
Report To:	The Inverclyde Council	Date:	7 December 2023
Report By:	Head of OD, Policy and Communications	Report No:	IC/04/23/MR
Contact Officer:	Morna Rae	Contact No:	07385434459
Subject:	Budget Consultation		

1.0 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

1.1 For Decision For Information/Noting

1.2 The purpose of this report is to seek agreement on the approach to the public consultation on the Council Budget 2024/26 savings proposals.

1.3 As part of the process for setting the next Council Budget public consultation is required. This will assist Elected Member understanding of what the impact of the Budget proposals might be and, in turn, inform decision-making. It also has a specific role to play in influencing the content of equality impact assessments in order that the potential effects on people with protected characteristics and related mitigations might be better understood. There are a range of methods that the Council can use to support this consultation. These have been evaluated and proposals devised.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is recommended that The Inverclyde Council agrees to the following for actions relating to the public engagement on the 2024/26 Budget:

- An online Smart Survey;
- Targeted engagement in relation to equality groups with support from an external partner, and
- Targeted engagement appropriate to individual proposals.

Morna Rae
Head of OD, Policy and Communications

3.0 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

3.1 Effective public engagement on the Council Budget 2024/26 savings proposals is required both so that officers and Elected Members understand public perceptions of local priorities as well as the potential impact of savings decisions.

3.2 Research has been undertaken on the range of mechanisms that the Council might use to support this public engagement, as well as on the approaches of other local authority areas. These have been evaluated in terms of implementation costs, officer time to support, accessibility and effectiveness. This has included consideration of budget simulator models, surveys, online engagement sessions, and in person events. The following is recommended:

- An online Smart Survey for the public to prioritise various areas. This would also be available for hard copy submission via libraries, and be promoted via the Communication and Engagement Groups;
- Targeted engagement in relation to equality groups with support from an external partner and
- Targeted engagement appropriate to individual proposals.

More detail on each of these is available below. Consultancy support will be used to help with the analysis and reporting of results. The results would be compiled and analysed and an overview provided to Elected Members as part of the decision making process.

3.3 SMART SURVEY

Smart Survey is a survey platform, offering opportunities to create online surveys, web forms and questionnaires to collect and analyse data. This is a tool already used by the Council and would not attract additional costs. It has the advantages of being able to save partially incomplete surveys and return to them later, it is simple to use and can generate useful reports.

Noted below is draft content for the survey, which will be refined in collaboration with the CMT. It is proposed that the following questions are posed (following introductory and contextual information). Short explanatory information on each service will also be provided.

Rank in order of importance:

ENVIRONMENT

1. *Roads maintenance*
2. *Parks and grounds maintenance*
3. *Public Toilets*
4. *Streetscene*
5. *Burial grounds services*

Rank in order of importance:

SCHOOLS AND EARLY YEARS

1. *Teachers*
2. *School transport and crossing patrols*
3. *School clothing grants and free school meals*
4. *Cleaning levels in schools*
5. *Family and additional support services*

Rank in order of importance:

COMMUNITY

1. *Support for community organisations*
2. *Community centres*
3. *Library services*
4. *Community learning and development*

Rank in order of importance:

PEOPLE

1. Council Customer Services
2. Employability services
3. Free swimming and swimming lessons for children
4. Community wardens
5. CCTV services

Free text box for each themed heading: What concerns would you have if budget savings were taken in relation to these?

3.4 The survey will also include questions on Council Tax levels as per below:

At the time of undertaking this consultation the Council faces an estimated Budget gap over the next 2 years of £5.4million before any increase in Council Tax.

