

Public Document Pack

Date Tuesday, 3rd December, 2013
Time 7.00 pm
Venue Committee Room 1, Civic Offices, Merrial Street,
Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire, ST5 2AG
Contact Louise Stevenson ext 2250

Supplementary Agenda Transformation and Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee

PART 1- OPEN AGENDA

- 4 THE BUDGET CONSULTATION PROCESS (Pages 1 - 16)**
The Budget Consultation Process Report will be received by Cabinet on the 11 December 2013, the Scrutiny Committee will consider the report prior to its receipt by Cabinet.
- 7 PORTFOLIO HOLDER(S) QUESTION TIME (Pages 17 - 20)**
The Portfolio Holder for Communications, Policy and Partnerships will give a statement on his priorities and work objectives for the next six months. The Committee will have the opportunity to ask questions following the statement. There will be an opportunity for the Portfolio Holder to flag up areas within their remit that may benefit from scrutiny in the future e.g. policy development.
- 10 PART 2 - EXEMPT**
- 11 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**
To resolve that the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the attached report, because it is likely that there will be disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 in Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.
- 12 ASSET MANAGEMENT STRATEGY (Pages 21 - 26)**
To consider the financial implications of the Asset Management Strategy. The Confidential report is attached.

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NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT OF EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT TEAM TO CABINET

11 December 2013

BUDGET CONSULTATION

Submitted by: Head of Communications

Portfolio: Communications, Transformation and Partnerships/Finance and Resources

Ward(s) affected: All

Purpose of the Report

To provide Cabinet with information relating to the outcomes of the 2013 budget consultation process.

Recommendations

- a) Cabinet notes the outcomes of the budget consultation process.
- b) Cabinet authorises the Portfolio holders for Communications, Transformation and Partnerships and Finance and Resources to further review the consultation process and consider how budget consultations could be developed for the future.

Reasons

The six-week process held during October and November 2013 was the second year running that the council had carried out a major budget consultation. The responses and comments from the public will help the borough council as it considers its spending pressures and priorities. Other feedback from community groups will also be fed into the process over the coming weeks and months to further shape the council's budget and spending proposals.

1. Background

- 1.1 Between Monday 30 September and Friday 8 November the borough council carried out a major budget consultation process. This was the second consecutive year the council had run such a process with an eight year gap between the previous consultation in December 2004.
- 1.2 Last year's process involved the production of a mini budget Reporter which set out how the council spends money and gave the consultation contextual background information. A sister document was produced which posed 10 questions to residents and for each they had to tick a box showing the level of importance they placed on that factor ranging from "Extremely Important" to "Of No Importance."
- 1.3 Analysis of the feedback showed three groupings of responses in terms of levels of importance. In the upper group were economy and environmental issues with keeping

streets and open spaces clean and clear; vibrant, active and safe town centres and promoting economic growth regarded as the three most important areas for residents.

- 1.4 In the next grouping were reducing worklessness, supporting victims of crime and vulnerable citizens as well as improving public health.
 - 1.5 In the next grouping, which could be assessed as being of lower importance were promoting healthy lifestyles; improving the way the council communicates; improving housing standards and choices; cultural activity and promotion of the arts.
 - 1.6 Cabinet agreed to run another budget consultation process in 2013 and following a series of discussions it was agreed that it would be beneficial if this second process built on the data gathered during the 2012 budget consultation. This would enable the council to compile a more comprehensive picture of local views and opinions with regard to budget issues and priorities. It was agreed that a mini budget Reporter would again be produced to set the context for the consultation (this is attached as Appendix A). In addition, it was agreed that to develop the consultation process a more probing questionnaire involving qualitative responses would be put together for residents to complete (this is attached as Appendix B).
 - 1.7 In 2012, the council received 635 responses to its consultation. This year the figure was 270. This means the council has received information from more than 900 residents as this cumulative information is helping it to gauge the thoughts and priorities of the public over local public spending. The detailed findings have been drawn together in Appendix C which is attached to this report.
 - 1.8 During the consultation process contact was made with a range of community groups including parish councils, Locality Action Partnerships and residents' associations. Cabinet members offered to visit meetings and discuss the budget issues with community groups. Although some organisations took up the offer immediately others have been slower to respond and some invitations are still outstanding. These will be met by Cabinet members and data collected will be added to the responses already gathered during the formal six week process with the public.
2. **Issues**
- 2.1 Cabinet members once again agreed to lead the consultation process with officers from the Communications Service – which has corporate responsibilities for consultation and engagement at the borough council - working alongside.
 - 2.2 The questionnaires asked residents six questions:-
 - a) What do you think the council could do to make the town centre more vibrant, active and safe?
 - b) What do you think the council should do to promote economic growth?
 - c) What do you think the council should do to reduce worklessness?
 - d) How do you think the council can improve support for victims of crime and vulnerable citizens?
 - e) How do you think the council can better promote healthy lifestyles?
 - f) Would you pay a few extra pence if it meant protecting public services?
 - 2.3 Some of the headline information from the responses can be summarised as:-
 - (i) A significant majority of respondents would be prepared to pay more to protect public services.

