Public Consultation on Potential Savings and Service Transformation

Consultation

1.   Over the summer of 2013, residents, county council staff and stakeholders were asked to take part in the council's consultation on how it can save £110m and reshape services for the future.

Methodology

2.   Surveys were launched online and through the council's magazine, Leicestershire Matters. Focus groups were also conducted with residents at various locations across the county.

3.   In total, just under 7,150 residents, staff and stakeholders took part in the surveys:

- Residents = 5,709
- Staff = 1,392
- Stakeholders = 43

4.   The surveys asked respondents the extent to which they thought the council should make reductions in 19 targeted and 17 universal services. They also asked questions on support services, new ways of working and council tax, as well as giving respondents the opportunity to leave comments.

5.   The surveys for staff and stakeholders also contained a number of additional open-ended questions which asked for views on some key challenges ahead. The focus groups were conducted with 73 residents of Leicestershire.

Headline Findings

Targeted and Universal Services

6.   From the survey, residents said that the top 10 services which they thought should be reduced are:

1. street lighting
2. grants - communities
3. funding - agencies
4. travel to schools
5. grass cutting
6. early learning
7. children's centres
8. funding - businesses
9. school support
10.museums

7. The top nine services on this list had more than 50% of respondents saying they thought the council should make reductions in these services either 'a great deal' or 'to some extent'. Together these nine services account for £31.5m of spending.

8. Residents said that the top 10 services they least want to be reduced are:
   1. gritting*
   2. older - community*
   3. older - prevention*
   4. roads/paths*
   5. mental health
   6. older - residential*
   7. physical disabilities
   8. learning disabilities - community
   9. trading standards
   10. safety maintenance

9. For five services above (*), more than half of respondents said the service should not be reduced at all. These five services account for £64.1m of spending.

10. Most of the services that people wanted to protect - especially the care services - have some of the council's largest budgets. The exception is gritting, which is the top priority for residents but has a relatively small budget.

11. The diagram below summarises the results of the survey question "To what extent the Council should make reductions";

We asked people to what extent the council should make reductions:

KEY: ■ Reduce: Not at all ■ Reduce: Not very much ■ Reduce: To some extent ■ Reduce: A great deal

Service	Reduce: Not at all	Reduce: Not very much	Reduce: To some extent	Reduce: A great deal
Street lighting (£3.5m)	14%	20%	37%	30%
Grants for communities (£1.6m)	13%	25%	37%	25%
Funding for agencies (£1.8m)	15%	26%	34%	24%
Travel to schools (£8.6m)	21%	22%	33%	23%
Grass cutting (£2.4m)	16%	28%	37%	20%
Early learning (£3.0m)	20%	25%	33%	22%
Children's centres (£6.4m)	21%	26%	33%	20%
Funding - Businesses (£1.0m)	19%	28%	30%	23%
School support (£3.2m)	23%	27%	33%	18%
Museums (£1.8m)	24%	28%	32%	17%
Waste disposal (£22.9m)	28%	24%	31%	16%
Libraries (£4.6m)	28%	27%	29%	15%
Bus passes (£7.3m)	33%	23%	27%	16%
Planning (£0.7m)	24%	34%	31%	12%
Youth services (£5.1m)	28%	30%	29%	13%
Special educational needs transport (£8.7m)	29%	30%	29%	12%
Children - Local authority care (£16.5m)	34%	27%	27%	12%
Country parks (£0.5m)	29%	33%	29%	10%
Tips/recycling sites (£4.5m)	34%	28%	30%	9%
Social care transport (£4.4m)	31%	33%	27%	9%
Youth offending (£1.6m)	37%	28%	24%	12%
Buses (£4.3m)	38%	28%	24%	10%
Vulnerable families (£0.9m)	33%	33%	23%	11%
Special educational needs (£2.8m)	36%	32%	23%	9%
Learning disabilities - Residential (£26.0m)	39%	30%	26%	6%
Child protection (£21.7m)	43%	27%	22%	7%
Safety maintenance (£4.0m)	42%	30%	21%	7%
Trading standards (£1.8m)	42%	31%	21%	6%
Learning disabilities - Community (£24.2m)	47%	29%	19%	5%
Physical disabilities (£13.2m)	47%	31%	19%	3%
Older - Residential (£26.1m)	55%	23%	18%	4%
Mental health (£7.6m)	47%	32%	18%	3%
Roads/paths (£7.2m)	56%	27%	14%	3%
Older - Prevention (£6.0m)	65%	21%	11%	3%
Older - Community (£23.0m)	65%	21%	10%	3%
Gritting (£1.8m)	67%	20%	10%	3%

Note: For the purposes of visualising the results and reporting the analysis, the labelling of service areas has been shortened from that used in the questionnaire. Ordered by 'Reduce: To some extent' and 'Reduce: A great deal'. Percentages have been rounded.

