

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

SERVICE REVIEW DIALOGUE 2014 FINAL REPORT

2nd December 2014
CSK Strategies Ltd

HEADLINES

This report summarises 314 comments made up to the close of the consultation period (midnight, 1st December 2014) on the Service Review Green Paper which sets out the Council's proposed approach to and initial thoughts on the future delivery of its services in the context of continued sharp reductions in funding over the next three years. The Green Paper was prepared following a long period of analysis and consideration by Review Boards made up of Councillors, senior officers and professional advisers and starting from the strategic direction set by the 2013 service review process and the consultation on the Budget 2014+ White Paper.

A consultation process on this was started on 23rd October 2014 with the Green Paper being available on the Council's website. Comments have been sent in by text, email and social media or, in the main, through an on-line survey in the Be Heard section of Birmingham City Council's website. This report also draws on and makes comparisons with points raised in last year's consultation.

Approach to Devolution and Reform of Public Services

- Strong support for triple devolution with most who responded being in favour. A handful were not in favour of some of the detail such as additional governance layers, devolution to Districts and the risk of losing economies of scale with a fragmentation of some services.
- Some concerns were expressed about the difficulties of doing this in a cuts scenario as Council resources might be spread too thinly; additional funds would be needed from central government.
- Others identified a need for training of local Councillors and community organisations.
- Many wanted to see more detail of how it would work.
- Strong support for integration and streamlining of services within the Council and with other service providers.
- Support for a 'Green City'. This meant outcome targets being set across the Council.

Children's Safeguarding and Education

- Very strong support amongst respondents for children's safeguarding to be a priority. However, many said that this should not exempt the effectiveness of the service from being thoroughly reviewed and that the increase in funding being offered was not sufficient.
- Many also felt strongly that education more generally should not be cut.
- Some felt that it was right for schools to take on more financial responsibility for services; others felt that this might detract from their primary function of providing good education. A few asked for more details to be able to reach informed opinions.
- Fears that reducing some support services would cost more money because of the loss of economies of scale. Reducing the schools audit function might increase the risks of poor safeguarding.
- School staff need to know about housing and welfare issues to deal with the issues preventing educational achievement.
- School facilities could be used in holiday periods for summer schools and visitors as a way of raising more funds.

Health and Adult Social Care

- Many respondents felt that adult care was as important as children's and should therefore have the same priority status.
- General support for integration of budgets/services and prevention but caution on NHS's ability to integrate, a focus on prevention costing more until the benefits appear and there still being the need for specific services to address problems when they do arrive.
- Some suspicions aired about the idea of a MOSE and many saying that care should be kept in-house particularly because Birmingham's adult care is seen as outstanding. There were also concerns that it might involve cuts to wages and pension rights, and that the training required for staff might be an issue.
- Promoting independence and care in the home for the elderly was strongly supported.
- A very large number of comments that mental health needs and the Supporting People service should be given a greater priority and not be subjected to service cuts, including case studies and submissions from people with mental health issues who are very concerned that they will lose their support.

- There are similar concerns for people with learning difficulties and other vulnerable groups. The need to maintain and invest in support and preventative services is a major theme of this year's Service Review Dialogue.
- Not replacing staff in customer care etc. would lead to a slow, unplanned death of these services was a view expressed a few times.
- The Pregnancy Outreach Service should be maintained because of its many measured benefits.

Employment Support and Transport Infrastructure (Economy and Culture)

- Most comments received in favour of the establishment of a Joint Delivery Unit with other local councils and agencies, with some calling for more ambitious proposals than in the past. These included submissions made by private sector partnerships.
- A few were sceptical about the impact of economic development work. Suggestions that this should also involve large private businesses and other government agencies and be funded from central government.
- Comments recognised importance of tackling youth unemployment. Many said *all* unemployment should be addressed.
- The importance of attracting conferences and events to Birmingham was generally recognised but many felt there was room here for cuts. A few felt that cuts here would be self-defeating.
- Though not raised specifically as a proposal in the Green Paper, a submission by a heritage organisation highlighted the risks to Birmingham's heritage assets by not having enough conservation officers and not being able to offer an adequate pre-planning application service.
- Proposal put forward by the Birmingham Arts partnership for the creation of a Birmingham Arts Trust.

Devolved Local Services and District SLA and Regulatory Services

- Large numbers of the respondents were strongly in favour of keeping the Youth Service. Some Be Heard respondents only focussed on this point.
- Support for advice and guidance for young people.
- Many in favour of having one point for neighbourhood, housing and other advice with a debate on whether it was enough to have one per District or whether there should be one in each ward or neighbourhood. Cost of travel can be a real obstacle to accessing such points.

- Some concern that local services were becoming harder to access.
- A number of general points made that didn't refer to the approaches in the Green Paper including:
 - housing needing a communication strategy so people knew what services they could expect,
 - the importance of 'floating support' for independent living through 'Supporting People' rather than residential care in relation to mental health,
 - the value of having a voluntary sector adviser on bidding for funds,
 - the importance of Environmental Health Officers, and
 - a small amount of opposition to devolution to Districts.

Financial and Support Services

- A few supported putting services out to external contractors but many more questioned whether this saved money. Several raised the value for money of the Service Birmingham contract.
- Frequent comments about savings being made by cutting wages and working conditions rather than organisational efficiencies.
- General support for greater efficiencies but some questioned whether these would, in practice, be false economies (e.g. cheaper buildings costing more to run; front-line staff having to spend more time on 'backroom' tasks).
- General support also for managers taking on budget monitoring and HR tasks. Some raised the need for training in and monitoring of these tasks.