- (ii) Business rates are perceived as a problem locally and a barrier to economic growth and vibrant town centres. The rating lists are created and maintained by the Valuation Office Agency, a Government executive agency, billing and collection is the responsibility of local authorities such as the borough council.
- (iii) Concerted action is required to develop and regenerate our town centres.
- (iv) Residents support taking positive action to increase skills and employment opportunities locally.

2.4 When the consultation process ran during 2012 it was the first of its kind for a number of years. A “lessons learned” process did take place involving Cabinet members and officers and as a result a number of changes were made to this year’s process.

2.5 Fewer public meetings were organised; a greater emphasis was placed on distribution of information rather than standing with residents to collect questionnaires from them (this was because of the time required to fill in a form); greater emphasis was placed on advertising and promotion.

2.6 The detailed proposals for this year’s consultation were brought to the Transformation and Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee for its consideration, comments and suggestions prior to the process itself starting.

3. Proposal and reasons for preferred option

3.1 As a result of the consultation process, the borough council has received a significant amount of up-to-date information from residents concerning their priorities for service areas.

3.2 This will undoubtedly play an important part in the council’s budget setting and will be aligned to information which is fed into process from other quarters such as community groups – dialogue is still going on with some in the borough over briefings from Cabinet members – the Scrutiny Café in January and so on.

4. Outcomes linked to Sustainable Community Strategy and Corporate Priorities

4.1 One of the borough council’s corporate priorities is to “become a Co-operative Council delivering high quality, community driven services.”

4.2 One of the key outcomes which will undoubtedly enable the borough council to fulfil its obligations within that corporate priority is that it will be an “open, honest and transparent organisation which undertakes regular consultation with its residents and listens to their views.”

5. Legal and Statutory Implications

5.1 The council has a statutory duty to consult with the business sector only with Government guidelines stating as a body the council has to consult with “persons or bodies appearing to it to be representative of persons subject to non-domestic rates.”

5.2 However, it is the council’s ambition to go further than this as indicated above in 4.1 and 4.2. As a result, it has carried out this six week long consultation to allow all sections of the community to get involved.

6. **Equality Impact Assessment**

- 6.1 Although an Equality Impact Assessment was not carried out on the budget consultation exercise, the diversity of the channels used ensured there was no negative impact on any section of the borough's community.
- 6.2 All of the work carried out was in line with the council's Communications Strategy – which includes a section on consultation. This strategy and an associated Equality Impact Assessment was approved by Cabinet in March 2012.

7. **Financial and Resource Implications**

- 7.1 At its meeting on 2 September 2013, the Transformation and Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the issue of the budget consultation and the programme of work which was being organised as part of the process.
- 7.2 That programme of work was delivered and the human and material resources outlined below were considered at the scrutiny committee again on 2 December:-

Meetings

- Three public meetings were held with Cabinet members in attendance to talk to residents about the budget pressures and issues. These were at the Civic Offices in Newcastle, Kidsgrove Town Hall and the Madeley Centre.
- Seven "stop and chat" events were held at locations across the borough.
- Presentations were given to two residents associations who accepted an offer from Cabinet members to go and discuss the budget at their meetings.

Material resources

- 5,000 mini budget edition Reporters were printed and distributed together with the same number of questionnaires. Forty of each of these documents were sent to all councillors.
- Most of the mini Reporters were distributed at public meetings, stop and chat events and also through ad-hoc site visits at different locations in the borough by the Communications Team.
- Pop-up banners in place for three weeks prior to the public events at the host venues.
- 10 A3 posters promoting the consultation and events were also displayed at the events which were to host the public meetings.
- An article outlining the process to be undertaken and the locations of public meetings and the "stop and chat" events featured in The Reporter which was distributed between 26-31 August.
- Two press releases were produced and circulated to the local media promoting the public meetings and the "stop and chat" events. These did receive local coverage.
- Following a suggestion from Transformation and Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee, all community centres received a letter on the budget consultation together with a poster advertising the process and a quantity of mini Reporters and questionnaires.
- A similar process involved the Locality Action Partnerships.

Human resources

- Approximately 12 hours were spent by staff in the production and printing of material associated with the consultation – mini Reporter, questionnaire, pop-ups,

flyers and posters, website content. This is significantly fewer than the 44 hours spent on this area of work last year. This is because production templates are now in place and no flyers were written, designed or printed.

- Twenty hours were spent by staff distributing materials – some posters were taken out to promote events but the main human resource here involved distributing mini-Reporters and questionnaires in short and sharp guerrilla marketing/promotion trips to a variety of locations. This is slightly less than the assessment of 28 hours last year.
- Approximately 56 hours were spent by staff supporting Cabinet members at sessions with the public. Two staff were at each of the four-and-a-half hour “stop and chat” events during the week with four at the Saturday event in anticipation of greater public demand. Staff also supported Cabinet at the three public meetings in the evenings. Some of these hours were paid at overtime as they took place at weekends and in the evenings.
- Approximately 40 hours have been spent inputting, collating and evaluating data received during the process. Although there were fewer responses this year, because they are comment based it has taken much longer to assess and evaluate. More than 200 of the responses were in electronic format which has significantly reduced inputting demands.

