

Finance and Resources Committee

10.00am, Thursday 19 January 2017

Play Your Part – 2017-18 Budget Proposals Overview of Feedback and Engagement

Item number	7.9
Report number	
Executive/routine	
Wards	All

Executive summary

This report outlines the structure of the budget engagement campaign and highlights the key actions taken to ensure staff, citizens and other stakeholders were meaningfully engaged. The report summarises the overall level of response and emerging themes from feedback to the Council's budget engagement process.

Given the reduced engagement period in 2016, the engagement process generated slightly more responses in the same time compared to 2014 and 2015.

Respondents generally looked for more information about how ideas would be implemented – particularly around potential changes to libraries – but were broadly supportive of shared facilities, increased use of volunteers and the aims of channel shift.

However, respondents questioned the quality of the Council's online offering and were critical of what were viewed as attempts to remove or minimise the role of skilled employees.

Links

Coalition pledges	All
Council outcomes	All
Single Outcome Agreement	All

2017-18 Budget Proposals

Overview of Feedback and Engagement

Recommendations

- 1.1 To note the contents of this report.
- 1.2 To refer this report to Full Council as part of setting the 2017/18 revenue budget framework.

Background

- 2.1 Each year the Council consults with citizens and other stakeholders on the planned changes to its budget.
- 2.2 In 2014, the Council conducted a three-year prioritisation exercise asking people to set relative spending levels across all of its services, while taking account of the restriction that the budget had to balance and that it was necessary to make savings in some areas to meet growing demand in others. In this exercise, services for vulnerable adults and children, schools, and cultural services were protected relative to internal administrative services.
- 2.3 In 2015, the budget engagement focused on a number of significant policy areas where the Council would make decisions in subsequent years. Citizens and stakeholders supported changes such as increasing Council Tax to help pay for services - while stressing the importance of the need to continue to make efficiencies - and a preference for centralised community hubs with co-located services.
- 2.4 As a result of information gathered in the 2014 and 2015 budget engagement activities, the Council made a series of budget commitments covering a three-year period to deliver its transformation programme and make necessary savings. As a result of these commitments, the scope of the 2016 engagement exercise was reduced from previous years.
- 2.5 The 2016 budget engagement focused on the delivery of programmes and initiatives already agreed in principle. Citizens and stakeholders were invited to contribute to the development of services and how changes might best be implemented. In particular, feedback was sought on ways access to facilities could be increased, how library services could be better integrated with other Council and partner services, and how best to introduce more online services. Additionally, views were asked for on two areas where public interest had

previously been high - how winter festivals are funded, and the funding of leisure services.

- 2.6 Responses to the budget engagement could be submitted by online survey, email, telephone, in writing, by paper form, using the online engagement tool Dialogue, and face-to-face during events. More information on communication and response is included later in this report.
- 2.7 This year's budget engagement exercise also operated on a shorter timescale than in previous years, covering just over seven weeks, and closing on 21 November 2016.
- 2.8 Two other major engagement activities have been planned to run alongside the budget engagement activity - the city's development of a 2050 vision and the first phase of Locality Improvement Planning. As these three engagements were likely to overlap, links were made to ensure that relevant feedback was passed to each process, regardless of where it was received. Through these links the Council sought to reduce any sense of repetition, fatigue, or disconnect amongst stakeholders.

