

Budget Engagement 2018/19



Headline findings

Overview



- Building on last year's consultation process, we asked a similar set of questions.
- We carried out consultation fieldwork between 20/9/17 and 15/10/17
- Public engagement mainly through an online survey
- Business engagement through forums and an engagement event held on 28/09/17
- CVS engagement through POP+ and other networks.

Executive summary – online survey



- Clear majority support for a 5% Council Tax increase, provided that it is spent on services but concerns about transparency, the impact on business and the most vulnerable, and an above inflation rise.
- Expectation of efficiency savings from staff, especially senior managers, consultants and councillors to enable spending on infrastructure, digital and the environment.
- Qualified support for providing services in new ways, although competing visions of delivery models and concern about the impact on the local economy.
- Strong support for joined up services provided standards are maintained or improved but some concerns about NHS capacity.

Executive summary – online survey



- Suggestions to prevent harm to children - parenting skills, early intervention and tackling child poverty.
- General belief that the council can make more of physical assets but competing visions of how to achieve this, opinion divided on commercialisation.
- Better internal and external transport links and affordable housing seen as key to economic growth.
- Education seen as key to increasing recycling rates, support for fines to tackle litter and dog waste, some opposition to alternate weekly collections.
- Strong engagement from Council Staff may have influenced some results but Business and CVS share concerns about organisational capacity.

Executive Summary – Business/CVS



- Overall the business community feel we should sell off surplus assets, stop providing non statutory services and be clearer about our openness to ASDV's;
- some in the CVS presented an alternative vision where surplus assets are handed over to the community and preventative services are co-designed and co-delivered.

They both agreed that:-

- local tax and fee increases will impact on the economy, especially the least well off, money collected locally should be spent locally.
- use of volunteers would build community resilience;
- more can be made of our natural assets and heritage;
- more consistent cross sector engagement is needed.

The public survey - who responded?



There were 283 respondents to the public survey, this builds on the 567 who responded to our 2016/17 consultation. This year;-

Of the 275 who provided demographic information.

- 242 were Plymouth residents;
- 66 were Council employees;
- 28 were VCS employees;
- 19 were employed in local businesses;
- 234 were working age;
- 137 were women and 108 were men;
- 30 self identified as having a disability;
- Other diverse communities were appropriately represented.

Q.1 Providing services in new ways - Do you think this is the right approach?



- Of 283 respondents, 135 agreed with our plans, 40 were unsure or did not reply.
150 respondents commented, the most common were;-
- the impact of job losses on the economy, or our capacity to deliver services; (122)
- concern that services would be less efficient, should not be run in the private sector, or about the Council losing control; (85)
- in favour of alternative delivery models which could include, private sector, arms length management or social enterprise; (34)
- review of council pay especially top earners. (17)

“I do support shared services where appropriate however if this means losing jobs from the Plymouth area, I would be against such measures.”

Q.2 Do you have any further comments about our plans to help grow Plymouth's economy?



- 223 respondents commented.

The most common themes were:-

- transport - better public transport, congestion, sustainability, and better external links, e.g. rail and airport; (65)
- housing - limit student accommodation, provide more affordable accommodation and tackle empty homes; (42)
- environment – build on brown field sites, revitalise the City Centre and Union Street, protect green spaces; (25)
- business – lower business rates, support start ups, create jobs. (22)

“Only build new homes if there are enough jobs for the people living in them, and public transport systems.. Traffic coming in and out of the city on main routes is close to breaking point.”

Q.3 Commercial approach - Have you any ideas for how we might raise more income to support local services?



- Of 268 responses 145 people offered a suggestion on taking a commercial approach:-

There were a number of recurring suggestions:

- Investment in and use of existing land assets and Buildings; (16)
- Charge for non-statutory services; (7)
- Development of a Commercial Strategy; (6)
- Investment in historic tourism. (4)

On commercialisation generally:-

- Supportive of Commercialisation; (23)
- Opposed to Commercialisation. (13)

“Of course you should be making best use of your assets...Local government is not geared up to competing with the business sector. Taxpayers want good services for their local taxes, they don't want to be flogged added extras Ryanair style”.