Financial resources

- £796 was spent on advertising space in The Sentinel; Kidsgrove News; Junction 15 magazine and on pop-up banners for the three venues which hosted the public meetings. These banners were in place for three weeks before the events.
- £404 was spent on printed materials – all of which were done in-house.
- £86 was spent offering Freepost returns on the questionnaires.
- £30 on room hire.
- £691.31 in staff overtime.
- £70 on transport.
- The total for financial resources is just over £2,000.

- 7.3 All of the costs identified above – including the overtime payments to staff – can be met from within existing budgets for consultation services at the borough council.
- 7.4 As far as the human resources are concerned, the focus on the budget consultation has been very resource intensive both for Cabinet members and for the Communications Service at the borough council.
- 7.5 Cabinet members have been on hand at public engagements to ensure any political questions could be answered and dealt with. Presentations outlining the budget issues facing the council have also been delivered by the Cabinet Portfolio holder responsible for finance and budget management. Members have also been in attendance at the face-to-face sessions.
- 7.6 Devoting officer time to supporting the initiative has had an impact on the Communications Service as staff from all sections of the department have been involved in the events schedule. This has meant some lower priority work being re-scheduled, other elements being postponed and in some instances work has been cancelled such as pro-active media releases.
- 7.7 This has been another significant piece of work for the borough council and if Cabinet is mindful to repeat budget consultation exercises on an annual basis then continued evaluation and development must take place to try and ensure as many residents as possible are given an opportunity to come forward and take part in the process.

7.8 Significant changes this year included greater publicity devoted to the consultation; a reduced number of public meetings to make better use of resources; wider distribution of printed materials and information; an offer from Cabinet members to personally visit and talk to community groups; more informal “stop and chat” events.

8. **Major Risks**

8.1 There are no major risks associated with this report.

9. **Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions**

9.1 There are no earlier Cabinet/Committee resolutions relevant to this report.

10. **Background papers**

10.1 Appendix A is a PDF of the four-page “mini” budget Reporter produced for the consultation.

10.2 Appendix B is a PDF of the questionnaire distributed as part of the process.

10.3 Appendix C is a breakdown of the results of the budget consultation process which ran from Monday, 30 September to Friday, 8 November 2013.

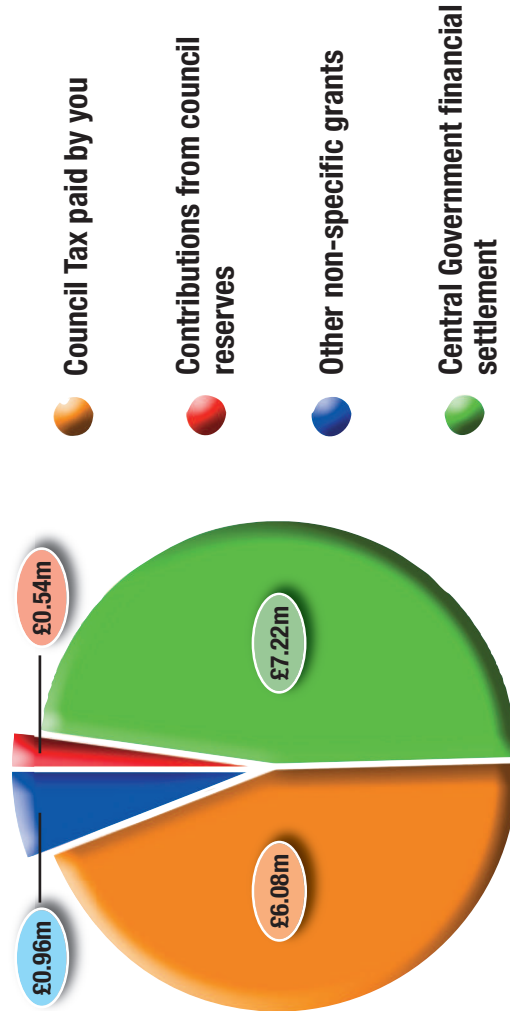
Council Tax - the facts...

An average household in Newcastle-under-Lyme pays **£1,449.43** in Council Tax each year.

The borough council collects all of this money from residents - but we only keep 12 per cent (**£176.93**) to pay for the services we run. The rest goes to:-

- Staffordshire County Council **£1,027.25**
- Staffordshire Police **£177.61**
- Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service **£67.64**
- Plus parish and town council precepts if you live in areas where they are in place.

Where the money comes from...



