

**BUDGET PLANNING CONSULTATION – FINDINGS**

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**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 sought the views of our citizens at three stages in this year's budget planning process.
- 1.2 Overall we received nearly 3,000 responses and over 4,300 comments from across Argyll and Bute.
- 1.3 This report outlines the feedback provided for elected members' consideration.

## BUDGET CONSULTATION – FINDINGS

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### 2.0 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 This report summarises the feedback provided by local communities in the course of this year’s budget planning process.

### 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 members of the public had three opportunities to get involved, by giving their views on:
- Delivering savings across amenity services
  - Delivering savings across school and bus services
  - Savings options across the range of council services
- 3.3 Surveys were promoted in a variety of ways, from social media and website links, to email, and via the Citizen’s Panel.
- 3.4 People could give views on the council’s website, by email, printed copies, by phone and via our Citizens Panel.
- 3.5 We received nearly 3,000 responses from across Argyll and Bute; and as well as giving views on specific questions, respondents also provided more than 4,300 comments.
- 3.6 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; a very small number of people used printed copies or phone.
- 3.7 Findings from the Citizens Panel, on-line and printed responses were overall the same, and so are presented together in this report.

## Overall findings

- 3.8 While we received feedback specific to the topics covered by the three surveys, this overall reference emerged:
- Rather than cut services, find different ways of working or delivering them to make them sustainable.
- 3.9 Recurring suggestions for how the council might do this were:
- Efficiency savings (e.g. reduce management/councillor costs, review how services are delivered, use technology to cut costs, reduce the council's energy costs)
  - Campaign for more funding for the council
  - Introduce/increase charges (\*)
  - Support communities to get involved in delivering services that matter to them (\*)
- 3.10 (\*) Charging, and involving communities more, received some objection as well as support. Main concerns about charging were about the level of charges, and the impact on low income residents. Main objections to community involvement were about expectations of what paying council tax should make possible.
- 3.11 Those who supported/suggested community involvement gave feedback on the help the council could provide to make this possible:
- Help to organise and coordinate volunteers
  - Health and safety training, equipment, insurance
  - Incentives (e.g. towards community projects, recognition)
  - Public awareness and educational campaigns (e.g. littering, take pride in your community, social responsibility)
  - Help community groups to apply for funding
  - Further communication and consultation on services that need support

## Responses to individual surveys

- 3.12 As well as seeking 2% savings across all council services, the council explored ways to make savings by working differently based on themes, including amenity services, and transport services.
- 3.13 Members of the public were invited to get involved in budget planning by giving their views on two topic-specific surveys, on amenity, and on school and public bus services.
- 3.14 Findings from these surveys are summarised in Appendices 1 and 2. The findings have been used to develop savings options from these themed areas of work, for presentation to elected members separate to this report.

- 3.15 Members of the public were invited to get involved in budget planning for a third time, by giving views on general service savings options. The options are set out in Appendix 3.
- 3.16 A smaller number of people gave views on these options. Feedback is summarised below.
- 3.17 Efficiency savings: the options receiving most objections are listed below. Other options commented upon received 10 or fewer objections.

	Option	Objections
ED4	Reduce classroom assistant budget.	46
DEG10	Maximise income through additional private water supplies income and introducing a new charge for the provision of shellfish movement documents	12
ED5	Review and reduce Clerical Support Entitlement using updated school rolls.	11

- 3.18 Themed savings: the options receiving most objections are listed below. Other options commented upon received 10 or fewer objections.

	Savings Option	Objections
ED6	Remove Pupil Support Assistants from schools	142
R&I13	Reduce specification for grass cutting, where possible scope out grounds currently serviced considering alternatives such as sheep grazing	22

- 3.19 Non-controllable budget options: the majority of people who gave comment on these options supported them.
- 3.20 In line with council practice, 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 budget planning process. This report and appendices set out findings for consideration by elected members.

#### **5.0 IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1/2 Policy/Financial: Feedback from the budget planning process 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 Equalities :The consultation was designed to reach a range of people in line with our duties under the Equality Act 2010, and to take account of covid health guidance.

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.

### **Executive Director Kirsty Flanagan**

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#### Appendix

Appendix 1: Amenity Services feedback

Appendix 2: School and public transport feedback

## Appendix 1: Amenity Services

Findings from this survey contributed to the proposals put forward for consideration for the amenity services themed savings.

### Q1. How would you make savings from statutory services?

Respondents were provided with a list of statutory services. Options were to reduce the service, introduce fees and charges, deliver differently or don't know.

For all services, the *majority were in favour of delivering the service differently.*

The most recurring comment given was that respondents object to any more savings to statutory services.

