

2012/13 Budget Consultation – Headline Overview

Background

The consultation on the 2012/13 draft budget proposals builds on the extensive consultation exercise that was carried out at the end of 2010 to inform the development of the Council's four year financial plan, the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

In 2010, the County Council heard the views more than 5,000 residents via an online survey, a questionnaire that went to every household via Leicestershire Matters, and three independently facilitated in-depth deliberative workshops with a representative cross-section of Leicestershire residents at three locations across the County.

The detailed findings from the 2010 exercise are available on the County Council's website.
www.leics.gov.uk/budgetconsultation20112012

The draft budget plans for 2012/13 reflect these findings, and have been amended to take into account extra budget pressures that have arisen over the last 12 months.

The consultation exercise on the draft 2012/13 budget proposals has been designed to supplement the extensive exercise conducted previously and provide another opportunity for residents and community groups to have their views heard and taken into account.

Methodology

Following the publication of the draft 2012/13 budget proposals, a survey form was made available on the County Council's website with a feature link on the website homepage (which was available throughout the consultation period of 17th January – 31st January 2012). This provided the opportunity for any member of the public, including Leicestershire County Council employees, to complete the survey. Paper copies of the survey and copies in alternative formats were available on request.

Awareness of the consultation was raised through press-releases, and it featured in the Leicester Mercury, Radio Leicester and the weekly press. It was also Tweeted by the County Council's Twitter account. Stakeholder groups were alerted to the consultation, and it was promoted to staff via a news item on the County Council's intranet service (CIS).

The survey form asked the following open-ended questions:

1. Thinking about the next four years...
 - a) Which services should the Council protect from cuts or invest in?
 - b) Are there any areas where you think we could make further efficiency savings?
 - c) Are there any additional service reductions or charges you think we should consider?
2. Do you have any other comments about our draft budget proposals?

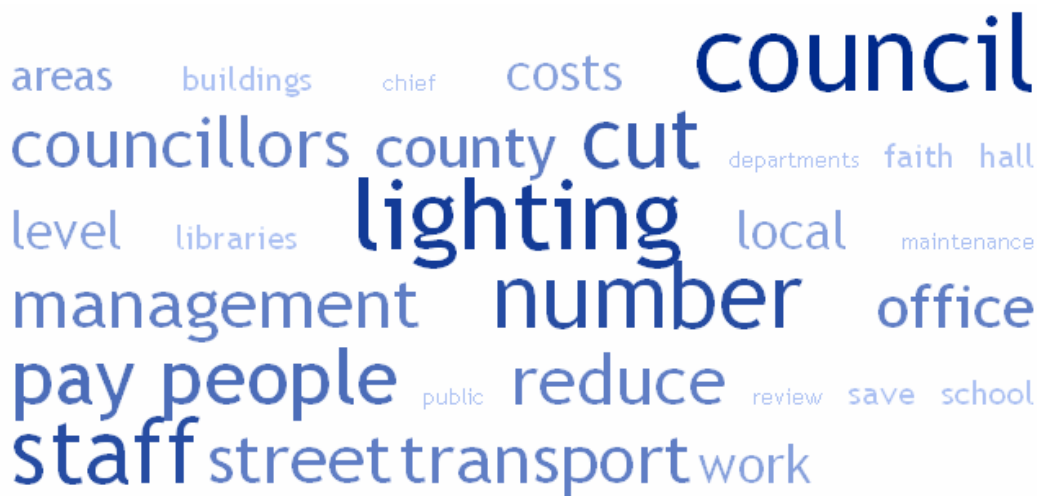
A range of demographic questions were also asked, namely: gender, age, disability, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, postcode and whether the respondent works for Leicestershire County Council.

- School budgets need to be protected with an emphasis on all children and not just vulnerable ones. Doing so ensures no long-term behavioural problems.

Hierarchy of comments (in descending order)

Vulnerable groups inc. children and adults (elderly, infirm, mental health)	60
Libraries (inc. other arts and heritage services)	55
Transport, inc. public transport concessionary travel and maintenance	24
Education/schools	18
Country Parks/Environmental resources inc recycling	9
Police/community safety	7
Protect voluntary sector	6
Youth Services	5
None - cuts should be across the board	4
All services should be protected	4
Look after your employees	2
High speed broadband	2
Disadvantaged groups inc. travellers, ethnic minorities	1

Q1b - Are there any areas where you think we could make further efficiency savings?
(151 comments)



Tag Cloud represents the thirty most re-occurring words. Removed words: ‘services’.

Key points:

- Reduce the number of staff at County Hall and streamline middle management tier.
- High management cost can no longer be justified in current financial climate, particularly when staff reviews have/are taking place.
- Cut out duplication of work and the numbers of “back-room” staff at County Hall.
- Turn off street lighting. It has been a great success – it reduces light pollution and prevents anti-social behaviour.
- Stop inappropriate and/or unnecessary highway maintenance (e.g. road patching, gritting and cutting of verges). Especially so due to the mild winter up to January.

