

## **APPENDIX 6a) – BUDGET CONSULTATION RESPONSES**

### **1. WHO DID WE CONSULT?**

The strategy set out in this report has been informed by a wide-ranging consultation and engagement programme with the local community. This has included:

- A postal survey of the Community Panel of 1350 local residents (534 responses, 40% response rate)
- ‘Your Money, Your Views’ – a consultation document summarising the main budget proposals (275 responses). This consultation was designed to be accessible to everyone – people were able to give their views online, by freepost or in person.
- Engagement events in the Borough Towns (Newport, Madeley, Wellington, Oakengates and Dawley) – 455 people took part in an exercise prioritising 12 of our key services (see Section 2.2)
- Meetings with external and internal stakeholder groups, including:
  - Parishes Forum
  - Voluntary and Community Forum
  - Chamber of Commerce
  - Young People's Forum
  - Connecting Communities Group
  - Rural Forum
  - Disabilities Forum
  - Local Strategic Partnership Executive
  - Head Teachers/Diocesan Representatives
  - Joint Information and Consultation Forum (JICF) – Trade Unions
  - Corporate Employee Focus Group

This year the timing of our budget consultation meant that unfortunately we were unable to meet with the Senior Citizens' Forum. To ensure that members of this group had an opportunity to give their views, we sent out copies of ‘Your Money, Your Views’ to all members of the Senior Citizens' Forum (approximately 1300 in total).

The budget strategy was also considered by the Value for Money Scrutiny Group, which comprises members from all political groupings. Appendix 6b) sets out the Value for Money Scrutiny Group's formal comments on the budget.

Section 2 of this appendix summarises the responses received to date. Full results can be viewed at <http://www.telford.gov.uk/Council+democracy/Consultations/>.

## 2. WHAT DID PEOPLE TELL US?

This year we asked for views on the following themes:

### 2.1 THE WAY WE RUN THINGS

The Community Panel were asked two overall questions about how we run things:

- To what extent do you agree or disagree that the Council's Budget Strategy will benefit the local community? - 79% agree, 3% disagree
- How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way Telford & Wrekin Council runs things? – 86% satisfied, 6% dissatisfied (which compares very favourably with a figure of 68% in April 2009)

These results are reinforced by a number of positive comments from Panel and 'Your Money, Your Views' respondents about the Council's spending and savings plans and willingness to listen to the views of local people.

### 2.2 BUDGET PRINCIPLES

The Community Panel were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with a number of key principles that underpin the budget strategy.

**Table 1- Budget Principles**

<b>Budget principle</b>	<b>% of Panel who strongly agreed or agreed with principle</b>
Spread our resources fairly and openly across the Borough, whilst taking account of the needs of different areas	95%
Seek to minimise the level of Council Tax increase, balanced against growing demands for Council services and protecting services from cuts	95%
Deliver efficiencies and savings, as far as possible minimising the impact on the quality of services	95%
Develop spending plans that are based on and address the community's needs and priorities	94%
Look for external investment e.g. Government grants, to create prosperity and success	93%
Keep the use of Council reserves to a minimum and use only when we need to	89%
Set aside some additional money to deal with any unforeseen circumstances caused by the current economic situation	86%
Sell some of the Council's poor performing land and property to fund community priorities (if it is practical and prudent to do so)	73%

Table 1 suggests that there is strong support amongst the Community Panel for the majority of core principles that we have used to develop our strategy. The principle with the lowest level of agreement (73%) and highest level of disagreement (14%) is

'sell some of the Council's poor performing land and property to fund community priorities'.

### **2.3 SPENDING PLANS AND PRIORITIES**

Consultation focused on four areas:

#### **a) Running Day to Day Services**

The Community Panel were asked to what extent they supported or opposed the specific revenue investments planned for 2010/11 (Adult and Children's Social Care, funding for services to help people affected by the economic downturn and a proposed new Community Fund – see Section 2.2b). The Panel were also asked to identify which of these three investments would be their top spending priority.

