

Balancing the books?

Your views on specific options and ideas for 2015-18

The findings from Phase 2 of the public consultation

Headlines:

In December 2014 we concluded our public consultation on your council's budget for 2015-16. This happened over two phases, with phase 1 asking about some broad themes, and phase 2 asking for views on some specific options and ideas.

The response rate for this budget consultation has been the highest ever, with a total **4595** responses across the two phases.

In summary:

- There was varying levels of support for the different options and ideas put forward in the survey.
- The highest levels of support was for removing expensive payment options; changing our School transport policy; charging schools and child care organisations for support and advice; and stopping the Free Town Bus.
- There was least support for reducing staffing in the Youth Offending Team; and in complaints and advocacy for children and young people.
- People's views on future plans for our three bold ideas were generally more positive, though possibly because these plans are quite non-specific at this early stage.
- We received a huge volume of comments which further explain residents' answers. These are being used by councillors to understand more about your views, as they prepare to make decisions on the council's budget for 2015-16 and beyond.

Introduction - a two phase approach

We are now part way through making some big changes to Kirklees Council, to make it both more innovative and modern, with the backdrop of a reducing budget from central Government.

This report summarises the findings for the Phase 2 consultation. This report and the phase 1 report are available online at www.kirklees.gov.uk/budgetreport.

Phase 2 was open for six weeks (Monday 27th October to Friday 5th December 2014). This second phase of consultation focused on some of the specific budget options and ideas for 2015-16 that we have been looking at to help balance the books, as well as longer term plans for the future.

Councillors will use the findings from both phases to help them make budget decisions, with the final budget being set at the Council meeting on 18th February 2015.

Who took part?

We received a total of **4595 responses** across the two phases (1679 in Phase 1 and 2916 in Phase 2).

Of the 2916 phase 2 responses:

- 2341 were online surveys

- 241 were paper surveys

- 65 were written comments (letters, emails, social media posts)

- 269 responses via groups and networks

The majority of questionnaires (83%) were completed by Kirklees residents. 5% came from local community groups, organisations, or local businesses. 29% were from Kirklees Council employees (most of our staff live locally).

There were more responses from South Kirklees (68%) than North Kirklees (26%). The age of participants ranged from 13 to 100, and 61% were female. 11% said they were from a Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) background, 7% identified themselves as disabled and 3% as Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual. 79% said they were in paid work and 38% the parent or guardian of a child aged up to 16.

Summary of results

We asked people for their views on 18 **specific budget options and ideas** for 2015-16. The table below summarises the responses given, with the options listed in order of negative response (i.e. the total saying '*not keen*' or '*bad idea*'), with the highest level of negative response first:

Specific options and ideas for 2015-16	Total % positive (<i>'good idea'</i> or <i>'OK idea'</i>)	Total % negative (<i>'not keen'</i> or <i>'bad idea'</i>)
Reduce staffing in the Youth Offending Team	19%	67%
Reduce staffing in complaints and advocacy for children and young people	19%	62%
Reduce the intensity of Street Cleaning	36%	52%
Reduce maintenance of our parks, open spaces and grass verges	38%	48%
Reduce subsidies for sport and physical activities	41%	45%
Stop funding the Kirklees Music Service	42%	44%
Change our remaining in-house residential and home care services	37%	44%
Increase the Council Tax Support scheme	31%	44%
Stop local welfare provision - food banks and white goods	40%	43%
Stop doing and funding events and festivals	46%	41%
Develop alternative options for running our library services	50%	37%
Remove the remaining subsidy to some child care provision	46%	37%
Change the way we provide reablement services	47%	34%
Change the way we provide employment, debt or housing advice and overall support for welfare benefits	55%	27%
Stop funding the Free Town Bus service	65%	25%
Charge schools and child care organisations for support and advice	60%	24%
Make changes to our School Transport policy	69%	21%
Remove more expensive payment options and promote Direct Debit and Debit Card payments	71%	20%

Least support

Most support

Then we asked people for their views on **future plans**. We asked about some longer term options for change, that link to supporting our ideas for working in new ways. Generally speaking, people were positive about these future plans although some comments showed that at this stage the plans feel quite non-specific and are therefore difficult to disagree with. The table below summarises the responses given:

Future plans	Total % positive <i>('good idea' or 'OK idea')</i>	Total % negative <i>('not keen' or 'bad idea')</i>
Health and wellbeing:		
Develop new ways of working to keep our neighbourhoods clean and safe	67%	20%
Look at alternative options for running our museums, art galleries and historic houses	65%	22%
Find alternative ways to help the arts flourish in Kirklees Council	68%	20%
Economic resilience:		
..resilient businesses that create good, fulfilling, long term employment opportunities	89%	3%
..helping people become more employable, with good career progression and skills for life, and looking at how we advise people on maximising their income	86%	4%
..good quality housing and neighbourhoods that support quality of life and attract people and businesses to Kirklees	86%	4%
..people becoming more independent and having the resources to be self-sufficient, positive and supportive of each other	86%	4%
Early intervention and prevention, and supporting communities to help themselves:		
Supporting children, families and adults	83%	8%
Helping people help themselves and each other	74%	15%

As with the specific options and ideas, the additional comments help to provide further insight into people's views on the council's future plans – these will help councillors make budget decisions in the coming years.

Comments

People made written comments about each of the budget options, ideas and future plans in the survey. We received over 1400 comments this way. Below is a small selection of those. A more detailed set of comments for each budget option and idea, is available at www.kirklees.gov.uk/budgetreport. These comments are intended to provide some context to people's opinions, explain more about why people feel the way they do and indicate the strength of feeling.

"...Free Town Bus: Never use it. If the local businesses want it, make them pay for it. Or make the people who use it pay..."

"Parks are for all - look at the popularity of Greenhead Park. Maintenance must continue..."

"...Do not cut leisure and sport as these are important to community cohesion..."

"Street cleaning - we already get loads of complaints about rubbish so this would only aggravate the situation and make Kirklees an eyesore and would not attract spenders into the region..."

"...School Transport: Parents have choices about which schools their children attend and with this should be the responsibility of getting their children to school..."

"...Sad as I would be to see cultural events like the Festival of Light go, in these straitened times, they are a luxury we can live without..."

"...making cuts in areas like youth offending teams, ... will only worsen the existing social division and create an increase in crime rates that will cost the council more in the long run than it would save in the short term..."

"I am a regular library user but think the service should be scaled down. The self service machines are excellent..."

"...If you remove funding for Kirklees Music School, people from poorer backgrounds would not get the possibility to enjoy learning a musical instrument and attending music centres across Kirklees...."

"You should not be looking to make 'savings' at the expense of the poorest and most vulnerable people on basic subsistence level welfare benefits..."

"...they are all good ideas - but how are we going to get there..."

"Children in care need additional support and it worries me the Council is considering cutting these services further..."

"...Out sourcing residential care for elderly and vulnerable usually means cheap and nasty profiteers take over with care not being a primary concern."

"Community spirit is needed rather than people relying on council"

"... essential for those who are struggling to be helped out of the quagmire so that they become less in need in the future."

"I agree with possible changes to the way of working with regard to keeping our neighbourhood clean and safe in order to save money. However, if this means that the streets are going to be less safe as a consequence then I don't agree."

What next?

Results from both phases of the Balancing the books budget consultation will be used by councillors, to help them make decisions on the budget for 2015-16 and beyond.

Final budget decisions for 2015-16 will be made at full Council meeting in February 2015.