

Balancing the books: a resident perspective

Report 1: summary of existing intelligence

Chief Executive's Policy and Partnership Unit

Kirklees Council

5th December 2011

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1. Introduction

Last year Kirklees Council approved a three year budget plan designed to make the savings required by government and 'balance the books'. Good progress has already been made over 2011/12, with significant savings achieved through the council-wide innovation and efficiency programme.

Budget plans are now being updated for 2012/13 and the following two years, with some further difficult decisions to be made to help meet the financial challenges ahead. To help inform the budget-setting process, Kirklees residents have been given the opportunity to tell us about their **overall priorities** for public services. Separately to this high-level consultation, local people are being consulted on specific proposals about changes to services that are likely to have a substantial impact on service users.

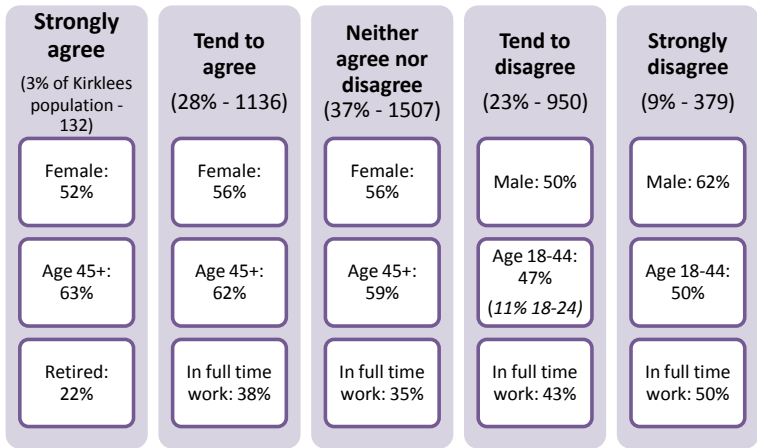
This purpose of this report is to provide a brief summary of the key messages from existing intelligence to help set the scene. This will be followed by two further reports on the findings from the 2011 consultation – an interim report in mid-December 2011 and a final report in mid-January 2012.

2. Key messages from existing data

Perceptions of value for money

Services that are effective and productive

- Resident perceptions of VFM got worse between 2006 and 2008
- In 2008, less than a third of Kirklees residents (30.9%) agreed that Kirklees Council provides VFM – just under the national average of 33%.
- Perceptions of VFM were poorer amongst younger male residents...



New figures from a recent national poll* have shown perceptions of vfm starting to bounce back...will Kirklees see the same trend? Our Autumn 2011 residents' survey will tell us what local people think.

