

Finance and Resources Committee

2pm, Thursday, 8 February 2018

2018-19 Budget Proposals: overview of citizen engagement process and feedback

Item number	5.7
Report number	
Executive/routine	
Wards	
Council Commitments	All

Executive Summary

This report outlines the structure of the budget engagement campaign and highlights the key actions taken to ensure 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.

2018-19 Budget Proposals: overview of citizen engagement process and feedback

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 To note the contents of this report.
- 1.2 To refer this report to Council as part of setting the 2018/19 revenue budget framework.

2. Background

- 2.1 In the context of the £21m savings that the Council needs to make in 2018/19, the Council continues to engage citizens and organisations in an open conversation about shared priorities and important themes for implementing the budget proposals, service changes and policy areas.
- 2.2 Continuing with the qualitative approach carried out in recent years, the purpose of this year's budget engagement process was to identify and understand the potential impacts of the proposals, areas of concern, solutions and opportunities. The engagement therefore asked participants to consider the impacts of the budget proposals and submit their comments.
- 2.3 The objectives were:
 - 2.3.1 to keep people engaged about the Council's budget position and the shape of service changes;
 - 2.3.2 to encourage and enable all sections of the population and the Council's partners to have their say, using digital and non-digital engagement methods, for wide accessibility; and
 - 2.3.3 to facilitate meaningful conversations with people in a positive and collaborative way, in order to develop solutions with them based on their needs and ideas.
- 2.4 In recent years the Council has taken a progressive approach to including citizens in decision-making processes around its budget, and being the first in Scotland to use a number of online tools. This has meant a significant increase in the number of participants and an improvement in the relevance of feedback in relation to the budget decisions the Council faces. Increasingly the Council has also brought partners into the budget engagement process to further broaden its reach.

- 2.5 The engagement campaign has previously been titled 'Edinburgh's Budget Challenge' and recently 'Play your Part', and each year has been framed based on the Council's financial challenges, policy areas and budget proposals.
- 2.6 In 2014, citizens were asked to prioritise spending across all services: participants highlighted a strong preference to protect spending on vulnerable people (both adults and children); direct delivery of education (nursery, primary, secondary schools); and culture.
- 2.7 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.
- 2.8 In 2016, the focus of citizen engagement moved to service re-design and transformation including libraries (opening hours and the use of volunteer support), channel shift (how the user online experience can be improved); sport and leisure (how activities can be run by individuals and communities). Participants were also asked what should be prioritised for investment in their local area. This feedback helped form the Locality Improvement Plans.

3. Main report

- 3.1 The engagement took place over 6 weeks, starting on 8 November and closing on 19 December.
- 3.2 Responses to the budget engagement could be submitted by online survey on the Council's consultation hub, email, telephone, in writing, by paper form and face-to-face during events.
- 3.3 A Question Time event was hosted again for the third year at the City Chambers. The public was invited to attend and submit questions to the panel of elected members. The event was streamed live online so that people could watch the discussion and also participate by submit comments and questions in real time.

Communications activity

- 3.4 The budget engagement was supported by a multimedia communications approach that included:
 - 3.4.1 Posters and leaflets - printing of posters and leaflets which were widely distributed to Council and non-Council locations;
 - 3.4.2 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;
 - 3.4.3 Social media - campaign messages were shared and discussed on major social media platforms including Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn;
 - 3.4.4 Lamp post wraps - placed in more than 50 locations across the city;