Q.4a What else do you think we can do as a city to increase recycling and reduce brown bin waste?



- Of 260 respondents to this question 196 people suggested ways to increase recycling.

The most common were:-

- Education; (44)
- Work with businesses to reduce packaging; (20)
- Return to Weekly Collections; (16)
- Enforcement; (14)
- Food Waste Collection; (8)
- Introduce communal recycling bins. (6)

There were 47 responses about alternate weekly collections, 17 supportive and 30 opposed.

“Fundamental behavioural change concerning recycling and the reduction of refuse Waste might be remedied by the introduction of a citizens charter holding some of the principles of neighbourhood watch.”

Q.4b What else do you think we can do to reduce problems such as littering, dog fouling and graffiti?



- Of 260 responses to this question, 180 people suggested ways to reduce these problems.

The most common were:

- Enforcement and Fines; (87)
- More Public Bins; (33)
- Education; (22)
- Designated Graffiti areas; (19)
- CCTV; (12)
- Employ more wardens. (11)

“Increase the amount that people are fined for littering and dog fouling etc to drive home the fact that we want a clean environment to live and work in...why not embrace Street Art in the way Bristol has, establish more legal sites.

Q5: Do you agree that we should continue to join up our services with the NHS?



- Of 242 respondents 181 agreed, 34 did not agree, 39 did not respond. 104 people provided an additional comment.

The most common responses among those agreeing were:-

- joined up services are more efficient and cost effective; (12)
- as long as the same standard of care was provided or improved. (12)

Those who did not agree, felt that the NHS:-

- too wasteful, or too bureaucratic. (6)
- was underfunded and in crisis; (5)

Doctors, pharmacist, health care and social services should all work as one unit to reduce costs and provide a better quick service.'

Q.6 Preventing harm to children

Is there anything else you think we could be doing?



- Of 265 responses to this question, 115 people suggested ways to ensure children and young people are protected from harm.

The most common were:-

- Parenting Skills Education Programmes; (9)
- System Review and Improvement; (6)
- Lobby National Government for additional funding; (5)
- Promote reporting channels and signs of abuse; (5)
- Early Intervention; (4)
- Invest in services for young adults; (4)
- Improve foster carer training and application; Mental Health Support; Specialised Support for Schools. (2)

As a parent of a disabled child, the support we have received has been good, but inconsistent. We get different information from different services and it feels as if services don't talk to each other.

Q7a: Do you agree that we should add a three per cent Council Tax precept specifically for services for vulnerable adults?



- Of the 272 people who responded, 136 respondents supported an increase, 72 did not, 64 were unsure or did not respond. 45 people commented.

Of those who said yes:

- only if money was going to be spent on services; (8)
- only if value for money; (4)
- a wide variety of caveats, e.g. recognise family carers. (5)

Of those who said no:

- could not afford the increase; (14)
- more should be done to make efficiencies; (8)
- reduce Council workers' and councillors' pay; (5)
- those who needed more support should pay more. (5)

Yes in principle, but it would be good to have a better idea how the funding is used and how services are administered to be able to decide whether this is a good idea.

Q.7b Would you support a small increase (maximum 2 per cent) in Council Tax next year to help maintain services?



- Of the 268 people who responded, 146 respondents agreed, 71 stated they would not. 51 were unsure or did not answer the question.

Of those who said yes:-

- if services were maintained or improved; (7)
- as long as this was a small increase; (6)
- some respondents thought it should be higher; (5)

Of those who said no:-

- salaries have not increased in line; (7)
- reduce wages and reduce spend on consultants; (6)
- people are not seeing the benefit; (5)
- transparent decisions on spending required. (5)

'I would support more than 2 per cent if it was put in the right areas I would also suggest some form of tiered implementation, so the poorest don't pay the increase...'

Q.8 Do you have any views or ideas about what else we could be doing to balance the books and protect services?



- Of 262 responses to this question, 193 people offered a suggestion on other ways to balance the books and protect services.

