

Budget Consultation 2011-2012 Report

Background

Each year Isle of Wight Council undertakes a budget consultation exercise with residents and stakeholder groups to help guide and inform the annual budget setting process.

This year the consultation exercise included a qualitative workshop consisting of eight focus groups and online budget simulator to consult residents on their spending and budgetary priorities for the forthcoming year.

In addition, a separate focus group, following the same topic guide utilised in the workshop, was held with the Cowes Friendship Group (a group of Asian women living on the Island) and the findings for this group are also included.

Methodology

The Workshop – The council is currently facing severe budget pressure. Because of increased demands on its services and a reduction in the amount of grant money available from government, it has to achieve £32 million in savings over four years, more than half of which must be found next year alone.

With significant reductions in Government funding to councils across the country, the Isle of Wight Council has difficult decisions to make to ensure it spends its budget wisely over the next few years whilst, as far as possible, protecting residents from large council tax rises and cuts to vital services.

Isle of Wight Council wished to discuss with its stakeholders their perceptions, expectations and suggestions about how the council allocates its budget spend to help influence decisions made around the 2011 budget.

Representatives of the following eight stakeholder groups were invited via e-mail and letter to attend the budget consultation workshop to discuss the budget for 2011/12; 67 stakeholders attended the workshop from the following groups:

1. Businesses on the Island
2. IW Residents Panel
3. Minority groups
4. Older People
5. Town and Parish Councillors
6. Trade Unions
7. Voluntary and Community Sector
8. Young People

Prior to the budget consultation workshop attendees were sent background information which would help inform decisions at the workshop which can be seen at the following [link](#).

At the workshop stakeholders, in their groups, discussed their priorities and needs for the budget. They were provided with a 'Key Choices' document which included areas of discretionary spend and questions relating to options for each of the

service areas listed – this can be viewed via the following link. They were asked to address allocation of budget to priority areas and consider what services could be ditched and which could be done differently. Council officers were available to help assist stakeholders decisions by providing information where required.

Priorities

The aim of the workshop was to ascertain stakeholder priorities within a reduced budget. Each group was then asked to feedback on their top three priorities. The priorities from each group were as follows.

Businesses (three groups)

- Involve local organisations in promotion of tourism/amenities including planning & parking costs
- Economic investment – supporting start-ups
- Co-ordinated approach to new business information (Chamber, Development Unit, outsource to other businesses?), providing support
- Library & Heritage services – run by community (rural areas), schools and prisons to run their own
- Zero-based budgeting approach
- Vulnerable groups not to suffer (key principle)
- Libraries – schools

IW Residents Panel

- Supporting people, learning disabilities, adult social care services – outsource/review costs?
- Help Centres – provided elsewhere (CAB, tourist information etc), more of a luxury?
- Subsidies for parking and transport – considered more important

Minority Groups

- Continue to look after vulnerable groups and retain support in all areas
- Cut family learning (do we need to invest so heavily?), but retain some family support e.g. literacy
- SEN – sustain training

Older People

- Take things from the top to local (including planning), local people take charge of local area and make voices heard
- Concern – leisure centre not up to standard – combine with health? Umbrella organisation?
- Anxious that housing is on the list and supporting people continues for those who are most vulnerable on the Island

Town and Parish Councillors

- Privatise tourism and leisure centres

- Don't touch adult social care – spend same but increase service by doing it in different ways?
- Encourage inward investment (fly the flag in Europe)

Trade Unions

- Leisure centres privatised/franchised
- Concessionary fares negotiate with Southern Vectis
- Online booking tourism

Voluntary Sector

- 50% of Island's population cannot use or access computers so putting everything online is a problem
- House TICs in libraries
- Get rid of building control – go online as people in this area will be online themselves – health and licensing – possibly other authorities to run them
- Agree with co-location and merging services e.g. library services and school libraries
- Commission out services to voluntary and community sector e.g. leisure/Ventnor Botanic Gardens etc
- Vulnerable groups should be supported (level same but ?different ways)

Young People

- Buses – concessionary fares - address, main issue times and fares
- Leisure centres/sports development – cut and close? Or increase fares and charges – volunteers? Funding for coaches in sport rather than full-time people
- One card – manage by one body

Cowes Friendship Group

- Community development is vital to community groups – make small charge (£1) for workshop attendees
- Decrease charges for everything so more people will use services and income will increase
- Public toilets are needed as this is a tourist Island. Pay to use toilets, expect them to be clean. Parish and Town Councils or other organisations to run them

Feedback

Feedback forms completed at the end of the budget consultation workshop showed the following results.

The majority (93%) of attendees who completed the consultation workshop feedback forms felt that the budget challenges facing the council had been made clear to them.

Of those that received information provided before the workshop the majority (75%) found it useful and 92% thought that the information provided during the evening was useful in helping them contribute to the discussion.

92% felt they could openly contribute their ideas and 100% felt that their views had been heard, of which 64% said 'fully heard' and 36% 'partly heard'.

Overall 85% found the workshop an effective way of involving them and 71% rated the workshop positively; 21% as excellent and 50% as good.

When asked what the key messages and thoughts from the sessions were, the following comments were received.

- Valuable to hear others priorities and views
- The need for innovative thought and doing things differently
- I would like to see more services and involvement within Town & Parish Councils i.e. IT suite, drop-in centre for parishes saving money
- Coordination of services is critical. Efficiency and look at the cost
- Eradicate cross pollinisation. Amalgamate 'like' services. Utilise building assets to generate revenue
- Tricky job to do! Share management/co-locate services. Make planning self-funding?!
- Changes are going to have to be more radical than many people realise
- It's a bit of a muddle
- Some sensible strong measures need to be taken. Cut out duplication and waste
- The diversity of views expressed within the groups. If this is done again could the key choice documents be circulated in advance?
- Useful to have had copies of the information provided (budget choices paper) during the evening e-mailed out prior to the event to help contribute to the discussion