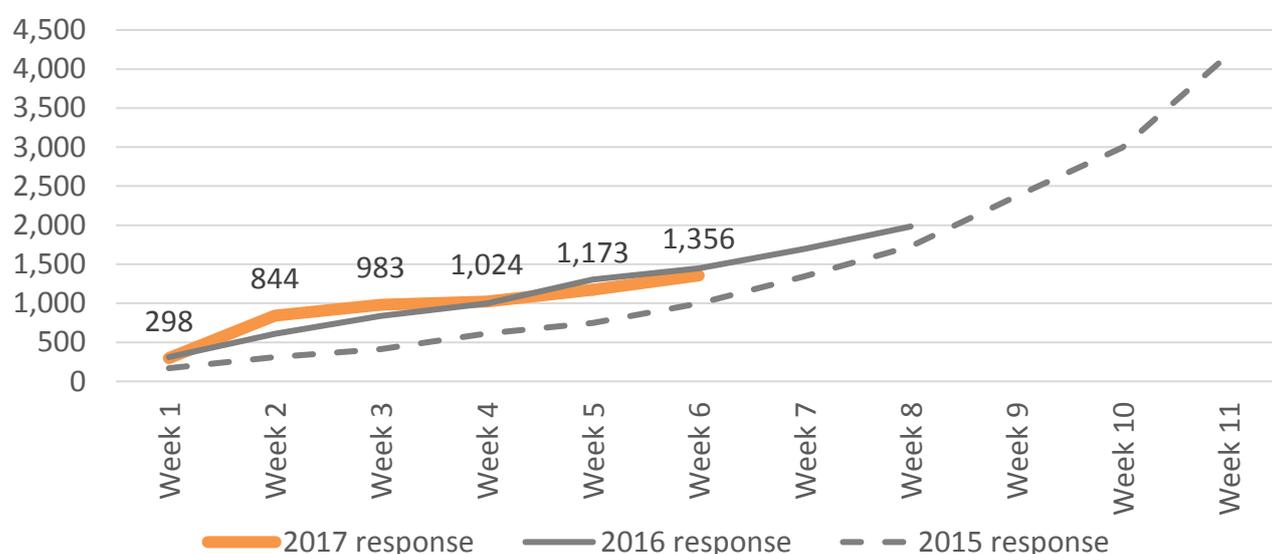
3.4.5 Internal communications - emails to Council employees from the Chief Executive and Council Leader through their scheduled messages, Managers News, Newsbeat and plasma screens in offices and libraries; and

3.4.6 Budget engagement video was produced and distributed to partners and stakeholders.

3.5 By the close of the engagement period the communications activity had generated 2,473 unique views on the Play Your Part webpage.

Response numbers

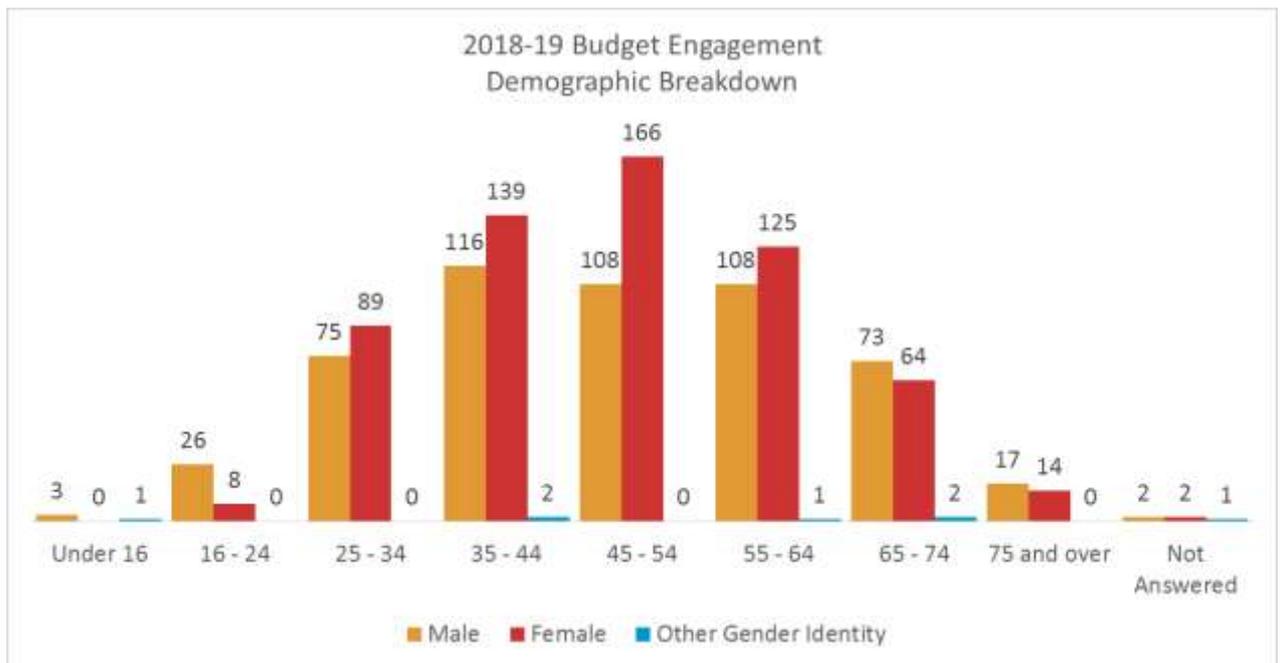
3.6 A total of 1,356 responses to the budget engagement have been received by all methods. While this was fewer responses than in 2015 and 2016 as shown in the graph below, the response was slightly above that generated over six weeks in 2015, and roughly tracked the response generated in 2016.