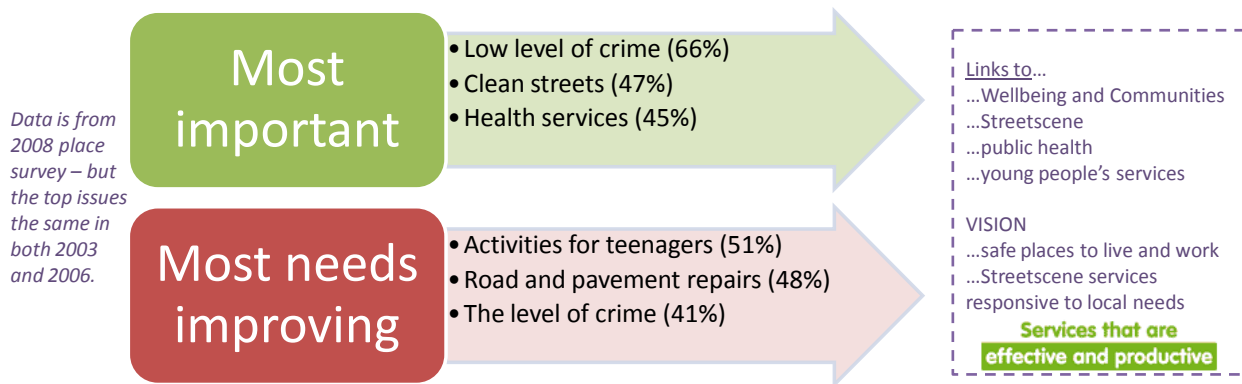
*Source: LGA/LGinsight poll, June 2011

...and those living in The Valleys and Dewsbury & Mirfield

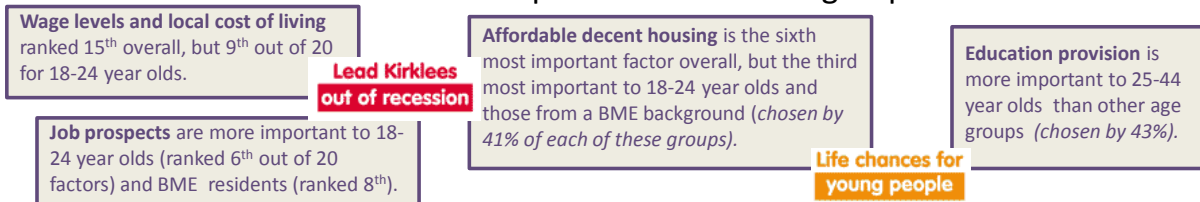
① Source: Place Survey 2008 (data published June 2009)

What do local people tell us is important?

- Overall, resident priorities have remained consistent over the years...



- But the variations in what's important to different groups should be noted...



① Source: BVPI surveys 2003 and 2006; Place Survey 2008 (data published June 2009)

What do people feel strongly about?

Based on the submissions to the Council under its new Petition Scheme, over the last 18 months the main issues are:

- Repairs to roads, on street parking provision, street lights, pedestrian crossings etc.
- Improved facilities for young people, e.g. skate parks, play areas, etc.
- Maintaining education provision in particular schools

What else do we know - linked to priorities?

<p>Life chances for young people</p>	<p>Perceptions of both adults and young people suggest this is an important priority...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Activities for teenagers is consistently one of the top things residents feel needs improving (<i>Place survey 2008</i>). •Fewer young people than in previous years are happy with their local area and positive about local activities. 'The future' was also highlighted by Year 9 pupils as a worry for them (<i>Young people's survey 2009</i>). •Wellbeing issues for 18-24 year olds are seen to link to the cross-cutting themes of unemployment, barriers to education/training, anger/stress and smoking/drinking/drug use (<i>CLIK 18-24 research 2010</i>).
<p>Healthy and active older people</p>	<p>Older people also have specific views and needs....</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Health services is the number one priority issue for residents aged 65+ (<i>Place survey 2008</i>). •Older people (65+) are generally more satisfied with the local area and services than other age groups (<i>Place survey</i>). •Older residents are less likely to rate their overall health as excellent/good and more likely to suffer from health conditions. They were less likely to undertake moderate physical activity but more likely to want to increase levels of physical activity in the future (<i>CLIK survey 2008</i>).
<p>Lead Kirklees out of recession</p>	<p>The economy remains a topical issue...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Supporting young people (in particular young carers and young adults NEET) in gaining/starting employment was identified as a key opportunity for action (<i>CLIK 18-24 research 2010</i>). •45% of local firms indicated that they faced barriers to growth ...in particular the current economic climate and a lack of overall demand. However, 52% rated Kirklees as 'good' or 'excellent' for their local business, with South Kirklees firms more satisfied than those in the North (<i>Kirklees Employer's Survey 2011</i>).
<p>Services that are effective and productive</p>	<p>Regular users of our services tend to be more satisfied, and...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Users of libraries are the most satisfied user group. •Kirklees residents as a whole are most satisfied with local tips/household waste recycling centres. •41% of residents are satisfied overall with how the council runs things. •33% think local public services act on the concerns of local residents. <p>① Source: Place Survey 2008</p>

What did we learn from last year's budget consultation activity?

