

Note to: SMT BPT

From: Jen Green, Head of Strategic Communications

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Subject: Communications and engagement approach for budget setting 2017-2020

1. Purpose

- 1.1 This paper outlines the proposed communication and engagement approach for the council's three-year budget setting process, taking an Our Manchester.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 Last year's budget consultation was the most successful ever with significantly increased levels of engagement and over 1,330 formal responses over a four-week period.
- 2.2 For the first time, a primarily digital approach to engagement was taken – providing a wide selection of content (short videos, live streamed meetings, social media Q&As) across a range of digital channels. This digital-first approach allowed the Council to deliver both universal and targeted activity which drove engagement from a range of audiences and groups to ensure greater representation from across the city.
- 2.3 The digital approach was complemented by considered offline activity to drive awareness and use of online engagement opportunities; this included the delivery of a proactive media plan. Internally staff were engaged in a more proactive way – delivering interactive sessions for more than 1,840 staff and supporting this through extensive use of existing internal communication channels.

3. Principles for the proposed approach

- 3.1 This year the aim is to build on the success of last year's approach, with a variety of additional options that support increased engagement, both online and off line, taking an Our Manchester approach. This approach sets the tone for the Council's new way of working and provides the opportunity to have a fuller conversation with all stakeholders so that they are truly part of the budget setting process; using the three-year budget strategy as opportunity to focus on helping people and communities to connect growth.
- 3.2 In setting a three year budget there is also a clear requirement for the communication and engagement approach, and the number of people engaged, to grow in line with the scale of the decisions being made. The core stakeholders include:

- Staff
- Manchester residents
- Manchester businesses
- Our partners – across the public, private, and voluntary and community sector

3.3 To reflect this approach our communication and engagement activity should:

- **Be strengths-based** - offering tools that allow all stakeholders to tell the Council not just what they value but also what they can offer, in terms of ideas and help in meeting the challenges and opportunities ahead
- **Be open and honest** – providing proactive information that outlines the challenge, the process and the options including the statutory requirements, in a clear and timely fashion
- **Be collaborative** – use expertise, channels and ambassadors from partners, stakeholders and local businesses
- **Be representative** – engage and gather views that reflect the make-up of the city. This will ensure that our equality duty is met and that channels and content are created and used that ensure that anyone who wants to participate in the process can.
- **Be people focused** – with materials developed in a tone and language that our stakeholders will understand and that will encourage them to get involved
- **Provide sufficient time to allow true engagement** –the proposal this year aims to increase the period of engagement from 4 weeks to a total of 30 weeks over two phases
- **Be digital** – understanding that the majority of stakeholders want to engage online and providing the appropriate tools to do that.

4. The approach

4.1 To maximise opportunities for involvement throughout the budget setting process a three stage approach will be utilised.

- Phase one – **Budget conversation** with an Our Manchester approach. This will take place from 21 July until 16 September 2016.
- Phase two – **‘You said... the options are / we’re proposing’**. Taking place between 16 November and 10 February.
- Phase three – **‘You said, we will’**. From 3 March 2017.

The phases are outlined in more detail below, explaining the objectives and activity.

4.2 Phase 1: Budget conversation (21 July – 16 September)

4.2.1 The initial phase is not ‘consultation’ – in its traditional sense - driven. Rather, this would be the start of a big conversation that aims firstly to understand

what people value while driving awareness of the Council's budget challenge and the budget setting process.

4.2.2 These views will support the organisation to develop budget options that meet the declared needs of local people, organisations and businesses. Alongside the 'big conversation' phase 1 options and the budget strategy will be developed, informed by the outcomes of these conversations.

4.2.3 The communication objectives for this phase are:

a) To deliver broad awareness of:

- The shared vision for the city as outlined in the Our Manchester Strategy
- The benefits of working together to deliver the city's shared ambitions and meet the challenges using an Our Manchester approach
- How the Council is funded
- How the Council's budget is currently spent
- The scale of the budget challenge, as far as we are currently aware, faced by the Council – both in increasing demand and decreasing resources
- The breadth of services the Council provides
- The emerging budget strategy and options.

b) To provide opportunities for residents, businesses and other stakeholders to:

- Talk about the services that the Council provides that they value
- Provide ideas about what the Council could do differently
- Provide ideas about what they, their community, their neighbourhood, businesses or other public services could do differently to support the services they value.

