

Methodology

The consultation has been planned to inform the next two years of budget decision making.

First phase – Mid November to Mid December 2012

Focus groups undertaken with members recruited from the current Citizens Panel. 4 focus groups with 8 people attending each.

Second phase - March 2013 onwards to undertake further focus groups with members of groups identified as likely to be impacted by changes to Council services, following any budget decisions. The learning from these sessions will be used to inform the assessment of the impact of any service cuts or service redesign resulting from budget decisions made in February 2013.

The focus groups were designed to reflect on the results of earlier budget consultations which identified possible areas for making savings.

The theme for the focus groups was as follows:

Over the next two years, the Council has to further reduce its budget by one fifth. This means that the Council will have to either:

- stop delivering some services or parts of services
- increase fees and charges for some services
- introduce charges for some services not previously charged for
- deliver services differently to reduce their cost

Members of the Citizens Panel were invited to take part in a focus group to find out their views on this. The focus groups were informal and made up of 8 members of the Citizens Panel each. The group were asked questions and encouraged to discuss the challenges and share their perspective and preferences for future service provision and targeting budget cuts.

Each focus group had the Council's budget position explained to them to establish the context for the next round of budget decisions:

- § Over the next two years the Council has to reduce its budget by a fifth.
- § The Council has already made savings of just over £2m since 2011.

2011-12	£1 million savings	Efficiencies achieved through service reviews, IT investment, voluntary redundancy
2012-13	£707,000	Shared Services, Waste Management review & reduction in grants to voluntary/community organisations
2013-14	£607,000	Creation of Business Hub within the Council, Budget Review & changes in Employee Terms & Conditions
2014-15 2015-16	£1,400,000	Savings to make over the next two years
Current year's revenue Budget (2012-13) is just under £7m		
Council Tax freeze since 2010 & Pay freeze since 2009		

Summary of Outcomes

The outcomes have been organized around the areas of questioning explored with each group.

Question 1

Using the results of the Budget Consultation from 2010. A list of the Council's services was shown to the focus group members. The list was ordered according to which services people wanted to cut the most. The panel members were given time to study the list.

Thinking about this list, do you think this list is in the right order?

Tourism and Tourist Information Centres was an area that people thought was in the wrong place and that it was an area that could be cut. People felt that this was an industry that provided low paid jobs and should be self financed by the Tourism Industry.

People felt that essential services should be protected especially services for vulnerable people, people in need, transport and community facilities, but that there was scope to look at the grants for arts, culture and heritage which were seen as a luxury at this time and should be self-financing.

Tackling crime and anti-social behaviour and waste collection were seen as sacrosanct, but how much we spend needs balancing against low crime rates.

Some services that only benefit a minority of the population should not be provided by the District Council eg Norton Playground & Skatepark. They should be handed over to the local council or a voluntary organisation to run.

Too many Councillors

Public conveniences should be kept in strategic areas, others that are under used should be closed.

Concerns over new houses in Norton and the strain on related facilities such as parking, schools, sewers etc. Concerns also expressed over the future of particular sites currently on the market

Question 2

The focus group members were handed a revised list of services which had ideas of how the Council could save money in that service area

Thinking about the bottom 5 (the services that people wanted to see cut the most) and how the services would change, how acceptable do you think that is?

Reduction in grants to the Voluntary & Community Sector

People felt that these grants should be looked at individually and it was not fair to cut them across the board. Grants to organisations such as CAB that helped people in need should be higher priority. Some organisations may be able to get funding from other funding bodies.

Reduction in opening hours Customer Services

As long as people know when the offices are open and they can still speak to someone local on the phone or in person, they did not mind a reduction in opening hours, they did however question how much money this would save. One suggestion was to have more flexible staff rotas with skeleton cover at quieter times.

People were in favour of being able to make payments through the Post Office.

Development Management - Reduce enforcement, Charging for advice, Increase charges

People did not like the idea of cutting enforcement work, they felt this would encourage cowboy builders and inappropriate development. Instead look at increasing the fee for the application and not the advice. It was felt that the service should be improved before increasing costs, applications take too long and are overly bureaucratic, and the recent planning appeals have cost the Council money.

