

Summary of activity and responses

Cabinet on 16 December agreed to a 6 week consultation period on the interim budget proposals for 2015/16. The consultation went live on Wednesday 17th December and closed on Monday 26th January. The opportunity to comment on the budget proposals was publicised to the widest possible audience via publicity in the press and on the Council's website. Special meetings were held with interested parties including businesses, parish councils and residents, to make sure that their views were heard as part of the consultation.

This year's consultation also provided the opportunity to prioritise 13 suggested proposals to spend the capital sum arising from the sale of North Place.

This report summarises the consultation activity and responses

Online Consultation

The draft budget proposals were made available on the Council's website and people were invited to make comments via an online survey or by submitting responses via email. In total 171 online responses (summarised as appendix A) were received and 34 responses by email (summarised as appendix C available in the Members' Room)

Paper-based forms

Responses were also invited by post and 17 hand-written responses were received. These responses have been included with the online responses in appendix A.

Consultation Fora

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Director of Resources also attended a number of meetings to discuss the budget proposals in person with a range of stakeholder groups. These were:

- Cheltenham Voluntary and Community Sector Forum – 9th December
- C5 Parish Councils meeting - 5th January
- Residents' Forum at which 18 residents were in attendance – 15th January (notes are available in the Members' Room)
- Cheltenham Chamber of Commerce – 19th January

Representations from local organisations

Formal representations were received from a number of local organisations.

Cheltenham Civic Society held a meeting of their members to discuss the options for future investment in the town. They expressed the view that the first priority should be the improvement of the Town Hall into a prestigious and flexible public building, of a quality and design to induce admiration and envy from visitors. They also suggested that the remainder should be spent on enhancing the public realm. The Society's full response is available in the Members' Room.

The Honourable Company of Gloucestershire wrote to urge the Council strongly to take this opportunity to transform the Town Hall. The Company's letter is available in the Members' Room.

The Playhouse Theatre made representations about the benefits of using some of the capital to invest in the Theatre, both for repairs and improvements. This will be considered further as the capital programme develops.

The Friends of Imperial Square Heritage and Conservation (FISHAC) and the Friends of Montpellier Bandstand and Gardens (FOMBAG) made a joint representation against the proposal to provide a permanent electricity supply for events in the Gardens.

Summary of responses

In total 222 responses were received. This is far greater than in previous years, thanks in part to the opportunity to influence how best to spend the £7.8m capital sum from the sale of North Place car park. The results are set in Appendix A. Appendix B which summarises the individual responses to Q8, Appendix C which summarises the general comments received by email and Appendix D which consists of notes from the Residents' Forum, are all available in the Members' Room.

The Cabinet's response to the consultation

The Cabinet considers the public responses to the questions on tax level, savings and shared services are strongly supportive of the budget strategy. The Cabinet has also responded to the strong expression of support for improving the bus station by putting a sum of money for this purpose in the capital programme.

