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**Manchester City Council  
Report for Resolution**

**Report To:** Resources and Governance Overview and Scrutiny  
Committee – 15 October 2009

**Subject:** Revenue Budget Consultation

**Report of:** City Treasurer and Chief Executive

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**Summary**

The report outlines proposals for consulting the public on the Council's revenue budget plans.

**Recommendations**

The Committee are recommended to note and endorse the proposed process for consulting the public as part of this years revenue budget and business planning process (section 3 of the report).

The Committee are asked to consider future proposals for consultation on the revenue budget as outlined in the report and indicate if there are any further options for future years that they would want officers to investigate further and report back on (section 4 of the report).

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**Wards Affected:**

The consultation on the revenue budget would take part across the whole of the city and in all wards.

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**Background documents (available for public inspection):**

The following documents disclose important facts on which the report is based and have been relied upon in preparing the report. Copies of the background documents are available up to 4 years after the date of the meeting. If you would like a copy please contact one of the contact officers above.

- Budget consultation leaflets 2007/8, 2008/9 and 2009/10

- Revenue budget reports to Executive including outcome of consultation exercises 14 February 2007, 13 February 2008 and 11 February 2009.

## **1.0 Introduction**

1.1 It has been the practice of the Council over the last few years to consult with the general public on its revenue budget plans. The number of responses received to this consultation have been disappointing and ideas are being developed as part of the Council's overall Communication Strategy to try and engage with the public on the Council's budget proposals in a more meaningful way.

1.2 The duty to "inform, consult and involve" which came into place in April 2009 places a statutory responsibility on authorities to inform, consult and involve representatives of local people (likely to be affected or have an interest) in routine functions and one off decisions. It requires authorities to coordinate engagement activities with its partners and ensure that involvement is central to service delivery, policy and decision making. Therefore it is a requirement that the council informs, consults and involves local people in budget setting. There is currently a new Engagement Strategy being developed for the Manchester Partnership.

## **2.0 Background**

2.1 Effective public consultation on a Council's budget proposals is seen as good practice and is one of the items considered under the Use of Resources element of the CAA. Over the last three years consultation on the budget has been carried out in the following way:

- Production of a "Budget Consultation Leaflet" which provides some details of where the Council's money comes from and where it gets spent (based on the budget for the current year) and broadly outlines the overall financial position being faced by the Council in the coming year including any potential pressures on budgets. Some broad detail is supplied on where the Council is seeking to save money through efficiencies and where the Council sees its priority for any potential investment. The leaflet then seeks views on whether the respondents agree with the priorities outlined or to put forward thoughts on where their priorities for investment lie or generally where they feel services could be improved or reduced.
- The leaflet is made widely available at Council public buildings including the Town Hall, Community Centres, Advice Centres, Libraries, Leisure Centres, Adult Education Centres and Citizen Advice Bureaus. Copies were also provided to the City Centre Management Company and the Chamber of Commerce for circulation to businesses in Manchester.
- The document is posted onto the Council's web site in an electronic form with a link from the Council's home page.
- Voluntary Sector groups are e-mailed with details of the consultation exercise through the Community Network for Manchester.
- In addition to the production of the leaflet, an article giving details of the consultation has been published in the January edition of the Manchester People

- A range of options are offered for responses including a special e-mail address, a dedicated answer phone and a free post address.

2.2 The consultation leaflet is usually issued in late December / early January and the consultation period runs until the end of January (to fit with reporting to Executive in February). An early indication of issues arising from the consultation is normally reported to scrutiny committees in mid January and any responses received after the end of January but before the Executive report is finalised have also been included in the Executive report.

2.3 Despite the wide circulation of the leaflet, the number of responses received over the last three years has been poor. The table below summarises the level of response over the last three years.

