

A fair budget for a fairer city

Let's talk Newcastle

Phase 3 report

Feedback on the budget consultation

**let's talk
Newcastle**

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1. Introduction

This report presents a summary of findings from phase 3 of the let's talk Newcastle budget consultation. This follows on from the Council Pound and thematic events which took place in 2011. It describes our key findings and the approach we have taken to engaging residents and key stakeholders in the budget consultation, ensuring that everyone had a chance to have their say. It contains:

- Level of response and people's views on the consultation process
- Key findings by directorate
- What people have told us
- What our Scrutiny Committees have told us
- Who we have spoken to
- How we have engaged with residents
- Background – phases 1 and 2
- Principles of let's talk Newcastle.

Formal consultation began when the draft budget was published on 29 November. It closed on 15 February 2012 when the papers were published for the Cabinet meeting where it considered its post-consultation budget on 22 February 2012. Effectively this was a three month consultation period.

The views expressed here by residents and key stakeholders should be considered alongside work done within directorates on the possible equalities impacts of these proposals.

2. Key findings

Key findings from what people told us for each directorate are set out below. All feedback has been considered by each directorate in order for them to review the proposals and the Equality Impact and Needs Assessments (EINA) completed on them. Updated EINAs have been published alongside the updated version of the 'A Fair Budget for a Fairer City' report. Section 8 of the 'A Fair Budget for a Fairer City' report outlines how feedback has informed changes to some proposals.

2.1 General response

Almost 4,000 people have attended a range of consultation events (see 'How we have engaged with residents' on page 17 for details), sent us their comments or feedback (for example, via let's talk Newcastle online or sent us an email or letter), responded through membership of an organisation, such as Newcastle LINK or the Newcastle Council for Voluntary Service (NCVS), or signed a petition relating to the proposals. It is not possible to calculate an exact total as not everyone who attended an event chose to give feedback and some people may have participated by more than one route.

Proposals have been discussed at all four Scrutiny Committees: Service Delivery, Policy, Wellbeing and Health, and Public Services. See 'What Scrutiny Committees have told us' on page 13 for a summary of the key points from these discussions.

It is noticeable that where we have received the most comments on proposals (such as around the proposals for changes to the warden service, the mobile library service, and leisure facilities) these have nearly always been on issues relating to the stopping of, or substantial change to, an existing service. Residents have generally not engaged with us on the topic of 'the budget as a whole.'

Prior to phase 3 of the budget consultation the context for public sector spending cuts had been clearly established both nationally and locally. The public had become increasingly conditioned to expect proposals for further cuts. Also, the budget proposals had been shaped by an extensive public consultation exercise which drew over 4,000 responses, so they are likely to reflect public priorities and expectations.

Comments on the consultation process have been quite varied. One organisation commented on the council's commitment to consulting with residents and stakeholders, seeing the budget proposals document as evidence of this commitment. Some people felt that there was not enough detail in the information provided while others felt there was just enough, or even too much. Some people were very happy with the approach we have taken and others have given us ideas for how we can improve this. These will be taken into consideration when we develop our approach for consultation on our next budget.

2.2 Adult and Culture Services

Approximately **2,460 people and organisations** have had their say on these proposals, either by sending individual feedback (through letters, let's talk Newcastle online, etc), signing a petition or by attending an event where the proposals were discussed.

Groups and organisations who took part included NCVS, the Disability Equality Group, NETS(work) (the North East Third Sector learning disability service provider network) the Newcastle Champions (for people with learning disabilities), Voluntary Sector Advisory Group (VOLSAG), Social Inclusion and Recovery Consortium (SIRC) and the Learning Disability Partnership Board. Members of VOLSAG and SIRC include, among others, Age UK, the Angelou Centre, Children North East, Crisis Skylight and Launchpad.

A key theme throughout the consultation has been the concern about the cumulative effects of cuts or changes to council services (such as Meals at Home and the warden service) upon the welfare of **older people** and other vulnerable groups such as homeless people. This view was particularly expressed by the Elders Council and several voluntary sector organisations. This is consistent with earlier stages of the budget consultation, such as the Council Pound event, where consultees indicated that adult social care services should be one of the council's top priorities. At one event suggestions were made that the council should consider raising taxes instead to pay for these services.

Consultees – both individuals and organisations – have specifically expressed a fear that changes to council services would lead to **less human contact** for older and disabled people through cuts to the **mobile library** service and changing the **warden service** in our sheltered housing. This was also mentioned in relation to changes to leisure facilities run by the Environment and Regeneration directorate, for example the proposal to close the Eldon Leisure indoor bowling green.

We received some more **general comments** from individuals, organisations and people attending consultation events. Topics included working adults not using libraries very much or at all and a question about the value for money of spending money on cultural events and festivals.

Mental Health North East (MHNE) contacted us to express a general concern about the cumulative impact of cuts in local government and the NHS. Other voluntary sector organisations raised concerns about the impact on people needing mental health services and the personalisation agenda. They also reaffirmed the importance of a joined-up working approach to addressing these issues. NETS(work) expressed a concern that proposals will impact disproportionately on people with learning disabilities and that service reductions in the short-term could lead to people needing more services and support in the long-term. Newcastle LINK (Local Involvement Network) said that they would prefer to see increased charges for services rather than cuts to services.