Recurring suggestions included:-

- Reduce Salaries/Number of Staff; (11)
- Improve the Environment; (5)
- Reduce Consultancy Fees; (5)
- Reduce Councillor expenses; (4)
- Reduce Number of Councillors; (4)
- Reduce Number of Elections; (4)
- Improve Infrastructure; (4)
- Improve Technological Efficiency and Automation. (4)

“An increase of up to 2% to maintain services is understandable but would be financially difficult for us as family not on any benefits therefore paying 100% of the Council Tax ourselves.”

Business Sector – who we engaged



At the Budget Finance Engagement Meeting;-

- Plymouth Chamber of Commerce;
- YGS Landscape;
- CSW Group;
- Tomorrows People;
- Caremark Plymouth;
- GA Solicitors;
- EXPO South Ltd;
- Imagine Office Supplies.

Individual responses were submitted by Plymouth and Devon Chambers of Commerce.

*“The council has invested strongly in the local economy
....Plymouth has a unique opportunity to showcase itself on the international stage...continued investment is essential to private sector confidence”
Devon Chamber of Commerce*

Business Sector Feedback



- The business sector would welcome more round table discussions with the Council.
- Money collected locally should be spent locally - procurement process should be transparent and where appropriate, favour local businesses.
- Increasing local taxes and fees and charges can put a brake on the local economy is enough being done to collect unpaid taxes and fines.
- More could be done, or spent on making the City attractive to, businesses, skilled workers or visitors.
- Will extra revenue be spent wisely, so that Adult Social Care outcomes are improved?

“Care must be taken in reducing disposable income; there is the need to look at other options. If these decrease then less will be put into the economy.”

Business Sector Feedback



The Council should:-

- be more proactive in ensuring assets are developed, and sell off those it doesn't need;
- recognise that care at home is an investment priority and stop providing non statutory services;
- be clearer about our strategic intentions regarding delivery of services and openness to more ASDV's.
- develop commercialisation and utilise current expertise to expand and do more;
- work more collaboratively with other public and private sector organisations and consider making more use of volunteers;
- consider undertaking 'Social Impact Assessments'.

“If all the money is put into Adult Social Care then growth will stop, can savings be made by reducing or stopping non-statutory services”.

Community and Voluntary Sector – who we engaged



- POP+ who we commissioned to support the Voluntary and Community Sector in Plymouth submitted a report based on an event held during the field work period and previous work around the sector's vision for the city and how it could work.
- Environment Plymouth which gives a collective voice to approximately 70 local 'green', environment and sustainability groups in the city submitted an independent report.

Our vision is a vibrant, sustainable third sector in Plymouth valued for delivering effective and efficient cross-sector services and support that leads to positive social change for local people.
POP+

Community and Voluntary Sector Feedback



- Local sourcing of contracts is important and the VCS is well placed to deliver early intervention.
- Prioritising early intervention and prevention services would reduce the high cost of acute and crisis cases.
- We should strengthen communities to be more resilient and take care of themselves.
- We should consider active co-design of community services with the community sector and local communities as equal partners with agencies.
- The SEIF fund has been a success in helping community ventures, real partnership could enable collaborative bidding for joint funds.

“As yet services do not look as if they are using new ways...the city has huge resources to deliver services in the Voluntary and Community sector– but is not using them.”

Community and Voluntary Sector Feedback



- The proposed rise in Council Tax is above the rate of inflation, the council would need to say what difference it will make, for the most vulnerable it is a huge leap.
- More can be done to make the most of our community assets and heritage and improved road and transport links are needed.
- The cost of producing a strategic Environment Plan for the city could be shared with Environment Plymouth.
- More risk taking and trust from the council to enable creative thinking and innovative solutions.

The city's support for 'green technologies' is failing to recognise the potential.... the Waste Management Strategy is clearly not working and, therefore, costing far more than it should.

Conclusions



- There is an understanding and acceptance that a rise in council tax is necessary but support is conditional and there are associated risks.
- The need for new service models is understood and cross sectoral engagement at a strategic level may help to clarify the best models.
- There is a clear expectation that joined up services will deliver improvements as well as savings and concerns about staffing levels and capacity to deliver.
- Transport and housing are seen as critical to economic growth, and there is a widespread belief we can do more with our natural assets.
- Findings are similar to those we recorded in 2016/17.