

Redbridge Borough Council Budget Engagement Report of Feedback from Residents' Workshops



31st October 2016

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1. Executive Summary

1.1 Introduction, objectives and methodology

Due to reductions in central government grants Redbridge Council has to change the way it delivers many public services. The authority needs to reduce its revenue spend by £42.6 million over the next five years. The Council is keen to take into account the views of local residents as it looks for ways to reduce its spend. To this end, the Council commissioned the independent research company Community Research to design and deliver a participative and transparent process to identify local residents' priorities.

To give participants time to learn about and discuss the council's services and budget challenge, the Council held eight 2½ hour workshops across the borough. Participants were recruited to broadly reflect the population of Redbridge. Seven of the workshops were with general residents and the eighth was with members of Redbridge's Youth Council. In total 163 residents took part in the sessions.

1.2 Key findings

Participants welcomed the opportunity to give their views on how the Council could reduce its spend. Many were aware that Redbridge, as with many councils, faced budget challenges but very few had prior knowledge of the size of the deficit.

Finding savings was challenging, as almost everything that the Council does was seen as an important service to support a reasonable quality of life. Participants also frequently said they felt the needed more information about the rationale for each service area and its budget to make a more confident judgement. However, by reviewing the services and spend across the sectors, participants suggested where services should be protected and which services could find savings.

Services that most participants wanted to protect were:

- **Services for vulnerable people:** these included services for people with mental health problems, disabilities, the elderly and children in need of protection. There was a strong belief among participants that there was a social duty to care for and protect the vulnerable and that all efforts should be made to maintain the availability and quality of services for these people.
- **Voluntary sector funding:** seen as a very small budget for the value it generates, participants wanted this to be protected or increased to encourage more volunteering for the benefit of the borough and as a way of saving money across services.

Services where savings could be found were as follows:

- **Promotion of healthy lifestyles:** tables at every workshop questioned the value of the Council funding the promotion of healthy lifestyles to such a large extent (£13.9 million). They felt that this should be the role was already being fulfilled by the NHS/Central Government/ schools and should not be funded by the Council, with the exception of sexual health clinics.
- **Temporary accommodation for homeless and housing support:** Almost all participants were sympathetic to the plight of homeless people and those in need of housing support. However, the size of the budget and participant's perception of the Council paying large sums to private landlords and hotels and B&Bs meant that they thought that savings could be found.
- **Planning and building control:** Most participants recognised the role this service played in helping to ensure appropriate developments in the Borough. The reason for putting this into the reduce budget category was the call for this service to be self-funding or even profit generating through fees from private developers.
- **Back office: IT, human resources, finance, legal etc:** cost savings could be made through cutting down on duplication, sharing services with other local authorities and efficiency savings such as "going paperless". Homeworking was also suggested to reduce the need for office space and help reduce pressure on transport services
- **Libraries and museums:** Views on whether to cut or maintain spending on libraries were split into two evenly sized camps. Those who wanted preserve spending on libraries argued that they are an essential service and "the heart of the community". The most commonly given reason for believing that the libraries could bear some funding cuts was that many more people are using the internet to get information and using tablets or kindles rather than reading hard copy books.
- **Customer services and debt collection:** Money could be saved by providing more customer services online and more automated services, but still provide some face to face personnel. Debt collection was felt to be a self-funding or even a profit generating area for the Council.
- **Support for schools:** One of the least well understood service areas. Most said that the very size of the budget meant this area merited scrutiny for opportunities to save money. Some participants who worked in schools said that there was real scope for making efficiencies.
- **Leadership and strategy:** This service area generated a mixed reaction. Some thought good leadership needed investment and cuts could endanger the future of the Borough. Others were angry at the thought of well-paid council staff and suggested paying for a five year strategy that was then delivered by more modestly paid staff.

- **Transport support and roads:** People's views on the quality of roads in the borough diverged quite markedly. Those who thought the roads were in good shape thought that spending could be reduced for a short time and diverted to more urgent areas such as support for vulnerable people.

Across all services, participants highlighted some changes to improve them, make them more efficient or increase revenues.

- **Reduce overlap between similar services:** particularly in the areas of education and children's services, participants felt there was an overlap in services and potentially too much repetition and bureaucracy. They wanted these services reviewed to reduce duplication and streamline processes.
- **Avoid use of expensive agency staff:** Some participants expressed frustration that the Council was paying over the odds for agency staff; particularly for social workers and street cleaning services. They wanted to see more use of Council employed staff which would deliver better value and greater consistency (a high turnover in agency staff meant people didn't see the same person more than once or twice.)
- **Invest in council owned housing and spend less on private landlords and expensive temporary accommodation:** there was a sense that the Council was guilty of expensive short termism by paying out for expensive temporary accommodation rather than investing in council housing for the long term.
- **Involve more voluntary sector services:** participants acknowledged the good work done by organisations such as Citizens' Advice Bureau and Victim Support but wanted to see more cross-pollination between services; such as helping young people or young offenders to gain a skill such as building or landscaping by helping with park maintenance or regeneration of housing.
- **Consider ways of earning revenue**

When asked about **council tax** and if they would be willing to pay more to help maintain services and reduce the deficit, a common ratio at the tables of 5/7 said no and 2/7 said yes (reluctantly). Those who said no, gave the increase in rent and other costs as reasons not to pay more. Those who said yes wanted visibility on how the extra funds would be spent and that any increase should come only after all efforts had been made to find efficiencies.

The majority of adult participants indicated that they would like to take part in future similar exercises, providing the Council with a resource for ongoing engagement. These participants should be given some feedback outlining the conclusions of the events they participated in and setting out how these findings will be used to inform budget decision making. Further engagement activities could be considered with this group as a way of gathering valuable feedback and input from residents.

2. Introduction, Objectives and Methodology

2.1 Introduction

Like many local authorities, due to reductions in central government grants Redbridge Council has to change the way it delivers many public services. The authority needs to reduce its revenue spend by £42.6 million over the next five years. The Council was keen to adopt a participative and transparent approach to identifying local residents' priorities, allowing them to deliberate and to weigh up the issues and, thereby, feed into the budget decision making process.

2.2 Objectives

This engagement programme was, therefore, designed to:

- Deliver insight, views and feelings from a range of residents about their expectations of the Council's strategy and priorities.
- Ensure a broad spectrum of views was included, with a mix of key demographics.
- Be a positive experience for participants, enhancing their view of the Council.