How you can get involved

"STOP & CHAT" EVENTS All 10am - 2.30pm	
Tues 1 October	Freeport, Talke
Thurs 3 October	King Street, Kidsgrove
Tues 8 October	Outside Guildhall, Newcastle
Tue 15 October	Keele University, Students' Union
Thurs 17 October	Madeley Centre
Fri 18 October	Farmers' Market, Newcastle

PUBLIC MEETINGS All 7pm - 9pm	
Tues 22 October	Madeley Centre
Wed 23 October	Kidsgrove Town Hall
Thurs 24 October	Civic Offices, Newcastle

OR have your say on our website www.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk/budget
OR fill in the attached questionnaire and send it back to us FREE



Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council is giving residents another chance to influence how public money is spent in this area.

For the second year running, the council is consulting local people so they can help to shape spending proposals in our communities.

Last year, you told us the most important things to you were:-

- Keeping streets and open spaces clean and clear.
- Vibrant, active and safe town centres.
- Promoting economic growth.

You said

The borough council has taken on board what was said during the six week consultation in October and November 2012. And as a result, a number of things have happened.

We listened

Since your comments were analysed, the council has:

- Invested £468,000 on new street sweepers.
- Worked with partners to bring JCB jobs into the borough.
- Allocated £30,000 for a Town Centre Manager post.
- Achieved Green Flag status at nine sites – more than anywhere else in Staffordshire.
- Overseen the final stages of a £500,000 investment in Newcastle town centre on new market stalls, better access for buses, improved taxi facilities.
- Frozen Council Tax.
- Won a Gold in the Regional In Bloom awards 12 years in a row.

We did

You already know from the television, radio and newspapers that the Government has been reducing the money it gives councils for local services.

This pattern won't change in the years ahead and this means resources to spend on services will continue to be stretched. With less to go round, your borough councillors need to prioritise where money is spent.

Reduced cash for councils inevitably means we can't go on doing everything that has been done before. But before the borough council makes any decisions, we want to hear what you have say first.

This consultation exercise enables you to do that and to make your voices heard **BEFORE** any decisions are made.

And once your borough councillors have heard what you have to say in this consultation exercise, they will then sit down and make some tough decisions on where to prioritise what your cash is spent on locally.

Reduced Government funding and inflationary rises means savings of £2.2m are needed in the council's 2014/15 budget. This equates to a 13 per cent reduction.

THIS IS HOW WE SPEND THE MONEY

Highways, Roads and Transport

- Highways/Roads (Structural)
- Highways/Roads (Routine)
- Street Lighting
- Parking Services
- Public Transport
- Traffic Management and Road Safety
- Transport Planning, Policy and Strategy



Corporate Expenditure

- Interest and Investment Income
- Investment Properties
- Pension Liabilities Account



Central Services

- Council Tax Collection
- NINDR (Business Rates) Collection
- Non Distributed Costs
- Members Services and Committee Administration
- Mayorality
- Registration of Electors
- Conducting Elections
- Corporate Management
- Local Land Charges
- General Grants, Bequests and Donations
- Emergency Planning



Cultural Services

- Museum and Art Gallery
- Theatres and Public Entertainment
- Parks and Open Spaces
- Allotments
- Golf Course
- Community Recreation Service
- Community Centres
- Sports and Leisure Centres
- Tourism
- Cultural Management and Support Services



Housing Services

- Housing Strategy
- Housing Advice
- Housing Advances
- Homelessness
- Private Sector Housing Renewal
- Housing Benefit Payments
- Housing Benefit Administration
- Enabling
- Licensing of Private Sector Landlords



Planning Services

- Building Control
- Development Control Enforcement
- Development Control Applications and Appeals
- Planning Policy
- Environmental Initiatives
- Economic Development
- Commercial Portfolio
- Economic Development - Other
- Economic Development - Government Initiatives
- Community Development



Environmental Services

- Cemetry and Cremation Services
- Environmental Protection
- Pollution Control
- Environmental Crime
- Food Safety
- Public Conveniences
- Licensing
- Dog Warden Services
- Infectious Diseases
- Pest Control
- Public Health
- Water Safety
- Community Safety - Crime Reduction
- Community Safety - CCTV
- Community Safety - Safety Devices
- Footpath Lighting
- Flood Defence and Land Drainage
- Street Cleansing



- Waste Collection
- Recycling
- Waste Disposal
- Waste Strategy
- Trade Waste
- Waste Minimization
- Climate Change Costs
- Environmental Management and Support Services
- Streetscene

Shown as a negative amount due to income exceeding the costs associated with these activities



Budget Consultation 2013

Please make your comments below and return the form to the borough council free of charge by putting it in the post.



What do you think the council could do to make the town centre more vibrant, active and safe?

What do you think the council should do to promote economic growth?

What do you think the council should do to reduce worklessness?

How do you think the council can improve support for victims of crime and vulnerable citizens?

How do you think the council can better promote healthy lifestyles?

Would you pay a few extra pence if it meant protecting public services?

Name

Address

..... Postcode

Age Under 18 18-35 35-55 55-70 70+

Reduction in financial settlement . . . there has been a 51 per cent reduction in the amount that the borough council receives from the Government from 2010/11 to 2014/15 (when taking account of inflation).

