

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

SUMMARY OF SERVICE REVIEW DIALOGUE FOR BUDGET CONSULTATION 2014+

7TH February 2014
CSK Strategies Ltd

HEADLINES

This report summarises comments made during the public dialogue on a series of Birmingham City Council (BCC) Service Reviews. The Service Reviews are part of a continuing engagement and budget planning process resulting from the need to cut the Council's controllable budget by two thirds in the seven year period from 2010/11 to 2017/18. In the three years to March 2014, the council will have made £375m of savings. A further £475million will be required by 2017/18.

The budget consultation built on comments on 11 Service Review Green Papers submitted via a number of means:

- Discussions at all 40 Ward Committee meetings.
- 319 responses to the on-line 'Be Heard' questionnaire on the Green Papers accessed through the Council's website.
- Individual comments via 109 emails, 1,363 letters and 59 postcards; and
- Feedback from 51 people attending two Birmingham People's Panel workshops.

Comments are summarised here by Green Paper.

The Future City Council

- Protecting and supporting vulnerable residents, including the elderly and children and young people, was seen as an essential role for the Council.
- There is an important role for the Council in enforcement, setting standards, coordinating services and developing partnership approaches to their delivery.
- The Council also had an important role in fighting for Birmingham and the wellbeing of its residents.
- Extensive cuts in local services would have a disproportionately negative impact on women and their children, particularly in deprived areas.

Adults' Social Care

- Strong support for supporting care in the home as long as possible and reducing reliance on residential care, but also strong support for maintaining some residential care for those most in need or with no family support. Furthermore, real concern about the quality of some non-Council residential care; the Council therefore has a role in ensuring quality of care.

- Support for encouraging families, neighbours and the community more widely to provide care, but recognised that this would be limited and was more difficult given the lower cohesiveness of communities, in part because of people moving for work. In addition, much care needed specialist skills.
- The importance of Supporting People services, particularly for older people, in ensuring that people could continue to live at home as long as possible was raised by many through letters and emails.
- Community care for vulnerable young people was important and was preventative, but there was still a need for specialist services.
- Providing proper transition between Children's and Adults Services was supported by all who raised it.
- Reduce administrative burden on social workers. Less qualified social workers, similar to healthcare assistants, be appointed to do the simpler jobs.
- Social workers should advocate more, be more participative and work more with the voluntary and community sector. More experienced social workers should mentor less experienced ones.
- Some concern at specialist social workers being moved out into a social enterprise.
- Strong views that there needs to be much closer integration between the NHS and social care and that this could provide savings *and* better outcomes. Multi-disciplinary teams could contribute a great deal and mental health issues needed to be given greater prominence.
- Several detailed ideas put forward of other organisations were services could be better joined up.

Education Services

- The key future role for the Council in education was seen by very many as being maintaining quality support for those with special educational needs and disabilities. Mention was made by several of the huge value of the SEND service, of the Communication and Autism Team (CAT) and of specialist teachers for the deaf and for those with vision impairment. This however should not lead to excluding pupils with learning difficulties who were not seen as being in greatest need.
- Schools needed to support each other more – across all schools according to many respondents and therefore including academies and free schools – and need to do more to link up to the world of work.
- Asking children what they needed and what they thought as well as engaging with parents was viewed by many as critically important for supporting vulnerable children. The need to invest in a youth service was also raised.

- Many felt strongly that schools should offer their facilities for use by the local community such as libraries, sports halls and pitches, performance spaces and meeting rooms

Support Services

- Recognition that there is a need for good quality data and analysis for policy formation. But process could be simplified and streamlined.
- Debate on localised versus centralised commissioning. Joint commissioning should be encouraged where appropriate, particularly around health and wellbeing.
- Complex issues need inter-departmental and interagency work involving the public. Learn and share with other Councils and outside professionals. Train and give customer feedback to frontline staff.
- Avoid jargon.
- Many ideas for improving communication and engagement including better website and more use of the internet while taking into account those who do not or cannot use the web (professional intermediaries can help here). Also, the importance of localisation for engagement stressed by many.
- Don't give up communicating and engaging as it is appreciated.
- More support for keeping civic catering in house than for building cleaning and security staff. Porters should remain in house. Quality risks of out sourcing stressed.
- Acivico seen as having potential but also many felt they did not know enough about it to comment or felt that the quality of services might suffer.
- Yes, invest in digital technology for customer services, particularly to improve the website, but ensure that the elderly, vulnerable groups and those that cannot use digital technology are not excluded.
- Removing all secretarial and admin support can be a false economy as expensive managerial staff end up spending too much time on admin tasks.
- There is no mention of Equalities in the Green Paper. This was seen as an important omission by some.

Sport and Physical Activity

- Sports and physical activities seen as important for health improvement but also other factors such as housing and fuel poverty.
- Yes, get other organisations to deliver sports and leisure activity as well as the Council but the Council has to facilitate this.
- Schools need to do much more to help including opening up their facilities and undertaking more inter-generational work.

- Have a wide range of sports, not just football and rugby.
- Strong support for the Home Library Service.

A Well Managed and Resilient City

- There was general agreement with the increased charges suggested in the Green Paper although the increases had to be appropriate and commercial but should definitely reflect cost inflation. Other charges that could be increased were suggested but this had to be combined with advice in navigating the system.
- There was general agreement with the income generating proposals in the Green Paper although some said these should only be implemented when there was a robust case that they would generate more income than the costs to establish.
- Many ideas were suggested to encourage people not to break regulations although some of these involved high profile enforcement early on.
- Almost all respondents wanted the Council to continue enforcing but to speed up the process to make it more effective.

Developing Successful and Inclusive Communities

- Strong support for targeting resources at the most vulnerable but many not keen for all universal services to disappear, in part for social cohesion reasons, because some services had to be universal and because it was not always easy to define who was vulnerable. The choice between targeting and universal services depends upon the service being considered.
- Young people and children identified by many as a priority group.
- While there was an understanding that non-statutory services were more likely to be targets for cuts, most said that all Council services were 'essential' or important, gave great value to people's lives and contributed to the fabric of life in the city.
- The youth service was given by many as an example of a valuable non-statutory service.
- The majority felt that the Council should not necessarily stop delivering services that are delivered by others or in other parts of the city as local residents may not be able to access these services, they may all be working at full capacity and the Council has a role in ensuring quality. These situations should be approached on a case by case basis and through working in partnership.
- Strong support for investing in prevention but key issues are having enough evidence to convince and having resources over and above that needed to deal with immediate problems.
- Yes to co-location of services but keep an eye on whether this makes local services too far away for some, on the need to integrate staff and services as well and on preserving the physical heritage of the city.
- Self-serve technologies and co-production were welcome approaches for respondents who worked for service providers in the public and third sectors but there were warnings that some sections of the public might be excluded by these methods and that they would fail if not adequately managed. Many members of the public felt excluded from this part of the dialogue by a lack of familiarity with the jargon.
- Support expressed for the greater use of volunteers to enhance and sustain a service, but this needed to be alongside trained and paid staff, not instead of them. Paid staff are also needed to organise and train volunteers. Volunteering should also be used as a path into employment.
- There was some support for the libraries proposals in the light of the financial pressures but also much opposition to an over-reliance on volunteers particularly in areas that were less deprived.

- There is strong support for libraries, which are seen as community hubs, and for the youth service. Parks and open spaces could provide more benefits if more widely promoted.

Developing a Successful and Inclusive Economy

- Most did see supporting the local economy as an important function of the Council.
- Most felt that there was a need for intervention to make the economy more inclusive, and many ideas were put forward, although some felt that such initiatives only encouraged dependency. Some emphasised the role of libraries and the youth service in creating a more inclusive economy.

Safe, Clean and Green Neighbourhoods

- Most in favour of charging for some of these services but some believe these are services which benefit all.
- Combine awareness raising and education programmes with enforcement.
- Mixed views on outsourcing, changing specifications, increasing charges and keeping staff terms and conditions under review. Some said yes, some said no and some said that it depends on the service and specific local needs.