<p>"I hope front line staff are allowed to carry on the good work"</p>	<p>"As a disabled person in a wheelchair I try to make my world bigger, [the] library helps enormously..."</p>	<p>Turn streetlights off at night "...at least some of them...in quiet/low crime areas...or maybe fit them with motion sensors..."</p>
<p>People, staff and services are important</p>	<p>Libraries was a particularly 'hot topic' for debate</p>	<p>Lots of Streetscene ideas</p>
<p>A strong desire to protect particular services</p>	<p>What difference do people's views make?</p>	<p>"...thank you for letting me comment, I look forward to seeing what Kirklees Council are going to do."</p>
<p>"The positive impact of support services on individuals and communities can not be underestimated. I hope that you will take account of that when considering budget allocations for the coming 3 years..."</p>	<p>"...will anyone in the council take any note?"</p>	

① Source: Your Voice budget consultation 2010-11

The full report on the findings from the 2010-11 'Your Voice' budget consultation (excluding the text of email comments) is provided separately as Appendix A for reference.

APPENDIX A: Your Voice – February 2011 summary

Introduction

- Your Voice (www.yourvoice.kirklees.gov.uk) is an online discussion forum that was designed to start a conversation with the public about tough financial choices. It went live in September 2010.
- The site supported public participation in the budget-setting process through allowing Kirklees residents, council employees and the voluntary and community sector to share ideas on the site, comment on other ideas, respond to the polls, set their own budgets using a simplified budget tool ('You Choose' – added on 6th January 2011) and comment on summary budget proposals for the four council directorates (added on 25th January 2011).
- Your Voice was promoted internally from 1st September 2010 and externally (using *Kirklees Together* and Twitter) from 6th September. A second round of internal promotion took place from 25th January 2011, when a banner advert was also added to the council's website homepage.
- This is the third and final summary of Your Voice feedback before the budget council meeting on 23rd February 2011 (earlier summaries were prepared to support budget discussions before Christmas).
- This summary is based on analysis of information submitted up to 13th February 2011. However, the Your Voice site remains live, so new comments and ideas may still be posted during February.

Participation using Your Voice

- There have been 5,364 unique visitors to the site, with 367 people registering as Your Voice users.
- Visitors spent an average of 4 minutes and 17 seconds on the site.
- There were two main periods of Your Voice activity online – September 2010 and February 2011.
- A total of 113 ideas and 295 comments have now been put forward using the site. (See APPENDIX 1).
- There have been 74 and 79 responses respectively to the two Your Voice polls. (See APPENDIX 2).
- 160 people have submitted their own budget proposal using the You Choose tool. (See APPENDIX 3).
- 33 people have emailed comments following publication of the budget proposals. (See APPENDIX 4).

Key messages

- The ideas put forward via Your Voice are varied, both in topic and complexity. They range from relatively small scale actions such as car boot sales to wider and more complex debates such as the role of different sectors. They also suggest ways of managing things differently, for example switching off streetlights, putting them on a timer or using bar codes to help report faults.
- A basic content analysis of the ideas emphasises the words 'people', 'staff' and 'services'.
- The most 'liked' ideas on Your Voice were added to the site relatively early and have a focus on employee working practices – perhaps reflecting the initial promotion of the site to employees.
- Libraries has been a 'hot topic' for debate – two separate posts on libraries are within the top five most commented on ideas, with some strength of feeling on the role and value of libraries.
[NB: the joint budget statement issued on 9th February indicates that libraries will not be cut right now and that consideration will be given as to how library services can best be provided in future].
- Other themes include councillors, green ideas and Streetscene. Discussion on the role of the public, private and voluntary sectors has also been cross-cutting over a number of posts.
[NB: the joint budget statement also commits to a new vision for Streetscene, bringing efficiencies.]
- There are no strong majority views emerging from the polls. However, they do show support for more joint working, some preference for introducing charging as opposed to cutting services and an indication that any charging for services should reflect people's ability to pay.