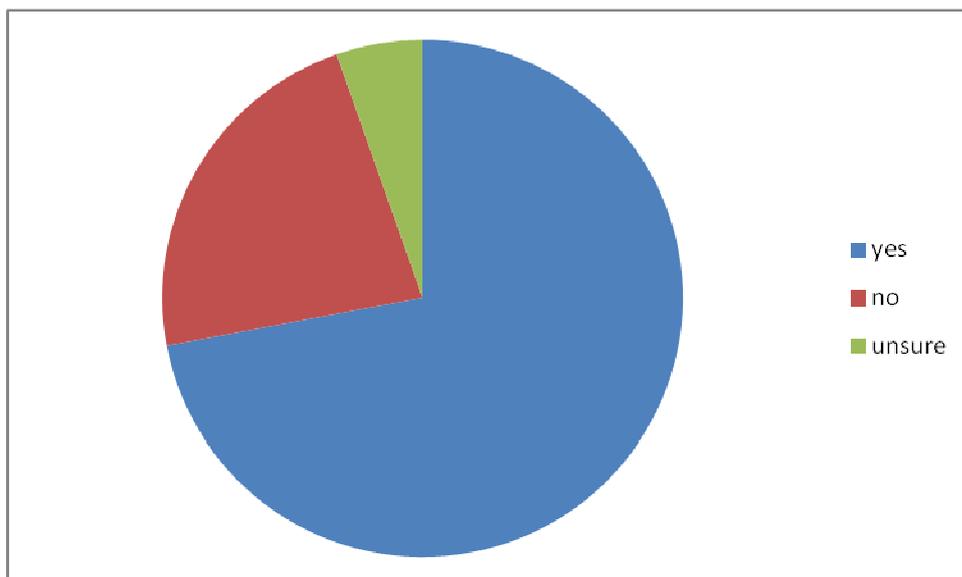
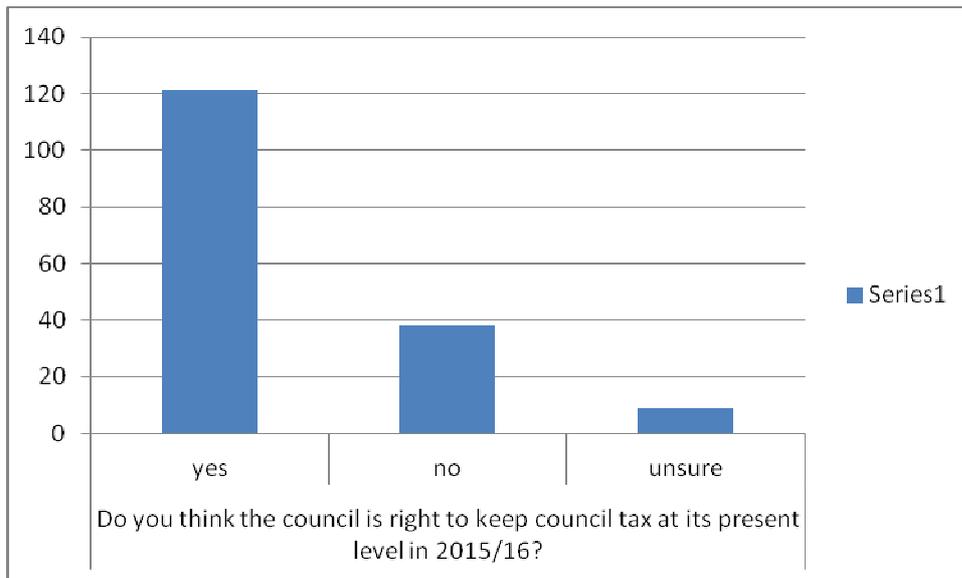
The answers given on the future capital programme will be considered as the programme develops. Consideration will be given to schemes not on the original list which are suggested by residents, as well as those that are on the original list.

Other comments are too numerous to respond to individually here. In any case many of them relate to matters which are the responsibility of the County Council. However, the Cabinet will work through them in order to pick up and respond to particular concerns wherever possible.

Appendix A – Summary of 222 online and hand-written responses.

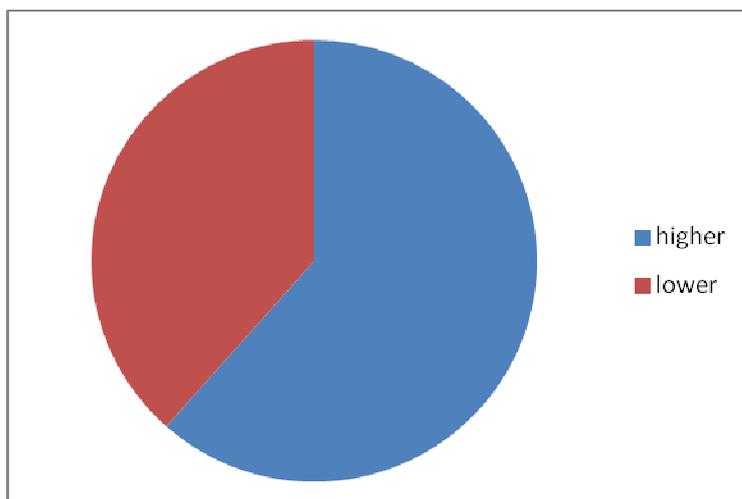
1) Do you think the council is right to keep council tax at its present level in 2015/16?