Safeguarding, Supporting and Educating Young People

- Very strong agreement that safeguarding children should be a top priority but many stressed the need for a holistic approach that involved a wide range of agencies including nursery schools, day care centres and children's centres.
- Early intervention and preventative work is important. There was a good deal of good practice in Birmingham that should be built upon.
- There needs to be good working conditions and management if Birmingham is to attract the child protection social workers it needs.
- The Council needed to be the facilitator of partnership working between schools and with other relevant agencies. Support for the Birmingham Educational Partnership registered.
- Celebrate the city's educational successes!
- Invest in early years learning.
- While most wanted to see child protection services protected, they also felt that just focusing on 'crisis point' services was 'putting patches on the dam'. There was a need for more early intervention and joint working to prevent situations reaching crisis point.

1. Introduction

This report summarises comments made during a wide ranging public dialogue on a series of Birmingham City Council (BCC) Service Reviews. The Service Reviews are part of a continuing engagement and budget planning process resulting from the need to cut the Council's controllable budget by about two thirds in the seven year period from 2010/11 to 2017/18. (The Council's controllable budget is that part of its budget over which it can make spending choices.) These cuts are required because of large reductions in the grant the Council receives from central government and because of cost pressures. The Council has already made big savings in recent years, for example £375m will have been saved in the three years to end-March 2014. But despite this the Council still needs to save a further £475m by 2017/18, in addition to over £88m in the next financial year.

The size of the budget cuts mean that the Council has very difficult decisions to make about what services it continues to provide and which it has to end. It is no longer possible to just make efficiency savings and trim at the edges. There needs to be a full review of all the Council's services deciding:

- Which services the Council should continue to provide and can these services be provided differently at a lower cost but with at least the same results?
- Which services should the Council provide at a reduced level?
- Which services should be passed over to others to provide or be delivered in partnership with others?
- Which services should be stopped altogether?

The idea of conducting Service Reviews was put forward during the budget consultations last year (2012/13). There was a large majority of those who took part in the consultation in favour of such Reviews but that there should be a full, participative and properly explained dialogue over the details of the proposals that emerge from the Reviews.

The Council therefore began the process of a dialogue around these Reviews early in 2013/14 with the phased production of an overarching 'Green Paper' (a discussion paper) called 'The Future City Council' followed by ten other Green Papers on:

- Adults Social Care (followed by the Adult Social Care Update)
- Education Services
- Support Services Part One.
- Support Services Part Two.
- Sport and Physical Activity.
- A Well Managed and Resilient City.
- Developing Successful and Inclusive Communities.

- Developing a Successful and Inclusive Economy.
- Safe, Clean and Green Neighbourhoods.
- Safeguarding, Supporting and educating Young People. (This Green Paper was the last to be produced. However, the seriousness of the issues covered was reflected in the large number of comments received in a very short period.)

Each Service Review Green Paper provided background information on the services it covered, suggested some initial proposals and asked a number of key questions. Comments were invited to be submitted via a number of means:

The budget consultation built on comments on 11 Service Review Green Papers submitted via a number of means:

- Discussions at all 40 Ward Committee meetings.
- 319 responses to the on-line 'Be Heard' questionnaire on the Green Papers accessed through the Council's website.
- Individual comments via 109 emails, 1,363 letters and 59 postcards; and
- Feedback from 51 people attending two Birmingham People's Panel workshops.

Looking at the Be Heard responses in greater detail, the table below shows the number of comments by Service Review Green Paper area. The largest numbers of responses were on the Adult Social Care Service Review Area followed by Safeguarding, Supporting and Educating Young People and Developing Successful and Inclusive Communities.

Be Heard Responses by Service Review Area

Adults Social Care Review	95
Education Service	10
Support Services 1	20
Developing Successful and Inclusive Communities	60
Developing a Successful and Inclusive Economy	11
A Well Managed and Resilient City	15
Support Services 2	11
Safe, Clean and Green Neighbourhoods	22
Safeguarding, Supporting and Educating Young People	70

Total	314
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Note: Five comments were not specific to any one Service Review Area

In addition each Service Review held discussions with specific stakeholders as part of the review itself, for example Education Services Review talked to Head Teachers, Schools and the Schools Forum, Adult Social Care held a series of meetings and discussions with service users, carers staff and stakeholders.

Some services, such as the Homes Library Service conducted special surveys with their users.

The comments received came from Birmingham residents who were users of Council services, employees of the Council (who were often also Birmingham residents), employees of other organisations (also often Birmingham residents) and Councillors.

This report covers all the comments received on the Green Papers up to 8th December 2013. An earlier version of this report allowed comments made to be fed into the consultation process on the White Paper containing specific proposals from the Council's Executive for savings in 2014/15 and beyond. These proposals were consulted upon through December 2013 to early January 2014. A report on the consultation on these specific proposals has been produced which also took into account the comments made on the Green Papers including comments received after 8th December 2013.

Structure of this report

The report summarises all the views submitted on the Green Paper on the changing shape of the Council overall and on each of the Service Review Green Papers. There is a separate section for each Green Paper with a merged section for the two Support Services Green Papers. Each section is organised under the key questions raised in the Green Papers, with some questions merged, and with a summary of key points at the start. There tend to be more comments on the earlier Green Papers because of their earlier publication although this is not always the case. The large number of comments received will mean that some details are lost in the summaries but these can be accessed if needed as all comments have been retained by the Council and many have been published on the Council's website with personal data removed.

2. Overview: The Future City Council

Key Points

Protecting and supporting vulnerable residents, including the elderly and children and young people, was seen as an essential role for the Council.

Important role for the Council in enforcement, setting standards, coordinating services and developing partnership approaches to their delivery.

The Council also had an important role in fighting for Birmingham and the wellbeing of its residents.

Extensive cuts in local services would have a disproportionately negative impact on women and their children, particularly in deprived areas.

The comments summarised here are drawn from a variety of discussions and submissions, mainly on specific Service Reviews.

A. What are the most important, valuable and essential things that the City Council does?

Many contributors to the Service Review dialogue acknowledged that the Council had to ensure first that it was meeting its statutory obligations. However these obligations could be provided in a different and more cost effective ways. In addition, non-statutory services could be equally, if not more important for the wellbeing of residents of Birmingham than statutory services. There were requests that in the 'Some things the City Council does' list, there should be an indication as to whether each service is statutory or not, to enable residents to make informed comments to the Reviews.

Protecting and supporting vulnerable residents was seen as an essential role for the Council. As well as the elderly, young people featured on most respondents list of priority groups.

Respondents also saw an important role for the Council in coordinating services and developing partnership approaches to their delivery. The Council's role in enforcement was also viewed as important.

B. Are there different organisations that could provide these things or other services that the Council provides?

There was some support for looking at each of the statutory services that the Council has to provide and consider who would be best to provide that service.

Some expressed the view that the Council had to be more active in encouraging the establishment of social enterprises, with input from local communities, as alternative providers of some services. This means a shift from the current approach of putting services out to tender and waiting to see if any social enterprise is out there capable of winning the tender.

C. What should we keep at the current service level, what could we provide but at a reduced service level and what should we stop providing all together?

This question is answered in different ways under the various Green Paper headings as it depends upon the specific service that is being discussed. There are also many factors to take into consideration such as the level of need and demand, who else is available in Birmingham to provide the service, and the Council's role in quality control.

D. What sort of local community facilities and organisations will we need in the future and how will they be funded?

There was general support for rationalising the use of Council buildings but care was needed to ensure that this does not make local services too far away for some and that buildings which encapsulated Birmingham's heritage did not suffer as a consequence. Co-location of services was seen as important but there was also a need to integrate the service provision and the staff delivering these services.

E. What services should continue to be provided on a universal basis and which could be targeted more at those most in need?

Comments varied a great deal on this question although the majority were in favour of targeting services on the most vulnerable, particularly at a time of budgetary constraints. Many pointed out that there needed to be some universal services for social cohesion reasons as all paid Council Tax plus it is clear that some services had to be universal such as education and training and health. It was also not always clear who were the most vulnerable.

F. What do we need to change about the way that local and central government as a whole works?

One suggestion was that there needed to be a more collaborative approach between neighbouring boroughs, e.g. sharing leisure centres, parks, community use buildings, etc.

"In some areas we should be challenging national government policy - e.g. when we place children in care outside the city we should be able to rely on local social workers to undertake monitoring visits, rather than a BCC worker spending two days travelling there and back. Also we should keep lobbying government on Birmingham's case for funding."

"We need a fundamental review of local government finance; cities need more control over their spending."