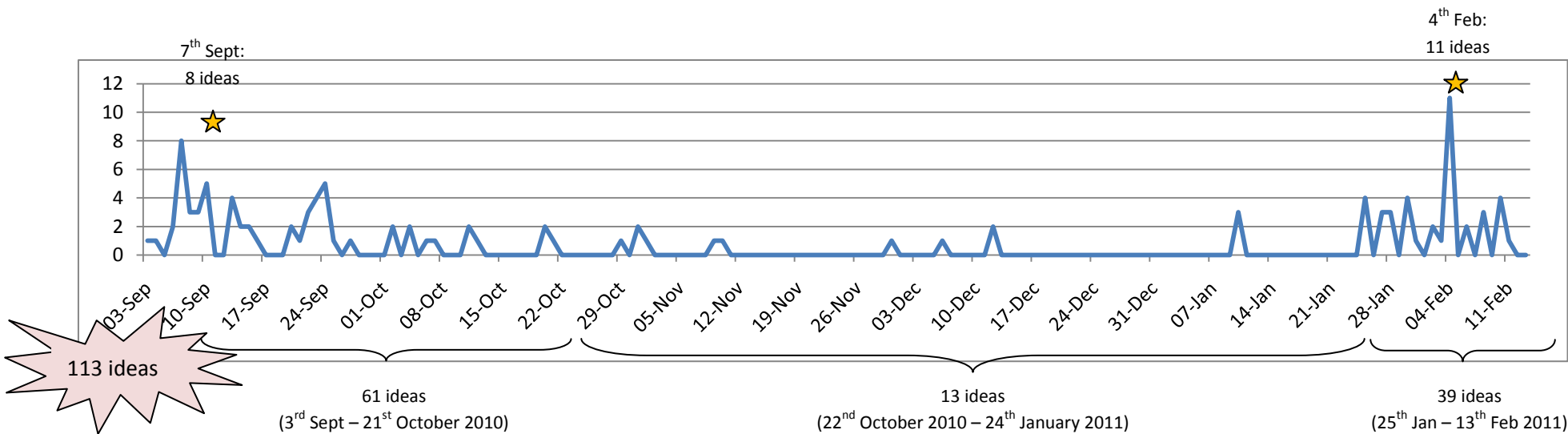
- The You Choose tool is purely a simulator and the proposals submitted by the public are not necessarily realistic (for example the proposals resulted in an average 12% reduction in council tax).
- Residents' budget proposals are based on personal choice and therefore reflect individual priorities rather than providing an agreed collective view. However, some of the choices (for example generating income from culture and leisure and making efficiencies when buying goods and services) provide an indication of how the public might like to see savings being made.
- 160 people have also experienced the difficulties of 'balancing the books' for themselves through using the You Choose tool.
- The comments received via email generally focus on the need to protect particular services (although some do suggest a review of or cuts to services). Adult social care, children's services, libraries and environmental health are all areas where the perceived impact of potential cuts has caused concern amongst respondents. (Interestingly, environmental health/public protection was also one of the areas where slightly more people opted to increase spending via You Choose). A number of email submissions are particularly detailed, including examples and cases studies – this highlights the personal importance of the issues raised to these people.
[NB: the joint budget statement commits to not cutting libraries now, helping the most vulnerable in society and still spending around £80 million on health and social care].
- Most of the email comments are from individuals, but a small number have been submitted by voluntary and community sector organisations.
- The role and impact of public opinion has been raised both through recent Your Voice posts ('...will anyone in the council take any note?') and email comments ('what evidence can the council provide that suggestions made on the website have been considered?'). This emphasises the importance of feedback to demonstrate how people's views have been taken into account and help to foster a culture of dialogue and involvement in the future.
- Although budget-setting is always complex, this year's council budget is particularly challenging and some difficult decisions will need to be made. Your Voice has provided a vehicle for public debate throughout the process and this final summary gives an overview for consideration prior to decisions on 23rd February.