3.7 This total response to the budget includes the following elements:

- 1,063 comments received through the online survey, budget leaflet, and by email and telephone;
- 237 comments received through social media, including 215 Facebook comments and 22 direct replies on Twitter; and
- 56 questions asked as part of the Question Time event at the City Chambers. These questions were either answered on the night or responded to afterwards. 45 people attended this event and 77 watched it live.

3.8 The total response by age and gender is illustrated in the graph below.



Feedback on 2018-19 Budget Proposals

- 3.8 The full text of all comments received has been made available to elected members. Major themes of this feedback have been identified, especially where these were in relation to a specific budget proposal.
- 3.9 The largest number of responses were received in regard to the proposals affecting **Edinburgh Leisure** (378 total comments, 7 clearly supportive, 319 clearly opposed) with the balance being strongly negative. A direct mailout by Edinburgh Leisure was effective in delivering hundreds of additional submissions which fell into two broad categories – those who were concerned about the future of one specific facility or activity (no overall majority or consensus), and those who felt leisure facilities were an important tool to address a range of public health concerns.

Feedback also highlighted the competitive marketplace in some areas of the city, stating that Edinburgh Leisure prices were already high in relation to many private gyms.

The reduction in total Edinburgh Leisure funding was the main concern of respondents. Though charging for the maintenance of pitches was not a concern raised by most respondents, it was recognised as double hit for the service.

- 3.10 Proposals to charge for **garden waste collection** (159 total comments, 20 clearly supportive, 100 clearly opposed) caused uncertainty. While a minority felt the charge was unfair and being levied against households that already pay higher Council Tax, in general respondents did not feel charging was workable in Edinburgh. This response was based on a lack of clarity about how the charge would be implemented and enforced.

Respondents did not understand how a charge would be applied for a single bin in a communal stair, or how the Council would prevent households who hadn't paid from using a range of other options – such as burning, public litter bins, neighbours' bins or residual waste bins. Some residents felt that they would stop maintaining shared green areas if they were being penalised for doing so.

There was recognition that – as garden waste collection is not a statutory service – the Council was right to look at alternative funding and delivery approaches.

3.11 Respondents have, throughout several years of budget engagement processes, been in favour of increasing and re-banding **Council Tax** (65 total comments, 38 stating there should be an increase, 6 stating there should be a decrease). Edinburgh was regarded as a relatively wealthy city, which should not encounter difficulties paying for essential services that Edinburgh residents need.

3.12 Those responding about **Parking** (88 total comments) presented a range of different views. There was negative perception that the Council was again using parking charges as a revenue source rather than as part of an overall strategy.

Respondents claimed that parking charges do not reduce congestion, that the Council does little to discourage out-of-town residents from parking in residential streets in some areas of the city (which did impact on congestion), and that resident parking charges were expensive, especially as there was no assurance of getting a parking space.

Increasing parking charges was seen as positive in an active travel context, where the long-term goal was to transfer people to sustainable transport modes. There were also calls to reconsider congestion charging.

3.13 **Advertising on Council assets** (34 total comments, 4 clearly supportive, 27 clearly opposed) attracted little interest from respondents, but was an emotive issue for some. The main concern of respondents was the impact on the appearance of the city and where such advertising would be located. While the Council may have envisaged this as advertising on roundabouts and bridges, it appears some respondents may have thought of this proposal as including illuminated billboards on the City Chambers. The former would likely be of little concern, while the latter would be unacceptable to some.

Of secondary concern was the impact of advertising revenue on the Council's decision-making. Respondents believed that the Council could be compromised if it were receiving advertising revenue from businesses also seeking Council contracts.

3.14 The proposal to change **Waste Services working patterns** (37 total comments, 6 clearly supportive, 19 clearly opposed) was received negatively due to perception of the current performance of the service. Respondents felt that, as the service did not function well with the current working hours, staff should not be placed on alternative hours seen as rewarding them and reducing the service to the public. Respondents were also sceptical about the choice of working days put forward, with alternatives being suggested.