G. How do we reduce demand for Council services, encourage local communities to improve their neighbourhoods and invest more in prevention?

Localism and neighbourhood working were seen as ways to encourage more volunteering in local communities. More investment in prevention was generally seen as a good thing but easier said than done because of difficulties in finding robust evidence that a service is preventative in the long run and because there was often limited funds available for such investment as what was available was needed to address immediate needs.

H. Other points raised.

- Use free labour, e.g., those on community service, in prison, job seekers – to assist the Council such as on highways work and clearing litter.
- The City Council should increase revenue available to it by selling assets. However in doing this there should be transparent consultation to determine which assets would be retained and which sold.
- When will we have 24/7 use of public buildings?
- A point was made at several meetings was that extensive cuts in local services would have a disproportionately negative impact on women and their children, particularly in areas like Handsworth. The questioners stressed that this included the impact on new communities, refugees. Negative impacts on women and children/young people identified were an increase in domestic violence and mental health problems.

3. Adults' Social Care

Key Points

Strong support for supporting care in the home as long as possible and reducing reliance on residential care, but do need to maintain some residential care for those most in need and to ensure quality.

Support for encouraging families, neighbours and the community more widely to provide care, but recognised that this would be limited and was more difficult given the lower cohesiveness of communities, in part because of people moving for work.

The importance of Supporting People services, particularly for older people, in ensuring that people could continue to live at home as long as possible was raised by many. Community care for vulnerable young people was important and was preventative, but there was still a need for specialist services.

Providing proper transition between Children's and Adults Services was supported by all who raised it.

Reduce administrative burden on social workers. Less qualified social workers, similar to healthcare assistants, be appointed to do the simpler jobs.

Social workers should advocate more, be more participative and work more with the voluntary and community sector. More experienced social workers should mentor less experienced ones.

Some concern at specialist social workers being moved out into a social enterprise.

Strong views that there needs to be much closer integration between the NHS and social care and that this could provide savings *and* better outcomes.

Several detailed ideas put forward of other organisations were services could be better joined up.

A. Should we reduce the reliance on residential care?

In general, there was support for reducing reliance on residential and hospital care and helping people to remain at home. It was felt that people should be supported to stay in their home for as long as they could and that is what most people wanted. However, there were several caveats. First, there was a great deal of agreement with the Service Review Green paper that there will always be a need for some residential and respite care as some families wouldn't be able to cope with looking after their elderly relatives and some elderly people would not have relatives to look after them when they got to the point of not being able to stay in their homes. Secondly, there was concern about the quality of care in homes that weren't provided by the Council. The Council would need to provide a safety net of some residential care and also quality check others available in the area. Finally, many expressed a need for support provided in the home to be of high

quality and that it be quality checked; there were references to the inadequacy of 15 minute visits.

The importance of Supporting People services, particularly for older people, in ensuring that people could continue to live at home as long as possible was raised by many through letters and emails.

Other points made included:

- Elderly care - the entire assessment process should be reviewed to help reduce the "bed blocking" of delayed discharges.
- The Person Centred Planning Team can help individuals move out of residential living, into a living situation they have designed for themselves, reducing the reliance on social care.

B. Are our communities able to support us to live in our own homes? Can my community help me to live in my own home?

There was significant support in principle for families/neighbours/communities supporting people to remain in their own homes but a number commented that communities were not as cohesive as in the past and that with people moving around for work and so on, it is in reality not always realistic for this to happen in all cases. In addition, some people have few community connections and are more isolated and therefore unlikely to receive much community support.

There were also issues of the extent of care possible from this source. Many people are happy to shop or look in on neighbours but NOT to provide any form of personal care.

On the other hand, sections of some local communities are willing and able to support people with care needs. In Billesley Ward there are examples of lunch clubs and craft groups for people with dementia, learning disabilities and mental health issues. However, there is a lot of stigma and ignorance about people with care needs locally.

Concerns were expressed around the risks and fear of litigation, the need for CRB checks and insurance. If we are expecting the community to do more, we need to make sure the infrastructure is in place to do that, e.g., fast tracking CRB checks, block purchasing insurance, logistical support.

The issue of personalised budgets also came up here with similar points made as during last year's consultation: yes to the flexibility of these budgets but allow for some people's inability to manage their own budget and therefore the need for support/advocacy and there was a risk of abuse.

C. Can my community support vulnerable younger adults to live a community life?

There were similar responses as for community support in general: yes where possible but not where community links were weak or where needs were great and specialist skills were required.

The preventative aspect of this was highlighted by some:

“Any schemes which support vulnerable younger adults is money well spent as it could mean money saved in the long run.”

Reference was made to the need to promote ‘Shared Lives’ more and to examine the Danish model. Some respondents highlighted a link between training people for job and the skills required to live independently.

Providing proper transition between Children’s and Adults Services was supported by all who raised it.

Specific detailed responses from sensory impairment charities to:

- Protect services for deaf children, young people and families.
- The Access to Education Sensory Team which provides a specialist service to visually impaired children in school.

D. Do our social workers need to work differently?

Many social workers and others, including their clients, feel that the social worker’s role has become over bureaucratic and that social workers are bogged down by paperwork and therefore not freed up to do the job of seeing the people and families they are supposed to be helping.

“The paperwork has taken over the person centred approach.”

A suggestion was made in the people’s Panel workshop that less qualified social workers, similar to healthcare assistants, be appointed to do the simpler jobs, thus freeing up the more experienced social workers. However, there was recognition of the need for more social workers.

Some social workers are already playing an advocacy role although other respondents said that social workers in general need to be more participatory, more focussed on outcomes than putting together a service package, and better at working with the third sector.

A suggestion was made that more experienced social workers should mentor newer social workers.

There was concern amongst specialist social workers with the possibility of being transferred to a social enterprise.

E. Do you have any examples from your own experience of problems that could be solved by joining our services up better?

Working in partnership/merging services with the NHS was strongly supported by most of those responding via all the consultation routes. Joint working with the health service is seen as the way forward.

The importance of good communication between different service providers and of consistency of advice given was raised by a number of people. It was also important that the right support was given at the right time.

Ideas suggested for joined up services included:

- Co-ordinate the delivery of items to homes or premises, e.g., equipment, Telecare, medicines, post, blood, continence products, decontaminated waste, etc., sharing resources and vehicles, lessening environmental impact and reducing costs.
- A whole life approach and integrated NHS and social care systems are needed in order to tailor services to people's lives, rather than the other way around.
- Bringing in social workers earlier to work with people that environmental health would have to deal with at a later date.
- Work with Women's Aid which had made a real impact on homelessness because of their understanding of domestic violence.
- Occupational therapy and physiotherapy and similar should be joined up better.

4. Education Services

Key Points

The key future role for the Council in education was seen by very many as being maintaining quality support for those with special educational needs and disabilities. Mention was made by several of the huge value of the SEND service, of the Communication and Autism Team (CAT) and of specialist teachers for the deaf and for those with vision impairment. This however should not lead to excluding pupils with learning difficulties who were not seen as being in greatest need.

Schools needed to support each other more – across all schools according to many respondents and therefore including academies and free schools – and need to do more to link up to the world of work.

Asking children what they needed and what they thought as well as engaging with parents was viewed by many as critically important for supporting vulnerable children. The need to invest in a youth service was also raised.

Many felt strongly that schools should offer their facilities for use by the local community such as libraries, sports halls and pitches, performance spaces and meeting rooms

A. What are the future roles of the Council in education?

- Many respondents to the consultation saw the Council as being crucially important for children with Special Educational Needs and early intervention. Linked to this was support expressed for the CAT team (Communication and Autism) which ‘provide a vital service not only to parents but to both Primary and Secondary Education.’
- At the People’s Panel workshop and through a number of the completed surveys and other submissions it was suggested that more educational services could be contracted out, such as school meals, home to school transport, and outdoor education centres) provided they were monitored for efficiency and quality. It was also suggested by others that there could be a reduction in some commissioned services and that the Home/School transport should be means tested, even if it is a statutory service.
- Services that were mentioned as needing to be retained included the Outdoor Learning Service and the BRASH nurses Drop-in.
- Some questioned the difficulties caused to the Council in planning educational provision and improving quality by the growing number of free schools.