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Appendix A – evaluation of budget consultation responses

As the main report to Cabinet indicates, the budget consultation process ran for six weeks from Friday, 30 September to Friday, 8 November 2013.

The questionnaire was structured so that the public were able to give greater thought and consideration to the issues presented before them. This has resulted in a significant amount of quality data being harvested by the borough council.

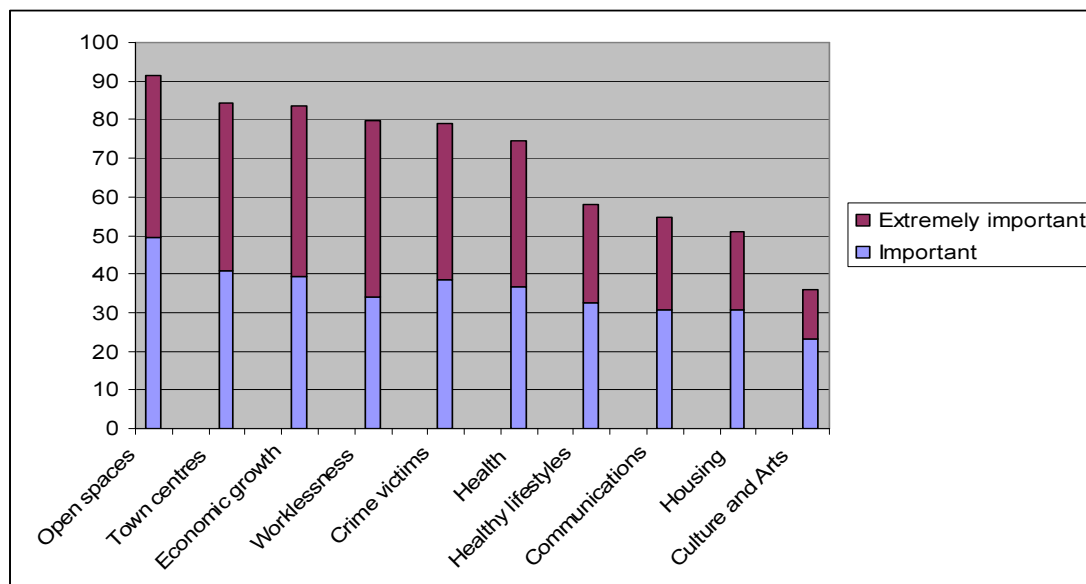
It was also intended to build on the responses from 2012 rather than just run a repeat process.

The first graph illustrates the relative levels of importance which residents who returned the questionnaire in 2012 placed on the 10 core themes.

The five categories used in the questionnaire were:-

- Extremely Important
- Important
- Neither nor
- Not important
- Of no importance at all

By adding the “extremely important” and “important” responses together, we can weight the 10 themes against each other in terms of their overall importance to the 635 residents who responded.



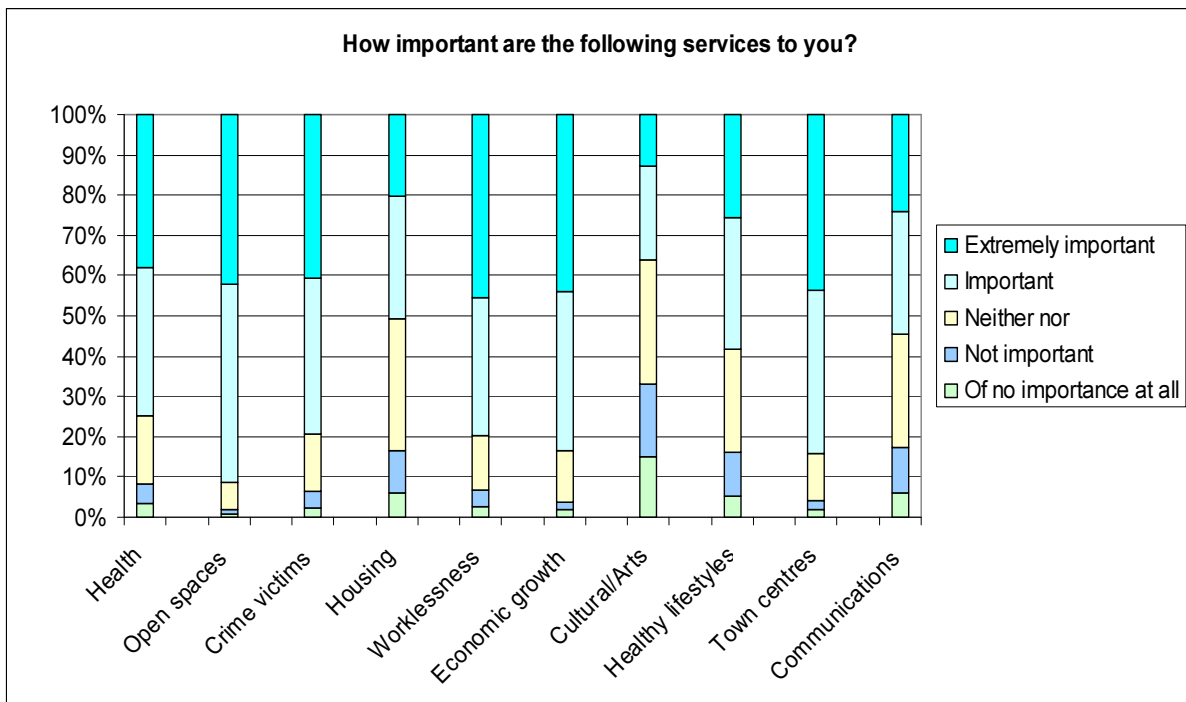
Analysis of this feedback shows three groupings of responses in terms of levels of importance.

