

Extract from Council Report – 2016/17 Budget Estimates

Council Meeting – 20 June 2016

7. CONSULTATION

- 7.1. At its meeting of 13 July 2015, the Council approved a 12 month trial of the online community engagement platforms of EngagementHQ and its complementary participatory budgeting tool, Budget Allocator.
- 7.2. A participatory budgeting process was developed to engage the community on the Council's 2016/2017 operating budget. Given that it was the first time the Council had formally engaged the community in its budget setting process, the engagement project aimed to not only raise awareness of and educate the public on the Council's budget process, but provide the Council with some insight into what programs and services are important to the community and how they would like to see the rates money allocated.
- 7.3. The 2016/17 Budget engagement was housed on the Your Say Hobart engagement website and used the interactive and conceptual budget allocator tool. The project page clearly outlined the purpose of the engagement, the public's role in the engagement and how feedback received would be used. The page contained detailed information explaining each program and service area, the budget process, 'where the money comes from', 'where the money goes' and how budget decisions align with the Council's strategic direction.
 - 7.3.1. The budget allocator tool challenged the community to tell us how they would allocate \$96.5 million of the Council's 2016/17 operating budget.
 - 7.3.2. Members of the public were invited to have their say by playing the 'Budget Challenge', budget simulator tool that allowed them to adjust spending on particular program and service areas to see how their choices impacted on the services delivery, the overall budget and ultimately the impact on rates.
 - 7.3.3. The 'Budget Challenge' featured 11 program and service areas where \$96.5 million in operating budget is spent and provided for three spending choices – increase spending by 5 per cent, maintain current spending levels or reduce spending by 5 per cent.
 - 7.3.4. It should be noted that the intent of the budget challenge was to provide a conceptual tool to educate and demonstrate in a simplistic way how the Council's operating budget works, how spending choices have impacts and sometimes difficult decisions need to be made. It provided a high-level view of what is a complex budget and process.

7.4. The 2016/17 Budget Consultation commenced on 19 March 2016 and was open until 29 April 2016 allowing a consultation period of six weeks.

7.4.1. Promotion of the 2016/17 Budget engagement process included:

- The City of Hobart website;
- Email notification to 206 Your Say Hobart registered participants;
- A ‘boosted’ post on the City of Hobart Facebook page that reached 6913 people with engagement by 146 people;
- Several elected members promoted the opportunity on their Facebook pages;
- Two advertisements in *the Mercury* newspaper;
- A media release;
- An interview with Alderman Cocker on the ABC Radio’s Breakfast program;
- Banners, posters and flyers in Council venues – Mathers House, DKHAC, Youth Arts and Recreation Centre, City owned and operated car parks, Elizabeth Mall Information Booth, the Council’s Customer Service Centre;
- Direct mail to progress and resident associations and the Council of Hobart Community Associations; and
- Council officers circulating details of the engagement opportunity to contact lists within their respective Divisions. For example, community and sector organisations – Hobart Access Advisory Committee, Hobart Older Person’s Reference Group, Hobart Family and Children’s Network, Hobart Mum’s Network, South Hobart Sustainable Community, Hobart Multicultural Networking for Harmony Committee, respondents to recent community engagement processes, sportsfield user groups and Traffic Committees, several of which shared the opportunity on their Facebook pages.

7.4.2. The engagement process was by the nature of the budget allocator tool, an on-line only process but in addition to the *Your Say Hobart* website, officers also conducted a ‘pop up’ presence for an afternoon in the Elizabeth Mall and at the Council’s Community Forum held in New Town, which provided an opportunity for people to learn about the Council’s budget and play the budget challenge on-site via iPads.



Image – 2016/17 Budget consultation ‘pop-up’ Elizabeth Street Mall

Results

7.5. In terms of the number of people engaged, the analytics from the *Your Say Hobart* show:

There were 462 visits to the project page, of which:

- There were 381 aware visitors, meaning a person visited the project page but did not take any further action and is considered aware that the consultation project exists.
- There were 76 informed visitors, meaning the visitor has taken the next step and clicked on something on the project page, whether that be a document, the FAQ section or the budget allocator tool. Clicking on something on the project page suggests interest in the project and the visitor is considered to be informed.
- There were 75 engaged visitors, meaning the visitor contributed to a tool – the budget challenge.
- Accordingly, 75 budget submissions were received.

7.5.1. While Budget Challenge participants were asked to leave comments about their choices on the 11 program areas, only one participant did this. 27 participants did however make an overall comment on the budget spending levels just prior to submitting their budget and a further 11 participants made comments on the consultation process.

7.5.2. Of the 75 submissions received 61% were under budget and 39% were over budget. However 72% of the submissions that were under budget were within \$1M of the budget.

7.5.3. The results showed support for maintaining the existing spending levels in 7 of the 11 program areas. These included:

- Parks, Reserves & Recreation
- Community Development
- City Planning
- Environmental Health & Animal Management
- Roads, Footpaths and Stormwater
- Waste and Recycling
- City Cleansing.

7.5.4. The results showed support for reducing spending in the following program areas:

- Economic Development, Tourism, Arts & Events
- Corporate Operations
- Strategic Planning and Finance
- Parking.

7.5.5. The strongest support for an increase in spending at 45% was for the Roads, Footpaths, Stormwater and Other Infrastructure Program and comments provided indicate support for increased or improved bicycle infrastructure and roads.

7.5.6. The comments received were varied (refer attachment E) and there is no clear rationale to alter the operating budget at this stage based on the consultation. There is some support for residual funds to spend in the Roads or Parks Programs. However in general there is support to maintain / increase spending in program areas that are most visible to the community and could be described as core business such as Waste and Recycling; Roads and Parks, Reserves and Recreation.

7.5.7. There are some points of detail in the comments that will be forwarded by the General Manager to relevant officers for action or consideration.