B. Different children need different levels of support. How can we make sure the service provided meets all their needs?

Respondents to the consultation process identified the following as being particularly important:

- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) – Although one suggested that there should be liaison with GPs to ensure correct diagnosis has been given before specialist service is offered.
- The Communication and Autism Team (CAT).
- Early intervention on learning needs which is far more cost effective than waiting for their needs to become more severe, requiring expensive intervention.
- Sensory Support
- Addressing deafness which is described as an invisible disability. Teachers of the deaf are vital to do this. Parents of deaf children also need practical and emotional support to enable their children to reach their potential.
- Addressing vision limitations. In order to understand and address these challenges, schools need specialist advice from a Qualified Teacher of children with Vision Impairment

One respondent cautioned of the risk of ignoring children with learning difficulties who are not 'in the greatest need'.

Some suggested that it was important to involve parents and give children a voice by asking them whether they are getting the support they think they need.

C. How can schools support each other?

Outstanding schools can support others although this support should not just be 'teaching to a test'.

The Council can work closely with schools and encourage schools to work with each other to establish where service provision gaps are and where duplication exists, and then act quickly and decisively to rectify them.

There was some debate whether there should be partnering between all schools, not just the ones that are local authority maintained.

D. How can services be provided differently?

Suggestions included:

- Returning to providing for the needs of children outside the school day.
- Linking more to the world of work through, for e.g., apprenticeships and the work in connection with the 'Birmingham Bacc'.
- Joint working between social services, education and housing.

E. How can we improve support to vulnerable children as they grow up in Birmingham?

Suggestions included:

- Ask the children if they are getting what they feel they need.

- Coordinate, join up and monitor provision for vulnerable children across the city while they are still in school. Ensure there is a central directory of support.
- Ensure schools / buildings / facilities are used to their maximum potential to allow full access for family therapy, extra-curricular activities, etc.
- Virtual contact should be provided by engaged partners for vulnerable children, e.g. a helpline, an information portal (along lines of Talk to Frank for drugs issues).
- Work with charities.
- Invest in a youth service.

F. How should schools relate to their communities?

Some respondents suggested that all schools should involve their local community, work with parents and provide regular communication by social media/websites. They should also work with colleges, job centres and local businesses to find out what skills gaps exist and how best to fill them.

Many felt strongly that schools should offer their facilities for use by the local community such as libraries, sports halls and pitches, performance spaces and meeting rooms. The People's Panel workshop suggested that schools would be local 'hubs' at the heart of their communities.

Comments on other Green Papers stressed the role of schools in promoting better health and having facilities for sports, leisure and other community activities which should be made more widely available.

Headteachers of free schools and academies, as well as those with the local authority, should be made aware of the role they can play within their communities.

G. Other points raised.

- Access to Education, should be chargeable to those who can afford to pay.

5. Support Services (Parts One and Two)

Key Points

Recognition that there is a need for good quality data and analysis for policy formation. But process could be simplified and streamlined.

Debate on localised versus centralised commissioning. Joint commissioning should be encouraged where appropriate, particularly around health and wellbeing.

Complex issues need inter-departmental and interagency work involving the public. Learn and share with other Councils and outside professionals. Train and give customer feedback to frontline staff.

Avoid jargon.

Many ideas for improving communication and engagement including better website and more use of the internet while taking into account those who do not or cannot use the web (professional intermediaries can help here). Also, the importance of localisation for engagement stressed by many.

Don't give up communicating and engaging as it is appreciated.

More support for keeping civic catering in house than for building cleaning and security staff. Porters should remain in house. Quality risks of out sourcing stressed.

Acivico seen as having potential but also many felt they did not know enough about it to comment or felt that the quality of services might suffer.

Yes, invest in digital technology for customer services, particularly to improve the website, but ensure that the elderly, vulnerable groups and those that cannot use digital technology are not excluded.

Removing all secretarial and admin support can be a false economy as expensive managerial staff end up spending too much time on admin tasks.

There is no mention of Equalities in the Green Paper. This was seen as an important omission by some.

A. How can the Council make best use of the data it holds to improve services and plan for the long term needs of the citizens of Birmingham?

Those that addressed this question appreciated the importance of collecting and analysing good quality information for determining the priority needs of Birmingham residents and for assessing their satisfaction with services delivered by the Council or paid for by the council but delivered by others. There was some caution about the creation of a 'performance management industry' which took up too much staff time and, it was suggested, could be based on smaller samples and fewer questions and yet yield the same quality of information.

A selection of other points made gives a flavour of the comments:

- Collect a complete set of data at first point of contact and share carefully and effectively.
- Analyse data professionally and use it to give a clear picture of where priorities are, cross refer and use data in a mix of situations.
- Assess whether data is still relevant for today's needs; categorise by post code to highlight regional differences then use data to develop joined-up services.
- Ensure data is up-to-date.
- Compare to other Council's performance.
- Collect data from childhood to adulthood.

B. How can the Council improve its commission, including joint commissioning, and contract management so that we deliver better outcomes more efficiently and ensure that good quality services are effectively delivered?

A variety of issues were touched on in comments made. Some felt that commissioning should be more localised to provide services that met local need and often at a cheaper rate. Others felt that centralised commissioning would yield economies of scale. There was some disbelief that employing a 'middleman' company to commission and deliver services would not save money and that it would be best to keep service delivery in-house as much as possible.

Several areas were suggested for joint commissioning including:

- Mental health and wellbeing;
- Services to provide for the complex needs of some young people;
- Services for vulnerable families;
- Many services could be jointly commissioned with the NHS.

But there was a warning that joint commissioning was not always the answer and that it could lead to services being spread too thinly. *'Joint commissioning should be a mechanism, not a target'*.

Other points made here included:

- Better communication on what is being commissioned across Council departments and with outside partners. Ensure each council department can see proposed commissions at the point of proposal so collaboration is made possible.
- Use a person centred approach. Listen and respond to feedback.
- Avoid prejudices against any organisation, no assumptions or inferences. Everything should be done in an agreed system of protocol and procedures.
- Pay partly on the basis of customer satisfaction.
- Use more web-based services.
- More use of personal budgets. Council can have a role here by publishing lists of reliable and affordable suppliers.
- Introduce time penalties into contracts.

- Focus on outcomes desired in the commissioning documents.

C. How can we improve how we develop policies to tackle big complex issues, work better with partners and ensure that the Council's priorities are reflected in frontline service delivery?

Most comments stressed that communication is key to tackling complex issues:

- When policy is being produced, identify potential interested parties (including the public and non-Council agencies) and communicate with them.
- Ask for ideas and make it as simple as possible, avoiding unnecessary complicated terminology.
- Set up multi-discipline and multi-level teams to help come up with helpful ideas.
- Encourage bottom-up processes.
- Have in-house specialists but also share expertise with other Councils and outside professionals.
- Implementation should then be given to an appropriate department to fulfil.

"Talk to each other!"

One comment suggested that the Council should stop trying to please everyone while another suggested that the focus should be on the most deprived groups.

In terms of priorities being reflected in frontline service delivery, some comments stressed the need for clear, written down objectives and training of staff. A number also said that it was important to communicate to employees with 'voice of the customer' reviews and statements, constructed using genuine customer feedback.

D. How can the Council improve its communications with the public in Birmingham?

Many suggestions were made including:

- Improve messy, unhelpful and out of date websites. Each locality should have a page on the Council's website.
- Use notifications in all council buildings (libraries especially) and adverts in the street rather than an overuse of the post.
- Use social media (e.g. Twitter and Facebook) and the internet more but care needed in communicating with some vulnerable groups where professional intermediaries are needed. Paper communication is often viewed as junk mail so less effective.
- Brief local press regularly.
- Use tenant groups and similar rather than just top-down communication.
- *"Stop using jargon and gobbledegook."*
- Abandon glossy publications in all departments.

E. How can we engage more effectively with the people of Birmingham, including through localisation and using digital technology?