In the upper group are economy and environmental issues with keeping streets and open spaces clean and clear; vibrant, active and safe town centres and promoting economic growth regarded as the three most important areas for residents.

In the next grouping are reducing worklessness; supporting victims of crime and vulnerable citizens and improving public health.

And in the final grouping, which could be assessed as being of lower importance, are promoting healthy lifestyles; improving the way the council communicates; improving housing standards and choices; cultural activity and promotion of the arts.

This second graph below shows how all 10 themes scored overall against each other in the five weighted areas.



This year's questionnaires asked residents six questions to build on this initial data set. They were:-

- 1) What do you think the council could do to make the town centre more vibrant, active and safe?
- 2) What do you think the council should do to promote economic growth?
- 3) What do you think the council should do to reduce worklessness?
- 4) How do you think the council can improve support for victims of crime and vulnerable citizens?
- 5) How do you think the council can better promote healthy lifestyles?
- 6) Would you pay a few extra pence if it meant protecting public services?

A total of 270 responses were submitted utilising both electronic and hard copy formats.

Responses have been analysed and grouped together in general themes and the most significant statistically have been grouped together beneath each question.

Because of the qualitative data which has been submitted, it is felt that a narrative rather than pictorial assessment of the responses is required.

What do you think the council could do to make the town centre more vibrant, active and safe?

- a) Reducing the rates which businesses pay was the single most common response (26) and although the council can lobby for this, the public should of course understand that business rates are set by the Government and the council merely acts as the collection authority.
- b) The range and type of businesses available in the town centre was by far the most consistently raised theme in response to this question.
- c) Too many charity shops (21); too many of the same kind of businesses (18); a need to enhance/expand the market (17); fill empty shops (14); attract national chains (12) and more activities/events (10) are all essentially making the same point which is that the fundamental retail offer needs to change if Newcastle town centre is to become more vibrant.
- d) Closely linked to this them of the range and type of businesses in Newcastle involved what some respondents felt was an over-reliance on alcohol-related premises in the town centre (21) with licensing issues also blamed for a perceived decline in the town centre (5) and an additional number of people (6) indicating they wished to see “more shops and less pubs.”
- e) Parking charges and a request for free parking (22) together with more short-stay parking (5) is also raised as an issue by residents.
- f) In terms of safety, there was a call for more visible policing (10), a suggestion that more CCTV is needed in Newcastle town centre (6) and the closure of the court buildings in Ryecroft (5) was also seen as a way of improving safety.
- g) Those who responded also seemed concerned by what some described as an over-reliance the Alcohol in the town was by response which drew the largest single number of responses (26) involved a reduction in rates for shops.

What do you think the council should do to promote economic growth?

- a) This question drew two responses which stood well above all others submitted and they relate to issues already raised in the first question. Respondents also followed through some of the themes that had also been raised through the first question.

- b) Respondents believe that a reduction in rates for shops (34) will make a significant contribution to the promotion of economic growth. As elected members know, business rates is the commonly used name for Non-Domestic Rates (NDR) which is a tax on the occupation of non-domestic property. All properties are assessed in a rating list with a rateable value, a valuation of their annual rental value on a fixed valuation date using assumptions fixed by statute. Rating lists are created and maintained by the Valuation Office Agency, a UK Government Executive Agency. However, billing and collection is the responsibility of local authorities such as the borough council.
- c) As the level of NDR is seen as an issue by the public then it may be something the council wishes to take forward and action through lobbying.
- d) Residents also repeated their focus on lower parking charges/free parking (32) as well as better shops (11) and tackling vacant shops (8).
- e) Some felt that the council could try to offer incentives to get businesses to locate in the borough (24) with others calling for efforts to attract “big” employers/national chains (13) to the area.
- f) Interestingly, a number suggested a bigger emphasis on encouraging local businesses/services (17) with the same number saying encouragement should be given to small/independent business.
- g) A smaller number talked about development of greater links with Keele University and considering ways in which graduates could be retained in the area.

What do you think the council should do to reduce worklessness?