2.3 Methodology

Discussions took place at eight x 2.5 hour workshops with a total of 176 participants: 163 general residents and 13 young people, who were members of the Redbridge Youth Council. The following sessions were conducted:

- Redbridge Central Library, Ilford on the evening of 10th October with 25 participants.
- Wanstead Library, Wanstead on the evening of 11th October with 23 participants.
- Cranbrook Primary School, Ilford on the morning of 15th October with 23 participants.
- Seven Kings High School, Ilford on the afternoon of 15th October with 25 participants.
- Redbridge Cycling Centre, Hainault on the afternoon of 17th October with 21 participants.
- Orchard Estate Community Centre, South Woodford on the evening of 17th October with 23 participants.
- Glade Primary School, Ilford on the evening of 18th October with 23 participants.
- Redbridge Central Library, Ilford on the afternoon of 24th October with 13 young people from the Redbridge Youth Council.

2.3.1 Recruitment of participants

Recruitment of the seven general residents' workshops was undertaken by Community Research. A purposive recruitment approach was used – a local recruiter went out into community locations and sought to invite members of the community to join the workshops. A monetary incentive of £50 was offered to encourage attendance and as a thank you for their time and participation. Recruitment was undertaken using quotas based on key demographics to ensure that a good mix of general residents was included in the research, broadly in line with what is known about Redbridge's population. The final profile of participants who attended the general residents' workshops is provided at Appendix 2.

The workshop of young people comprised members of Redbridge's Youth Council. The participants were offered a monetary incentive of £25 to attend

2.3.2 Workshop format and content

The workshop agenda and materials used with adult audiences and the separate workshop agenda and materials used with young people are attached at Appendix 3. In both cases the agenda was developed to allow participants to:

- Ensure they understand what Redbridge Council does.
- Discuss their spontaneous priorities for Council services.
- Gather an understanding of the Council's income, spending areas and budgetary pressures and what the Council has already done, over the last few years to reduce spending.
- Discuss and prioritise Council spending areas – dividing them into areas where a reduction or cut is definitely acceptable, areas they would wish to see protected from cuts and areas that they might possibly consider for reduced spending.
- Discuss and explore views around charging for services, Council Tax and suggested areas for efficiency improvements.

The young people's workshop was designed to be more interactive and fun than the adult workshops, with a team-based quiz used to build their knowledge. In the case of the adult workshops, a senior Council representative presented some of the key information and was available for an interactive Question and Answer session. The information presented included the following:

- Explanation of population growth since 2011 Census.
- Projected population growth of an additional 25,000 more people since 2014 by 2020 and the impact on services.
- Projected population increase by 2039 when there will be an additional 104,000 more people living in the Borough.
- Funding – where this money comes from and where the money is spent.
- Budget gap of £42.6 million over next 5 years.
- Reminder that Council Tax Band D is the most common in Redbridge and is currently £1,139.22 per year.

Workshop participants discussed the issues in small groups, each facilitated by an independent researcher. Notes of these separate small group discussions were taken and these have been analysed, to produce this report.

At the end of the session, participants filled out a feedback form on their views of the session and an outline of responses is provided in Appendix 4. They also completed a postcard to the senior management of the Council detailing one single recommendation when considering the budget.

2.3.3 Limitations / warnings for interpretation

Events of this nature and scale cannot claim to offer a robust or statistically reliable representation of the approximately 300,000 residents in the borough. Neither are they intended to; the data produced is qualitative rather than quantitative in nature.

In addition, participants become more informed about the issues they are discussing, as the workshop progresses. As such, participants, in a sense, become more unrepresentative by virtue of their increased understanding as their deliberations continue. This clearly has benefits in terms of the quality of feedback, in that it is based on an enhanced understanding; however it is important to be cautious if attempting to extrapolate from this, assumptions about the views of the wider audience of uninformed residents.

Every effort was made to ensure that the information provided to participants was not leading, or indeed misleading. Participants were encouraged to ask questions and participate in a dialogue, in order to become more informed. It is important not to over-interpret the views of workshop participants at the end of the process, as being representative of the wider population. However, the process does provide insight into what a broad cross section of residents concluded, after they had had the opportunity to learn more about the issues facing the Council.

3. Spontaneous Views and Priorities

3.1 Spontaneous views regarding Council Services

Each workshop contained a mix of participants. Some were lifelong residents, others were more recent newcomers either from other parts of London or from other countries. People lived in a range of areas across the borough. They, therefore, had diverse views about the quality of life in the Redbridge and their dealings with the Council.

Those who were positive about living in Redbridge based that on their **appreciation of the parks, the high quality of education** and the **good range of transport links**. Some also mentioned the **good quality of social care** they had received as older people and for disabled family members, in comparison to experiences in other boroughs.

When talking about the less positive aspects of living in the Borough, participants referred to **litter in town centres**: *"they just like to keep the posh parts nice"*, the **shortage of affordable housing** and more **homeless people** on the streets.

3.1.1 Positive aspects: parks and green spaces, education and good transport links

- Some participants described the borough as a safe, clean place to live, and enjoyed its green spaces, parks and forest: *"the parks are the best part of living in Redbridge"*. Some who used to live in other inner London boroughs such as Tower Hamlets felt that Redbridge was comparatively cleaner and better maintained.
- Most participants were spontaneously positive about education provision in the borough. Many knew that most of the schools in the area were rated good or outstanding by Ofsted.
- Participants appreciated Redbridge's good transport links with frequent buses, trains and tubes. They were also very positive about Crossrail coming to Redbridge.

3.1.2 Areas for improvement: Environmental services and affordable housing

- Many participants were grateful that the Council still provided weekly rubbish and recycling collections and free (x3 a year) bulk waste collections when this was being phased out by other boroughs.
- In every group discussion participants spontaneously focused on the Council's role in cleaning and maintaining public spaces. Participants recognised that their experiences of public spaces and the environment differed according to where they lived in the borough. For example, some Ilford residents felt that the area's streets were particularly dirty, whereas

Wanstead residents acknowledged that their area was relatively free from litter.

- Many participants complained about litter and the lack of litter bins.
- Many also complained about the limited provision given to residents for domestic waste removal: no wheelie bins, boxes where lids do not stay on, distribution of green recycling bags which then get stolen, no recycling facilities in high rise buildings.
- Some older residents said that their quality of life in the borough had declined over the years, with more litter, greater traffic and parking congestion and less pride amongst other residents in terms of maintaining and caring for their properties.
- In every workshop there were participants who complained about the high volume of takeaway outlets, such as chicken shops and the fact that they generated litter.
- Participants frequently raised the issue of the lack of affordable housing and the prevalence of poorly maintained, expensive private rented accommodation in the borough. Many thought that the Borough needed a better strategy on how to house those on low income in an increasingly expensive area.