Many suggestions were made including:

- Council website should include email contact details throughout to encourage channel shift.
- Create internet webpage that, on typing in a postcode, would allow people to see details of all the Council services available in their area, together with contact numbers and addresses for queries or complaints. Local doctors, hospitals, recycling centres, libraries, leisure facilities, tax offices, etc., could all be displayed in this way.
- Ask more straight-forward, relevant questions. What we care about is whether we can be cared for. But don't treat the public as idiots.
- Regular consultation meetings and community discussions. Put forward different scenarios for comment. Feedback so that people know they are being listened to. *"Make the strategic players in the Council visible, give them a profile. Every key department can be contacted online or via Twitter or Facebook."*
- Involve housing reps and other organisations on committees.
- Don't give up – keep communicating. It is appreciated.
- *"Localisation cannot happen without engagement and vice versa."* But be careful to avoid the 'postcode lottery'. *"Ensure that local concerns are prioritised, e.g. the problem with rubbish collection and street cleaning in Lozells and East Handsworth."*

F. Should the council continue to run a civic catering service? What are the alternatives?

Most that it should but that it should break even or make a surplus. One employee pointed out that it did make a surplus but that a realistic income and expenditure budget needed to be set.

There were mixed views about transferring to Acivico although the extra flexibility for commercial growth was seen as useful. However, one commentator said Acivico still had to move further to become a flexible, commercial operator. Another said it should have to compete for Council contracts.

G. Should the council continue to run a building cleaning service? What are the alternatives?

There were mixed views on retaining the building cleaning service in-house as some pointed to other Councils that had contracted this out. There were fears that this might lead to a lower quality of services particularly where people were less likely to complain such as in tower blocks. However, one comment suggested that only local firms should be allowed to tender.

On transferring to Acivico, one commentator suggested that this would make the company more competitive as it would have a wider portfolio of management services it could offer.

H. Should the Council continue to run a services management service, including security? What are the alternatives?

There were a limited number of responses here. Some said that the most cost effective solution should be chosen while others stressed the importance of supervising security personnel and making them proud of the buildings and people they were protecting. This was reflected in the mixed views on the hybrid approach of Acivico managing this service but security staff staying in house.

More thought porters should stay in house because of the vital role they play in setting up meetings for the Council's functioning.

I. Should the Council be making more use of digital and electronic technology in its customer services? Can we run our call centre better? How can we improve our web and digital media?

There was a great deal of support for continuing to invest in digital and electronic technology in customer services although the option to write a letter and be responded to by letter should remain. There was also concern that vulnerable people and elderly should not lose out so this should not be the only method of accessing customer services.

A number said investment was needed to improve the Council's website.

Improvements to call centre suggestions included it being Birmingham based with local knowledge. One comment suggested that it was better to have telephones answered by departments. There was also a need for shift workers so the centre could be accessed at hours when you weren't at work. It *"needs to be customer focused with a genuine desire to help. The front line also needs to be knowledgeable about council services so that callers are directed to the right place."*

J. What is the best way to provide administrative functions within the Council?

While reference was made to the option of contracting out typing services, some pointed out that removing secretarial and other admin staff from a team could be a false economy as expensive managers then spend too much time on admin tasks. Working with a team was also seen as more productive than being in a centralised pool. However, there was agreement that the amount of support did need to be limited.

K. Other points raised.

- There is no mention of Equalities amongst the seven functions, neither is there any further mention of Equalities throughout the rest of the Green Paper.
- Some concern for pay and pension rights that possible changes would involve as this would impact upon staff morale and on unemployment in the wider economy.

6. Sport and Physical Activity

Key Points

Sports and physical activities seen as important for health improvement but also other factors such as housing and fuel poverty.

Yes, get other organisations to deliver sports and leisure activity as well as the Council but the Council has to facilitate this.

Schools need to do much more to help including opening up their facilities and undertaking more inter-generational work.

Have a wide range of sports, not just football and rugby.

Strong support for the Home Library Service.

A. What are the most important things that improve health that the Council should support?

There needs to be a greater emphasis on dietary education.

In terms of influencing health, sport and leisure are obviously key – but so are other factors like fuel poverty and poor housing.

Need to attack the health outcomes through the schools and the parents. Change the parents' attitudes.

B. Given the reduction in resources available to the Council, which groups of people or areas of the city should be prioritised in the delivery of any health and wellbeing services?

The debate here was similar to other service areas. While there should be targeting on the grounds of need – some areas have worse health outcomes and some groups of people are facing particular health issues to a greater extent than the population in general, there was also a strong feeling that good and basic health and wellbeing services should be universally available.

C. Are there other organisations or companies that could provide some of our sport and leisure services?

There was support for the suggestion that schools, universities, charities, and sports clubs should provide some of BCC's sports and leisure services. However, BCC had a key role to facilitate this.

Schools should do more to help with this agenda – education on diet, working across generations, opening up facilities to the public. Schools need to be pushed to be more active

contributors to the wider community, including opening up access to their assets (e.g., playing fields) and undertaking more intergenerational work with local residents.

D. Which services relating to sport and leisure should the council stop doing or support?

Comments were more about widening the sport and leisure opportunities available rather than stopping services.

E. What different sorts of health and leisure services should we provide in the future and how can we make better use of our parks?

Suggestions included:

- Look at what is done in other cities, which have developed a “park culture” such as London.
- Think differently about the Sport on offer – not just Rugby and Football. E.g. Archery clubs, cycling.
- Strong support for the Home Library Service reflected in 274 completed specific questionnaires which covered several details of the service.
- Cycling was an up and coming sport and Birmingham should have an indoor cycle track.

F. What can be done by local community groups and volunteers?

Comments pointed out that a great deal can be and is done by local community groups and volunteers but they do face obstacles including the lack of professional resources to supervise community sport and exercise activities. An example was given of a local heart support group found it impossible to get and retain sports supervisors. They are now having to train up their own

G. What activities/services should we continue to provide universally (free) and which should be targeted at those most in need?

See B above.

H. Do you agree we need to invest in exercise and sports to prevent spending on health and care services? What kinds of leisure activities should we invest in that are preventative?

Virtually every consultee agreed with this as ‘prevention is better than cure’. While almost agreed on this principle, key issues are having enough evidence to convince and having resources over and above that needed to deal with immediate problems. Combining investment in parks with walking clubs and similar initiatives involving exercise in parks was seen as preventative. This type of activity also increases social interaction which is good for health and wellbeing.

7. A Well Managed and Resilient City

Key Points

There was general agreement with the increased charges suggested in the Green Paper although the increases had to be appropriate and commercial but should definitely reflect cost inflation. Other charges that could be increased were suggested but this had to be combined with advice in navigating the system.

There was general agreement with the income generating proposals in the Green Paper although some said these should only be implemented when there was a robust case that they would generate more income than the costs to establish.

Many ideas were suggested to encourage people not to break regulations although some of these involved high profile enforcement early on.

Almost all respondents wanted the Council to continue enforcing but to speed up the process to make it more effective.

A. Should we increase our current charges?

Generally there was agreement with the increases suggested in the Green Paper although there was some concern that this would lead to a lot of complaints. Charges therefore had to be appropriate and commercial but should definitely reflect cost inflation.

A number of other charges were suggested as candidates for increasing charges including health and safety training, marriage ceremonies (together with an income generating suggestion of filming the ceremony and selling the resultant DVD), planning fees and fines for planning breaches. However, increases in fees should be combined with better advice in navigating around systems, particularly planning regulations.

One comment referred to the costs of collecting all the charges as well as the risk that higher charges would lead to avoidance or other effects such as increased fly-tipping (a point made by a number of people). It was suggested that increasing the Council tax might be a better option.

B. Should we or could we increase income?

There was general agreement with the income generating proposals in the Green Paper although some said these should only be implemented when there was a robust case that they would generate more income than the costs to establish. For example, higher planning penalties may be hard and more costly to implement as most enforcement cases referred to buildings already built. There had been some success in generating income from retrospective planning fees.

Although not mentioned in the Green Paper, there was opposition to charging for bulk and green waste collections.

C. How can we encourage people to behave in ways that mean we don't have to spend so much on enforcing regulations?

Many ideas for doing this were suggested including:

- Providing advice on planning permission;
- Speeding up the enforcement process and then charging for each contact;
- Increasing fines and publicising prosecutions (paid for by higher fines) as a deterrent;
- Higher profile enforcements early on which then increases pride in the area – the 'broken window theory' which suggests that breaches are more likely when other breaches are more highly visible;
- Enforcing when the Council can definitely prosecute;
- Use spot checks more so people think it is more likely that they will be found out;
- Encouraging competitions such as neighbourhood in bloom to increase pride in an area.