Externally Contracted and Council-Traded Services

- Several ideas for raising income put forward by respondents including:
 - selling the Councils gardening expertise to the private sector,
 - developing natural resources to raise revenue,
 - putting coffee bars in local libraries,
 - having an adviser on raising funds for the voluntary sector in each District and
 - more hiring out of Council buildings.
- Comments in support of better management and of raising more income where Council charges. Concerns expressed that staff who increase income are not rewarded, that there is a risk of losing business by charging too much and that there will be resentment from Birmingham residents if start charging for services that were previously free.
- Support for improving contract management but this requires better expertise across the Council.
- The need to regularly review long term contracts raised.

Other Points

- A number of respondents suggested reducing the numbers and tiers of management and of Councillors amongst a host of other individual suggestions.
- There were also several requests for more information and more definite proposals.
- There were generally supportive comments on the prioritisation criteria for Council Services but most of these questioned the way these criteria were applied. For example, why was Marketing Birmingham seen as more important than Neighbourhood Advice.
- Some calls for the Council to do more to mobilise residents against the imposition of these cuts by central government.

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1. Introduction

This report summarises 314 submissions made up to the close of the consultation period (midnight, 1st December 2014) on the Service Review Green Paper which sets out the Council's proposed approach to and initial thoughts on the future delivery of its services in the context of continued sharp reductions in funding over the next three years. The Green Paper was prepared following a long period of analysis and consideration by Review Boards made up of Councillors, senior officers and professional advisers and starting from the strategic direction set by the 2013 service review process and consultation on the Budget 2014+ White Paper.

A consultation process on this Green Paper was started on 23rd October 2014. Comments have been sent in by text (6), email (28) and social media (3) or through an on-line survey in the Be Heard section of Birmingham City Council's website (277), 314 in total. However, more people were involved in the consultation as some submissions were from organisations (19) and some of these collected together comments of a large number of comments from their clients. In addition, as this year's Service Review Dialogue built on last year's, this report also draws on and makes comparisons with points raised in last year's consultation.

Some of the respondents were Council staff but the majority appeared to be non-staff Birmingham residents. The Be Heard survey also asked broad demographic questions such as age, gender, ethnicity and sexual orientation of respondents as well as whether they had any long lasting physical or mental health conditions. This data has been added together and shown graphically in the Appendix to this report. (Note that not all respondents answered these questions.) The key points that emerge from this information are:

- All broad age groups were represented within the respondents but there is probably an under representation of younger people (under 25) and of older people (over 65). The largest group was in the 45 to 54 age category.
- There were slightly more female respondents than male.
- While all broad ethnicity categories were represented, there is probably a small under-representation of Black and Minority Ethnic residents of Birmingham.
- A few of those making comments were gay, lesbian or bisexual, but the numbers were relatively small.
- A very high proportion of the respondents reported that they had a physical or mental health condition or illness lasting or expecting to last for 12 months or more, probably reflecting the concern of this group of Birmingham residents about the actual or potential impact of Council budget cuts on their lives.

Clearly, an open access survey cannot be expected to produce a statistically representative sample of Birmingham's population. Responders to any consultation process tend to be those concerned about a particular issue. Nevertheless these responses do reflect the views of a large number of people in the city, particularly from those groups most worried about the impact of the service review proposals.

The Be Heard survey also requested residential post codes from respondents. This has allowed an analysis of respondents by Ward of residency and this is shown in tabular format in the Appendix. Key points from this analysis are that:

- Residents from 39 of Birmingham's 40 Wards responded to the Be Heard consultation. The missing Ward was Sutton Four Oaks although a resident from that Ward may have answered but not put a complete postcode down.
- The distribution was uneven between the Wards ranging from 31 from Sparkbrook to one from each of Handsworth Wood, Oscott, Sheldon and Sutton New Hall.

Structure of this report

There is a separate section for each theme in the Green Paper. Each section is organised under the different approaches suggested under each theme together with a sub-section summarising general points made not directly related to the approaches referred to in the Green Paper. Italics are used to identify quotes from consultees. The report finishes with a section on other points raised that were not directly related to one of the individual Service Review themes.

2. Approach to Devolution

Key Points

Strong support for triple devolution with most who responded being in favour. A handful were not in favour of some of the detail such as additional governance layers, devolution to Districts and the risk of losing economies of scale with a fragmentation of some services.

Some concerns were expressed about the difficulties of doing this in a cuts scenario as Council resources might be spread too thinly; additional funds would be needed from central government.

Others identified a need for training of local Councillors and community organisations.

Many wanted to see more detail of how it would work.

Strong support for integration and streamlining of services within the Council and with other service providers.

Support for a 'Green City'. This meant outcome targets being set across the Council.

Of the 57 who commented directly on the triple devolution proposal in the Be Heard on-line questionnaire, 43 were in favour and only 4 against with the rest expressing no particular opinion. Most were in favour of triple devolution, sometimes linking it to the benefits of different agencies pooling resources, for example:

I think the triple devolution model is a very good one, however in order to make the savings outlined transition needs to take place quickly at all three levels.

I think the Council should push hard for as much devolution as possible as this will increase options for delivering services.

It is the sensible approach.

However, a few were not in favour of all aspects of triple devolution such as additional governance layers, devolution to Districts and the risk of losing economies of scale with some services:

Providing another layer of governance is not introduced then my view is that this is a good approach.

I don't think, however, that the Council should be spending £90m "playing districts"

The approach is largely sound, however greater emphasis should be placed upon measures to reduce waste and poor management decisions within the City Council.