Out of 168 responses to this question, 72% of respondents said yes:



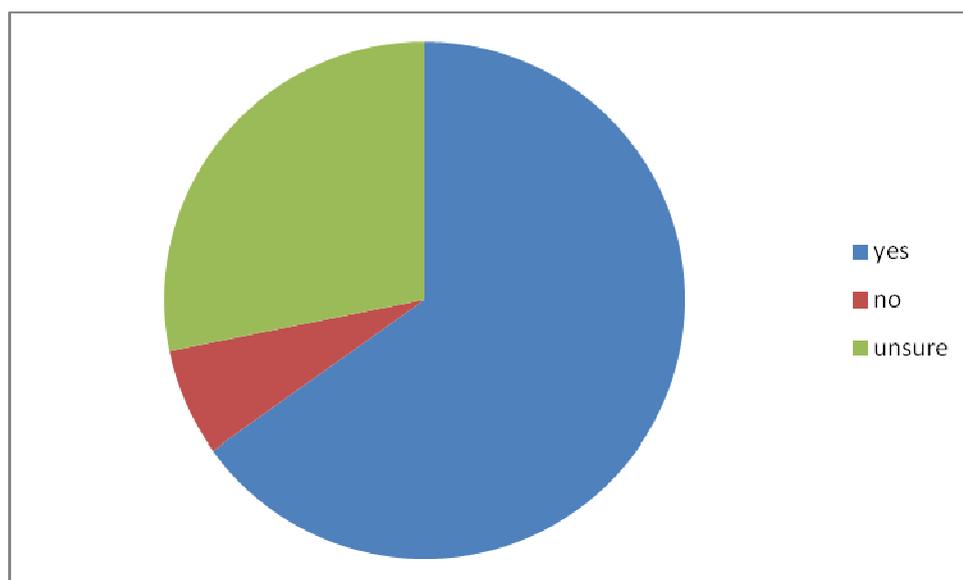
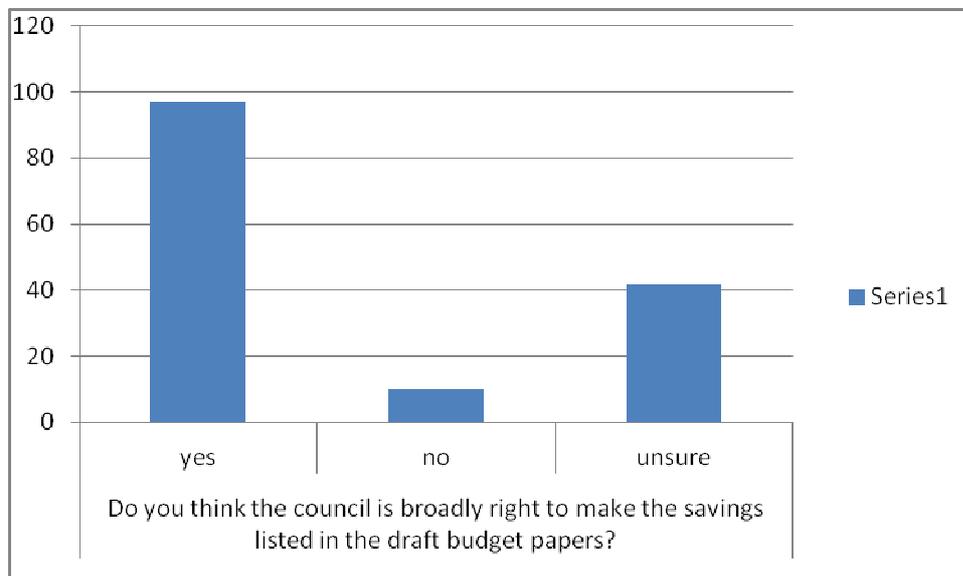
2) If your answer to question one was no, do you think council tax should be:

Out of the 39 respondents to this question; 62% said higher, 38% said lower.



3) Do you think the council is broadly right to make the savings listed in the draft budget papers?

Out of the 149 respondents to this question, 65% said yes, 28% though were unsure



4) What Borough Council services would you most like to see improved?