D. Should we choose to do less enforcement? (e.g. relating to Planning, Trading Standards, Environmental Health)

Almost all respondents disagreed, and wanted the Council to continue enforcing but to speed up the process to make it more effective. Some felt that weak planning and litter enforcement was already showing in what the city looked like. However, some felt that there should be a prioritisation in enforcement, for example where there was the greatest public health risk, and that small areas of behaviour that were difficult to enforce could be given less priority.

8. Developing Successful and Inclusive Communities

Key Points

Strong support for targeting resources at the most vulnerable but many not keen for all universal services to disappear, in part for social cohesion reasons, because some services had to be universal and because it was not always easy to define who was vulnerable. The choice between targeting and universal services depends upon the service being considered.

Young people and children identified by many as a priority group.

While there was an understanding that non-statutory services were more likely to be targets for cuts, most said that all Council services were 'essential' or important, gave great value to people's lives and contributed to the fabric of life in the city. *"It depends on the impact on residents and the impact it'll have on other services."*

The youth service was given by many as an example of a valuable non-statutory service

The majority felt that the Council should not necessarily stop delivering services that are delivered by others or in other parts of the city as local residents may not be able to access these services, they may all be working at full capacity and the Council has a role in ensuring quality. These situations should be approached on a case by case basis and through working in partnership.

Strong support for investing in prevention but key issues are having enough evidence to convince and having resources over and above that needed to deal with immediate problems.

Yes to co-location of services but keep an eye on whether this makes local services too far away for some, on the need to integrate staff and services as well and on preserving the physical heritage of the city.

Self-serve technologies and co-production were welcome approaches for respondents who worked for service providers in the public and third sectors but there were warnings that some sections of the public might be excluded by these methods and that they would fail if not adequately managed. Many members of the public were excluded from this part of the dialogue by a lack of familiarity with the jargon.

Support for the greater use of volunteers to enhance and sustain a service, but alongside trained and paid staff, not instead of them. Paid staff are also needed to organise and train volunteers. Volunteering should also be used as a path into employment.

There was some support for the libraries proposals in the light of the financial pressures but also much opposition to an over-reliance on volunteers particularly in areas that were less deprived.

There is strong support for libraries, which are seen as community hubs, and for the youth service. Parks and open spaces could provide more benefits if more widely promoted.

A. Where services are currently universally delivered across the city irrespective of the circumstances of individuals, should the council target services to the most vulnerable people in Birmingham?

Comments varied a great deal on this question although the majority were in favour of targeting services on the most vulnerable, particularly at a time of budgetary constraints. Many pointed out that there needed to be some universal services for social cohesion reasons as all paid Council Tax plus it is clear that some services had to be universal such as education and training and health. It therefore depends in part on the service being considered. One respondent said:

“Hopefully a balance can be achieved between all groups of people.”

A few made the subtle point that it was sometimes hard to define who was vulnerable and that someone might become vulnerable later if the services they received were poor. Universal services therefore had a preventative component.

“Vulnerable people are not specific to one place, age youth unemployment or... geography.”

Within these general points, a large number of the 50 people commenting on this question identified children and young people as a priority group for whom services should be targeted.

B. Where elements of services are not statutorily required or where a service is being replicated parts of the city and/or delivered by others, should the council stop delivering these services?

While there was an understanding that non-statutory services were more likely to be targets for cuts, most said that all Council services were ‘essential’ or important, gave a lot of value to people’s lives and contributed to the fabric of life in the city. Decisions should be made on the basis of need and social return from the service and only following consultation with residents and, because of potential knock on effects, other service providers.

“It depends on the impact to residents and the impact it’ll have on other services.”

The youth service was given by a number of people as an example of a valuable non-statutory service by some.

Some expressed a desire to see a list of statutory and non-statutory services provided by the Council.

Some non-statutory services are preventative and thus save money on statutory services in the long run.

A number said that non-statutory services should only be cut if there was an alternative provider. One person pointed out that often people find a way to get the service they want from somewhere else, for example from community libraries, although staff are not always adequately trained. However one respondent wrote:

“Not necessarily so....the overview and economies of scale the council offers can address issues of equal opportunities or equality.”

A further point made was that savings could be made by looking at the cost of corporate services to both statutory and non-statutory services. Some did not think that the Council was saving money by using Acivico and Service Birmingham.

With regard to replication of services or where services are delivered by others, many respondents did say they thought the Council should withdraw from providing these services. However, more respondents said that what the Council should do depended on the specifics of the services. Was the service in a place that was accessible to local residents? For example, the New Library was not easy to get too for many residents so there was still a need for community libraries. Existing service providers might also be working to capacity so demand would be unmet if the Council closed its service provision. There was also an issue about the quality of provision and the Council's role in improving this quality. For example, there was a difference between some community groups that were 'working with young people' and the Council's youth service.

"The Council should set standards of service and staff conditions by providing democratically accountable services."

"This needs to be looked at on a case by case basis."

Most thought that greater partnership working and collaboration between the different service providers was the way forward particularly as local partners might understand their locality better.

C. Where a service has robust evidence to support early intervention and prevention, should the council direct more of its resources to stop costly interventions later?

This was supported by virtually every consultee as 'prevention is better than cure'. Some pointed to the libraries role in improving literacy as an example and others to the youth service. Another wrote that cuts in the City Design and Conservation Team were having an adverse impact on protecting the city's built heritage and its ability to attract heritage grants. While almost agreed on this principle, key issues are having enough evidence to convince and having resources over and above that needed to deal with immediate problems.

D. Where a local asset is being under used or is costly in terms of maintenance/renovation costs, should the council close the building and move the service to a different one so it is more cost effective? This could include co-located services where a number of services are delivered from the same building or Community Asset Transfer where it is appropriate.

Many of the points made, which were generally in favour of co-locating services in as few buildings as possible, are summed up in the following two quotes:

'Co-location may help but service integration and the integration of staff is key to savings in this area.'

“An example of this in action is where one of the newer community libraries (Shard End) has an integrated neighbourhood office and a library on the bottom floor, which provides excellent services in one building.”

However, there were many words of caution around whether this would make travel distances to some services too great for more immobile residents and that some under-used assets might become more valuable and useful in the future. Another caveat was that not using an asset might

“damage/detract from the cultural fabric of the city - e.g. buildings such as Moseley Road Baths should be preserved and used.”

Preserving buildings with historic merit featured in many comments including pointing out that many libraries are in listed buildings.

Community Asset Transfers were seen as useful where the organisation being transferred to was viable.

“Community Asset Transfer is only helpful if there is likelihood that the service using the building will be viable in the long term.... leasing, or renting out the property to cover maintenance [may] be a better option, to enable the Council to take back the building for the Community if the service using it collapses.”

E. Would you support a service in changing the way it works with citizens so it was co-produced, or expected you to self-serve?

Written submissions to the Service Review dialogue were divided between people who had worked with these concepts and ordinary users of Council services who could not comment fully as they did not understand the jargon. The former were keen to use self-serve methods and technology and to explore ways of co-producing services that is designing and delivering services together with local people and other service providers. However, there was some concern that some sections of the public might be excluded by these methods and that they would fail if not adequately managed as illustrated by this selection of quotes:

“Self-service technology and the redesign of libraries is key to their future. Whilst the Green Paper advocates self-service it doesn't appear to identify how it will be financed?”

“Some customers still prefer face-to-face service or struggle with the technology. IT systems also need to be robust so customers have faith in using them.”

“But the majority of the elderly and social excluded residents still have not got basic ICT skills and to have a self-serve policy will in effect exclude these customers to any help”

“Self-service needs to be managed....it doesn't just happen.”

The jargon did exclude many members of the public as succinctly put by one respondent:

“No idea what you mean.”

This may be one reason why some respondents saw self-serve and co-production as cynical ploys to cover up cuts to services.

There was some keenness amongst staff of service providers in the public and third sectors to explore co-production as a way of preserving or even improving some services, but there were warnings that it was not always the solution or appropriate and that it required work and had to be followed through.

“Within a local authority context, co-production has to be real, it isn't just about consultation with clients, it needs to go all the way through an organisation, staff, officers, elected members or in my opinion it can't truly work.”

F. Would you support a service in changing the way it works so that volunteers were enabled to provide services?

There was general support for using volunteers to enhance or sustain a service but almost all felt that volunteers couldn't run a service by themselves; there was a need for trained staff as well. Trained staff were also needed to organise, train and supervise volunteers.