Reduce Members allowances

People felt that this would not save much money, however, they felt there was scope to reduce the numbers of Councillors which would result in quicker decisions.

Increase use of electronic communication

Generally, people believed that this was the way forward. However, that paper communications should still be kept as an option so as not to exclude people without a computer. Also, the website should be improved before paper communications ceased altogether.

Question 3

If there is a business that provides a service that is also provided by the Council, how would you feel if the Council stop providing that service and let the business deliver that service instead? For example Pest Control, Trade Waste

In principle, people did feel that it was acceptable for a business to undertake these areas of work instead of the Council but people did have some reservations.

The Council's prices could be keeping the prices in the market at that level, if the Council no longer provides that service it could result in higher prices being charged by these businesses and no means to control this, which in the case of pest control could result in rat problems.

The fact that a service is run by the Council gives the service credibility and a guarantee, it was feared that vulnerable people would be taken advantage of by rogue traders.

Some people felt happier if it was a service provided to businesses that was outsourced rather than services that are provided to households.

Question 4

What do you think about charging for services? (On top of the Council Tax you pay) E.g. Garden waste collection

In the case of garden waste collection, the majority were not in favour of being charged for this service. People couldn't see how this could work, with some households opting in and out. They felt the green waste would be put in the household waste bin and end up in landfill sites. They also felt it could increase fly-tipping and might increase the amount of bonfires. It was also thought it could disadvantage elderly people. Some people felt that the Council should not be paying farmers to dispose of green waste. The Council should compost it and sell it. However, they did feel unanimously that it was acceptable to not collect green waste in the winter months.

In general, people were not keen on charging for services on top of Council Tax and would rather see savings made in other ways. People said the Council Tax was high enough already and people struggle to pay it without paying extra.

In the case of car parks, they wanted to see charges reduced for Ryedale residents and increased for tourists, with different charges in different locations.

Licensing should be self-financing and a profit should not be made out of it.

Introduce charging for public conveniences.

Question 5

Please could you look at the rest of the list and is there anything that is either totally unacceptable or on the other hand is acceptable? For example; stopping winter collections of garden waste.

Although people believed crime prevention was important, they know that Ryedale is a low crime area and felt at what stage do you stop putting money into education and just maintain the levels of policing. People didn't feel it was a good idea to increase market rents - they felt the Council already made a profit and thriving markets are important to the market towns.

With regard to leisure facilities, it was felt that the pools although expensive were valuable and all other options should be looked at before closing any of the facilities.

People questioned whether there was an actual need for affordable housing and felt that the houses were never allocated to local people.

The idea of reducing the cleaning of public conveniences was not received well and people thought it was better to let local councils take them over, if it can be done cheaper and to the same standards.

Some people liked the idea of transferring more to parishes in terms of environmental protection- but could see it being problematic with the variable quality of parish councils - others thought that the parishes would just increase the parish precept and it would not end up being done any cheaper.

Look at the industrial estates - should they be self financing i.e. The rent should cover maintenance and repairs. Vacancy rates.

Question 6

Have you any other suggestions/comments that haven't been mentioned already?

Share services where possible to save money.

One suggestion was to bring in consultants to take an independent view of how the Council is run and where efficiencies can be made. Another was to cut a certain % off each budget then everyone takes a cut and no one service area or sector of the community suffers, someone felt that certain services may already have taken cuts and was it fair to cut them further.

People believed that the Council spends £1.4m on capital financing and felt these loans should be paid off using the reserves that the Council has.

Bring food safety, infectious diseases, health and safety and trading standards under one group for responsibility.

The selling of the bowling club was mentioned and felt the Council should be helping to keep this facility open.

Continue to find ways to help with running costs of Ryedale House such as letting out rooms and possibly sharing with the Police.

Council Tax should be doubled on second homes

Sad to think people may lose their jobs over these cuts, better to pay them to do something rather than pay benefits.

Too much spent on salaries, pensions, travel expenses and cutting from the front line service. Need some management and support to ensure the front line delivery happens, needs to be balanced.

Can't expect staff to keep having pay freezes.