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Introduction

With the ever-changing needs of our residents and customers, societal changes resulting in increased pressures on the way we deliver service and the unprecedented squeeze of public budgets, Clackmannanshire Council has to make some difficult decisions in the coming months.

The Council has to find over £7 million of savings in order to set a balanced budget for 2014/15.

Over a period of ten weeks, the Council ran a series of public events to raise awareness of the financial challenges and seek suggestions from the public as to where savings and improvements could be made.

The response to the consultation was significant and, in general, there was a sense of acknowledgement of the challenges and choices that the Council faces. However, there is no decisive indication of relative priorities and savings.

This report presents analysis of qualitative and quantitative findings from public meetings, letters, emails and responses received through Citizen Space, an on-line consultation system.

We would like to thank all those who took the time to read the budget proposals and responded to our consultation.

We made every effort to summarise the findings as accurately as possible to ensure this report reflects all opinions and concerns raised in a balanced and objective way.
Methodology

The budget consultation aimed to collect opinions on a number of savings from a wide range of audience over a period of 10 weeks.

The following section highlights the methodology behind the Budget Consultation 2014/15 focusing on the overarching research approach, methods of engaging with the public as well as analytical tools utilised to analyse received responses in a sound and systematic manner.

In the course of the consultation, four methods of gathering views on the budget proposals were used:

- Public meeting,
- Email,
- Letter,
- and Citizen Space.

Public Meetings

Over the consultation period, four public meetings were held across Clackmannanshire to gather views of the public on the budget proposals. The events took place at:

- Sauchie Hall, 18th November, Third Sector Forum
- Alloa Town Hall, 21st November 2013,
- Alloa Academy, 26th November 2013, Parent Councils
- And Devonvale Hall, 11th December 2013.

Although not all of the events were well-attended, the overall number and nature of responses to the consultation was substantial. Feedback was broad and diverse and has been included in the findings section as per emerging themes.

Email

Between the 11th of November 2013 and the 22nd of January 2014, a number of emails regarding to the budget proposals were received. While some of them expressed views of single individuals on either one or larger number of proposals, others consisted of opinions of larger groups and organisations.

Letter

Much fewer responses to the budget consultation were received via post. In the space of over two months, the Council received 92 responses via email and letter to
the consultation\textsuperscript{1}. Similarly to the above discussed methods, views of the senders have been coded and included in the findings section.

\textit{Citizen Space}

While the above mentioned methods appealed to some residents from across the county, the vast majority of responses were came through Citizen Space, an on-line engagement tool.

Citizen Space included all relevant documents and publications on the budget proposals, including the Making Clackmannanshire Better Budget Booklet along with Officers Savings Proposals.

Alongside the supporting documents, a questionnaire was used to establish public attitudes to the proposed changes. The questionnaire sought basic demographic information, followed by questions exploring views on a number of proposals divided into four broad saving areas the Council has been considering:

- Stopping services,
- Reducing services,
- Charging services,
- and Changing services.

In the course of the consultation, five open-ended questions were added as per residents’ request. Four questions followed the above broad areas, while the fifth was introduced at the end of the questionnaire to elicit further comments and suggestions aiming at reducing the Council’s financial burden.

In the space of 10 weeks, 327 respondents took part in the on-line survey leaving over 500 comments.

\textit{Analysis}

The wealth of data gathered through public meetings, letters, emails and Citizen Space underwent qualitative and quantitative analysis. The exercise was divided into two stages.

The first stage involved establishing a demographic picture of the respondents from each area of Clackmannanshire\textsuperscript{2}. Further, it utilised Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to perform exploratory data analysis and descriptive statistics. The analysis focused on establishing measures of central tendency, frequency tables and data distribution per question and saving area.

\footnote{78 responses were from individuals and 14 from organisations, associations or groups.}
\footnote{ArcGIS (geographical information system) was used to map out responses in each postcode sector in Clackmannanshire}
The second, more prone to subjective interpretation stage utilised a thematic coding approach, whereby responses were subject to initial coding, followed by establishing broad topics before finally defining emerged themes.
Findings

Over the following pages, a detailed analysis of the budget consultation results is presented.

The section starts by presenting the overall response to the proposals, followed by a thorough analysis of each section and relevant proposals:

- Stop,
- Reduce,
- Charge,
- and Change.

In a period of over 10 weeks, 327 respondents completed our on-line survey on budget proposals. The 327 people who answered the questions altogether provided 9,300 responses to the 29 proposals divided into four areas: stop, reduce, charge and change. Overall, 4,201 (45%) responses supported the proposals as opposed to 2,794 (30%) which disapproved of them. The reminder of 2,305 (25%) indicated neutrality or no strong view one way or the other.

