

<b>5 October 2010</b>		<b>ITEM 5</b>
<b>Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>		
<b>THURROCK BUDGET – ‘LET’S TALK’</b>		
<b>Report of:</b> Cllr John Kent, Leader of the Council		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Non-key	
<b>Accountable Head of Service:</b> Phil McCusker, Interim Head of Corporate Communications		
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Richard Waterhouse, Director of Change and Improvement		
<b>This report is:</b> Public		
<b>Purpose of Report:</b> To present a progress report on phase one of the Thurrock's Budget, Let's Talk campaign		

Comment [sj]: PLEASE CLICK THIS BOX ONCE and enter the date of the meeting (in font 16, not capitals)

Comment [sj]: Please leave this for completion by Democratic Services

Comment [sj]: PLEASE CLICK THIS BOX ONCE and enter the name of the Committee you are reporting to (in font 16, not capitals)

Comment [sj]: PLEASE CLICK THIS BOX ONCE and enter the title of your report (in font 16)

Comment [a j]: Please enter the name and job title of the person who will be presenting the report

Comment [sj]: Please enter details of any Wards and Communities affected by the

Comment [sj]: Yes/No/Not Applicable – a 'Key Decision' is generally one affecting more

Comment [sj]: Please state the Head of Service's name and job title

Comment [sj]: Please state Director's name and job title

Comment [sj]: State whether your report is Public or Exempt. If Exempt (i.e. not to be given to

Comment [sj]: Briefly set out the purpose of your report

Comment [sj]: Please provide a summary of the key points in your report

Comment [sj]: The recommendations should be set out in bold in the form of the

Comment [sj]: You should briefly explain why the report is on the agenda - See para. 5.3 and 5.4

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Thurrock's Budget, Let's Talk is a marketing campaign promoting Thurrock Council's budget setting process. Phase one of the campaign was intended to raise awareness of the first stage of the budget consultation and to engage the hearts and minds of Thurrock's communities; explaining the seriousness of Thurrock's financial challenge and calling on local people to submit their own budget saving proposals.

This progress report informs Cabinet of the results of phase one of Thurrock's Budget, Let's Talk.

**1. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

**1.1 Corporate Overview and Scrutiny be requested to note the proposals received during phase one, Thurrock's Budget, Let's Talk.**

**2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND:**

**2.1** In July 2010 the 'Priorities and Budgets 2010/11 and Beyond' report highlighted how Thurrock Council is having to make major changes to the way it provides services; meeting service demands within significantly tighter financial constraints.

- 2.2 The Thurrock's Budget, Let's Talk campaign was developed by the council's communication service to encourage a borough-wide conversation about Thurrock Council's budget saving opportunities. It looked to engage the public on the council's budget saving proposals as well as encourage them to make their own proposals.
- 2.3 Thurrock Council developed Thurrock's Budget, Let's Talk to serve two consultation functions. The first captured stakeholders' (internal and external) budget saving proposals and the other recorded agreement/disagreement with those proposals.
- 2.4 [www.thurrock.gov.uk/talk](http://www.thurrock.gov.uk/talk) was produced in-house as a fully integrated section of the council web site. The framework of the web site can also be adapted for future engagement exercises.
- 2.5 Using the site residents were able to get an overview of the financial challenge facing Thurrock Council, make budget saving proposals and vote on published proposals. The site also explained the type of services provided by Thurrock Council as well as demonstrating that some services are statutory.
- 2.6 The online component of Thurrock's Budget, Let's Talk has been highlighted as best practice – two local authorities have requested support in the development of their programme and a representative from the Participatory Budget Unit said Let's Talk was a 'good initiative'. Phase one of the Thurrock's Budget, Let's Talk campaign was featured in 'Elected', the new national magazine for councillors.
- 2.7 A number of methods were used to promote Thurrock's Budget, Let's Talk – including adverts in the media, media releases, public displays, suggestion boxes and social media networks.
- 2.8 The submission of budget saving proposals was available via the [www.thurrock.gov.uk](http://www.thurrock.gov.uk), post, suggestion box and Thurrock Council's customer contact centre. All ideas published had passed through moderation – first, before publishing, to make sure that it was not a repeat idea, that it was about services the council has the legal ability to change, that no individuals were named, and that no offensive language had been used. Ideas that passed these checks were added to our list of ideas within two working days.
- 2.9 A debate on the feasibility of the public proposals was incorporated into the Thurrock Council's Managers' Conference, September 2010 – where groups of managers were asked to score the public's budget saving proposals against the following criteria: Opportunities, Timeline, Estimated Savings, Achievability and Impact on community. Results of phase one and details of the Managers' Conference scores have been incorporated into the corporate programme team's work plan for further investigation. The council recognises that some proposals can be implemented immediately while others may take up to four years to implement.

2.10 The campaign lasted for six weeks between 2 August 2010 and 13 September 2010. Subsequent phases of the Let's Talk campaign will focus on detailed consultation of individual proposals.

**3. ISSUES AND/OR OPTIONS:**

3.1 The campaign engaged with more than 3,800 individuals; capturing 167 public budget saving proposals (in addition to the 58 proposals supplied by the council) and recording more than 52,500 votes.