Main report

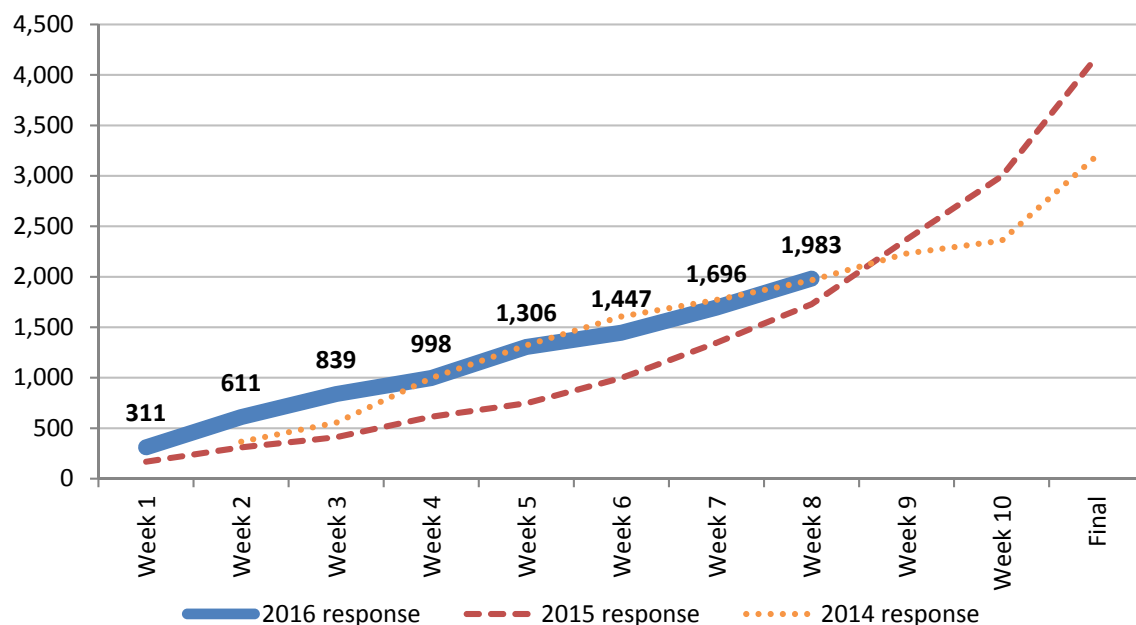
Communications activity

- 3.1 The budget engagement was supported by a multimedia communications approach that included:
 - Posters and leaflets - printing of posters and leaflets which were widely distributed to Council and non-Council locations;
 - An e-flier - used in previous years as a simple way for stakeholders to disseminate information, this was directly sent to more than 1,000 contacts;
 - Social media - campaign messages were shared and discussed on major social media platforms including Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. Targeted advertising was used to encourage participation from key groups under-represented in the response;
 - Lamp post wraps - placed in more than 50 locations across the city. This outdoor advertising was further enhanced by phone box advertising;
 - Internal communications - emails to Council employees from the Chief Executive and Council Leader through their scheduled messages, Managers News, Newsbeat and plasma screens in offices and libraries;
 - Budget engagement films - three different films were produced and distributed to partners and stakeholders;
 - Attendance at events - including a presence at the annual tenants conference and Leith Decides.

- 3.2 Working with the Edinburgh Evening News, a number of opinion pieces have been produced and published discussing the budget and the 2050 city vision.
- 3.3 By the close of the engagement period the communications activity had generated 8,599 unique views on the Play Your Part webpage.
- 3.4 This activity, which the Council has conducted itself, is further augmented by activities which other groups and organisations have taken forward. The Council has supported others to coordinate and engage with their stakeholders on key issues through the creation of a workshop brief.
- 3.5 The annual Question Time event, which gives members of the public an opportunity to quiz a panel of senior councillors, was successful once again. Delivered in partnership with the Evening News, twice as many people attended the event (80) than last year, with a big increase in numbers watching the live webcast online (250) and a healthy number of questions submitted in advance (43).

Response numbers

- 3.6 A total of 1,983 responses to the budget engagement have been received by all methods. While this was fewer responses than in 2014 or 2015, as shown in the graph below, the response was slightly above the same level achieved over the eight weeks in which the consultation was open in 2016.



- 3.7 This total response to the budget includes the following elements:
- 784 individuals completed the online survey;
 - 101 ideas discussed on the Council’s Dialogue site, resulting in 172 individual comments and 387 ratings;
 - 66 budget leaflets, 28 emails, 2 telephone calls; and
 - 443 comments received through social media, including 391 comments on Facebook, and 52 direct replies on Twitter.