There was concern that volunteers should not be used to substitute for paid jobs and that volunteers should not be exploited but have an opportunity to use their experience to progress into a job. The following three quotes illustrate these points:

“Volunteer run services are difficult to sustain, are effectively putting people on the 'dole' and result in services being delivered by untrained individuals, often unsupervised, and often delivering services to vulnerable members of our communities”.

“Volunteers cannot take the place of properly trained staff in the delivery of council services. If there is a role for volunteers, those individuals need training and supervision. The use of volunteers is not an easy low-cost option.”

“Yes, only if it enhances the service and gives young people help into employment.”

G. During tough economic times, are these the correct priorities for the Birmingham library services? Do you agree that the options set out for all areas of the service will result in a more targeted, integrated and sustainable service?

There was some support for the proposals in the light of the financial pressures but also much opposition. Some respondents suggested that there were other options that could have been explored such the libraries being established as a Mutual and with greater flexibility to innovate than available under local authority control.

For one consultee:

“The priorities should be reading, digital access to services and community cohesion.”

For another:

“Literacy levels are below national average in Sparkbrook and closing a facility with access to books which children cannot afford to buy will possibly have a negative outcome.”

However, yet another wrote:

“To focus on libraries as just literacy, and knowledge ignores the importance of them as a resource for community development, and information provision.”

There was some disagreement with the plan to priorities in areas of deprivation and lower literacy whilst relying on volunteers much more in other areas, summed up in the following quote:

“I believe that all areas of the city should have an accessible free and local library service run by paid staff with skills and expertise.”

A number of respondents stressed that they saw libraries already as community hubs and it this overall role that would be shut down.

Many detailed recommendations were made in addition to those in the Green Paper by a significant number of respondents.

H. Do you agree with the proposals for specific services? (Birmingham Library Services; Community Support & Advice Services; Community Development Services {Youth Service, Connexions Services, Adult Education Service, Community/Local Development Services, Local Play Services, Local Car Parks; Housing Services {Council Housing, Homelessness Services, Supporting People Grant Services; Health and Wellbeing; Parks and Nature)

Again, there appeared to be a disjunction between those who worked at or with the Council who understood many of the changes proposed and the general public who found the jargon difficult to understand and the Green Papers or explanations at Ward Committees inadequate for them to be able to comment on the proposals. However, the dialogue has thrown up concerns about the impact of the proposals and a number of detailed ideas on what might go wrong and alternatives. It has also provided an impression of what services people find most important and views of the role that people expect the Council to play.

There is strong support for libraries, which are seen as community hubs, and for the youth service. Parks and open spaces could provide more benefits if more widely promoted. The following quotes illustrate the range of views:

“Libraries are excellent value for money and very cheap in the grand scheme of things.”

“Changes to the way Youth Services are delivered is a false economy and by pushing through these proposals and cutting services further, the Council will end up paying far more in the medium to long term. The hub and spoke model was adopted last year but this no longer works as the hubs have no spokes”.

“We need to protect our services for young people. These have already been cut significant. The retention of all existing youth centres is also need along with the two new youth centres (My Place buildings) These are a legacy for the next generation of young people”

“I believe the most vulnerable people will be severely affected by the Council’s proposals.”

“The city's open spaces are vital to improving citizen's health, mitigating climate change, developing sustainable travel routes and so much more. For relatively little cost you have a resource on most people's doorstep that can change lives.”

“Also it is imperative to keep the constituency support officers, Hall Green in our case as the relationship within the Council is through them.”

I. Other points raised.

- Compost the green waste collected by the Council and sell the resultant fertiliser, potting soil, etc.
- Set up register of vetted tradespersons – they pay to be listed and residents pay to access the list.
- Involve volunteers for neighbourhood clean ups and maintenance, with the Council ensuring issues like insurance are covered.
- Self-help is key to the review, e.g. residents willing to cut grass or hedges on Council land, residents preferring to use local tip rather than be supplied with wheelie bin, recycle everything – not just certain bottles or plastics. Council should incentivise self-help using vouchers or similar.
- Ensure street lights are switched on and off at the appropriate times to save money.

9. Developing a Successful and Inclusive Economy

Key Points

Most did see supporting the local economy as an important function of the Council.

Most felt that there was a need for intervention to make the economy more inclusive, and many ideas were put forward, although some felt that such initiatives only encouraged dependency. Some emphasised the role of libraries and the youth service in creating a more inclusive economy.

A. Should we continue to support Birmingham's economy?

Most did see the Council having an important role in supporting the Birmingham economy by creating jobs, improving infrastructure, attracting inward investment and boosting tourism. Some thought much of this was best left to the market with the Council concentrating on road infrastructure, trading standards and trying to get business rates reduced. However, the majority were in tune with the following comment:

"Birmingham needs to grow its own economy, not sell control out to distant investors who have no real long term interest in the city."

Reducing energy costs and the carbon intensity of the Council, businesses and residents was also raised as an important objective.

B. How can we support the development of a more inclusive economy?

Ideas put forward included:

- Bringing vacant housing property back into effective and sustainable use;
- Training young people and the unemployed;
- Enterprise development;
- Encouraging 'import substitution' and a greater use of local labour;
- Making Birmingham a more attractive place to remain in once trained and gaining a job.
- Expanding the airport and improving access to it by car.

Some emphasised the role of libraries and the youth service in creating a more inclusive economy.

Most felt that there was a need for intervention to make the economy more inclusive although some felt that such initiatives only encouraged dependency.

C. Should we develop an "enterprise services" model?

Many did not understand the terminology but those who did thought it was 'worth a try'. There was some enthusiasm for developing a municipal energy company in partnership with the private sector which would provide Birmingham with a competitive advantage.

D. Should we consider new ways to fund services to help provide support for the growth of the economy?

Many people had difficulty responding to this question because they didn't know what it meant. Those that did were mainly supportive although the devil is in the detail.

E. Should we look at the way we work both as a Council and with partners across the region to help identify ways of reducing collective costs by working more closely together?

This was generally supported although there were warnings of some dangers to avoid including not trying to set up too large projects which then fail – it is better to first look at smaller areas for cooperation – and the benefits of the partnership only going to one area.

F. Should the City Council consider varying or renegotiating current contracts and funding agreements to either save money or get greater value?

This was broadly supported although some felt it applied more to large companies and their contracts rather than smaller businesses.

G. Other points raised.

“The Council should seek to use the LGA supported REFIT framework to invest in energy efficiency in its own buildings.”

10. Safe, Clean and Green Neighbourhoods

Key Points

Most in favour of charging for some of these services but some believe these are services which benefit all.

Combine awareness raising and education programmes with enforcement.

Mixed views on outsourcing, changing specifications, increasing charges and keeping staff terms and conditions under review. Some said yes, some said no and some said that it depends on the service and specific local needs.

A. Do you agree that we should develop some of these services on a more commercial basis? This would include increasing revenues as well as reducing costs.

While many respondents agreed with this, some said it depended on the proposal while others were strongly opposed arguing:

“These are all functions which benefit all citizens and make Birmingham a better place to live. Failing to keep up street cleaning, for example, will make Birmingham less attractive to residents, visitors and potential investors - leading to more crime and social problems.”

B. Do you agree that we should develop awareness raising programmes to try to change behaviour and reduce the demand for these services? For example should we put resources into persuading people not to drop litter or fly tip and businesses to clean up around their properties? Do you have any suggestions for how we might do this?

Most respondents thought this was worthwhile but many said it needed to be combined with enforcement. Some said there also needed to be the

“provision of tools to help people change habits, e.g. street bins, street recycling bins.”

Others felt that such programmes had not been effective in the past and new ideas should be piloted. Schools should be a focus of such campaigns. Other Council changes, such as charging for green waste, might lead to a growth of these bad habits.

C. Do you agree that we should strengthen enforcement by making more use of the powers we already have to prosecute people who break environmental rules?

Comments made to date are almost all in favour of this.

D. Do you agree that we should explore the potential for outsourcing services and the costs and benefits of this?

As with similar questions in other Green Papers, there were mixed views with some in favour of more outsourcing to reduce costs, some against as it is important to keep skills in house while others argued it depended on which service. The choice, according to one person:

“Needs to be intelligence and evidence led, based on the need down to a neighbourhood level.”