On a broad scale, the respondents endorsed 13 and opposed 8 out of the proposals. It needs to be borne in mind that the responses varied from area to area and even more so from question to question. Therefore the above gauge chart should be interpreted with a high level of caution.
Demographics

Nine of out ten (94%) respondents who shared their views on the proposed budget through Citizen Space were of working age with the exception of one person who was under 16 years-old and 17 people were retired. The vast majority of working age people (40% or 128) were in their mid 30's to mid 40's.

More information on the age of respondents is found in the gauge chart on the left.

Nearly nine in ten (85%) respondents expressing their opinion via Citizen Space were in some form of employment\(^3\) at the time of responding to the consultation.

A further 41 people were workless and another five people were studying full-time.

The chart on the right presents employment status of the respondents taking part in the on-line consultation.

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\(^3\) Including seasonal and casual work
Over a period of 10 weeks, the budget consultation attracted 327 respondents who shared their views on Citizen Space. The largest number of responses came from residents of Tullibody, Alloa South and West as illustrated in the map below.
The section exploring attitudes towards the proposals to stop services not required by law was met with mixed reactions from the public. Although a significant number of respondents shared their views, it is difficult to draw conclusions based on their responses as a third of all respondents were against ceasing provision of some of the services, while a further third supported the idea stopping discretionary services. Slightly fewer people were either ambivalent or felt they needed more information to about the proposals in question.

Further, a few respondents commented that the broad questions were not sufficient to make an informed decision and would welcome further information the proposed changes.

The following sub-sections will look at individual questions and how the public felt about the proposed changes.
Stop funding to voluntary organisations who cannot demonstrate alignment with local priorities or the impact of their contribution

While the majority of members of the public expressed support to stop funding to voluntary organisations that do not align with council priorities, a number of Third Sector organisations currently receiving financial support from the council, have expressed deep disappointment that the council is considering such a move. While it was suggested to carry out an impact assessment with the Third Sector, others pointed out that the funding of organisations that are not community-orientated should cease simply because they do not benefit the local groups.

Some expressed the view that voluntary organisations in Clackmannanshire provide invaluable and unique services, a lack of which might lead to deeper poverty and further inequalities. Consequently, most responses from the voluntary sector related to appeals by organisations against the funding bandings they have been allocated in, which will be reviewed on a case-to-case basis.

Other respondents suggested that the Third Sector should not entirely rely on the council or that its monitoring should improve in order to demonstrate full impact. This coincides with the need expressed by the voluntary organisations to receive more support towards attracting external funding and help to align their work with local priorities.
Stop services that we are not obliged by law to deliver

Some felt that stopping the delivery of services not required by law is short-sighted and risky as it is likely to lead to negative long-term consequences. Stopping discretionary services could even lower the quality of life in the county as expressed by one of the respondents.

While some expressed disappointment, others suggested introducing changes for discretionary services.

Many residents feel the proposals are inconsistent with local strategies, such as Single Outcome Agreement.
Stop stand-alone Community Access Points

Some of those who welcomed the idea of stopping stand-alone Community Access Points would like to see them incorporated in local schools to create local community hubs. Other suggested merging advice centres and community access points as they are seen as duplicating work.
Opinions on the proposals to stop advice services in Clackmannanshire were divided with some arguing that they are preventative measures while others finding them redundant and unnecessary. Interestingly, the largest proportion of respondents either did not have enough information to make an informed decision or were ambivalent whether such a move would generate savings.

The demographic profile of respondents may also be significant as many may not be high users of advice services.
Stop financial support for homeowners

Although slightly more people supported the idea of stopping financial support for homeowners, there appears to be a high number of uncertain respondents who voiced their concerns about the vague nature of this question.
Stop public toilets

While four in ten people opposed stopping public toilets, some of those who were ambivalent or supportive of the idea, proposed that local businesses could be encouraged to make toilets available for the public as not only could it increase public trust and community cohesion, it could also potentially generate income either directly through introduction of small charges or indirectly when the customer visits the place of business.
The proposal to stop school crossing patrol was met with significant disapproval. Such a service was seen as paramount to child safety. Interestingly, those who would consider other measures suggested creating ‘walking buses’ to replace the council-funded service which not only would eradicate the need of Council’s involvement, it would also increase social interaction between children and young people.
Stop funding CCTV

Although there clearly was no consensus on CCTV, some respondents suggested that it could be used to generate income by charging people involved in anti-social behaviour incidents or not cleaning after their dogs or at least could be reviewed to monitor areas of potential problems. While others suggested transferring the whole service on to Police Scotland since their very nature is to protect the public. Others suggested raising awareness of safety amongst local residents rather than repeatedly relying on the Council.
Further comments

The list of proposals was by no means exhaustive and the respondents provided valuable feedback on areas where spend could be partially or completely stopped across the whole consultation.

