

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL
2012+ BUDGET CONSULTATION
Saturday 22nd October
Council House

Thirty people attended the meeting on Saturday 22nd October.
The attendees were from 19 different postcodes across the city.

Elaine Elkington, Director of Homes and Neighbourhoods, presented Birmingham City Council's budget options to the meeting. Following this, residents were able to put forward their views to the meeting and in groups afterwards. The following issues were raised. They are presented in an order that represents the feeling of the meeting, in terms of the support for the points made. The issues related to proposed savings are listed first, followed by alternative ideas for savings and additional points made.

1.	Concerns about specific savings proposals.	For the attention of Directorates/s
1.1	<p>Supporting People.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ It was pointed out that research and evaluation has shown that there has been a net gain in terms of the cost of Supporting People – the money saved was much larger than the money spent. People felt that this research should be taken into account. ▪ The Chair of the Supporting People Citizens Panel said that they had undertaken a review and, if a further £3.8m has to be saved, services will be closed and people will have to move to more expensive acute care. Hard savings have already been made and they are cut to the bone. ▪ Contradictions were seen in the fact that the Council says their approach is to protect vulnerable people and to encourage enablement and empowerment, but Supporting People is being asked to make further savings and it does all of those things. ▪ Blind and partially sighted service users spoke about the support for independent living that is provided by Supporting People. ▪ Supporters and users of Supporting People wanted to know who and which agencies will be affected and by what amount. ▪ Losing staff and experience would be devastating. It would take years to get back. ▪ People asked for joined-up thinking across departments. For example, Supporting People is already running enablement services. ▪ The Strategic Director emphasised that no decision has been made about the current proposals. <p>Please see written contributions, below.</p>	Homes & Neighbourhoods Adult & Communities
1.2	<p>Children's Services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A parent of a child with disabilities who uses the respite 	Children, Young People & Families

	<p>service spoke of his shock in learning that the centre he uses is due to be closed. He was particularly concerned about the possible loss of excellent, skilled staff.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Similarly, it was said that foster care and non-council providers can not always provide the standard and level of care that is provided in children's homes. ▪ In response, participants were reassured that the Council was reviewing methods of care and exploring alternatives, not removing services. Individual needs will be taken into account. Parents were asked by the Chief Executive to put forward alternative proposals and to attend service-specific consultation meetings. <p>Please see written contributions, below.</p>	
1.3	<p>Connexions. A participant said that staff reductions were destroying the Connexions service at a time when youth unemployment was so high. 250 staff worked for Connexions, then it was reduced to 175 and now it could be 70.</p>	Children, Young People & Families
1.4	<p>The Voluntary Sector The voluntary sector reduces costs by its nature.</p>	All Directorates

2.	<p>Possible Alternative Actions to Make Savings</p>	For the attention of Directorates /s
2.1	<p>Joined-up Thinking. People asked for joined-up thinking across departments. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Why is a new enablement service being considered when SP already does that? ▪ Has there been an analysis of the impact of budget cuts? Cutting one budget causes costs in other areas. 	Adult & Communities All Directorates
2.2	<p>Community Chest.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ It was suggested that the Community Chest should be removed from the more affluent Wards and possibly transferred to Youth Services. ▪ Others suggested that the Community Chest be cut altogether, believing it to be a waste of money. ▪ It was also suggested that extra money should not be given to those not receiving Community First funding. 	Corporate Resources & Democratic Services
2.3	<p>Staff Salaries and Member's Payments.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Strategic Director said during her presentation that senior management posts have been reduced by 41%, and was asked what this meant in staff numbers. The meeting was told that this percentage represented 32 out of 78 posts. 	Corporate Resources & Democratic Services

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ It was suggested in one group that Senior Officer and Member Pay should be considered as a matter of principle. Sandwell's leader cut pay of all senior officers. It is understood that the savings wouldn't be huge, but could this be considered? ▪ A member of another group suggested that certain senior posts should be deleted altogether. ▪ It was also said that reducing staff is counter productive, and a short term gain for long term loss. 	
2.4	<p>Re-paying Council Debt. The Chief Executive was asked why the city council was paying £210m in debt charges to the banks. Borrowing this year is three times the amount of the cuts. It was suggested that debt charges should be resisted. The CE said that most of the debt charges were paid to the government, not to banks. The Council only borrows money to do useful things such as raising the Council's homes to decent standards. The Council cannot default on its loans. Refusing to pay these charges is not an option.</p>	Corporate Resources & Democratic Services
2.5	<p>Solar Power. More solar panels. Is the Council taking advantage of the possibilities of using their own buildings or new builds for the use of solar panels?</p>	Corporate Resources & Democratic Services.
2.6	Why spend on the new library of Birmingham?	

