

London Borough of Sutton**The Executive – 3 February 2009****Report of the Chief Executive****BUDGET CONSULTATION 2009 / 2010****Ward Location:** Not Applicable**Author and Contact Phone Number:**

Darren Stevens, Head of the Chief Executive's Office

Ext. 5779

Area Served: Borough-Wide**Executive Councillor:** John Drage**Key Decision Report****Summary**

This report summarises the feedback received from the consultation undertaken on the 2009 / 2010 budget. All responses were logged and where appropriate were individually responded to. Copies of all the responses received can be found in the Members room.

Recommendations

The Executive is recommended to consider the feedback received.

1. Background

1.1 On 4 November 2008, the Executive agreed for public consultation proposals for the 2009 / 2010 budget. The proposals were publicised in a wide variety of ways including, a feature in Sutton Scene; a mailout to 700 stakeholders; on the Sutton Council website; via 31 large posters located around Sutton; in a press release sent to the Sutton Guardian on 6 November 2008 and at a wide variety of meetings and forums, many of which are described later in the report. A copy of the feedback form used by many respondents can be found in Appendix 1. Those affected by proposed savings were specifically consulted. Feedback was invited by e-mail, in writing, on the telephone and via the completion of a feedback form. All responses were logged and where appropriate were individually responded to. The consultation exercise closed on 27 January 2009.

2. Issues

2.1 A wide range of people and organisations responded to the budget consultation. 79 items of correspondence were received (letters, emails and feedback forms) signed by a total of 98 people. A petition has been received containing more than 200 signatures about the animal warden proposals. In excess of 110 people attended meetings (as described below) where the budget proposals were presented and/or discussed. A copy of the responses received can be found in the Members Room. The key points made in the feedback received were as follows:

Increase in Council Tax

2.2 8 responses were received arguing for a lower percentage increase in the level of Council Tax or in favour of the Council stopping doing things that it currently does.

Suggestions included terminating the final salary pension scheme; reducing energy use; reducing back-office staff; halting capital projects other than those directly linked to employment opportunities for local people; reviewing the salaries and benefits paid to managers; cutting back councillor emoluments; reducing temperatures in offices and libraries; ceasing payments to the Lea Valley Regional Park Authority; stopping the installation of speed bumps; contracting out the roadside tree planting; cutting the number of Council committees; and spending less on communications, in part by publishing fewer editions of Sutton Scene.

- 2.3 On the other hand, one respondent said that, “3.4% seems about right but nothing higher”. Another respondent said that the Council’s choices were constrained due to the current economic downturn and that the proposed spending plans and savings proposals should therefore be supported.

Reorganising the Animal Warden Service

- 2.4 There were 17 responses to the proposal to extend the existing contract for the night-time collection of stray dogs to cover the daytime and evenings, and focus the efforts of the warden on enforcement activities. All the responses were opposed to the proposal. Respondents suggested that if this proposal was pursued it would have a detrimental effect on the stray dog service currently provided to Sutton residents and that it could lead to an increase in the stress and distress experienced by the dogs themselves.
- 2.5 A petition has also been received containing in excess of 200 signatures, “strongly” opposing the proposal.

Savings Arising from Investment in Preventative Care

- 2.6 4 responses were received to the proposal to reduce the growth of the number of children being taken into care as a result of current and future investment in measures designed to support children and their families. Respondents were concerned that such a move might be “dangerous” and that it could lead to children being put at risk.

Review of Street Trading Budget

- 2.7 Responses have been received from the street traders themselves (containing around 20 signatures), opposing the increase in licence fees for street traders. The respondents contend that the proposed increases are too high in the current economic climate.

Special Educational Needs (SEN) Transport

- 2.8 Several responses were received about Special Educational Needs (SEN) Transport. All comments have been noted by the Executive Member for Children, Young People and Learning Services and the Strategic Director Children, Young People and Learning Services. On 1 December 2008, the Executive agreed a revised SEN Transport Policy (minute 995 refers) which was subsequently confirmed by Council on 15 December.

Responses to Survey Questions

- 2.9 Respondents to the budget consultation were invited to answer two specific questions about the spending plans and savings proposals. 47 respondents took the opportunity to answer these questions, yielding the following results -

Do you agree with our package of new spending proposals for 2009/10?