3.2 Voting anomalies, which suggest a high volume of repeat votes by an individual or a group of people, were identified against less than 2% of the budget saving proposals. An asterix (\*) highlights the relevant proposals in paragraphs 3.6 and 3.8.

3.3 The budget saving proposals received through the Let's Talk campaign were diverse and related to many areas of council expenditure. Potential budget saving opportunities were suggested as part of how the council manages its buildings. These included introducing automatic light sensors (so lights are only turned on when they are needed), reviewing the use of air conditioning and heating systems – which include the temperature of the air vents and the water.

3.4 A number of proposals directly related to Member activity were received regarding political expenses; including the restructure of Cabinet positions, reducing the number of ward councillors, reducing political allowances and the cancellation of councillor Blackberries all featured as proposals. Savings opportunities were also suggested in relation to the mayor and the use of the mayoral car.

3.5 Other budget saving themes featuring frequently were the use of consultants and reducing the number of senior managers.

**Comment [s]:** Other headings may be appropriate. The report should outline the reasoning that leads to its recommendations and **must** include:

1. a brief summary of options considered;
2. consultation outcomes
3. a risk assessment.
4. Whether the responsible cabinet members have been consulted/contributed to the report (NB professional and political advice must be clearly distinguished)

- See para.5.5 of the report writing guidelines.

3.6 The table below shows the ten proposals which received the highest total number of votes.

	Total votes	Votes 'Agree'	Votes 'Disagree'
Re-commissioning services within Adult Education*	2231	165	2066
Return of planning powers to the council*	837	210	627
Reduce financial support available to Impulse Leisure	798	183	615
Restructuring Thurrock Youth and Connexions Information Advice and Guidance service*	619	162	457
Review and reduce high salaried positions	597	509	88
Reduce employees working hours	504	182	322
Removal of one senior manager in Community Well-Being Directorate	502	412	90
Staff reduction in the Sports and Leisure team.	492	186	306
Cut Cllrs Allowances	465	401	64
Less managers	462	360	102

3.7 The table below shows the ten proposals which received highest number of votes as 'agree'.

	Total votes	Votes 'Agree'	Votes 'Disagree'
Cut Cllrs Allowances	465	401	64
Review the use of private consultants being contracted to write TBC policies and strategies	451	374	77
Sale of council land	442	371	71
Reduce the number of cabinet members in line with service cuts	449	368	81
Less managers	462	360	102
Cut down big time on food for meetings at Civic Offices	414	334	80
Reduce financial support available for the Royal Opera House	443	333	110
Reduce consultancy levels within Children, Education and Families Directorate	417	328	89
Vigorously collect unpaid council tax	379	315	64
Allow staff to buy extra holiday time	452	293	159

3.8 The table below shows the ten proposals which received highest number of votes as ‘disagree’

	Total votes	Votes ‘Agree’	Votes ‘Disagree’
Re-commissioning services within Adult Education*	2231	165	2066
Return of planning powers to the council*	837	210	627
Reduce financial support available to Impulse Leisure	798	183	615
Restructuring Thurrock Youth and Connexions Information Advice and Guidance service*	619	162	457
Identify potential efficiencies at Collins House	426	96	330
All council staff to take an immediate 20% wage cut	433	107	326
Reduce employees working hours	504	182	322
Staff reduction in the Sports and Leisure team.	492	186	306
Spend less cleaning the streets	371	117	254
Review frequency of waste collection	373	121	252

3.9 Thurrock Council has already highlighted and implemented a number of budget saving opportunities across the council as part of their austerity measures, which were set out in the *Budget and Priorities 2010/11 and Beyond* report, include:

- An immediate freeze on all recruitment other than that agreed by the Directors’ Board;
- A withdrawal of delegated spending approval below Heads of Service until Directors and the Board are satisfied that delegation can continue within acceptable bounds;
- A requirement on all senior managers to heavily constrain expenditure wherever possible until Council has made decisions on the future shape of the budget;
- Steps should be taken to minimise and avoid agency/temporary/consultancy costs where possible. Where these are incurred Directors and Heads of Service will need to demonstrate that they have a good grasp on this type of expenditure and there is a strong case for the deployment of these resources;
- No attendance at external conferences and seminars
- No expenditure on hospitality at internal meetings
- No expenditure on external venues unless all internal and Council owned venues not available or suitable.
- No expenditure on printed publications (unless statutory and required to be printed on paper as opposed to internet or other electronic means).

- Reduce/stop producing internal posters and all advertising through central Design team to approve and allow central buying.
- No lease extensions on property for the next 24 months unless approved by Directors Board
- No spend on overtime unless agreed by Head of Service or Directors
- Review and reduce all expenditure on training and prioritise remaining spend on statutory training required and training linked to redeployment opportunities. Lowest cost for training delivery will be sought, including on-line, distance learning, groups on-site and opportunities for sharing training with partners.
- Proactive review of all interims, agency staff and temps. Assume the need to terminate all unless a case is made to Directors' Board to keep the post. If the post remains, look to move to a fixed term contract or re-negotiate terms wherever appropriate
- Stop staff using taxis (not including essential taxi journeys for service users)

NOTE: these examples are not exhaustive but a minimum set that are also to concentrate the mind on really questioning whether the expenditure, no matter how small, is really necessary.