3.2 Attitudes towards the Council overall

- Some felt that their dealings with the Council were mostly positive and had no axe to grind about the service they had received.
- Some participants praised the council for inviting them to events like this and thought the information they received about the budget should be more widely shared.
- Other participants said that the Council was unresponsive and uninterested in helping residents. A few participants had personal experience of needing to campaign hard or volunteer to act or contribute before much-needed improvements were made. Specific examples included playparks such as the one outside Wanstead library; traffic calming and parking restrictions in Ilford and South Woodford.

3.3 Spontaneous future priorities for the Council

Services most often seen as future priorities for the Council were housing, education, rubbish collection and street cleaning, services for the elderly and roads. Further details are provided below:

- **More affordable housing** – many participants were concerned at the lack of social housing within the Borough. Investment in affordable housing and social housing was perceived to be essential to counteract the high costs of private tenancies and temporary accommodation such as hotels. Some wanted to see an easing of regulation around housing development, particularly the conversion of properties to residential use. They suggested regenerating empty buildings to provide social housing. All participants at the

Young People's workshop highlighted housing as a priority. One young person said:

"They shouldn't be moving people out of the area. There should be enough housing in the area. For children, its important because their education is affected, their social life is affected if they're uprooted and have to go to difference schools or commute."

- **Protect and maintain the high quality of schools:** many recognised the increase in quality achieved in recent years and didn't want this to be put at risk by budget cuts. Some called for further expansion to provide more school places locally.
- **Improved care of the local environment and public spaces** – Pride in the area was frequently expressed and many people called for the following:
 - Better street-cleaning and pavement maintenance.
 - Focus on hot spots for crime and antisocial behaviour e.g. Barking and Ilford stations; more CCTV cameras; a frequent call for wheelie bins to help rubbish stay in the bins.
 - Improved building and planning controls - Limiting increase in takeaway outlets and betting shops to reduce litter; protection of green spaces against the threat of new housing.
 - Maintain the parks and green space - do not sell off green space for development: new houses are needed but participants urged the regeneration of existing properties instead of building on green space.
 - Improved recycling services - particularly for those living in high rise flats who share a communal rubbish disposal chute. For those living in houses, more information was needed about how to recycle correctly using the Council's bins. There seemed to be a lack of consistency in how recycling was managed in the borough: some have bins other have bags.
- **Improved access to leisure facilities** - investment in more swimming pools and affordable gyms, providing more activities for children and young people e.g. youth clubs.
- **Improved partnership working between the Council, police and other agencies** - particularly to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour, including drug use.
- **Improved communication and greater transparency** from the Council regarding its service provision. Many participants mentioned that they would like the Council to communicate better about what it is doing, both in terms of long-term strategic plans and capital investment (e.g. new swimming pool - when and where?) and in terms of giving them useful information about regular services for residents and how to better use and access these (e.g. correct recycling behaviour). Suggestions for how to do this included using something like the back of a P60 form which shows a pie chart of how money is spent and Ward members talking to residents.

- **Improved governance and accountability.** Many participants perceived that there was too much waste/inefficiency within the Council (and the public sector as a whole). They wanted the Council to be more transparent about expenditure.
- **Tackling things according to what's needed in a particular area:** e.g. rubbish management
- **Attracting more businesses** - reduction in rates to encourage more businesses into the borough.
- **Improved road and traffic management** - to ease congestion, encouraging walking and cycling; provision of more parking spaces, especially disabled parking. Especially in new developments.
- **Greater investment in services for vulnerable residents,** particularly for the elderly, disabled people, young people and the homeless.
- **Better use of public money for improvement projects** - less wastage on schemes which do not benefit the community; there were complaints about civic projects at Gants Hill and Barkingside Leisure Centre.

4. Reaction to presentation from Redbridge Borough Council

4.1 Reaction to how the budget is currently spent

Most participants were aware of the Council's need to reduce its budget, but didn't know exactly how much needed to be saved and were often surprised by the figures given. At the young people's workshops, all tables underestimated the budget they thought the Council was responsible for. The most surprising aspects of the presentation were:

- The wide range of services that the Council was responsible for delivering.
- The relatively small contribution that Council Tax makes to the Council's overall income and the range of other funding streams.
- The size of the deficit.
- The high cost of social care, housing benefit and customer services.
- The scale of the future housing problem and the money which needs to be spent on providing temporary accommodation for homeless people.
- The relatively limited amount of discretionary expenditure within the Council's control.
- The high amount spent on health promotion
- That the Council had to fund some transport projects. They expected that, as TfL is a non-profit making organisation, it should be able to afford to pay for transport upgrades.
- That Redbridge had lost so much industry and employment and that most people who lived in the Borough worked outside it.
- The inherent contradiction between Council expenditure on promoting healthy lifestyles and the planning rules which enable unhealthy food outlets such as takeaways and chicken shops to increase.

4.2 Awareness of previous cuts to services

Some participants said that they had not noticed any dramatic decline in council services, but most had noticed some reduction in the quality and availability of services during the last few years, particularly:

- Street cleaning and maintenance of public spaces such as parks and highways.
- Closure and removal of recycling bins for clothes and waste disposal sites (e.g. Alderbrook Estate.)
- Provision of activities for children and young people e.g. fewer youth clubs.
- Cuts to social care and services for disabled people and the greater use of private company staff.
- Closure of day care centre services.
- Less funding for arts and music education.
- Stopping offering school children support with work experience.
- Swimming pool provision in Ilford.
- One Stop Shop only accessible by telephone rather than in person.
- No more free pest control.

- Fewer park wardens meant that parks felt unsafe places to be in the early mornings and later evenings (noted at the young people's workshop.)
- The privatisation of services such as Vision taking over parks and leisure services led some participants to question if they were charging the Council too much.

4.3 Response to the scale of the issue

Many participants were concerned that the Council was trying to reduce expenditure and yet still trying to improve the services it delivered. They questioned how it would be possible to do both. Some were concerned that other boroughs had introduced cuts such as reducing street lighting and did not want this to happen in Redbridge.