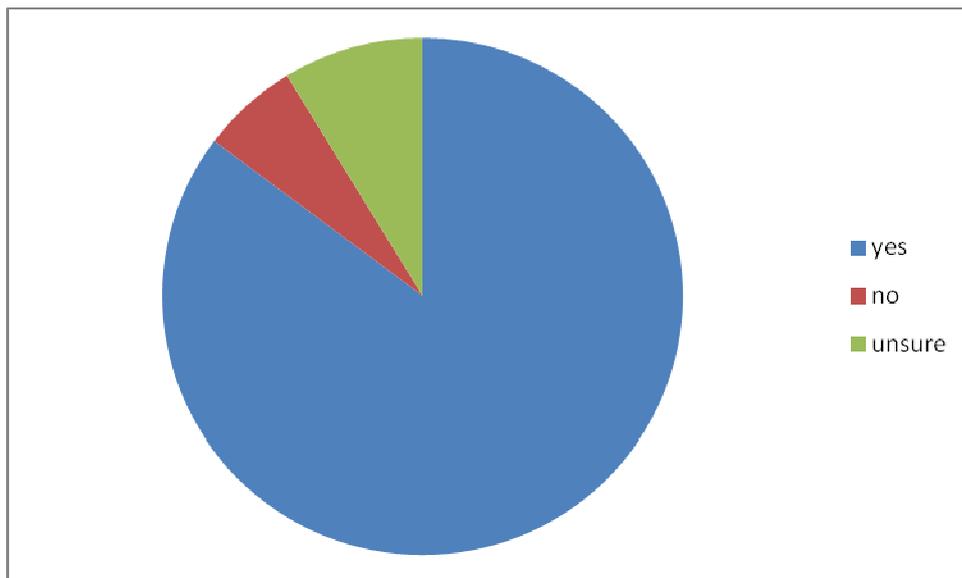
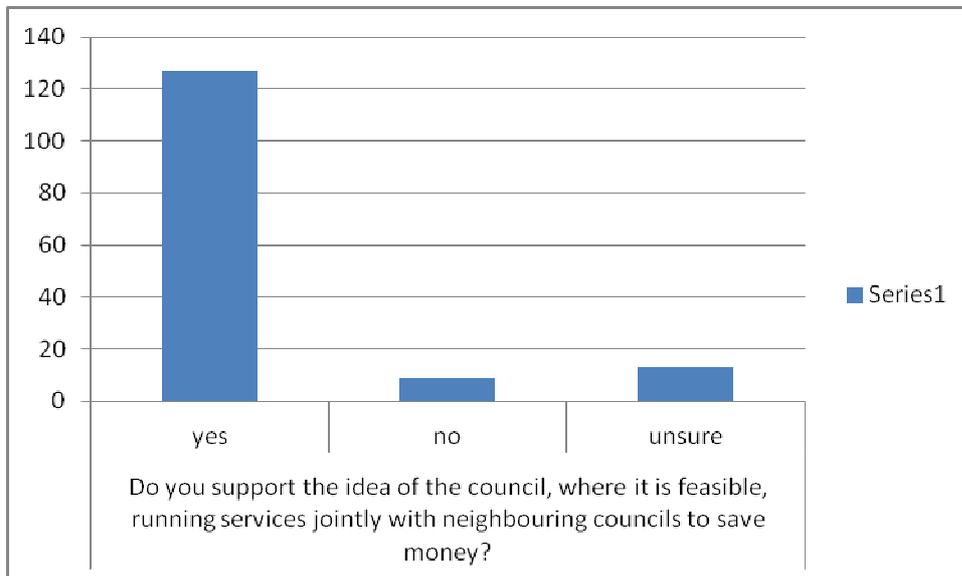
Out of the 85 responses to this question, 17 (20%) related to the maintenance and upkeep of pavements and roads, 12 (14%) related to waste and recycling services, 10 (11%) related to the cleansing of pavements and pedestrianized areas and 9 to car parking (11%).

5) Are there any services you would like us to cut back or stop providing?

Out of the 30 responses, apart from cutting benefits (3 respondents), there was no suggestion that received more than 1 mention. 11 (37%) respondents did answer "No" to this question.

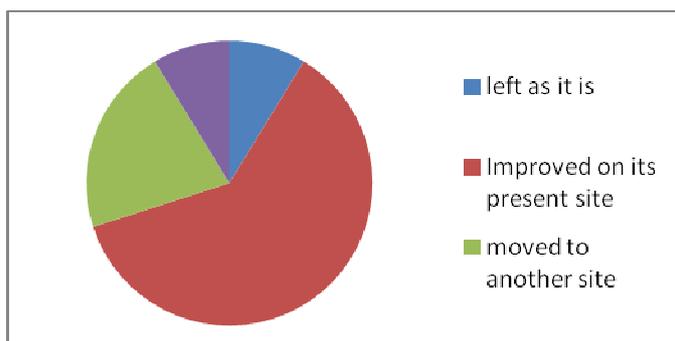
6) Do you support the idea of the council, where it is feasible, running services jointly with neighbouring councils to save money?