4.2.4 The final objective would require discussions with partners and our staff to ensure that they are appropriately involved in the process. It would be especially vital to link this to the delivery of the Locality Plan objectives and the key pillars of a single commissioning system, the development of the Local Care Organisation, 'One Team' – delivering integrated health and social care services and the single hospital service for the city.

4.2.5 Activity for phase one is dependent on audience, recognising that a one size fits all approach will not engender the level of engagement required. The activity includes numerous opportunities to support the development of a 'big conversation' and includes:

- **Digital and off line questionnaire:** A short online form/questionnaire outlining current areas of spend and asking stakeholders to rank the areas of spend according to the things they value the most.

The form would also offer opportunities for people to share their reasons for the rankings given and to share ideas about what the Council and they could

do differently. Finance and Communications will work closely to understand how this is best presented as just numbers alone will not acknowledge the level of demand/need and statutory responsibilities.

During this and each future phase, details of stakeholders will be gathered to provide further opportunities to engage them throughout the budget setting process.

- **Engaging digital content:** A series of online ‘snackable’ or easily consumed content, that pulls stakeholders into the online questionnaire, this includes:
 - A series of short videos, providing overviews of the ambition, challenge and the opportunities to get involved in shaping the future of Manchester’s Council services. These will need to be in a mixture of formats – from direct interviews with Executive Members to short animated films
 - A set of infographic images and GIFs (short compressed animations or films) outlining elements of our key messaging
 - Online polls on social media - these could act as a more provocative way to gather interest for the online form – either by sharing ideas already submitted or by asking stakeholders to rank services or ideas against each other.

For business audiences it is proposed that a short video including the Leader or Executive Member and Chief Executive be created - outlining the vision for businesses in the city, how the Our Manchester approach could help deliver this and the opportunity to contribute.

- **Community driven content:** To offer a more informal and people -focused way of providing feedback it is suggested that residents and groups are encouraged to make their own short videos, provide still images and text outlining their priorities or responses to one of the questions above.

To kick-start this element of the consultation, it is proposed that a series of short films or stories are curated, taking a similar approach to the ‘Humans of New York’ stories(www.humansofnewyork.com) using key ambassadors from across the city – including Executive Members, local business leaders, existing groups like the youth council and community leaders.

This approach provides an ongoing set of engaging content that can be used across digital channels to further encourage conversations and provides real-life opinions and ideas to spark debate and discussion online.

- **Social media content** – rather than just using social media to broadcast budget messages or drive people to online content, it is suggested that social media Q&As which have proved particularly successful previously are run again. It is suggested that this approach is taken again to help drive the big conversation, but that the number of people ‘leading’ the conversation increases – working with Executive Members and focusing on their portfolio priorities.

- **Face to face engagement** – A variety of face to face opportunities will be made available during this phase. This will be led by directorates rather than Communications, however, materials and support will be offered. Existing business engagement activity will be mapped throughout the engagement period to make the most of speaking opportunities and potential interactive sessions, linked to established groups such as the MIB, the Our Manchester Forum and the LEP.

For Council employees there will be positive and productive staff events held throughout the engagement period. These events will be interactive and offer an opportunity for staff to get involved in shaping potential proposals for their directorate – based on an Our Manchester strengths-based approach. These sessions will be led by Strategic Directors but will be supported by the delivery of a series of consistent tools provided by Communications. There will also be specific opportunities for engagement with Trade Unions – both corporately and within directorates.

Similarly, partners should be engaged in an ongoing series of conversations throughout the process. It is particularly important that partners are specifically involved in the identification and evaluation of options and careful consideration to partner engagement and the coordination of partnerships conversations is required. These conversations will be led by the appropriate Strategic Director. Both the activity with partners and staff will be front loaded to start of phase one to ensure that sufficient time is given to provide a thorough response.