While several people mentioned that investment into new offices and buildings in the current economic climate is unnecessary and should cease, others proposed reducing spend on renovating Alloa Speirs Centre.

Others put forward proposals to switch off street lighting between certain hours at night.

It was suggested to stop providing breakfast clubs in affluent areas as well as financial help to those with substance abuse problems. One respondent proposed to seek sponsorship from large corporations to fund breakfast clubs.

Some respondents indicated open space maintenance should be stopped in low use areas.

A number of respondents commented on the unnecessary and expensive public art seen as a luxury the Council cannot afford anymore. On the other hand, some residents appreciated the fact the Council has invested in public art to transform the face of “Wee County” and contributed to making it more culture-orientated.

Others would welcome stopping overtime and “call-out” payments as they are seen unfair and selective in nature. One respondent suggested stopping provision of call centre services.

More general ideas were to look for assistance from local authorities that have already undergone a similar exercise or be more innovative when making cuts. Others included reduction in services that do not generate income.

It became apparent that local residents experienced duplication in services provided by the Council, private and voluntary sectors. Not only would addressing this issue save funds, it could potentially lead to establishing strong business links with local organisations.

A number of respondents added that free uplifts for council tenants are not sustainable anymore and should be ceased or charged for.

A few comments related to traffic calming measures seen as ineffective and therefore potentially saving the Council money.
A significant number of respondents broached the subject of subsidies the Council currently funds. Several were of the opinion that all subsidies should be stopped (inclusive of community groups) as they are unsustainable and even unfair.

Similarly, some would not like to stop workless parents’ children attending private nurseries.

Several commented on the use of Information Technology, in particular the expansion of services with some even welcoming this as a default. A few Council employees suggested stopping Grapevine or at least distributing the magazine only electronically to save money on publishing.

There were mixed views on swimming with some considering it a core life skill particularly important as children play in the River Devon. Others highlighted the fact that swimming lessons boost confidence and help combat obesity; swimming also encourages children to use local facilities. A few argued that the proposal is at odds with commitment to Commonwealth Games legacy. On the other hand, it was pointed out that many parents simply do not take their children to swimming lessons with a further number suggesting stopping free swimming in primary school and during school holidays.

Other suggestions included:
- to cease the ‘disturbance allowance’ payments to council tenants,
- to reduce number of committees,
- community wardens seen as ineffective and therefore potential saving.
This section details attitudes towards the proposals to reduce provision of services in Clackmannanshire. While a large proportion of respondents opposed this direction, a quarter were uncertain or needed more detailed information on the proposals.

The following sub-sections will look at individual questions and how the public felt about the proposed changes.
Respite support was seen as important by a significant number of respondents yet some would support the idea of reviewing current arrangements to more efficiently tailor respite, and care packages in general, to individual needs. Those opposing the proposal pointed out that current means-testing methods concentrate on the level of income and not the need of an individual.
Reduce funding on community safety

Some respondents who left comments relating to community safety were concerned that offending would be likely to spiral if the funding was reduced. Others felt that community safety should be mainstreamed and incorporated into central services delivered in partnership with other services.
Reduce open space maintenance

While four in ten people supported the idea of reducing open space maintenance, the remaining 60% expressed a negative or ambivalent response to the Council considering such a move because well-maintained areas not only improve the quality of life in the already hit by recession county, but they also boost tourism. A handful of those who supported the decision to reduce spend on open space maintenance suggested introducing new low-cost green schemes (such as herbaceous planting) or even reducing the number of plants in flowerbeds. Other alternatives included companies adopting and maintaining open spaces if this proved financially sensible. Some respondents recommended reducing maintenance of infrequently visited open spaces all together, while others suggested introducing community work for those dependent on welfare or found guilty of minor offences and service community payback orders. This would, as explained, be seen as fair given the level of support and financial investment involved. A small number of respondents proposed introducing reasonable charges for grass cutting and more general open space maintenance work.
While more than half of all respondents disapproved of the proposal to reduce the frequency of bin collection, others suggested using compost bins could alleviate at least some of the financial burden of the service.

Some proposed adjusting the frequency of bin collection on a seasonal basis or per individual household's needs, while others pointed out the inadequate size of recyclable bins.
Reduce gritting of roads and footpaths in line with other councils

The majority of respondents expressed their disapproval of the idea of reducing roads and footpaths gritting as it was seen as hazardous and even life-threatening.

