

SCRUTINY: FINANCE REVIEW GROUP		AGENDA ITEM 6
DATE OF MEETING:	13th December 2012	
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SUBJECT:	Community Debate update	

PURPOSE

1. This report provides an update of progress on the Community debate.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. That the Finance Review Group note this report.

REPORT

Background

3. Phase 1 of the “Your Say” community debate involved realism about the level of influence that residents could have. It was considered important that councillors in making the difficult decisions required on the budget, understand how these decisions would affect residents and that citizens had the opportunity to provide ideas about what could be done to reduce the impact. The focus was on five universal services: street lighting, street cleansing, grass cutting – verges, refuse collection and libraries. Officers went out to carry out face to face interviews with residents at community festivals, community groups, sheltered schemes and supermarkets. The Citizens Panel members were also asked to complete the survey. In total just under 800 residents completed surveys.
4. Phase 2 of the community debate had an emphasis on communications. This involved:
 - Informing residents of the results of phase 1 and how the Council will respond to the findings;
 - Explaining that the savings which the Council has to achieve have increased considerably;
 - Outlining the next stages of the community debate.

5. Phase 3 is the current stage of the community debate and provides citizens with the opportunity to be involved in the consultations relating to specific savings proposals.

Update

6. There are a large number of projects identified as requiring consultation over the next six months, the majority of which are budget related. There is clearly a need to co-ordinate this process and make it manageable and meaningful for staff, residents, councillors and other stakeholders.
7. This is being co-ordinated through the following process:
 - the “Your Say” website pages have been expanded with, background on the financial position of the Council, a copy of the Leaders statement & the Prospectus and details of how to comment on the budget proposals;
 - projects are grouped into themes that mirror the service areas on the LBC website;
 - a simple template has been developed to explain each project in a consistent and clear way to the public;
 - Heads of Service challenge the number of proposals in their area and consider if they can group individual projects together;
 - a survey has been developed for residents and for organisations to comment on the grouped proposals. Residents tick which proposals they wish to comment on and answer questions such as: what they consider the impacts of the proposal to be, how the impacts could be mitigated, if they have any other concerns on the proposal. The survey design means they only have to provide demographic data once;
 - copies of the proposals and survey form are available for people without internet access;
 - while it is not feasible or desirable to bespoke surveys for individual proposals, there is considerable expertise within service areas about carrying out consultations with service users. For many proposals the survey is only one source of consultation with residents, and additional consultation as to how people can get involved is listed on the template. Qualitative methods such as meetings with service users can often provide “richer” information than just relying on a survey;
 - proposals which affect vulnerable people require approval from the LBC Ethics Panel;
 - there will be a separate consultation process for Libraries which will go live in January 2013.
8. Given that the budget proposals are going to different Executives (22/11, 3/12, 7/1 etc) there are separate surveys for each batch of Executive reports. The results of the individual consultations will be reported back to Executive meetings.