

INVERCLYDE COUNCIL CITIZENS' PANEL NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2015

Dear Panel Member

Welcome to the latest Citizens' Panel newsletter.

We were pleased with the response to the survey issued in Winter 2014. 63% of you completed a questionnaire and provided valuable feedback that assisted the Council to make decisions regarding its Budget for 2016/17. To find out more about the Council's Budget for 2016/17, visit <https://www.inverclyde.gov.uk/committees/details/1771/> (agenda items 03 and 03a).

At this link, you will find the report which was considered by Inverclyde Council's Elected Members, as well as a budget proposals booklet which includes a wide range of information covering the budget proposals, the feedback from all methods used for consultation on the budget and the equality impact assessments of the budget proposals.

As well as your responses to the Citizens' Panel questionnaire, the Council has considered feedback from the Budget Simulator, consultation events, focus groups and e-mails to the 'Have your Say' e-mail address.

Topics covered in the Winter 2014 questionnaire were:

- *Council services where spending should be reduced or protected*
- *budget saving options*
- *satisfaction with Council services*
- *participation in sport and leisure activities*
- *charging for Council services*
- *the Council as a Service Provider*
- *access to Council buildings*
- *the role of carers.*

The Spring 2015 survey covers a variety of issues including Child Protection, Alcohol, Mental Health and Stigma, Inverclyde Council's Website and Satisfaction with Council Services. We look forward to receiving your completed questionnaire.



This newsletter outlines the key results from the Winter 2014 survey and what we are doing in response to the feedback you provided.

The main focus of the Winter 2014 survey was the Council's Budget for 2016/17. Given the scale and pace of the savings the Council will be required to make, we asked your opinion on a number of areas around the budget-setting process for the period 2016/17.

1. Inverclyde Council - Services

We asked for your views on the five services you think the Council should reduce spending on. The top five services that you chose to reduce spending on are:

Alcohol services	36%
Drugs services	34%
McLean Museum and Art Gallery	26%
Develop and support businesses	24%
Welfare benefits/money advice	23%

The main reasons you gave for reducing spending on alcohol and drugs service were that you thought support was already provided by other agencies and that these are services which benefit only a minority of local people. Panel members also suggested that it is the role of the NHS and other agencies - rather than the Council - to assist people who have problems with alcohol and drugs. It was also felt by many that such problems are the result of personal choice.

What are we doing with your feedback?

We took the responses of Citizens' Panel members into account when we decided to reduce alcohol counselling services in Inverclyde. We also plan to conduct a review of the service delivery model of alcohol and drugs services. A review of the services provided by the Young Persons' Alcohol Team School Worker will be prepared for consideration by The Members' Budget Working Group.

We then asked you what Council services you would choose to **protect or invest in**. The top five services that you chose to protect or invest in are:

Care for older people	56%
Care for children and young people	35%
Care for people with a disability	35%
Repairs to roads and footpaths	26%
Schools - primary	24%

The reasons people would choose to protect or invest in care for older people, children and young people and people with a disability were that such frontline services provided a social good and engaged with vulnerable members of the public. In addition to this, people did not want to see a reduction in services that would preserve a good local environment such as roads maintenance.

What are we doing with your feedback?

The Elected Members have taken account of, and echo, the desire to protect services for vulnerable people in their budget decision processes.

Roads maintenance is a priority for the Council. We have prepared and implemented an asset investment strategy and recent investment in roads has allowed us to carry out more preventative or resurfacing work rather than solely responding to emergency pothole repairs or patches to roads. We have allocated enhanced funding of £4,600,000 to our Roads Asset Management Plan for both 2016/17 and 2017/18.

2. Charging for Council services

95% of respondents said they accepted the principle of charging for Council services to either avoid reductions in service or to improve the level of service provided.

Panel members said the top five Council services that we should **charge less** for are:

Respite charges for older people and other adults	43%
Waste uplifts from charities	35%
Cremation (adult)	20%
Home helps subject to financial assessment	20%
Music tuition in secondary schools	20%

The top five services that respondents said **charges should remain the same** for are:

Home helps subject to financial assessment	68%
Burial (adult)	67%
School meals and day care meals	67%
Cremation (adult)	66%
Musical instruments in secondary schools	66%

When asked about **increasing charges** for Council services, Panel members opted for the following five services:

Library overdue book/cd	71%
Lost/replacement library tickets	64%
Golf - adult per round	62%
Library cd hire	62%
Animal boarding licence for fewer than 4 animals	61%

We then asked your views on whether we should **introduce charging** for a number of Council services that people do not currently pay for. The five services that most Panel members chose were:

Winter maintenance service for private businesses	78%
Advertising and events sponsorship	77%
Library requests	68%
Replacement or additional black bins	64%
Use of computers in libraries	58%

The five **least popular services** that people thought the Council should **introduce charges** for were:

Day care	31%
Musical instruments in primary schools	33%
Musical tuition in primary schools	33%
Swimming for under 16 year olds	34%
Community alarms	35%

What are we doing with your feedback?

