

BUDGET CONSULTATION 2011/12 – SUMMARY OF RESPONSES

21 completed surveys were received in total.

Q1.

Given the need to find savings of £2.9m in 2011/12, do you think the council has compiled a list of proposals which is broadly acceptable given the circumstances?

		%
Yes	16	84
No	3	16
Total	19	100

Q2.

Are there any proposals for cuts which you do not support?

	Response	%
Cut grants to the Arts Council	8	26.7%
Reducing charitable concession for hire of town hall	5	16.7%
Cancel contribution to MAD (Youth Council)	2	6.7%
Closure of Public Conveniences	2	6.7%
Reduce Frequency of Cutting Grass Verges	2	6.7%
Stop employing insurance brokers	1	3.3%
Dropping ECDL qualification	1	3.3%
Reducing funding to Cheltenham Festivals	1	3.3%
Merger of Art Gallery & Museum and TIC	1	3.3%
Reduction in grant funding to Performing Arts Society	1	3.3%
Equipment for saving energy costs at leisure @	1	3.3%
Concessionary fares - discretionary top up of statutory scheme	1	3.3%
Cancel Taxi Vouchers Scheme	1	3.3%
Move to Alternate Weekly Collections and Charge for Collection of Garden Waste	1	3.3%
Reduce Economic Development Grant Support to County and Regional Organisations	1	3.3%
Reduction in CIVIC and Mayoral Expenditure	1	3.3%
TOTAL	68	100.0%

Q3.

If you have answered No to question 1, what savings could be made instead of the proposals you do not support?

Common responses were:

- Reduce planting in parks and gardens and hanging baskets in the town centre
- Sell land/buildings which are no longer required
- Closely examine entertainment and hospitality costs
- Charge Cheltenham Borough Council tenants for pest control
- Get tough and commercial on bad debts
- Funding for "big society"
- Reduction in chief executives remuneration
- Reductions in salaries of senior staff
- Smaller car for the Mayor
- Reduce amount of paperwork in general
- Reduce administration costs
- Ask for volunteers to help cut grass verges
- Increase charges at Leisure @ and Cemetery
- Turn down the heating in the Municipal offices
- Reduce HR and IT budgets by 10%
- Reduce Twinning Budget Further

- Reduce mileage rates for employees to HMRC rates of 40p
- Scrap car lump sums
- Reduce all staff salaries by 5% (except for lowest paid), pay freeze for foreseeable future, move to “career average” pension scheme
- Don’t freeze car parking fees
- Ask a company to sponsor the mayor an electric car

Q4.

Given the need to make further savings in future in response to more reductions in government funding where should the council continue to look to make savings? Please identify any services you believe where the council should reduce, or stop funding?

- Reduce councillor expenses more than 5%
- Merge Everyman and Playhouse theatres
- Share the Municipal offices with another organisation
- Reduce number of councillors
- Don’t give bus pass’ to 60 year olds
- Reduce management salaries
- Reduce CIVIC pride budget
- Get people doing community service to work on our parks and gardens
- Increase council tax
- Reduce discount for single household family’s in council tax
- Small annual charge for concessionary travel
- Stop Twinning
- Reduce back office costs further
- Reduce business change budget

Q5.

Finally, do you have any general comments about the proposed budget?

- “its not possible for the layman to analyse in detail the proposed cuts”
- “in general the budget review Is necessary from time to time”
- “nobody said it was easy”
- “it does not seem to go far enough in terms of redundancies”
- “I am happy to see that the council tax and parking rates are to remain unaltered”
- “Well considered response to an extremely difficult situation”
- “we stress the importance of not to undermine Cheltenham as and attractive centre for tourism”

Other Responses:**Anonymous:**

The closure of ANY public toilets is a leap back to pre-Victorian times but the closure of the Bath Road toilets is totally irresponsible. There are no big stores with conveniences; the little shops mostly have 'upstairs' toilets and will not allow public usage for insurance reasons. Like myself, many people require easy access to toilets for medical reasons. I have to be sure of easy access to facilities before I go anywhere. I visit the shops, and particularly the opticians, in Bath Road, because the conveniences are readily available. I DO NOT WANT AND CANNOT GO INTO SHOPS, TELLING THEM MY MEDICAL PROBLEMS AND BEGGING TO USE A TOILET. Public toilets are a necessity not a luxury. Supposing EVERY shop and store says 'Our toilets can be used only by customers making purchases. Will the authorities allow the use of back alleys and gutters for people unable or unwilling to make purchases? By the end of the Victorian era, there were facilities in all busy thoroughfare! As, many of them staffed. Is the Council saying to all medically unfit, disabled and elderly people 'We cannot provide your basic needs so you cannot go to shopping areas any more'?

