

2020 Budget Consultation Summary Report 31 January 2015

About the Let's Talk Budget consultation

As part of doing things different an animated video was commissioned showing key line messages to explain the 2020 budget challenge and soft launching Milton Keynes Council as a co-operative borough.

It was also decided to hold a series of roadshows with eight in total across the borough and three daytime internal roadshows for staff to attend, six in the evening and two during the day presented by the Leader and senior finance officer.

The budget consultation period ran from Monday 8 December 2014 to Saturday 31 January 2015. We received significant response from citizens, businesses, business leaders, third sector, key stakeholders and local community groups. In total 658 comments on the budget (excluding parking feedback which totalled 220) have been received as at 31 January 2015.

Approximately 1,000 budget consultation leaflets were distributed or downloaded from the council's website. 2307 people visited the consultation budget pages to view budget proposals online with an average dwell time of 2.39 minutes with 319 visiting the Q&A page and 352 visiting the roadshow dates page.

In total 220 citizens attended the eight external roadshows and 265 MKC colleagues attended the three internal roadshows.

A prepaid postal address was available for citizens to use the return letters at no cost. In total 52 letters were received one of which contained a petition with 39 signatures.

Marketing campaign

The consultation was publicised through the following channels:

- Digital:
 - The MKC website featured a dedicated budget consultation page and web page with links to full budget papers, pdfs of the poster and information flyer. A direct link was publicised via the home page slider to these pages.
 - Q&As were updated throughout the consultation period to answer questions raised at the external roadshows and questions asked in letters and emails.
 - An online feedback form was available on the web for citizens to make comments with 475 responses received by 31 January.
 - There were 24 instances where a one line comment was received which were probably in respect of the CAB but were unclear stating a comment such as "don't take away this service". These have been discounted from all metrics.
 - Twitter: There was a comprehensive twitter campaign to launch the consultation and each roadshows date was promoted.

- Facebook: Details of the budget consultation were posted on our Facebook account. Issues raised were cuts to buses, YMCA and the CAB with a fair bit of conversation relation to the reduction in street lighting.
- Video: A Budget 2020 challenge animated video was produced. The number of individuals exposed to the video in total throughout the consultation period is over 1500.
 - The video was hosted on You Tube with links from the MK Council website and other key stakeholder websites. Number of views online 923.
 - The video was shown at Cabinet meeting on 8 December where it was viewed by all attending councillors and members of the public in attendance. It was also shown at all roadshows and a number of stakeholder and council internal meetings throughout the consultation period.
- Marketing collateral consisting of information budget leaflet, poster, web copy and link to the video issued:
 - via libraries and council offices, children's centre co-ordinators, via housing 22 resident's associations and involvement groups, and emailed to all parish council offices (all parishes were contacted about the consultation and offered posters/leaflets to share with residents). Known to have featured on Great Linford, West Blethchley and Shenley parish websites. The Reader's Service were provided with 25 copies in response to a personal request.
 - Distributed to key stakeholder partners, Community Foundation, Age UK, MKCCM, MKCIL, MK Equality Council, Women and Work, MKFM, Qalliance many of whom also posted details and links onto their home pages to the budget consultation page. Community Action MK set up a budget blog and survey to co-ordinate responses and have reported that over 2000 people viewed the blog with 200 clicking through to the MKC's website and over 300 people responding to the survey.
 - Distributed to the business community via Invest MK's contact list that included Chambers of Commerce, Federation of Small Businesses.
- Public Meetings. Details of dates of all public meetings were emailed to all parishes and dates posted onto the web consultation budget page. Members of the public were present at all public meetings and included:-
 - Cabinet meeting on 8 December 2014
 - Full Council on 14 January 2015
 - Four Budget Review Group meetings 6, 7, 15 and 21 January 2015.
- Media
 - Press releases were issued to promote the budget consultation and roadshow dates.
 - A full page colour advert was taken out in MK News.
 - As a result of viewing the video Mark Easton from BBC approached MKC about the financial situation of local authorities and a national interview aired on Thursday 17 December.
 - The Leader interviewed for MKFM, Heart FM and BBC 3 Counties radio.

