

Cllr David James
Plymouth City Council
Civic Centre
Plymouth
PL1 2AA

Friday 23rd December 2011

Dear Councillor James

Priorities and Budgets Consultation Feedback for City Council Budget Scrutiny Panel 2012/13

I am writing as Chair of Community and Social Action Plymouth (CASAP), on behalf of our members and Directors, with feedback on the 2012/13 City Council corporate priorities and how this should effect budget planning.

A workshop involving our members on Monday 12th December had a presentation from City Council Officers on a range of issues effecting priorities and plans and importantly feed back on what had been taken forward out from our member's comments last year. Following the meeting all of our 180 member organisations, sector networks, Consortium Directors and partnership representatives were sent briefing notes and asked to give their feedback. We have now gathered all the comments, feedback and ideas to enable us to formally respond to the City Council Budget Scrutiny Panel.

Whilst we understand the need to make efficiency savings and reduce budgets, in times of funding cuts and change, we would like to highlight areas for particular consideration. We have grouped the feedback into common areas that we received comment upon from members. This does not represent the total feedback but summarises and reflects the key points.

It was agreed that good progress had been made on some of the issues identified by our members in the 2011/12 budget consultation. The City Coucil Budget Scrutiny process made recommendations that have had a direct impact on the voluntary and community sectors in the city:

- Support for volunteering
- Voluntary and community sector infrastructure support funding

- Equality Impact Assessments on City Council activity
- Endorsement of the need to develop and maintain small grants for voluntary and community organisations

In addition to this a focus on supporting vulnerable adults and children was reflected in the final budget set, a priority area for our members. We would like to see all these areas still taken forward and built on in 2012/13.

Areas raised by CASAP members on this years draft budget priorities included:

1. Views on the Council's spending priorities

- a) Good genuine attempts at consultation were recognised but focus quite tight and does not take into account wider consequences of changing spending priorities
- b) Need to share more evidence and evaluation to fully determine if priorities are delivering real growth and improvements.
- c) How are we managing the impact of spending plans for services and areas outside key priorities - can partnership working reduce the wider impact
- d) Spending priorities also need to take into 'Community Impact' along the same lines as Equality Impact Assessments
- e) Involve Voluntary and Community Sector at every level and planning, not just at strategic level
- f) Procurement processes need to allow relationships to be developed that allow real engagement to happen
- g) Voluntary and community sector to be more fully involved in pathway/service design and implementation
- h) Priorities around growth should be more inclusive of the voluntary and community sector and recognise the potential for Social Enterprise development

2. Views on areas for efficiencies

- a) Empower people and communities to influence efficiencies in their neighbourhoods
- b) Have ongoing and open consultation and engagement about the use of vacant buildings with the community
- c) Council property if left vacant should be let to community to help deliver growth
- d) Sell Civic Centre
- e) Make decisions on a longer term basis e.g. years ahead
- f) Use planning powers and leasing strategy to reinforce City priorities not undermine them, e.g housing developments creating additional stress and demands on local services and opportunities
- g) Do away with annual elections - builds in uncertainty - inefficient use of members - cost of elections
- h) Gateways to the City - rail/sea/road need to be better in terms of cleanliness and general repair if tourism growth is gong to be achieved
- i) Airport issues feels like a short term decision that could impede growth

3. Plans and aspirations for the next year

- a) Smaller groups will be helped to survive and larger groups and organisations to establish longer term funding and contracting relationships
- b) Look for more opportunities to join in and develop more relevant partnerships with all sectors in the city
- c) Consultation meetings will be effective, especially for volunteers
- d) Meaningful engagement and 'Community Spirit' kept going - keeping people feeling involved and included
- e) Increased support and opportunities for Social Enterprise and Social Investment vehicles
- f) Dialogue with partnership about underwriting or working together to offer guarantees to develop new investment vehicles for our sector
- g) Localism used to underpin and build local growth in all sectors but particularly those which support longer term employment
- h) Contracts that give certainty, difficult to plan with any certainty due to short-termism
- i) Contracting and commissioning will develop real opportunities to include Social Value benefits that are monitored and measured

Overall the City Council and other statutory organisations should protect services to vulnerable people, especially in the light of welfare cuts and the effect those might have on the four strategic priorities which the city and the 2020 Partnership has set themselves. The huge impact in the city of the changes in welfare benefits and worklessness needs to be considered and particularly the impact on the voluntary and community sectors, who are already seeing greatly increased demand for their support, with shrinking resources.

It is important not to lose sight of the value of funding a range of services which are provided by social enterprises, community, voluntary and faith organisations, which actually save money by preventing the need for crisis intervention or support by statutory services.

CASAP members would want me to express their desire and commitment to continue to work in partnership with the City Council and the 2020 Partnership through these difficult times to support the people of Plymouth.

Yours sincerely

George Plenderleith, Chair
Community and Social Action Plymouth

Thank you for including me in this consultation. In addition to the comments and feedback from the event I would like to highlight the following points from the perspective of Stroke Survivors, however I am sure there is applicability to many other conditions:

1. Integrated working and commissioning between health and social care provides the best results for the Stroke Survivors and their carers.
2. We need to be wary of diluting the quality and effectiveness of support for people in a rush to avoid duplication. For example, Stroke Survivors often feed back to us that longer term support services offered to them often do not understand stroke or the suddenness of its impact, this needs to be considered in terms of how services are provided. Therefore I welcome the request for impact assessments.
3. Personalisation, and as part of this direct payments, personal budgets are an incredibly valuable tool and something we support. However, there must be due consideration given to how this process plays out as often it results in support that should be available to all being decommissioned under the auspices of personal budgets and direct payments. Often with relation to the provision of stroke informed advice (see number 2). Again this needs to be properly tested in terms of impact as there is a risk that it results in more expense for statutory providers rather than less.
4. Really support the feedback regarding support for infrastructure and volunteering and community development. However, it is important to define what can be provided by a volunteer and what by a professional.
5. To ensure that consultations are accessible to those with communication impairments such as aphasia as often unintentionally they are excluded from most types of consultations.

Danny Hames
Regional Head of Operations - South West
The Stroke Association