

15. Where appropriate and as we are legally required to do, plans are now being developed for formal consultations with service users and/or stakeholders where significant changes to services are proposed as part of the Directorate Business Strategies. The outcomes of these consultations will be used alongside other evidence such as the Equality Impact Assessment to inform formal decision-making about how service level proposals will be implemented. The timing of these consultations will vary and will be published on the Council's online consultation calendar, www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/consultation.
16. In addition, the Council has already provided feedback channels for people to give comments at an early stage on the emerging proposals for Oxfordshire's libraries and services for young people. Up to the 7 January 2011, the Council has recorded 458 pieces of correspondence relating to the emerging proposals for the library service and 57 pieces of correspondence relating to the emerging proposals for services for young people.
17. Comments relating to the emerging proposals for the library service predominately state concern, opposition or asking the council to reconsider the proposed closure of individual libraries. There have also been questions asking for example, for detailed information on visitor numbers or for costs of running a library etc. and a small amount of contact from individuals or groups expressing an interest in community-led facilities in support of the Big Society.
18. Comments on the emerging proposals for services for young people are mainly asking the Council to reconsider the proposed closure of youth centres. There have also been queries from organisations about possibly sharing facilities, and a small amount interest in community led models, with people asking for detailed information about running costs and expressing an interesting in helping to run a local youth centre.
19. A record of the comments/queries received by 7 January 2011 on these two emerging proposals has been formally put on deposit for inspection by all councillors. Comments received at this early stage will be considered again alongside the outcomes of the formal consultation to inform Cabinet decision-making on the final proposals for these services later this year.
20. The expressions of interest in community-led facilities will be addressed through a new process currently being developed by the Council in support of the Big Society. Further information will be published on the County Council website by the end of January 2011.