

Equality and Diversity Case Studies

Directorate: Resources

Service: PPP&T

Title: Budget Consultation

Introduction:

The Council feels it is essential to take an active approach to engagement with all members of the local community. The particularly challenging budget position faced by the Council over the next few years means that allowing local residents to influence decisions on the way in which the Council spends its money is more vital than ever. Given the fact that the Council's budget has an impact on all Council services, it is extremely important that everyone has the opportunity to have their say.

Challenges:

Making minority groups feel empowered to participate in consultation and comfortable to share their views and aspirations with the Council was vital, as was ensuring that ideas and comments were captured, listened and responded to. Recruiting a wide range of participants with 'protected characteristics' was also important to gain a cross-section of views. For example, consulting residents with a range of disabilities helps the Council to understand how budget proposals may impact differently on people with different types of disability.

How the challenges were overcome:

A series of structured workshops were held with a number of residents with 'protected characteristics' under the Equality Act. This included discussions with:

- Older People
- Adults and young people with disabilities
- Residents from the local Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) and Faith communities
- Representatives of religious groups
- Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) residents

- Children and young people (including Children in Care)

The workshops were facilitated by trained staff with experiences of working with people from different backgrounds. Each workshop was tailored to meet the specific needs of each group, and the face-to-face nature of the consultation helped to ensure that meanings and concepts were understood by all. This approach also meant that discussions focused on the issues of greatest interest and relevance to each group. Efforts were made to hold the events at locations where participants felt comfortable and at ease. Staff also tried to ensure that participation in the consultation was as convenient as possible by holding events to coincide with regular group meetings and during the evening, for example.

Outcomes:

As the workshops explored all services provided by the Council in addition to budget proposals for the year ahead, the findings are being used to inform service developments beyond budget consultation. The workshops also helped to forge deeper links with local communities; because of the nature of the discussions, those who attended were more informed about the Council's budget and its activities as a result of attending. Officers took the opportunity to advertise activities (both Council and partner activities) that would be of benefit to the participants at the workshops, and many participants were eager to take part in similar consultation activities in the future.

What we could have done better:

Due to time and resource constraints, some religious groups were not directly targeted by the consultation. Building in additional planning time would help to ensure that more communities were given the opportunity to take part and would allow for a wider selection of participants to be recruited. Whilst many workshops were held at times to suit participants, some were arranged at short notice and could have been at more convenient times for participants.

Further information:

Feedback from all the discussion groups is included in the budget consultation feedback document that can be found at the following address:

www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/budgetconsultation