

## BUDGET CONSULTATION RESPONSES

**1. Introduction**

The Council was facing a budget shortfall of over £400,000 for 2012-2013 and wanted the public to be more involved in shaping where the Council spent their limited resources in the local area.

**2. Online Survey**

An online survey was developed and launched in November and closed on 13 January 2012. The Tavistock and Okehampton Times mentioned the survey several times and gave the website link in each case. The survey was actively promoted at Link Committee meetings and through the Council's Outreach sessions within local towns and villages. There was an article in the Council's Connect magazine, which was delivered to all households in November.

109 entries were made to the survey and most of the surveys were completed by residents of West Devon (72.5%). The responses will help inform the budget process for both 2012/13 and in the medium term for 2013/14 onwards, as well as help inform other Council initiatives and consultation projects.

The survey asked respondents to indicate whether they would reduce, maintain or increase the budget for these services. The answers to these survey questions are provided below in table format and a rank position has been provided based on peoples' decision to reduce the budget for the service. Services with a lower number rank had a lower percentage of people selecting them for service reductions.

For example for Children & Young People, 69% said they would like to maintain this service, with only 15% saying they would like to see a reduction in this area.

Therefore there was strong support for services such as Children & Young People, Economic Regeneration Grants, Emergency Planning, Building Regulations and Housing Advice & Homelessness being maintained at existing levels (these are the first 5 on the list overleaf).

For Democratic Services, 91% said they would like to see a reduction in this service and ranked as number 32 (The service people would most like to see a reduction in). Similarly, people would like to see a reduction in support services such as ICT, Personnel, Audit, Post & Printing and Corporate Management, as well as a reduction in some discretionary services such as Arts Grants and some statutory services such as the electoral register & elections.

**APPENDIX D**
**BUDGET CONSULTATION RESPONSES**

	Type *	Rank	Reduce %	Maintain %	Increase %
Service:			%	%	%
Children & Young People	Discretionary	1	15	69	16
Economic Regeneration Grants	Discretionary	2	18	65	17
Emergency Planning	Discretionary	3	20	78	1
Building Regulations	Statutory	4	21	78	1
Housing Advice & Homelessness	Statutory	4	21	73	6
Ring & Ride Scheme	Discretionary	5	22	70	8
Public Toilets	Discretionary	5	22	67	11
Waste & Recycling	Statutory	6	23	73	5
Engineering & Drainage	Statutory	7	24	70	6
Clean Streets	Statutory	7	24	73	2
Leisure	Discretionary	8	27	69	4
Insurance	Support	9	28	72	0
Economic Development	Discretionary	10	29	60	11
Voluntary Sector Grants	Discretionary	11	30	69	1
Tourism	Discretionary	12	31	63	6
Planning Applications	Statutory	12	31	69	0
Parks & Open Spaces	Discretionary	13	32	64	4
Environmental Health	Statutory	13	32	66	2
Housing Benefit Administration	Statutory	14	35	62	2
Crime Reduction	Discretionary	15	38	57	5
Sports Development	Discretionary	16	41	51	8
Council Tax & Business Rate Collection	Statutory	17	43	56	1
Property Searches	Statutory	18	47	52	1
Employment Legislation	Support	19	49	51	0
Planning Policy	Statutory	19	49	49	1
Property Services	Support	20	50	49	1
Housing Enabling	Discretionary	21	51	44	4
Communications	Support	22	54	41	5
Legal	Support	22	54	46	0
Finance	Support	23	55	42	2
Private Sector Housing	Statutory	24	56	39	5
Customer Services	Support	25	57	43	0
ICT	Support	26	61	37	3
Personnel Support	Support	26	61	40	0
Arts Grants	Discretionary	27	63	36	1
Electoral Register & Elections	Statutory	28	66	35	0
External & Internal Audit	Statutory	29	69	31	0
Post & Printing	Support	30	77	23	0
Corporate Management	Support	31	88	12	0
Democratic Services	Support	32	91	10	0

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**Council Tax**

In the on-line survey, 58% of people indicated in their responses that they would not be prepared to pay more for council tax and 42% said they would be prepared to pay more to protect some local services. 30% of people taking part in the survey skipped the question completely.