Many other people and organisations received **invitations** to take part in events and information about the proposals. For example, about 2,000 people were sent an invitation to attend a Newcastle LINK event, 127 were invited to attend consultation for people with learning disabilities at Disability North and letters were sent to the 135 households who receive the Meals at Home service.

Adult social care

- **Reducing the council's contribution towards warden services in sheltered housing and ensuring Telecare service is available to all older people in the city:**

This received more comment than any other proposal. 25 individual comments were received and over 440 tenants, families and carers attended the tenant consultation events or another event (such as a ward committee) where this was discussed. 14 petitions were received about this proposal containing 1,518 signatures opposing the changes to the current arrangements. In total, nearly 2,060 people fed back on this proposal via one of these methods.

Residents initially expressed concern that people in sheltered housing would be left with no regular human contact or the support the existing warden service provides (for example, reminding people to attend medical appointments). This was also a concern expressed by the NCVS, Newcastle LINK, the Carers Centre Newcastle and the Elders Council.

The Carers Centre Newcastle also expressed the view that the existing warden service provides support to vulnerable people to help them deal with everyday problems (a view shared by several consultees). They were also concerned about the effectiveness of the Telecare service, although clearer presentation of the proposals has helped to allay these concerns. Some existing users of the Telecare service have expressed satisfaction with it.

- **More efficient commissioning from external providers and retendering the home care service:** These proposals were discussed at area events and ward committees, with around 100 people and organisations commenting on it. The Disability Equality Group, Newcastle LINK and Carers Centre Newcastle raised some concern over whether 20 minutes was sufficient time for a visit from individuals. Others were concerned that this could lead to a drop in the quality of the service if cost was used as

the main test for commissioning. The Elders Council expressed concerns about the cumulative impact of these proposals on the choice of providers and quality and continuity of care.

The Carers Centre Newcastle welcomed the idea of reorganising services to operate in a specific geographical area and wanted to see travel time be taken out of the total time of the visit (for example, a 30 minute visit is 30 minutes from the time someone arrives at the house to the time that they leave the house). They also emphasised the need for regular monitoring of home care service providers. This latter point was also expressed by Newcastle LINK.

- **Increasing meals at home charges:** This was discussed at various consultation events by residents and by Newcastle LINK. Generally speaking, people accepted the proposal as reasonable but there were some concerns over whether there would be adequate safeguards against people's welfare being negatively affected by the changes.
- **Reducing the amount of older people who need residential care:** Some concerns were raised that this is not a viable proposition and that the number of people needing residential care is increasing, not decreasing. Others, such as Newcastle LINK, said that it could be a good thing to support older people to stay in their own homes if this was what they wanted. Feedback from NCVS was that they agreed in principle and wondered if some funding could be transferred to the voluntary sector to enhance local prevention services.
- **Developing more accommodation choices for people with learning disabilities:** This was commented on by various people and groups including the Learning Disability Partnership Board, Disability Equality Group, NETS(work) and Newcastle LINK. Feedback was mostly concerned with how this would work in practice and what support people would receive. There was some concern about whether support would be appropriately person-centred and have sufficient safeguards to ensure that the money was spent appropriately. Other people wanted more information about this.

The Disability Equality Group, Newcastle LINK and NETS(work) were concerned that people with learning disabilities should only be in residential care if they want to be. NETS(work) commented that evidence indicates that supported living offers a better of quality of life for people with a learning disability, can be cheaper than residential care and provide better outcomes.

- **Staff meals at day centres:** Opinion was divided, with some people (including members of the Newcastle Champions) agreeing that staff should bring their own meals but others (including members of Newcastle LINK and attendees at the intergenerational event) feeling that they needed the service given their working conditions.
- **Reduce subsidy to providers that provide practical help to older people in their homes:** There was some concern from individuals and at the intergenerational event that this could lead to older people being unable to remain in their own homes for as long as they would want to and their ability to pay full costs for services. Newcastle

LINK said they broadly supported this but felt that the service should be more widely publicised.

Care packages

- **Giving people the opportunity to design their own care packages:** There was much discussion about this at the West area event and among organisations supporting people with learning disabilities. Several people were in favour, such as some members of the Newcastle Champions group and NETS(work). Others wanted to see reassurances that the council would put procedures in place to ensure the money was spent “as it should be” and that people, particularly those with complex needs, were properly supported when making choices. NETS(work) and Newcastle LINK wondered if non-traditional commissioning routes could also be considered for people with lower-cost care packages.
- **Introducing a cap on high cost care packages:** Initial feedback focussed on trying to understand how the proposal would work in practice. Later feedback, such as that from NCVS and Newcastle LINK, expressed concern that this could potentially conflict with the need to promote personalisation, the Valuing People agenda and independent living for people with disabilities. In addition to feedback received at the Learning Disability Partnership Board, an individual commented that they were uncertain how this would work in practice and doubted it would produce the savings needed.