Yes 66% No 19% Don't know 15%

Do you agree with our package of proposals to make savings in 2009/10?

Yes 64% No 22% Don't know 14%

Other General Feedback

2.10 A number of other suggestions and comments were received which included:

- More emphasis should be put on addressing a range of issues in Wallington town centre which it was argued is largely ignored compared to the emphasis placed on Sutton town centre.
- Concern that inadequate resources will be available to achieve the goal of transforming care services by helping people stay longer in their homes through intensive and community based support.
- A suggestion from the Acorn Project in Worcester Park that a greater proportion of the youth service budget be allocated to outreach services in that part of the Borough.
- More money is needed for maintaining, cleaning and improving the streetscene and a related concern about the proposed saving on highways winter maintenance which it is feared could lead to less gritting being undertaken on icy roads. Another respondent expressed concern that the proposed method of weed removal does not seem to be very environmentally friendly.
- A suggestion that there should be free green garden waste collection for those in receipt of housing and council tax benefit and from another respondent, a suggestion in favour of a small charge across the board for this service. A further respondent proposed that the Council should introduce a small council tax rebate for those who do not use the green garden waste collection.
- A response was received from Age Concern. They said that person centred care which meets the dignity and respect standards expected by older people must be maintained. They particularly focussed on the proposals around 'Transforming Social Care' saying that the current range of preventative services available to older people who do not meet the 'Fair Access To Care Services' criteria should be maintained. Age Concern also stressed that funding priorities should include access to information, practical support at times of crisis, access to transport for leisure activities and prevention projects that focus on falls, fear of falling and mobility issues.

Paul Burstow MP and Tom Brake MP

2.11 A joint response was received from the two local Members of Parliament. They stressed that there is a very real concern amongst their constituents about making ends meet and that because of this they stressed the importance of doing everything possible to minimise the impact of council tax and that any increase should be below the rate of inflation.

2.12 The two MPs also explained that in past years they have supported the Council in its efforts to secure a better deal from Central Government and that despite some success in this area, it remains the case that Sutton receives one of the lowest government grants of any London Borough. They say that if Sutton were to receive

the average level of government support that is paid to other Councils in outer London, then the level of council tax in Sutton would reduce significantly.

- 2.13 Finally, the two MPs stress the importance of protecting front-line services and they say that they appreciate the efforts being made to do just that, delivering efficiency savings whilst investing in key Council services.

Council and Employees' Joint Committee

- 2.14 The Council and Employees' Joint Committee considered the proposals on 22 January. The relevant minute from this meeting and their comments can be found in Appendix 2.

True Voice Meeting

- 2.15 True Voice is a representative group of young people from the Borough who meet as a focus / consultation group for the Council to gain feedback from young people on different issues. This group discussed the budget consultation on 15 January and considered a number of issues including safety; SEN transport; children in care; leisure centres; libraries and the proposed Sutton Life Centre. The relevant note from this meeting can be found in Appendix 3.

Local Committees

- 2.16 Local Committees were offered the opportunity of considering the budget proposals. Three Local Committees considered the proposals as follows –
- St Helier, The Wrythe & Wandle Valley Local Committee on 9 December.
 - Carshalton & Clockhouse Local Committee on 16 December.
 - Cheam North & Worcester Park Local Committee on 18 December
- 2.17 The relevant minutes from these three meetings can be found in Appendices 4, 5 and 6.
- 2.18 Sutton South, Cheam and Belmont Local Committee organised a session before one of their formal meetings to discuss the budget proposals and this was attended by several local residents. Beddington and Wallington Local Committee wanted to consider the budget proposals at one of their meetings but for practical reasons, this did not happen.

Equality & Diversity Forum

- 2.19 The Equalities and Diversity Forum considered the proposals on 10 December. The relevant minute from this meeting can be found in Appendix 7.

Sutton Partnership Board

- 2.20 The Sutton Partnership Board discussed the imminent budget consultation at its meeting on 28 October. The relevant minute can be found in Appendix 8.

Sutton Federation of Tenants & Residents Associations

- 2.21 The Sutton Federation of Tenants & Residents Associations considered the proposals at its meeting on 27 January. 14 feedback forms were completed by those attending the meeting of which 12 said that they supported the spending plans and saving proposals. 1 respondent opposed the plans and proposals and 1 didn't know.