Participants suggested a range of ways of addressing the budget deficit:

- Greater efficiency of Council services: a review of all areas of Council services and types of staff to see where more efficiencies could be made.
 - Focus on large spend areas such as adult social care and children's services and scrutinise value for money e.g. are some elderly care homes badly run and thus overly expensive? Is there duplication in children's services?
- Greater involvement of the voluntary sector and making use of volunteer resources.
- Greater innovation and entrepreneurship in making use of Council assets i.e. properties (such as libraries, schools and parks) and services (e.g. Council run car MOTs) for the benefit of residents.
- Increased personal responsibility amongst all residents for keeping the borough clean e.g. through greater enforcement of penalties for littering; retailers being more responsible for clearing up areas outside their premises.
- More holistic approach to delivering services whereby young people could be encouraged to get involved in improvements to the borough for their own benefit (work experience, life skills) and the benefit of the community as a whole (meeting a need, cost savings, reduction in opportunities for anti-social behaviour) e.g. maintenance of parks, provision of services to older people etc.
- Benchmarking costs vs other local authorities.

Some participants expressed frustration that when residents had previously provided their views on Council initiatives they had been largely ignored. They emphasised the importance of the Council providing feedback and explaining the reasons why it had decided to reject resident's views when making its decisions.

The presentation also raised a number of common questions – these are summarised in Appendix 1.

5. Prioritisation of the main spending areas

5.1 Introduction

Many participants struggled to categorise which services should be prioritised over others because they:

- Found it challenging to understand how these large sums were spent on the various services.
- Did not feel sufficiently informed of the value for money of current services and whether they were already efficient or could be further improved.
- Perceived that most of the Council services listed were essential or important.

However, during their discussions participants were able to reach some degree of agreement over the priorities and during the workshops some consistent themes emerged.

"The scale of the issue is shocking... we have to reduce."

5.2 No reduction in spend

The main areas which participants most wanted to protect from reductions in expenditure were **services for vulnerable people** (those under the headings Health and Social Care, Children and Young People, Education.) But whilst they were keen to protect these services from cuts, participants did highlight some changes to improve them and/or make them more efficient.

Another area for protection was **voluntary services** which were perceived as relieving the pressure on Council services and offering good value for money. Many groups were surprised that the budget for this area was so small.

In their initial discussions and sorting exercise participants identified a large number of services to protect which were **universal services** (under the heading 'Place' i.e. those services that had a big impact on the quality of life in the borough for everyone.)

5.2.1 Services for vulnerable people

Participants gave the following explanations for wanting to protect these services:

- **Services for people with learning disabilities and mental health problems**
 - This area had near universal support for maintaining or increasing the budget.
 - Poor mental health was perceived as an increasingly widespread issue that had been underinvested in for years.
 - It was seen as the duty of society to protect people with mental health problems: both from harming themselves and from harming other people

(the group was conscious of recent press reports of people with mental health problems harming other people.)

- The service for people with mental health issues was seen to be struggling to cope and prioritising those with extreme issues over those with ongoing problems.

"I would hate to think what will become of them if support is reduced"

- It was suggested that preventing people's mental health problems from deteriorating would help save money in the long term.
- Some were aware of previous cuts, such as the closure of Oakside and Burnside day centres.
- They said that there was already little or no respite care for carers and that care was often the sole responsibility of the family.
- The large size of this budget was acknowledged and some felt that savings could be made by working more closely and co-ordinating services more effectively with voluntary organisations and using existing venues such as libraries and council halls.

- **Help and support for children with disabilities; services for children with special educational needs (SEN)**

- These children were considered to be among the most vulnerable in society and, therefore, needed protection and support.

"I couldn't live in a country that doesn't support its most vulnerable".

- Their families also needed support so that the parents can earn an income and support themselves and contribute to the economy and society.
- This area was viewed by some as over stretched and underfunded already, with many children with SEN not getting access to support quickly enough.
- Another argument for not reducing funding in this area was the need for early intervention to prevent escalating problems that then limit these children's life chances and lead to greater costs in the future.
- There was a call by some to increase this budget in line with the increasing number of children in the Borough.
- However, some participants were surprised by the size of this budget.

"It's very expensive, a lot of money being spent on 3% of the child population."

"It's about 30 times more expensive to educate them than other children"

- Some wanted to see savings and suggested that volunteers could get involved with providing additional support in this area or by training staff in schools to deliver part of the service.
 - Other savings could include sharing teaching assistants between children with similar care needs.
 - Some at the session with young people thought that money could be saved given the size of the budget.
- **Early years, childcare services, children's centres and support to parents**
 - Many participants thought that this area had already been cut and that there should be more investment in these areas.
 - In one group participants highlighted the Orchard Estate community centre: it used to care for mothers across the estate but now was only used by social services and most people did not have access to it.
 - Some participants felt that education services were an important strength of the borough and that services that enabled children to enter the education system ready to learn was vital.

"The formative years are very important".

"This is a prevention of problems if the money's spent wisely"

- Some identified that these services provided vital support to single parents.

"New mums can suffer, like with post-natal depression."

- Means testing and charging for some services was suggested by some groups.
 - Others questioned the popularity of children's centres, saying that they were not used very much by the community. They suggested cutting down on services that are not popular or charging a small fee for certain activities.
- **Services for children in care and support for families**
 - Children in care were seen as very vulnerable and in need of good quality services to prevent problems later in life
 - More focus was called for helping young people 18 to 21 moving on from local authority care to independence.
 - One participant who had lived in foster care said that children needed more tailored care given the differences in need of those with severe behavioural problems and those who are in care because of family issues.
 - One participant said that fees paid to foster carers should be reviewed because some foster families provided minimal care (small rooms, limited food) and profited from their earnings *"raking in money"*.

- **Youth services**

- Many participants felt that the funding was already very low for this service when compared with the benefits delivered by providing services to young people.
- Young people in particular thought that the budget was low *"is that all we get?"* and had already been cut.

"If they don't invest in youth services there is potentially more youth crime."

- It was considered to be an essential service which helped young people avoid falling into gang crime, taking them off the street and reducing anti-social behaviour for the benefit of the whole community. Particularly those young people whose families were not providing the support they needed.
- Some believed that youth services could be improved and expanded at a low/no cost by collaborating with private sector funders, working with Churches, and Scouts/Guides, using volunteers and free venues such as schools and playgrounds.
- Others thought it should be spent more efficiently and targeted at specific needs.
- Some suggested that the budget could be reviewed alongside the Parks and Leisure budget to look for synergies e.g. young people helping with park maintenance or activities.
 - Involve older school children to run services for the elderly and younger children.
 - Help young offenders to be trained in construction trades by doing work such as helping to refurbish council houses or in landscaping/gardening by maintaining and improving parks.