The Carers Centre Newcastle and Disability Equality Group expressed a concern that this could negatively affect the personalisation agenda. The Disability Equality Group asked if people attending a panel for a decision would be provided with independent advocacy support and Newcastle LINK wanted more details about who would be on the panels. The Newcastle Champions were concerned about the impact of the proposals on the welfare of people who need very high levels of support. NETS(work) felt that this would have a disproportionate negative effect on people with high support needs, particularly on people with learning disabilities. They felt that more detail about the proposals was required, for example, on how the figure of £500 was reached.

Resource centres, Carers Centre Newcastle and advice

- **Building a new resource centre for people with mental health problems:** Many people who commented were relatives and / or carers of people using this service. Most praised the work of the existing service and were concerned at the possible loss of a system where people with mental health difficulties have regular contact with staff, providing social interaction and contact with professionals. VOLSAG and SIRC expressed concern that there was not enough detail about the costs incurred by building and staffing a new resource centre.
- **Getting better value for money from organisations that provide specialist homelessness services and encouraging joint working between homelessness day centre services:** These proposals were discussed at two of the area events and commented on by VOLSAG, SIRC and The Cyrenians. Feedback included concern over whether homeless people would be able to access the expert advice and support they needed in future if the changes go ahead. The Cyrenians also asked that any changes be implemented with consideration to the national welfare reform and that any change in commissioning of day centres be “needs led.”

- **Reducing amounts paid to Carers Centre Newcastle:** This was discussed at the area events, a 'Have Your Say' event at the Carers Centre, by VOLSAG and SIRC and we have received one person's feedback through a feedback form. There was some concern that this could lead to lack of support for carers although others felt that making the saving through finding alternative accommodation would be acceptable.

The Carers Centre Newcastle asked that the council consider the points made in the subsequent paper they have submitted. This includes what they consider to be the importance of having a city centre-based location and that the proposal be renegotiated to lessen the impact on their service, perhaps with a phased reduction of the amounts being paid. Newcastle LINK emphasised that they considered the Carers Centre Newcastle to be a very valuable services.

- **Redesigning Welfare Rights and Housing Services and relocating some Welfare Rights staff:** There was some concern that it would be harder for the council to provide services with fewer staff and that this could negatively affect regeneration in the neighbourhoods where services are currently located. The Newcastle Champions thought the development of an Active Inclusion Service could save people time. VOLSAG and SIRC expressed concern that adequate advice services should continue to be provided, if not there could be less money coming into the city in the form of benefits, particularly for people with mental health problems. Newcastle LINK were strongly concerned to see the Welfare Rights service protected.
- **Advice and Information Services:** There was some concern that implementing this proposal could affect the work of the Citizens' Advice Bureau.

Library services

- **Stopping the mobile library service:** This received 37 individual responses and was raised at the majority of ward committees. In total, over 188 people had their say on this. Two main themes emerged from the feedback. Firstly, concern for the welfare of older and disabled people currently using the service (for example, loss of social contact and inability to get to branch libraries). Secondly, suggestions that it could be retained by running it less frequently (monthly for example).

Nearly everyone who commented wanted the service kept, including the Newcastle Champions. North Gosforth Parish Council suggested that better advertising could attract more custom. One suggestion was to increase the use of the mobile library and reduce hours or close other libraries. However, others felt it was a "luxury."

Some people asked if Home Delivery Service volunteers would be CRB-checked if they were going into the homes of older people who may be vulnerable. NCVS suggested that perhaps a book collection service could be part of other services such as collection points at GPs' surgeries. The Carers Centre Newcastle asked if perhaps librarians could still carry out some home visits to help people choose books.

- **Volunteers in libraries:** Eight people commented via email and let's talk Newcastle online and others attended an event, such as an area event, at which this was discussed. In total, around 108 people gave feedback and opinions were divided.

Some expressed support if CRB checks were carried out on volunteers and others thought it would provide training opportunities. There were concerns that use of volunteers would devalue the work of paid librarians. The Disability Equality Group commented that they were concerned that there might not be sufficient volunteers willing and able to do this work for the proposal to be viable.

- **Reducing opening hours at some libraries:** 63 people gave their views on this either individually or via discussion at all the area events. Opinions are mixed with some concerns expressed but other people accepted the proposals thinking that they were "reasonable." Most participants suggested modifying the proposals rather than rejecting them, for example having no late nights at Fenham library but using the time saved to open on Wednesday. Others were concerned that changes to evening closing times could reduce income generation through not being able to hire out facilities.
- **Increasing some library charges and cutting library jobs:** We received feedback via let's talk Newcastle online and email and this was discussed at the area events. We have received suggestions about charging for the use of computers and e-books and suggestions that the council could look for ways to work more efficiently rather than increasing charges. Some people were prepared to accept these changes if it meant that money could be used for services they saw as more critical such as social care. Some people would prefer to see opening hours cut rather than see staff posts reduced.
- **Changes to funding for Tyne and Wear Museums and spending on culture and tourism:** At an area event people expressed concern about whether there would be a drop in quality of the museums service and suggested that reductions in income could be raised by obtaining sponsorship from the private sector, by encouraging donations and bequests and increasing income generation. Others were concerned that lack of spending on culture and tourism could lead to less income being generated by visitors to the city.