**Table 2 – Revenue Investments**

<b>Investment</b>	<b>% of Panel who strongly support or support</b>	<b>% of Panel who identified as top priority</b>
Extra funding for Adult Social Care Services to support older people and vulnerable adults	90%	41%
Extra funding for Children's Social Care Services to help protect vulnerable children	88%	41%
Extra funding to help people affected by the economic downturn	72%	18%

Table 2 shows that there is strong support for the additional funding for both Adult and Children's Social Care Services with equal percentages of people (41%) identifying these as their top priority. There is also support for helping people affected by the economic downturn (72% support and only 7% oppose), although a much lower percentage of people (18%) prioritised this above Social Care Services.

The Panel were also asked to consider the importance of 12 day to day services and to prioritise which 5 were most important to the community overall. We also ran a similar service prioritisation exercise in the Borough Towns and at most of our consultation meetings (a total of 573 people took part). Everyone who took part was given 5 tokens (each worth £100,000) to 'spend' on the service or services that they thought were most important.

**Table 3 – Service Priorities**

<b>Service</b>	<b>% of Panel who identified as a 'Top 5' priority</b>	<b>Overall service rankings from all events and meetings</b>
Maintenance of roads, pavements and street lights	67%	4
Crime and safety	66%	1
Social services for disabled adults and older people	57%	2
Education	54%	3

Waste collection and recycling	51%	8
Social services for children	48%	5
Environmental maintenance	40%	9
Transport	32%	7
Housing	30%	6
Leisure and culture	23%	10
Economic development/support for local business	19%	11
Benefits advice	6%	12

Table 3 highlights some differences between the results for the Community Panel and the overall results of the service prioritisation exercise carried out at consultation events and meetings. For example, compared to people who took part in meetings and events, the Community Panel appear to place:

- More importance on maintenance of roads, pavements and street lights, waste collection and recycling and environmental maintenance; and
- Less importance on housing

However, there does appear be broad overall agreement that the 4 highest service priorities are:

- **Crime and safety**
- **Maintenance of roads, pavements and street lights**
- **Social services for disabled adults and older people**
- **Education**

And the 3 lowest service priorities overall appear to be:

- Leisure and culture
- Economic development/support for local business
- Benefits advice

Clearly, there was variation in priorities across the different consultation meetings and events. For example:

- Voluntary and Community Forum – identified Environmental Maintenance as their top priority (ranked 9<sup>th</sup> overall)
- Young People's Forum – identified Transport as their top priority (ranked 7<sup>th</sup> overall)

## **b) Community Fund**

The Community Panel were asked to what extent they supported or opposed the creation of a new Community Fund. The results were that 75% of respondents support setting up the Community Fund, whereas 11% are opposed to it (though as seen below, in most cases this was not because they were generally against the principle).

There was a great deal of debate and interest in the Community Fund at the consultation meetings. A lot of people expressed support for the proposal, giving reasons such as:

- “small grants can make a big difference to the community”

- “gets people working for their communities”
- “gives people some control”

However, a number of issues and concerns were raised. The main reason why people are opposed to the Community Fund is a concern that not enough money is being allocated to the fund to make a real difference, for example: “£150,000 goes nowhere in today’s climate”, “keep hold of the money for when funding runs low”. Some people also feel that administering the scheme could be time-consuming and costly. A very small number of people felt that the Council and not local people should decide how resources are allocated, raising the concern that the Community Fund could lead to competition and bad feeling between and across communities.

In terms of how the fund should work, there is a general view that local people should be actively and directly involved in deciding how money is allocated and that money should be spread ‘fairly’ across the area and different age groups.

Further consultation will be needed to develop this project in detail, as a number of different suggestions have been made about how funding should be distributed, including:

- Money distributed by Parish - local people/organisations apply for grants to their local Town/Parish Council who allocate funding based on their existing grants policies;
- Money distributed by ward - ward Councillors engage with local people and organisations e.g. at public meetings, to decide how to allocate funding locally;
- Money held in a central pot – local people/organisations bid for funding to a central committee.

The Panel questionnaire and ‘Your Money, Your Views’ asked people how they thought the Community Fund should be spent. A very high percentage of people commented on this – to date, we have received over 600 suggestions, which is a very positive indication of how the fund can engage and involve local people.