A handful of suggestions included provision of gritting only in the necessary areas (taking into account the needs of the Elderly) as opposed to across the whole of the county, while others pointed out that improving roads traction would reduce the need for frequent gritting, therefore reducing spend\(^4\).

\(^4\) One respondent wished A91 to be resurfaced as its condition is unacceptable.
Nearly half of all of those who responded to the question regarding opening hours of council facilities and offices would welcome reduced opening times as it could cut down Council’s energy bill. More radical suggestions were to reinstate a standard working pattern, whereby all offices would be open between 9am and 5pm which would reduce the energy bill and also improve the monitoring of staff time, others included varying peak times to efficiently provide services.

Conversely, several respondents noted that opening times are already problematic and even hindering, especially for those in employment as they need to take time off to attend an appointment or discuss some matters with council officers in person therefore more flexible working arrangements should be put in place. Further, if facilities were to be merged, some would like to see opening hours extended, inclusive of weekends.
Reduce school meal provision to statutory minimum

This attracted a wide range of comments. A number of respondents pointed out the fact that a school meal very often is the only hot meal a child has during the day and reducing its provision in any way would have detrimental effects on young children, their educational attainment and ultimately future job prospects. Others highlighted the fact the school meals are not always full of nutrients as they should be, and replacing rather than reducing their provision could be more valuable – both financially and nutritiously. A couple of respondents suggested increasing the threshold entitling for a free school meal, piloting Jamie Oliver-style dinners\(^5\) or adjusting school meals provision per season with hot soup during cold weather.

Conversely, a couple comments implied that hot meals are a parental responsibility and the Council should not subsidise them with one suggesting that workless parents could have their children home for lunch. Others proposed reviewing eligibility of free school meals and stopping free meals for teaching staff.

\(^5\) No further information on a Jamie Oliver-style dinner was provided
Further comments on Reduce

Throughout the consultation, it was felt that reducing services, especially those provided to the most vulnerable, might endanger lives with some suggesting that if any reduction to service provision was to be made, this should not affect the most vulnerable ones in Clackmannanshire. On the other hand, there were some voicing concerns that those relying on welfare should not be exempt when everyone else is experiencing cuts in the public sector. Some went further and proposed removing discounts to use leisure facilities for the unemployed.

A couple of comments pertained to school environment suggesting reducing the number of head teachers (introduce posts of head teachers covering several schools), high pay grades and holiday entitlement. Other suggested changing school term dates and assess financial implications of school requests from other local authorities.

A number of comments about the way the Council operates were made. While some suggested introducing a cap on employees’ expenses and reducing the number of councillors and staff, such as policy officer posts; others were more general and suggested limiting or completely removing staff perks, such as discounts, holiday entitlements and improved monitoring of staff breaks. Others suggested replacing managerial posts with posts of team leaders to reduce spend and improve staff retention. On the other hand, there were those who wished to see recognition of staff work and efforts by managers and local residents. A few wished to be able to change the culture of the Council to implement change in a quick and efficient manner.

A comment was made about a perceived reduction in police presence in Clackmannanshire, which, as pointed out, should be reflected in a reduced funding from the Council.

Several of those who took part in the on-line consultation suggested that council tenants should have their current free services reduced or even charged, while others proposed reducing spend or introduce charges for installation of new facilities in council tenancies.

Other suggestions included:

- to reduce response times where an unnecessarily prompt response incurs additional expense if safe and viable to do so,
- to reduce maintenance cycles on non-critical buildings and plants,
- to reduce the number of Road Repairs and Management Accounting teams,

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6 Including councillors
- to reduce spend on employability projects aimed at 16-24 year olds and focus on the older unemployed population,
- to reduce free service provision for pensioners who can afford it,
- to reduce budgets of all services by 10% alternatively reduce spend in the largest service.
Analysis of the graph above may lead to a conclusion that one in every two respondents agreed to the proposals to increase charges for some services the Council currently provides. However, a closer inspection of individual questions detailed in the following pages gives a better understanding of the attitudes towards particular proposals.
Prioritise free access to services through the use of means testing, and charge those who have the means to pay

While means testing proved popular amongst the respondents, some saw it as a bone of contention. It became apparent that means testing as much as supported by nearly 60% of all respondents remained a controversial topic. Nevertheless, numerous respondents shared the opinion that those who can afford should pay for council services. While others saw means testing as unfair leaving the middle class and working parents bearing the burden of increased costs associated with additional support for the vulnerable and workless families. A number of respondents were of the opinion that means-testing is simply ineffective and a few argued that its very principle is flawed as it leads to increased administrative costs therefore the proposal should be completely abandoned. A few argued that such a move would have a knock-on effect for council services as more people would turn to the Council for support.

