

# Council's budget planner proves popular

✘ The council is delighted that there was a great deal more interaction with their draft budget proposals this year than in 2014. The report for next week's Finance Committee explains that they received five times more responses than last year through their 11 week long budget consultation.

The council put a lot of effort into getting the details of what they spend over to residents, including paid for advertising in the Edinburgh Evening News, and a big part of their consultation was the adoption of the online budget planner which you could use to try and balance the budget yourself.

The online planner allowed residents to have their say on what the capital should spend or save in the next three years.

Councillor Alasdair Rankin, Convener of the Finance and Resources Committee said that one of the most surprising things for those who used it was the kind of things that the council spend money on. He said: "This whole consultation process is more effective each time. Some members of the public were actually surprised at the range of services that the council provides. They had had no idea we did so many things.

"Overall this has been a successful consultation although we are always prepared for more people to get involved. We reached out to different age groups from the young to the old, and it was interesting to me what people wanted to safeguard. It is very much in line with the council's own priorities. There was a broad range of responses and we will take heed of what people had to say. That is the whole point of the consultation particularly in times like this when money is

tight.”

*1719 people used the online planner.*

*782 people phoned the council or contacted them by email or letter.*

*145 budget leaflets were completed and returned to the council.*

*524 comments were made through social media.*

✘ The council has analysed all the data from these responses and found that more men than women responded overall, that the age group 35-44 offered more responses than any other and that parents were more engaged with the consultation. There was a petition to keep Edinburgh Leisure facilities open which largely resulted from the Edinburgh Evening News coverage suggesting possible closures.

In relation to the possible increase in allotment charges almost 100 people responded on this matter, but most importantly the Federation of Edinburgh and District Allotments and Gardens Association (FEDAGA) offered some suggestions which may be implemented by the council anyway. One suggestion for increasing revenue from allotments (which are so popular across the city there is in some cases a waiting list of up to 7 years) is to put a joining fee in place for new allotment holders.

The suggestion that public toilets might be closed was a matter for some concern with the responses including the idea that the facilities might be contracted out to a profit making company.

Another important part of the process which will probably be repeated next time round is the budget Question Time which was held at the City Chambers involving six senior councillors.

Although only 40 people attended the event, 200 watched online live and the webcast was watched another 862 times afterwards.

People who responded were most concerned about possible cuts to Edinburgh Leisure, increases in allotment charges, changes in library opening hours, changes to maintenance of parks and the closure of public toilets outside the city centre. They also suggested that the council should look at ways of increasing its income rather than making any cuts to services.

Most people seem to support the protection of front line services for vulnerable people, care for the elderly, culture and refuse collection. The council is responsible for more services than any other public body in the city and has a fairly static budget of around £1bn to provide these with in the next three years. Any savings must therefore be made by implementing changes to the way the council works, whether by procurement or using technology, otherwise increases in funding for one service will mean reduced spending elsewhere.

Over the next two decades the population in the capital is expected to increase faster than any other local authority area in Scotland, and most of the growth will be at either end of the age spectrum where most of the council money is spent.

In recent years the council says it has managed to find £200m of savings or 'annual efficiencies' but it still needs to find £67m of savings in the 2017/18 budget. Some of the council moves on reorganisation of the way it works are designed to provide some of these savings. The series of changes to the [council's structure](#) will mean the establishment of four local areas and the devolution of power to the local areas who will be responsible for their own parts of the budget across all council services there.

Councillor Rankin concluded: "The comments and results of the budget planner are now being carefully considered along with all the other feedback we received. This will help us to make

the right decisions for our residents now and in the future when setting our budget. I would encourage people to watch councillors making these important decisions for the city live, via our website, or catch up afterwards on the webcast archive.”

The report will be approved at the Finance committee meeting on 3 February 2015 and then the council plans to offer feedback to both residents and organisations on the final budget decisions which will be made at the full council meeting on 12 February 2015 which you can watch online [here](#).

