

Member Briefing

Number: 1092

Title: Balancing the Budget: Consultation on our future budget plans 2018-2021.

Summary: This briefing provides an overview of the budget consultation process that the Council will undertake over the autumn of 2017. It includes; background information, an overview of the proposed methodology and how Members can promote participation.

Background: Every local authority has a statutory duty to conduct a public consultation ahead of Budget Council. Cheshire West and Chester Council is currently two years into a four-year financial plan, and will use this consultation process to engage residents on new proposals that have emerged since the last consultation. This consultation will not re-consult on proposals that have previously been put to the public.

This consultation: *Balancing the Budget*, will launch on Thursday 12 October, inviting opinions regarding potential changes to the Council's budget from 2018 onwards. The materials and methodology for this consultation have been informed through a review of previous approaches to budget consultation locally, and wider best practice.

Consultation approach and structure: The following methodology and approach has been approved by Cabinet, and the consultation will run from 12 October to 23 November:

- **Consultation document and questionnaire:** A 12 page document has been produced that sets out the financial position of the Council, and describes the proposals that have been developed to address the budget gap and how much they will save. This document will be accompanied by a short questionnaire for respondents to provide their views on proposals and wider issues. An easy read version of this document has been developed for use with specific client groups.
- **Budget simulator:** An interactive online budget simulator will be used so that residents can build their own budget, allocating resources towards their priority services. Through this process respondents will have to save £38.3 million from the Council's budget, which is the overall gap we face between 2018/19 and 2020/21, as reported in the Medium Term Financial Strategy. Respondents will also be provided with indicative consequences describing the impact of their changes to the Council's budget.
- **Online event:** A key method in this year's budget consultation is a live online event that will be held in early November. This event will enable residents to submit their questions to Cabinet Members regarding these budget proposals. This event will be supported by a small representative panel of residents to interact with the Cabinet through questions and comments. There will be opportunity for residents to

submit their questions in advance, or during the event through a range of methods and social media channels.

Taking part in this consultation: Elected Members are central to disseminating information to residents and will be able to promote this consultation through their local networks. There are a number of methods that people will be able to take part, with each of these methods going-live on Thursday 12 October.

- **Online:** visiting the dedicated web pages from 12 October at: www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/Balancingthebudget.
- **Hard copies:** collecting a printed copy of the document and questionnaire from libraries and Council leisure centres.
- **Social media:** tweet @Go_CheshireWest using #CWACbudget to take part in the online debate.
- **Via email:** emailing views and opinions to the Council through the dedicated email address of: BalancingtheBudget@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk
- **Via mail:** Writing to us at Balancing the Budget, Cheshire West and Chester Council, Council Offices, 4 Civic Way, Ellesmere Port, CH65 OBE
- **Via telephone:** Calling us on: 0300 123 8 123 and quoting 'Balancing the Budget'.

Next Steps and Analysis: The Council's Communication and Marketing team will be promoting this consultation over the coming weeks to encourage as many residents, respondents and wider stakeholders to take part as possible. This will include the use of the Council website, intranet and wider social media.

The results of this consultation will be presented to Scrutiny in January 2018 alongside the wider Council budget, and will be considered by Cabinet Members prior to recommending the budget for approval at Budget Council on 1 March 2018.

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Responsible Cabinet Member: Councillor Samantha Dixon, Council Leader

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