

COUNTY COUNCIL BUDGET CONSULTATION 2017/18 WITH DEVON'S BUSINESS COMMUNITY, REPRESENTATIVES OF OLDER PEOPLE AND THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR AND TRADE UNIONS, INCORPORATING RESULTS OF THE 'YOUR COMMUNITY, YOUR CHOICE' ONLINE CONSULTATION

1.0 Recommendation: that the contents of the report and the representations of the consultees be noted.

2.0 Introduction

2.1 The Leader of the Council, Group Leaders and other Members and officers met with the representatives of the Business Community, organisations which champion the cause of older people and the voluntary sector and Trade Unions. This was to discuss the County Council's budget for 2017/18 in line with statutory requirements and previous good practice.

2.2 The public consultation 'Your Community, Your Choice' survey was posted online, with alternative formats available, as part of the wider ongoing programme of budget engagement. 898 responses were received between the 8 of November 2016 and 6 January 2017. The survey asked the people of Devon which key services were important to them and included questions around the role of communities.

3.0 Budget Presentation

3.1 The Deputy County Treasurer gave a presentation on the 2017/18 budget at each of the three consultative meetings.

3.2 The presentation first reflected upon the impact of the Comprehensive Spending Review outlining the significant changes to the way in which Local Government was funded. The reduction in core funding from 2010/2011 to 2016/2017 was outlined in terms of the cash reduction year on year and also the real term cumulative impacts. Staffing figures and the decreases in FTE's over the seven year term was also reported.

3.3 The presentation also highlighted the current position in terms of the revenue budget for 2016/2017 and the reserves and balances in terms of the County fund and the earmarked reserves.

3.4 Looking forward to 2017/2018 and beyond, the autumn statement (published on 23 November 2016) outlined changes to the National Living Wage and National Insurance Thresholds, but gave no indication of core funding levels and contained very little other detail relevant to local government. The provisional settlement (announced on 15 December 2016) gave details of the four year funding settlement, which saw core funding reduced by £23.3 millions, equivalent to almost 15.4%. The provisional settlement also included a new power to increase the Social Care Precept, changes to the New Homes Bonus, meaning that District Council's particularly will see a significant reduction in income, and the creation of a new, one off, Adult Social Care Grant.

3.5 Finally, the presentation outlined what the provisional settlement meant for Devon in terms of its budget target for 2017/18, which was set at £459,585.

4.0 Representatives of the Business Community: 12 January 2017

4.1 Businesses and organisations represented at this meeting included, Rosie Bates (Careers South West Group), Michael Green (FSB), Edward Humber (NFU), Tim Jones (Devon &

Cornwall Business Council), John Laramy (Exeter College), Colin Lomax (Unison), Duncan Waldon (Devon & Cornwall PCC) and Susan Wilkinson (FSB)

4.2 Issues and questions raised by the group and discussed with County Council representatives included:

- the impact of changes to schools funding, resulting in a financial benefit for smaller schools but meaning that some secondary schools would see a significant reduction in funding;
- the potential impact of budget reductions in Highways, on economic development within the County;
- the relationship between the revenue budget and the capital programme and the use of government capital grants for highways works;
- the importance of partnership working between the County Council, district councils and local business on forward planning, and the role of the Local Enterprise Partnership in this; and
- the uncertainty caused by Brexit and unresolved Devolution plans, and the need for local businesses to have greater clarity to allow them to invest further in their business and continue to grow the Devon economy.

5.0 Representatives of Older People and the Voluntary Sector: 13 January 2017

5.1 Representatives at this meeting included; Brian Blatchford (Devon & Cornwall NPC Regional Secretary), Alan Hughes (Devon Parent Carers Voice), Karen Kelly (Devon Voluntary Action), Iain McDonald (Devon Faith and Belief Forum), Julie Paget (Race Equality Council), Diana Crump (Living Options Devon), David Incoll (Citizens Advice Devon), Graham Davey (Housing Enabling Manager, Teignbridge District Council), Sarah Cripps (Age Concern - Exmouth), Gill Smith (Age Concern – Exmouth), Vanessa Bryant (Age UK – Mid Devon), Sarah Gunn (Age UK - Devon), Yvonne Atkinson (Fawcett Devon) , Roberto Franceschini (Unison Retired Members) and Colin Lomax (Unison Retired Members)