1. *A 1% increase in Council Tax raises an extra £350,000 per year and reduces the need for reductions in services in the areas covered by the earlier questions, do you support an increase in Council Tax in order to reduce service cuts?
Yes/No*
2. *The Council's planning assumption is based on a 7% increase in Council Tax which would raise approximately £2.5 million. Do you believe an increase of this level is:
too high/ too low/ about right*
3. *Please indicate the level of Council Tax increase you believe is appropriate: 0%, 1-3%, 4-6%, 7-9%, 10-15%*

3.5 TARGETED ENGAGEMENT IN RELATION TO EQUALITY GROUPS

In order that we can best understand the potential impact of decisions on those with protected characteristics and any mitigations that should be put in place we require to consult with equality groups. This will allow equality impact assessments to be revised and updated. The services of an external organisation should could be used to support this engagement.

3.6 TARGETED ENGAGEMENT APPROPRIATE TO INDIVIDUAL PROPOSALS

There are a number of proposals that, if taken, would have a direct impact on service provision. It is important therefore that the views of current service users are taken into account. Specific consultation should be undertaken with them. Giving these groups particular opportunities to input should be balanced with the wider public consultation exercise.

3.7 TIMING

It is proposed that the survey is carried out in December with results available for the January special meeting of The Inverclyde Council. The targeted engagement in February could then align with decisions of Elected Members on which budget savings proposals should progress to the next stage of consideration. There will be a requirement to allow sufficient time to collate and analyse the results and to update equality impact assessments accordingly. A timeline is available in Appendix 1.

3.8 IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

It should be noted that the robustness of the equality impact assessments has taken on greater importance, given the nature of the options the Council is now forced to consider, and recent legal challenges/adverse publicity faced by other authorities on budget savings proposals. In addition, following the Council decision in September, the Council is also now treating care experience as a protected characteristic, with the Armed Forces Covenant Duty also now needing

to be taken into account, where appropriate. In order to ensure officers and members are fully aware of the considerations around the preparation and consideration of these assessments training sessions will be arranged including one for members. The MBWG is asked to encourage all members to attend this session.

4.0 PROPOSALS

4.1 It is recommended that The Inverclyde Council agrees to the following for actions relating to the public engagement on the 2024/26 Budget:

- An online Smart Survey;
- Targeted engagement in relation to equality groups with support from an external partner, and
- Targeted engagement appropriate to individual proposals.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendation(s) is(are) agreed:

SUBJECT	YES	NO
Financial	X	
Legal/Risk	X	
Human Resources		X
Strategic (Partnership Plan/Council Plan)	X	
Equalities, Fairer Scotland Duty & Children/Young People's Rights & Wellbeing	X	
Environmental & Sustainability		X
Data Protection		X

5.2 Finance

The financial implications will include the costs of engaging an external organisation and consultancy costs for analysis. These will be confirmed and will be contained within the Budget Delivery Reserve.

One off Costs

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	Budget Years	Proposed Spend this Report	Virement From	Other Comments
N/A	Budget Delivery Reserve	2023/24	TBC		Unlikely to be significant

Annually Recurring Costs/ (Savings)

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	With Effect from	Annual Net Impact	Virement From (If Applicable)	Other Comments
N/A					

5.3 Legal/Risk

There are requirements for the Council to conduct effective and inclusive public consultation on the Budget proposals with a particular focus on the potential impacts on those with protected characteristics. The proposals in this report will help mitigate the legal risk around this, including to make sure that the views of those at risk of digital exclusion can also be taken into account.

5.4 Human Resources

There are no human resources implications associated with this report beyond the requirement for employee time to support its implementation.

5.5 Strategic

These proposals support the outcome “High quality and innovative services are provided, giving value for money”.

6.0 CONSULTATION

6.1 None.

7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 None.

Appendix 1

Timeline

Date	Action
7 December 2023	Approval of Budget engagement approach
8 December 2023	Launch of Smart Survey
5 January 2024	Close of survey
January 2024	Analysis of results and sharing with Elected Members prior to January special meeting of The Inverclyde Council
February 2024	Targeted engagement with equality groups on refined list of savings proposal
February 2024	Targeted engagement with service users related to refined list of savings proposals
February 2024	Analysis of results, updates to Equality Impact Assessments and sharing with Elected Members prior to meeting of The Inverclyde Council