

Budget engagement summary 2012/13

February 2012

Introduction

The engagement and consultation for the 2012/13 budget setting was undertaken throughout January and February 2012. The engagement exercises were designed to build upon the range of consultation activity that was undertaken last year (2011/12), which included a statistically representative Citizens Panel survey of over 1,000 residents.

The overarching objective of the 'Your Services, Your Call' activities was to keep the Council in touch with the needs and aspirations of the community. They were designed to:

- bring the budget setting process to life
- give people a chance to discuss what has happened to date
- spark debate and influence future decisions as well as reminding residents
- give people information the about the wide range of services their Council provides
- give people the opportunity to speak to senior councillors and officials in a familiar environment

Consultation exercises

To help ensure the engagement process was equitable and open to as many residents and organisations as possible, a number of separate exercises were undertaken.

- Blackburn market stall
- Video interviewing in Darwen
- Consultation event with children and young people
- Consultation events with adult social care users and carers
- Comment boxes - questionnaires
 - Darwen Leisure centre
 - Darwen Town Hall
 - Blackburn Library
 - Blackburn Town Hall
- An online questionnaire (as this was online, it was open to residents and non residents)
- Article and questionnaire in the Shuttle (with free post address)
- Questionnaires sent to community and children's centres to be left in a prominent place for residents to complete (with free post address)
- National Non Domestic Ratepayers meeting (statutory consultation)

Some of the consultation is currently ongoing and remain open for comment, such as the Shuttle article and online questionnaire which will remain open until 23rd February. Therefore the following summary presents there responses we have received as of the 17th February.

Overall summary of key issues

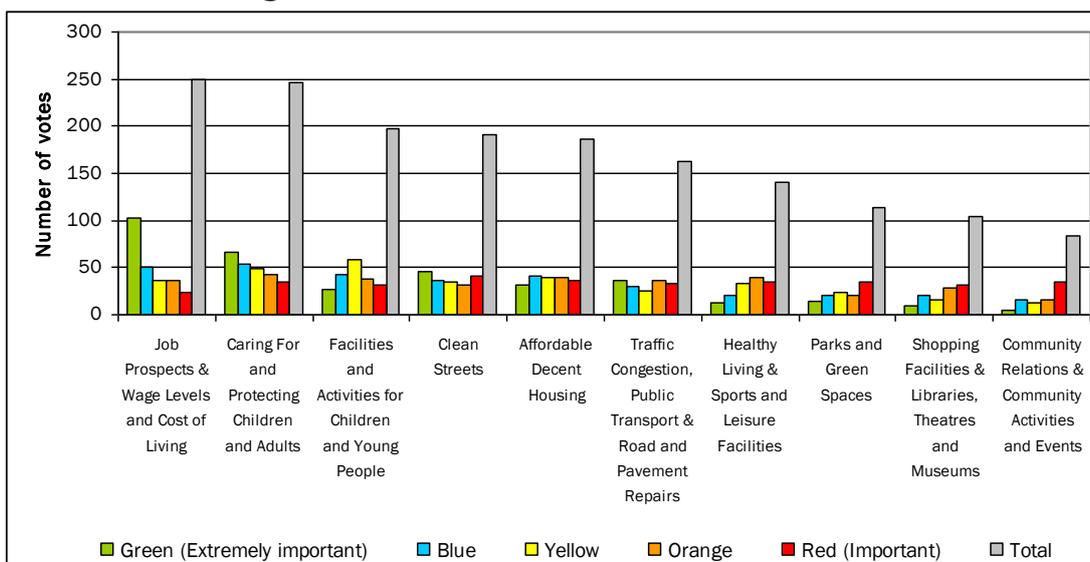
- The priorities identified through last years consultation remain important and highway maintenance is seen to still need particular improvement
- Issues around job prospects and cost of living was an emerging important theme identified through the Blackburn Market, questionnaire and young people consultation
- Caring for young people and adults was also reinforced as an important issue through the Blackburn market stall consultation and the adult and young people consultations specifically
- Clean streets was a major recurring theme and the need for the community to get involved in improving the look of the borough
- Improving feelings of safety through the police / PCSOs / street lighting was an issue highlighted particularly via the questionnaire and young people consultation

Blackburn market stall

At the Blackburn market stall event on the 27th January, 335 people took part in an exercise that allowed people to rank how important a cross section of services provided by the council are to them. People did this by 'voting' with coloured balls which highlighted the level of importance placed on each issue. (Ranked in differing levels of importance from the lowest 'important' to the highest 'extremely important').