Some concerns were expressed about the difficulties of doing this in a cuts scenario as Council resources might be spread too thinly and the benefits of localisation would be unattainable because of a lack of staff to deliver the benefits. Additional funds would be needed from central government.

Some stated that the success of devolution to Districts would depend upon the skills of local Councillors and local community organisations, suggesting a need for training. This was

linked with a call for 'silos' within senior management to be broken down just as they had with Cabinet portfolios and Scrutiny Committees.

There were calls for more information on how this would be implemented and for the process to be transparent with local consultation. (One respondent, however, felt that *vast sums have been wasted continually consulting residents and staff.*) There was a call to avoid jargon.

These comments are in line with favourable comments with regard to devolution in previous budget consultations.

Many of the respondents gave strong support for integration and streamlining of services within the Council and with other service providers. For some, this was linked with mental health or other support services and the need to integrate Council and NHS services.

Three environmental organisations expressed strong support for Birmingham being a 'Green City' with a vision for the natural environment. They emphasised, however, that this would mean setting outcome targets across the Council and at all levels.

3. Children's Safeguarding & Education

Key Points

Very strong support amongst respondents for children's safeguarding to be a priority. However, many said that this should not exempt the effectiveness of the service from being thoroughly reviewed and that the increase in funding being offered was not sufficient.

Many also felt strongly that education more generally should not be cut.

Some felt that it was right for schools to take on more financial responsibility for services; others felt that this might detract from their primary function of providing good education. A few asked for more details to be able to reach informed opinions.

Fears that reducing some support services would cost more money because of the loss of economies of scale. Reducing the schools audit function might increase the risks of poor safeguarding.

Point raised of school staff needing to know about housing and welfare issues if they are to be School staff need to know about housing and welfare issues to deal with the issues preventing educational achievement

School facilities could be used in holiday periods for summer schools and visitors as a way of raising more funds

A. Priority?

There was very strong support amongst respondents for children's safeguarding to be a priority. However, many said that this should not exempt the effectiveness of the service and of staff from being thoroughly reviewed so that it was delivered as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Children's Safeguarding is vital. I think it is right that this is protected from cuts, but it should still be subject to review to ensure it is operating effectively as possible.

The plans are positive, however the message needs to be clearer, many people will view no cost savings as services staying the same, we need to encourage best practice and attract the best people in the country to this area. Currently we are over reliant on agency workers, as the reputation of Birmingham in terms of safeguarding needs to radically improve.

Protecting vulnerable children is important but poor staff and procedures don't also need protection.

Some also felt strongly that education more generally should not be cut. Some asked why education spending was being cut if central government was ring-fencing education.

B. General Comments

A point was raised of school staff needing to know about housing and welfare issues if they are to be able to deal with the issues preventing educational achievement:

Re-training or refresher course's required. Staff need to know how to deal with welfare and housing issues if they are to be able to deal with core issues that face children in terms of decent homes so the children can flourish both at home and school.

A couple of respondents felt that schools were insufficiently accountable particularly in relation to exclusion of students.

A few respondents stated that insufficient information was provided in the Green Paper for them to reach a conclusion and asked for more details to be able to reach informed opinions. One asked for more information on how things were done in other local authorities.

C. Managing how schools spend their money in a different way

Some felt that it was right for schools to take on more financial responsibility for services and that they had had enough money already. There was a suggestion that schools invest more in their locality such as in providing a youth service. However, some could not understand how changing the way schools spend their money would save the Council money.

Schools do not need any more money. They should make do with what they have and use it better they waste too much.

Others felt that this might detract from their primary function of providing good education:

...schools are already under pressure to deliver high quality education. more pressure... operate as a business has the potential to move them further from their core purpose.

A suggestion was made that school facilities could be used in holiday periods for summer schools and visitors as a way of raising more funds.

D. Reducing the money for services related to education (e.g. admissions, audit and school improvement).

While some respondents felt that it was right that schools should be paying for their support services if they had more financial independence, some expressed fears that reducing some support services would cost more money because of the loss of economies of scale. One respondent expressed concern that reducing the schools audit function might increase the risks of poor safeguarding:

Concerned that if you reduce the schools audit function you will increase safeguarding risks.

Some services such as admissions are already stretched beyond capacity.

A few respondents felt that there was still waste to be eliminated and that layers of management could be reduced.

E. Changing the way the catering and cleaning service for schools operates.

Some felt that Council catering and cleaning services in schools could be more efficient and therefore be bought-in by more schools. However there was some concern that there would be a negative impact on the quality of school meals and on a low priority being given to schools' playing fields. A few expressed opposition to contracting out these services and others suggested they be brought back into individual schools.

I'm worried about the plans for school meals I think putting school playing fields as a low priority is a mistake - how can we encourage children to participate in physical activity if space to do so is compromised?

4. Health and Adult Social Care

Key Points

Many respondents felt that adult care was as important as children's and should therefore have the same priority status.

General support for integration of budgets/services and prevention but caution on NHS's ability to integrate, a focus on prevention costing more until the benefits appear and there still being the need for specific services to address problems when they do arrive.

Some suspicions aired about the idea of a MOSE and many saying that care should be kept in-house particularly because Birmingham's adult care is seen as outstanding. There were also concerns that it might involve cuts to wages and pension rights, and that the training required for staff might be an issue.

Promoting independence and care in the home for the elderly was strongly supported.

A very large number of comments that mental health needs and the Supporting People service should be given a greater priority and not be subjected to service cuts, including case studies and submissions from people with mental health issues who are very concerned that they will lose their support.

There are similar concerns for people with learning difficulties and other vulnerable groups. The need to maintain and invest in support and preventative services is a major theme of this year's Service Review Dialogue.

