



Customer First Analysis: Budget 2012-13

1. Purpose

- What are you trying to achieve?

The Council is seeking to agree a balanced budget for 2012-13. Given reductions in grant funding from Central Government this will require the Council to identify savings of approximately £2,100,267 (which represents a saving of 14.52% compared to the roll forward position for 2011-12).

- Who defines and manages it?

The budget for 2012-13 is determined by full Council having regard to the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy and to relevant statutory requirements.

Savings proposals are identified by service managers and then considered (and possibly revised or rejected) by Corporate Management Team, the Council's Cabinet and by the Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee. The savings proposals are then presented to Council for approval as part of the budget setting process.

- Who do you intend to benefit from it and how?

As much as possible, savings proposals have been directed at "back office" functions to minimise the impact on front line Council services and local residents.

It is in the interests of the Borough as a whole for the Council's finances to be on a sound footing.

The budget aims to minimise the impact of our reduced resources on the more vulnerable residents of the Borough. For example:

- The Council is maintaining expenditure levels in respect of disabled facility grants
- The Council is looking to maintain subsidised coach trips to the coast for elderly residents
- The Council will continue its housing renewal programme in West Accrington and Woodnook
- The improved waste collection arrangements will benefit the elderly and the disabled in particular
- IT improvements in the Housing Benefits Service should result in service improvements for our customers
- The Council is maintaining the level of funding allocated to area working. This funding addresses local priorities and is often directed at facilities for older people, younger people, faith groups and the disabled.

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- A lesser level of savings have been required in Environmental Services and in the Regeneration Section

- What could prevent people from getting the most out of the change?

The budget contains some element of risk. For example, inflation could be higher than the budgeted level, or some proposed savings may not be achieved. However, the Deputy Chief Executive Resources considers that the level of risk is reasonable and manageable, especially given the current level of reserves and the Council's track record of sound financial management.

- How will you get your customers involved in the analysis and how will you tell people about it?

The budget proposals were presented in full to Cabinet and to the Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee. The proposals were made available to the press and the public on the Council's website and the relevant Cabinet and Committee meetings were open to the public.

2. Evidence

- How will you know if the policy delivers its intended outcome?

We will monitor the Council's financial position each month to determine whether spending is in line with budget projections.

- How satisfied are your customers and how do you know?

Service areas have their own arrangements for engaging with customers. Customer focus groups exist in respect of the both the housing benefit and waste management services and the Council uses the Feedback Online facility.

A staff survey is carried out annually. A recent liP inspection reported an apparently high level of staff morale.

- What existing data do you have on the people that use the service and the wider population?

The Council and its departments use a range of data sources when setting budgets and considering service provision. Statistics on the general population of the Borough and its residents is available through www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk and the Lancashire Profile, using as its base the census in addition to other local government data. Hyndburn Borough Council is also able to draw upon primary research results via the citizens panel and users of the Feedback Online website. Our individual service areas have access to service user information through a number of groups which were set up to deal with service specific changes.

The proposed new waste collection arrangements resulted from customer feedback received from the Council's recycling calendar questionnaire, which indicated dissatisfaction with a lack of containers for cardboard and a wish to recycle more types of plastics.

We have a detailed workforce profile.

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- What other information would it be useful to have? How could you get this?

Not applicable

- Are you breaking down data by equality groups where relevant?

Yes

- Are you using partners, stakeholders, and councillors to get information and feedback?

Yes where relevant in each service area

3. Impact

- Are some people benefiting more – or less - than others? If so, why might this be?

The budget seeks to minimise the impact of budget reductions on front line services. The budget proposals have been tested against the priorities in our Corporate Strategy and spending decisions have been prioritised accordingly.

The proposed savings have been centred on back office costs. Most staffing reductions have been achieved through voluntary redundancy and / or early retirement and, where possible, vacant posts have been deleted or remain unfilled. The number of compulsory redundancies has been minimal (less than 5) and, where possible, we look to redeploy staff at risk of redundancy in accordance with our redeployment policy.

The deletion of a Senior Technical Officer post in the Regeneration Section and a 15% reduction in the Council's contribution to Hyndburn Homewise could have an impact on services provided to the elderly and disabled via that voluntary group. Hyndburn Homewise benefit from a contribution in kind by the Council of 50% of a Technical Officer's time for house inspections and specifications for improvement works mainly for the elderly and the disabled. The withdrawal of the Council's contribution may result in a dilution of the service. The 15% reduction in the Council's grant to Hyndburn Homewise (£5,325) will put pressure on the Agency's budget.

The Council's funding for housing has been significantly cut by Central Government following the end of the Housing Market Renewal Programme (a loss of approximately £7 million per annum) and the end of Housing Capital Grant (approximately £1 million per annum). Therefore the Council no longer has the external funding available to continue to employ housing technical staff. Regrettably, this directly impacts on the Council's ability to support Hyndburn Homewise.

The Council is exploring with Hyndburn Homewise potential alternative funding options and whether other partners are able to assist with a Technical Service. Registered Providers have been approached to see if they are able to assist

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4. Actions

- If the evidence suggests that the service benefits a particular group is there a justifiable reason for this and if so, what is it?

Not applicable

- Is it discriminatory in any way?

No

- Is there a possible impact in relationships or perceptions between different parts of the community?

No

- What measures can you put in place to reduce disadvantages?

The impact of the budget on Hyndburn Homewise will be closely monitored in conjunction with Hyndburn Homewise. The matter will be kept under constant review and alternative options and opportunities will be explored and pursued whenever the opportunity arises.

- Do you need to consult further?

No

- Have you identified any potential improvements to customer service?

It is anticipated that the new waste collection arrangements will benefit the community as a whole, but particularly older people and people with a disability.

The new IT system in Housing Benefits should produce an improved service for customers.

- Who should you tell about the outcomes of this analysis?

Members and customers.

The report will go to the next Cabinet meeting along with the analysis.

- Have you built the actions into your Business Plan with a clear timescale?

Not applicable

- When will this assessment need to be repeated?

Not applicable.