5.2 Issues and questions raised by the group and discussed with County Council representatives included:

- confirmation that Councillors would consider the Equalities Impact Assessment as part of their decision making;
- whether the staffing figures of FTE's reflected those outsourced services or staff transferred via TUPE as part of service externalisation;
- reference to specific grants received by the Council, for example concessionary fares, and a real concern that Government was not funding the statutory services that Councils were expected to provide;
- the continued reduction in the Revenue Support Grant, which was expected to be Nil by 2019/2020 and the changes to business rates retention, for which the detail (including how much would be received) was unknown;
- the role of the Better Care Fund and the expectation of joined up services with the NHS;
- the need for a wider conversation about supporting communities, the role of the voluntary sector and promoting independence;
- any assessment of the geographical spread of funds spent across the County;
- that the Councillors locality budget funds were welcomed; and
- a concern generally over Council Tax, its 'regressive' nature and whether this was the correct way to fund Councils in the future.

6.0 Representatives of Trade Unions: 13 January 2017

6.1 Trade Union Representatives at this meeting included Tim Hodge (Devon NUT), Trevor Cope (ATL), Darienne Flemington (UNISON), Steve Ryles (Unison), Lisa Youlton (Unison), Andy Bowman (Unison) and Hilary Jackson (NASWT).

6.2 Issues and questions raised by the group and discussed with County Council representatives included:

- clarification of the Councils position with debts and what the figures included (for example, PFI and academy schools);
- where the New Burden Resilience featured in the budget, the link to the anticipated overspend in adults services and any impact on reserves;
- the Councils position on Reserves and what this equated to per head of population;
- what impacts on staff were anticipated as a result of any restructure and the overspend;
- clarification of the business rates distribution of funds and the impact of the council tax revaluations in 2017/2018;
- the funding formula for schools, the impact of some schools losing funding and the Councils current work in lobbying Government for fairer funding;
- the current decision on the high needs block and the potential for redundancies in schools;
- the impact of the proposed Apprenticeship Levy and the current work of the Council on potential opportunities within the apprenticeship scheme; and
- clarification of the Council Tax rise being suggested by the Council, including the social care precept element.

7.0 On-Line Consultation 'Your Community, Your Choice'

7.1 The results on the online consultation indicated that services around protecting vulnerable people scored highest, with respondents wishing to protect these services. The top three priority services from 'Your Community, Your Choice' were:

- Appropriate community support and care for older people (86% selected as Essential or High Priority);
- Supporting vulnerable individuals and families to prevent neglect and harm (82% selected as Essential or High Priority);
- Maintaining major road networks (75% selected as Essential or High Priority);

The lowest priority services were:

- Supporting home to school transport (32% selected as Essential or High Priority);
- Supporting healthy lifestyles (30% selected as Essential or High Priority);
- Supporting Devon's cultural heritage (27% selected as Essential or High Priority).

7.2 The highest and lowest priorities appeared similar for gender, age, and disability. However, there appears to be a higher score given to subsidising non-commercial public and community transport, and increasing accessibility to facilities and services, by those who indicated that their day-to-day activities are greatly limited due to disability or illness.

7.3 Supporting vulnerable and older people and maintaining major road networks have scored consistently high over the budget priority surveys.

7.4 In addition:

- 24% of respondents indicated that they would like to get involved in their local community;
- 45% of respondents indicated that they were already involved in their local community, with 16% indicating that they would like to do more;
- 64% thought communities could play a bigger role in the running of local services;
- 74% of respondents said they would pay more council tax if it helped Devon County Council to protect services.

7.5 A separate written submission was provided by the RNIB, who indicated a wish to protect community care services for older people and those with physical disabilities, and for children with disabilities and their families. Particular reference was made ensuring rehabilitation services were available for blind and partially sighted people.

8.0 Conclusion

The consultations carried out provided a positive opportunity for the people of Devon to specify their priorities in future service delivery, particularly in times of austerity where difficult choices have had to be made. The data collected and feedback received provides a valuable snapshot of current opinion on where resources should and should not be allocated in future.

Jan Shadbolt, County Solicitor

ELECTORAL DIVISIONS: ALL

Local Government Act 1972: List of Background Papers

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<u>Background Paper</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>File Reference</u>
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Nil