Not replacing staff in customer care etc. would lead to a slow, unplanned death of these services was a view expressed a few times.

The Pregnancy Outreach Service should be maintained because of its many measured benefits.

A. General points

One respondent stated explicitly that adult care is as important as children's and therefore it should be ring-fenced from the cuts. This appeared to be the implicit view of a number of the other respondents.

One comment sent in believed that money was wasted on *unnecessary adaptations for those without 'real' disabilities* and that some *weak managers* allowed money to be spent on unneeded items.

Another commented on the importance of also looking at the quality of the environment:

People live in 'places'- but we seem to be managing the person- not the place- ... making the Place much more 'Liveable'

A detailed submission argues that the Pregnancy Outreach Service *contributes to that* [the Council's] *vision and evidences the specific contribution that the service makes to BCC's priorities*. It argues against the decommissioning of the service because of its many

measured clinical and social benefits and because it saves money by reducing pressures on other services.

B. Bringing budgets for caring for older people together and aiming to use money to prevent problems in advance.

Many respondents expressed general support for integration of budgets and services and for there to be more of a focus on prevention. But some thought there needed to be a culture change to get the NHS to integrate its services with the Council's social care services and also pointed to:

the unnecessarily bureaucratic governance arrangements of both the NHS and Local Authority that could stop any meaningful partnership/integrated working in the short term.

Others suggested that a focus on prevention would cost more as benefits in terms of lower costs would take time to come through while acute and critical needs would still require addressing.

The support so far this year for more integration and preventative work is consistent with similar strong support in the 2013 Service Review Dialogue and Budget consultation.

Another person said that even with a greater emphasis on prevention there would still be a need for specific services to address problems when they do arrive.

...the "offer" to people of Birmingham needs to be clear i.e. you get these services for free, and then list the ones that must be paid for. The provider isn't the issue it's all about managing expectations.

Age UK stressed the importance of voluntary sector services for older people and that cuts in funding to the third sector were creating an untenable situation in a city where services for older people were not strong. The growing issue of dementia was one that required resources.

C. Mutually Owned Social Enterprise (MOSE) for Specialist Care Services

Some suspicions were aired about the idea of a MOSE and many said that care should be kept in-house particularly because Birmingham's adult care is seen as outstanding.

Why reinvent the wheel?

In addition, there were concerns that it might involve cuts to wages and pension rights.

Most of those who think it might work say that need to check whether existing staff can move over to this new way of working without training:

If you're serious about a MOSE, then you should start by seeing if the workforce can actually operate in a co-operative structure before spending money on setting up a new body.

D. Reviewing the use of the Public Health budget

No specific responses to this suggested approach although a number of the submissions stressed the importance of prevention through Public Health initiatives which could save money in the long run, and offered detailed prescriptions in different health and wellbeing areas.

E. Focusing on early years, promoting independence in the elderly, and getting people with enduring mental health problems back to work.

Promoting independence and care in the home as long as possible were strongly supported in last year's consultation and again a large number of comments supported this approach this year.

A very large number of comments suggested that mental health needs to be given a greater priority and not subjected to service cuts, with some saying that there are limits on the number of people with mental health issues who are able to find employment. This was backed up by a collection of 53 submissions from people with mental health issues, and two more detailed case studies, stressing their reliance on the floating support they receive from a 'Supporting People' service which helped them with independent living. MIND also highlights the residential care provided by the third sector and the reliance on Council funding for a large proportion of the funding.

A number of respondents also argued that there will be limits on the number of people facing mental health issues who would be able to find employment.

... money spent getting people to work might be better spent locating and finding people who have mental illness and offering them front-line services to cope with life. I would expect a very small return on finding them employment.

A large number of similar comments on the importance of preventative services and support for people with learning difficulties were submitted to this Dialogue. Midland Mencap makes this point forcefully, supplemented by 48 hand-filled in Be Heard survey forms, and it is backed up by Birmingham Rathbone's submission:

We have very real concerns that a large number of vulnerable people with learning difficulties could effectively be cut adrift if Supporting People services for them no longer exist next year.

RNIB and others make similar points about the importance of prevention and support services for other vulnerable people.

There is back up for a priority being given to services for vulnerable people, and role of preventative and supporting services within this, from the private sector. The Southside Business Improvement District (BID) points to the risks of an increase in homelessness and people living on the street as a result of the withdrawal of these services and the consequent negative impact on business.

F. Arranging a new external contract for preventative services for younger and older adults who do not have 'substantial' or 'critical' needs.

No specific responses to this suggested approach.

G. Not replacing staff who have left customer care and continuous improvement teams

Not replacing staff in customer care etc. would lead to a slow, unplanned death of the service.

H. Reducing the amount of money we give to Healthwatch Birmingham.

The RNIB is not happy with this proposal unless money can be found from elsewhere:

The reduction of the grant to Healthwatch could potentially mean excluding those who traditionally may be harder to reach meaning their experiences and needs remain unheard.

If the council wish to create fairer and more inclusive communities, it is imperative that they seek to mitigate this impact. No funding should be withdrawn from Healthwatch by the council without the securing of funding from another source to replace it.

On the other hand, a handful of respondents felt that money given to Healthwatch should be reallocated to preventative services.

5. Employment Support and Transport Infrastructure (Economy and Culture)

Key Points

Most comments received in favour of the establishment of a Joint Delivery Unit with other local councils and agencies, with some calling for more ambitious proposals than in the past. These included submissions made by private sector partnerships.

A few were sceptical about the impact of economic development work. Suggestions that this should also involve large private businesses and other government agencies and be funded from central government.

