

COMMITTEE: EAST LUTON AREA BOARD

DATE: 8TH NOVEMBER 2012

SUBJECT: COMMUNITY DEBATE

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IMPLICATIONS:

LEGAL		COMMUNITY SAFETY
EQUALITIES	✓	ENVIRONMENT
FINANCIAL		CONSULTATIONS ✓
STAFFING		OTHER

WARDS AFFECTED: All

PURPOSE

1. This report updates the Area Board on the findings from phase 1 of the Community Debate and outlines the next stages.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

2. East Luton Area Board Committee is recommended to note this report

BACKGROUND

3. The Government has made the biggest cuts to public sector funding seen in decades. Luton Borough Council, like all public authorities, faces enormous challenges to minimise the impact of these cuts. In the last two years the Council has already made huge organisational changes to become more efficient, saving around £35 million.

4. The savings requirement has increased considerably since phase 1 of the community debate. The Council has to find estimated savings of around £48 million when planning spending for the three-year period from April 2013 until March 2016.

REPORT

5. Phase 1 of the community debate was designed to get as many people in Luton as possible talking about what can be done to meet the savings Luton has to make. The debate was realistic 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 those decisions will affect residents and that citizens had the opportunity to provide ideas about what can be done to reduce the impact.
6. A summary of the headline findings is attached as appendix 1. A full report of the findings is available from www.luton.gov.uk/yoursay
7. Service areas are considering the findings and specifically the mitigating actions of any possible proposals. Each service has produced a vision for their area and what can be delivered within the budget. The phase 1 findings have inputted into these visions.
8. Phase 2 of the community debate involves:
 - informing citizens of the results of phase 1 and what the Council will do to respond to the findings
 - explaining that the savings which the Council has to achieve have increased considerably
 - outlining that citizens will have the opportunity to be involved in the future in consultations relating to specific savings proposals
9. Despite the government cuts the Council has ambition and clear ideas for the future success of our town. A “prospectus” for Luton is being drafted which will form part of a speech by the Leader of the Council to Full Council on 6 November 2012. The prospectus will include sections such as: celebrating success, the vision for the future, financial reality, business and growth, education and lifelong learning, support and enablement.

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS **LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972, SECTION 100D**

None

Appendix 1

Community debate
Phase 1
Headline findings

August 2012



Consultation & Community Engagement Team

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	Detailed findings are available at www.luton.gov.uk/yoursay	

1. Introduction, methodology, costs

1.1 Introduction

This report provides an analysis of the surveys carried out as part of the “Your Say” Community Debate in June and July 2012. The Community Debate was in response to the budget challenge faced by the Council.

The Government has made the biggest cuts to public sector funding in decades and the Council faces huge challenges to minimise the impact of these cuts. The Council has saved £35 million through becoming more efficient over the past two years, but still has to save at least another £28 million over the next three years. This means the Council will have to operate with about a third less income. The size of the budget cuts cannot be met by efficiencies alone and there will have to be cuts to services. Since the survey was undertaken (and at the time of writing in August 2012) this requirement has been further increased.

The Community Debate was realistic 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 those decisions will affect residents and that citizens had the opportunity to provide ideas about what can be done to reduce the impact.

The consultation built upon previous consultations including:

- 2011/12 budget consultation where citizens provided information on their priorities for services and which services they would wish to protect or reduce
- 2012/13 budget consultation - November 2011 deliberative event

1.2 Methodology

A survey was drafted which focused on a number of “universal services” received by all citizens: these included street lighting, street cleansing, grass cutting - verges, refuse collection, libraries services. Questions were also asked on charges for services and community spirit.

The survey was conducted through a number of methods:

- An online survey was developed on the Council’s website
- Paper version of the survey with a freepost address
- Face to face interviews were carried out by Council officers. The approach taken followed the principles of the Community Involvement Strategy, in particular to “go out to people” to complete the form - rather than passively rely on questionnaires to come back. Staff went to community festivals,

- Questions were included in the Citizens Panel survey. This is a Panel of 1,000 citizens independently maintained for the Council by BMG Research.

Accuracy

There was no significant statistical differences between the results of the “LBC” conducted survey (online, paper and interviewer completed) and the Citizens Panel. The results and comments from the LBC conducted survey and the Citizens Panel have therefore been aggregated throughout this report.

In total 786 surveys were received: 374 from the LBC conducted survey and 412 from the Citizens Panel (41% response rate for the Panel).

As with any survey the results should be seen as a guide, however the large sample enables us to state a high level of statistical accuracy. On an observed statistic of 50% a sample size of 786 is subject to a maximum standard error of +/- 3.5% at the 95% confidence level. This means that if 50% of the residents give a particular answer to a question, we can be 95% certain that the true figure will lie between +/- 3.5% of this figure, i.e between 46.5% and 53.5%. When analysing the survey findings by smaller sub groups the range of error will increase.

Open ended questions were coded into “themes/categories” and quantified. The coding of such questions is clearly a subjective process. This summary report highlights the most frequently made comments – detailed analysis is available in the full report.

1.3 Cost of the consultation exercises

The cost of phase one of the community debate is estimated to be less than £15,000. This included costs of additional staff salaries to cover existing staff seconded to work on the project, but not the cost of salaries for those staff already working for Luton.

There were no direct costs involved in the Citizens’ Panel since these were activities already taking place on a regular basis and budgeted for elsewhere. There was no cost to the website survey as this was carried out internally. The indirect costs of the consultation exercises consisted of the officer time involved.