2.3 Chief Executive's Directorate

We received less feedback on proposals relating to Chief Executive's Directorate. Around 50 people commented on these proposals either by sending individual feedback or attending an event at which they were discussed. There was little strongly negative feedback on the proposals although some areas of concern were raised. NCVS expressed a wish to have discussions with managers in some of the affected service areas to "consider improved and joint working with the voluntary and community sector."

- **Consolidating four community-focused teams (Community Engagement and Empowerment, Area Based Regeneration, Economic Development and Safe Newcastle) and consolidating capacity in Community Safety:** This was discussed at the intergenerational event and with resident groups who expressed concern that this could lead to less support being available for community safety work. The Youth Council expressed support for the transfer of Children's Rights to the Community Engagement and Empowerment team and agreed that everyone has to take responsibility for ensuring young people are listened to.

- **Reducing services and supplies:** This was discussed at an area event where residents expressed concern that reducing IT costs could impact on data retention and the capacity to respond to Freedom of Information (FOI) requests.
- **Consolidate all communication and marketing staff in one team and introduce stronger controls on spend:** This was discussed at area, residents' and service user events. Some felt it could lead to improved communications. Residents of Cowgate were concerned that it would lead to lack of effective communication about regeneration proposals such as the Cowgate Strategy.
- **Providing more cost effective first point of contact solutions:** Residents at one area event were concerned that this would not be more effective, stating that voice-recognition technology does not always work with people with strong accents.
- **Making efficiencies in Democratic Services:** Residents at an area event expressed support for these proposals.
- **Reducing capacity in Revenues and Benefits:** Residents at an area event expressed concern that reducing the opportunity for face-to-face contact between residents and staff would limit the public's ability to engage with the council and would be problematic for people with learning disabilities or hearing difficulties.
- **General comments** received have included suggestions that the council could reduce postal expenditure by banning the use of first class post for most council communications and turn down the temperature in the Civic Centre.

2.4 Children's Services

Around **282 people** fed back on these proposals. As well as individual feedback we have also received feedback from partner organisations, voluntary and community groups, an intergenerational event, service specific events and area events.

The proposals which attracted most comment were **identifying savings** across Sure Start, Early Years and Childcare Services focusing on **earlier support for mental health** and **targeting the Early Intervention Grant** where it is most needed.

Relatively few **general comments** were received. One person commented that they thought that too much was being spent on looked after children but no other people who gave feedback said this. The voluntary and community sector expressed some concern at the potential loss of capacity to support their sector development.

- **Sharing services with other councils:** There was general agreement that this was worth looking into and some people asked for more information on what was being considered.
- **Reduce our management structures:** Concern was expressed about the impact on services provided, capacity to support and develop close working relationships with the voluntary and community sector (this was raised by NCVS among others). The Youth Council commented that they support the protection of frontline services.

- **Focus on earlier support for mental health:** Staff within the service and health partners agreed that the remodeling would have minimum impact on service delivery. Other feedback asked for more information on the success of the service to date and stated that the service was reviewed regularly. A letter was received from a campaigning group asking that mental health services be protected from cuts.
- **Targeting of Early Intervention Grant:** More information about what activities would be curtailed was requested by some people. Two opposing views for and against this proposal were expressed by different voluntary and community sector organisations. NCVS expressed support for the intention behind the commissioning process but there were concerns about the lateness of commissioning service in February to start in April. SIRC and VOLSAG expressed concern about the level of savings and the potential impact on parents and families already in a stressful situation.
- **Identifying savings across Sure Start, Early Years and childcare:** Concern was expressed at a ward committee and at one of the area events about the impact of reductions in Sure Start funding. One group asked for more detail on how the savings would be met. The comments from the five Sure Start Area Partnerships themselves were fairly supportive describing it as a manageable reduction.
- **Increasing fees for nursery places:** At an area event and resident group discussion there was some concern expressed over whether this would reduce available places and if it would have a negative impact on parents who needed low cost childcare to enable be able to work.
- **Safely reducing the numbers of looked after children:** Concerns were expressed about the scale of the proposed savings in a difficult social and economic climate.
- **Gain additional traded income from schools:** Comments received supported the need for the council to develop attractive packages to schools now that both schools and academies could choose to source services from external suppliers.
- **Reviewing non-statutory activities and school responsibilities:** More information was requested by some respondents about what this would entail.
- **Refocus our School Improvement Service:** The proposal was supported by the Schools Forum and external partners were positive about the level of grants they would receive.
- **Providing more cost effective care for children with disabilities:** One person commented at a voluntary and community sector event that a constant demand for efficiencies cannot be sustained in the long-term and expressed caution over trying to reduce the costs of placements as these were often expensive for good reason. Another person felt that other public health organisations could contribute more towards the cost of care.
- **Review of contact arrangements for looked after children:** Attendees at the intergenerational event asked how often this would be reviewed.

- **Make other identified savings:** The governing body of Bridgewater raised concerns about the affordability of the proposals and the potential impact on vulnerable families.