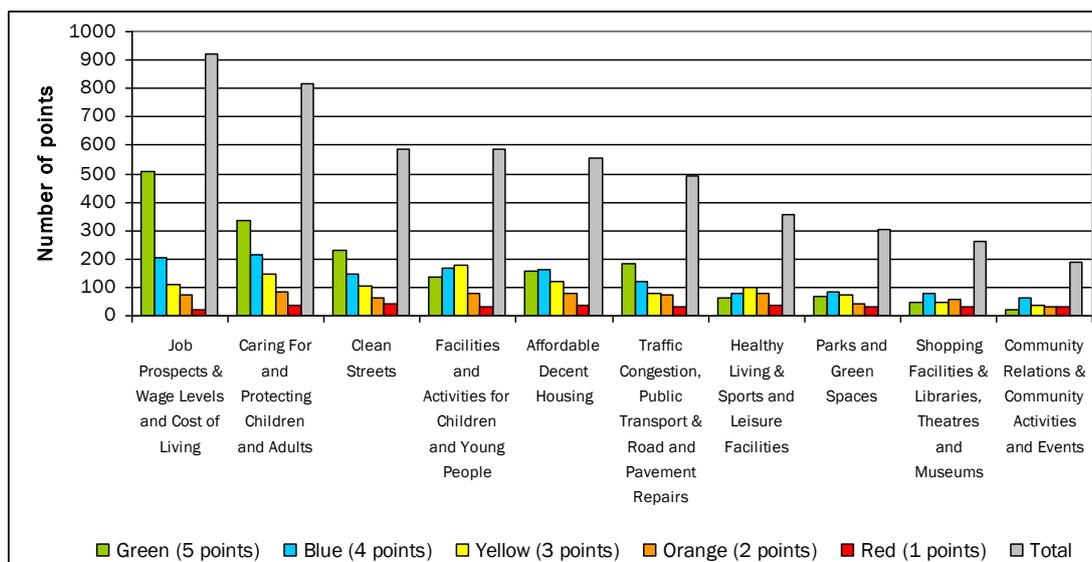
Of the council services available for people to choose, 'job prospects and wage levels, and the cost of living' was the ranked has the most important issue, followed by 'caring for and protecting children and adults'.

Number and ranking of votes for each issue



Resident's selections as to the importance of issues were also weighted by the level of importance, to provide a ranking that took into account the level of importance associated with each issue. Green (extremely important) votes were weighted with the maximum of five points to red votes, which were weighted as one point.

Overall score and ranked scores for each issue and overall



Darwen video interviewing

Three video interviews were undertaken in Darwen. These residents felt the six key issues from last years consultation remained important. Cleanliness of streets, highway maintenance and street design were other important issues.

The friendliness of people made the area a good place to live and also that it was close to the countryside.

Money could be saved by better co-ordinating street works but another resident commented that the Council was doing OK considering the finances available.

One resident felt that the decisions should be left to Councillors whilst another felt there should be more to encourage market stalls / shops in Darwen and that there should be more police visible in the area.

Questionnaire results

As of the 17th February the following questionnaires had been received:

65 - Comment box at Blackburn market stall

26 - Comment box at Darwen during video interviewing

17 - Shuttle

94 - Web site

20 - Community and children's centres

9 - Other

231 - Total

Questionnaires are also due to be input from the comment boxes left at various locations from the town hall and continuing responses to the Shuttle and web questionnaire.