When asked how much extra they would be prepared to see council tax rise, 24% of people suggested that a 1% increase would be acceptable, 29% suggested a 1.5% increase would be acceptable, 38% suggested a 2% increase would be acceptable and 9% suggested a 3% increase would be acceptable.

At the public events, nine participants said they would be prepared to see council tax rise by between 2% and 3%. Three participants said they would not like to see a rise in council tax.

**How the Council runs things and provides value for money**

78% of people were very or fairly satisfied with the way the Council runs things and 9% were fairly or very dissatisfied (with 13% neither satisfied or dissatisfied).

58% of people strongly agreed or agreed that the Council provided value for money. 16% disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement, with 26% neither agreeing or disagreeing.

**General Comments**

People were asked if they had any comments on how the Council could improve its services. Common themes from the feedback received have been summarised below and grouped in the table below with the appropriate management response.

**3. Public Consultation Events**

The Council held two public consultation events, one in Tavistock on the 28<sup>th</sup> November 2011 and one in Okehampton on the 5<sup>th</sup> January 2012. The events were largely interactive and one of the later workshop sessions was an exercise to close the £400,000 budget gap. There were three tables at each event and each table had a budget board with the net cost of all council services and people were asked to indicate where they would reduce or increase service provision to bridge the £400,000 gap.

Commonly recurring themes within all of the group budget reduction sessions included a reduction in Support Services or administration charges (External Audit and Internal Audit or Council Tax and Business Rate Collection) with the highest proportion of the suggested savings to be identified from ICT. There was also support for a reduction in Democratic Services which ranged from £17,050 to £100,000. Other common service areas identified for a budget reduction were Waste and Recycling, Property services, Culture, Tourism and Leisure, Housing Enabling and Public Toilets. Attached is a summary (Table A) of the comments that were received from the Public Events and the Budget Survey. The table shows how the Council will take those comments forward and address these issues in the future.

## BUDGET CONSULTATION RESPONSES

**Table A – Consultation Responses**

<b>Feedback received</b>	<b>Council Response</b>
<b>Arts Costs</b> – Reduce the ‘nice to haves’	<p>The Arts Officer supports a lot of local arts initiatives and provides a channel of access to external grants and other forms of support and funding for local organisations and small businesses.</p> <p>The Council is currently undertaking a review of the Economic Development service and this area of work is currently being considered as part of the wider review. Consultation has been undertaken, particularly with the business community and this is now being used to consider service options. It is envisaged that a formal decision will be taken Spring/Summer 2012.</p>
<b>Assets</b> – Look at pump priming assets and challenging retention of some assets	<p>The Council is undertaking a strategic review of assets across both West Devon Borough Council and South Hams District Council, to ensure our property assets are best used to support the Councils’ aims, priorities and targets.</p> <p>The comprehensive review will look at each asset class in both Councils’ portfolio and undertake a locality based assessment challenging the retention of each individual asset. The review will deliver cashable benefits but will also consider cross cutting initiatives around co-location with partners and asset transfers to deliver wider non cashable benefits. This is a project within our Transformation Programme 2015.</p>
<b>Audit costs</b> – Why is this needed? Costs should be able to be reduced	<p>The Audit Commission is responsible for appointing the Council’s External Auditors and for setting the scale of fees payable by local authorities. The Council has to have a statutory audit of its finances and accounts each year. New auditor appointments are being made for 2012/2013 and the Commission Board are outsourcing the work currently being undertaken by the Audit Commission’s in-house audit practice. It is hoped that audit fees will reduce as a result of this work being nationally re-tendered.</p>