- Internal council staff communications, Time to Talk, Tuesday Bulletin and three internal roadshows were delivered by the Leader and Chief Executive.
- Road Show: Eight public facing roadshows were held in total. After complaints were received that no roadshows were being held during the day or in the South of the Borough and as a result two roadshows were held during the day one at the civic offices and one at Woburn Sands.

Summary of responses

It was felt that the extent and severity of the cuts warranted taking a strong engagement focused approach. It was decided to do things differently in order to connect with as many individuals as possible that may be affected by the decisions arising but the 2015/2016 budget.

Key topics from feedback to date

In order of level of response as at 31 January 2015:

1. Citizen's Advice Bureau - 474
2. YMCA - 68
3. Wider use funding - 60
4. Children and families/community support - 22
5. Transport/Buses - 16
6. Lunch clubs - 8
7. Libraries - 4
8. Parking (in addition to the dedicated parking consultation) – 165

SENTIMENT

CAB – comments received in total:474 (97 email) (331 via online web form) (46 letters)

Feedback on the withdrawal of funding the CAB has attracted the largest proportion of comment on the specific budget cuts. There was strong resentment to the proposal to cut funding support that provoked, dismay and anger. Feedback was received from previous and present employees, volunteers and past and existing customers.

Multiple case studies of how people had used the CAB were received many from citizens, including older citizens, vulnerable adults and citizens with learning difficulties.

The view that the CAB actually saves the council money and that it doesn't make economic sense to put this service at risk was repeated over and over. Examples of how their work benefits the council was given such as ensuring take up of benefit claim, legal and debt advise securing payment to the council of rent and council tax and preventing homelessness.

The question of "where will they go" was often stated and the council reminded that people are entitled to statutory advice in respect of certain services.

There was also much concern around how people would receive housing advice and that the lack of the CAB will lead to increased homelessness.

YMCA - comments received in total: **68** (28 email) (34 via online web form) (6 letters)

Objections to the withdrawal of funding support for the YMCA was the second highest feedback returned. At the roadshows several former service user presented as living case studies to lobby for their cause.

Feedback was received from concerned citizens upset that the withdrawal of funding would increase homelessness and people living on the streets.

Feedback was received from previous and present employees, volunteers, workers at night shelters and past and existing customers campaigning against the cuts.

Multiple case studies from previous users or professionals of how people had benefitted from using the YMCA were received and evidence of how their lives have been turned around. .

The view that the YMCA is a critical service to the borough was frequently stated and that by reducing the funding will actually end up costing the council more in the long term.

One respondent asked for the council to support a campaign to recruit private landlords to provide accommodation to DSS clients and to pay rents directly to them.

Wider use funding proposals - in total: **60** (45 letters) (11 emails) (4 via online web form)

Three general comments were received against all cuts to grant funded organisations together with 42 template letters that focused attention on savings 64, 66 and 67. The local scouting community have met with councillors as they will be particularly affected by these changes and letter from Howe Park Scout Group and email from girl guiding was received which focused on the removal of rent subsidies provided by the Wider Use Funding Grant and the effect it would have on their ability to continue to deliver scouting activities.

Children and families/community support - in total **22** (email 9) (4 emails) (4 via online web form) (5 letters)

There have been six comments received in respect of the cuts to youth service and children and families. Comments received from professionals working in children's services and service users. Other issues raised included funding for sexual health education, and support for vulnerable people.

Comments are against the closure of children's centres. One respondent stated that they had attended a parliamentary workshop in which they were informed that there needed to be more joined up working with the NHS with a proposal to deliver integrated health services through the local clinical commissioning groups working directly with children's centres. If the cuts go ahead there is concern about how this would then be delivered.

Another comment focused on reducing early help that would inevitably lead to pressure on children's services. They evidenced the success of the service at present with the success of the very low number of safe guarding cases.

One comment received against the cuts in community support.

One comment received against the cuts to sensory services.

One citizen, Tony Villiers, has requested to be get involved in the cultural services review.

Four comments received from service users in support of the lunch clubs
Five letters and ten home visiting service feedback forms as evidence from Age UK.

