

**Report To: Policy and Resources Committee**

**Date: 5 February 2013**

**Report By: Corporate Director,  
Education, Communities and  
Organisational Development**

**Report No: PRO79/13/AH/LF**

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**Subject: Consultation on the Budget**

## **1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Elected Members with the results from consultation about the budget that carried out with the Citizens' Panel, Community Councils and responses from an online questionnaire that was hosted on the Council's web site.

## **2.0 SUMMARY**

2.1 A number of different consultation methods were deployed in December 2012 in order to consult with members of the public over the setting of the Council's budget for 2013-16. Members of the Citizens' Panel were sent a postal questionnaire and the same questionnaire was also published on the Council's website in order to obtain feedback from members of the public. In addition, a budget briefing session was held with Community Councils on the 17<sup>th</sup> of December 2012.

2.2 A total of 625 Panel members completed and returned a questionnaire. This is a response rate of 63% which is very good for this type of consultation. In addition, a total of 117 members of the public completed the questionnaire on the Council's website.

2.3 The top 5 services that people said they would choose to protect / invest in were care for older people, repairs to roads and footpaths, care for people with a disability, care for children and young people and Primary Schools.

2.4 There were a number of key themes that emerged from the briefing session with Community Councils. With regard to services where spending could be reduced, the Community Warden Service and staffing within Planning were the only suggestions made. Services for vulnerable people and education were the two services that Community Councils thought should be protected.

2.5 It was suggested that we need to encourage people to recycle more in order to reduce the amount of money spent on landfill tax. Encouraging people to take part in food waste recycling, especially in tenement properties, was highlighted as a particular issue that we need to address.

## **3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

3.1 It is recommended that Committee:

- a. Note the content of this report.
- b. Use the feedback to inform the setting of the Council's 2013-16 budget.
- c. Consider how to develop the process for budget consultation in future years.

**Albert Henderson  
Corporate Director  
Education, Communities and Organisational Development**

## 4.0 CITIZENS' PANEL AND WEB SITE RESULTS

4.1 A postal questionnaire was issued to all 1000 members of the Citizens' Panel in December 2012. The purpose of the questionnaire was to obtain the views of members of the Panel on:

- Council Services where spending should be reduced
- Council services that should be protected
- The principle of charging for services
- Satisfaction with Council Services

A total of 625 Panel members completed and returned a questionnaire. This is a response rate of 63% which is very good for this type of consultation.

4.2 The questionnaire was also published on the Council's web site to obtain feedback from members of the public and a total of 117 responses were received.

### 4.3 Council Services – Reduce Spending

Respondents were asked to select up to 5 services that they would choose if they had to reduce spending in some services. The top 10 services that respondents would choose to reduce spending are:

|                                   |     |
|-----------------------------------|-----|
| • Drugs Services                  | 41% |
| • Alcohol Services                | 32% |
| • Dog Wardens & Pest Control      | 22% |
| • Develop and Support Businesses  | 21% |
| • Planning and Building Standards | 21% |
| • McLean Museum and Art Gallery   | 20% |
| • Welfare benefits / Money Advice | 20% |
| • Anti-Social Behaviour Services  | 20% |
| • Halls and Community Centres     | 19% |
| • School Transport                | 19% |

The main reasons that people gave for reducing spending on alcohol and drugs services were as follows:

- It is the responsibility of the NHS or the Police
- Money could be spent on other Council Services
- Issues are self inflicted / personal choice
- A luxury that can no longer be afforded

This question asked members of the Panel to prioritise services provided by the Council and members of the public tend to view drugs and alcohol services as supporting people who have brought these issues on themselves. Therefore, they do not see it as a deserving cause when compared with care for older people, people with a disability or children and young people. It is when compared with these types of services that members of the public see drugs and alcohol as less important.

If members of the Panel had been asked to indicate what they see as being the key issues in Inverclyde that the Council needs to tackle, then alcohol and drugs would have been fairly high up on the list of priorities. For example, in the Spring 2012 survey, 87% of respondents said that they believed excessive alcohol consumption is a particular problem in Inverclyde.

### 4.4 Council Services – Protect/Invest

Respondents were then asked to select up to 5 services that they would choose to

protect/invest in. The top 10 services that respondents would choose to protect are:

- Care for older people 45%
- Repairs to roads and footpaths 35%
- Care for people with a disability 29%
- Care for children and young people 25%
- Schools – Primary 22%
- Anti-Social Behaviour Services 19%
- Employment Initiatives 19%
- Flooding 18%
- Snow clearing / gritting 18%
- Community Safety / Crime Prevention 17%

#### 4.5 Charges for Services

93% of respondents said that they accepted the principle of charges to either avoid reductions in service or to improve the level of service provided.

Respondents indicated that the top 5 services they feel that the Council should charge less for are:

- Music Tuition in Secondary Schools 28%
- Bulk Uplift 26%
- Cremation (Adult) 26%
- Musical Instruments in Secondary Schools 25%
- Burial (Adult) 23%

In contrast, the top 5 services that people thought the Council should increase charges for are:

- Library Overdue Book/ CD 66%
- Library CD Hire 59%
- Lost /Replacement Library Tickets 55%
- Golf – adult per round 54%
- Animal Boarding Licence for fewer than 4 animals 53%

#### 4.6 Introduction of Charges

Respondents were asked to look at a list of services that the Council does not currently charge for and say whether or not they think charges should be introduced. The top 5 services that people think charges should be introduced for are:

- Library Requests 72%
- Use of computers in Libraries 60%
- Lunch Clubs 56%
- School Transport 51%
- Breakfast Clubs 50%

In contrast to this, the services which the least number of people thought that charges should be introduced for are:

- Swimming for under 16 year olds 24%
- Day Care 29%
- Community Alarms 31%
- Under 16 Football Pitch Hire 35%
- Musical tuition in Primary Schools 35%

In general, respondents living in the worst 15% of datazones are more inclined to state that the Council should not introduce charges for a variety of services than those people living in

the rest of Inverclyde. The exceptions to that are charges for musical instruments in Primary Schools and charges for parking.