- **Services for children and young people who are asylum seekers**

- Many participants felt that the borough had a duty to look after these vulnerable children.

"They've been through hell".

- Some looked to the future and good saw a good legacy of supporting these children:

"We are creating a generation of people who will contribute to this country and make a difference."

- Some participants expected that this funding was ring-fenced or should be funded by central government because it was a statutory duty to look after asylum seeking children.

- The Young People's workshop was supportive of keeping this budget because *"it will help them merge better with the community."*
 - Some participants wanted more assurance that this money was being spent on genuine asylum seekers (reference to recent media reports about 20-30 year olds claiming to be children).
 - Participants wanted to know if Redbridge was taking more or less than its fair share and if this was a fair allocation of spend vs what is spent on UK children for similar services.
 - Some participants suggested that spend could be reduced by getting more volunteers involved e.g. to teach English.
 - A small number of participants wanted other services to be prioritised ahead of this group as they said they weren't affected by this issue.
- **Fostering and adoption team and child protection and training for child social workers**
 - These budgets were considered to be small for such important services to help vulnerable children which could result in cost-savings in future.

"In the long run it will put money back into the Council if these kids are helped and function well."

"It costs less later if they're adopted, given good families and homes. Their lives will be better so they'll rely on the state less."
 - The process of adoption should be made easier (so long as the correct checks are made.)
 - Some groups called for training to be focused on permanent social worker staff rather than employing *"expensive agency staff"*. They said that agency staff cost the Council double the amount of permanent staff and that they change all the time leading to an inconsistency in care.
 - Some felt that social workers had to do too much training related to red tape and that money was wasted on training that was just common sense.
 - Peer to peer training from experienced to less experienced social workers was suggested to save on external training costs and help increase team bonding.
 - Some wanted to see children brought into the decision-making process by courts.
 - The closure of the Adolescent Resource Centre was highlighted by one group as an example of cuts going too far.

- **Residential, nursing and home care for elderly and disabled adults**
 - Most participants thought that this budget was important to maintain or increase because people are living longer, the elderly population is increasing and support is needed for those who can't support themselves.
 - Many elderly people are isolated and vulnerable.
 - Elderly people had contributed to society and paid taxes throughout their life and society should recognise this by caring for them.

"The elderly shouldn't have to beg, steal and borrow to get into a home".

- Some recognised that the system was already means tested and thought this should be further extended.
- Hospital beds were blocked when there was not enough care provided in the community, participants recognised that it was far more expensive to keep people in hospital than care for them at home.
- The rising incidence of dementia meant there was a rising need for constant care *"you are scared for them and for yourself."*
- Some noted that two 'step down' care facilities had been closed: Wanstead and Heron.
- Those that thought some reductions could be found suggested that families should be supporting their older relations more directly rather than being placed in care homes:

"We could change the system by keeping people in their own homes and paying more carers... Less care homes, less beds, less staff, less money."

"They've paid into the system and should get help to stay at home with carer support from loved ones if possible. This would be a cheaper option than residential care."

The suggestions from the young people's workshop for protecting services and where budgets could be reduced were very similar to those given by the general resident groups. One significant difference was that all tables at the young people's workshop said that **Residential, nursing and home care for elderly be reviewed for reductions**. Reasons given were the large size of the budget and that families could do more to support the elderly.

5.2.2 Voluntary sector funding

This was an area that was perceived to have been *"shredded already"* by earlier cuts.

Many participants were shocked at the low level of funding provided by the Council when compared to the great impact that this could have in terms of

helping the community and providing services which the Council could not deliver.

Some mentioned that providing this funding often led to matched funding and considerable volunteer resources.

“Victim support: people offer time, advice, if that wasn't there people would go on to have further issues that would cost more money. It's preventative rather than curative.”

There was a call for publication of what this was spent on and what their work delivers for the borough.

A small number of participants thought this could be cut slightly and ask projects to be more self-sufficient by increasing their fundraising activities.

5.2.3 Universal services

During the sorting exercise many participants wanted the Council to protect services that everyone experienced and which had a considerable impact on daily life including. But as with services for vulnerable people, participants did suggest ideas for improving efficiency and revenue generation:

- **Sports, parks and leisure**

Most participants thought that these facilities were important as a resource for people's well-being and spending time in one of the parks *“lifts you for the day.”*

- Many participants felt that the parks are central to what makes Redbridge a nice place to live.

“The parks are one of the nicest parts of Redbridge.”

- The budget was seen to be small for the large benefit these services and facilities provided.
- Parks are seen as a safe place for young people to spend time, rather than being out on the streets.

“Parks are used in the mornings and evenings. We need to get schools and day centres using them more”.

“There are so many skyscrapers and there's isolation for the people who live there and no outside living space”

- Many participants compared this budget to the one for promoting healthy lifestyles and thought that good parks and leisure facilities were a far more effective way of encouraging health living.

- Some suggested that they could be made more efficient so that they make more money. For example leisure facilities should open at more convenient times and facilities improved to compete with private clubs.
- Participants complained about the lack of a swimming pool in the area and wanted to see one built.
- Some requested that Christmas decorations be brought back to increase the appeal of the area.
- **Reducing crime and anti-social behaviour**
 - Keeping control of crime levels and reducing anti-social behaviour was also important for Redbridge's reputation and future as a safe and desirable borough in which to live.
 - Participants spoke of the fundamental need to feel safe as residents.
 - Participants were particularly protective of this budget when they learnt it included tackling domestic violence.
 - Some felt that expenditure needed to be increased, and wanted a greater focus on tackling unsafe areas around stations.
 - Increased fines for anti-social behaviour could help reduce Council spend.
 - Some called for more CCTV cameras.
 - One group complained of *"youngsters playing music in their cars in residential areas at 2am."*
 - Some wanted to know more about how this money was spent vs the police budget.
 - A few groups were sceptical about the current impact of this spend

"Has it been improved, what's the impact of that on crime and anti-social behaviour?"

- **Rubbish collection**
 - Weekly collections were appreciated by the vast majority of participants. Many participants emphasised that they did not want these to be reduced. A minority said they would be willing to move to fortnightly collections if they were given wheelie bins.

"People would become unneighbourly if this service was reduced. You'd have people using your bins."