2.5 Environment and Regeneration

Approximately **1,420** people fed back on these proposals either by sending their individual feedback or by attending a consultation event, taking part in community and campaigning groups, ward committees and area events.

The two proposals that attracted the most comment were changing the way staff are allocated to **parks and countryside** and changing the use of some leisure facilities including the **Eldon Leisure bowling green** and the **Outer West sauna**. In both cases the vast majority of feedback received was opposed to the proposals.

Environmental and Regeneration also received the largest amount of general feedback not related specifically to budget proposals but the work of the directorate. This included suggestions for income generation by charging for advertising on the sides of bollards and stricter enforcement of parking regulations. Others were concerned about the impact of charges (for example, for replacement bins) on people with low incomes and the potential for a decline in standards of street cleanliness. One person wanted to see us continue to encourage recycling and look at generating energy from waste.

Leisure facilities and Park Rangers

- **Changing the use of some leisure facilities, including closing others that are not widely used, or moving them to community ownership:** This received more responses than any other Environment and Regeneration proposal including a meeting with 200 people (relating to a change of use of the Eldon Leisure bowling green), a petition from 200 people (relating to the Outer West leisure centre sauna) and 21 individual pieces of feedback. Over 700 people have sent in their feedback, signed a petition or attended an area event or ward committee at which this was discussed.

Residents and service users were generally opposed to the proposals often giving loss of social contact among users (especially among older users of the Eldon Bowling Green) as their reason why. Some put forward proposals to retain facilities, for example, a possible contribution of ward money and changing the use of some areas within the existing facilities to retain the Outer West sauna. Organisations who have commented on this include bowling groups and campaigning groups.

- **Changing the way staff are allocated to parks and countryside areas (changes to the park ranger service):** Over 600 people fed back on this. They either sent in feedback (40 individuals), signed a petition (including an electronic petition with 467 signatures) or attended an event where this proposal was discussed. This was also discussed at most ward committees.

Many comments came from volunteer rangers and groups such as the Friends of Heaton and Armstrong Parks, Walker Riverside Park, Jesmond Dene and Tyne Riverside Park. The Disability Equality Group also commented. All feedback received was opposed to the proposed change. Concerns were raised about proposed changes leading to a reduction in volunteering, usage of parks and countryside facilities, decrease in biodiversity and a possible increase in anti-social behaviour in these areas.

- **Increasing income from recently refurbished leisure centres and car parks:** Feedback on this has generally been positive with some requests for greater accessibility for vulnerable groups to facilities.

Waste collection

- **Charging for green waste collection:** Three comments were received by email and online and this was discussed at some ward committees. Around 155 people have given their feedback either individually or at an event. There has been some concern over whether charging for green waste will meet the anticipated savings targets. One resident asked if the council had considered expanding sales of compost from green waste. Others were concerned that this would lead to more fly-tipping and an increase in landfill charges if people dump garden waste in their domestic waste bins.
- **Making the domestic waste collection service more efficient:** There was some concern over the communication costs involved in letting people know about the changes to the service.

Other services

- **Reducing what we spend on maintenance of the city's roads and pavements:** There were around 80 comments on this. Several people expressed concern at ward committees and the intergenerational event that this could lead to an increase in accidents, particularly among older people and a possible increase in legal challenges following accidents. One person was concerned that this would increase hazards for cyclists in the city. NCVS expressed the view that "areas near schools, community facilities, sheltered housing and where vulnerable people might live or use [services] should be given higher priority for maintenance."
- **Closing some public conveniences:** This attracted comment at an area event, some ward committees and from the Disability Equality Group. Most people were concerned that the "Use Our Loos" scheme could not be a substitute if facilities in Paddy Freeman's Park were closed. People also suggested that sponsorship might be a way to keep facilities open. Others were concerned that homeless people would be unable to access public conveniences at night and when "Use Our Loos" is not operating.
- **Changing the way local services like graffiti removal, street cleansing and gully maintenance are delivered and reducing the frequency of grounds maintenance:** Concern was expressed at the intergenerational event, ward committees and resident meetings that this would lead to a decline in the appearance of neighbourhoods. English Heritage North East asked that the ongoing problem of 'heritage crime', such as graffiti on historic buildings, be considered and provided information about the Heritage Crime Initiative.
- **Introduce charges to private landlords for the Private Rented Service:** Some people agreed with this. Others felt there was a risk that landlords would pass the increased cost on to their tenants.
- **Changing the environmental engagement and education team:** Some concern was expressed over the possible reduction to the Enviro Schools programme.

- **Reduce capacity in our planning services:** People expressed concern at a ward committee that this would lead to less consultation with communities around proposed changes in their neighbourhoods. English Heritage North East asked to better understand and comment on the detail of this proposal and commented that the planning function is essential to protect and enhance the quality of the city and maximize its potential to develop and grow sustainably.
- **Increasing charges for bereavement services:** One person expressed opposition to this proposal and funeral directors asked that charges were not increased.
- **Street lighting:** One person asked if we had considered turning some street lights off to save money.

