

ANGUS COUNCIL

ANGUS COUNCIL – 24 JUNE 2021

THE COUNCIL'S APPROACH TO CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT ON OUR PLANS & BUDGETS 2022/23

JOINT REPORT BY VIVIEN SMITH, DIRECTOR OF STRATEGIC POLICY, TRANSFORMATION AND PUBLIC SECTOR REFORM AND IAN LORIMER, DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

ABSTRACT

This report sets out the proposal for the communication and consultation processes for the Council's plans and budgets as agreed at Angus Council on 17 December 2020 (report 330/20 refers), and seeks the Council's approval for the content of the consultation and engagement tools for the 2022/23 planning and budgeting cycle.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

1.1 It is recommended that the Council:

- a) notes the three strand approach to consultation and engagement intended to be progressed in the 2022/23 planning and budgeting cycle as agreed at Angus Council on the 17 December 2020, (report 330/20) as set out in section 3 of this report;
- b) notes the intended timing of the consultation set out in paragraph 4.2 which will allow the Council to have due regard to the results as it begins to formulate its priorities and budget strategy for the 2022/23 financial year and beyond;
- c) approves the draft intended content for the Simulator Tool in Appendix A, noting this may be subject to some final minor edits;
- d) approves the draft intended content for the Social Pinpoint Tool in Appendix B, noting this may be subject to some final minor edits.

2. ALIGNMENT TO THE COUNCIL PLAN

2.1 This report contributes as a whole to the Council Plan.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 Reference is made to Item 11 of the minute to Angus Council of 17 December 2020 which approved the approach to consultation and engagement, report 330/20 refers.

3.2 Report 330/20 identified 3 options for the 2021/22 planning and budgeting cycle including the timescales and what those options would mean for finalising the plans and budgets in March 2021. The options identified were as follows:-

Option 1 – Three Strand Approach undertaken during January 2021, outputs fed into the finalisation of plans and budgets in late February 2021

Option 2 – Two Strand Approach undertaken during January 2021, focus on information sharing and answering questions, no consultation using Simulator

Option 3 – Information Sharing Only in lead up to budget setting in late February 2021 with Three Strand Approach developed further for launch in Autumn 2021

- 3.3 Option 3 was agreed by the Council which noted that the content of the Simulator and Social Pinpoint would be subject of a further report to Angus Council prior to the summer recess in June 2021.
- 3.4 As per Option 3 information sharing was undertaken in the lead up to the 2021/22 plans and budget setting in March and officers are now proposing the content and timeline for the Three Strand Approach for the 2022/23 planning and budgeting cycle.

Details of the Three Strand Approach are as follows:-

Strand 1) We use the Delib Simulator tool to test it out and get feedback from the public on some of our existing Council Plan priorities.

The simulator would be set up so that participants have a number of points (scoring) that they need to allocate to different priorities and options. However, there will not be enough points available to deliver all priorities in full, thereby requiring choices/compromises to be made. This will help citizens understand at a very high level some of the challenges the Council faces in balancing competing demands and will also give the Council a sense of the relative importance of our existing priorities to citizens.

The suggested content for the Simulator is set out in Appendix A of this report so members can consider the merits of this option and approach. The simulator would include some brief background on the purpose of the consultation including links to more information and the further information on Social Pinpoint (see Strand 2 below). Participants would be able to allocate between zero and five points against 3 options under the 4 headings in our Council Plan of Economy, People, Place and Our Council, i.e. there will be 12 options overall to allocate points against. A fifth category covering the possibility of raising additional income will allow participants to increase (by up to 6) the number of points available to use on other priorities should they so wish. There is no right or wrong answer to how points are allocated – if this option were adopted we would be testing the relative importance of the 12 options and the income raising aspects with the Angus public.

It is important to emphasise that because it's not been used before by Angus Council the content and options for the Simulator are deliberately pitched only at a high level for this year. The Simulator is intended to be used as an opportunity to gauge in relatively simple terms the public's view on our existing priorities. If the Simulator is well received it can be used to carry out more detailed consultation with more sophisticated options in future.

Strand 2) We use the Social Pinpoint tool to share key information about the Council's plans, budgets and challenges to enable an online conversation to take place with the public.

The content of Social Pinpoint would be drawn from the summary financial information in our 2021/22 Finance and Change Plan. The intention would be to use videos and graphics to convey what can be quite complex issues and to hear what the public's questions and comments are via a discussion board.

The suggested content for Social Pinpoint information is set out in Appendix B of this report. Social Pinpoint would be used mainly to share information about the Council's Plans and Budgets and to respond to comments and questions raised by the public. The Social Pinpoint tool would be used to complement the Simulator tool.

Strand 3) We offer a phone-in/online questions and answer session where the public can contact us to ask questions about our existing plans and budgets and hopefully have them answered there and then, or if not answers can be posted later. A video of the session could also be posted on the Council's You Tube channel.

This would provide another means of engagement and would help promote the engagement tools in Strands 1 and 2 above. Further detailed planning for this is required.

4. CURRENT POSITION

- 4.1 The content for the Simulator and Social Pinpoint engagement tools attached at Appendix A & B are draft and may be subject to some final minor updates and edits. The Council is being asked to approve the undertaking of the work using the 3 strand approach outlined in Section 3 using the content in Appendices A and B.
- 4.2 There is some flexibility on the timing of this work but it is important that the results of the consultation are available in a timescale which will allow the Council to have due regard to the results as it begins to formulate its priorities and budget strategy for the 2022/23 financial year and beyond. The intention is therefore that the Simulator and Social Pinpoint tools would go live in mid-late July and run for around 6 weeks, concluding in late August/early September. This will allow the results from the Simulator and Social Pinpoint engagement to be collated and taken into account as the Council starts to update and develop its plans and budgets for the 2022/23 financial year. This timing will allow all of the information to be considered together in the lead up to the 2022/23 plans and budgets being set. A summary of the output from the consultation work would be captured formally in a report to the Council in November 2021 and the learning from this year's engagement work used to inform future consultation and engagement work on our plans and budgets.
- 4.3 The engagement tools will give members a sense of some of the key issues being raised by citizens and how the public view our existing priorities, but it would not provide information on specific budget choices. Members would of course wish to reflect on the output from the consultation in finalising their plans and budgets, but this will be just one of many pieces of information to inform those considerations and there is no intention for the output from the work to determine specific decisions in the budget for 2022/23. It is important to note that the intention of this report is for this to be the start of a process of consultation and engagement not a one-off exercise which ends when plans and budgets are set for 2022/23.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There will be officer time to run a consultation process but this will be met by prioritising existing staff resources and using existing budgets given the importance of this work. The annual subscription of £5,000 for the simulator software was paid in 2020/21 from the Provision for Additional Burdens revenue budget and this remains available to use as proposed in this report. Likewise, the Social Pinpoint tool also has an existing subscription.

6. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESMENT

- 6.1 An equality impact assessment has been completed and is attached at Appendix C.

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List of Appendices

Appendix A - Simulator Tool – draft content

Appendix B - Social Pinpoint Tool – draft content

Appendix C – Equalities Impact Assessment