## BUDGET CONSULTATION RESPONSES

**Table A – Consultation Responses**

<b>Feedback received</b>	<b>Council Response</b>
<b>Car Parking Tariffs</b> – A review of car parking tariffs	A report is on the agenda for the Environment & Community Committee on 17 January 2012 which recommends a freeze on car parking charges for 2012/2013 and a move away from the RPI linked bi-annual tariff increases. The report also recommends a return to 2007/08 prices for season tickets – it is hoped that the reduction in prices will be welcomed by daily/regular car park users who will benefit from reduced annual car parking charges.
<b>Democratic Services</b> – Reduce expenditure in this area Can Council meetings be seen via a webcam?	In 2011/12, Councillors' Allowances were frozen at the 2010/11 level. The Council are currently reviewing the Committee structure with a view to reducing the number of Committees. We will look into Council meetings being able to be viewed over a webcam.
<b>Economic Development</b> – Would like to see more investment in this area	The Council is currently undertaking a review of this service. Consultation has been undertaken, particularly with the business community and this is now being used to consider service options. It is envisaged that a formal decision will be taken Spring/Summer 2012.
<b>Green Energy</b> – Would like to see the Council optimise these opportunities on Council owned assets	The Council's building at Kilworthy Park has many sustainable and energy efficient features such as photovoltaic cells and the use of stored rainwater. Similarly the Council's Okehampton Business Centre won an award for its high degree of environmentally friendly design and renewable energy features such as a wind turbine. There is a Strategic Asset Review project on the Transformation 2015 Programme to look at the combined use of the assets of West Devon and South Hams which will look at further opportunities.

## BUDGET CONSULTATION RESPONSES

<b>Table A – Consultation Responses</b>	
<b>Feedback received</b>	<b>Council Response</b>
<b>Housing Benefits</b> – more investment in this area	The Council has a shared service with South Hams District Council and is currently in the process of harmonising software systems, which will give much more resiliency and flexibility to deal with peaks in work load and cover for sickness or vacancies.
<b>ICT</b> – Reduce expenditure in this area	A £40,000 budget reduction has been built into the budget for 2012-13 relating to reduced salary costs and savings from contracts being re-negotiated. As the shared ICT service develops further we expect to realise more savings in this area due to the joint procurement of hardware and software.
<b>Planning</b> – generate more from planning fee income	Emerging Government legislation may allow us to recharge higher planning fees to better reflect the cost of the service.
<b>Public Conveniences</b> – transfer these assets and reduce their cost	The Council owns 13 public conveniences and the current cost is £140,000. One of the projects within the Council's 2015 Transformation Programme is the Devolved Services model. This will develop a comprehensive and effective method to allow Parish and Town Councils and potentially community organisations to take on delivery of services and/or the ownership and/or management of facilities where appropriate and where it is to the benefit of our communities. For example, the Council will explore the idea of devolved services for public conveniences, along with other suitable services in a locality.
<b>Street Cleaning</b> – would like to see the Council being firmer on individuals regarding litter offences	West Devon Borough Councillors will be considering a report on litter enforcement during the next Committee cycle (April 2012). Shared services with South Hams District Council will bring the benefit of some expertise in this area.

## BUDGET CONSULTATION RESPONSES

**Table A – Consultation Responses**

<b>Feedback received</b>	<b>Council Response</b>
<b>Shared Services</b> - look at extending shared services to other partners	In the Council's 'Shared Services and Beyond' document, which was considered by the Strategies & Resources Committee in January 2011, it was recognised that we would look at greater integration of staff across both West Devon Borough Council and South Hams District Council. The document also sets out that for any propositions that come forward for sharing services beyond the two Councils, we would need to carefully consider the potential costs and benefits. We will be receptive to any such offers, provided there is a strong business case to support further sharing.
<b>Second Homes Council Tax</b> – Increase the amount charged to second homes council taxpayers	The Government is currently consulting on this issue with a view to changing the legislation to come into effect from 2013/14. The new legislation would allow Councils to remove the 10% discount on council tax bills for second homes. Any proposed removal of the 10% discount would apply to over 500 second homes in the West Devon Borough. Removing the discount would give a potential council tax income of around £84,300 of which just 12% (£10,100) would be retained by West Devon Borough Council. The majority would go to Devon County Council whose charge represents 71% of the average Council Tax bill.
<b>Senior Management Review</b> – reduce senior level staff	The Council has already carried out a review of its senior management team in March 2011. This has led to a reduction in senior managers, saving £175,000 per year.
<b>Travel</b> – reduce travel costs	The Council has two Transformation 2015 Programme projects to look at Agile and Mobile working which will reduce the travel costs. Video conferencing facilities are in use and are actively promoted for staff use to avoid travel costs.

