

2016/17 Budget Engagement Strategy

North Tyneside Council is committed to being a resident-focused and listening Authority and this commitment includes giving residents and other key stakeholders an opportunity to be involved in helping to shape budget decision-making.

The Council's overall approach to engagement ensures that the public have opportunities to have their say throughout the year, through a series of different methods, including engaging with the Elected Mayor, Cabinet and ward members through the Mayor's Listening Events and Community Conversations.

Most recently (June-September), there has been a programme of engagement out-and-about around the borough speaking to people to proactively gather qualitative feedback from people about their experiences as a resident and a customer of North Tyneside Council and their suggestions for future improvement.

More than 600 questionnaires, the number achieved last year, have already been completed, with a few weeks still to go. The programme has been planned to visit each ward at least twice over the period of the project, as well as to fulfil the requirements of its Equality Impact Assessment by ensuring there is adequate targeting to provide opportunities for those with specific characteristics to be involved.

The feedback from engagement from this programme and other activity throughout the year will inform the initial Cabinet budget proposals process.

This engagement strategy aims to ensure residents, and key stakeholders are provided with opportunities to feedback views on the budget proposals.

As with all engagement the Council is committed to ensuring that residents with protected characteristics, as set out in the 2010 Equality Act, are able to participate. Further information on this aspect of the engagement approach can be found in the Equality Impact Assessment on the Budget Engagement Strategy, which is available on request.

Target audiences

The budget proposals are likely to have different levels of impact on different audiences and therefore the engagement strategy will aim to facilitate opportunities to reach appropriate sectors of the population through a targeted approach.

The approach delivers both universal engagement as well as engagement with particular groups, e.g. carers, deaf and hard of hearing.

External audiences:

- All residents of North Tyneside so they understand how North Tyneside Council aims to allocate its budget. This includes working with the representatives of the Residents Panel.
- Service users - so they understand the impact of proposals and can identify any issues that the Council may need to consider.
- Children and young people - including the Young Mayor and Cabinet, Youth Council, schools and colleges
- Older people - promoted through older people's networks
- North Tyneside Strategic Partnership - including the representatives of the NTSP Executive
- Business Community - including the Chambers of Trade, Cobalt and Silverlink Business Association, the Federation of Small Business (FSB) and the North East Chamber of Commerce (NECC), North Tyneside Business Forum
- Schools (Governors and Head teachers) - including the Schools Forum, School Governors and the Head Teacher Convenors
- Voluntary and Community Sector, including faith groups.

Internal audiences:

- Elected Members – format to be agreed with Group Leaders and Overview and Scrutiny
- Staff - via the Staff panel / Communications Champions
- Strategic Partners (Kier, Cofely and Capita) - via existing networks
- Trade Unions - via meetings with the Employee Joint Consultative Forum

Timescales

The timescales to be taken on board in this phase of the budget engagement process around specific proposals are November 2015 - January 2016, to cover the budget engagement programme on Cabinet's initial proposals.

Approach

Our approach will aim for maximum reach by offering a range of different opportunities for people to have their say.

A variety of methods will be used to increase accessibility to the engagement process. These will accommodate the three key strands of a successful two-way communications approach.

1. Informing

This will provide information to audiences about the budget proposals in the context of the Council Plan and the Creating a brighter Future programme via:

- Information on the Council's website - www.northtyneside.gov.uk
- The resident's magazine Our North Tyneside has been confirmed by an independent resident's survey as the most popular way for residents to receive information about the council. Therefore, it is proposed that:

- In the Autumn edition of the residents' magazine (distributed between October 5 and 10) there will be an overview article that will help residents understand the context of the budget decisions, for example identifying the different budgets and the key spend that has to be achieved. Residents will be invited to give their feedback on how they will meet the challenge.
- The November edition of the magazine, will be available to enable the council to focus on the specific proposals, and again canvass public feedback on the proposals, via email, the website, or in writing.
- Information inviting residents to engage in the process will be provided in key places visited by residents, including libraries (including mobile libraries) and customer service centres, community centres, leisure centres - together with feedback cards for comments to be forwarded to the council.
- Social media

2. Listening

We will listen to the wider community and specific interest groups by:

- Providing opportunities for online feedback via website and e-mail.
- Four events will be organised in each of the four areas of the borough to provide the public with more in depth information and to invite them to consider the key areas and consider future options.
- Service-level engagement with service users or their representatives, via existing networks.
- Formal engagement, with key stakeholders, including with business representatives, schools, young people, community and voluntary sector, trade unions.
- Social media discussions
- Residents Panel
- Staff Panel / Communications Champions
- Members via formal briefings and Cabinet and Council meetings.
- NTSP Executive

3. Feeding back

- The council will ensure that residents and specific groups are given feedback on how their comments have been taken on board
- On the council's website
- An overview of the budget decisions will be provided in the March 2015 edition of the residents magazine.
- Information can be provided on notice boards in Customer First Centres.

Evaluation

Each year the council evaluates the success of its budget engagement process to consider improvements that can be achieved in future years. This will include consideration of the number of people involved (including via formal engagement sessions, social media contacts,) and the feedback received.