"We need to keep that! Otherwise things will get yucky pretty quickly!"

- Some concerns were raised about more rats.
- Some suggested that the cost of rubbish collection could be reduced if more recycling was provided e.g. for people living in flats.
- Participants perceived a disparity in services between areas.

"In some areas its awful, in some there's a better cleaning service. Off Ilford Lane its awful – around here (Clayhall) they're beautifully clean."

- **Waste recycling**

- Participants believed it was important to improve recycling and to make it as easy as possible to access.

"They give us these tiny boxes that are hard to use. The stuff we want to get rid of doesn't fit inside so it's a waste of time."

- Many participants wanted better recycling receptacles and more opportunities to recycle, including stations for larger items.

"They don't let you take a van or trailer to the dump to get rid of rubbish for free."

- Some believed you could reduce fees for this service by negotiating better deals with private sector providers.
- Others thought that recycling should be a money generator rather than a cost, referring to the British Heart Foundation earning money from recycled electrical waste.

- **Street cleaning**

- Street cleaning was seen as an essential service which needs more investment, particularly in Ilford.
- The appearance of the local area is a top priority for residents and is important in reducing other anti-social behaviour.
- Participants suggested providing more bins and more education on littering to help reduce the litter problem and therefore the cost of this service.
- One group suggested looking at what places like Singapore have done to make this service more efficient.
- Agency workers were understood to be paid far more (double was quoted) than the former council employed street cleaners. Some participants wanted to see this brought back in-house.
- Taking a more area by area approach was suggested to identify areas to reduce daily to less frequent cleans if they aren't needed.

"I rang the council about fly tipping. They will only remove 6 bags at a time and their available appointments can be as much as 5 weeks away."

- **Improving run down areas (regeneration) and improving council housing**

- Some were aware of positive examples of this e.g. Barking end of river

- But more help is needed for run down areas such as Ilford Hill (by the old Police Station) as a poor environment affects mental and physical health.
- Ilford town centre was a cause for worry to some. The town centre felt tired and in need of updating. With Stratford's Westfield Centre 15 minutes away, shoppers were being drawn away from Ilford, which could not compete. Gants Hill attracted people with its entertainment offerings, leaving Ilford with very few reasons to visit.
- Investment was seen as essential to prevent the need for greater remedial costs in future.
- Some asked if the Council could purchase a number of properties in the area and regenerate them together rather than ad hoc regeneration.
- Others suggested that private funding could be sought to fund some regeneration work.

5.3 Areas where savings or efficiencies could be made

The **promotion of health lifestyles** was the one service area that received almost universal endorsement for reducing its budget. Other areas, such as **temporary accommodation, support for schools** and **planning services**, had a mix of support for reduction or maintenance of spend, but there was general willingness to see efficiencies and savings made.

- **Promotion of healthy lifestyles**

Some participants at every workshop questioned the value of the Council funding the promotion of healthy lifestyles. They felt that:

- This should be the role of the NHS/Central Government/schools and not funded by the Council.
- Most wanted to keep sexual health clinics and thought this was the most important part of the budget.
- The Council should not duplicate existing national health campaigns such as Change for Life and smoking cessation campaigns.
- Individuals should take greater personal responsibility for their own health. It was felt that people know what they should do and that more information is not necessarily the answer. People weren't convinced that the campaigns work in changing people's behaviour and money was better spent elsewhere.

"Obesity rates are going up so it's either not spent well, or people aren't listening."

"I think less needs to be spent on things like promotions for healthy lifestyle etc. People are influenced by the media and their friends predominantly, and often trying to tell them to do something will push them away and actually have the opposite effect than intended."

- There was the view that the Council is fighting a losing battle with all the fast food outlets, hence the waste of money. The Council should limit the fast food outlets instead.
- Some thought that a tax should be levied on fast food outlets and high sugar foods.
- People questioned why so much was spent on this area compared to services that affect wellbeing such as street cleaning.

"Depression comes from your surroundings, it's important for it to be clean."

- Some wanted to see more free sports and leisure for adults and young people near housing estates and poorer areas.

- **Temporary accommodation for homeless and housing support**

Almost all participants were sympathetic to the plight of homeless people and those in need of housing support. However, the size of the budget and participants' perception of the Council paying large sums to private landlords and hotels and B&Bs meant that they thought that savings could be found.

- Many were surprised that the budget was so high, but there was widespread agreement that there was a significant housing crisis due to the lack of affordable homes to buy or rent.

"Money's not being put into council housing and people are getting rich on private rentals."

- Some thought the budget could be reduced by regulating the money charged by temporary accommodation landlords and hotels.
- There was a call for the borough to have a strategy to provide its own housing.
- Many participants felt that homeless families were very vulnerable and needed help. As one participant with personal experience said:

"I've been in a B&B for 2 ½ years with 4 kids in two rooms. I was in a hotel in Ilford for two years and they moved us to this B&B in Green Lane and told me it would be six weeks but I'm still there six months later. Two of my children sleep with me in the same bed."

- Some felt that there was abuse of the system, with people getting support when they don't really require it. More investigation and stricter rules about who receives this support could help reduce spend in this area.
- The practice of sending people to live in other boroughs and boroughs charging each other for housing their residents was a waste of resources because it entailed so much bureaucracy.

- Many felt that the Council was spending too much on temporary expensive and unsuitable accommodation such as poor quality private rented accommodation and hotels. This was attributed to a lack of social housing.
- Some participants called for rent control to help reduce the high spend on housing (but most recognised this was a difficult area to regulate).

“The money ends up going to private landlords who charge too much. The council is ripped off by the high cost of sub-standard private accommodation.”

- **Planning and building control**

Most participants recognised the role this service played in helping to ensure appropriate developments in the Borough. The reason for putting this into the reduce budget category was the call for this service to be self-funding or even profit generating through fees from private developers.

- Others suggested it could be shared with other local authorities to increase efficiency.
- Regulations around flat conversions could be eased to make the system more efficient.
- People should self-assess their applications before submitting them and be charged if they submit something that is against the regulations.
- Some thought that lots of regulations re house improvements had been scrapped so they thought that the Council didn't need as many staff.
- Another revenue generation idea was that Redbridge Council keeps a % of all commercial property developments so that it also profits from the growth in the area.