- In the current economic climate libraries (and museums) are seen as an unnecessary luxury.
- Councillors should have their allowances reduced and their actual number decreased.
- Cut subsidies for pensioner travel, educational travel (esp. for faith schools) and SEN transport.
- Make publications (such as 'Leicestershire Matters' and the 'Events Guide') less about "boasting" and more factual. Change glossy paper to save money. Stop sending 'Leicestershire Matters', gets put straight into the recycling bin.

Hierarchy of comments (in descending order)

Reduce LCC staff numbers (esp. of Management) and senior pay	32
Road maintenance (patching, lighting, gritting, grass)	25
Libraries (inc. mobile) and other arts and heritage services	13
Reduce number of Councillors inc. allowances	12
Concessionary travel subsidies	12
Ceasing or making cheaper outgoing publications e.g. "Leics Matters"	12
Sharing council services (internally and externally)	10
Reduce your energy cost/no County Hall refurbishment	8
Reduce ICT costs/delay high speed broadband roll-out	6
Less waste collection/more efficient recycling	6
None	4
Improve efficiency of consultation/postage	2
Cannot say without further information	2
County Hall absenteeism	2
Staff working from home more to save cost of offices/ travel	2
Cutting translation services	2
Procurement	1

Q1c - Are there any additional service reductions or charges you think we should consider?
(176 comments)



Tag Cloud represents the thirty most re-occurring words. Removed: 'services', 'cuts'. Joined together: 'Council' and 'tax'.

Key points:

Respondent comments centred around two key themes - how to *make* the council money and how to *save* the council money.

How to make money:

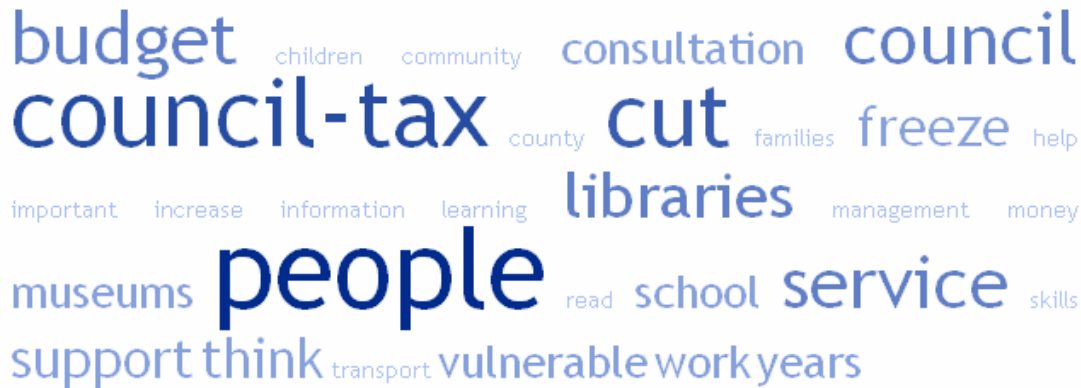
Increase council tax and/or introduce means testing	10
Small charge for libraries inc. other Arts and Heritage services	8
Charge more for concessionary travel	4
Make council staff pay to park at County Hall	2

How to save money:

Reduce management tier/Councillor's expenses	13
Concessionary travel subsidies	7
Make energy efficiencies at County Hall	5
Share council services (internally and externally)	5
Road safety/public transport	3
Decrease waste collection frequency	3
Stop public consultations/community forums	2
Stop employing consultants	1
Stop conducting staff reviews and then evaluating those reviews	1
No high speed rural broadband	1

None (no ideas suggested) 12

Q2 - Do you have any other comments about our draft budget proposals? (76 comments)



Tag Cloud represents the thirty most re-occurring words. Removed: 'services', 'cuts'. Joined together: 'Council' and 'tax'.

Key points:

- Some felt they did not have the appropriate knowledge of “how the council works” to make a decision, regardless of whether they were in possession of the facts or not.
- Some respondents felt the draft proposals did not contain enough detail or had been “cherry-picked”.

- Council tax should be increased in line with inflation to reduce pressures on frontline services (except for most vulnerable in society). Some view freezing council tax as a political tactic.
- Not increasing tax is viewed as important in times of “austerity”.
- By closing/reducing library services you are hurting people and families with complex needs. The library offers a valuable meeting place, free internet and offers education which in turn is a positive force for health and general well-being. Libraries are “cradle to grave” service for all members of society to use. Do not cut further.