Out of the 149 responses to this question 127 (85%) said yes



7) There have been a number of complaints about the condition of the bus station. Do you believe the bus station should be

Out of the 150 responses to this question, 13 (9%) said it should be left as is, 92 (61%) wanted it improved on its present site and 32 (21%) wanted it moved to another site.



8) Have you any other comments on this budget or on the services the borough council provides?

28 responses were received to this question and these are listed in appendix A.

9) What do you believe the council's three top priorities for capital investment should be, from the projects listed below?

Respondents were asked to rank their favourites 1st, 2nd and 3rd. These have then been given a score with 1st rank getting 3 pts, 2nd rank getting 2 pts and 3rd rank getting 1pt. These scores are then added up to form a cumulative score.

What should be the council's top 3 priorities for capital investment			
Improve the Town Hall, creating a new foyer, providing better seating and a lift to the balcony, creating a new café/bar, and building a winter gardens style conservatory on the back as a restaurant and event venue (£2,400,000)			
1st rank	2nd rank	3rd rank	Total pts
37	24	18	
111	48	18	177
Create a new sports and play hub at the Prince of Wales Stadium providing facilities for competitive field sports and athletics (£1,843,000)			
1st rank	2nd rank	3rd rank	Total pts
43	8	10	
129	16	10	155
Create a new public square with landscaping and other improvements to the street scene at Boots Corner (£2,000,000)			
1st rank	2nd rank	3rd rank	Total pts
24	21	15	
72	42	15	129
Improve facilities for community sport and new gym facilities at Leisure at Cheltenham (£433,000)			
1st rank	2nd rank	3rd rank	Total pts
6	42	5	
18	84	5	107
Relocate the council HQ from the Municipal Offices to another office building, cutting the council's ongoing accommodation costs and allowing a redevelopment of the Municipal Offices for (for example) hotel, retail or leisure provision (£2,500,000)			
1st rank	2nd rank	3rd rank	Total pts
13	16	16	
39	32	16	87
Invest in the Crematorium to replace the cremators and potentially improve the facilities for bereaved families (£1,000,000)			
1st rank	2nd rank	3rd rank	Total pts
12	10	22	
36	20	22	78
Improvements to existing car parking provision (£3,700,000)			
1st rank	2nd rank	3rd rank	Total pts
12	12	12	
36	24	12	72
Invest in the Pittville Park play area to provide a higher standard of play equipment, create a major family attraction and potentially attract more visitors to the town (£300,000)			
1st rank	2nd rank	3rd rank	Total pts
12	6	11	
36	12	11	59

Small scale renewable energy initiatives including solar panels on top of council-owned buildings (£1,000,000)			
1st rank	2nd rank	3rd rank	Total pts
6	12	13	
18	24	13	55
Provide a permanent electricity supply to Imperial Gardens to avoid events organisers having to use noisy generators (£180,000)			
1st rank	2nd rank	3rd rank	Total pts
4	12	17	
12	24	17	53
Restore Neptune's Fountain to its former glory (£600,000)			
1st rank	2nd rank	3rd rank	Total pts
4	8	18	
12	16	18	46
Large scale solar farm to generate clean electricity and generate income for the council (£8,000,000)			
1st rank	2nd rank	3rd rank	Total pts
8	6	3	
24	12	3	39

St Mark's Junior School

As an experiment, Cllr Chris Coleman on behalf of the Cabinet conducted a consultation session with around 60 children aged 9 to 10 at St Mark's Junior School. The children were asked how they would like the £8 million spent and then given three votes each. The results were as follows:

- New Pittville play area - 35 votes
- Improve Leisure @ - 18 votes
- Improve Town Hall - 16 votes
- Repair Neptune's fountain - 15 votes
- Drainage for Swindon Village football pitch - 12 votes
- Electric parking signs - 12 votes
- Boots corner - 9 votes
- Electricity for the festival gardens - 9 votes
- Improve car parking - 8 votes
- Upgrade Prince of Wales stadium - 8 votes
- Renewable energy farm - 6 votes
- Buy and re- develop buildings - 5 votes
- Rainwater harvesting - 4 votes
- Move the council to save money - 4 votes
- Repair crematorium - 4 votes
- Solar panels on roof tops - 0 votes

A fuller version of the children's comments is available in the Members' Room.