- **Back office: IT, human resources, finance, legal etc.**

Some participants saw this as the 'engine room of the council', whilst others felt they didn't really understand what the staff did. However almost all participants felt that the services should be reviewed for efficiency savings:

- Reduce the use of contractors in favour of more permanent staff.
- Cost savings could be made through cutting down on duplication, sharing services with other local authorities and efficiency savings such as “going paperless”. Homeworking was also suggested to reduce the need for office space and help reduce pressure on transport services.
- Specialisms such as legal and finance were seen as particularly important to ensure the budget is well managed and that legal challenges are dealt with effectively. They felt that trying to save money on those people's wages could backfire when legal cases were lost to better paid private sector lawyers, the need to enforce regulations on rogue landlords and the need to avoid accounting mistakes.

- **Libraries and museums**

Views on whether to cut or maintain spending on libraries were split into two evenly sized camps.

Those who wanted preserve spending on libraries argued that they are an essential service and “the heart of the community”.

All agreed that library spaces were particularly important for the young (quiet space for studying) the unemployed (for job seeking support and the internet) and for the elderly and disabled (for socialising, staying warm and learning to use the internet).

The most commonly given reason for believing that the libraries could bear some funding cuts was that many more people are using the internet to get information and using tablets or kindles rather than reading hard copy books.

“The library budget seems to be almost three times that of the parks sector. Yet in this virtual age, most people can access these services online, which could save. As well as this, the people who like the library would be happy to pay a small membership fee. This won't put people off as those people could not use the library anyway, therefore an examination of this budget could be an area for savings.”

Suggestions for saving money in this area included:

- Some fees would be acceptable to keep the library service going e.g. small fees for borrowing books, internet use and increased fines for late returns.
- Some participants at the Young Persons workshop suggested re-locating libraries to buildings that are shared to save more money. Another suggested selling off ClayHall library as it was too small to be useful.
- Some thought that the mobile library service could be cut, particularly if local schools had good libraries.
- Additional paid for classes could be offered such as film clubs, coding classes and language classes.
- Revenue could also be earned through renting out space for events.
- Linking up with local colleges to mix utilisation was suggested.

Most participants did not know that the museum existed and many thought it could be closed and its contents put online e.g. Wikipedia. Those that wanted the museum to be retained thought that it should be better promoted and possible charge a small fee to cover its costs.

- **Customer services and debt collection**

Participants had mixed experiences of the Council's customer services. All had noticed a greater use of automation and so long as this was done well, this was acceptable as long as some opportunities for face to face interaction were kept.

- Some said that the Council is not very responsive and accessible at the moment and so did not want customer services to be further cut.
- Others said that money could be saved by providing more customer services online and more automated services, but still provide some face to face personnel.
- Participants were keen that debt collection services are scrutinised to ensure that they provide value for money and has a cost benefit, not running at a loss, some suggested outsourcing this could be more efficient and cheaper.
- If debt collection brought in a profit, it would be worth expanding this service.
- Target repeat offenders.

"They should be withdrawing services if people don't pay, so that should cost less."

- **Leadership and strategy**

This service area generated a mixed reaction. Some thought good leadership needed investment and cuts could endanger the future of the Borough. Others were angry at the thought of well-paid council staff, with generous pensions living lives that were removed from that of the ordinary residents.

- Good leadership was seen as important but some suspected that high salaries were driving up costs without necessarily the commensurate benefit to the public.
- There was some scepticism that senior management provided good value for money and a clear desire to know more about what the leaders did (both officers and members) and why they deserved their high salaries.

"They sit in meetings and project ideas and debate and think tank and 'who's for coffee'."

- Some groups said the budget should be left to the leaders are responsible for shaping decisions about the borough and have to live with the responsibility.

"Their heads are on a plate if they get it wrong."

- They wanted the leadership to report back at the end of each year on what has been achieved and how Redbridge compares to other boroughs.
- A few groups called for senior staff to be paid average wages because *"you need hands on people living in the real world"*.

- The £4.2 million on leadership vs £1.4million on the voluntary sector felt like the wrong way round to some.
- Young People compared this budget to that spent on sports and leisure and were also surprised that more was spent on Leadership.
- Others suggested investing in developing a really good forward plan which lasts for five years and then cut down on this area as the planning would have been done.
- Some participants thought it would be possible to reduce some staff and make services more streamlined, for example sharing some posts with other Councils.

"Please, before cutting back on the services you provide, can you look at new innovative ways of providing the services, so that things are not being done simply because that's the way it's been done. Better cash efficient ways of service delivery. Can you also look at merging departments and building and look at permanent solutions as well as temporary solutions."

- Reduce spend on expensive consultants.
- Those that were against reducing the budget in this area said that the Council needed to have the right talent to provide leadership for the future and that if reduced it risked making the wrong decisions for the borough.
- Some felt that the council's senior staff are faceless and difficult to have direct contact with. They wanted monthly local forums and Q&As with senior council staff.
- Others wanted residents in prominent roles and to use young people more for their input.

- **Support for schools**

This was one of the least well understood service areas, with many participants not having a clear picture of what was delivered even when given examples.

- Some participants did not want to comment without further clarity.
- Those who wanted the budget to remain the same said that Redbridge schools were high performing and the progress made in improving them should be maintained.
- Most said that the very size of the budget meant this area merited scrutiny for opportunities to save money.
- Some participants who worked in schools said that there was real scope for making efficiencies.
- Savings could be found by using volunteer mentors such as parents and older people.

- **Transport support**

There was some confusion about whether this area had ring-fenced money from TFL and therefore the budget could not be cut or transferred to other services. Most participants thought that the council should seek more funding from TFL.

- Some thought that a congestion charge should be brought in for central Ilford to help reduce the gridlock.
- The Charlie Brown Roundabout was a focus for many complaints at the Orchard Estate workshop e.g. buses terminating early there and forcing residents to walk through the poorly lit subway which was used by drug users.
- Ilford Lane roundabout was said to be a nightmare *"they've narrowed the road – it can take an hour to get out of it"*.
- Prospect Road area has been made 20mph but needs cameras to enforce it.
- Many participants wanted more consultation with residents before finalising transport improvement plans, making better use of their local knowledge.

- **Repairing roads and providing parking**

People's views on the quality of roads in the borough diverged quite markedly. Those who thought the roads were in good shape thought that spending could be reduced for a short time and diverted to more urgent areas such as support for vulnerable people.

Others thought the roads were in a dire state and needed better quality repairs that didn't disintegrate in a matter of months.

Most participants were aggrieved by the frequency of roads being dug up and resurfaced, seeing this as a waste of money and a huge inconvenience. They wanted this to be better managed.