Generally, people seemed happy that the priorities identified through the Citizens Panel survey in last years budget consultation remain important. These are:

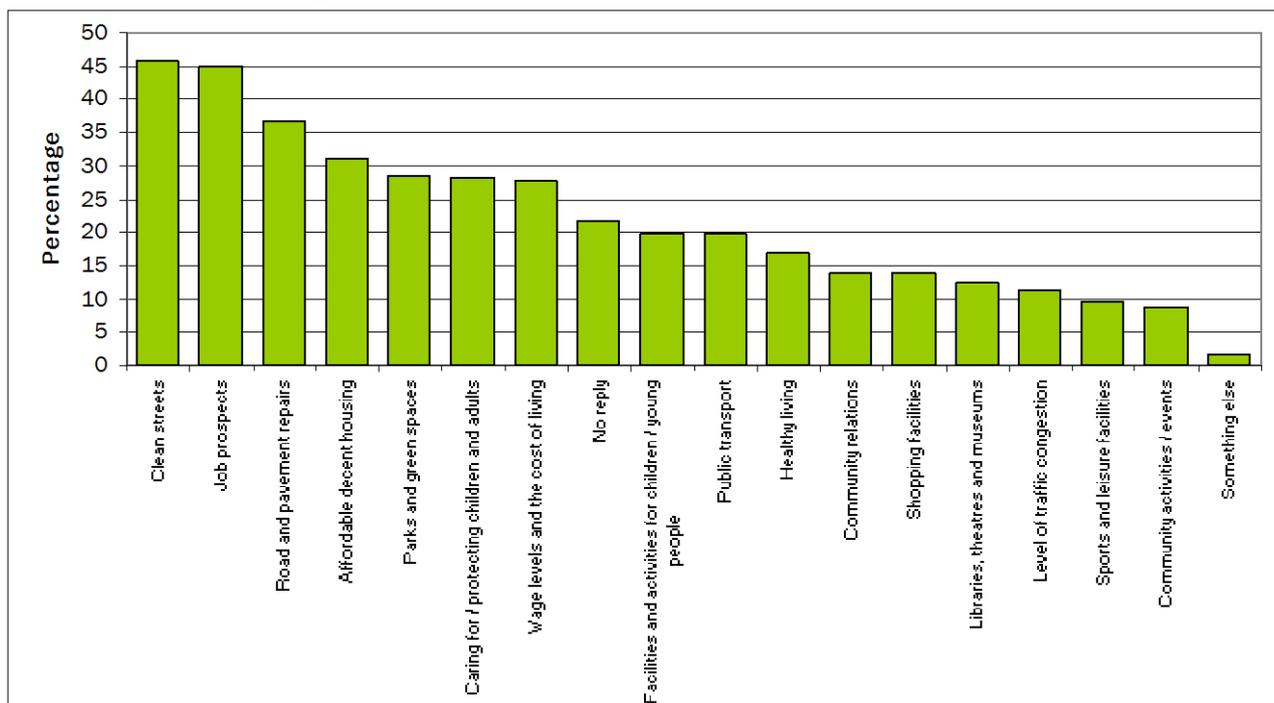
- Education
- Bins / refuse collection
- Care services
- Leisure services / facilities
- Children's / young people services
- Highways / road maintenance

However, a large number of people commented that they were unhappy with ‘highways and road maintenance’, but written comments identified that this issue remained important but it was felt that the level of road and highway maintenance in the borough was poor and improvements were needed.

In addition to the priorities identified last year, residents were also asked about what are most important and making somewhere a good place to live. People could choose up to five issues of a list of 16 in addition to making their own suggestions. The top three areas selected were:

- Clean streets
- Job prospects
- Road and pavement repairs

What makes an area a good place to live?



A range of other suggestions were given, but issues around rental houses / tenants and issues around anti-social behaviour / crime / feeling safe were also highlighted.

Adult social care

In addition to specific service based consultation, two more general consultation events were undertaken, with a focus on adult social care. One meeting was held in Blackburn and another in Darwen. These meetings were presented by senior local authority staff and attended by representatives from interested organisations and individuals.

The meeting consisted of a presentation outlining how cuts had been addressed in the financial year 2011/12 and what the position was for 2012/13. Following the presentation attendees could ask questions.