Hierarchy of comments (in descending order)

Not enough info provided to give informed opinion	14
Increase Council Tax (inc. means testing of)	13
Stop cutting library service and other Arts and Heritage services	10
Do not cut concessionary travel	6
(Continue to) Freeze Council Tax	6
No (other comments)	4
FCN initiative won't work/not fair	3
Cut concessionary travel	3
Provide more VFM/reduce your energy bill	2
Protect children/youth services	2
Do not financially support schools becoming academies	2
Look after the voluntary sector	2
More wider/deeper cuts needed	2
Streamline management tier at County Hall	2
LCC restructuring is wrong/not fair	1
Stop council car park charges - encourage traffic into towns	1
Listen to the public/your staff more	1
Reduce business rates	1
Reduce Council Tax	1

Respondent Profile

The demographic profile of respondents (see Appendix) shows that there is an over representation of responses from county residents who:

- Are aged 60-69 (15.9% point difference)
- Have a long standing illness or disability (6.9% point difference)
- Have no religion (30% point difference)
- Are white (3.5% point difference)

One in five respondents are employees of Leicestershire County Council.

Comparison to 2010

There is a one notable difference between the comments received this year, compared to the 2010 budget consultation exercise. A strong theme within the previous consultation was that the Council should review its efficiency drive, including:

- Tightening its procurement policies (more 'shopping around').
- Increasing energy saving drives.
- Sharing of county resources (buildings, staff, functions, etc) with other authorities.
- Making greater use of volunteers.

Whilst the above themes are visible within this year's consultation, they are not to the same extent. Respondents this year largely avoided suggesting efficiency-saving ideas in any great volume – this perhaps in response to the Council's widely publicised efficiency drive.

A number of responses picked up contemporary themes. Notable additions to this year's consultation include comments around schools applying for academy status and the Council's lead on the national initiative of turning around Troubled Families.

Similarities between the consultations concern four themes:

1. Protecting vulnerable adults and children
2. The need to switch off street-lighting and cease unnecessary roadwork
3. The argument between reducing, freezing or raising Council Tax
4. The argument between cutting or protecting libraries

Other sources

There were 14 responses to the consultation that arrived in non-survey format. These include letters by post and by email from the following individuals and/or organisations:

- Heritage Lottery Fund
- Leicestershire Adult Learning Service
- Leicestershire Partnership Trust
- Leicestershire resident(s)
- Loughborough University
- Rutland Local History and Record Society
- The COMMBUS Project
- Voluntary Action Leicestershire
- Woodhouse Parish Council

The individual summaries of each email and letter are available on request.

Appendix - Respondent Profile

Age

	Mid-2010 population estimates (%)	Budget Consultation 2012/13 (%)
20-24	9.0	3.7
25-29	7.1	2.9
30-34	6.5	6.6
35-39	8.3	4.4
40-44	10.0	10.3
45-49	10.1	8.8
50-54	8.8	11.8
55-59	8.2	9.6
60-64	8.9	20.6
65-69	6.8	11.0
70-74	5.5	7.4
75-79	4.5	0.7
80-84	3.3	2.2
85-89	2.1	0.0
90+	1.0	0.0

Under-representation for those aged under 30 and an over-representation of those aged 60-69.

Gender

	Mid-2010 population estimates (%)	Budget Consultation 2012/13 (%)
Male	48.9	48.3
Female	51.1	51.7

Gender is representative of the wider Leicestershire population.

Long standing illness, disability or infirmity

	2001 Census (%)	Budget Consultation 2012/13 (%)
Yes	15.5	22.4
No	84.5	77.6

There is a slight over-representation of those having a long standing illness, disability or infirmity.

Sexual orientation

	Budget Consultation 2012/13 (%)
Bisexual	1.8
Gay	1.8
Heterosexual / Straight	93.8
Other	2.7
Lesbian	0

Religion

	2001 Census (%)	Budget Consultation 2012/13 (%)
No religion	16.3	46.3
Christian	79.3	50.0
Buddhist	0.2	0
Hindu	2.2	0
Jewish	0.1	0.7
Muslim	0.9	0
Sikh	0.9	0
Other	0.2	3.0

There is a large over- representation of people answering no religion to the consultation and a under- representation of those of the Christian faith.

Ethnicity

	Mid-2009 estimates (%)	Budget Consultation 2012/13 (%)
White	90.6	94.1
Mixed	1.3	3.0
Asian	5.8	0.7
Black	1.0	0
Other	1.2	2.2

BME residents are under-represented

Leicestershire County Council Employee

	Budget Consultation 2012/13 (%)
Yes	20
No	80

1 in 5 work for Leicestershire County Council.

Geography

	Mid-2010 estimates (%)	Budget Consultation 2012/13 (%)
Blaby	14.5	15.0
Charnwood	25.7	31.0
Harborough	12.9	12.0
Hinckley and Bosworth	16.2	17.0
Melton	7.6	9.0
North West Leicestershire	14.0	15.0
Oadby and Wigston	9.0	1.0

	Count of postcodes
Valid postcode	100
Leicester City	9
Rutland	1
Partial/Missing/Unmatched	39
Total	149

There is an under-representation of respondents from Oadby & Wigston borough.