

Consultation on the City Council's Budget Plans

Guidance Notes

Like many local authorities, the City Council faces the challenge of providing good services on a tight budget. The challenge is made more difficult as demand for services has grown at a faster rate than for many authorities, whilst Government funding has increased by less than it has for other authorities.

Despite extra money being found over recent years for priority services such as schools and social care, demand for many services continues to outstrip the money the council gets to fund them.

Because of the pressures we face, it is vital that we have a clear view about what our priorities are and how we can fund them. Inevitably, the Council cannot do everything it would wish to do and difficult choices have to be made about reducing some services or increasing council tax.

Over recent months the Council's new leadership has been considering its approach to the budget over the next several years and will set out its views formally later in the year in a financial plan, which is called the budget strategy. The plan will set out how we intend to spend our money over the next 3 years.

Before publishing the plan, the Council is keen to hear your views about what we should be spending our money on.

Local Government Finance is a complicated subject, and the questions have been written in a way which will enable you to answer them without knowledge of how the system works. There is one exception to this however. In answering the questions, you need to be aware that 80% of the Council's money comes from the Government. Only 20% comes from the council tax. It is therefore very hard for the Council to increase its overall level of spending. A 1% increase in spending would mean a 5% increase in council tax.

Spending Priorities

The New Leadership has 2 strategic spending priorities:-

- **Education** - we will commit to increasing money spent on schools by giving schools the whole of any government funding increases, and ensure the Education Department is adequately resourced to support schools.
- **Environment** - we will make additional resources available, wherever affordable, to improve the cleanliness of the city and its neighbourhoods; and to improve its parks and open spaces.

There are 2 other spending priorities, both of which are largely unavoidable (the first because of growing demand , such as the rising number of elderly needing care services,the second because of the legacy of underfunding inn the past):-

- **Social Care and Health** - it is a priority to ensure that this service area is adequately and fairly funded, subject to overall affordability.
- **Buildings and Roads** – over the next few years we will make plans to maintain our heritage, buildings, and infrastructure, such as roads, and not permit these to become a drain on future generations of taxpayers.

Finding money for these priorities will mean the Council has to review other areas of service in order to find savings. In order to help fund these priorities the Council proposes to:-

- consolidate services where these are extensive but of insufficient quality, and provide enhanced services from fewer locations where appropriate. In particular, the Council will work to co-locate nearby facilities to save money. This may mean fewer but better Council services.
- review the efficiency of what we do, with a view to reducing management and administration and maximise alternative sources of income.
- Take a long hard look at some historically provided services where the money can be better spent elsewhere, particularly where such costs are above and beyond what other authorities provide.

Council Tax

The financial plan will set out that the Council believes in modest tax rises. However, we already know that this will not be possible in 2004 because of the financial pressures that the Council faces. Therefore, unless substantial additional resources are provided by the Government, which is very unlikely, or the Council makes significant service cuts, it is likely that the Council will need to set an above average tax increase next year. This is not something the Council wishes to do, but we expect to have no choice.

In future years the Council will aim for modest tax rises, which are broadly in line with or below those of other authorities. However, clearly this is dependant upon the adequacy of future government grant or if an unexpected and significant spending need arose.

Tell us what you think

Please complete and return this questionnaire in the envelope provided by 21st November 2003

1. Do you agree with the Council's 3 suggested strategic budget priorities?

	Agree	Disagree	No opinion
Education	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Environment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social Services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. Do you agree that the Council should spend more on its general heritage and infrastructure, such as spending on keeping buildings in a good state of repair and maintenance of roads?

Agree	Disagree	No opinion
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

3. Are there any other Council services, or aspects of living in Leicester, on which you think the Council should be spending more money? For example, these could be services you use regularly or Council buildings or facilities you feel need improving, or new services you think the Council should provide. If so, please give examples.

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4. Do you agree with the suggested areas for finding savings to fund our priorities?

	Agree	Disagree	No opinion
Co-locate services and facilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
review efficiency, reduce administration. and maximise alternative sources of income	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
discontinue non core services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5. In your opinion, are there any services on which you think the Council spends too much money? If so, please give examples.

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6. What are your views on balance between increasing Council Tax and reducing or discontinuing services. For example, to reduce council tax by 1% £700,000 of budget reductions would be required. 1% of council tax equates to an additional £9.37 per annum for a Band D property, or £6.25 per annum for the majority of the City's taxpayer who live in Band A properties. Please tick 1 box below.

- The Council should seek to have low council tax increases even if this means making significant cuts to key services
- The Council should provide the necessary money to key services regardless of the impact on council tax
- The Council should strike a balance between council tax increases and cuts to services

To assist us in analysing this survey, it would be helpful if you could complete the following questions:

- Age: Under 18 18 to 30 31 to 43
 44 to 56 57 to 69 Over 70

Full Census Ethnic Categories

To which of these groups do you consider you belong to (*please tick one or write in*)

Asian or Asian British

- Indian
- Pakistani
- Bangladeshi

Any other Asian Background
(please write in)

Mixed

- White and Black Caribbean
- White and Black African
- White and Asian

Any other mixed background
(please write in)

Black or Black British

- Caribbean
- African

Any other Black background
(please write in)

White

- British
- Irish

Any other White background
(please write in)

Chinese

Other ethnic group
(please write in)

Gender: Male Female

Name:

Address:

Postcode:

Do you wish to be entered into a free prize draw for £100 of gift vouchers? Closing date for entry in 21 November 2003.

Yes

No