Mrs H E Atkinson, Secretary, Cheltenham Local History Society.

On behalf of CLHS, I am writing to express our concern at the proposal to cut the funding to the Cheltenham Arts Council as a result of the Budget Consultation. We feel that it is vital to have a central body, the CAC, to lobby for the many and varied arts groups in Cheltenham. We subscribe to CAC annually, and over the years have benefited greatly by grants it has given us to aid our research, buy equipment, and provide local history resources and displays. Ultimately, this benefits the town, bringing education and pleasure to many.

We therefore support CAC, and hope that the Council will reconsider how it will allocate its funding more fairly.

A letter was received from Cheltenham Arts Council in support of the Annual Grant to Cheltenham Arts Council.

I understand from the draft Budget Proposals that the Annual Grant to the Cheltenham Arts Council is likely to be removed in 2011 and beyond. I am writing to you in my capacity as Chairman of the Cheltenham Arts Council to offer my views on this proposal, and would appreciate it if this letter could be considered as part of the consultation process.

As you will know the Cheltenham Arts Council was set up by the Borough Council to act as a coordinating body for community arts organisations within the borough and to provide a valuable link between those organisations and the Borough Council. This link includes the disbursement of modest funds from the council to a range of organisations that would otherwise need to seek individual help and support from the Borough Council. The Cheltenham Arts Council represents the widest cross section of the population engaged in community arts endeavours and includes many organisations whose aims embrace encouraging young people to develop community and arts related activities. A list of our members is attached.

I note that the Budget Proposals do continue to include direct funding for some selected arts related organisations and I welcome this; however, I feel that for many of the organisations we represent, the availability of some funding from the central source of the Cheltenham Arts Council is vital.

I am aware that difficult choices have to be made; however, I offer these views, on behalf of the Cheltenham Arts Council, in good faith and in the understanding that it is not possible for the Borough Council to continue to support all arts ventures to the same extent. Rather I feel that having set up the Arts Council partly for the purpose of disbursing certain council funds equitably across various community arts organisations it would be a pity to revert to a

situation where those without a strong individual voice are not able to receive adequate support for worthwhile ventures.

Brian Carvell
Chairman, Cheltenham Arts Council

A Response from a member of the public

21.01.2011

To Councillor John Webster, All Members of the Cabinet and All Members of The Council.

Dear Councillor Webster

I am writing as we are concerned about the closure of public toilets in Cheltenham.

Our particular concern is the proposed closure of public toilets in the Bath Terrace Car Park. It is a very busy car park used by people of all ages and, as I am sure you know, serving the excellent Bath Road Shopping Area.

If these toilets are closed, where are the alternatives to be found? The shops and cafes in this area are mainly small ones and have limited facilities just enough for their customers. Some of the facilities are not on the ground floor and so stairs (some narrow and steep) have to be negotiated in order to access them, which can be a problem for people with disabilities. Also they are not all open every day of the week.

This is a different scenario from the town centre where there are shopping arcades and big shops and all week opening.

Closure could lead to a **serious public health issue**. Failing access to basic facilities, some people may resort to using the car park instead, which is both unpleasant, unhygienic and undesirable.

Where has the public consultation been on this? Have the local traders been consulted? Are they willing to provide this service to non-customers? Will their Council Tax be reduced to compensate them? Have the electors been consulted? We certainly have not and our house backs on to the car park.

I notice that certain conveniences have been earmarked for saving, all in certain strategic positions – Town Centre, Pittville Park and Montpellier Gardens. I would suggest the Bath Terrace Car Park also qualifies to be saved on account of a total lack of other public facilities in the area.