#### **Budget Consultation Responses**

	<b>2007/8</b>	<b>2008/9</b>	<b>2009/10</b>
<b>Total Number of Responses</b>	5	28	22
<b>Responses Received from:</b>			
Residents	5	13	13
Staff	0	4	6
Associations / organisations	0	3	2
Not disclosed	0	8	1
<b>Responses received through:</b>			
E-mail	2	21	16
Phone (consultation hot line)	0	1	4
Letter	3	6	2

2.4 Residents are continuously consulted about their top priorities. Findings from these consultations, and specifically the Place Survey, are fed into the decision making process using the State of the City Suite of reports.

### **3.0 Proposals for this year**

3.1 It was recognised, after last year's budget process that improvements were necessary but that the appointment of the City's Head of Communication would be key to taking this forward. This has meant that the time available for 2010/11 budget is limited and the scale of any activity will have to be containable.

3.2 The following is therefore proposed for the current year:

- There will be a limited print run of the consultation leaflet for distribution at libraries with the emphasis on providing the information via the website (home page linking to bespoke page highlighting direction of travel for the budget and proposals for Council Tax).
- Local PR - press release at the start of the consultation encouraging views and near the end of the process highlighting deadline.

- Local advertising - Manchester Evening News, North East Manchester Advertiser and South Manchester Reporter and Wythenshawe World launching the consultation
- Email key partners with link to the website and encourage their views (as organisations)
- Email key partners and ask them to issue an internal message to their staff asking for their views
- Intranet - ensure staff have visibility of the consultation
- Email all staff and invite their views and responses.
- Email key Trade Unions inviting their comments
- Local forums and networks - utilise the relationships we have with community groups, third sector etc and email them inviting their response (as organisations)
- Local forums and networks - send an internal template for them to issue to their members and encourage a response
- Local businesses and organisations - email them inviting their response (as organisations)
- Local businesses and organisations - send an internal template for them to issue to their staff/members and encourage a response from Manchester residents
- Issue ward coordinators a briefing note regarding the consultation for them to share with residents, local business etc and encourage their networks to respond.

We need to be clear what it is that we are asking residents and others as part of the consultation. Specific rather than open questions are more likely to elicit a response. Consultation about priorities will continue through surveys and other consultation activity. The main vehicle, which will cover the general population, will be the new continuous Telephone Survey which will replace the Place Survey.

3.3 As we are not producing any physical printed material, costs will be minimal, between £8-10k dependent on media charges which could be quite high due to Christmas and it being a busy time of year.

3.4 It is anticipated with the above approach that response rates should be considerably higher than in previous years. The communication also presents an opportunity to promote what the Council is doing in terms of savings, investment and proposals for a nil Council Tax increase as well as seeking confirmation that the public are behind our general direction of travel.

3.5 The information to be included within the above would be drawn from business plans and option appraisals which are currently being drafted and which will be going through a second round of support and challenge in October. The aim would be to “launch” the consultation early in December to allow a longer consultation period than has been possible over the last few years.

3.6 Residents have told us that they feel that they are often consulted but then don't hear the results and outcomes of that consultation. It is important that we give clear feedback to residents following consultation and show the impact that their engagement has had. We need to allow for this within the timetable.

#### **4.0 Considerations for future years**

4.1 In future years the Council may wish, in addition to the above process, to consider additional consultation activities on a more on-going basis. This could include more pro-active approaches such as:

- Formal presentations to / consultation with ward committees
- Formal presentations to / consultation with the voluntary sector
- Opinion surveys
- Focus Groups
- Community workshops
- Structured Public meetings / budget conferences
- On-line consultation tools (there are a number of such tools which allow the public to consider how the budget of the council has to be balanced and to allow them to submit their preferences on the balance of spend and Council Tax levels and their priorities for spend).

4.2 The Community Engagement Strategy states that in line with the local compact best practice indicates that there should be a three month consultation period. We should aim to get closer to this time period in future years.

4.3 All the above options would require additional resource input including some cash outlay and all would need to be investigated further to identify such costs and input requirements. Members are asked to identify whether there are any proposals listed above that they would want officers to investigate further with a view to making a further report on proposals for next year at a later date.