Feedback on budget proposals

- 3.8 All feedback received will be made available to all elected members and the Council Leadership Team as a searchable electronic information pack. This will be completed and circulated before Christmas 2016.
- 3.9 In 2014, citizens were presented with the full Council budget and asked to prioritise spending across all services. The feedback received from that exercise indicated a strong preference to protect spending on: vulnerable people (both adults and children); direct delivery of education (nursery, primary, secondary schools); and culture.
- 3.10 In 2015, citizens were given a range of policy decisions on which to have their say. Of particular relevance to budget setting was the attitude towards how the Council raises money to pay for services. There was support for both increasing Council Tax and increasing charges for services, however this opinion was not uniform across the city or across age groups.
- 3.11 Older respondents and those from more deprived areas of the city were more strongly in favour of Council Tax increases over increasing per-use charges for services. By contrast younger people and those in more affluent areas of the city preferred smaller Council Tax increases and more increases for per-use services. Despite these local variations, the majority of residents responding in all wards were in favour of ending the Council Tax freeze.
- 3.12 In 2016, while demographic information was captured for respondents and this was analysed to identify any differences in perceptions or preferences, there were no significantly different views expressed by men and women, or Council employees and non-employees.
- 3.13 Engagement activity related to themes of the Play Your Part is planned and still ongoing. A data review will begin shortly, with the Council working with Edinburgh University, to develop the evidence base for making decisions around two service pairings – Gilmerton Library and Gilmerton Community Centre; and Piershill Library and Northfield Community Centre. Community groups and customers of these facilities will be involved in those discussions, which may provide useful learning for how all local provision should be reviewed across the city.

Local hubs

- 3.14 Through the Council's Asset Management Strategy, a number of opportunities have been realised to create shared facilities and deliver savings. This review and rationalisation of the estate has resulted in the replacement of old and energy inefficient buildings no longer fit for purpose.
- 3.15 The creation of local hubs has been viewed as broadly successful by officers and customers – though use of shared office space is variable across sites and amongst partner organisations. This success, alongside economic, social and operational factors, has encouraged the Council to consider the development of more shared-used facilities. In some cases planned developments are focused

on targeting particular customer needs – such as the shared space for the new Inclusive Homelessness service – and in others the hub can also help to improve overall access to suitable spaces and strengthen communities.

- 3.16 The Council's Asset Management Strategy is considering the estate not simply in the context of purpose and efficiency, but in light of the powers and responsibilities created by the Community Empowerment Act. In this context the Council, its partners and communities will consider assets and the services delivered from them and determine whether the best overall outcome for local people is for these assets to be owned and operated directly by the public sector, or owned and operated by communities or voluntary organisations, or redeveloped for entirely new purposes.
- 3.17 As part of the 2015 budget engagement, the Council put the issue to citizens – giving them a choice between: smaller and more local service delivery; a gradual process of sharing facilities where opportunities became available; and an accelerated approach of transferring most services to local hubs.
- 3.18 17% of respondents were in favour of more local delivery. 23% supported the Council's current plans at the time, to merge some facilities and seek future opportunities. However, 60% of all respondents were in favour of more service hubs that provide more services at the expense of very local provision.
- 3.19 Amongst those respondents to the 2015 survey who were in favour of smaller and more local facilities, a reduction in opening hours was stated as a preference over the merging of facilities.
- 3.20 In 2016, citizens were asked how they would like to access libraries along with other community services. Concerns were raised regarding noise levels if libraries were to share space with other services. However, in general, feedback was supportive as respondents recognised the benefits in cost savings and the potential for better partnership working.
- 3.21 Respondents were particularly keen on the use of space in hubs for local community groups and the merging of community and school libraries.

Use of volunteer support in libraries and community centres

- 3.22 As part of the latest budget engagement, respondents were asked to provide their views on local community groups and individuals having more of a role in delivering library services.
- 3.23 Respondents were supportive of volunteers assisting with library services such as reading groups and other activities as long they were part of a managed volunteer programme. Amongst those who were supportive of volunteers assisting in libraries, many felt that it would be a good opportunity for individuals, and young people in particular, to gain work experience and actively participate in their local community. It was suggested that the Council offer incentives as a means of recruitment such as good quality training and other non-financial rewards.