7 Financial, psychological and physical
More than half of all respondents would endorse increasing charges for school meals in line with national average. Some added that charges for school meals should be means-tested as not every family can afford a hot meal for their child each day. Others were in favour of increasing in charges for school meals provided their quality improves too.
Charge for car parking in Alloa Town Centre to cover cost of public car maintenance

Nearly half of all respondents opposed the proposal to introduce charges for car parking in Alloa. Interestingly almost 40% would welcome such a move. Those who opposed the proposals argued that Alloa Town Centre already has a scarce number of shops and businesses and cannot complete with bigger cities in the neighbouring local authorities. Several argued that the introduction of charges for parking would deter shoppers from the town centre, gradually killing local businesses. Others insisted on improving the quality of roads in Alloa Town Centre if the proposal was implemented. It was also pointed out that removal of traffic wardens would cease recovery of any parking charges and penalties.

The supporters and those of mixed views, on the other hand, pointed out that such a decision should be carefully implemented, ideally in partnership with local businesses, who are still recovering from the financial downturn. A handful would accept the introduction of parking charges provided they are reasonable and agreed through a consultation exercise with a wide range of stakeholders.
Introduce a higher rent increase (5.2% rather than the agreed 4.2% in the approved business plan 2014/15) to help cover some of the shortfall caused by the increase in rent arrears.

With a quarter of all respondents opposing the introduction of higher rents, those who approved of such a decision pointed out that it would be fair to implement the proposals. Others said it would make financial sense to increase rents.

On the other hand, a number of respondents pointed out that such a decision is unfair and more efforts should be made to improve rent and arrears management and even deducing the payment (council tax and rent) at source. Some indicated that increasing rents would ultimately mean subsidising those in rent arrears at the expense of diligently paying residents.
Increase all existing charges by minimum of Retail Prices Index inflation (approximately 3.2%)

More than half of all respondents would support increasing existing changes by minimum of Retail Prices Index inflation as current prices are deemed unsustainable by the Council. However, the opponents of the proposal argued that while increasing prices in line with inflation seems fair in principle, in times of frozen wages, the move would put more pressure on already struggling families.
More than half of all respondents were in favour of increasing social work charges in line with national strategies with a few emphasising the need to improve the quality of social work altogether.
Nearly three quarters of all respondents were supportive of increasing charges for hire of Council facilities emphasising that it is unsustainable to remain the level of current prices. It was, however, noted that improving publicity of available facilities (such as leisure facilities) could generate further income.

On the other hand, a number of respondents voiced opinions that increasing charges would result in falling demand\(^8\) ultimately undermining the very intention of the proposal. Some argued that discounting facilities could in fact increase demand generating the much needed revenue, however, a few argued that rental discount to charity shops in Alloa hinders local business growth. Other respondents raised concerns that the management of council facilities should be improved with the Council becoming more proactive in the way it operates\(^9\). One or two proposed reducing charges to organisations supporting council priorities.

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\(^8\) Perhaps even deterring new home buyers if costs of leisure facilities increase

\(^9\) Proposals included conversions of small, vacant or derelict buildings into accommodation
Further comments on Charge

Overall, there was a sense that increasing or introducing charges should strike a balance between affordability and financial sustainability.

A number of respondents drew attention to the fact that the 7-year council tax freeze is no longer sustainable and it results in crucial services being reduced, therefore should be increased\textsuperscript{10}. Others would like the Council to focus on income maximisation and localised budgeting.

A few commented on the need to review bus passes eligibility by either introducing means-tested bus passes or implementing minor charges for pensioners.

A number of respondents suggested introducing charges for work done for council tenants. Others pointed out that work done due to tenant’s negligence should also be chargeable. Similarly, where an area of work covers communal spaces with a mixture of private and social housing tenants, all efforts should be made to recover costs of the work from the private owners. One person commented that payment for services should be taken in advance of any work carried out.

A couple of comments related to councillors and an introduction of fines for an inefficient management of budgets.

Other suggestions included:
- to introduce charges for use of facilities,
- to increase planning charges,
- to introduce small charges for prescriptions,
- to increase all fines,
- to increase rent on allotments,
- lease out garages and lockups,
- and to sell off land around private properties to allow for parking.

