

## **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.

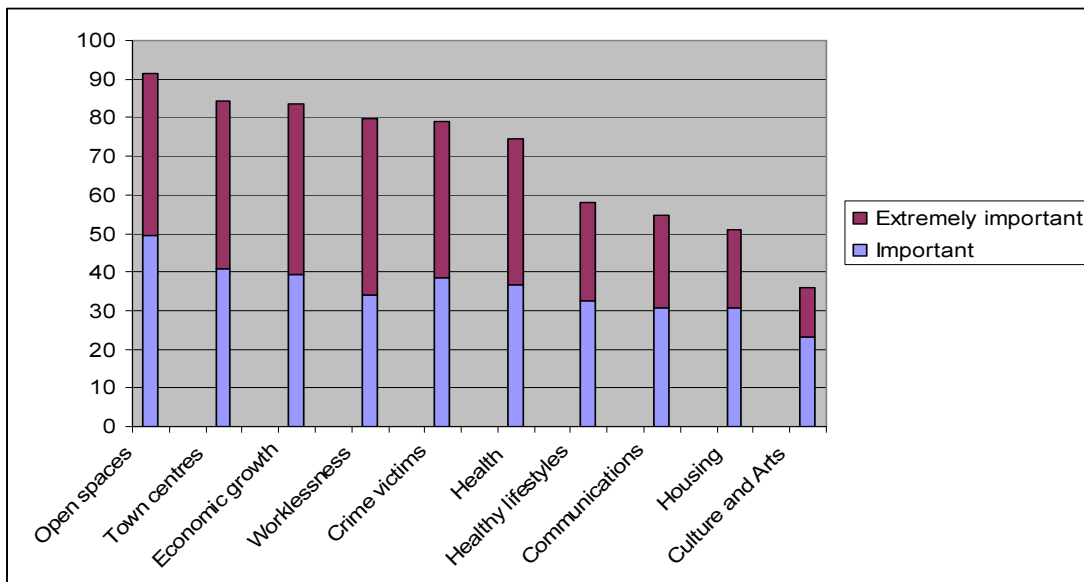
It was also intended to build on the responses from 2012 rather than just run a repeat process.

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.



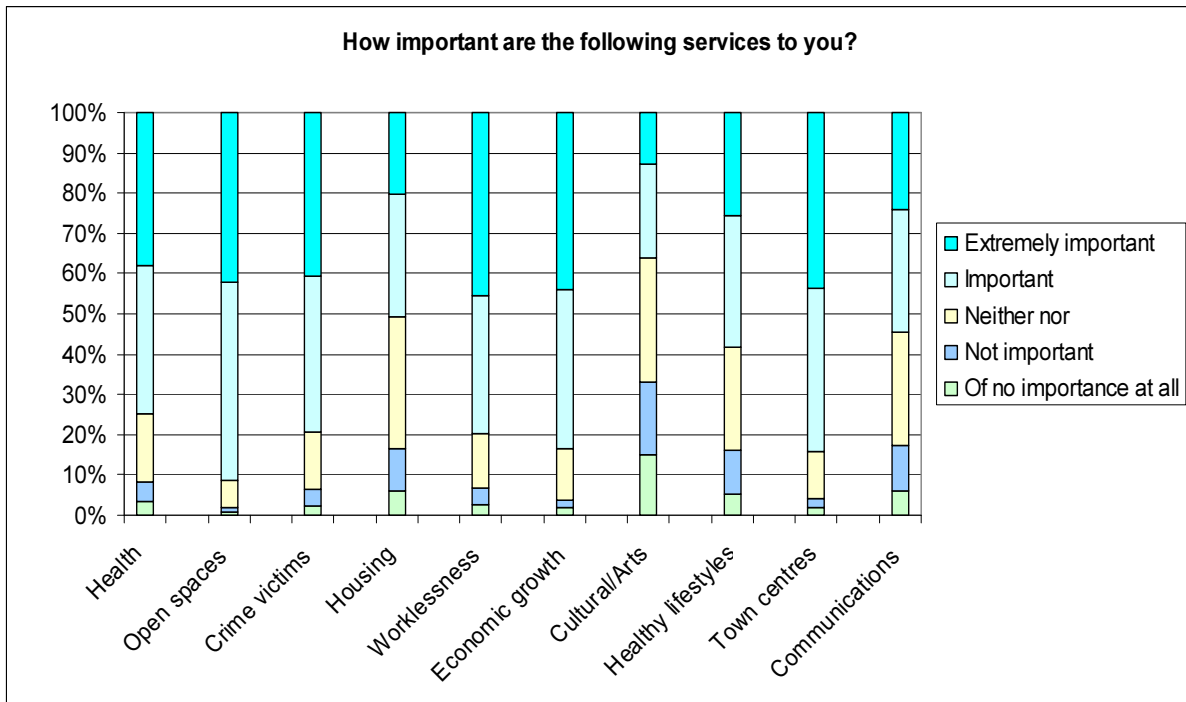
Analysis of this feedback shows three groupings of responses in terms of levels of importance.

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.

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