The ability to link the Locality Plan activity and share channels and engagement mechanisms will be important and Communications will work with Health and Social Care colleagues to make sure this is also frontloaded into this phase.

Similarly, the link to the development of Area Plans in North, Central and South needs to be explored. This includes the opportunity to engage with residents, with an Our Manchester approach, alongside partners.

It would also be helpful to include members of SMT alongside Executive Members to participate in local engagement. This would support an Our Manchester approach, of listening and engaging with communities directly about things that matter to them. This approach will require further development, but potentially could be the residential version of the Listening in Action sessions held with staff earlier this year.

- **Media strategy** - A proactive media strategy should be developed across all three phases with the aim of communicating the decision-making process, highlighting the opportunity to get involved and signposting stakeholders to the online tools available.

4.2.6 It is not proposed to use a formal budget calculator (offering the chance for people to fully set their own budget) as having reviewed the options available, the process of engaging is time consuming, sometimes complicated, taking

about 15-20 minutes to complete. As a result budget calculators tend to engage fewer people and the bounce rate (or drop off rate) is very high. It is often the very engaged or knowledgeable that go on to complete the calculator process and so offers limited feedback, given people find it too time consuming or complicated to persevere until the end. This does not support the desire for better conversations with residents.

- 4.2.7 It is proposed that weekly updates on responses to this phase of activity will be provided throughout August to SMT and Executive Members. This will allow activity to be tailored to engage any groups that are underrepresented and help shape the second phase of the consultation activity.
- 4.2.8 It is suggested that the final results are taken to scrutiny committees in October.
- 4.2.9 Those that have participated and provided their contact details will be notified about the formal consultation. Results will also be shared through Council and partner channels, driving people to the formal options consultation.

5. Phase 2: Consulting on budget options - 'You said... the options are / we're proposing' (16 November – 10 February)

- 5.1 The second phase of activity is the formal consultation phase. The engagement during this period aims to reiterate the ambition for the city, the challenges and provide a summary of the feedback provided during phase one as well as asking people for their comments on the options available. This phase links to the formal publication of the Council's efficiency plan to the DCLG and will follow the DCLG principles for consultation. During this period, there is a need to be mindful of the potential for a budget statement during September and October and the implications this may have on the city and emerging budget strategy and proposals.
- 5.2 This phase provides an opportunity to share budget options, as opposed to proposals, earlier and gather feedback on them individually before making final proposals before the consultation closes, and then taking decisions. There would be a specific period of statutory consultation on defined proposals. This consultation will be promoted to businesses as well as residents and will ensure the Council is compliant with its statutory duty under the Local Government Finance Act 1992 to consult with persons or bodies appearing to them to be representative of persons subject to Non-Domestic Rates (also known as Business Rates) in their area, about their proposals for expenditure for the forthcoming financial year.
- 5.3 The length of this phase allows time to complete all required statutory consultations and provides enough time to have meaningful conversations about individual options. It also allows the Council to adapt messaging based on the outcomes of the first phase and ensure engagement around the options following the announcement of the financial settlement in December, if required.

- 5.4 Statutory consultations around individual options will be managed by the individual service or directorate but supported by Communications with implementation and messaging to ensure consistency with the wider engagement approach.
- 5.5 The proposed communication objectives for this phase are
- a) To further increase awareness of the council's ambitions and ongoing budget challenges to all stakeholders
 - b) To ensure stakeholders are informed of the impact of their feedback and how this has been used to shape budget options using a 'you told us... we are proposing' approach
 - c) To encourage feedback on proposals across all stakeholders groups

5.6 The suggested activity for phase two includes:

- **Plain English summaries** - a short, online, plain English, written summary of each proposal be developed alongside an Agree/Disagree question. Written comments should also be encouraged alongside each proposal explaining the reasons for their response.

To ensure an ongoing people-focused conversational approach the options should be communicated according to theme areas that make sense to major external stakeholders rather than by 'directorates'. This will allow the Council to link similar options, for example, 'options to increase income for the Council', or 'options for services for older people'.