#### 4.7 'Getting it Right for Every Child, Citizen and Community'

The Council's vision is 'Getting it Right for Every Child, Citizen and Community' and in order to achieve this we want every child, citizen and community to be safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected and responsible and included.

Respondents were asked to make suggestions about what would help to make them safer, healthier, achieving, nurtured, active, respected and responsible and included.

**Safer** – more Police, better street lighting, address anti-social behaviour and on street parking.

**Healthier** – better access to the NHS, encourage people to exercise, reduce prices at leisure facilities.

**Achieving** - Better secondary education, support for primary children who fall behind, facilities to help young people who leave school without qualifications.

**Nurtured** - More community events, activities for children to keep them off the streets and more caring services for elderly people.

**Active** - Longer opening hours for sports facilities and swimming pools, reduce the cost of leisure and sports facilities, improved information regarding facilities and activities.

**Respected and Responsible** – consult with local residents, encourage community spirit and participation and address crime and anti social behaviour.

**Included** - More community events, opportunities to provide views and opinions to the Council and empower and support local people to help themselves.

#### 4.8 Satisfaction with Council Services

The services that people are most satisfied with are:

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| • Libraries, McLean Museum and Art Gallery | 87% |
| • Leisure and sports facilities            | 83% |
| • Recycling Services                       | 81% |
| • Refuse Collection                        | 79% |
| • Education / Schools                      | 76% |
| • Social Care Services                     | 74% |
| • Parks and open spaces                    | 70% |

The services with the highest levels of dissatisfaction are:

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| • Flooding  | 73% |
| • Maintenance of roads and footpaths              | 57% |
| • Litter and street sweeping                      | 37% |
| • Environmental health                            | 33% |
| • Care for vulnerable people                      | 32% |
| • Community safety/anti-social behaviour services | 32% |
| • Snow clearing/gritting                          | 31% |

#### 4.9 Additional information on the results from the Citizens' Panel and online survey is available if

any Committee members would like more detail.

## **5.0 COMMUNITY COUNCIL BRIEFING**

5.1 A briefing session on the budget was held with Community Councils on the 17<sup>th</sup> of December 2012. A presentation was given by Alan Puckrin, the Council's Chief Financial Officer and this was followed by a question and answer session and general discussion.

5.2 The Community Councils used the briefing session to ask questions relating to the Council's budget. Limited feedback was obtained on what services they think should be protected and what services they think should be cut. The feedback from the briefing session that can be used to inform the budget is outlined in the following paragraphs.

### **5.3 Council Services – Reduce Spending**

- Several Community Councils suggested that the Community Warden Service could be cut. The members who raised this issue said that the Community Wardens should either be given more power or the Council should consider stopping the service. Residents of one Community Council advised that they have had to phone the Police because the Community Wardens are unable to deal with the issues. One Community Council suggested that the public need to be educated about when they should go to the Community Wardens and when they should contact the police.
- One Community Council suggested that due to the streamlining of planning processes efficiencies could be made by reducing the number of staff within Planning.

### **5.4 Council Services – Protect /Invest**

Only two suggestions were made regarding services that should be protected.

- Services for vulnerable people
- Education

### **5.5 Charges for Services**

One Community Council said that people need to be in work to be able to pay extra for services. Given the level of deprivation that exists in Inverclyde and the impact of welfare reform, it is difficult to predict whether people would be able to pay extra for services. It was suggested that wider consultation with all members of Community Councils could be carried out in order to provide a better answer to this question.

### **5.6 Suggestions on Saving Money**

An extensive discussion took place regarding improving recycling in order to reduce the amount of money spent on landfill tax.

- Concerns were raised about recycling, particularly food waste recycling in tenement properties. It was suggested that we need to investigate the reasons why tenement properties are not taking part in food waste recycling.
- Another suggestion was that we need to raise awareness amongst residents that it costs the Council more in landfill tax if they do not recycle. If members of the public were aware of this then it may help to increase participation in recycling.
- A discussion took place over whether blue bin collection should be increased to every week and black bin collection reduced to once a month. Several Community Councils expressed concern if black bins were only emptied once a month.

## 5.7 Other Issues that emerged

- One Community Council highlighted that free swimming is currently being abused by people who live out with Inverclyde. It was suggested that proof of residency should be introduced in order to stop this as children are only currently asked what school they attend.
- Everyone who attended the briefing session welcomed the opportunity to take part in consultation over the budget and said that they hoped we would build on it in the future. It was also suggested that we might want to consider consulting with Community Councils on specific themes such as the new schools and the CHCP. Community Councils are not aware of the CHCP and what it is responsible for.

## 6.0 NEXT STEPS

- 6.1 This was the first time that the Council has undertaken this type of consultation on the budget and it would be worthwhile carrying out a review of how we go about consulting members of the public on the budget in the future. There are a range of different consultation methods that can be used and it might be worth using different methods in the future that will provide us with more informed feedback. It may also be worthwhile asking residents what they think the priorities should be for the Council and what issues they are most concerned about.

## 7.0 IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Finance  
None

7.2 Personnel  
None

7.3 Legal  
None

7.4 Equality and Diversity  
None

## 8.0 CONSULTATION

- 8.1 Local residents, members of the Citizens' Panel and Community Councils were all included in the consultation on the budget.

## 9.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

9.1 None