

Consultation and Engagement - Appendix 5 of 2024/25 Council Tax Report to Executive 7 February 2024

Residents' engagement including in the context of budget setting is important to the council. Feedback has previously indicated that without sufficient contextual information, it is more challenging for residents and groups to express views about relevant priorities for the budget and council services.

The council outlined the context of the budget in the Council magazine before Christmas to better explain the national and local background to residents, not only for the year ahead but also for the next four years, with residents and groups then also able to comment via the usual channels if they so wished. The council's views have also featured in local and regional media, including the ongoing call for fairer funding.

Contextual information has also been published on the website with opportunity for residents to share their priorities for the 2024/5 budget.

Responses have been received around a number of themes and services. Some resident groups along with individual residents have responded directly and indicated their priorities for council services, with other responses identifying potential opportunities for savings or further income streams.

Responses include from Copers Cope Area Residents' Association who set out their priority services for Beckenham, which were: waste management services, road safety and pedestrian improvements, adult and child social care, social housing, sports and leisure facilities, special education and early years education. Libraries, and parks and green spaces.

Similarly, Knoll Residents' Association provided their priority services based on a poll of 76 of their members, from which the top supported priorities were waste services, children's education and schools, parks and green spaces, children special education needs, and children safeguarding. Further views from these members also being provided, including around priorities between council tax levels and service provision and around the budget deficit in future years.

The Council received a range of further comments, with some praise for council achievements and how services are run. There were suggestions around raising further funds through council tax on new builds and from parking charges, with others requesting street lighting or pedestrian crossings in certain locations. Specific spending was also commented on, including requests for funding on Churchill Theatre and questioning of spending on the Crystal Palace Park Regeneration Plan.

Where comments related to specific services, these have also been shared with the relevant officers for consideration.

Alongside formal responses submitted to the consultation, further engagement was also found from social media, with partners and others sharing these posts to help reach further residents and 15 further comments received from residents sharing their views.

It is noted that many of the responses indicated a high level of awareness around the council financial situation and the contextual information provided around the budget setting. As such, responses were generally well considered, providing useful feedback to the council to inform the budget setting process.