Transport - Buses - in total 16 (9 email) (7 via online web form)

Responses received challenged the changes to the bus routes and cuts in bus services.

One comment received stated that the changes hadn't gone far enough and that more cuts should be made as lots of buses are running near empty. A comprehensive response was received from the Milton Keynes Alliance of Local Councils.

Lunch Clubs 8 (2 letters, 4 emails and 2 phone calls)

Comments were received from eight service users requesting not to affect cuts that would see the lunch clubs closed. Other agencies, Age UK, Community Action also stressed the importance of the clubs as means to prevent isolation for elderly citizens. A petition was presented at Full Council on 14 January 2015 in support of the lunch club service.

Libraries (4 via online web form)

General comments to not cut funding, due to the importance of libraries for other purposes and importance of books for children.

Stakeholder response

We received several letters from key stakeholders and local businesses. These included the Milton Keynes Reader Service, Milton Keynes District Scout Council, Arts and Heritage Alliance, Connection Floating Support, Age UK, MK Community Foundation, Iain Stewart MP, MK Dons (Get Set Get Parenting Services, Stony Stratford Town Council, Old Woughton Parish Council, Bletchley and Fenny Stratford Parish Council and Milton Keynes Alliance of Local Councils. We also received a letter from the Unison Chair in respect of MKC employees.

Responses from key business leaders in the City and focused on raising the cost of parking, Santander (Chief People Officer), John Walden (Chief Executive) Home Retail Group, E.C. Harris.

The letter from Age UK provided a comprehensive reply opposing cuts to the community home visiting service and lunch clubs providing a lunch club review report and community home visiting report. Stony Stratford provided a segmented response to various cuts. Community Action MK logged responses from community groups and individuals through their MK app and provided 96 specific responses to S12 about the importance of infrastructure support and 71 responses to S46 from residents who spoke to their Community Mobilisers.

Unique comments

1. Council tax:
 - a. Three respondents supported raising council tax to stop the cuts.
 - b. Another agreed that with reducing funds there was a need to focus money on essential services for those who cannot pay and make those who were more affluent pay for services.

2. Reader Service

One email received reminding the Council of the services that the Reader Service provides to the citizens of MK in supporting independent living through a network of 100 unpaid, fully-trained security checked volunteers who deliver 7,000 hours of free support. It was felt that their service may be being confused with a talking newspaper service. The Adult Social Care Team will often refer people to their services. All funds are matched funded by fundraising.

3. MK Theatre/Gallery: two comments have been received against the award of the grant to the MK Theatre and use the money to stop some of the cuts to libraries, YMCA and children's centres, one comment to stop support the Gallery, one comment supported providing funding to support the arts and a letter from the Arts and Heritage Alliance was received
4. To stop spending money on translation costs and use it to pay for services.
5. Two comments were received that criticised the budget campaign.
6. Around 12 comment were received that referred in general terms to stopping cuts to community services that would affect vulnerable people, community mobilise, social and elderly care, home visits and the youth offending team.

All comments from the online web form, received by emails and phone calls have been captured in an excel spreadsheet. Physical copies of all letters received are available on demand.

Parking Consultation 165 (3 phone calls) (5 direct emails) (157 via online web form)

The parking consultation ran alongside the budget consultation.

There was a very strong response from the business community especially, Home Retail Group, Santander, Foreign Office and Network Rail against the proposed rise in parking charges. We received feedback from individual employees and the Chief Executive received personal letters from the CEO of Home Retail Group, Santander and senior executive from E.C. Harris.

On 16 January Pam Gosal and Rob Middleton attended a meeting by invitation from four city employers, Mazars, Deloitte, Santander and The Home Retail Group at which each organisation presented their views on the proposed changes to parking arrangements and charges in the City.

The overall sentiment is that more car parking is needed and that charges should not be put up. That some of the red areas should be released for purple parking.

Several comments were received from women who commented on their struggle to find parking spaces after dropping children at school and several raised issues of safety concerns on returning to their cars when parked a long way away.

One comment was received in support the raising of car parking charges to support better bus services and improved night time safety for footpaths and redways.