- a) This question produced the biggest concentration of responses in terms of overall groupings with five themes in particular drawing heavy responses and a significantly reduced spread of responses.
- b) The most significant factor according to respondents was a demand for the council to focus on support for the unemployed and enhancing skills (42). There was a call for efforts to be made in improving access to education opportunities, skills training and development. Another set of respondents (5) made calls for skills training workshops to be developed in the borough.
- c) The next highest theme involved young people in particular and a desire to see more apprenticeship schemes locally (36).
- d) Greater council support for job creation schemes (27) was also highlighted.
- e) It should also be pointed out that a high proportion of respondents who answered this question wanted to see council support for welfare reform and less of what they described as “welfare handouts” (34).
- f) The issue of reducing business rates (18) was highlighted once more in this question as it was in the previous two questions.

How do you think the council can improve support for victims of crime and vulnerable citizens?

- a) Two distinct themes were generated by this question and the responses from residents can then be broken down into two broad sub-themes – where the council may be in a position to take direct action on its own and secondly where the council may try to work with its partners to move forward on issues raised during the budget consultation process.
- b) As far as the first sub-theme is concerned, the single most common response (19) involved people calling for the council to do what it can to increase funding for, and also awareness of, the various victim support mechanisms which operate across the borough.
- c) The availability of funding for enhanced home security for the vulnerable (10) and the provision of more diversionary activities for young people (8) were also areas where the council could take direct action – although it has to be recognised that there have been good examples of joint working in this latter area in the borough.
- d) Through its involvement in Newcastle Safer Communities Partnership, the borough council could decide to raise some of the other issues which have been raised but where the council cannot directly decide on an outcome.
- e) For instance, respondents would like to see an increase in police numbers locally (18) what they describe as a “crackdown on perpetrators” of crime (14); more visible policing (14); proactive policing (11) and the availability of more community officers (7).
- f) There was also a call for “partners to pool resources” (12).

How do you think the council can better promote healthy lifestyles?

- a) Affordability, accessibility and awareness were the three main themes from this question which drew a hugely diverse range of responses.
- b) The individual theme which resulted in the greatest number of responses revolved around making facilities more affordable (37).
- c) Accessibility/service provision was also a common theme for respondents. Thoughts put forward included encouraging cycling through the provision of more routes and events (20); a greater emphasis on outreach work and locally based events and activities (20); providing healthy eating advice and meal ideas (19); health promotion and screening events with partners (16) and providing routes and maps to boost walking as an activity both for individuals and local groups (13).
- d) Awareness raising and incentivisation – membership incentives for target groups such as the chronically ill and those on low incomes (19); more active

engagement with young people (18) and better promotion of sports and leisure facilities (17) and health promotion

- e) Respondents also felt the council could take a more proactive stance when it came to planning issues and restricting access/availability of what were described as “junk food” outlets (31) and licensed premises (7).
- f) It should also be noted by members that there was also a school of thought which felt no additional action was required from the council although admittedly this was for a variety of reasons – not the council’s job (10); already doing it (8); individual’s choice (6) and do nothing (3).

Would you pay a few extra pence if it meant protecting public services?

- a) Of those respondents who answered this question, an overwhelming majority said they would be prepared to pay more to protect services. The ratio was broadly just under three out of every four in support of this suggestion – 156 to 69.
- b) Of those who said neither yes or no (16) they said their eventual decision would depend on things such as which services would be protected and evidence produced of value for money.

Phil Jones
Head of Communications

Agenda Item 7

TO:	TRANSFORMATION AND RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
FROM:	CLLR. GARETH SNELL, PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR COMMUNICATIONS, POLICY AND PARTERSHIPS
RE:	PORTFOLIO HOLDER QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

My portfolio covers the areas listed below and within this report, I have included all the significant developments and decisions which have taken place as well as enumerating the activities that should be taking place over the next few months.

1. Communications

Between now and the end of the financial year Communications will be concentrating on completing the agreed number of questionnaire returns for Service Level Agreements they have in place with Streetscene, Recycling and Waste and Customer Services.

The annual assessment of all public sector websites in the country ended in November and Newcastle under Lyme will now have to wait until the early part of 2014 to see if we have retained our spot as the best public sector website in Staffordshire and one of the best in the country. Newcastle under Lyme is currently classed as "Four star mobile enabled" – the highest possible – in the ratings carried out each year by SOCITM.

Early in the New Year Cabinet will be asked to consider establishing a Wholly Owned Company for communications. The aim is to have in place a Service Level Agreement with the council for core communications activities and then to consider how to sell specialist skills to the market to generate money for the council's company. Staff will continue to be employed by the council so there are no TUPE issues. We will simply charge out their services to private business, the public sector or third sector, and the income generated will go to the council company.

'The Reporter' remains the most significant publication through which the Borough Council communicates with its residents, but the Communications Team are looking at online presence though the Website, Social Media and who our marketing tools can be maximised for the purposes of income generation.

2. Business Improvement

The work of the Business Improvement Team are, within my portfolio, responsible for production of the Quarterly Performance monitoring reports which have been streamlined in order to provide a greater level of meaningful qualitative information as well as the quantitative data members have requested.

The Business Improvement Team also produce the Annual Report and were instrumental in assisting in turning the political priorities of the new administration into quantifiable and measurable objectives within the new Council Plan – ongoing work to review, collate and support in the publication of the Council Plan.