3. What else people have told us

Around 170 comments were received that did not relate to specific budget proposals but to the work of the council as a whole or to specific topics not raised in the proposals.

- **Increasing council tax:** At the West and East area events participants said that they would be willing to see an increase in council tax or find other ways of raising revenue locally. They were concerned that there were contradictions between council commitments, such as maintaining decent neighbourhoods, and the potential impact of the budget proposals. Some people wanted to see council tax lowered for people in the lowest council tax band and increased for people in the highest council tax band. There was a feeling that people were suffering as a result of central government decisions and that they would like to see the council challenge central government decisions which appear to be detrimental to the wellbeing of the city and its residents. In contrast, one person sent feedback saying that they thought that cuts were necessary and should be accepted and another supported the council tax freeze.
- **Keeping people in work:** Several people felt this should be a priority for the council and were concerned at proposals to cut jobs. Some said volunteering would increase the opportunities to gain work experience while others were concerned that it would displace paid workers. NCVS suggested that the council should build links with SkillsBridge and The Volunteer Centre (Newcastle) to look at ways of both retaining some of the skills and experiences of individuals and helping them through a difficult time. The Youth Council commented that they wanted to see frontline services protected.
- **Protecting vulnerable people:** Many individuals and organisations, such as Newcastle LINK, VOLSAG and SIRC and MHNE, expressed a general concern that cuts to services could have a disproportionate effect on poor, disadvantaged and vulnerable people within society.
- **Community safety:** One person was concerned that a decrease in funding for the Police would lead to a decline in public safety. A general concern for community safety was also raised at other events.

- **Fit for purpose organisation:** One person commented that departments within the council did not work together as one organisation and better connectivity was needed. One person asked whether the proposal for a single contact number would lead to savings.
- **Increasing income:** Some people wanted to see income being generated by stricter enforcement of regulations (for example, parking infringements) and collecting unpaid council tax. Newcastle LiNK suggested that they would prefer increased charges for services rather than cuts to services.
- **Local decision making:** Some people felt that existing arrangements for this were satisfactory. Others were concerned that plans to devolve more financial decision making to wards would lead to greater inefficiencies.
- **Newcastle Fund and voluntary and community sector organisations:** Several respondents said that they wanted to see continuing support for the Newcastle Fund and for the voluntary and community sector in general. Some felt that the process for obtaining grants was too bureaucratic. Others were concerned that proposed changes to asset management could lead to a lack of community facilities for voluntary and community sector groups. One person wanted to see the council work with voluntary and community sector organisations to mitigate the possible impact of the budget proposals. Another issue raised was the need to acknowledge neighbourhood-based organisation knowledge of their local areas. The North East Chamber of Commerce suggested that the council works ever closer with the private and voluntary and community sector around the social care agenda (see Appendix 1).
- **Number of elected members:** One resident asked if the number of councillors per ward could be reduced.
- **Public transport:** Some people wanted to see the council support greater use of public transport. Others argued that it should not be a priority.
- **Staff salaries:** Some participants suggested reducing staff travel expenses and reducing the number of staff earning above a certain wage, for example £50,000 per annum.
- **Volunteers:** NCVS sent detailed feedback relating to how volunteers could be involved in the areas mentioned in each of the proposals. Directorates are considering their feedback.

4. What Scrutiny Committees have told us

Scrutiny Committees are an important part of our political management structure and have a statutory role to hold the Cabinet and key external organisations to account for their decisions, policies and performance. Informal meetings were held with all Scrutiny Committees in November and were followed by formal meetings when the proposals were published. They are the Policy Scrutiny Committee, Wellbeing and Health Scrutiny Committee, Service Delivery Scrutiny Committee and Public Services Scrutiny Committee.

The concerns raised by Scrutiny Committees reflect their respective remits and their current work programmes, for example, the Service Delivery Scrutiny Committee is interested in the work of Children's Services, in particular looked after children. The concerns raised by the Scrutiny Committees tended to focus on service impact, risks associated with proposals and how achievable savings targets are.

4.1 Comments not raised by other stakeholders

- Reducing our in-house learning and development team in Adult and Culture Services: concern about staff requiring more training to take on additional responsibilities.
- To market our City Build services to the public: concern about the need for successful marketing of the service.
- To reduce the tree inspection service: concern about the impact on non-emergency work.
- To charge for green waste collection and back lane clearance: concern about an increased risk of deliberate anti-social fires. Scrutiny also noted that there are areas of the city not currently covered by the scheme that would be very keen to have access to it.
- To reduce capacity in our planning service: concern about the impact on performance and possible effect on the working city priority and major development proposals.

4.2 Comments raised by other stakeholders

- Reducing the council's contribution to warden services in sheltered housing and ensuring Telecare service is available to all older people in the city: concerns about the wider duties carried out by wardens and whether reduced funding to providers will make the service non-viable.
- Redesigning Welfare Rights and Housing Services: concerns about the ability of the council and partners to maintain a sufficiently high standard of advice especially as the increase in unemployment and changes to the benefits system will lead to greater pressure on such services. A report will be provided to Scrutiny six months after implementation of this proposal.
- Stopping our mobile library service: concerns relating to the value of the service to vulnerable and frail people.
- Reductions to Tyne and Wear Museums Services: concerns about the level of investment (particularly the interactive displays at the Discovery Museum) and the potential knock-on effect on tourism and visitor spend.
- To consolidate four community based teams: concern about maintaining the focus on crime and anti-social behaviour and integration with the new Police and Crime Commissioner to be elected in November 2012.
- Reduce our management structures in Children's Services: concern about the impact of a reduction of 20 posts given the need to maintain an 'excellent' rating.

