

Committee(s): Policy, Resources & Economic Development Committee	Date: 24 November 2021
Subject: 2022-23 Budget Consultation Response	Wards Affected: All
Report of: Jacqueline Van Mellaerts, Corporate Director (Finance & Resources)	Public
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Summary

This report provides information on the budget consultation exercise for 2022/23 that was undertaken with residents and businesses. The purpose of this report is for committee members to review its contents and consider the outcomes from the consultation.

Main Report

Introduction and Background

1. The purpose of the budget consultation exercise is to secure views and opinions from the community within the borough. This is to aid in decision making with regards to the Councils Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and setting the budget for 2022/23.
2. The consultation this year covered, spending priorities, service satisfaction, corporate strategy priorities, views on raising funds and driving efficiencies and views sought specifically on council tax levels. The consultation ran from 2 September until 3 October 2021. The exercise was supported with contextual information to aid responses as well as a communications plan.
3. The communications plan included press release, front page and consultation area of the Council's website, the Council's social media platforms, as well as the use of e-newsletters for residents and business and the use of radio with members of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) discussing the consultation on Phoenix FM.
4. The drive was to complete the form online, however, to ensure accessibility for those not confident with this option paper copies were available and were posted to anyone who requested.

Issue, Options and Analysis of Options

5. Full detailed analysis of the budget consultation response can be found within Appendix A. The following headlines are covered within the report.

Participation

6. In total the Council received 255 responses. 247 were from residents, 5 were from businesses in the borough, 2 respondents work in the borough and 1 respondent was interested in the borough.
7. 97.27% of the respondents were Council Taxpayers.

Spending of Services

8. The consultation asked respondents to score out of 10 their satisfaction levels for the following services:
 - a) Household Waste Collection
 - b) Household Waste – Recycling
 - c) Environmental Health
 - d) Community Development
 - e) Parks & Open Spaces
 - f) Leisure and Sports Facilities
 - g) Street Services
 - h) Homelessness Prevention
 - i) Economic Development
 - j) Regeneration of Council buildings
 - k) Community Safety & Enforcement
 - l) Planning Development Management
 - m) Planning Policy
 - n) Planning Enforcement
9. Household Waste Collection scored 8.14/10 whereas Planning enforcement scored 5.03/10. These were the most and least satisfied services. The average satisfaction level stood at 6.07/10.
10. Respondents were given the current spend per a band D household. They were then asked whether they would spend more, less or the same on the service. Full detail breakdown analysis is within Appendix A, however the overall majority wanted more to spend on Community Safety & Enforcement, with less being spent on Planning Policy.

Corporate Strategy

11. 13 questions were asked regarding the Council Corporate Strategy 2025 asking respondents which activities were the most important to them. 81% of responses were either important or very important across all the questions.
12. The Corporate Strategy activities asked were as follows:
 - a) Wherever possible we will support local business and organisations.
 - b) Support and invest in the community which enables everyone to lead happy health safe and independent lives.
 - c) To develop and invest to promote a cleaner greener borough for everyone to enjoy.
 - d) To be more environmentally conscious and strive to decrease and eliminate a carbon footprint as well as address littering issues such as fly tipping.
 - e) Through the LDP, shape the development of the borough for the future ensuring developments are responsible and of high quality.
 - f) Enable growth for existing businesses and encourage the creation of innovative ideas.
 - g) Improve our efficiency through modernisation and changing the way we work to meet residents' needs.
 - h) Continue to invest in community facilities creating greater opportunities for leisure and cultural enjoyment for all.
 - i) Invest in the future of the borough to stimulate growth and attract investors and visitors.
 - j) To build and provide decent, safe, and affordable homes for local people
 - k) Work with other council across South Essex and central government to attract regional investment where the borough of Brentwood would benefit.
 - l) To build community resilience and public safety by supporting community groups and working with partners.
 - m) Support our council housing tenants with a high quality and professionally managed housing service.
13. Ranking the responses resulted in the following activity coming on top - *Wherever possible, we will support businesses and organisations* with 93% of respondents classifying this as important or very important.
14. Three activities were ranked with the lowest importance at 73% being important or above. These were:

- a) Work with other council across South Essex and central government to attract regional investment where the borough of Brentwood would benefit.
- b) To build community resilience and public safety by supporting community groups and working with partners.
- c) Support our council housing tenants with a high quality and professionally managed housing service.

