

BUDGET CONSULTATION – FINDINGS

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Argyll and Bute Council aims to work with, as well as for, the people of Argyll and Bute. We therefore held a consultation exercise seeking the views of our citizens on priorities for the council.
- 1.2 We received 1,399 responses from across Argyll and Bute from residents aged 11 – 75+. We received responses from Community Councils, Community Groups, School Parent Councils and Youth Forums.
- 1.3 This report outlines the feedback they provided for elected members' consideration.

BUDGET CONSULTATION – FINDINGS

2.0 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 This report summarises the feedback provided by local communities to the council’s budget planning consultation, for consideration by elected members.

3.0 DETAIL

Consultation approach

- 3.1 The council carries out budget consultation exercises to ensure that communities have the opportunity to get involved in the process of setting the council budget.
- 3.2 This year’s consultation asked people to tell us about their priorities for the work of Argyll and Bute Council, and their views on a number of savings options.
- 3.3 It was promoted in a variety of ways, from social media and website links, to email, in council customer service points, and via the Citizen’s Panel.
- 3.4 People could give views on the council’s website, in printed copies available in libraries and council offices, through our Youth Services, and via our Citizens Panel (a representative section of the local population).
- 3.5 We received in total 1,399 responses from residents aged 11 – 75+ across Argyll and Bute, and from Community Councils, community groups, School Parent Councils and Youth Forums.
- 3.6 As well as giving views on specific questions, respondents provided more than 2,300 comments.
- 3.7 The majority of respondents chose to give views via on-line channels; the number of people responding via the Citizens’ Panel fell again this year; more people this year than last year used printed copies; and one person responded by phone.
- 3.8 Findings from the Citizens Panel, on-line and printed responses were overall the same, and so are presented together in this report.

The role and services of the council

- 3.8 We asked people what for them is the most important role for the council?
- The majority of respondents stated that it is to 'deliver the services I use.'
 - Comments given under the 'other' option stated that the council should deliver all services used by the community.
- 3.9 We asked people which services they use most:
- The most used service category is 'Economy, Environment and Customer Services.'
 - The services highlighted as most used via 'other' are part of this category - refuse and recycling, roads and ferries.
- 3.10 We asked people to indicate the service categories in which they would most support reductions in funding.
- Customer support/information services;
 - Education for adults; and
 - Economic development/business support services.
 - Most common responses given under the 'other' category are: reduce consultants, councillors, senior/middle management; reduce salaries and expenses; reduce travel/make better use of VC facilities
- 3.11 We asked people to indicate their top three priorities:
- Education for children;
 - Environmental services; and
 - Roads/harbours
 - Priorities indicated via 'other' comments are: refuse and recycling, roads and social care.

Savings options

- 3.12 We asked people to comment on a list of savings options. A number said that they agreed with/did not oppose them.
- 3.13 The most recurring objections were received to these proposals:
- ED20 – Pupil support assistant
 - RAIS09 – Public conveniences
 - ED03 – Psychological services
 - RAIS02 – School crossing patrollers
 - All Education proposals
 - ED15 – Additional support needs
 - ED14 – Swimming pool subsidies

- 3.14 We received a lower level of comments opposing additional proposals and cuts to services, primarily waste (increase to/introduction of uplift charges), community learning and development, early years services, ferries, and youth services.
- 3.15 We received suggestions to mediate some of the savings:
- Means test the increase in burial charges
 - Public conveniences to be run privately or by local communities
 - Campaign for more council funding

Ferry Services

- 3.16 The council currently runs ferry services between Easdale/Seil, Lismore/Port Appin, Luing/Seil; and Jura/Islay.
- 3.17 We asked people whether they agreed with our approach to call on Transport Scotland to take over the responsibility for these services to protect them from council cuts and deliver savings.
- 3.18 The overwhelming majority of respondents are in favour of the council's approach.
- 3.19 A number of respondents included the caveat that they would expect Transport Scotland to maintain or improve the ferry services.
- 3.20 The main exception to support for this approach came from residents and the Lismore Community Council: the view put forward is that the ferry service is a lifeline for the island and that the council is best placed to serve the needs of local communities.

Key services: transforming our work

- 3.21 Respondents were asked for their ideas on making savings/raising income. Recurring ideas include:
- reduce management and councillors costs
 - close small schools
 - reduce bureaucracy
 - increase in charges
 - address HSCP budget issues
 - campaign for greater council funding
- 3.22 More detail on ideas for making savings/raising income, and any other comments on the role and services of the council, is set out in Appendix 1.
- 3.23 In line with council practice, and in support of the comment from a number of respondents that the council should 'listen to local people', we

will provide an outline of how findings from this consultation contribute to budget decisions, once the Council has set its budget.

4.0 CONCLUSION

- 4.1 Many people gave time and thought to this year's consultation. This report and Appendix 1 set out findings for consideration by elected members.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Policy/Financial: Feedback from the consultation is set out in this report for elected members to consider in setting the council's budget
- 5.3 Legal: None
- 5.4 HR: None
- 5.5 Fairer Scotland Duty:
- 5.5.1 Equalities - protected characteristics: The consultation was designed to reach a wide range of people in line with our duties under the Equality Act 2010
 - 5.5.2 Socio-economic Duty: As above
 - 5.5.3 Islands: As above
- 5.6 Risk: None
- 5.7 Customer Service: Providing feedback on actions taken as a result of this consultation will highlight the value of citizens taking the time get involved in setting the council's budget

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Ideas on making savings/raising income

Appendix 1: Ideas for savings and raising income / other comments on the role and services of the council

Comments given for making savings include:

- Reduce councillors, senior and middle management
- Reduce agency staff/consultants
- Reduce staff/councillor expenses and redundancy packages
- Reduce travel/better use of VC facilities
- Reduce the number of primary schools and transport to these schools
- Rationalise office space and promote home working
- Cut specific services (suggestions covering all aspects of the council's work and the HSCP)
- Reduce the level of service delivered (a wide range of service areas were suggested)
- Greater control over heating schools and council properties
- Encourage local groups to take more responsibility
- Reduce paper/postage – use cheaper paper like NHS
- Encourage staff to car share and use pool car
- Stop using council services as a free resource e.g. planning consultations/licence costs
- Review sickness levels and underperforming staff
- Sharing services with other organisations and local authorities
- Improve online services/move to automation and digitisation
- Use volunteering where you can
- Stop Gaelic bi-lingual signs

Comments given to raise income include:

- Full recovery of Council Tax
- Increase in charges - Council Tax, commercial waste, planning officer time
- Increase in Council Tax to second-home, empty properties
- Campaign COSLA / Scottish Government for a better funding deal
- Maximisation of council assets (selling and repurpose)
- Commercialise services – grass cutting, hire equipment, mechanical services, pre-school nurseries, and training
- Car parking charges / overnight car parking charges / Motorhome charges
- Sell Oban Airport
- Tourist Tax
- Invest in green initiatives – biomass, solar panels, electric vehicles, wind farms
- HSCP: restrictions on purchasing unused equipment
- Explore advertising/sponsorship
- Explore Infrastructure Levy from the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 2019
- Congestion charge
- Increase traffic wardens
- Reduce business rates
- Invest in sport, culture and leisure
- Run a lottery
- Promote tourism/events
- Address depopulation
- Stop non-statutory functions
- Use waste: charge for collecting garden waste; run a waste incineration plant that generates power and income