\textsuperscript{10} A public consultation on increase of council tax was put forward
Across the Change section, the vast majority of respondents supported the proposals with only some of mixed views on outsourcing and further shared services arrangements. The following pages detail responses to individual proposals to change services.
Eight in ten respondents supported the proposal to utilise council buildings more efficiently. A number of respondents suggested merging facilities and providing services from as fewer locations as possible ultimately creating ‘one-stop shops’. Those opposing the proposal raised concerns about increased difficulties in accessing Council services if facilities and services are centralised.
Make it easier to access Council services

There appears to be a relative consensus on the need to make accessing Council services easier for local residents.
Set higher rents for tenants living in new build homes

More than half of all respondents agreed that tenants living in new build homes should be paying higher rents since the charge should reflect the quality of the property as pointed out by some. On the other hand, a couple of comments were made suggesting rents should be consistent across the whole of Clackmannanshire.
Spend funds to prevent problems occurring, rather than addressing problems that have occurred

There seemed to be an overwhelming consensus that preventative work should be at the forefront of Council work. Most respondents agreed that prevention, especially early intervention, is productive when addressing deep-rooted problems within the county and crucial to target areas of need. Ideas included expanding home care provision for the Elderly as it would save up money long term.

Conversely, a couple of comments on the proposed cuts to the Early Years Teachers drew attention to the fact that the proposal to reduce funding is against the local and national policies\(^\text{11}\) to invest in early years.

\(^{11}\) 600 hours of nursery provision
Seven in every ten respondents endorsed the idea of merging schools and community facilities highlighting that if viable and financially sustainable these moves should be taken as soon as possible. Furthermore, it was suggested that merged facilities should be home to as many services (public, private and voluntary) as possible.

However, it was noted that caution should be paid when implementing such a massive change. In particular, the respondents were concerned about child safety when services are provided from schools as it would be difficult to monitor service users' whereabouts. Alternatives included utilising secondary schools as community hubs operating at the weekend and once children leave the schools.
There seemed to be lack of consensus whether outsourcing would be the right way forward for the Council. Those who provided feedback on outsourcing services were concerned that the quality of service might decrease as external providers are notoriously difficult to monitor. Others suggested using skills and knowledge of the internal workforce to provide such services.

However, there were also those who supported the idea in principle provided effective monitoring measures of performance management are put in place.
Move more services into shared service arrangements with other authorities

While one in every two respondents supported the proposal to expand shared services arrangements, the qualitative feedback was more divided.

Those approving of shared services recognised the financial benefits adding that working in partnership with other local authorities and even sectors could improve the quality of services delivered. A number suggested what services should be shared or merged. They included roads departments of Clackmannanshire and Stirling Councils, IT, HR and Payroll. A couple of respondents even suggested merging the neighbouring councils into one local authority covering the Forth Valley region and even privatising services.

Those who opposed further shared services questioned the benefits of current arrangements calling for an assessment of the merged Education and Social Work Services. Others were worried that further shared services would lead to Clackmannanshire losing its unique character and identity; whereas a few suggested that we could learn from other local authorities that have undergone a similar exercise.
Further comments on change

Amongst the widely ranging comments on what the Council could do differently to generate savings, several, sometimes contentious, themes emerged.

In general, there was a feeling that the Council should work closely with other public bodies as well as the private and voluntary organisations. Centralising services was one of the most common suggestions made.

One of the most prevalent yet general comments made by the respondents was to improve efficiency and structure of services across the Council. Working as one entity rather than separate departments seemed popular.

A number of observations regarding Social Work and Education services were made. It was argued that efficiency of social services should take priority, while some suggested that the Social Work function should be transferred to the NHS to allow for seamless and comprehensive service provision. Others pointed out that the scarce level of resources hinders social workers from efficiently carrying out their duties. On the other hand, a couple mentioned unnecessary provision of branded items within Social Work.

Some would welcome an introduction of measures monitoring productivity and efficiency inclusive of local teachers. Others suggested changing nursery teachers’ contracts to part-time other would like to see all temporary contracts ceased. On the other hand, a few suggested employing new staff on a project basis. A number of respondents broached the subject of wages suggesting that managerial and councillors’ wages should be reduced with some proposing merging roles if viable. One put forward a proposal to review staff bonuses and funding to organisations rewarding staff with additional benefits, other would like to see salary wages streamlined and extending the voluntary severance scheme.

Several respondents commented on the use of IT and how it could improve efficiency of Clackmannanshire’s services (e.g. videoconferencing). Some of Clackmannanshire Council employees suggested better use of on-line training (indirectly reducing training budgets) and course, while a couple suggested encouraging payment by direct debit and ceasing collecting cash and cheques.

