

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

16 October 2017

Budget Engagement Process for 2018/19 and 2019/2020

Objectives

- To increase awareness of WBC's financial position, including need for significant savings in 2019/20
- To set out how residents will be able to influence budget decisions and create a two-stage two-year budget engagement plan in preparation for the difficult budget decisions WBC will need to make in the 2019/20 financial year.

Background

- In 2015, WBC held five budget engagement sessions across the borough to raise awareness of WBC's difficult financial position and get residents' views on a series of budget proposals. Building on this in 2016, WBC held engagement sessions across the borough asking residents their views on how the authority should prioritise its spending, attended a number of meetings and events across the borough to gather views from a wider cross section of the borough including youth, minority and town and parish councils, and hosted an online survey, promoted via social media.
- These engagement events provoked interesting and useful conversations and provided a valuable opportunity for senior officers to join councillors in hearing residents' views

Proposal: Two-year budget engagement process

In order to build on the engagement events held in previous years events, it is proposed to have a two-year process that will build a wider budget engagement process by involving more members of the public and targeting a wider demographic range . There are essentially two approaches.

- In year one, this will involve consulting on broad priorities and to use the feedback received as a guide to more detailed budget decisions
- In year two, this will involve consulting at a more detailed level where there is a question over actual lines of expenditure

The budget engagement and communications plan below focusses on priority setting in year one (details for year two will be informed by findings for year one and the council's future financial position).

FY 2018 – 2019 PRIORITY SETTING

October 30 to December 15: Engagement on stakeholders' and residents' priorities

Target audiences

- All borough residents (including young people)
- Ward members
- Town and Parish Councils
- Community and Voluntary Sector
- Business sector (LEP, major businesses and SME)
- Other statutory service providers (Police, Fire, Clinical Commissioning Group etc)

Objectives:

- Increase people's understanding of the reality of WBC's funding position, including risk of negative revenue support grant
- Get feedback on residents' priorities to guide more detailed budget decisions
- Build database of people willing to join community voice panel (Viewpoint)

Methods:

- Communications plan to incorporate: Borough News, media releases, social media, attendance at community venues , dedicated webpages, direct communication with stakeholders (see below for details)
- Online resident survey designed to identify:
 - what services residents consider most important
 - what services most contribute to quality of life
 - Invite sign-up for Viewpoint
- Establish a Community Panel (Viewpoint)with representatives from cross section of residents that could be a 'sounding board' for ongoing budget discussions
- Launch budget engagement survey at same time as Transport and Highways Survey and promote jointly (including directing those participating in one to take part in the other)
- Work with Schools Federation to ensure young people's involvement

Communications Action Plan

Activity	Outcome	Date
Notification and hard copies distributed to members for distribution	Members have the opportunity to promote participation	Pre-launch
Hard copies of survey distributed to libraries, sports and community centres, town & parish councils	Residents without access to internet are able to take part in survey	Pre-launch
Social media to promote coming consultation	Wider group of residents are aware of consultation	Pre-launch
SDL newsletters: notify all those on distribution list of consultation launch	Direct communication to residents who have expressed an interest in major development in the borough	Pre-launch
Notification to community and voluntary groups via Inform Wokingham	Community and Voluntary Groups are aware of the consultation and	Pre-launch
Notification and hard copies sent to community development workers for distribution	Residents in the borough's more deprived areas are encouraged to take part	Pre-launch
Notification sent to schools and to PTA / PA and school governors	Wider group of residents are aware of consultation	Pre-launch
Media release to announce launch Budget Consultation	Residents are aware of consultation and how to take part	Pre-launch
Advertising in local media	Residents are aware of consultation and how to take part	To run Nov 2
Presence at SDL Community Forums: Arborfield Community Forum and North Wokingham Community Forum take place during consultation period	Opportunity to engage with involved residents	Oct 31 and Nov 15
Presence at Wokingham Winter Carnival and Woodley Winter Extravaganza	Opportunity to direct engage with significant number or residents	Nov 25 and Nov 26
Social media updates throughout consultation providing link to web survey but not inviting online comments	Residents are encouraged to take part in online survey	Oct 30 and forward
Borough News article or pull-out (hard copy of consultation could be inserted if budget and print deadlines permit)	Wider group of residents are aware of consultation (potentially almost all households receive copy of survey)	Dec 4 to 15

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