- Safely reduce the number of looked after children and the cost of placements: concern about the scale of the proposed savings in the current social and economic climate. The importance of ongoing investment in early intervention and prevention was highlighted.
- Gain additional traded income from schools: concern about the risk that schools may decide to buy these optional services from elsewhere. There were concerns that there were a number of income streams from schools and members commented on the need to consider the cumulative effect of these proposals.
- To change the way we allocate staff to our parks and countryside: concern about impact to services currently provided in parks and the ability to support and co-ordinate volunteer activity.
- To close and relocate some public conveniences: concerns about the number and availability of public conveniences, especially in Paddy Freeman's Park and access for disabled children.

4.3 Comments to be addressed through implementation

It was agreed that Scrutiny Committees would closely monitor some proposals if they are implemented.

- More efficient commissioning from external providers: concerns relating to the reduced minimum time per visit from 30 minutes to 20 minutes.
- Introducing a cap on high cost care packages: concern about choice for people and outcomes of introducing a panel. A report will be provided to the Wellbeing and Health Scrutiny Committee six months after implementation.
- Changing the way we work across care management: further detail on this proposal was provided to the Wellbeing and Health Scrutiny Committee on 26 January 2012.
- To reduce capacity in the Central Policy Unit: query about how support for partnership arrangements will be maintained.
- To reduce capacity in Revenues and Benefits: concern about whether withdrawal of face-to-face interviews at Kenton and Gosforth Customer Service Centres in the light of reduced demand would put pressure on the viability of the centres.
- To change the way local services like graffiti removal, street cleansing and gully maintenance are delivered: concern about a possible decline in the appearance of neighbourhoods raised by many stakeholders and concerns about performance management dropping.
- To improve the efficiency of street lighting: query about the possibility of dimming lights.

5. Who we have spoken to

We have used the 'A Fair Budget for a Fairer City' report and supporting documentation to consult with a range of stakeholders throughout the city. Consultation with some of these stakeholders is a statutory requirement but we consider it good practice to also include others when consulting on our budget. We have consulted with various interested groups within the city including:

- **Business partners** such as the North East Chamber of Commerce and NE1
- **Carers** via a 'Have Your Say' meeting in January 2012 held at the Carers Centre Newcastle and attended by officers and an elected Member
- **Members of Parliament**
- **Parish Council** members
- **Public sector partners** such as the Children's Trust Board and Safeguarding Children Board
- **Representative groups** such as the Elders Council, Disability Equality Group, Schools Forum, Learning Partnership Disability Board and Youth Council
- **Residents** through let's talk Newcastle online, feedback forms and events
- **Scrutiny Committee** members through the Policy Scrutiny Committee, Wellbeing and Health Scrutiny Committee, Service Delivery Scrutiny Committee and Public Services Scrutiny Committee
- **Service providers** who may be affected by our proposals. Adult and Culture Services and Children's Services held service specific events for providers to talk through the proposed changes to service delivery and contract specifications
- **Service users** who may be affected by our proposals such as meetings with tenants in sheltered housing accommodation, bowling green users and Special Educational Needs transport users. Factsheets or letters were given to library users, people receiving the Meals at Home service and parents of children attending community nurseries
- All directorates spoke to their **staff** about proposals and provided information and opportunities to feedback. In Adult and Culture Services consultation notes and invitations to events were sent to Community Mental Health Managers, the Mental Health Social Work Team and the Carer Support Development Workers. In Children's Services all staff were invited to briefings (342 staff attended) as well as service specific discussions
- **Tenants** – there have been consultation meetings held with tenants of individual service providers
- **Voluntary and community sector** through the NCVS Compact Review Group, a city-wide VCS event and targeted sessions, including on proposals relating to Adult and Culture Services and Children's Services. Organisations who have responded include NETSwork, Mental Health North East, NCVS, VOLSAG (Voluntary Sector Advisory Group) and the Social Inclusion and Recovery Consortium
- **Ward committees** - members of Corporate Management Team attended all ward committees where the Chair agreed to this.

6. How we have engaged with residents

Launch of the budget proposals – 29 November 2011

- A link to budget papers and proposals on the Newcastle City Council web site homepage
- Press release
- Copies of budget proposals and 'A Fair Budget for a Fairer City' report in all Customer Service Centres and Libraries
- Plasma screen promotion in all Civic Centre receptions, Customer Service Centres and Libraries
- Email to key stakeholders with a link to the budget papers
- Inclusion in the 'Business Briefing' with a link to the budget papers.