Further, it was emphasised that with the inevitable digitalisation across the county, the need of council presence in each community will eventually fade; therefore centralisation of services should be the focal point of council’s efforts to address the difficult financial situation.
A few respondents highlighted the need to focus on improving the housing repairs system (including evictions) and shifting the nature of current service towards more proactive and forward-thinking approaches (such as combining all invoices billed to the same person). A couple would welcome an introduction of a named contact accountable for work carried out.

While some respondents would welcome increasing the working week, others strongly opposed such an idea. Also, a couple respondents mentioned the need to review current sickness policies as they were seen as a huge financial burden.

A number of respondents focused on the need to review transport policies within the Council with some arguing for a firmer approach towards transport arrangements for the disabled and substance users. Others suggested reviewing criteria for bus passes and school taxis.

It was noted by a few respondents that the current tender process might not always transparent and effective, therefore improving it would be seen as beneficial.

Other suggestions included:
- to set up or renovate community and school gardens for local produce,
- to purchase a more economical Council car,
- to sell off the SL 1 registration plate,
- to improve management of council vehicles,
- to review benefit claimants on a regular basis to identify benefit fraudsters,
- to review efficiency of internal mail,
- to introduce mandatory recycling.
Comments

In general, there was a feeling of recognition of the difficult situation the council faces. The sheer wealth of comments and suggestions to the consultation made it clear that there was no overall consensus. It was also stated that further clarification was needed to make informed decisions on the proposals.

The following pages summarise all themes and suggestions submitted by respondents.

There was a large response from parents and other residents of Clackmannanshire about the proposed increase in music tuition, pointing out that such a rise would make the classes unaffordable, in particular for those ‘trapped in the middle’. The respondents also emphasised that the increase is not in line with the private sector as private classes are delivered on a one to one basis, whereas the current music lessons are delivered in groups of at least 5 or 6. Some argued that the benefits of music are priceless pointing the Scottish Government findings on the value of music, which provides young people with well rounded skills, builds confidence and teamwork. What’s more, increasing music tuition would effectively make it an ‘elitist’ art. Others urged that an equality impact assessment would be required if such a move was to be taken forward.

Interestingly, a couple respondents supported utilising skills of secondary school pupils to provide music classes as a way of gaining professional experience/apprenticeship, while others proposed a modest increase in fees or making music lessons private and even ceasing funding to the local orchestra.

A number of responses against any proposed cuts to Home/School Liaison Workers were made arguing that HMIe identified the post as crucial to Deerpark Primary School's success. Others emphasised that the cuts would lower attainment and aspiration and would lead to disengaged and unsupported young people with some pointing out these posts are highly valued by the families they work with.

Similar views were expressed in the area of reducing the Learning Assistant Posts. The comments focused on the proposal contravening Human Rights, the Equality Act and Learning Act. It was stressed that removing the posts would have a negative impact on children with additional needs, could lead to a reduction in attainment levels and increase truancy. Some drew attention to the fact that the posts of Learning Assistants are essential to support the principles of the Curriculum for Excellence and GIRFEC. Others pointed out that the proposal goes against the ethos of building inclusive schools and allowing children to take part in mainstream education.
Several responses were made against changes to speech and language therapy in schools pointing out that the proposals targets the most vulnerable children, some of whom are already on long NHS waiting lists. Others argued that it would be better to keep the service in school to avoid further stigmatisation and missing school classes. Whereas some highlighted that learning to communicate is a basic life skill and this service is essential for children.

Similar comments were made regarding the proposed cuts to psychological services stressing that such a decision would have a detrimental effect on the most vulnerable resulting in increased pressure on teaching staff.

Numerous comments were made regarding the proposal for some Tillicoultry children to walk/cycle to school at Alva Academy. The concerns included child safety (busy road next to the path, volume of children at busy times, unlit in the winter, risk of bullying), social and economic divide as children on the east side of the town would receive transport, more parents driving their children to school resulting in increased volume of traffic on the A91 and congestion in Alva, and a likelihood of increased absenteeism. Others suggested that a full school transport review should be carried out before a decision is made.

A number of respondents drew attention to the fact that Youth Services are a crucial part of transition to high school and reducing it would have a detrimental impact on employability and life skills of young people and could even result in an increase in anti-social behaviour as there is very little for young people to do in Clackmannanshire. It was stressed that Youth Services deal with children who do not fit in and keep them at school and overall provide much needed support outwith the school environment.

A couple of responses regarding school clothing grants were made arguing that it would affect only the most vulnerable families, therefore would need an equality impact assessment. As pointed out, the very proposal would breach the robust uniform policies set by schools and could lead to bullying.

A few respondents made comments related to Sports Development. A couple argued that the service encourages and introduces children to a variety of sports providing extracurricular activities at a reasonable cost, not to mention the positive impact on health. On the other hand, one respondent felt that sport receives an unbalanced share of funding to the detriment of drama, creative art and music.