- 3.24 Respondents valued skilled staff and were opposed to volunteers replacing qualified, paid staff. It was felt that there were many enquiries dealt with in libraries in particular that were complex and required specific knowledge that unskilled volunteers would not possess. Furthermore, respondents were concerned about un-vetted individuals working with vulnerable people.
- 3.25 As part of the process of engaging on the 2016/20 revenue budget framework, concerns were expressed by residents about reductions to staff numbers in community centres. Following this feedback, the Council decided not to make the proposed reduction in staff numbers.

Access to facilities outside of normal hours

- 3.26 Citizens were asked for their suggestions or views regarding ways in which the Council can make libraries more accessible to a wider range of people and in particular, a swipe card system which would provide access to unstaffed library facilities out of hours.
- 3.27 Access to facilities outside of normal hours was not opposed as an idea, but was felt to carry a number of risks including care of the buildings and facilities, health and safety of library users, and the likelihood of inappropriate use of library buildings. Respondents requested further information regarding how this system would be managed.
- 3.28 Respondents were specifically concerned about the wellbeing of vulnerable individuals when accessing unstaffed facilities and the lack of assistance available during these periods when help from skilled staff is required.
- 3.29 Some respondents welcomed extended opening hours with many working shifts and unable to access libraries during the current opening times. However, it was apparent that respondents did not want unstaffed facilities to replace the current system altogether, many valuing skilled library staff.

Channel shift

- 3.30 In 2015, when citizens were asked for their views on moving from paper to electronic billing, electronic billing was overwhelmingly supported. 81% of respondents supported moving to digital billing by default, with customers having to specifically request paper billing. While fewer than 1% were in favour of the current system of paper bills, 19% preferred an *opt-in* to digital billing, rather than an *opt-out* system.
- 3.31 It should be noted that these are all results of online engagement, and may therefore not represent the views of the whole population on online issues. However this does give a strong indication on the views of the majority of Edinburgh residents who are, generally speaking, using online billing for banks, credit cards, utilities and a range of other services.
- 3.32 Subsequently, in 2016, citizens were asked how the Council could create better online access to all services so that individuals can access information when they need it, make a payment or make a request for a service.

- 3.33 Comments received in relation to current online services indicated that at present, systems are too slow and not user friendly. Issues surrounding registration and signing-on to systems were identified and respondents were generally in favour of one system that provides access to all Council services rather than a number of different systems which causes confusion for citizens.
- 3.34 Respondents were generally concerned about system security and data protection. They questioned whether the Council needed to collect as much data as it did, whether this was secure, and advocated use of a secure payment platform like PayPal – but these concerns do not appear to relate to actual personal experience of using Council services online.
- 3.35 Accessibility for those with no internet was highlighted as problematic. This was linked with potential reductions in staff, and it was felt this would impact on the level of support available for those most in need and individuals who are less computer literate.
- 3.36 It was evident that many were unaware of the online services available and how citizens can access these services. The development of the online service offering continues, with support from CGI to ensure that new access methods create efficiencies and deliver savings for services as well as benefits for customers. Some communication activity has taken place (such as the Save Time, Do It Online campaign), but further communication and transition support will be rolled-out as online access is enabled and improved for more services.

Leisure facilities

- 3.37 During this year's budget engagement, citizens were asked how the Council can encourage individuals and local communities to be more involved in the provision of sport and leisure activities and the challenges this might bring.
- 3.38 The responses received were comparable to those relating to the use of volunteers in library services. In general, respondents were not in favour of volunteers taking over from paid, trained staff in leisure facilities with many raising health and safety concerns.
- 3.39 Some respondents suggested volunteering opportunities might be beneficial for young people who are trying to gain work experience in the health and leisure industry. In addition to gaining experience, incentives such as free gym membership were viewed as a good way of attracting volunteers.
- 3.40 Instead of reducing the number of skilled staff, respondents suggested alternative measures that they felt could be adopted to ensure that the level of service is maintained and service cuts kept to a minimum.
- 3.41 The cost of leisure facilities was considered too high, which respondents felt had led to customers moving to other providers of leisure services. Respondents were in favour of an increase in the amount of promotional work carried out and the development of initiatives to encourage more people to join. Suggestions included flexible payment methods, free trial days and discounts for multi-sessions.