Comments recognised importance of tackling youth unemployment. Many said *all* unemployment should be addressed.

The importance of attracting conferences and events to Birmingham was generally recognised but many felt there was room here for cuts. A few felt that cuts here would be self-defeating.

Though not raised specifically as a proposal in the Green Paper, a submission by a heritage organisation highlighted the risks to Birmingham's heritage assets by not having enough conservation officers and not being able to offer an adequate pre-planning application service.

Proposal put forward by the Birmingham Arts partnership for the creation of a Birmingham Arts Trust.

A. General points

Some respondents were sceptical about the impact of economic development work. Some were also broadly in support of all the approaches suggested in the Green Paper under this theme.

One respondent suggested that rather than investing in trams, the money should be used for paying off debt.

Though not raised specifically as a proposal in the Green Paper, a submission by a heritage organisation highlighted the risks to Birmingham's heritage assets by not having enough conservation officers and not being able to offer an adequate pre-planning application service.

B. Setting up a 'Joint Delivery Unit' with other nearby local councils, Local Economic Partnerships, universities and other bodies, for the commissioning of economic development work

Many comments received were in favour of the Joint Delivery Unit despite the scepticism of a few others about the impact of economic development work. Establishing such a unit was supported by the private sector bodies that responded to this Dialogue.

One suggestion was that this should also involve large private businesses and other government agencies. Another did not want to see scarce Council resources being used to fund such a unit with the implication that it should be funded from central government.

For joint delivery would it not be more effective to work not only with other local authorities but also with the big private sector employers and the Central government agencies whose responsibilities include reducing employment - such as DWP.

Submissions from two Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) underlined the importance of private sector alliances for economic development and promotion of the city. There was some concern, however, that services previously supplied by the Council would now be passed down to BIDs and similar agencies.

C. Reducing the amount of money we need to cut by using some reserves that aren't already allocated elsewhere, deleting vacant posts and restructuring management. Income could also be generated through 3D modelling in city centre design as well as from programmes outside the council.

A few expressed support for this proposal, with none opposing. There were some concerns that managers would be protected at the expense of other staff. One person could not see the point of 3D modelling of city centre design.

D. Focusing our employment and skills work on youth unemployment and delivering this locally.

While the importance of tackling youth unemployment was recognised in many responses, many said all unemployment should be addressed. One pointed to a potential role for youth services and another thought this proposal was contradicted by the reduction in resources for the careers service.

Encourage the Youth Service and prospective employers to work together to get young people work ready.

We need to ensure focus on helping the young into work has equal pegging with helping those who are older. People are living and work longer so the strategy must recognize this.

E. Reducing budgets for events and the external marketing of Birmingham

Contrasting views were expressed in relation to this approach. The importance of attracting conferences and events to Birmingham was generally recognised but many felt there was room here for cuts here without undermining the prospects for attracting investment and visitors to the city. On the other hand, a few felt that it would be self-defeating to cut these budgets and there was a great deal of support for maintaining event budgets, including from private sector respondents, because of the visitors, income and investment they attracted.

Linked to this discussion is a proposal put forward by the Birmingham Arts partnership for the creation of a Birmingham Arts Trust.

6. Devolved Local Services and District SLA and Regulatory Services

Key Points

Large numbers of the respondents were strongly in favour of keeping the Youth Service. Some Be Heard respondents only focussed on this point.

Support for advice and guidance for young people.

Many in favour of having one point for neighbourhood, housing and other advice with a debate on whether it was enough to have one per District or whether there should be one in each ward or neighbourhood. Cost of travel can be a real obstacle to accessing such points.

Some concern that local services were becoming harder to access.

A number of general points made that didn't refer to the approaches in the Green Paper including:

- housing needing a communication strategy so people knew what services they could expect,
- the importance of 'floating support' for independent living through 'Supporting People' rather than residential care in relation to mental health,
- the value of having a voluntary sector adviser on bidding for funds,
- the importance of Environmental Health Officers, and
- a small amount of opposition to devolution to Districts.

A. General points

A large number of general suggestions were made under this theme that did not refer to the specific approaches suggested in the Green Paper. These included:

- Housing needing a communication strategy so people knew what services they could expect
- A view that Housing had a top heavy management and spent too much on revamping its IT systems
- The value of having a voluntary sector adviser on bidding for funds and income generation in each District
- The importance of Environmental Health Officers in local services
- A small amount of opposition to devolution to Districts partly because of the 'infrastructure' costs of setting up an office
- Getting people who were out of work to pick up litter
- Reduce the number of Councillors and Councillors' pay.

A. Working to enable all young people in Birmingham to access appropriate advice and guidance, with a guaranteed offer of employment, education or training.

A number of respondents were in support of this proposal for advice and guidance for young people but some felt a job could not be guaranteed, just education and training. A couple felt that this contradicted the cuts to the Connexions Careers Service over the past few years.

A large number of the respondents were strongly in favour of keeping the Youth Service. Some Be Heard respondents only focussed on this point.

The youth service should be leading the way with young people, they safeguard young people.

Youth Service should be maintained as part of a statutory service as it is a key service provider for young people of the age 13 to 19 ensuring they are protected and safeguarded.

This view is consistent with similar strong support in the 2013 Service Review Dialogue and Budget consultation.

B. Joining neighbourhood and housing advice services into single centres providing a wider range of support to local residents.

There was some real concern that it was getting harder and harder to access local services. Many respondents were in favour of having one point for neighbourhood, housing and other advice.

Local Services need to be made more readily available - Libraries for example could be used as key sites for local services.