2. Executive summary

2.1 Overall satisfaction with street scene services

There is a high level of satisfaction with all four street scene services:

- Refuse collection (91%)
- Street lighting (85%)
- Street cleansing (77%)
- Grass cutting – verges (77%)

2.2 The scale of impact of possible proposals

Most of the possible proposals would have a fairly or very big impact on residents. The list below details all the possible proposals in order of impact on residents:

- Street lighting: turning the street lights off all together in your area (86% rating a fairly big/very big impact)
- Refuse collection: reducing the refuse collection to once a fortnight instead of once a week (65%)
- Refuse collection: stopping some discretionary services such as garden waste (65%)
- Grass cutting –verges: significantly reducing the frequency that shrub beds and other features such as roundabout displays are maintained to as little as once a year (56%)
- Street cleansing: reducing the frequency of cleansing operations (54%)
- Street lighting: turning lights off all together in the middle of the night (53%)
- Street cleansing: cutting some discretionary services all together such as deep cleaning of streets (53%)
- Grass cutting: reducing the frequency of mowing of verges from 17 times to as low as 6 times a year (53%)
- Street cleansing: reducing the response times to service requests (53%)
- Refuse collection: introducing a charge for the collection of bulky household waste and/or clinical collections (52%)
- Grass cutting – verges: reducing the maintenance of the roadside trees to the extent that the Council would only undertake work where there was a statutory requirement or financial risk to the Council (51%)
- Libraries: possible closure of local library (42%)
- Street lighting: reducing the brightness of lights at certain times when roads are less busy (38%)

2.2 The main impacts identified by residents

2.2.1 Street lighting

The most frequently identified impacts by residents were:

- Crime and anti-social behaviour (238 comments)
- The fear of crime after dark (143)
- Accidents (113)

2.2.2 Street cleansing

The most frequently identified impacts by residents were:

- The area will become rundown (60)
- Litter on the streets means more people will litter and create a bigger problem (55)
- Greater problems with vermin (54)

2.2.3 Refuse collection

This section in particular provoked many comments and has therefore been split into each issue:

Stopping discretionary services such as garden waste:

- People will put their garden waste into the household rubbish bin (36)
- Difficulty of getting to the TIP if you do not have a car (22), particularly for elderly, disabled people
- People will just dump/flytip their waste (22)

Reducing the refuse collection to once a fortnight instead of once a week

- Concern with vermin (53)
- Bins are already full/bins would be overflowing if the proposal went ahead (33)
- Smell (28)

Introducing a charge for bulky household waste and/or clinical collections

- Proposals would mean people will just dump/flytip their waste (71)
- Do not support a charge for clinical waste (19)
- General opposition (11)

(27 people were willing to pay a reasonable charge)

General

- Proposals would mean people will just dump/flytip their waste (99)
- Vermin (22)
- Health/hygiene (21)

2.2.4 Grass cutting – verges

The most frequently identified impacts by residents were:

- The proposals would make the Town look untidy/scruffy (96)
- Damage to Luton's image, the perception of people and sense of Civic Pride (77)
- The proposals for trees will create hazards and will be dangerous (30), including risks for people with sight impairment/disabled people

2.5 Libraries

The most frequently identified impact by residents should there be a closure of their local library were:

- Impact on children's and young people's reading and education (64)
- General concern on the impact of reduced access to reading and education for the whole community (51)
- Loss of an important community asset/space (28)
- Would have to drive or bus to another library (28) including the environmental implications of this

2.3 Steps to reduce the impact of possible proposals

2.3.1 Street lighting

Agreement with the proposals to mitigate impacts was high: ensure any changes could be speedily reversed should it prove necessary (88% agree), consult closely with emergency services before implementing changes (85%).

The most common suggestions made by residents to mitigate impacts for street lighting were:

- Consultation with residents and effective communications (67 comments)
- More policing (14)
- Implement energy saving measures (9)

25 residents felt the proposals were unacceptable.

2.3.2 Street cleansing

Agreement with the proposals to mitigate impacts was high: increase enforcement action to prevent littering (85%), work with community groups (76%), increase education about the environment and work to encourage Civic Pride (72%).

The most common suggestions made by residents to mitigate actions for street cleansing were:

- Greater enforcement and fines (37 comments)

- More litter bins (21)
- Education and publicity general (17)

2.3.3 Refuse collection

Agreement with the proposals to mitigate impacts was high: ensure charges are fair and cover the cost of the service (88%) and ensure we have measures in place to help large families (85%).

The most common suggestions made by residents to mitigate actions for refuse collection were:

- Bigger bins particularly for larger households (14)
- Education/publicity on waste management (9)
- More recycling/TIP facilities (7)

18 residents felt there should not be special measures for larger households

2.3.4 Grass cutting

Agreement with the proposals to mitigate impacts was again high: mowing the grass on main highways more frequently than side roads (88%), introducing “urban meadows” (88%), arranging for grass cutting to take place alongside street sweeping operations (85%).

The most common suggestions made by residents to mitigate actions for refuse collection were:

- Positive support for urban meadows (24 comments)
- Community groups, residents and volunteers to take on more responsibility (15)
- Grass cutting to be better managed and co-ordinated with cleaning (14)

2.4 Charging for services

Residents were asked the question “are there any services which you would be willing to start paying for or pay more for to protect local services?”

Overwhelmingly residents were not willing or felt they pay enough council tax already (164). However of the ones who were willing the most common suggestions were:

- Bulk household refuse (34 comments)
- Libraries (23)
- Transport and concessionary fares (13)

2.5 Community spirit and getting involved

Residents helped out in their local community in a wide variety of ways: nearly eight in ten stated they recycled everything they could and just over half said they helped out neighbours.

A third of residents expressed an interest in finding out more about influencing decisions in their local area and just under a quarter about the community debate.