- 3.42 The overall tone of comments regarding customer service, facilities and staff were very positive. However, a minority of respondents also reported unclean facilities, restrictive opening hours, excessively busy gyms and cold swimming pools. Negative aspects such as these have led people to move elsewhere and it was frequently reported that those who had done so were receiving a better quality of service at privately run facilities and paying less.
- 3.43 The importance of citizens sustaining a healthy lifestyle was mentioned frequently by respondents as was the Council's role in supporting it. Partnering with schools to encourage children to be active and healthy from a young age was valued and considered as an effective, preventative and cost-cutting measure.
- 3.44 As part of measures to expand access to leisure facilities, increase revenues and generally deliver better use of Council assets, Edinburgh Leisure has taken on responsibility for the management of sport and leisure facilities within the school estate. This should also help to better connect schools to their local communities whereas in the past most adults would have no reason to visit a school and might be specifically excluded from doing so.
- 3.45 Additionally, providers of leisure facilities and GP practices working in shared facilities was considered an area that should be explored to support and expand the way health and fitness services are developed and services delivered.

Dialogue ideas

- 3.46 Feedback on the Council's Dialogue page that relates directly to budget proposals has been included previously. Aside from these, some of the highest rated ideas suggested on the Council's Dialogue page have been summarised below. As appropriate, Dialogue ideas will be passed to services or Locality Leadership Teams to be considered for inclusion in Locality Improvement Plans.

More regular & efficient street cleaning

- 3.47 The need for a more regular and efficient street cleaning service was mentioned on a number of occasions on the Dialogue page. Litter, weeds and dog fouling were some of the main issues citizens felt affected the condition of Edinburgh's streets and the wellbeing of the local residents. Citizens were not only keen to see an increase in the frequency of street cleaning and general repair but were eager for those who contribute to the litter and dog fouling problem to be held accountable for their actions.
- 3.48 The Waste Improvement Plan, amongst other actions, seeks to address street cleansing, the provision of street litter bins and fly-tipping. Through working more closely with Parks, a more preventative approach to weeds will be implemented. And all of this work will be supported by behaviour change communication campaigns including Neat Streets and Our Edinburgh.
- 3.49 The Council is currently exploring the development of a Citizen Deal or Citizen Charter, following on from the development of a new Customer Strategy and the Edinburgh 2050 City Vision. This charter would clarify the role of the Council in

delivering universal services – such as street cleaning – while also outlining the behaviours and responsibilities which are expected from citizens.

Improve road surfaces

- 3.50 The conditions of the roads in Edinburgh were considered poor and highlighted by a number of citizens. Concerned citizens noted the damage caused to vehicles and the risk to lives caused by potholes and uneven road surfacing and suggested that this could be resolved by resurfacing being carried out on a more regular and thorough basis. It was felt that if the condition of the roads were improved, it may encourage more people to cycle which would have a positive impact on congestion and pollution in the city.
- 3.51 The Edinburgh Street Design Guidance (ESDG) was approved by committee in 2015. The ESDG seeks to bring the Council into line with Scottish Government policy on street design where, amongst other triggers, carriageway and footway renewal activity takes place and utilities work impacts on the road surface. This should ensure a more holistic approach is taken to development, maintenance and reinstatement works. The experience and efficacy of deploying this approach will be reported to the Transport and Environment Committee.

