

Appendix 10

Overview of consultation for the Medium Term Financial Plan Proposals

Stockport Local Assistance Scheme

Background

The support available through SLAS can be summarised as follows: To provide a safety net in an emergency, when there is an immediate threat to health or safety (for example, a lack of food and utilities), to help people to settle into new accommodation after for example, a stay in hospital or temporary accommodation (for example, help with furniture and/or white goods) and supporting people to continue to live independently when they are facing difficulties (for example, help to repair or replace an essential household appliance).

The consultation has focused on a proposal to end the Stockport Local Assistance Scheme in its current form.

Methodology

Consultation on the proposal to end the Stockport Local Assistance Scheme began on 26th October and ended on 21st December '18. A number of approaches have been adopted to ensure that people who have used the service, Stockport residents and stakeholders have all had an opportunity to respond. The methods adopted are outlined below:

- People who have applied to SLAS over the last 12 months
- Postal questionnaire
- Online questionnaire
- Focus groups ran by an independent research company
- Members of the public
- Online questionnaire
- Paper copies of the questionnaire available in libraries
- Stakeholders (local organisations and support providers) Online questionnaire

A letter and paper copy of the questionnaire was posted to 1626 people who have applied to SLAS for assistance over the last 12 months. A total of 157 responses were received, which equates to a 9.7% response rate. In order to ensure that the views of people who have used SLAS were heard during the consultation process, the Council commissioned Qa Research to carry out two independent focus groups to gather feedback on the proposal from people who have accessed SLAS over the last 12 months. These focus groups were held on 13th December '18 at The Hatworks in Stockport. A total of 16 people were recruited by the research company and 13 people attended on the day.

Results

The results of the consultation show a high level of opposition to this proposal with 86% of respondents disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. When broken down by type of respondent, 90% of previous SLAS applicants disagreed, 91% of non-SLAS applicants disagreed and 91% of stakeholders expressed their disagreement. A small number of people (7%) are in agreement. When analysed by type of respondent 2% of previous SLAS applicants, 8% of non-SLAS applicants and 4% of stakeholders agreed with the proposal.

The main reasons for disagreement with this proposal include concerns regarding the impact on vulnerable people and the removal of a safety net for people who have nowhere else to turn during times of crisis. The recent implementation of Universal Credit in Stockport is also highlighted as a concern due to potential delays in payments. Many respondents feel that the removal of SLAS would lead to pressures elsewhere in the system, resulting in increased demand for already stretched local services and pressures on statutory Council budgets.

Public Realm

Background

It was proposed that in 2019/20, changes would be made to the Council's street cleansing and greenspaces offer. This would include the following, where the public would see a revised service:

- Street cleansing: a reduction in the frequency of the street cleaning outside of the town centre and local centres
- Greenspaces: a reduction in greenspace maintenance, including a reduced mowing frequency for some highway verges and open greenspace, reduction in some pruning and other maintenance activity
- Traffic and infrastructure: it was proposed that the delegated highways budget would be removed as a discretionary payment given to respective Area Committees.

Amendments have been made to the proposal since the consultation opened. The delegated highways budget contained within the original report will be consolidated along with other discretionary budgets available for Committees to award. Therefore, comments relating to this aspect of the consultation will be considered within the analysis of Proposal 6: Support and Governance.

Methodology

An online survey was available from Friday 16 November until Friday 11 January. A standard message was disseminated through the Council's social media and other communication channels that advertised a number of consultations relating to the MTFP proposals. Paper versions of the consultation survey were also left in local libraries.

In addition to this, the committee of the Stockport Greenspace Forum was asked to encourage their members to fill out the survey. The Forum is a network of voluntary

community groups that help to maintain a variety of greenspaces, including parks, allotments and cemeteries.

Results

A total of 725 responses were received in total. 45.4% of respondents said they either Tend to Agree or Strongly Agree that they understood that the Council has to make savings. Those that Tend to Disagree or Strongly Disagree numbered 45.5%, 8.3% Didn't Know, or selected Neither Agree or Disagree and 0.8% did not answer.

663 people responded with comments on the impact of the proposal. The main areas for concern for residents was the deteriorating condition of the public realm and the negative impact it would have on their sense of pride in the Borough and also the environmental impacts. There was also 608 suggestions with a wide range of responses for alternative ways to reduce the budget.

Fees and Charges

Background

The public were provided with an overview of the proposed approach to Fees and Charges including a list of the eleven principles in the Policy.

Methodology

The consultation was undertaken between 26th November 2018 and 6th January 2019. The method of consultation was an online public survey on the Council website. The purpose of the consultation was to communicate the Council's approach to fees and charges and to seek suggestions for any other ways in which the Council could generate income.