### Q2. What are your ideas for delivering statutory services differently?

Recurring ideas for delivering statutory services differently were:

- Efficiency savings through staffing (e.g. review of services, reduce management, combining roles for staff)
- Review of waste and recycling
- Working with the community by enabling volunteers to take on roles.
- Public awareness and educational campaigns e.g. littering, take pride in your community
- Use of resources (mix between contracting services out and employing more staff in house, ensure value for money on procurement, energy efficiency e.g. street lighting).

### Q3. We charge for a number of services. Which of these services would you pay more for?

	No of votes	% of those in favour
Bulk waste uplift	617	55%
Commercial waste service	529	47%
Hiring space in car parks	487	44%
Parking permits	444	40%
Car parking	359	32%
Burial and cremation services	233	21%

Recurring comments were:

- Respondents do not use these services, therefore no income would be generated.
- Review car parking arrangements
- Concerns about unintended consequences (e.g. fly tipping)
- Increase in fines (e.g. fly tipping, illegal parking, littering)
- Increase in charges in some areas (e.g. grass pitches, halls, stadiums)

Some respondents were in favour of paying for public toilets, creating a commercial garden waste service, and permits – car, skips, scaffolding, road opening

**Q4. In principle, do you agree with the council introducing charges for other services where possible if it would mean we would avoid reducing or stopping a service?**

	Number	%
Yes	634	<b>58%</b>
No	283	<b>26%</b>
Don't know	184	<b>16%</b>

**Q5. How would you make savings to these non-statutory services?**

- Public toilets, school crossing patrollers, grass cutting, pest control, play parks, street cleaning
- Choices were to: stop or reduce the service, keep the service with community or don't know.
- The majority were in favour of keeping the service with community involvement.

**Q6. What help would local communities need to make delivery of services possible?**

Recurring themes:

- Working with the community to enable volunteers to take on roles and further engagement with community council/groups
- Providing support to organise and coordinate volunteers / online forum
- Provide training / health and safety / guidance and support / equipment / PPE / storage / insurance
- Provide incentives (e.g. towards community projects, recognition)
- Communication and further consultation with communities with more information and transparency on services that need support
- Public awareness and educational campaigns (e.g. littering, take pride in your community, social responsibility)
- Provide support to community groups to apply for funding

**Q7. Any other comments or ideas for cutting the costs of any/all of these statutory and non-statutory services?**

Recurring themes:

- Working with the community more in delivering services and making decisions on service delivery;
- Review of grass cutting (e.g. reduce grass cutting and letting wildflower verges develop); and
- Using business more, either for contracting out services, or their expertise.
- Using technology more to cut down on travel, staff working from home which would allow the council estate to be reduce
- Council tax (respondents were both in favour and not of increasing council tax)

## Appendix 2: School and bus services survey

This survey was one part of a broader assessment of transport services. Its findings have been used to shape recommendations for this savings theme.

Respondents were presented with a range of hypothetical options for the future of local buses and school transport in Argyll and Bute.

Option	Response
1. Some bus services operate on a demand responsive basis where instead of running to a fixed timetable, they operate flexibly to meet bookings made by phone or app. Should the Council covert more bus services to this type of operation it if reduces costs?	Slightly more agreed (42%) than disagreed (37%).
2. Some communities in Argyll and Bute run their own minibuses with volunteer drivers in cases where the demand for buses is slow. Do you think this is something which should be considered in your area if local buses could no longer be funded and are wholly or partially withdrawn?	More agreed (50%) than disagreed (33%).
3. Where school transport options are limited parents can be given an allowance to transport their children by car, often because a local bus service is not available or would not be viable. Clearly reducing car travel is a sustainable objective, but should we encourage parental car-pooling more formally post COVID (help establish user groups who are open to the concept and provide support) to maximise the benefits and control costs?	More agreed (52%) than disagreed (27%)
4. The Council has a legal duty to transport school pupils who live over 2 miles (up to age 8) or over 3 miles (over 8) from their school but in fact offers this service to all primary pupils living more than 2 miles from their school. Would you support the Council providing only the legally required service, if this delivered savings that could be used to better support school transport which the Council has a duty to provide?	Slightly more disagreed (44%) than agreed (41%).
5. The Council has begun using low emissions vehicles, bringing savings in operating costs. Would you support a fare increase in the short term if this made it possible to use low emission vehicles across all its bus and taxi services?	Substantially more agreed with this option (68%) than disagreed (19%).  NB entitlement card holders would not be affected by any increase in fares and this may have influenced some responses.
6. Many local buses are busy with school pupils in term times but may be used by few people in the school holidays, evenings or weekends. Should the Council consider reducing the frequency of these services outside term time to secure funding for core weekday services?	More agreed (49%) than disagreed (38%).