Raising Funds and Driving Efficiencies

15. Eight proposals were put forward to residents regarding generating or saving money. These eight questions were ranked, and respondents wanted to see the following:

Rank	Question	Score
1	Increase the use of modern technologies in the delivery of services to drive efficiencies.	233
2	Are you prepared to pay for enhanced services in order to keep services	89
3	Continue in becoming cashless with regards to provision of services	68
4	Build more affordable homes and invest in homes on the private market	56
5	Invest in a property portfolio to generate cash to support the delivery of services currently provided	7
6	Increase existing fees and charges by a minimum of inflation	-16
7	Increase Council Tax	-92
8	Introduce car parking charges in car parks that currently are free	-178

Council Tax

16. Participants were asked to indicate which statement best represented their view on setting the Council Tax for 2022/23. Within this section the form allowed for respondents to select their current banding to see the monetary impact to them based on the proposed statements.

As a council taxpayer, would you prefer to *	
If you do not pay Council Tax to Brentwood Borough Council, please select 'N/A'	
Reduce council tax and the council provide less service	42
Increase Council Tax marginally (up to 2%) and maintain the current service provision	123
Increase Council Tax significantly (above 2%) and increase the service provision	80
N/A	9

17. 50% want to increase Council tax marginally to maintain the current service provision. 33% want to increase Council tax significantly to increase the service provision and 17% wanted a reduction in Council Tax income.

General Comments

18. The form provided opportunity for participants to leave comments. The most frequent comments can be found within Appendix A.

Conclusion

19. Overall, after analysing the participants responses the following can be derived:
- a) Services wish to be kept the same across the board.
 - b) Supporting local business and organisations was the most important to the respondents regarding the corporate strategy.
 - c) The household waste collection service had the highest satisfaction score. However, this is a service that is likely most participants are in receipt of. Other services such as homelessness prevention not all participants would have been in receipt of and therefore would not have a satisfaction score for them.
 - d) Creating efficiencies first overall increasing income to raise extra revenue was the preferable option.
 - e) Most respondents would support a marginal increase to council tax to maintain the current service provision.

Consultation

20. The Consultation was for the period of 31 days. Going live 2 September 2021 and closing 3 October 2021.

References to Corporate Strategy

21. One part of the exercise was to gain views on Corporate Strategy from the community and to understand what was the most and least important to the community regarding the Council's priorities and ambitions.

Implications

Financial Implications

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22. The cost of the consultation exercise was met from within existing resources.
23. The responses of the consultation will be considered when preparing the Council's MTFS and setting the 2022-23 budget.

Legal Implications

Name & Title: Amanda Julian, Corporate Director (Law & Governance) and Monitoring Officer

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24. There is a general duty under Section 3(1) of the Local Government Act 1999 for Best Value Authorities to secure continuous improvement in the way its functions are exercised. Under section 3(2) there is a specific duty to consult representatives of persons who live and work in the Borough. By taking into account the views of the representatives in making its decision the Council will have mitigated the chance of a successful challenge.

Economic Implications

Name/Title: Phil Drane, Corporate Director (Planning and Economy)

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25. It is important that the Council engage with local residents and businesses about how budgets can be spent. Feedback will help inform corporate priorities, such as those to grow our economy.

Other Implications (where significant) – i.e. Health and Safety, Asset Management, Risk Management, Section 17 – Crime & Disorder, Sustainability, ICT.

None

Background Papers

None

Appendices to this report

- Appendix A: Budget Consultation Analysis 2022/23