There was, in effect, a debate on whether it was enough to have one such point per District or whether there should be such points in each ward or neighbourhood with more tending towards this latter view. One respondent linked this to the cost of travel which can be a real obstacle to accessing such points.

C. Introducing a small set of minimum requirements that apply to all Districts, for example what library or parks services should be provided?

Only one person addressed this, suggesting that there was a real risk of a postcode lottery on local services.

D. Changing the schools crossing patrol service so that schools can buy the service they need.

Only one person addressed this expressing concern about the cost to schools of this, possibly leading to a reduction in safeguarding.

E. Maintaining council expertise to help and support community events, but reduce the financial support for these events.

No specific responses to this suggested approach although answers under the previous theme suggest that there would be some support for some reductions here but that there would be resistance from others.

7. Financial and Support Services

Key Points

A few supported putting services out to external contractors but many more questioned whether this saved money. Several raised the value for money of the Service Birmingham contract.

Frequent comments about savings being made by cutting wages and working conditions rather than organisational efficiencies.

General support for greater efficiencies but some questioned whether these would involve false economies (e.g. cheaper buildings costing more to run; front-line staff having to spend more time on 'backroom' tasks).

General support also for managers taking on budget monitoring and HR tasks. Some raised the need for training in and monitoring of these tasks.

A. General points

A couple of respondents felt that the Council Tax should not go up when services were being cut.

One respondent supported putting services out to external contractors but a number questioned whether this saved money and, in this context, raised IT services and the value of the Service Birmingham contract. The issue of external contractors versus internal provision was a frequent debate in previous budget consultations and Service Reviews.

One respondent wrote:

What are desperately needed are different financial models for Councils and council services.... This is a City we are managing- not a city council- it needs re-thinking as to who is involved in the decision making.

However, suggestions on what these financial models might be were not provided.

Reducing the number of managers, HR staff and Councillors was also raised under this theme of the Green Paper.

A. Reducing staff in 'behind the scenes' support roles, using financial reserves and making things more efficient (e.g. by moving the contact centre into cheaper premises and bringing communications budgets together).

There was general support for greater efficiencies but some questioned whether these would involve false economies. For example, the building that the call centre is moving into may be cheaper to buy but may cost more to run. Some respondents also argued that a call centre provided a much poorer customer service than residents being able to speak directly to frontline staff.

The Council has already cut/merged contact centres which is not compatible with good customer service

Reducing staff in 'behind the scenes' roles could also put stress on the remaining staff if they are expected to maintain the same level of service without the tools to do so, and also because it may lead to front-line staff being diverted from their front-line roles to undertake these back room functions.

Good ideas but it's very easy to cut the behind the scenes support roles without realising its impact on the front line roles, often the front line is then left doing the work previously done behind the scene so the end result is a poorer service.

B. Reducing the need for support with things like personnel and budget monitoring by providing managers with the tools to help themselves.

There was also general support for managers taking on budget monitoring and HR tasks but some raised the need for training and monitoring because they might not have the requisite skills and because of the risks of a lack of consistency in these tasks across the Council.

8. Externally Contracted and Council-Traded Services

Key Points

Several ideas for raising income put forward by respondents including:

- selling the Councils gardening expertise to the private sector,
- developing natural resources to raise revenue,
- putting coffee bars in local libraries,
- having an adviser on raising funds for the voluntary sector in each District and
- more hiring out of Council buildings.

Comments in support of better management and of raising more income where Council charges. Concerns expressed that staff who increase income are not rewarded, that there is a risk of losing business by charging too much and that there will be resentment from Birmingham residents if start charging for services that were previously free.

Support for improving contract management but this requires better expertise across the Council.

Raised the need to regularly review long term contracts.

A. General points

Several ideas for raising income have been put forward by respondents including:

- Selling the Councils gardening expertise to the private sector to help with their floral displays and landscaping
- Developing natural resources to raise revenue
- Putting coffee bars in local libraries
- Having an adviser on raising funds for the voluntary sector in each District and
- More hiring out of Council premises.

B. Better management of, and more income from, the parts of the council that charge for things.

Comments so far are in support of better management and more income where Council charges. However, many respondents expressed concerns that staff who increase income are not rewarded, the example of Pest Control being given. In addition, there is a risk of losing business by charging too much with one comment reporting that Acivico was avoided for this reason.

Another respondent also feared resentment from Birmingham residents if you start charging for services that were previously free

C. Improving commissioning and contract management across the council.

Support for improving contract management was expressed by many but some stressed that this requires better contract negotiation and management expertise across the Council.

Service Birmingham was mentioned again under this theme although a few suggested that bin collection could be contracted out. Some felt that there was a need to regularly review long term contracts for best value rather than being bound up in contracts that could not be looked at again for many years.

One respondent suggested a closer relationship with the community sector was required to improve the chances of third sector organisations securing contracts to deliver Council services.

Community chest and community services can be commissioned with community partners working with City officers.

9. Other Points

Key Points

A number of respondents suggested reducing the numbers and tiers of management and of Councillors amongst a host of other individual suggestions.

There were also several requests for more information and more definite proposals.

There were generally supportive comments on the prioritisation criteria for Council Services but many of these questioned the way these criteria were applied. For example, why was Marketing Birmingham seen as more important than Neighbourhood Advice.

Some calls for the Council to do more to mobilise residents against the imposition of these cuts by central government.