Results

The public were asked "Do you have any suggestions for other ways in which Stockport Council could generate income?" There have been 27 responses to the consultation, but only 22 of these provided suggestions in relation to the question above.

Buss Pass

Background

The consultation focussed on the proposal to change the eligibility criteria for free school bus passes. The proposals were to redefine the concept of a 'Suitable School' omitting catchment and associated Catholic school areas in favour of: The nearest School to the pupil's home address with places available. This proposed definition is aligned with the definition provided in statutory guidance, Home to School Transport Guidance July 2014. Omit the stipulation regarding funding / providing assistance to pupils who wish to attend a denominational institutions outside of the Borough whose offer cannot be provided for within Borough

boundaries. Vary the definition used in extended entitlement back to its statutory level i.e. low income be defined as: 1. Pupils who qualify for free school meals and 2. Pupils whose parents/guardians are in receipt of their maximum level of Working Tax Credit.

Methodology

The main method of consultation was an online public survey on the Council website which was available from 5th December 2018 until 25th January 2019. 343 responses were received in total.

In addition to the online survey there was direct communication to the parents and guardians of pupils with free school bus passes and current applicants, all primary and secondary Headteachers, Chairs of Governors and Diocesan Authorities.

Results

The majority of respondents (291, 84.8%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the proposal to change eligibility for free school bus passes to only parents in receipt of the maximum level of Working Tax Credits. A small proportion of respondents either agreed or agreed strongly with the proposal (41, 12%) and 10 (2.9%) of the respondents chose neither agree nor disagree.

In relation to the proposal to change the criteria for the allocation of free school bus passes we asked respondents to indicate their preference on the following two options. Option 1: To remove all faith schools, including those within the borough, from the eligibility criteria. This would mean, pupils would only be eligible for a school bus pass for the nearest school to their home (with places available) based on distance or other benefits criteria. Option 2: Only remove faith schools located outside the borough from the qualifying criteria for free school bus passes.

The highest number of respondents (152, 44.3%) chose neither option 1 or 2. However, a significant proportion of respondents chose Option 2 (138, 40.2%). There was a much lower level of support for Option 1 (43, 12.5%) and 10 (2.9%) respondents didn't have a preference.

On the question of whether people agreed with the timing of the introduction of the new criteria from September 2019, the majority of respondents either disagreed or disagreed strongly (266, 77.6%). Only 34 respondents (9.9%) either agreed or agreed strongly with the proposal.

There were 245 responses to the question about what the impact the reduction in eligibility would have.

The most frequent issue that was raised was the potential negative financial impact this proposal would have, straining household budgets and increasing child poverty. The view that the proposal would adversely impact on religious families and schools was the next most frequent issue raised.

Metroshuttle

Background

The consultation focussed on the proposal to cease funding for the free Stockport Metroshuttle service after the current contract ends on 27th April 2019. There were a total of 659 responses to the consultation, 598 responses provided through the online questionnaire and 61 paper questionnaires were received.

Methodology

A range of consultation methods were undertaken between 7th December 2018 and 2nd January 2019. The main method was an online public survey on the Council website.

The following communication activity was undertaken to communicate the consultation to stakeholders: Posters on Metroshuttle buses, at Stockport Bus Station and the Travel Shop, posters in the Council public reception areas in the Town Hall and Fred Perry House, paper copies of questionnaires in Fred Perry House reception and local libraries, social media messages sent via the Council's platforms containing a link to the consultation, Email to Disability Stockport and an article in local business newsletters.

Results

The majority of respondents (526, 79.8%) either disagree or strongly disagree with the proposal. A lower proportion of respondents either agree or agree strongly with the proposal (101, 15.3%). There were 18, 2.7% of respondents that neither agreed or disagreed and 7 (1%) respondents chose 'don't know'.

The majority of the comments were on the impact of stopping this service on older people (particularly pensioners on low income), people with a disability and families. Concern was also expressed that this would have an adverse impact on the use of town centre shops with older people and people with a disability unable to access the town facilities. Reference was also made to the gradients in the town centre which impede easy access.

There were 351 responses giving 'other comments'. These focussed on a number of areas. Many reiterated their concern that it may lead to more shops closing and the loss of business rates, and that it was contrary to the investment in new office developments and residential accommodation in the town which may result in increased usage. The impact on older people and people with mobility issues was again raised in this section.

Alternative suggestions to the proposal also identified in this section included more direct routes, running it only at weekends or offering a reduced service, adopting a charging policy, and finding alternative funding such as retail providers.

There were a few negative comments about the current Metroshuttle service including: safety concerns; its impact on road surfacing; it not being popular with local traders; and, its routing impacting on the development of street cultural offers.