3.	Other Points Made at the Meeting	For the attention of Directorates /s
3.1	<p>The Consultation Process. A parent asked for some meetings to take place during the day while children are at school. People were assured that no-one was left out on purpose. Individual service consultations will take the timing of meetings on board.</p>	All Directorates
3.2	<p>The meeting heard from a member of the Occupy Birmingham (We Are the 99%) movement currently staying in tents in Victoria Square. He asked for more support for the homeless, who are having problems with benefits. The Strategic Director guaranteed that someone from her Directorate would visit the camp today or Monday to discuss the situation.</p>	Homes & Neighbourhoods
3.3	<p>No Cuts. A number of residents believed that the government should be opposed and there should be no cuts as all of them will affect the working class. Youth unemployment is a big issue. It will become adult and long-term unemployment. Cuts will</p>	All Directorates

	exacerbate this and should be resisted. Cuts should be resisted by Council officers.	
3.4	City Councillors. One resident enquired whether there were any City Councillors present at the meeting. It was ascertained that no Councillors were there. Other residents asked that Councillors be encouraged to attend the meetings.	Corporate Resources & Democratic Services
3.5	Responsibility. A further resident asked who will take responsibility if people die due to the cuts. In response, the Chief Executive asserted that people will not be allowed to die. The Council would be failing in its statutory duty if it allowed this to happen. An impact assessment will be undertaken of all proposals and if it says that people will be put at risk we won't do it.	All Directorates
3.6	Council Priorities (p5 of document). One participant believed that the effect of the cuts would make these priorities less possible to achieve.	Corporate Resources & Democratic Services
3.7	It is believed that millions are being spent with Capita is it for the purpose of finding savings? Clarification is needed on this.	Corporate Resources & Democratic Services

4. Written Comments

Each of the City Council's Strategic Directors has provided Fact Sheets about the proposed savings in their directorates, which were displayed around the room. Participants had the opportunity to read these and pin written comments on the display. These will be included in an appendix of the final report, which will be available on the City Council's website. The following comments were posted:

Homes and Neighbourhoods

From the proposal to cut £3.8m from SP budget – what % of the programme will have to be cut in total? What does this mean in monetary terms? What kind of agencies are in receipt? Who specifically will this affect should the cuts to SP take place? Won't such cuts impact on other services?

Solar Panels on Council buildings

Increase enablement and prevention services.

Re-write the assessment process

Re. housing-related support: suggest cut SPAs for all but the ones with no other options to access HRS.

Why employ workers when lay assessors do it for nothing?

Children, Young People & Families

- Charles House should not be closed as it is an invaluable service for vulnerable disabled children with complex needs. Other alternatives are not viable for these children and families.
- Charles House and Camborne House are highly valued not only by parents but health and education professionals.
- Charles House consistently delivers a high level of service, receiving outstanding status in all areas from ofsted.
- Charles House has a wealth of highly experienced skilled and caring staff who have the full trust of parents of children with very complex needs. This level of service is not replaceable.
- Many families who use Charles House and Cambourne House are in serious danger of breaking down if their services are closed down.

Corporate Resources & Democratic Services

Any percentage cut in the 2012/13 budget agreed by the City Council will be the same percentage cut in Councillors' allowances and the pay of senior staff eg. if the Council agrees a 10% cut in services, the allowances of Councillors and pay of senior officers will be cut by 10%.

Reduce the £120m+ that BCC spends on consultants/agency staff.

Reduce millions spent on hospitality and taxis.

Get rid of Penna careers consultants and have BCC own careers staff do this work and so save careers staff jobs.