

Lambeth listens...

10 March 2010

...to your views on our spending

“Over the last four years local residents have had a direct impact on how Lambeth Council spends money.

For those residents who answered a survey or attended a focus group, I'd like to thank you for your feedback. It is always encouraging to hear that people have noticed positive changes in the borough. However, there are still council services that we need to improve to meet your needs and expectations.

The next few years will be a tough time for local government finances. We need to save over £40 million in the next three years and will need to make some tough decisions. By listening to those who live and work locally, I'm sure we will continue to improve the services we deliver to you.”

Councillor Jim Dickson

Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources (*pictured above right*)



What we did

Each year, we ask residents about how we should spend money, improve services or make savings through budget consultation. This information is used by councillors to make decisions on what our budget should be funding and helps council officers understand local people's perception of our services.

In August and September last year, we surveyed over 500 residents on their doorsteps and ran a wide range of focus groups and detailed interviews. This research tells us what people in Lambeth are thinking on key areas such as our financial management and the value for money of our services. We also asked about how we can improve services.

Our finances

This year we asked local people how they feel we are managing our budget, how well we are communicating the way we spend money and how we can improve the use of our facilities. We found that people were more positive about our financial management and this is at our best ever level.

However, many people feel that they did not know enough about our financial management to be able to comment on these issues. When we provided specific details about the money that we spend on services that affect all residents the majority felt that we provide good value for money across a range of services, particularly parks and community safety.

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Our research found that many people were unaware of our financial situation or thought that we will have the same or more money to spend in the future. This shows that we need to make our financial situation clearer to residents.

Crime and disorder

Crime has historically been a key issue in the borough. However our research shows that a majority feel that crime has stayed at the same level or dropped in the last 12 months. This is consistent with Lambeth's official crime statistics which show that total crime figures have slightly reduced compared to last year.

Of the people affected by crime a significant number reported that they had been affected by burglary compared to last year (31 per cent compared to 17 per cent). This is consistent with Lambeth's crime statistics where residential burglaries have increased in the last 12 months.

People feel that the future priorities should be to:

- make policing more visible
- take a tougher line on anti-social behaviour
- provide diversionary activities for young people and
- make better use of CCTV.

ACTION: In partnership with the Clapham Park project we have responded to the rise in burglary by supporting free home security upgrades to tackle burglary.

Priority is given to older residents, people on low incomes and those living in burglary hotspots. However anyone can apply to have an assessment of their home.

Service improvements

We asked people to comment on how they would like to see the services they currently get improved. There is strong demand from many residents for more council services to be provided online, for example applying for parking permits and checking council tax or rent balances. However, people still wanted to be able to use existing options such as the phone.

While only a small number (14 per cent) do not have access to the internet this group includes many of those who might be seen as more vulnerable residents. This information will be very important when we develop our internet services in the future as we will need to take account of those less able to use them.

ACTION: We are introducing a pre-booked appointments system at our customer centres, and making more services available online so that our residents don't have to call us or come to a customer centre to complete their enquiry. One new internet service we have already introduced is our online benefits form (See 'Helping people affected by the recession' on page three).

NB:- Lambeth reviews all service changes to ensure that the change does not accidentally discriminate against any group of customers. Customers who still need traditional access, such as face-to-face services, will be offered the same types of access as present.

More for less

The whole of the public sector is now in a position where it must deliver much more for less - this includes Lambeth Council. Part of this involves improving the use of our buildings or vehicles and exploring new opportunities for generating money.

The survey found that Lambeth residents are open to many ideas about how we can improve our use of buildings and increase the money received outside of council tax collection. However, people were clear that this should not mean additional costs to residents for basic services.

People support the idea of introducing commercial services such as a coffee shop or newsagent into libraries, but not into customer centres. Having more advertising on our vehicles or buildings was seen as an easy way of raising extra money and would have no or minimal disadvantages.

Helping people affected by the recession

Some people felt that we should play a greater role in guiding people through the complexity of claiming benefits and ensuring that they are taking up all they are entitled to.

To help young people gain work experience when there are fewer jobs on offer, residents felt we could be offering more work placements.

ACTION: The Green Man Skills Zone in Coldharbour Lane is due to be opened by April 2010 and will provide a range of support services for unemployed residents. This 'one-stop shop' will work to tackle the many barriers faced by residents who have been out of work for a long time.

We have introduced the online benefits form to enable residents to apply for benefits on the internet. We are also providing people with useful information and advice such as the 'Supporting you' guide which outlines the financial support available to local people.

We recognise the need to support young people finding a job and have been offering work experience placements in the council for unemployed young people, including those who are leaving social care.

Waste and recycling

Refuse collection is probably the service most used by residents and recycling is rising up their list of priorities. Our research found that:

- People say they would be likely to recycle their food waste if free caddy liners were provided. People are not so keen if they have to pay for them but the majority would still support the idea.
- The idea of a free collection service for things like clothing, shoes and small electrical items was very popular.

ACTION: The results supported our decision to introduce a textiles and small waste electrical and electronic equipment collection service.

The willingness to participate in food waste services was fed into our waste strategy which is looking at how we can introduce a borough-wide service.

Parks

Lambeth residents view parks as a local success story. People were keen for the council to maintain the standards that have been achieved and think about how the parks could be more used widely.

ACTION: Through future changes to our parks maintenance contract, we aim to have:

- more staff dedicated to single parks through a reduction in mobile teams
- localised staff that are present throughout the day, particularly during summer evenings when young children are playing in paddling pools
- support for community groups to run more community and activity days including planting, ecology and environment themes.

Partnership working

Many residents do not understand the differences between what the council delivers and the work of the police, Lambeth NHS, Transport for London and community groups. People often suggest that all the partners should work more closely together to address common issues.

ACTION: Lambeth has now adopted “First Class: The Lambeth Third Sector Investment Plan” which sets out how joint working can:

- address growing needs at a time of reduced public sector funding
- increase the involvement of the charitable and voluntary groups in our services
- improve the ability of our communities and neighbourhoods teams to deliver services that deal with problems early on to prevent them growing into significant issues.

“Your borough, your budget, your choice”

Lambeth created a pot of £250,000 and asked residents to vote for three projects that they would like to see funded. Projects included improvements to parks and recreation facilities, youth and community centres, and improved public areas. Residents voted in person, online, by freepost or by SMS.



ACTION: Over three thousand votes were received in total. Residents voted for:

- £125,000 to be spent on improved recreation provision on Streatham Common
- £75,000 to be spent on a wet play area for children in Norwood Park
- £50,000 on outdoor fitness equipment in Brockwell Park

Work has either started or is poised to begin on all these projects. Look out for opportunities to suggest projects or vote on funding in the future.

For more information on the results of the budget consultation or to provide feedback and comments, please visit www.lambeth.gov.uk/budgetconsultation