3. Financial Implications.

- 3.1 The budget consultation process informs the Council's choices on the 2009/10 budget but otherwise there are no direct financial implications.

4. Influence of the Council's Core Values

- 4.1 The budget consultation exercise has been driven by our core values of working in partnership and empowering everyone so that we can all "take part and take pride" as active citizens and staff.

5. Equality Impact Assessment

- 5.1 The primary purpose of the consultation exercise is to ensure that all people have the opportunity to comment on and influence our priorities and budget for 2009 / 2010. In order to achieve this, a variety of consultation methods were utilised in order to ensure that people could use the method most appropriate to them.

6. Background Papers

A copy of the responses received can be found in the Members Room.

Appendix 1

**FEEDBACK FORM USED BY MANY RESPONDENTS
TO THE BUDGET CONSULTATION**

Now tell us what you think:

Spending plans *(please tick)*

Do you agree with our package of new spending proposals for 2009/2010?

Yes No Don't know

Savings proposals *(please tick)*

Do you agree with our package of proposals to make savings in 2009/2010?

Yes No Don't know

Do you have any comments about our budget plans for 2009/10?

(please continue on a separate sheet of paper if you need to)

We will write back to you at the end of the consultation to let you know the outcome, so please let us have your contact details below. If there's a specific point that you would like a response to before the consultation ends, please tick here.

Name:

--

Address:

--

--

--

E-mail:

--

You can find more information on line at www.sutton.gov.uk and you have until 27 January 2009, to respond. Please send your response Freepost to: London Borough of Sutton, Budget Consultation, Freepost CN2117, Civic Offices, Sutton, SM1 1EA. No stamp required.

Appendix 2**RELEVANT MINUTE FROM THE COUNCIL & EMPLOYEES'
JOINT COMMITTEE MEETING ON 22 JANUARY 2009**

The Strategic Director – Resources reported that a three year forecast of the cost of existing services had been agreed as part of the 2008/09 budget process and had been updated in July 2008 based on a provisional increase of 3.4% in Council Tax in 2009/10. The current forecast projected that savings of approximately £4.6m would be required to limit the increase in Council Tax to 3.4%, after allowing for a revised apportionment of Freedom Pass costs, increasing to £7.4m to maintain it at 2008/09 levels. That forecast provided for additional spending of £5m in 2009/10.

Members considered the report that had been considered by The Executive on 4 November 2008, and in particular the savings options that had been identified therein. Savings proposals had been developed on the basis of minimising the impact on services to residents.

A schedule of savings options totalling £4,639,000 in 2009/10 was submitted to meet the projected shortfall in the budget. The savings options were not expected to lead to many redundancies, but all staff potentially affected by them had been informed of the position.

The Employees' Side were invited to comment formally on the savings options, with a view to any comments being considered by The Executive at their meeting on 3 February 2009. They commented, and the Council Side responded, on the two items as set out in the Appendix to these Minutes.

The Chair drew attention to the 2008 pay award on which a decision was still awaited from the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service, and asked what the position would be if the final award was greater than the financial provision. It was understood that there could be significant budget implications. The Executive Head of Financial Services explained that the Council would meet its obligations to pay any final award but that it would be more difficult overall if the award exceeded the financial provision. An award that, for example, exceeded the financial provision by 0.5% would cost an additional £452,000.

The Council Side referred to the economic position nationally, which had worsened since the report now submitted had been prepared. In particular the Council's income and interest rates on its balances had reduced. Nevertheless it was the Council's intention to seek the lowest increase in Council Tax that it could achieve. If salary costs exceeded the budget further savings would have to be considered and jobs would be at risk.

The Employees' Side asked if an early retirement scheme could be considered but officers explained that there would be an impact on the pension fund and any blanket policy could not be implemented because it would discriminate on the basis of age.

The Chair asked about the funds invested in the Heritable Bank of Iceland. The Executive Head of Financial Services reported that the funds were still held in the United Kingdom and that the Bank was in administration. The administrators proposed to run off the various sections of the business and had said that a material dividend would be payable to creditors, but it was expected to take a long time.

Resolved:

That the views and comments of the Employees' Side on the savings options and the Council's responses, set out in the Appendix to these Minutes, be submitted to the meeting of The Executive on 3 February 2009.