A couple of comments related to the use of renewable energy across the county and heating and lighting efficiency measures, such as reducing heating in council buildings, switching off all lights once schools are closed and reducing the time Christmas lights are on in town centre. One comment in particular provided a detailed proposal not only how to save money, but how to generate income through an implementation of a wide range green energy solutions from solar panels and building heating through to hydro power.
Another idea to generate income was to sell off or lease out vacant buildings and facilities. On the other hand, there were some who would welcome an opportunity to be able to buy vacant buildings in order to renovate at their own expense to create the home they want. Such an opportunity would provide the necessary apprenticeships for pupils from the college.

Some focused on the very nature of the proposals drawing attention to the fact that they will have long-term, still to be indentified, negative outcomes for young people, families, communities and businesses. Others wished to ensure quality of services remains the same if the cuts are implemented, while some wished to improve services for people with disabilities.

Various comments on unpaid work were made throughout the consultation. A number of respondents mentioned recognising the value of volunteering and encouraging local people to get involved in provision of unpaid work to support neighbours and local communities. A few suggested introducing resident associations and using community spirit to work better together, some would even welcome community groups taking control over halls and buildings. It has been stressed that volunteering brings people and communities together as well as improves employability prospects.

A number of respondents expressed their disapproval of the proposal to reduce the number of librarians as they provide an invaluable and unique service to young people across the county, it was suggested that a cost-benefit analysis should be carried out before such a move is considered. One suggested opening youth clubs for young people to socialise.

On a more general transport topic, some respondents suggested that parents wishing to place their children in a school outside their school catchment should be prepared to contribute to the cost of school transport. It was also proposed to remove school bus services for secondary school pupils on a wider postcode radius. Several respondents suggested that instead of removing school buses, parents should contribute to ticket fares. The related transport proposal to cut bus subsidies highlighted the move’s negative impact on rural communities.

A reasonable number of respondents were of the opinion that education is paramount to success in Clackmannanshire, therefore, any reduction to service provision should be carefully considered.

One respondent stated that Criminal Justice unpaid teams should be better used.
Only a few directly expressed support towards making bold and unpopular decisions and supported proposals for minor increases in service charges.

Other comments included:
- obtaining sponsorship for council vehicles and buildings in exchange for income,
- pressing for larger share of budget given to local authorities from the Scottish Government,
- improving childcare provision across the region,
- closing down denominational schools,
- extending autonomies of school budgets,
- improving community engagement with a focus on identifying local needs in partnership with local communities,
Conclusions

The public budget consultation ran for a period of 10 weeks and attracted over 450 responses.

Four methods were used to gather views on the budget proposals. These were public meetings (59 responses), an online survey on Clackmannanshire Citizen Space (327 responses), email and letter (92 responses).

The consultation concentrated on 4 key areas, namely, what the Council could:

- Stop
- Reduce
- Charge for
- Change

In general, the budget proposals drew broad and mixed reactions.

In the section exploring what services the Council could Stop providing, public opinion was very mixed. There was some acknowledgement that the Council should stop funding voluntary organisations who cannot demonstrate alignment with local priorities and also a high proportion of views against stopping school crossing patrols as these are seen to be paramount to child safety. Several suggestions were made on other areas that the council could stop.

Similarly, the section exploring the proposals to Reduce provision of Council services resulted in mixed opinion. Over half of respondents were against reducing respite support to carers, reducing the frequency of bin collections and reducing gritting. The letter and email responses fed back opposition to reducing Learning Assistant posts, Home/School liaison worker posts, speech and language therapy in schools and primary school swimming lessons. The most palatable services to reduce seemed to be open space maintenance and opening hours of council facilities and offices. Again, numerous suggestions on reducing service provision were made by the public.

In the section looking at proposals for Charging, the results again were fairly mixed. In general, the public agreed with proposals to increase charges for the hire of Council facilities. There was also limited support for prioritising free access to services through the use of means testing, increased charging for school meals and increased social work charges. However, several parents of children with disabilities wrote into the Council explaining why free respite provision is so important for them.

Finally, the section exploring proposals on Changing the way the Council provides services, resulted in clearer public opinion. The vast majority of respondents agreed
that the Council should make more efficient and widespread use of Council buildings and merge school and community facilities. Likewise, there was overall consensus that the Council should make it easier to access Council services and should target funds to prevent problems occurring.

Overall, there was a sense of acknowledgement from the public that there were difficult decisions to be made and they welcomed the fact that the Council had asked for their opinion.