- 3.10 Some of the austerity measures were also raised as budget saving opportunities by Thurrock's community through Thurrock's Budget, Let's Talk.
- 3.11 Thurrock Council is keen to implement budget saving opportunities which will not impact on frontline service delivery. Several initiatives have already been implemented to reduce council spending – for example the introduction of a Design and Print framework, the appointment of a Civic Office's 'Handyman' (to reduce call out costs) and the introduction of a managing absence pilot. The unanimous decision by Council to reduce Member allowances by five percent is evidence that Members are examining all saving opportunities.
- 3.12 All phase one budget saving proposals (as set out in Appendix A) are being filtered and validated against the initial moderation criteria before being passed to relevant services for consideration. Details of the validation process will be promoted on [www.thurrock.gov.uk/talk](http://www.thurrock.gov.uk/talk) as will updates on the status of individual proposals. Any proposals which are likely to achieve a tangible saving will be implemented as part of the efficiency programme.
- 3.13 Phase two of Thurrock's Budget, Let's Talk will ensure that Thurrock's communities are given the opportunity to comment on the detail of specific budget saving proposals. It will track individual proposals and identify whether the proposals are being considered for implementation or being discarded.

**4. CONSULTATION (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)**

- 4.1 Phase two of Thurrock’s Budget, Let’s Talk will continue to place Thurrock people at the centre of decision’s made about Thurrock Council’s budget – consulting with people directly affected by the proposals. Final recommendations will be presented to Cabinet in November/December 2010.
- 4.2 Proposals will also be considered by each Overview and Scrutiny committee alongside the budget reports.

**Comment [j]:** This should include any consultation with Ward Members and Shadow Portfolio Holders, as well as any public or statutory consultation

**Comment [a]:** Please refer to Section 5.7 of the Report Writing Guidelines

**5. IMPACT ON CORPORATE POLICIES, PRIORITIES, PERFORMANCE AND COMMUNITY IMPACT**

- 5.1 Community involvement in Thurrock’s Budget, Let’s Talk will influence the development of the council budget setting and impact the delivery of services by Thurrock Council.

**Comment [sj]:** This section should always be completed – if they are dealt with fully in another part of the report, they also need a brief cross reference here. The names and job titles of the officers providing the implications should be provided in full – see Guideline 6.1 and please note Democratic Services Deadlines and ensure that officers providing implications are given 5 clear working days to work on the report. Authors can write implications but they must be signed off by the appropriate officers

**Comment [sj]:** See Guideline 6.2

**Comment [sj]:** See Guideline 6.3

**Comment [sj]:** See Guideline 6.4

**6. IMPLICATIONS**

**6.1 Financial**

Implications verified by: **Sean Clark**  
 Telephone and email: **01375 652010**  
**sclark@thurrock.gov.uk**

Phase one of the Thurrock’s Budget, Let’s Talk campaign was produced in house. The total external cost implication was £500. Further phases of this campaign have the potential to incur additional costs. All budget saving proposals will be considered and used to inform the setting of the Council’s budget for 2011/12 and the medium term.

**6.2 Legal**

Implications verified by: **Jamie Hollis**  
 Telephone and email: **01375 652925**  
**jhollis@thurrock.gov.uk**

There are no specific legal implications directly arising from the Thurrock’s Budget, Let’s Talk campaign at this stage of the process. When detailed proposals are developed in response to the campaign, specific legal advice should be sought to ensure that the Council is meeting its obligations and is acting lawfully.

**6.3 Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Samson DeAlyn**  
 Telephone and email: **01375 652472**  
**sdealyn@thurrock.gov.uk**

When consulting on the specific details of budget saving proposals the Thurrock's Budget, Let's Talk campaign should be as accessible as possible to all of Thurrock's communities. All elements of subsequent consultations will need to consider the equality issues and use of the Community Engagement Toolkit will support this.

Each savings proposal considered for implementation will need to undergo an Equality Impact Assessment to identify potential adverse impacts on any groups.

**7. CONCLUSION**

7.1 Thurrock Council's 'Thurrock's Budget, Let's Talk' campaign started in August 2010. The results from the engagement exercise are being considered within Thurrock's efficiency programme.

7.2 At a total cost of £500 the engagement of the Thurrock's Budget, Let's Talk campaign represents value for money. The campaign engaged with more than 3,800 individuals; capturing 167 public budget saving proposals (in addition to the 58 proposals supplied by the council) and recording more than 52,500 votes.

**BACKGROUND PAPERS USED IN PREPARING THIS REPORT:**

- N/A

**APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT:**

- Appendix A – Details of individual proposals as placed on [www.thurrock.gov.uk](http://www.thurrock.gov.uk)

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Comment [sj]: This should inform the recommendations in the report

Comment [sj]: See Guideline 8. If any Papers are to be placed in the Members room that relate to this report, you should also list them here

Comment [sj]: List the Appendices referred to in the Report

Comment [sj]: Insert the full contact details of the author of the report