### **How should the Community Fund be spent?**

The 627 suggestions from ‘Your Money, Your Views’/Panel included<sup>1</sup>:

- **Sport & leisure facilities** (117) e.g. a skate park<sup>2</sup>
- **Roads and pavements/environmental maintenance** (101) e.g. repairing potholes, pedestrian/zebra/school crossings, dropped kerbs, litter picking, cycle paths
- **Facilities and activities for young people and teenagers** (74) e.g. youth clubs, after school clubs, music/arts projects (DJ workshops etc)
- Preventing crime and anti-social behaviour (55) e.g. more CSOs, more CCTV, free door chains and smoke alarms
- Improving the appearance of Borough Town Centres (41)
- Looking after or creating new open spaces and play areas (37) e.g. community gardens, allotments, wildlife areas, tree/bulb planting
- Support for/grants for community groups (37) e.g. resident’s groups, local playgroups/clubs, history/heritage groups
- Facilities and activities for older people (32) e.g. outings, help with gardens, clubs
- Improving or developing community centres/meeting places (24) (not necessarily Council-run)
- Helping older people to stay at home (15) e.g. home helps, meals on wheels

- Supporting housing/homeless projects (14)
- Arts/music/theatre (12)
- Car parking on estates (8)
- Traffic calming/enforcement (8)
- Local events (7) e.g. fun days, Ironbridge/Wellington festivals
- Plastic recycling (7)
- Gritting (5) e.g. provide more grit boxes so people can look after their own areas
- Improving New Town Estates (5)
- Adult Education and Training (5)

1 - All ideas suggested 5 or more times shown, 3 most frequent are shown in bold (full results will be put on the Council's Website at the end of the consultation period)

2 – 99 separate responses were sent requesting that the Council builds a new large concrete undercover skate park

### c) Long-term Investments

The Community Panel were asked for their views on a range of 10 longer-term (capital) investments. Results are shown in Table 5 at the end of this Appendix.

In addition, people who attended consultation meetings were asked in groups to agree the 5 most important long-term investments from the same list of 10, giving reasons for their choices (see also Table 5).

The area that caused the most discussion at consultation meetings was priorities for regenerating the Borough. Table 5 suggests that there is significantly more support for regenerating the **Borough Towns** (83%, ranked as top priority at consultation meetings) than redeveloping **Telford Town Centre** (38%, ranked 7<sup>th</sup> priority). Whilst there appears to be broad consensus about the Borough Towns Initiative, views about Telford Town Centre are more mixed, although there is strong support from some groups, for example the Voluntary and Community Forum.

In the consultation meetings, it was clear that some people feel that there is a clear choice to be made between regenerating either the Town Centre or the Borough Towns – a number of people talked about the Town Centre and the large retail parks being 'competition' for smaller businesses in the Borough Towns. The other main reason for the strong level of support for Borough Towns appears to be that people identify more and feel a greater sense of community in their 'local' centre', for example "I see Telford Town Centre as a posh new house with granite worktops that you don't want to live in and the Borough Towns as a home".

27 Community Panel/'Your Money, Your Views' respondents commented specifically that they did not think we should be prioritising the Southwater development (particularly new Civic Offices) in the current economic climate. Most of these people did not object to the re-development itself but the timing of it.

Views about regenerating the **New Town Estates** also vary - 65% of Community Panel members support this initiative and 13% oppose it. Although some people feel that a lot of money has already been spent on these areas, particularly South Telford, there also appears to be a general acceptance that there is a need to improve these areas.

Almost three-quarters (72%) of the Panel support the creation of new **Sports & Learning Communities** (this was ranked as the 3<sup>rd</sup> = highest priority overall at consultation meetings).

The issue of **housing** also generated much debate. Interestingly, there appears to be stronger support for Extra Care housing (88%, ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> priority at consultation meetings) than supporting the building of new homes (64%, ranked 6<sup>th</sup> priority). The main reasons for this appear to be concerns about the number of new houses being built, particularly in rural/'green' areas and a view that the Council should not get involved in house-building.

Table 5 also shows high levels of support amongst the Community Panel for investing more in **roads and pavements (97%), street lights (88%), improving recycling (81%) and parks/play areas (74%)**. However, at consultation meetings, opinion was divided about the relative importance of these investments. For example, street lights were ranked as the least important priority overall, although the Disabilities Forum placed relatively more importance on this due to safety concerns. Recycling was ranked as 9<sup>th</sup> priority overall, many people expressing the view that we already have an excellent recycling service.

#### d) Missing Priorities

Everyone who took part in consultation also had the opportunity to raise any other priorities that they thought were missing from the proposed spending plans.