- **Digital content** - As with phase one it is proposed that the digital and social media content is developed in line with the responses and options – once again using social media to drive consultation responses.

In addition, it is proposed that an animated or voice-over video is created summarising the feedback provided during the first engagement phase and the broad principles underpinning our options. This is intended to pull stakeholders to the online summary and questions.

As in previous years, digital activity will target underrepresented groups and drive engagement, with access to corporate channels as well as taking a collaborative approach and increasing our reach through partner and stakeholder channels. Driving people to live streamed meetings to ensure that people are aware of the open and transparent process.

- **Offline engagement** - There will be a considered off-line approach to ensure equitable access to the consultation process. This will include opportunities for a media facility and briefing if considered appropriate. Hard copies of consultation questionnaires will be produced, but in more limited numbers and specialist formats available on request; however, offline alternatives to print should be available too particularly to ensure that groups with protected characteristics are effectively engaged with.

As in previous years a comprehensive engagement plan will be developed by Directorates for specific statutory consultations which include events and the opportunities for face to face discussions.

5.7 The results of the formal consultation phase will be sent to Resource and Governance Overview and Scrutiny Committee in February 2017.

5.9 Once again those that have participated and provided their contact details will be notified about the results formal consultation. Results will also be shared through Council and partner channels as well as through the budget setting process outlined in phase three.

6. Phase 3: Budget setting - 'You said, we will' (3 March onwards)

6.1 This final phase is to share the outcomes of the formal budget consultation. The approach will be more proactive and engaging than in previous years and will provide clarity about the results and the Council plans to deliver against them, explaining why the decisions made have been taken.

6.2 The communication objectives for this phase are:

- a) To communicate the final decision-making process and timescales for budget proposals
- b) To thank stakeholders for their involvement and share how their feedback was used to shape final proposals
- c) To reiterate the ambition, explain how the proposals support that ambition (as far as possible) and provide a call for action for further engagement around our Manchester.

6.3 Once again activity includes the live streamed budget-meetings promoted via digital channels, directly to those previously engaged in the budget process and via the media. Social media will drive people to the results online.

6.4 Once proposals have been made a short video will be created summarising the engagement process, the feedback received and the final proposals. It is suggested that this is a talking head, fronted by the Leader or Executive Member as appropriate. This would not just focus on the results of the consultation, but support the call to action to further engage with Our Manchester.

6.5 Following the Budget Council, Council tax bills and accompanying booklets will act as a key communication tool – providing a summary of 'You told us, We wills' to residents and businesses via the Business Rates booklet.

6.6 This will be supplemented by a proactive media and social media plan, ensuring leadership-led coverage in local print and broadcast media is produced.

7. Issues to consider

7.1 Delivering a strengths-based engagement on a 'deficit' process

While taking a bold strengths-based approach to the Council's budget engagement provides a great opportunity to reinforce the Our Manchester approach, it does pose some challenges. The overwhelming narrative nationally about uncertainty, austerity and difficult times, is both understandably negative and the Government's previous approach to making cuts to public services is based on a deficit model – certainly in communication terms.

7.2 While stakeholders are engaged in positive discussions about future services there is a risk that the proposed values based messaging could be drowned out by the breadth of other, more negative budget information being delivered or that expectations about what is achievable are unreasonably raised.

7.3 This could, however, also provide an opportunity to raise awareness of the Our Manchester approach among audiences as the Council will be taking a more positive approach than most and set the tone about how Manchester collectively works together to both overcome challenges and achieve its strong ambitions.

8. Monitoring and evaluation

8.1 Working with PRI, it is vital to monitor the performance of the communications and consultation plan during the three phases. During the first phase, weekly updates about the conversation will be provided. This will enable Directorates and Communications to modify and develop the approach based on insight and response rates.

9. Conclusion

9.1 The proposed approach to consultation and engagement is designed to promote a more open and transparent approach to the way that the budget is set and decisions are made. Based on the Our Manchester approach, it offers the opportunity for honest and frank conversations with all stakeholders within the context of challenging financial times.