- 3.15 The removal of the **Night Team** (24 total comments) was questioned by all those who mentioned this proposal. It was unclear to respondents whether Police Scotland had been consulted and what their views were, and whether there would be effective cover for issues currently dealt with by the Night Team. Respondents believed that because of the broader remit of the police, the Night Team delivered better results. And, in general, the importance of night-time economy to Edinburgh was stressed, with some feeling this reduction could be a false economy.
- 3.16 Many of the comment received in relation to **Health and Social Care** (100 total comments) did not explicitly relate to budget proposals. Respondents stressed the importance of the protection and care of vulnerable people, stating this was a core responsibility of the Council. Additionally, there was a clear misunderstanding amongst some respondents between work being performed “by the third sector” and work being performed “by volunteers”. It was felt that volunteers would not be a suitable replacement for Council staff in a care role. In future communications, it may be useful to adopt a term for third-sector partners and their staff which makes it clear to customers that they are paid to perform their services.
- 3.17 **Education** (89 total comments) received few comments that related to the budget proposals, but was often cited as a priority. As with care for the elderly and vulnerable, education was seen as a core responsibility, and was felt to be essential to secure the long-term success of the city.
- 3.18 Respondents used the budget engagement process to talk about **Housing** (62 total comments), with a consensus that there was more need for affordable housing.
- 3.19 Comments received in relation to **active travel** (48 total comments) often urged the Council to push people towards walking or cycling, or to make these easier, as a way of addressing environmental, transport and public health concerns.
- 3.20 There was significant spontaneous support for the introduction of a **Tourist Tax** (suggested 118 times) – around 42% of all suggestions received as part of the budget engagement were about a Tourist Tax, vastly more than any other suggestion. Respondents observed that they had paid similar taxes during their stays in Europe and it was reasonable that visitors to Edinburgh did the same.
- To a lesser extent, calls for a Tourist Tax were about making tourists compensate Edinburgh residents for the inconvenience and disruption they caused. This was also reflected in negative comments about **AirBnB** (19 total comments), urging the Council to restrict or control short-term lets in the city.
- The proportion of residents who believe the Festivals make Edinburgh a worse place to live has increased every year for the past five years – from less than half a percent, to the 6% recorded in the 2017 Edinburgh People Survey.
- 3.21 There were 100 complaints received about the quality of service provided by the Council, many mentioning multiple issues, including: roads and pavements (63); street cleaning (34); and refuse collection (28).

- 3.22 Respondents felt that the Council had brought some of its budget issues on itself with spending on what they termed wasteful programmes or vanity projects. There were 78 comments about the tram, most of which were negative, and a further 34 comments about the extension of 20mph zones. It should be noted that while a majority of residents support 20mph zones, the proportion who support the programme has fallen from 59% in 2016 to 55% in 2017, while those who oppose has risen from 20% to 25% (all figures as measured by the Edinburgh People Survey 2016 and 2017).
- 3.23 Though not part of the 2017 budget engagement process, there were also 38 comments in relation to libraries. These respondents opposed the reduction in opening hours which was approved by Council as part of the previous year's budget but were delayed as a result of one-off Scottish Government funding.

Feedback on the engagement process and future approach

- 3.24 Respondents commented on the budget engagement process (28 total comments) itself, criticising the process for providing no options and felt that the options decisions had already been taken.
- 3.25 Going forward the Council plans to continue to involve citizens, elected members, partner organisations and Council employees in an open and meaningful conversation to shape the strategic direction, financial planning and service redesign. To do this effectively, engagement will be integral to the Council's Change Strategy in helping to shape priorities, understand what matters most to people and to develop innovative solutions with people.
- 3.26 Any approach taken forward will be aligned to the principles of the Community Empowerment Act and the National Standards of Community Engagement with relation to involving communities in decision-making processes and ensuring engagement is inclusive, open and genuine.

4. Measures of success

- 4.1 The success of a budget engagement process is determined by several criteria, including:
- 4.1.1 The number of individuals who are reached by messages about the consultation, raising awareness that the Council is engaging on its budget;
 - 4.1.2 The number of individuals who attend events or otherwise respond to the budget engagement; and
 - 4.1.3 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.

5. Financial impact

- 5.1 The budget engagement process is met from within existing budgets and resources.
- 5.2 The cost of the communications campaign was £6,300.

6. 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.

7. 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.

8. 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.

9. 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 The budget engagement process will be continually reviewed based on participant and stakeholder feedback and good practice. Methods will be established for enabling meaningful dialogue with all stakeholder groups to ensure they are accessible and relevant for obtaining all types of feedback.

10. Background reading/external references

None.

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11. Appendices