For a full picture of the ongoing Your Voice dialogue and details of all the individual ideas submitted please see www.yourvoice.kirklees.gov.uk

APPENDIX 1: ideas summary

Ideas over time...

The chart below shows the number of ideas submitted using the Your Voice site over time (a total of 113 ideas between September 2010 and February 2011). There were two main periods of Your Voice activity, one coinciding with the launch of the site (peaking at 8 ideas on 7th September 2010) and another with promotion during the weeks leading up to budget council (peaking at 11 ideas on 4th February 2011). The total number of site visitors also peaked during January 2011. Active use of Your Voice (i.e. posting ideas and comments) was much more limited during the interim period of October-December 2010:



Key words...

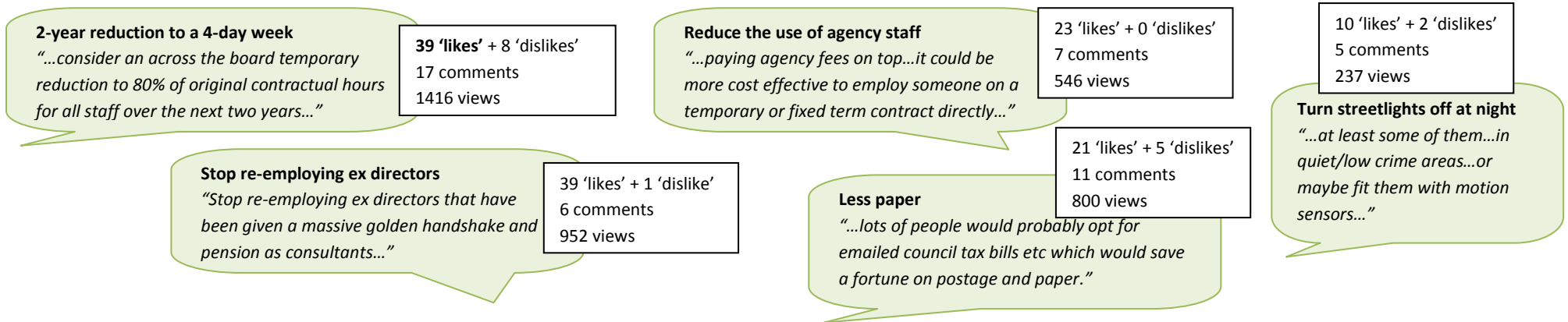
The following 'wordle' is based on the text of Your Voice ideas – more frequently occurring words have greater prominence. This shows an emphasis on 'people', 'staff' and 'services' throughout the ideas.