I hope that my letter will persuade you to look again at this matter.

Yours sincerely

CABINET RESPONSE TO BUDGET CONSULTATION

1. There were two stages to the consultation process. The first stage was conducted before the draft budget was produced, and the second consultation following the production of the draft budget.
2. The initial feedback was substantial as has been outlined. The results of the surveys highlighted those areas that people had suggested should be cut or protected and these were subjected to more detailed examination.
3. Most useful were the four Focus Groups that were selected from the list of participants in the survey. There were detailed discussions with the participants in these four groups prior to the formation of the budget and following the production of the draft budget they were consulted again and gave their response to it.
4. One of the most useful pointers for the Cabinet in identifying the criteria by which the budget should be evaluated was provided by the responses to the question 'What do you most like/ dislike about the town'. What emerged was that people most valued the environmental, social, cultural and economic quality of the town particularly the parks and gardens, the architecture, the festivals and so on. They disliked the things that got in the way of this, most notably crowded roads in poor repair, and anti-social behaviour. In assessing all the suggestions for cuts, the protection of the quality of the town was at the forefront of the Cabinet's considerations.
5. Following the production of the draft budget the people in the focus groups were invited back to respond to the budget suggestions. There was a unanimous view that in the circumstances the budget had satisfactorily addressed the deficit even though some suggestions – such as closing toilets – were acknowledged as difficult decisions. Concerns were voiced particularly about the impact of the verge-cutting contract, Cheltenham Festivals, the need to ensure the provision of more social housing for local people and the County Council cuts to the Youth Service.
6. The Overview and Scrutiny committees picked up a range of issues including Cheltenham Festivals and the verge-cutting contract among other concerns.
7. In addition there were 21 formal responses to the budget consultation document with the majority (16) 'broadly accepting' the budget.
8. As a result of the consultation some changes have been made to the draft budget. This has been made possible through further consultation with the pensions actuary (following the 2 year freeze on staff salaries) which has delivered a one-off saving of £259k.
9. This funding has therefore been reallocated as follows:
 - (i) For the coming year the £110k reduction in spend on the verge cutting contract will be reinstated. The basic contract with the County has been terminated so that from the financial year 2012/13 it will be their responsibility

to cut the verges unless negotiations with them produce a more acceptable settlement to Cheltenham.

- (ii) £140k has been allocated to facilitate works to Imperial and Montpellier Gardens as a first phase of works. Cheltenham Festivals initially requested that we provide transitional funding to them for the next two years amounting to £71k for the coming year, and £35k for the following year (total £106k). Because of cuts to their cash grant proposed in the draft budget and the installation of a new box office system which will increase their income at a cost to the Council, the amount of cash grant they will receive in the next financial year is effectively nil, although they will continue to receive substantial support in kind from the Council. The Cabinet was sympathetic to the Festivals but felt the best way to support them was to invest in the infrastructure that enabled them to become financially successful in the long term and which also benefited the whole town at the same time. The catering contract will be renegotiated in 2012 and will apply only to the Town Hall and the outside bar, and not the whole gardens, and so the Festivals will be able to make an income from this. They will also be able to use Imperial and Montpellier Gardens free this year, but in future years will have to pay a fee at the charitable rate.
 - (iii) There has been a problem reported relating to nuisances caused by seagulls in the town and so £3k one-off additional funding has been allocated over the next two years, to extend the oiling of seagull eggs.
 - (iv) There have been a series of objections to ending the grant to the Arts Council (£10k). The Cabinet suggests that one-off funding of £6k be allocated to them to cover this year only, to help reduce the effect of the lost funding.
 - (v) Extensive and intensive work has been put into consultation around the budget which has been useful and has reassured people that the Council does take their views into account. A Budget Scrutiny Group has been established with representatives from all O&S committees which will meet throughout the year and consider the budget as it evolves and which can also look at more detail at some of the ideas that emerged during the process – like the suggestion that the Council should look towards more sponsorship and income generating initiatives.
10. In the commissioning environment there is a need for elected members to focus on finances throughout the year and not just at Budget time.