Looking at overall responses to 'Your Money, Your Views' and the Community Panel, there appears to be a high level of agreement with and support for the Council's spending plans and priorities.

#### **Is there anything missing from our priorities?**

192 responses from 'Your Money, Your Views'/Panel included<sup>1</sup>:

- **Skate park (25)**
- **More support for local shops and businesses and tourism promotion Borough-wide (21)**
- **Cheaper and more reliable public transport and better concessionary travel scheme (16)**
- More environmental maintenance (13)
- Gritting of side roads and pavements and provision of grit boxes (12)
- Plastics recycling (8)
- Public footpaths/cycle ways (8)
- Out of school activities for children and young people (8)
- Arts/music/theatre (7)

1 – All issues raised 5 or more times shown, 3 most frequent are shown in bold (full results will be put on the Council's Website at the end of the consultation period)

A number of other priorities were identified by stakeholder groups, including

- More British Sign Language interpreters to help deaf people access Council services (Disabilities Forum)
- More emphasis on equalities and diversity and making services racially/culturally sensitive (Connecting Communities Group)

- More activities for young people, particularly cultural/social activities (Rural Forum, Young People's Forum)
- More help with grant applications (Rural Forum)
- Economic development/regeneration of rural areas – possibly set up a rural regeneration partnership? (Rural Forum)
- Rural footpaths and bridleways (Voluntary and Community Forum, Parishes Forum)
- Lower priced public transport for CYP (Young People's Forum)
- Commercial transport links e.g. Cosford – airport (Parishes Forum)
- More support for jobs for young people, particularly graduates – along with facilities/activities for this group that will encourage young people to return to Telford after college/university (Young People's Forum, Connecting Communities Group)
- Regeneration of other areas e.g. Trench, Donnington, St. Georges (Young People's Forum)
- Improvement of industrial estates and more marketing of Council-owned commercial properties (Parishes Forum)
- More support for start-up operations (Parishes Forum)
- More wardens/Community Support Officers e.g. in parks/play areas (Young People's Forum)

## **2.4 SAVINGS PLANS**

The Community Panel were asked to consider two specific savings proposals (switching off certain street lights between midnight and 5.30am and providing Travel Link Shop services in different ways).

**Table 6 – Savings Proposals**

<b>Savings Proposals</b>	<b>% of Panel who strongly agreed or agreed</b>
Switching off street lights	74%
Providing Travel Link Shop services in different ways	76%

Table 6 suggests that there approximately three-quarters of the Panel agree with both these proposals, although the percentage of people disagreeing is slightly higher for turning off street lights at night (18% disagree/strongly disagree) than for providing Travel Link services in different ways (10% disagree/strongly disagree).

The main reasons for opposing the street light proposal appear to be concerns about safety and impact on disabled people, particularly the visually impaired. For Travel Link, a number of people raised issues about the use of screens/technology for public transport information, for example that older people may not be able to use them or that they may be damaged or vandalised.

The results of consultation on the Travel Link Shop will be included in a full business case, which will be considered by Cabinet in March 2010.

The Panel questionnaire and 'Your Money, Your Views' also asked people what else they thought we should stop doing or do less of.

### **Is there anything else you think we should stop doing or do less of?**

308 responses from 'Your Money, Your Views'/Community Panel including<sup>1</sup>:

### **Reduce employee/Councillor costs**

- Get rid of more senior managers/non-essential jobs (26)
- Reduce Councillor expenses (21)
- Reduce/freeze employees' pay (17)
- Stop final salary pensions and other benefits (10)
- Use volunteers/people doing community service for environmental maintenance etc. (7)
- Manage poor performance (5)

### **Reduce/change services**

- Reduce the number of street lights or use more energy efficient lights (21)
- Reduce/review traffic lights/management (12)
- Proactive road surfacing i.e. do the job properly the first time to save patching several times later (invest to save) (5)

### **Get the best price for services**

- Outsource/contract out services e.g. catering and review existing contracts e.g. TWS (6)

### **Bring more money in**

- Increase fees and charges (13), particularly introduce a small charge for bus passes (6)
- More fines/penalties for people who litter, don't recycle etc. (7)
- Sell land/assets (8)

### **Cut out red tape/waste**

- Reduce the frequency/quality of publicity material and review use of translation/interpretation\* (23) and less consultation (5)
- Buy less stationery/furniture/ICT (13)
- Reduce printing and postage (12)
- Stop all refreshments/lunches/hospitality (9)
- Less meetings (8)

1 - All issues raised 5 or more times shown (full results will be put on the Council's Website at the end of the consultation period)

\*The Connecting Communities Group raised a concern about reviewing translation and interpretation, as these are crucial services for some people. Whilst we do need to promote and support the use of English, we need to do this in a sensitive way and recognise the difficulties that people experience with this.