COMMENTS ON SAVINGS OPTIONS

Option	Employees' Side Comments	Council Response
<p>Reorganise the animal warden service</p>	<p>The proposal involves the withdrawal of a vehicle for use by the animal warden. It is unreasonable to expect the warden to purchase their own vehicle and to transport animals in it.</p> <p>They were concerned about how the Council would respond, for example, to calls where animals were locked up and or distressed, and the time taken if the response depended on a private contractor. They believed that the animal warden could provide a faster response that would be in the interests of animal welfare.</p>	<p>The proposal will enable the animal warden to focus on nuisance and complaints and the enforcement of dog fouling and animal welfare. The job description for the post did not include the collection of animals. It was not envisaged that the post holder would collect animals and so there was no need for the use of a Council vehicle. Another vehicle would be made available to the post holder temporarily, pending their acquisition of their own vehicle, but it would not be adapted for the transport of animals.</p> <p>When the Council received calls about animals that were locked up or distressed the Council's contractor would respond. The target response time was currently 2.5 hours. The animal warden was only available between 10:00 am and 3:00 pm on five days each week, and there was no cover if they were sick or on leave. The Council's contractor would be available 24</p>

Option	Employees' Side Comments	Council Response
		hours each day on every day of the week.
Streamline waste management supervision	All supervisors were expected to be working away from the depot at all times that the Council's waste collection service was operating. The proposal involved a reduction in the number of vehicles available to them and so they would not be able to maintain the level of supervision required.	The Executive Head of Street Scene Services had indicated that the proposed saving could be achieved without affecting the service and so would have to respond to the Employees' Side.

Appendix 3**RELEVANT NOTE FROM THE TRUE VOICE MEETING ON 15 JANUARY 2009**True Voice Meeting – Budget Consultation - 15 January

True Voice is a group of young people from the borough who meet as a focus/consultation group for the council to gain feedback from young people on different issues.

Attendance

Council:

Neil Sewell, Sharman Lawson, Helen James – Senior Youth Worker, Cllr Tony Brett-Young, Anthony Reeves, Cllr John Drage, Ian Birnbaum, Nic Wilson

Students:

Seven students from different schools across the borough

ISSUES RAISED:

Safety

Use of CCTV was seen as a good way to spend money, however the presence of Police in public places received mixed reaction – some thought it was good while others felt they were there to ‘catch you doing something bad’.

Buses in the borough do not feel safe when they are busy or crowded. Having CCTV on buses was seen as a waste of time, if anything went wrong the driver is too busy to do anything about it.

SEN Transport

The changes to the SEN transport arrangements were viewed as positive as, “it will help people prepare for the real world”.

Children in Care

Keeping children in their home environments was seen as a better use of funds rather than moving them to live with other carers – so long as the children were safe. Money should be spent on preventative measures rather than a cure.

Leisure Centres

Recently, the leisure centres have changed their pricing structure and put the prices up – from £2 to £3.50 for a casual session in the gym – which was viewed as too expensive for youth. Furthermore, for a membership, there was no option for instalments, the whole years fee needed to be paid in advance – instalments was the preferred option.

Libraries

The Central Library was most used, and was viewed as a good facility, particularly the new IT suite

Citizenship

When told about the new Sutton Life Centre, which would house the existing citizenship courses, the students thought that this would be a good facility for the community and an improvement in the citizenship course.

Appendix 4**RELEVANT MINUTE FROM THE ST HELIER, THE WRYTHE & WANDLE VALLEY
LOCAL COMMITTEE MEETING ON 9 DECEMBER 2008**

Sue Higgins, Strategic Director of Resources and Councillor John Drage, Executive Member for Resources, explained the process for this year's budget consultation and explained some of the proposals for extra spending i.e. waste disposal and areas for budget reductions. The council tax level had not yet been set but there was a policy commitment to an increase of 3.4% or lower.

The consultation period ends on 27 January. The Executive would take representations at their meeting on 13 January 2009. The Executive would then consider the council tax and budget in February 2009 which would then go on to full Council on 1 March for approval.

The consultation leaflet received praise from one member of the public as being well set out and clear.

There were various questions from the public which received responses and all were encouraged to complete the consultation forms and hand them in before they left the meeting.

Resolved: To thank Sue Higgins and Councillor Drage for presenting their report and responding to questions and to thank Nic Wilson who also attended the meeting for the Communications Team.

