

TITLE	Participatory Budget Exercise for the 2016/17 Budget
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on 12 July 2016
WARD	All
DIRECTOR	Graham Ebers, Director of Finance and Resources
LEAD MEMBER	Anthony Pollock, Lead Member for Economic Development and Finance

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

To enable the community to engage with the financial challenges faced by the Council over the coming years and attain views on potential areas for budget savings.

RECOMMENDATION

The Committee is requested to consider the report and comment on the Participatory Budget Exercise for the 2016/17 Budget.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

Wokingham Borough Council asked residents to have their say on the Council's budget at a series of public drop-in sessions during October 2015. An initial pilot event was held with Members which was followed by five public meetings.

The intention of the sessions was to get a better understanding of the priorities of those who live, work or do business in the borough and to allow a discussion with the public to take place where they thought the council could make future savings.

The events took the form of a brief presentation (attached) explaining the financial context the Council was facing, usually introduced by the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive, followed by exhibition style discussions. Borough residents were encouraged to walk around each service and ask questions and give their views on a number of proposed saving options.

The drop-in sessions took place at:

- The Salvation Army Hall, Chalfont Close, Lower Earley
- St Crispin's School, London Road, Wokingham
- Charvil Village Hall, The Hawthorns, off Park Lane, Charvil
- Finchampstead Memorial Hall, The Village, Finchampstead
- The Oakwood Centre, Headley Road, Woodley

Events were advertised on the Council's website, local press (Wokingham Paper and Woodley Chronicle) as well as social media.

Attendees heard about the council's budget challenges and had the opportunity to discuss its priorities in terms of what local people believe are the most important and least important areas that the council should focus its limited resources on.

Those responses were collated and then published on the Wokingham Borough Council's website.

The conversations were generally considered to be very useful. They helped those attending attain a better understanding of the challenges faced by the Council and consequences of making particular decisions. They also provided insight into the desirability or otherwise of proposed budget savings. Alternative options for change were also captured.

Although not intended to be a consultation exercise, it is possible to cross reference areas of strong opinion with decisions made in the 2016/17 budget. It is however important to stress that the events were primarily intended to engage and discuss with the public, rather than directly determine budget decisions. A very small proportion of the total population of the borough attended and the comments (attached) should be considered in this context.

Although the attendance was low the exercise was generally considered to be successful for a first run. There is an intention to undertake a similar exercise for the 2017/18 budget setting process later in 2016. Lessons have been learned for the next round of events. This includes choice of venue, publicity (e.g. seeking greater radio exposure) and greater use of online interaction.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of the austerity measures implemented by the Government and subsequent reductions to public sector funding. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions in excess of £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	Nil	Nil	N/A
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	Nil	Nil	N/A
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	Nil	Nil	N/A

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

Cross-Council Implications (how does this decision impact on other Council services, including property and priorities?)

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2

Not applicable

List of Background Papers

<http://www.wokingham.gov.uk/news-and-consultation/news-and-events/news-from-december-2015/budget-conversation-your-comments-published/>

Participatory Budgeting presentation (PDF).

Wokingham Paper – 25th September 2015

Woodley Chronicle – 24th September 2015

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