

# Let's hear your views on the **COUNCIL'S BUDGET**

## The Council continues consultation on its budget proposals.

**WHAT do your refuse collection, the quality of your child's education, the state of the footpaths and the amount of Council Tax you pay have in common?**

They are all directly affected by the setting of Darlington Council's annual budget – now you can have your say on where the money goes.

The Council is presently working on its budget for the coming year, with a wide variety of issues to take into account.

This leaflet tells you many of the things you need to know about the impact of the financial decisions being taken and, crucially, how you can affect them.

**Please take a few minutes to read about the Council's budget, how it affects you and then give us your thoughts.**



## **The Council's budget and how it is spent**

The Council's Cabinet, which is made up of senior councillors, is planning to spend £200m next year. This money will be spent on an enormous range of services, with the main ones being:

- Schools;
- Care for children and elderly people;
- Refuse collection, street cleaning and other environmental services;
- Roads and footpath repairs;
- Sports, leisure and arts facilities such as the Dolphin Centre, Arts Centre and Civic Theatre.

The money for all of this comes from several sources – grants from the Government (55%); income from Council Tax (17%); service users (13%); business rates (14%) and the Council's own reserves (1%).

## **The challenges we face**

The budget that has been suggested would allow the majority of public services to be maintained at the same level you have seen over the past year. Some services will be improved in line with public consultation.

It also takes into account emerging challenges that Darlington Council, like countless other local authorities across the country, faces.

These include:

- A further £1.5m being spent on caring for elderly people;
- An extra £1m needing to be spent on waste disposal and recycling issues;
- A new national free travel scheme for pensioners that will cost about £750,000.

The Council must also become more efficient. Darlington has a good track record in this area, having reduced costs by some £17m in the past ten years and more efficiency savings are part of this proposed budget. Value for money is a key aspect of any budget and external inspectors gave Darlington top marks for value for money, so you can see we are working hard to spend your money wisely.

## **A balancing act**

The upshot of all this is that the Council's Cabinet faces the financial equivalent of a balancing act – striking a balance between what it spends and what it brings in, and a balance between the needs of the public and the level of Council Tax for the coming year.

## **The options**

To strike that balance, the Cabinet needs to either reduce spending on public services or increase income by £2.6m. This leaves three options:

- Reducing spending on public services;
- Increasing Council Tax;
- Increasing fees and charges for services.

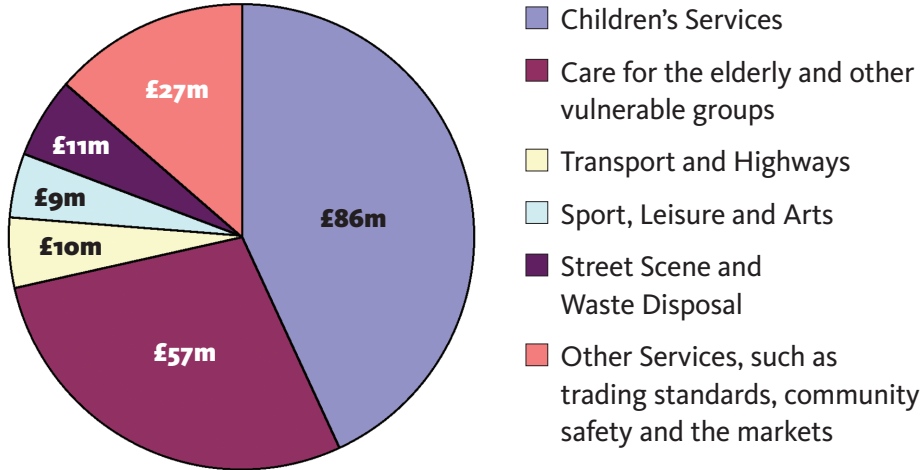
## **The proposals**

What Cabinet is proposing is a mix of all three: reducing spending on services by £1.8m, raising Council Tax by 4.9 per cent and increasing fees and charges by £500,000.

This will lead to the majority of existing services remaining in place and a number of services being improved.

*To see the detailed budget report, log onto the Council's website at [www.darlington.gov.uk](http://www.darlington.gov.uk) (click on Budget Proposals) request a copy by calling (01325) 388287 or call into the Town Hall reception.*

## How the budget is spent



## LET'S HEAR YOUR VIEWS

The Cabinet believes its proposed budget is fair, but is now eager to hear your views. You can give your opinions on the plans by answering the questions below:

1. Are you happy with the budget proposals? YES  NO  (please tick)  
If not, which aspects are you unhappy with and how would you like things to be done differently?

COMMENTS: .....

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2. A one per cent rise in Council Tax represents an additional £360,000. If you want to pay less Council Tax what services would you reduce to make this possible?

COMMENTS: .....

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3. If you want to pay more Council Tax how would you like to see the extra money spent?

COMMENTS: .....  
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Please send your comments along with your name, address and age to: Freepost, RRBK-JYEX-EHXR, Darlington Borough Council, Public Consultation, Town Hall, DL1 5QT or e-mail budgetviews@darlington.gov.uk by Thursday, February 14.

NAME:.....AGE: .....

ADDRESS:.....

..... POSTCODE: .....

**How to get more involved**

- You can discuss budget issues with Council officers at Talking Together events taking place on the following dates:

**Tuesday, January 15, from 5pm to 7.30pm, at Holy Family RC Primary School, Prior Street, Cockerton;**

**Saturday, January 19, from 10am to noon, at St George’s CE Primary School, Neasham Road, Middleton St George;**

**Wednesday, January 23, from 6pm to 8pm, at St James’ Church Hall, Allan Street, Albert Hill;**

**Wednesday, January 30, from 6pm to 8pm, at Whinfield Primary School, Jesmond Road;**

**Saturday, February 2, from 10am to noon, at All Saints’ Church, Ravensdale Road;**

**Wednesday, February 6, from 6pm to 8pm, at Heathfield Primary School, The Broadway.**

- The Council’s Resources Scrutiny Committee will be reviewing the proposed budget on Tuesday, January 29 at the Town Hall. Residents can attend the meeting and comment on the budget.
- A Cabinet meeting on February 19, at 5pm, in the Town Hall will consider all of the public responses and residents can also attend this meeting.
- Finally, a meeting of all councillors will consider the Cabinet’s proposed budget on February 28 at 6pm, in the Council Chamber at the Town Hall. Residents can ask questions at that meeting – contact Lynne Wood on (01325) 388287 to find out how to do so.