www.wordle.net



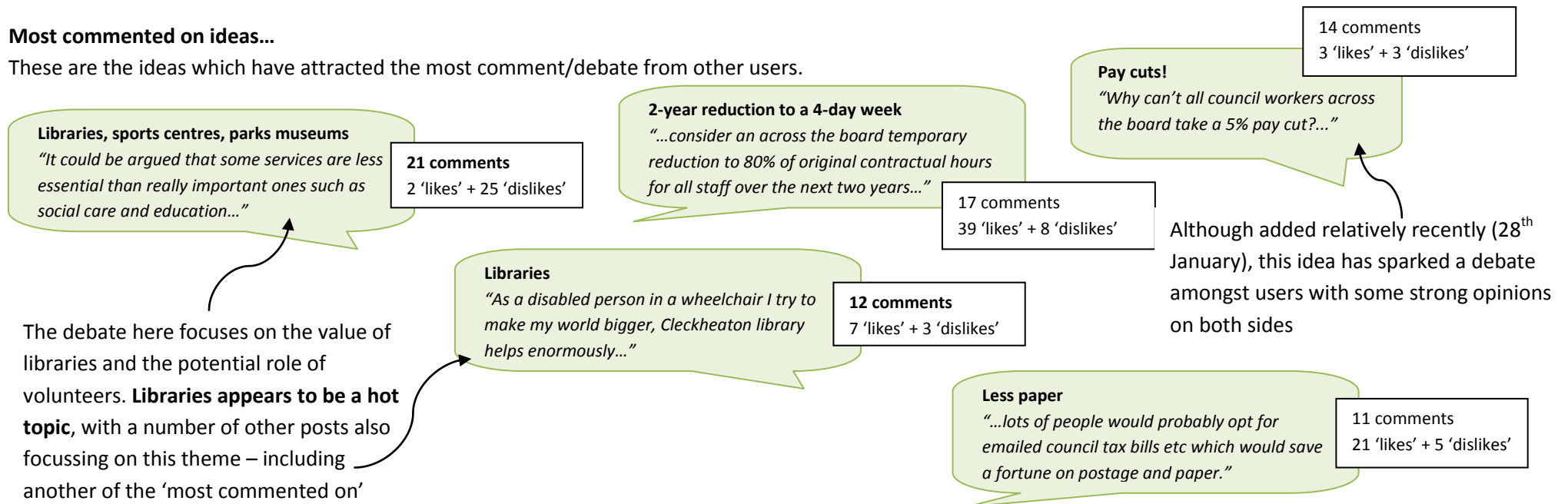
Most 'liked' ideas...

These are the ideas which have had most support (👍) from other site users. They were added to the site relatively early (i.e. during September) so they are also amongst the most viewed. There is a focus on **working practices** here, which may reflect the early promotion of the site to Kirklees Council employees.



Most commented on ideas...

These are the ideas which have attracted the most comment/debate from other users.



Recurring themes...

In addition to working practices and libraries, a number of other themes have emerged , suggesting that these areas are also important to site users:

Councillors	Streetscene	'Green' ideas
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Big money• Councillors and MPS• Cabinet and councillor allowances• Reduce the number of councillors• Reduce no of councillors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Streetlighting• Use offenders• Town centre rangers• Wheelie bins• Road furniture• Footpaths• Road signs• Bar codes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Turn streetlights off at night• Bulky waste collection processes• Roads and highways• Pointless traffic calming measures• Wheelie bins and recycling boxes• Litter is a blight on the community• Cut the speedhumps• Bring waste disposal sites back to the council <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recycling• Small scale hydro-electric• Utilise water power• Lighting and energy• Generate large amounts of renewable energy

(bullet points show the titles of ideas as posted by site users – for the full test of ideas please see www.yourvoice.kirklees.gov.uk)

Other specific topics that have come up more than once include translation services, Together magazine and end-of-year budget spending. The role of the public/private/voluntary sector has also been a cross-cutting theme in Your Voice discussions.

APPENDIX 2: poll summary

Two poll questions have been running since the launch of the site. While the total number of responses is relatively low and views are not necessarily representative of all Kirklees residents, the polls do give some indication of how Your Voice users feel about broad concepts linked to making savings. Some examples of user posts that link to these poll topics are also shown here:

What do you think is the best way of making our services more affordable?

More joint working with partners (NHS, police and other councils)

(35%)

More use of volunteers and voluntary groups to help deliver services

(14%)

Reduce the number of local council buildings and introduce more mobile services

(25%)

Reduce opening hours of face to face services but increase online and telephone contact

(25%)

"Why not use offenders to take on a lot of the work like street cleaning, road maintenance etc?..."

"...support VCOs – and think very very carefully before cutting any more contracts and grants..."

"...more use should be made of mobile libraries. The new way forward is taking services out into the communities, not expecting users to come to you."

"There is an urgent need for a volunteer policy and a volunteer officer to supervise voluntary work on public rights of way..."

This poll shows some general support for more joint working. The idea of using more volunteers/voluntary groups to help deliver services has the least support. However, these are complex issues – as highlighted by the comments and discussion around some of the Your Voice ideas posts.