In line with the Council's commitment to become a Cooperative Council, the Business Improvement team are conducting a Procurement Strategy review in order to ensure that the Council is maximising opportunity for small and medium sized companies in the local area to tender for Council contracts, thus helping support the local economy.

Working with various departments, the Business Improvement team have introduced protocols and procedures to allow the Council to be compliant with 'Community Right to Challenge' and the 'Community Right to Bid' parts of the Government's localism agenda.

A Social Value toolkit has been produced for members of the Newcastle Partnership to ensure that all public sector organisations are working together to deliver social value and Newcastle Borough Council is already using the Social Value Act to ensure that any commissioned services provide Social as well as financial value.

Business Improvement officers have assisted with identifying procurement savings within the budget setting proves and have supported the successful delivery of those savings, for example stationery; Cash Collection; Mail; ICT Hardware; Telecoms; Cleaning Materials; Fuel.

3. Partnerships (some cross over with Safer Communities and Healthier and Active Neighbourhoods)

In the last six months, the Partnerships Team has delivered a range of measures to address, deter and prevent anti social behaviour through the Community Safety team. These have included diversionary activities such as graffiti projects and enforcement activities such as restorative justice. Newcastle is now the only district in Staffordshire to see a fall in ASB during 2013/14 so far.

The Partnerships team, too, co-ordinate a range of activity to support victims of domestic violence and anti social behaviour such as raising awareness of domestic violence and other community safety related issues as well as helping a range of families and family members through our work and work of partners e.g. through the IDVA (which we part fund)

This Council has taken a lead on organised a series of events - welfare reform and public health - designed to bring partners together and focus on future areas of work needed in Newcastle and co-create local solutions which provide real dividends to local communities.

The Borough Council has, too, rolled out a "Let's Work Together" programme for partners across the Borough - series of training sessions established on key areas such as Safeguarding

The priorities for this area of my portfolio going forward are working closely with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner to maximise future funding opportunities and the development of services for the Borough and ^{progress} and improve the opportunities with co-location of services.

The Partnership team, along with the portfolio holders will be working with the Public Health team to co-ordinate a gap analysis of Health and Wellbeing services/activities available in the Borough with a view to providing a service for identified need.

In conjunction with Councillor Williams, I will be working with officers on streamlining and strengthening the Locality Action Partnerships and providing additional support in order to allow them to govern their own work programmes and commission work effectively.

4. ICT

Each year ICT is required to comply with the Government's Code of Connection in order to access the secure Government network. Compliance enables major services of the Council (such as Revenues & Benefits) to exchanges statutory & sensitive information with Central Government departments such as the DWP and other civil service organisations. Up until 2012, this compliance has been for government sites only. From 2013, the ultimate aim is to have a set of shareable, interoperable services that run over PSN, reducing duplication and waste across the whole of the public sector (incl. Police, NHS etc.). This year, the controls put in place were greater in number, much more stringent and included a zero tolerance policy for connection compliance.

In November 2013, the Council's accreditation with PSN was confirmed; which is a significant achievement with less than ¼ of those who need to register having successfully done so.

ICT has overseen the intergration of a number of pieces of new software and information systems to replace outdated ones. Migration from the Council's legacy Customer Relationship Management to the new, Staffordshire wide CRM was completed by the end of October 2013. The Cloud based CRM system offers many improvements in usability, options for expansion and integration and facilities for customer self-service and mobile based apps.

A review of the Council's corporate financial system resulted in procuring a replacement system that will meet the needs of the Authority for the foreseeable future and secure a cost saving above the original system.

Upgrade to the Council's Modern.Gov system to offer residents, Members and staff, the opportunity to link to the Council's public website using the Modern.Gov app via their smartphone or tablet device.

This free app for Apple and Android based devices facilitates Council documents being pushed to subscribers when they become available. Users can annotate and quickly navigate documents using the intuitive and simple, touch based interface. This upgrade was secured at no-additional cost; is already being used by Cabinet Members and is the basis of ICT's forthcoming Digital Member Services offering.

In spring 2013, ICT decommissioned the Council's legacy remote access solution, Netilla, and replaced it with a mainstream system provided by network specialists, Cisco.

ICT have consolidated 8 existing telecoms contracts into a single common agreement. This has secured significant cost savings from BT, facilitated a refresh of the Council's Wide Area Network technology and with it the introduction of new, cutting edge telephony technology called SIP (session initiated protocol), to the Council's voice infrastructure. SIP technology is due to be implemented by April 2014.

ICT are migrating all Council users (including Members) to Windows 7 and Office 2010; which will be completed by April 2014. This is a huge undertaking involving testing of all Council applications to ensure compatibility, whilst introducing new technology such as Roaming Profiles.

All Councillors have now been registered as Data Controllers with the Information Commissioners Office. Replacement of the Content Management system used to upload information to the Council's website. The replacement is an Open-Source solution (Drupal) which may also be cloud based for improved business continuity/disaster recovery resilience, whilst offering improved performance for the Council.

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By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

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