

One Darlington: Perfectly Placed

“Thank you to those who responded to the article in the December edition of the Town Crier which outlined our approach to meeting the funding challenge ahead whilst ensuring we are still in a position to continue delivering on our priorities for ‘One Darlington: Perfectly Placed’.

“As you may have read in the local media, the recent ‘Oneplace’ independent assessment of the Darlington area by the Audit Commission shows that public services are performing well and working together to deliver real improvements for the people of Darlington.

“As part of this on-going commitment to working across the Borough to secure good quality services and value for money for you, we are now inviting your views on our proposed budget plans for 2010/11.



“Your views are very important to us - please take a little time to complete the following questionnaire and return it to us using the instructions provided at the end of this article.

“If you would like to find out more, we are also joining with our partners in health, fire and police to invite you to a ‘Talking Together – planning for the year ahead’ event which will take place from 5.30pm on Monday 25 January 2010 at the Dolphin Centre, Darlington – further information is provided at the end of this article.

“With the funding challenges ahead it is now more important than ever that we hear directly from you what matters to you and I hope you will have the opportunity to join us for this event.”

Councillor John Williams, Leader of the Council

Have your say

- Cut out and return the slip below using the FREEPOST address provided.
- E-mail your views to connecting@darlington.gov.uk or telephone (01325) 388527.
- Visit the website at www.darlington.gov.uk/budgetconsultation where you can submit your comments via our online questionnaire and forum.
- Join us at ‘Talking Together – planning for the year ahead’ which will take place at the Dolphin Centre, on Monday 25 January from 5.30pm, where councillors, Council officers and representatives from the police, health and fire and rescue services will be on hand to discuss their plans.

To find out more about the Council’s budget plans, or to view a full copy of our proposals, please visit www.darlington.gov.uk/budgetconsultation

What happens next?

The Council’s Cabinet will meet at 5pm on **Tuesday 16 February 2010** to fully consider your feedback before a final budget is proposed.

The final budget will then be considered at a meeting of the full Council which will take place at 6pm on **Thursday 25 February 2010**.

You are welcome to attend both Cabinet or Council meetings – for details, please contact the Democratic Services Team on (01325) 388351 or e-mail democraticservices@darlington.gov.uk

We will also be providing a full report on the feedback you provide and the budget for the coming year in the April edition of the Town Crier.



We need to hear from you by Friday 5 February 2010.

Proposal 1: Freeze Council Tax

Question: Do you agree or disagree with the proposal to freeze Council Tax required by the Council?

Your response (please delete as appropriate): I agree/disagree with the proposal to freeze Council Tax required by the Council.

Proposal 2: Balancing the budget

Do you agree or disagree with the proposals to balance the budget? We would welcome your comments.

Proposal 3: Invest in Darlington

Much of the money we receive to invest in Darlington is already allocated to specific schemes - this is because we had to bid for the money for particular schemes. However, we would welcome your comments on our investment plans.

Please cut out and return to: **FREEPOST, RRBK-JYEX-EHXR, Darlington Borough Council, Public Consultation, Darlington, DL1 5QT** (please add additional sheets as required.)

If you require a copy of the completed feedback report – please provide your details here.

I would like to receive a copy of the feedback report:

by e-mail (please tick and provide e-mail address) _____

by post (please tick and provide postal address) _____

Your details will only be used for the purposes of providing the consultation feedback report to you and will not be retained for any other purpose.

Please return your response by Friday 5 February 2010.

Our approach to budget planning

The Council’s proposed approach to budget planning and reducing expenditure is three-fold - we propose to:

- continue to improve our efficiency in everything we do – we have saved £3.5million in the last 12 months;
- review the Council’s budget in light of the priorities included in the Community Strategy ‘One Darlington: Perfectly Placed’ to determine which services are not a key priority and, therefore, can be reduced or withdrawn;
- review who delivers services to ensure that the most efficient and effective option is selected – this may mean less services being directly delivered by the Council.

Our budget proposals for the coming year

The Cabinet has three proposals it would like to receive your views on – once you have read these proposals, please complete the cut-out slip at the end of this article and return it to the FREEPOST address provided.

Proposal 1: Freeze Council Tax

The Cabinet is very much aware of the financial challenges many residents and businesses in Darlington are facing and, in light of this, proposes NOT to increase Council Tax this year.

People in Darlington pay less Council Tax than other residents in the North-East. However, the Council Tax bill residents receive is made up of three elements: i) money for Darlington Borough Council services ii) money for policing iii) money for fire and rescue services - some residents also pay a Parish Council Tax.

Whilst the Council does not propose to raise its part of the bill, the overall amount residents are asked to pay may rise if the police, fire and rescue authority or Parish Council choose to increase their amounts.

Proposal 2: Balancing the budget

Due to the increasing gap in levels of future funding and the increasing demand in services, members of the Cabinet and officers have developed a number of key proposals to further reduce spending whilst maintaining effective services.

Our plans for balancing the budget are as follows.

- We will invest an additional £1.4million in social care to pay for the increase in demand for services.
- Schools will receive a 3.1% increase in funding in line with an increase in Government grants.
- We will drive efficiencies of £4.7million across the Council and its services.
- The majority of service levels will remain the same. However, it is proposed there will be some reductions in service levels to save a further £240,000.
- We will seek to increase income by £200,000 from charges and sales.

Proposal 3: Invest in Darlington

Whilst the Council must find savings, it is also important to invest in the Borough.

These investments will be made using capital budgets which we compete with other local authorities to secure from Government. A recent example of this approach is our success in securing £57million from the Government’s Building Schools for the Future fund which will be used to rebuild or renew Branksome, Hurworth and Longfield schools.

Over the next four years, the Council proposes to invest £143million through capital schemes, this includes:

- £10million on roads, tackling congestion, improving safety and helping bus passengers.
- £82million on schools.
- £19million on regeneration schemes including Central Park, the new Teesside University building in Darlington and helping new businesses.