Appendix 5**RELEVANT MINUTE FROM THE CARSHALTON & CLOCKHOUSE
LOCAL COMMITTEE MEETING ON 16 DECEMBER 2008**

Mrs Sue Higgins, Strategic Director of Resources and Councillor John Drage, Executive Member for Resources, explained the process for this year's budget consultation and explained some of the proposals for extra spending i.e. waste disposal and areas for budget reductions. There would be an increase in council tax of 3.4%.

The consultation period ends on 27th January. The Executive would take representations at their meeting on 13 January 2009. The Executive would then consider the council tax and budget in February 2009 which would then go on to full Council on 1 March for approval.

Various questions were received from the public which received responses. Mrs Higgins encouraged everyone to complete the consultation forms and to hand them in before they left the meeting. Councillor Paul Scully highlighted the importance of the return of such form to ensure that the budget consultation was as fair as possible.

Resolved:

(i) To thank Sue Higgins and Councillor Drage for presenting their report and responding to questions.

(ii) Completed feedback forms should be returned to Sutton Council by the 27 January 2009.

Appendix 6**RELEVANT MINUTE FROM THE CHEAM NORTH & WORCESTER PARK
LOCAL COMMITTEE MEETING ON 18 DECEMBER 2008**

Councillor Butt stated he was disappointed that this item had remained on the agenda. He was of the opinion that local committees were for the discussion of local matters and should not be used by the Administration to disseminate information which could have political connections. He did not think it was right to have corporate issues on the agenda and requested that the committee did not discuss it. Cllr Senior, Cllr Dunlop and Cllr Gordon-Bullock concurred.

The Chair allowed Councillor Brett Young, Executive Member, to explain what the item was about and took a vote from the public to see if they wished to discuss it. The vote was even.

Phil Butlin, Executive Head of Group Finance, explained the process for this year's budget consultation and explained some of the proposals for extra spending and reductions. The council tax level had not yet been set but the intention was that the 2009 increase should be no higher than the 2008 increase of 3.4%. He encouraged members of the public to respond to the budget consultation either by submitting comments on the forms provided or on the London Borough of Sutton website.

The consultation period ends on 27 January 2009. The Executive would take representations at their meeting on 13 January 2009. The Executive would then consider the council tax and budget in February 2009 which would then go on to full Council on 2 March 2009 for approval.

Resolved: To note the report.

Appendix 7**RELEVANT MINUTE FROM THE EQUALITIES & DIVERSITY FORUM
MEETING ON 10 DECEMBER 2008**

Mr Phil Butlin, Executive Head of Group Finance explained the process for this year's budget consultation and explained some of the proposals for extra spending, i.e. waste disposal and areas for budget reductions. Mr Butlin stated the proposals consulted on would result in an increase in council tax of 3.4%.

The consultation period ends on the 27 January 2009. The Executive would take representations at their meeting on 13 January 2009. The Executive would then consider the council tax and budget in February 2009 which would then go on to full Council on 2 March 2009 for approval.

Rachael MacLeod raised the issue of the principal savings proposals for 2009/10 especially with regard to "continue to manage contracts with external care providers to achieve efficiencies" and the Sutton Carers Centre.

Councillor Ruth Dombey advised that she should write to Adi Cooper, Director of Adult Social Services and Housing in the first instance to obtain further information, following which Rachael could submit a full letter to be considered as part of the consultation process.

Ms Fisaya Fadahunsi queried the support for youth clubs/organisations. Mr Butlin advised that he would contact Ms Fadahunsi as to how funding could be obtained.

Resolved:

- (i) To thank Phil Butlin for presenting the report and responding to questions.
- (ii) Completed feedback forms should be returned to Sutton Council by the 27 January 2009.

Appendix 8**RELEVANT MINUTE FROM THE SUTTON PARTNERSHIP BOARD
MEETING ON 28 OCTOBER 2008**

Sue Higgins gave a short verbal report highlighting the imminent launch of the annual LBS budget consultation. A report going to The Executive on 4 November contained details of proposals except with regard to the Housing Revenue Account. The budget consultation document would be placed on the Council's website and there would be presentations to local committees where the Chairs wanted it. It was hoped that residents and partners would engage with the consultation during its 12 week duration. Sue said she would be happy to visit partner group meetings to explain the details.

Resolved: To thank Sue Higgins for the report.