E. Do you agree that we should consider changing the specification of services, for example their frequency?

Changing the specification to reduce costs was an option that could be explored but many did not want to see the frequency of services reduced. Some suggested that this might work better for some services than others and would vary between different neighbourhoods. Pilots were needed.

F. Do you agree that we need to increase charges for services where appropriate?

Again, mixed views here and a view that it depended upon the particular service and particular needs in different localities. A common view was reflected in the following quote:

“Basic services or those benefiting all citizens directly or indirectly - no. Only enhanced services or those for individuals or small groups should be run commercially”.

G. Do you agree that we should continue to review the terms and conditions of staff to ensure that we are achieving value for money whilst ensuring fairness?

Mixed views here too with many saying that staff terms and conditions should always be kept under review while many others saying that Council staff had already lost a great deal and too much ‘battering’ will lower morale even further and lead to poorer quality services.

11. Safeguarding, Supporting and Educating Young People

Key Points

Very strong agreement that safeguarding children should be a top priority but many stressed the need for a holistic approach that involved a wide range of agencies including nursery schools, day care centres and children's centres.

Early intervention and preventative work is important. There was a good deal of good practice in Birmingham that should be built upon.

There needs to be good working conditions and management if Birmingham is to attract the child protection social workers it needs.

The Council needed to be the facilitator of partnership working between schools and with other relevant agencies. Support for the Birmingham Educational Partnership registered.

Celebrate the city's educational successes!

Invest in early years learning.

While most wanted to see child protection services protected, they also felt that just focusing on 'crisis point' services was 'putting patches on the dam'. There was a need for more early intervention and joint working to prevent situations reaching crisis point.

A. Do you agree with our top priority being to make the city safer for all of Birmingham's children – and in particular our intention to make the necessary improvements to our safeguarding and child protection services?

Responses overwhelmingly agreed with this with only one of the 70 respondents to the Be Heard online survey disagreeing. This is perhaps not surprising as the large majority of the respondents were employees of nursery and primary schools or children's centres. One reflected the prevailing mood:

"This is a bit of a "motherhood" statement. How could we not agree?"

However, respondents did not just agree but added important additional comments, in particular the need for safeguarding to be seen as a collective responsibility involving a number of service providers with the role of nursery schools, day care centres and children's centre's emphasised in particular. The following three quote sum up the general sentiments of the comments:

"I wholeheartedly agree with the principle that all children should be safe. That has to be a priority across the country not only in Birmingham and I also believe very strongly that it is essential to ensure that funding for safeguarding is secure but not at a cost to other valuable services such as Nursery Schools which also provide an excellent level of safeguarding."

"Yes., with consideration given to developing the holistic provision that enables the safeguarding and protection of children i.e. schools, adult mental & health services, as these play (or could play) a significant role in improving safeguarding in the City."

“Nursery School provision is a front line service targeting the most vulnerable families in society. Our in depth knowledge and experience within the safeguarding sector and close ties and working relationships with other providers (children's centres, the private, voluntary and independent sector, safeguarding hubs, health professionals, police and other community services and leaders) make us an essential but easily overlooked resource.”

The need for early intervention and preventative work was also highlighted, for example:

“Safeguarding children is not only about those that deal with families when they are in crisis, but about spotting and supporting families before they are in crisis.”

There was a good deal of good practice in Birmingham that should be researched, consulted upon, celebrated and built upon.

Others stressed the importance of creating a good working environment for social workers if Birmingham is to attract the social workers it needs.

“Yes, but Birmingham has been failing for years, I know many experienced social workers who used to work in Birmingham, but never work for Birmingham’s children’s services again, due to high caseloads, poor management, poor terms and conditions, it seems Birmingham doesn't learn.”

B. How should the role of the Council in education change in future?

There was a wide range of comments in answer to this question although some respondents were unsure. The Birmingham Education partnership was welcomed by many and a primary role of the Council was seen as coordinating partnership working between schools and also with other institutions such as the NHS.

“The education partnership is a good way forward!”

Many felt that this facilitation of joint working was particularly important as there were fears of fragmentation and for equality of opportunity with the growth of academies and free schools.

A couple felt that the Council should concentrate on statutory and critical services (such as Special Educational Needs specialists) and focus its service provision in these areas.

“The council should act more as a facilitator rather than a provider of services... [and] act as a unifying force by encouraging cooperation between schools and between schools and other agencies.”

There was some nostalgia for the support to schools that used to come from the Council:

“I feel the loss of school Improvement advisors access to schools on a regular basis is a great disadvantage. They knew the city and fostered improvement for the city of Birmingham not just for their own company's gain.”

The educational achievements of Birmingham schools were raised by many with some stressing the importance of the foundation laid by those supporting early learning in the city. (There was just one lone voice that said children learnt nothing at nurseries.) These successes needed to be celebrated.

“In terms of education, Birmingham is not a ‘national disgrace’, our outcomes prove this. We need the Council to ‘champion our successes’.”

C. How can we continue to support improvements to the standard of education that Birmingham’s children receive?

While many ideas were put forward in answer to this question, the strongest theme to emerge was the importance of early years education in determining future educational success. Some stressed that this was particularly important for communities facing deprivation on many fronts.

“Investment in early childhood education is essential when considering how to improve standards, on a short term and long term basis. There is a growing body of evidence to show that experiences in the early years are critical to children's future achievement and wellbeing and that early intervention saves money in the long term.”

“We require a positive, forward looking strategy for the development of early years provision in Birmingham.”

Other points put forward are illustrated in the following quotes:

“By providing high quality staff to advise and support struggling schools and to facilitate networks of schools. This may even entail encouraging schools to group together as academy trusts or as groups of academies and community schools.”

“Better use of pupil premium and stop using PFI”

“Use excellent school leaders ,continue to recognise the significant part that school leaders play in raising standards.”

“Ensuring that some staff have QTS status and other members of staff hold relevant qualification to work with the correct age range.”

D. Do you agree that the whole citywide “system” of children’s and young peoples’ services and organisations need to work better together and develop a different, more cost-effective model for supporting children and young people?

The strong support for partnership working was also reflected in answers to this question. But there was concern that these partnerships were led by professionals, that nursery education should not be cut or overwhelmed by such partnership working and that social workers should be integrated better with schools rather than separated off into separate hubs.

“Yes, we can always improve partnership working, but any developments should be driven by the professionals and organisations, who are involved in working with children, young people and their families so that the ‘model’ is achievable on the ground; enabling high quality as well as good value financially.”

“Yes, but send the staff to where the children and families are (i.e. children's centres, schools) rather than in isolated buildings where they cannot build relationships with families.”

“Value for money needs to be achieved. If by this we are considering the amalgamation of education services (0-19 agenda), on single sites with a single leadership team, I am unable to concur.”

E. Do you agree (pending the Joint Review) that spending on safeguarding children should be protected from cuts, even if this means greater cuts elsewhere? If so, should those greater cuts apply solely to other children’s services, or should they be spread across the whole council?

The majority view is summarised in the following quote:

“I agree that spending on safeguarding must be protected but I disagree that this should be at a cost to other children’s services.”

Respondents in general felt that while safeguarding was essential, it was not just about a service at crisis point but was about all taking a responsibility and identifying and preventing possible problems well before crisis point. Some felt that eventually less could be spent on crisis-point social work if there was enough early intervention and joined-up working.

“We require a strategy for early intervention that quickly identifies concerns and provides the appropriate support and challenge to families. Too many issues escalate through the system that could be addressed in more effective ways without incurring the costs and bureaucracy associated with the involvement children’s social care.”

“We have spent many millions of pounds to prop up a failing social care system in recent years, millions of pounds that have had not achieved our desire and responsibility to protect. We continue to lurch from one crisis to another attempting to reinvent the wheel with no real direction. We continue to ask the same questions and receive the same answers; unsafe and unsatisfactory service for our youngest citizens. This must stop. Appropriate funding of social care is required. It is, however, too simple a suggestion to ‘ring-fence’ all funds currently allocated in this way. To do so will only ever result in placing patches on the dam,”

F. Do you agree that limited discrete parts of current BCC “general fund” spending should be charged against the Dedicated Schools Grant for 14/15, where it does not materially impact on schools budgets?

Most of the respondents were non-committal as they wanted further information and more specific proposals. There were concerns about the impact on school budgets and that funding saved would not be spent on other children’s services.