Many points were raised in the last section of the Be Heard questionnaire that asked for other ideas for saving money and other comments. These included:

- Reducing the tiers of management within the Council;
- More robust debt recovery;
- Be cautious about land sales at the current time;
- Reducing the number of Councillors;
- Stop recruiting staff into an '*unaffordable pension scheme*';
- Promoting more events in the city and surrounding areas;
- Allow staff who apply for voluntary redundancy to go but seek to keep the most experienced and talented people;
- Charge for entry to museums;
- One consultee said: *I am surprised that Arts and Museums takes priority over Early Years, Youth Services and Specialist Adult Care.*
- Merge the Neighbourhood Advice and Information Service with Housing;
- Ensure that people can sometimes speak to a human being rather than automated systems;
- Maintain services for young people.

There were also several requests for more information and more definite proposals to allow consultees to form more rounded opinions, a point that was also made by several people last year. One quote sums up the views expressed:

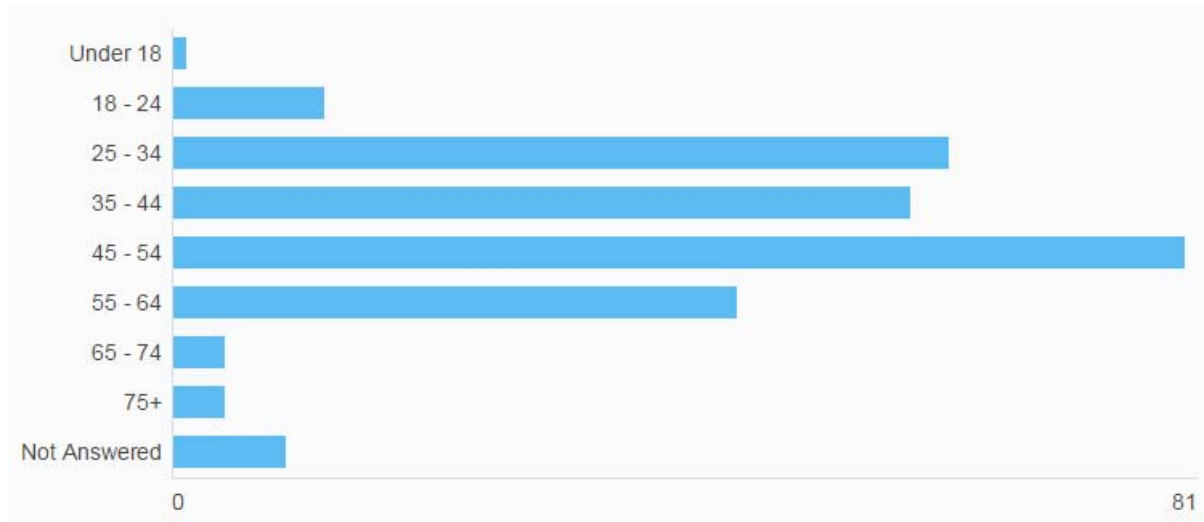
I find the outline options disappointing. After such an 'intense period of service review' I would have expected some clearer more definite thoughts about what needs to change. The outline options detailed in the green paper are vague and don't explain how the financial challenge would be met and what the cuts might actually look like. Why does the Council need to continually claim that it will improve outcomes whilst cutting costs? Be honest!

There were a number of generally supportive comments on the prioritisation criteria for Council Services but many of these questioned the way these criteria were applied. For example, how do registrars contribute much more than careers advice and why was Marketing Birmingham seen as more important than Neighbourhood Advice.

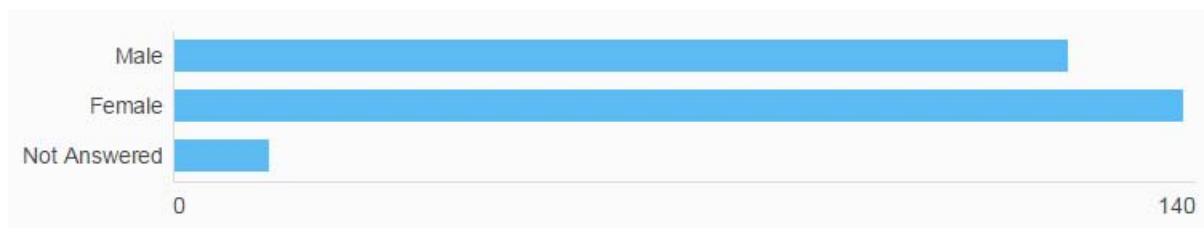
As with the Service Review Dialogue last year, there were some calls for the Council to do more to mobilise residents against the imposition of these cuts by central government.