To help save money would you prefer the council to:

Provide services only to the people who most need them

(19%)

Start charging for some non-vital services - and everyone should pay the same

(24%)

Start charging for some non-vital services - but charges should reflect my ability to pay

(36%)

Stop providing some services altogether

(20%)

Total votes: 74

"...only undertake those services which the LA is obliged to provide by statute..."

"Perhaps it is worth reminding ourselves of the basic responsibilities of our local councils..."


While there is no strong majority here, the idea of charging for some non-vital service appears to be preferable to cutting or targeting services. There is a slight preference for 'means tested' over universal charges and stopping the provision of some services altogether is seen to be the least acceptable option for saving money.


APPENDIX 3: You Choose summary

A total of 160 people submitted their own budget summary (based on a simplified model) using the You Choose tool. The table below illustrates the number of people making particular choices across the four areas covered by the council's proposals:

	Children and Young People	Wellbeing and Communities	Place	Effective and productive services
Council proposals	Savings of £8million Budget: £85 million	Savings of £20 million Budget: £110 million	Savings of £16 million Budget: £70 million	Savings of £13 million Budget: £23 million
You Choose	<p>Budget</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children's services and education: 149 people chose to reduce and 5 people chose to increase spending in this area. 	<p>Budget</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adult social care: 154 people chose to reduce and 2 people chose to increase spending in this area. Culture and leisure (inc. libraries): 146 people chose to reduce and 3 people chose to increase spending in this area. <p>Income</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 127 people chose to generate income from culture and leisure. 100 people chose to generate income from adult social care services. 107 people chose to generate income from bereavement services. 	<p>Budget</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Business support: 144 people chose to reduce and 8 people chose to increase spending in this area. Environmental health and public protection: 140 people chose to reduce and 8 people chose to increase spending in this area. Roads and safer streets: 147 people chose to reduce and 4 people chose to increase spending in this area. Streetscene, cleaner streets, your local area: 153 people chose to reduce and 2 people chose to increase spending in this area. <p>Income</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 117 people chose to generate income from parking charges. 110 people chose to generate income from public toilet charges. 	<p>Efficiency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 134 people chose to make efficiencies on buildings management. 136 people chose to make efficiencies on staff restructures 137 people chose to make efficiencies on buying goods and services. 122 people chose to make efficiencies on information technology. <div style="border: 1px dashed black; border-radius: 15px; padding: 10px; margin-top: 10px;"> <p>Staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 136 people chose to reduce and 10 chose to increase staff pay. 150 people chose to reduce and 3 chose to increase management pay </div>

Overall statistics

 Total submissions 160

 Council tax: Av. decrease 12%

OVERALL SUMMARY - the budget choices people made...

- Budget: more people chose to reduce spend in adult social care and Streetscene than other areas. For increased spend, the top choices were business support and environmental health/public protection.
- Income: the most popular area for generating income was culture and leisure.
- Efficiency: the most popular area for making efficiencies was buying goods and services.

APPENDIX 4: email comments on budget proposals

- A total of **33 comments** on the budget proposals were received via email between 25th January and 13th February 2011.
- 21 comments are from external email addresses, 12 have been sent internally.
- The majority of comments are from individuals (albeit some working within specific council services). However, a small number (20, 25 and 29) have been sent on behalf of voluntary and community sector organisations.
- Many comments (e.g. 5, 9, 15, 24) focus on the need to protect particular services. Adult social care, children's services, libraries and environmental health are all mentioned by more than one person. Others (e.g. 4, 22, 32) suggesting reviewing or potentially cutting particular service areas.
- Some comments (e.g. 21 and 25) are particularly detailed, including examples and case studies.
- The final comment calls for evidence that the ideas submitted by the public using Your Voice have been considered as part of the budget-setting process.

NB: the full text of all comments (names/email addresses removed) were included as an appendix to the report in Feb 2011.