

**REPORT ON THE 2010 BUDGET CONSULTATION**

*To:* **Cabinet**

*Date:* **26 January 2010**

*From:* **Corporate Director, Finance, Property and Performance**

*Electoral division(s):* **All**

*Forward Plan ref:* **Not applicable**

*Key decision:* **No**

*Purpose:* **To present to Cabinet the key results and analysis from this year's formal budget consultation with residents and other informal feedback from stakeholders.**

*Recommendation:* **That Cabinet takes account of the content of the report in considering and recommending the Integrated Plan to full Council (the following paper)**

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## **1.0 BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 The County Council's budget consultation process this year took a different approach to gaining the views of residents.
- 1.2 Instead of the quantitative data based-approach used in previous year, which produces broader results from a wider sample, this year a qualitative approach was used to gain a more in-depth analysis of the views of residents.
- 1.3 An approach known as SIMALTO budget modelling was used, a method which asks residents to choose their priorities and relative importance of these priorities from a choice of defined alternative levels of service.
- 1.4 The method acknowledged that the council may be in a position where large savings were necessary and asked residents what the least worst options might be. It also asked which service improvements, if any, should take priority. In addition it also if residents would be prepared to pay more council tax to minimise the impact on services from the economic down-turn.

## **2.0 METHODOLOGY, SAMPLE, ANALYSIS AND KEY FINDINGS**

### **2.1 Methodology**

- 2.2 A matrix with 13 different sections or 'attributes' was prepared, illustrating a range of services which may or may not have their level of service changed as part of budget proposals.
- 2.3 Residents allocated 'points' to the levels of service described on the grid, with each point being worth, in very approximate terms, £200,000 of council budget.
- 2.4 Residents were asked to carefully study the matrix, and then carry out a series of tasks, detailed in Appendix 1 p4.

### **2.5 Sample**

- 2.6 260 interviews were carried out, with roughly equal numbers being conducted in each of the county's five districts, with the interviews carried out in the homes of residents. Although drawn at random a representative sample was achieved. More detailed figures are available in Appendix 1 p5.

### **2.7 Analysis**

- 2.8 Top line findings offer a good view of residents priorities and wishes:

Services that the public would ideally not like to see reduced or reduced last:

- School support
- Adults remaining living in their own homes
- Roads and path maintenance
- Road improvements

Services that if reduced would cause the public less concern or displeasure:

- Special educational needs
- Climate change (carbon reduction)
- Residential home care costs charging increase
- Agency foster care not being tailored
- Voluntary sector grants halved

Services that the public would prefer to be enhanced, if funding was available:

- New school buildings either brick built/prefabricated
- Enabling older people to stay in their own homes longer
- Road and path maintenance

## 2.9 Key findings

- 2.10 The data provides some fairly clear messages about the most popular choices (eg road maintenance) and least popular choices (eg subsidised bus routes). Analysis in more depth is available in Appendix 1 p9.
- 2.11 Simalto modelling can be used to predict the best 'consensus' budget allocation from the resident's perspective; a clear picture of opinion emerges from the data (see table, Appendix 1, p13) in terms of how much more or less people would be prepared to pay or save for the subsequent improvement/reduction in service.
- 2.12 The data suggests that relatively few residents would opt for Council Tax cuts and lower service levels. Moreover, in principle an increase in Council Tax could lead to greater satisfaction if the public understood that the increase would preserve or improve specific services. In the survey, 33% of interviewees chose as their preferred option a -£6m budget with a £15 increase in Council Tax, while 36% chose a -£3m budget with a £30 increase in Council Tax. It is important to note that these choices were made by interviewees who were well informed following the Simalto exercise. Notably, 40% of people in Fenland chose the £15 increase in Council Tax option. (Appendix 1, p11 and p17).
- 2.13 Some results give a good indication of public views. For example, in the survey there is considerable support for 'helping adults to remain living in their own home' where possible. Seventy two percent of respondents prioritise keeping the level of support at current levels rather than by lowering it by 10%. Higher percentages still would prefer lowering the support by as little as possible. A large 83% would prefer a 10% reduction over a 20% reduction and 87% would prefer a 20% reduction over a 30% reduction. (Appendix 1 p15).
- 2.14 Some results are clear in themselves, but leave the Council with difficult decisions. For example, 58% of residents prioritised keeping the level of youth work and careers advice 'as now' (provided to all young people), but this means that 42% would be prepared to see youth work being more targeted only at areas such as those with anti-social behaviour issues. (Appendix p15).

- 2.15 The example of ‘helping adults to remain living in their own home’ demonstrates the depth of information that Simalto provides.
- 2.16 Further informal consultation activity
- 2.17 The council has also informally consulted (i.e. without research or statistical vigour) with wider groups on its budget proposals; briefing and consultation activity has been carried out or is ongoing with the voluntary sector, the business community, younger people and with the council’s staff.
- 2.18 The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Association of Local Councils (CPALC) were also informally consulted and highlighted the lack of a fair Government grant to Cambridgeshire County Council, the importance of consulting stakeholders in respect of changes to services, and the fact that parish councils had successfully taken on some services (eg parish paths) without the need for extra funding and that this option should be explored with other services.
- 2.19 The Council’s employees were engaged via an online suggestion scheme, which encouraged them to put forward ideas for more efficient ways of working.
- 2.20 Around 200 employees submitted suggestions for savings. Many of the proposals put forward were along similar themes and lines.
- 2.21 Staff taking responsibility for their own actions was a strong theme. Switching off lights, PCs, electrical appliances, reducing printing and paper use.
- 2.22 Travel was another theme many staff contributed ideas on, including using audio conferencing to reduce business mileage, care sharing, and charging for car parking at Shire Hall to encourage public transport use and generate income.
- 2.23 Ideas for reducing the costs and generating the maximum return from fixed assets like property and equipment was mentioned by several employees. Reducing the Council’s consultancy spend was another recurring theme.

### **3.0 SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS**

- 3.1 Cabinet should take account of the results of the formal and informal consultation when considering the Integrated Plan and its supporting Budget for which implications details have been provided in report 5 (1).

<b>Source Documents</b>	<b>Location</b>
Cambridgeshire County Council SIMALTO budget consultation report, December 2009	Research Group, Room 323, Shire Hall, Cambridge