## **2.5 COUNCIL TAX**

The Panel questionnaire and 'Your Money, Your Views' asked people to what extent they supported or opposed the proposed Council Tax increase of 1.9%. Those who did not support the proposed increase were asked to give their reasons.

Amongst the Panel, there is strong support for the Council's proposal of 1.9% with 85% of the Panel respondents stating that they strongly support or support the proposed

increase. However, for 'Your Money, Your Views' this figure drops to 46% (it should be noted that around 30% of respondents neither support nor oppose the proposal).

People who oppose the proposal (8% - Panel, 23% 'Your Money, Your Views') fall into two distinct groups: those who think the increase is too high and those who think it is too low.

Of the 77 people who gave their reasons for opposing the increase (it should be noted this is only 9% of the total respondents), about two-thirds think that the increase should be lower or that there should be no increase at all, for example:

- 'It is hard enough for the little people to cope in this recession without putting up costs'
- "Although a reduction in costs is laudable, it is still not ZERO increase"

However, there is also a group of 26 people (34%) who feel that the Council should consider a higher increase in order to protect public services, for example:

- "At these tight times, ...more on council tax would not hurt me too much, but cuts in services would"
- "If we in Telford want the best of services, we must be prepared to pay for them"

**Table 5 – Long-Term Investment Priorities**

<b>Proposed Investment</b>	<b>% of Panel who strongly supported or supported</b>	<b>Overall ranking (consultation meetings)</b>	<b>Examples of comments and reasons for prioritisation (consultation meetings)</b>
Invest more in roads and pavements	97%	3=	“please repair the crumbling infrastructure”, “ice/frost has caused damage”, “save money – prevent accidents”, “make easier for disabled people”, “people’s morale affected by shabbiness”, “should include public footpaths and bridleways”, “everyone uses”
Extra care housing	88%	2	“Need a lot more money – ageing population, demand will increase”, “deaf people need to have specialist accommodation ... and not become isolated”, “looking after those who need help – better quality of life for elderly and disabled”, “need to live independently”
Invest more in street lighting	88%	10	“Really important for older people and deaf people who rely on their eyes”, “helps to feel safe”
Improve Borough Town Centres	83%	1	“Places where you can have more specialist shops and community facilities as well”, “heart of local communities”, “their inhabitants deserve and need to see that their neighbourhood is in its own way as valuable and valued as the Town Centre”, “improve local economy”, “support smaller business”, “everyone has an affinity with one of the six”
Improve recycling facilities	81%	9	“Save the planet!”, “save landfill costs/tax”, “extend to business/industry”
Improve parks and play areas	74%	8	“We need to maintain along with areas for wildlife”, “giving people something to do – reducing crime”, “people enjoying their environment”, “no more development on green places, access to all”
Create new Sports & Learning Communities	72%	3=	“Schools should have dual roles”, “more things for children and young people to do”, “more schools like Hadley Learning Community”, “investing in children and young people for the future”, “local communities can benefit from facilities”, “sport important”
Improve New Town Estates	65%	3=	“Because some of them are becoming physically run-down and need restoration”, “reducing stigma and reputation”, “reducing crime”, “improving places we live and community pride”, “improve existing housing prior to building more”
Support more new homes	64%	6	“To help local people stay local”, “should be more cheaper, rented accommodation and social housing”, “especially rural areas and make sure there are more affordable homes”, “happy home helps to maintain happy family”, “growing town – low wage area”
Re-develop Telford Town Centre	38%	7	“Attract people to visit – late night opening/entertainment like ‘Star City’ in Birmingham”, “to improve the economy”, “because it is merely a shopping complex not a town centre”, “Telford needs a ‘heart’”, “create community spirit”, “bring in new wealth, image, attract new businesses”