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**Table A – Consultation Responses**

<b>Feedback received</b>	<b>Council Response</b>
<b>Trade Waste</b> – would like to see the Council provide a trade waste service	Future opportunities for providing a Trade waste service in West Devon will be explored by officers with both South Hams District Council and our current contractor, during the next financial year.
<b>Website</b> – an area felt needed to be improved	There is a joint Transformation 2015 project with South Hams to replace the Council's website. The project will provide a site that is easier to navigate and search as well as having up to date and accurate information. There will be an increase in the level of transactional services currently provided, the ability to exploit additional web channels, increased integration with back office services, use of modern technologies such as social networking and the addition of micro sites available for community use.



**APPENDIX D**

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**Table B - Meeting the Budget Challenge 2012-13 Public Events**

		Okehampton Group 1	Okehampton Group 2	Okehampton Group 3	Tavistock Group 1	Tavistock Group 2	Tavistock Group 3
		£	£	£	£	£	£
<b>Service:</b>	<b>Type</b>						
Planning & Building Regs	Statutory		(26,250)	(50,000)	(22,000)	(23,000)	
Environmental Health	Statutory		(25,550)		(35,000)		(11,000)
Housing	Statutory	36,000	(16,800)				
Council Tax & Business Rate Collection	Statutory		(29,850)	(10,000)	(40,000)	(30,000)	(30,000)
Waste & Recycling	Statutory	(50,000)	(72,500)	(15,000)			(154,000)
Clean Streets	Statutory	(10,000)	(22,550)	(5,000)			
Engineering & Drainage	Statutory		(2,700)			5,000	
Elections	Statutory		(3,450)				
External & Internal Audit	Statutory	(10,000)	(5,750)		(10,000)		(25,000)
Customer Services	Support		(15,100)	(3,000)	(20,000)	(22,000)	(15,000)
Finance	Support	(10,000)	(19,500)		(20,000)	(45,000)	(20,000)
Legal	Support		(11,000)		(20,000)		(20,000)
Personnel & Payroll	Support		(7,750)		(5,000)	(35,000)	(5,000)
Communications	Support		(3,150)		(3,000)	(10,000)	(3,000)
Property Services	Support	(50,000)	(14,600)		(50,000)	(10,000)	(14,000)
Democratic Services	Support	(25,000)	(17,050)	(35,000)	(35,000)	(100,000)	
ICT	Support	(100,000)	(34,500)	(150,000)	(50,000)	(100,000)	(90,000)
Central Corporate Services	Support	(40,000)	(24,350)		(20,000)	(50,000)	
Culture, Tourism & Leisure	Discretionary	(13,000)	(25,650)		(50,000)	5,000	(10,000)
Economic Development	Discretionary	(10,000)	(8,400)			5,000	
Crime Reduction	Discretionary		(1,850)			(7,000)	(2,000)
Emergency Planning	Discretionary		(700)			(4,000)	(1,000)
Housing Enabling	Discretionary	22,000	(8,900)	(2,000)		(9,000)	
Open Spaces	Discretionary		(8,700)		(20,000)		
Public Toilets	Discretionary	(140,000)	(7,000)			5,000	
Community Development	Discretionary		(6,150)			10,000	
<b>Total Savings Identified</b>		<b>(400,000)</b>	<b>(419,750)</b>	<b>(270,000)</b>	<b>(400,000)</b>	<b>(415,000)</b>	<b>(400,000)</b>

A figure with a bracket around it indicated an area where the Group at the public events would like to see savings or more income generation. Conversely, a figure without a bracket indicated an area where the Group wanted to see more investment in a service.