Let's talk Newcastle online

- An email to over 900 residents (from a database of citizen's panel members and people who had completed the resident's survey) in the first week of December 2011 to encourage them to take part in the budget consultation online
- A reminder email to over 900 residents in mid-December to direct them to the online consultation
- An email to 50,000 residents in early January to direct them to the online consultation, encourage attendance at area events and other ways to get involved in the conversation.

Social media

Ongoing Twitter and Facebook campaigns ran throughout the consultation period to raise awareness of the consultation itself, let's talk Newcastle Online and individual proposals.

During January Twitter campaigns were run on specific topics:

- Parking
- Park rangers
- Mobile library
- Leisure facilities
- Public conveniences
- Green waste collection.

Young people were also encouraged to take part in the consultation through the Youthlinx Facebook site (<http://www.facebook.com/Youthlinxnewcastle>).

Area budget events

- Quarter-page press adverts in the Evening Chronicle (16 December and 11 January) and Newcastle Journal (17 December and 11 January) to promote the area events and describe other ways to get involved
- Plasma screen promotion in all Civic Centre receptions, Customer Service Centres and Libraries
- Leaflets and invitations handed out by all Ward Co-ordinators, Community Engagement and Empowerment staff working in the community, and members of Corporate Management Team when they attended ward committees.

Citylife

Published four pages in the Winter/Spring issue on the budget and how people could have their say.

Service specific engagement with residents and service users

During the development of proposals and the consultation period Children's Services engaged with service users by:

- Writing to all parents affected by the proposed increase in community nursery fees
- Meetings with parents / carers of Special Educational Needs transport users and with children and young people
- Meetings with schools and provider organisations
- Meeting with the Youth Council as representatives of children and young people.

Adult and Culture Services held a series of events to engage with all service users who could be impacted by the proposals, including:

- Learning Disability consultation event
- Letters to Meals at Home service users
- Tenant consultation meetings with individual service providers and their tenants
- Sessions with library home delivery service users.

Voluntary and community sector events

- An email invitation was sent to all VCS organisations
- Invitations were given to all Community Engagement and Empowerment officers to pass on to groups they were working with
- An advert was placed in e-bulletin 'Informed' which is sent to all VCS groups by NCVS
- Newcastle LINK consultation event
- Carers Centre Newcastle 'Have your say' event
- A specific meeting held at the request of youth sector organisations to discuss Children's Services proposals. This was promoted by NCVS.

Ward Committees

Ongoing promotion of the ways residents can join the conversation and invitations to events were delivered by Ward Co-ordinators and members of Corporate Management Team.

7. Background to let's talk Newcastle phase 3

Let's talk Newcastle is based on the fundamental principle of presenting information in a way which is open, honest and easy to understand to engage the broadest possible audience. Budget information should be presented in a way which helps everyone to understand what is being proposed and any potential implications this might have for them.

Let's talk Newcastle is also based on the principle of creating a range of different ways can engage including online and via social media as well as more traditional routes to encourage greater participation by reflecting the different preferences of respondents. These principles are an important aspect of our approach to equalities in consultation. Recent legal judgements have involved challenges to local authorities over whether they have consulted widely enough. They emphasised the need to make sufficient information available to people so that they can make a reasonable assessment of the potential impact

of budget proposals both on them as individuals and on their communities.

The 'let's talk Newcastle' budget consultation programme ran in three phases:

- **Phase 1** examined the relative priority which the public attach to council policies and services.
- **Phase 2** explored in greater detail some of the important policy issues likely to be central to budget deliberations.
- **Phase 3** engaged people, both externally and internally, on the budget details during the formal consultation period.

Appendix 1



Paul Woods
Director of Finance and Resources
Newcastle City Council
Civic Centre
Barras Bridge
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE99 1RD

Dear Paul,

Newcastle City Council Budget Consultation

Following the meeting between the Council and NECC members on 16 January, I am writing to confirm that effective consultation has taken place with regards to the Council's 2012 budget plans.

Specific points raised by members during the meeting included:

- Businesses recognise the significant financial pressure the council is under and it would be all too easy to cut back on non statutory services. A continued effort to support job creation is therefore welcome;
- Partnership working is going to be vital if the council is to achieve its aims. This is not restricted to the relationship with Gateshead but also includes the private sector and universities;
- The localisation of business rates ought to be seen by the council as an opportunity rather than a threat. Efforts to use creative means of funding such as borrowing against business rate growth suggest that Newcastle are approaching this in the right way;
- The proposed creation of an Accelerated Development Zone across key regeneration sites in the city has been welcomed by businesses. If it is to be successful, then the council's main focus ought to be on providing world class infrastructure to support development, working with the private sector to encourage new investment.
- It would be wrong to assume that the business community has little interest in the social care agenda. In fact, the council needs to work ever closer with the private and VCS sectors to address a growing problem.

Before and after the meeting we circulated the draft documents and minutes and invited any members to come forwards with any questions or requests for further information.

No further enquiries have been received and I am therefore satisfied that members have had access to sufficient information regarding these plans.

NECC will continue to work with the Council as these budget plans are implemented to ensure that an effective business voice is heard and that the needs of the local business community are met.

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Walker
Head of Member Relations

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