12. Demographic analysis shows that often it is respondents living in relatively well-off areas, or are perhaps less likely to use the services in question, who are most likely to think the council should reduce services a great deal. In contrast, those people who it could be argued are most likely to be affected by any service reductions are more likely to say that budgets should not be reduced at all.

13. The staff and stakeholder surveys produced a similar list of prioritised services.

However, staff were more likely than residents to think that services could be reduced, but they were also more likely to want to protect services for the vulnerable. Stakeholders were less supportive of service reductions.

14. From the participants at the resident focus groups, there was more acceptance of reducing service levels than seen in similar exercises in previous years. The services which participants were most willing to contemplate budget reduction were mostly universal services of which they all had awareness of and, directly or indirectly, some experience - this made them more confident in taking a view. The services which participants at the focus groups were most willing to contemplate budget reductions were:

   1. museums
   2. libraries
   3. street lighting
   4. grass cutting
   5. bus passes for older and disabled people

15. The service which participants at the focus groups were least willing to contemplate budget reductions were:

   1. maintaining roads and pavements
   2. children's social care and child protection
   3. winter road gritting
   4. adults with learning difficulties /mental health problems
   5. residential and nursing homes for older people

Support Services

16. There was strong support for the approaches being pursued to reduce the cost of support services (i.e. the costs involved with running back office functions, property and information technology):

   • 85% agreed with finding further efficiencies
   • 83% agreed with utilising new technology and innovation
   • 71% agreed with having fewer council properties

17. Staff and stakeholders shared similar views, although staff were less likely to agree to fewer council properties (62%).

New Ways of Working

18. Residents generally supported new ways of working, particularly joint working with other organisations. However, more private sector contracts and more charging for services received less support:
   • 92% agreed with working more with partners, such as the NHS, district councils, and police, to redesign services together
   • 83% agreed with spending more money on early intervention
   • 73% agreed with letting residents and community groups run services and 18% disagreed
   • 70% wanted to reduce the number of public sector organisations
   • 45% supported charging for services and 37% disagreed

- 33% agreed with letting the private sector run services and 45% disagreed

19. Staff were less likely to want to see fewer public sector organisations and more contracts with the private and voluntary sector, but were more likely to support charging for services.

20. Stakeholders were less likely than both residents and staff to agree with handing over the running of services to residents and community groups.

21. Participants at the focus groups were keen to see services working more closely together and across geographic boundaries where appropriate. They also wanted the council to consider services being run on a more community-orientated basis (if service quality could be maintained), and also for individuals and communities taking more responsibility - either paying more for services or volunteering. Participants were less keen on the outsourcing of services to the private sector.

Council Tax

22. When asked about council tax, 69% of residents said that they would be prepared to pay an increase. An increase of 1.5% was preferred, with 50% of residents selecting this option. Some were prepared to pay more, with 14% saying they would pay a 3% increase, and 5% indicating they would be prepared to pay more than this.

23. Compared to residents, a higher proportion of staff and stakeholders were in favour of some increase in council tax (80% and 93% respectively). The majority of staff favoured a 1.5% increase (51%). However, most stakeholders wanted an increase of 3% or more (50%).

24. At the end of the discussions, the majority of participants at the resident focus groups thought that council tax should be increased (53%). Of these, most favoured a 1.5% increase. However, they had been briefed of the requirement for a referendum for increases of 2% or above. If it wasn't for the referendum, the discussions indicated that many would have selected a higher increase.

Analysis of Comments

25. Respondents had the opportunity to leave written comments. These were analysed and coded. The most popular categories of comment made by residents in the survey were:

- reduce the number of councillors, their expenses and allowances
- share services – either becoming a unitary authority or by closer working
- means test transport subsidies or introduce a nominal charge per journey
- reduce verge maintenance, switch off more streetlights and reduce road signage
- stop the bureaucracy, duplication and waste

26. Comments from staff concerned: protecting the most vulnerable; maintaining high quality services; investing in early intervention and prevention; maintaining trusted relationships with service users (particularly in the social care services);

and, the importance of empowering and enabling service users to help themselves and contribute to their communities. Promoting partnership working was also raised.

27. Stakeholders commented on the importance of the universal outcomes for services users relating to health and wellbeing, maintaining highways, culture and heritage, education and learning. The most important targeted outcome were cited as protecting vulnerable people from harm, reduced isolation, promoting independence, choice, and positive transitions into adulthood.

28. Other issues raised by stakeholders include: the council reducing bureaucracy and red tape; more joint working and pooling of resources; increased support for volunteers and more emphasis on individuals and communities taking responsibility; and reducing demand through early intervention/prevention, more charging and reviewing eligibility criteria.

29. The results of the consultation are on the County Council website.