More than three quarters of Panel members said the Council should introduce charging for advertising and events sponsorship. We have therefore made plans to generate income of £20,000 from advertising and the sponsorship of events during 2016/17. The Council also plans to prepare a report on swimming for under 16 year olds and swimming lessons for Primary 6 pupils. The Council will continue to review its charging policies and will take your feedback into account during this review process.

3. Budget saving options

The next section of the questionnaire asked for Panel members' views on budget saving options. The Council identified a range of specific proposals that could assist it to make the required budget savings. Panel members were asked to consider the options and indicate how acceptable or otherwise these would be.

The top five suggestions that respondents felt are acceptable options are:

Maximise the collection of Council Tax and pursue all non-payment	84%
Review the Council's policy in respect of Council Tax liability for long term empty properties	76%
Develop community trusts to maintain flower beds and other landscaped areas	65%
Review all non-teaching staff in schools, moving those not on term time to term time contracts	52%
Investigate shared headships between nurseries and primary schools	48%

What are we doing with your feedback?

The Council collected 94.51% of its income due from Council Tax in the financial year 2013/14 and continues to look at ways of increasing income from current and prior years' Council Tax charges.

Additionally, given that more than three quarters of Citizens' Panel members said the Council should review its policy regarding the Council Tax liability for properties which are empty on a long term basis, we have decided to conduct a review of this policy in 2016/17.

4. Satisfaction with Council services

Eighty-five percent of Panel members said they are either fairly or very satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live. A similar number (87%) said they were either fairly or very satisfied with Council services while just over three quarters (78%) of respondents thought the services provided by the Council were either fairly or very good value for money.

Panel members were then asked about the following statement: 'By working together, local people can influence decisions that affect the local area'; 74% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they could influence decisions that affect their local area.

Just under half (48%) of respondents said they were very or fairly satisfied with the way Inverclyde Council takes residents' views into account when making decisions affecting the local area; a similar number (47%) agreed or strongly agreed that they could influence decisions that affect the local area.

What are we doing with your feedback?

It is pleasing to note that satisfaction with Inverclyde as a place to live has increased since the last time Panel members were asked this question. Over time this rate has increased from 72% in 2011, to 85% in 2014. In 2014, the Council invested £1 million to help reverse the declining population in Inverclyde, and with partners has been working to encourage more people to move to the area which has suffered population decline over a long period. It is encouraging that there has been an increase in the number of people who are satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live.

In terms of influencing decisions that affect their local area, 74% of Panel members felt they had a say in what happens in Inverclyde; this is an increase of 9% since the Panel was last asked the question in 2012.

The percentage of people who are fairly or very satisfied with Council services has increased by 25% since 2012. The results of Citizens' Panel surveys are shared with Council Services to help them identify areas for improvement. This practice may have helped contribute to the improvement in satisfaction levels with Council Services.

There has also been a substantial increase in the percentage of people who think the services provided by the Council are good value for money, up from 54% in 2012 to 88% in 2014.

The Council is keen that residents feel they have the opportunity to have their say in the decisions that affect them; the Citizens' Panel is one way that local people can provide their opinions. The percentage of respondents who are satisfied with the way the Council takes residents' views into account when making decisions that affect the area has increased to 48% from 34% in 2012.

5. Access to Council buildings

Just under half (41%) of respondents said they had visited the main Council buildings within the last 12 months. Among those respondents that stated they had visited the main Council buildings, 88% said that it was either fairly or very easy to access them.

What are we doing with your feedback?

The last time these questions were included in a Citizens' Panel survey was in 2012 when the figures were 29% and 79% respectively. The Council's office modernisation/rationalisation programme has resulted in improved accommodation and, as expected, we have seen performance improve. We will continue to improve our buildings over the next few years.

6. Sport and leisure

Panel members were asked about their participation in sport and leisure activities. Just over half (51%) of respondents said they regularly participate in any kind of sport or leisure activity (i.e. at least once a week). In contrast to this, however, just over a third (34%) of respondents do not regularly participate in any kind of sport or leisure activity.

What are we doing with your feedback?

An *Inverclyde Sports Framework* has been developed and a steering group was established to oversee the implementation of the Framework, the vision of which is to inspire a sporting way of life for all in Inverclyde.

7. Carers

Forty-one percent of respondents said they look after, or give help or support to family members, friends, neighbours or others because of long term physical or mental ill health or disability or problems related to old age. Just over half (53%) of respondents felt they received enough support in their role as a carer.

What are we doing with your feedback?

The Inverclyde Carers' Centre offers information, advice and support to individual carers at a number of locations including Inverclyde Royal Hospital and community venues, as well as at the Centre itself. With additional funding from the Inverclyde Community Health and Care Partnership, the Centre provides a range of relaxation therapies and counselling, together with short breaks for carers and their families. The Centre can be contacted on ☎ 01475 735180.