Appendix: Be Heard respondent data – 277 people

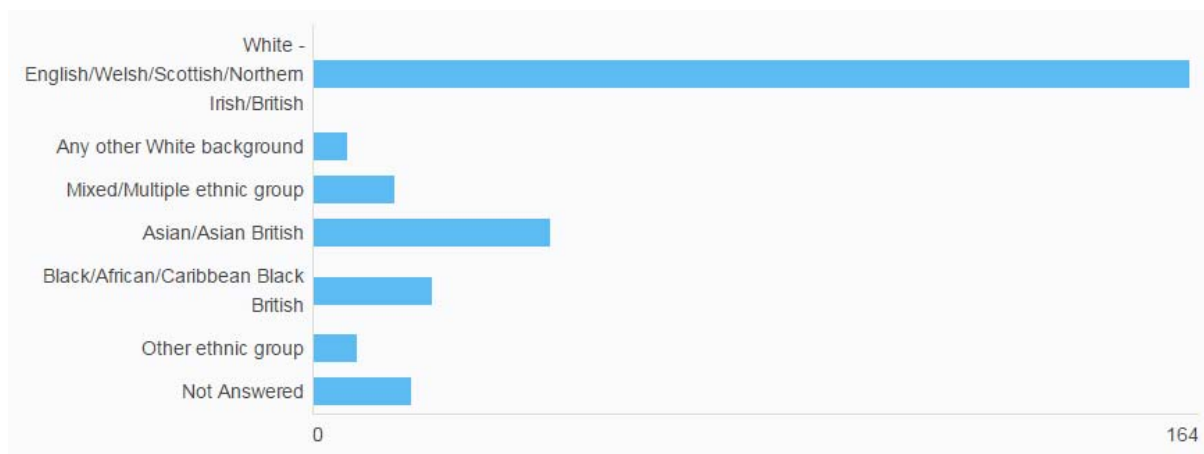
Age

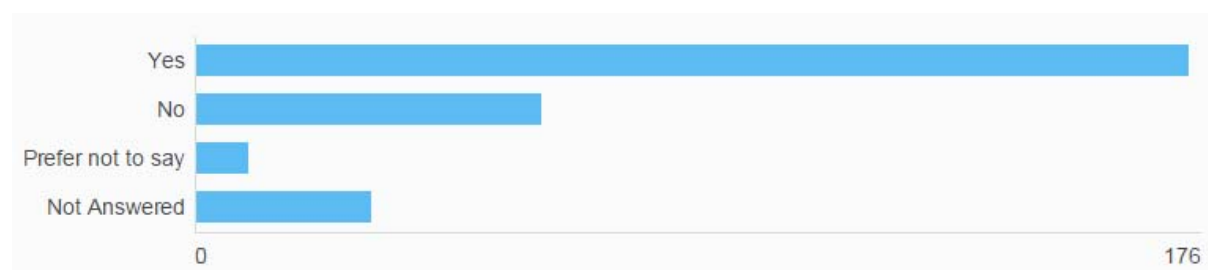
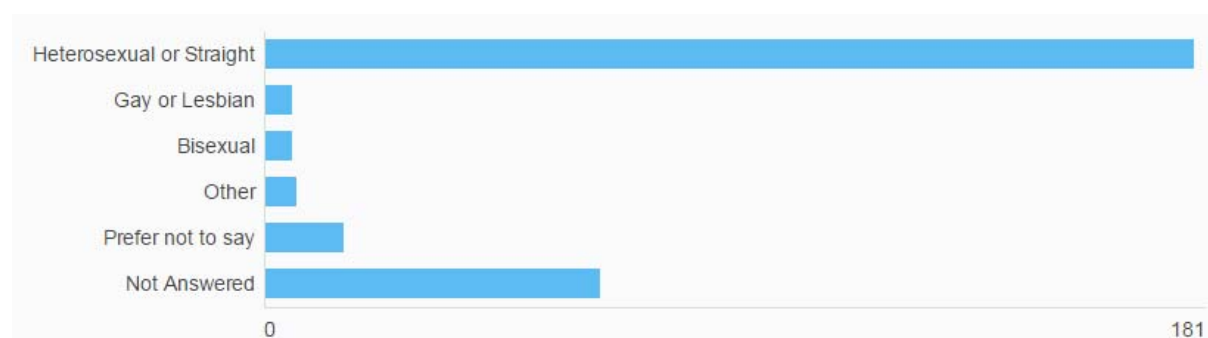


Gender



Ethnicity



Physical or mental health conditions**Sexual orientation****Respondents by Ward**

Ward	Number of respondents
ACOCKS GREEN	10
ASTON	5
BARTLEY GREEN	8
BILLESLEY	5
BORDESLEY GREEN	3
BOURNVILLE	4
BRANDWOOD	14
EDGBASTON	3
ERDINGTON	3
HALL GREEN	2
HANDSWORTH WOOD	1
HARBORNE	2
HODGE HILL	5
KINGS NORTON	3
KINGSTANDING	2
LADYWOOD	10
LONGBRIDGE	5
LOZELLS AND EAST HANDSWORTH	4
MOSELEY AND KINGS HEATH	12
NECHELLS	14
NORTHFIELD	4

Ward	Number of respondents
OSCOTT	1
PERRY BARR	2
QUINTON	3
SELLY OAK	3
SHARD END	7
SHELDON	1
SOHO	3
SOUTH YARDLEY	4
SPARKBROOK	31
SPRINGFIELD	8
STECHFORD AND YARDLEY NORTH	8
STOCKLAND GREEN	3
SUTTON NEW HALL	1
SUTTON TRINITY	2
SUTTON VESEY	2
TYBURN	6
WASHWOOD HEATH	8
WEOLEY	4
OUTSIDE BIRMINGHAM	16
TOTAL	232

Residents by Possible Wards due to Incomplete Postcodes

Postcode	Possible Wards	Numbers
B1	ASTON, LADYWOOD	1
B12	MOSELEY AND KINGS HEATH, NECHELLS, SOUTH YARDLEY, SPARKBROOK, SPRINGFIELD	2
B16	EDGBASTON, HARBORNE, LADYWOOD, SOHO	3
B17	EDGBASTON, HARBORNE, QUINTON, SOHO	2
B19	ASTON, LADYWOOD, LOZELLS AND EAST HANDSWORTH, SOHO	1
B21	HANDSWORTH WOOD, LOZELLS AND EAST HANDSWORTH, SOHO	1
B24	ERDINGTON, NECHELLS, STOCKLAND GREEN, TYBURN	1
B34	HODGE HILL, SHARD END	1
B74	SUTTON FOUR OAKS, SUTTON TRINITY, SUTTON VESEY	1
B76	SUTTON NEW HALL, SUTTON TRINITY, TYBURN	1
B76	SUTTON NEW HALL, SUTTON TRINITY	1
TOTAL		15