Improve cycle infrastructure

- 3.52 Edinburgh now has higher proportions of people who cycle to work than anywhere else in Scotland and the importance of maintaining well-kept cycle paths and lanes was reflected in the ideas written by citizens on the Dialogue page. It was felt that improvements are required in order to ensure that the network of cycle paths and lanes are properly linked together throughout the city to ensure a safer and easier journey and to encourage more people to choose cycling as their mode of transport.
- 3.53 The Council has made a significant commitment to spend an increasing portion of its revenue and capital spending on the active travel network.

Next steps

- 3.54 Feedback from the budget engagement will also form part of the considerations for the creation of Locality Improvement Plans – particularly with regard to the use of facilities in localities – and the development of the Edinburgh 2050 City Vision. Through regular review of the Council Business Plan, the organisation remains focused on delivering positive outcomes for our customers within the current operating environment. The next update to the Business Plan will reflect all development work around budget engagement, Locality Improvement Planning and the development of the City Vision.
- 3.55 Views on the use of online services will influence the approach to the development and roll-out of the Council's ICT Transformation Programme, and the development of a new Customer Promise and supporting strategic approach to managing the customer experience.

Measures of success

- 4.1 The success of a budget engagement process is determined by several criteria, including:
- a. The number of individuals who are reached by messages about the consultation, raising awareness that the Council is engaging on its budget;
 - b. The number of individuals who attend events or otherwise respond to the budget engagement; and
 - c. The extent to which individuals and organisations have been able to understand and meaningfully input into the budget process. Unlike other measures of success, this is subjective and takes into account wider feedback on the budget process.
- 4.2 The budget engagement process is reviewed each year, and all of this feedback will be considered when designing any future budget engagement activity.

Financial impact

- 5.1 The budget engagement process is met from within existing budgets and resources.

Risk, policy, compliance and governance impact

- 6.1 There is a general acceptance that a local authority has a responsibility to meaningfully engage with stakeholders on its budget. An open, transparent budget engagement process is a key part of several corporate strategies and local community plans. This process reduces the overall risk of legal action and reputational damage for the Council.

Equalities impact

- 7.1 The engagement process has been designed to be inclusive through all communication channels, reaching both individuals and special interest groups, using a range of promotional material.
- 7.2 All proposals from the budget are in the process of being equalities rights impact assessed both individually and cumulatively. The results of these ERIAs will be reported to Full Council as part of the budget process.

Sustainability impact

- 8.1 The impacts of this report in relation to the three elements of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 Public Bodies Duties have been considered, and the outcomes are summarised below.
- 8.2 This budget engagement process has no appreciable impact on carbon emissions. Through any engagement process it is hoped that services and their customers will develop more sustainable ways of operating.
- 8.3 The need to build resilience to climate change impacts is not relevant to this report, however specific proposals may have climate change impacts and these will be reported on as part of their individual impact assessments.
- 8.4 The budget engagement process will help achieve a sustainable Edinburgh through ensuring a diverse range of people have a meaningful say on issues that affect the economic wellbeing and environmental stewardship of the city.

Consultation and engagement

- 9.1 The budget engagement process is one of the Council's key projects for ensuring citizens, staff and other stakeholders have a voice in priorities for the city and how its budget is spent.
- 9.2 This budget engagement is part of a four year programme of continuous engagement with citizens, staff and the Council's partner organisations on all issues relating to the budget and transformation of services, including integration of health and social care services. Methods have been established for enabling meaningful dialogue with all stakeholder groups and these will be continually reviewed with these groups to ensure they are accessible and relevant for obtaining all types of feedback.

Background reading/external references

None.

Andrew Kerr

Chief Executive

Contact: Kirsty-Louise Campbell, Head of Strategy (interim)

Email: kirstylouisecampbell@edinburgh.gov.uk | Tel: 0131 529 3654

Contact: David F Porteous, Lead Insight and Engagement Officer

E-mail: david.porteous@edinburgh.gov.uk | Tel: 0131 529 7127

Contact: Pamela Dooner, Senior Insight and Engagement Officer

E-mail: pamela.dooner@edinburgh.gov.uk | Tel: 0131 529 5159

Links

Coalition pledges	All
Council outcomes	All
Single Outcome Agreement	All
Appendices	None