Issues raised in the question and answer session included questions and comments about:

- personal circumstances
- the ‘underestimated’ numbers of informal carers in the borough
- more investigation into fake benefit claimants

- how volunteer services can support pressures caused by cuts / the possibility of home care services being provided by not for profit groups
- comment about the council's future vision for care services
- comment that whilst remaining in a home is important to some people, others cannot stay at home and residential care is needed
- services shouldn't focus on older people and people with physical disabilities, include mentally disabled young people
- the service should also focus on preventative measures
- concern about people who don't meet critical or substantial eligibility, but whom are still in need of support
- balance between personalisation and day services are needed as different services work for different people
- services that encourage social inclusion are important

Young people and young carers

Eighty young people from a range of organisations attended the event. These included representatives from all three Neighbourhood Youth Forums, Blakewater College, Brook, Nightsafe, Kids Next Door, T Shop, Urcarecouncil, Crosshill School and Blackburn College.

The event consisted of an introduction and presentation, and then a 'world café' style event in which the young people were split across 12 themed tables with an adult facilitator / table host.

	What has changed in the last 12 months	Ideas to help improve things
Things to do / places to go	Keeping facilities open, perception that some are being closed and may mean more youths on the streets.	Be flexible on age ranges. Youth centres open more. Events hosted by successful people from BwD to show young people what's possible
Community cohesion	More concern about racially motivated crime. Need to break stereotypes and get people mixing	More group projects to get people from different areas to come together, more community events e.g. football
Employment	Concern about lack of employment	Need dedicated service for young people. Increase work experience opportunities and sources of employment advice. Volunteers to help people improve their English
Help / volunteering	Perception that young people are volunteering less. Concern that more responsibilities are being placed on volunteers rather than paid workers	More volunteering opportunities for young people. Free transport for volunteers.
Housing	Concern about lack of good affordable housing with support. Difficulties for young people with criminal records. Link between poor housing and health issues	Regenerate run down properties to provide affordable supported housing. Volunteer young person on panel / organisation which sorts out housing for young people
Money / debt	Perception that some people turning to crime because of money worries. Concern about cost of attending activities and increased living expenses	Provide work experience. Improve education about cost of borrowing at high interest rates. Expand beeZ card to cover more activities e.g. outdoor activities

Community	Perception less professionals to help and need to communicate activities and improve community where they live e.g. litter, volunteering	Improve parks and youth clubs to encourage people to attend. Better communication via Facebook and twitter. Make community life part of curriculum in schools e.g. food science linked to meals on wheels
Transport	Concern about cost and frequency of buses. Feelings of being unsafe on busses. Questioning why bus passes free to older people and not young.	Discounted transport for young people to access activities. Different routes, particularly at night. Better lighting on train stations.
Health	Need better sexual health advice, particularly in schools. Concern about ability to register with dentist / GP and getting appointments with GP. Peer pressure re drugs / smoking	Better access to out of hours doctors. Better sexual health advice in schools. Better marketing of sources of health advice for young people.
Education	Concern about quality of school education and lack of variety in teaching methods leading to boredom / absences. Cost of education due to loss of EMA.	Hardship funds for young people. Laptops available to students who don't have a computer / internet access. Input on what activities students want at lunchtime/after school
Environment	Lack of quality parks / playgrounds. – many damaged. Litter / waste a concern. Need improved recycling	Events for young people to show off their talents. Repair street lighting. Incentives for young people to collect rubbish
Staying safe	Bullying major issue. Need to improve street safety and need safe activities to attend e.g. youth clubs/community centres in local areas	Better safeguards to prevent internet bullying etc. Allow disabled young people to join in with other youth clubs. Increased numbers of police / PCSOs on streets especially at weekends

A targeted event was also held for Young Carers. The issues raised reflect many of the general issues for young people - transport costs, EMA reduction, reduction in activities etc. Young Carers would like to access more 'Chill Nights', activities and accredited training. They would like to provide more awareness events in schools / colleges so that more young carers might be identified and access support.

Statutory National Non Domestic Ratepayer meeting

An annual meeting of voluntary organisations and business rate payers was held on 6th February 2012 in the Council Chamber. The meeting was attended by local charities and representatives of the chamber of trade.

Key issues raised were responded to during the meeting, with key issues including:

- Parking and accessibility of the town centre
- Jobs and economic growth
- The level of Council support to local charities