

## Public Consultation

As usual, the Council engaged in public consultation in respect of the 2014/15 budget. Specifically:

- A series of consultation meetings were held with stakeholders, namely the Voluntary Sector Forum, the C5 Group of Parish Councils, the Cheltenham Business Partnership and the Cheltenham Chamber of Commerce.
- Budget information and a questionnaire were posted online.
- A summary of the budget and a questionnaire were made available in reception at the Municipal Offices.
- The Cabinet Member Finance wrote personally to residents who had taken part in previous consultations, enclosing a budget summary and inviting them to comment.

### Response from the consultation meetings

#### 1. The Voluntary Sector Forum

- **Some members were critical of the decision to freeze council tax, given the size of the cuts in Government funding over the past few years.**

*Cabinet response:* The Cabinet's views on the case for freezing the borough's share of council are outlined in the main budget report.

- **Some members expressed concern at the impact of welfare reform on private tenants.**

*Cabinet response:* The Council funds CCP to provide welfare and housing advice and also supports a number of other charities that can be of assistance to private tenants. Also some of the investment CBH is making in helping council tenants cope with the changes in the welfare system may benefit private tenants too.

#### 2. The C5 Group of Parish Councils

- **Members of the Group queried the council tax freeze. They have followed the lead of the Borough Council in freezing their precepts for a number of years but are finding it increasingly difficult to do so.**

*Cabinet response:* The point is noted and will be a factor in deciding the level of council tax for 2015/16.

- **The Group was appreciative of the Cabinet's proposal not to pass on the Government's cut in Council Tax Support funding to the parishes.**

*Cabinet response:* The comment is noted.

- **The Group asked the Council to consider allocating part of its New Homes Bonus income to the parishes.**

*Cabinet response:* It would be difficult to do this without disadvantaging many residents, bearing in mind that most of the borough is not parished. However, the Cabinet is proposing to continue the Community Pride scheme, which allows parish councils among other local organisation to bid for grants for local improvement schemes. In the current budget proposals this is funded from New Homes Bonus.

#### 3. The Cheltenham Business Partnership

- **There was some discussion of parking charges and how borough charges related to county on-street charges. The point was made that on-street**

**parking is intended for rapid turnover while car parks are intended for longer stayers and priced accordingly.**

*Cabinet response:* No response necessary.

- **There was also some discussion of the possible creation of a Business Improvement District, for which the Borough Council provided £15,000 as start-up funding last July. It appears that this project may not have enough support now among the business community to make it viable.**

*Cabinet response:* We have always been of the view that the BID is only viable if it is supported and led by the business community. If this support is not forthcoming, the Council will need to reconsider.

#### **4. The Cheltenham Chamber of Commerce**

- **The Chamber members who attended the meeting were generally favourable to the draft budget. The Deputy Chief Executive of the Chamber subsequently wrote on their behalf to the Cabinet Member Finance expressing the view that the Council had “worked hard on producing a sensible mix of proposed savings”.**

*Cabinet response:* The Cabinet are grateful to the Chamber for taking part in the consultation and for their positive feedback.

#### **5. Feedback from individual members of the public**

Despite writing to past participants in the consultation process to invite their comments, only seven individual residents responded, all of them online.

- **In response to the question “Do you think the Council is broadly right to make the savings listed in the draft budget papers?”, all of them answered YES.**
- **In response to the question “Do you think the Council is right to keep council tax at its present level in 2014/15?”, once again all of them answered YES.**

Individual comments included:

- **Make more savings if possible** (one respondent).  
*Cabinet response:* The Council will need to make further savings to bridge the funding gap in future years and it is already working hard to do so.
- **Cut out any spending on twinning** (one respondent).  
*Cabinet response:* Expenditure on twinning is very modest and delivers significant benefits in terms of cultural, sports and business links.
- **Provide more public toilets** (one respondent).  
*Cabinet response:* We accept that lack of public toilets is a particular problem in the town centre late at night and we will examine what we can do to address this.
- **Management costs have not decreased in line with reduced services** (one respondent).  
*Cabinet response:* This comment is based on a misunderstanding. There have been drastic cuts in management costs, especially due to shared services and senior management restructuring.