- More consultations with residents, using their local knowledge, regarding the roads and plans for road changes and repairs.
- Desire for leeway to leave cars for a short while e.g. outside schools and mosques.
- Some would accept a slight increase in parking charges e.g. from £1 an hour to £1.20.
- Funding should come from either TfL or from road tax.
- Some question what parking is provided by the Council as it was perceived to be provided by private companies.
- Views on the state of the roads were mixed:
 - Those that thought there were in good shape thought spending could be eased.

- Those who thought the state of the roads was poor led some to question if the current private contractor should be challenged over costs or replaced.
- Some highlighted the need to maintain roads for the safety of cyclists.

"Talking about the roads, the conditions are horrible, cracked. They cover holes if it's done at all, but even when they're repaired a few weeks later the problems appear again."

- Road repairs could be better co-ordinated to prevent roads being dug up, resurfaced and dug up just weeks later.

"It needs to be a joined-up service to ensure that the different companies that do work on the roads know each other's timings and work in an organised way that keeps the roads in optimum condition e.g. gas repairs, cable installation, road works need to work together."

- Some called for smarter, more flexible parking regulations: One participant had asking parking restrictions to be relaxed to accommodate older people attending U3A classes.

Participants tended to believe that **the Council as a whole could be run more efficiently** and that savings could be made from better administration rather than cuts to essential services.

Specific ideas for helping the Council to be more efficient included:

- Ensuring that services are run as efficiently as possible, particularly those with large budgets, including services for vulnerable people. Participants suspected that some of the very large sums spent could go much further if **services were designed better and inefficiencies were removed** to deliver better value for money. For example, could some of the overlapping social care departments be merged? Could red tape in fostering and adoption services be cut? Could large-scale changes be made to avoid what one former foster carer described as *"repetition, duplication and contradiction"* when dealing with children's services.
- **Reducing reliance on costly contracted out services** e.g. care agency staff. Many participants were aware of the higher cost of agency staff and thought that the Council could save money by employing more permanent staff as social workers and to care for the elderly.
- Greater **involvement of the voluntary sector** in delivering services to the vulnerable.
- Children's services was an area that participants thought had lots of overlapping services and savings could be found by reducing duplication.

- **Greater efficiency of contracted out services** with relatively high funding levels such as road repairs and parking services. Improved negotiation and management of contracts. Improved oversight including penalties for failures if work overruns.
- **Merging services and departments** and reducing the number of council buildings (similar to Brent and Hackney that had brought all council services into one building and closed many other council buildings.)
- **Utilising young offenders/those doing community service** to provide more benefit to the community through public space improvement activities and schemes.
- **More innovation in deriving income** from Council properties and services, for example:
 - Income derived from recycling.
 - Charges for some library services: e.g. borrowing books or increased fines for late returns
 - Charges for some park services such as a small fee for tennis courts and rackets; BBQ areas; outdoor gyms; small animal farms (Fairlop Waters was quoted as an example of doing this well.)
 - Charges for hiring out parks and buildings as venues.
 - Income from fines for offences such as littering and fly-tipping, anti-social behaviour such as spitting and dog-fouling, "*Littering should be seen as taboo as dog fouling is now*".
 - Charging for green bin collection.
 - (Increased) rubbish collection charges for landlords of housing with multiple occupancy.
 - Using school premises and playgrounds at the weekends and evenings for activities.
 - Fines for utility companies whose road works over run.
 - Income from events and innovations such as pop up shops and fun fairs
- **More transparency about expenditure:** be honest about inefficiencies and how this is being improved.
- It was suggested that **building control should be completely self-funded** by increasing the cost of permits to commercial developers.
- **Investment in Council owned housing stock** which would reduce the large amount spent on temporary accommodation and private landlords.
- **Improving run down areas (regeneration) and improving council housing** savings could be made through better organisation of maintenance (doing preventative work rather than piecemeal maintenance).

- Some questioned how this money is being spent as lots of areas still need improving.
- Some suggested residents being encouraged to police their own streets to reduce community safety and policing costs.

5.4 Attitudes towards increasing Council Tax

Most participants were not prepared to accept an increase in Council Tax because they felt the tax was already high and that with rising rents and other costs, they already had a lot to pay out. They particularly did not want to pay more and receive less, "*we would be paying more for less services.*" They preferred to see services generating their own income rather than increase council tax. Those in single person households particularly resisted any increase, saying they already pay over the odds.

A few participants were prepared to accept small increases above inflation, if they could see where the money was being spent and that improvements and efficiencies were being found. Some participants expected Council Tax to increase further and reluctantly saw the rationale: "*It's inevitable*". However, they felt services should be reviewed for efficiencies before increases in Council Tax were considered.

Some wanted to see higher increases in Council Tax applied to those living in larger properties.

6. Conclusions

The most prominent themes that emerged from the eight workshops and advocated by most of the participants were as follows:

- **Protect the vulnerable:** participants felt strongly that it is the duty of a civilised society to ensure that those with mental and physical disabilities, children in need of protection and the elderly should be cared for and that the cuts should not harm their wellbeing.
- **Ensure Redbridge is an attractive place to live:** with changes such as the introduction of Crossrail and many flats being built in town centres such as Ilford, participants wanted the Borough to maintain its attractive features such as its parks and improve the cleanliness and safety of its urban areas.
- **Invest in permanent people and assets:** spending on expensive agency staff such as social workers and on costly private rented housing and hotels was seen as a waste of the council's budget. People urged investment in permanent staff who could provide a consistent service and council housing that would cost less over the long term.
- **Get rid of duplication:** in large service areas such as Children's Services, participants felt that there must be large overlap and wanted to see this reduced, with the benefit of streamlining processes rather than affecting children's wellbeing. The health lifestyles budget was singled out for cuts because people felt this work was already being done by central government, schools and the NHS.
- **Encourage volunteering and skill development:** parents and older people helping in schools and upskilling young people through working on regeneration projects were suggested as ways to find mutual benefits for different service areas.

The majority of adult participants indicated that they would like to take part in future similar exercises, providing the Council with a resource for ongoing engagement. These participants should be given some feedback outlining the conclusions of the events they participated in and setting out how these findings will be used to inform budget decision making. Further engagement activities could be considered as a way of gathering valuable feedback and input from residents.

Appendix 1 – Participants' Questions

Participants had many questions following the Council's presentation. The Council representatives who were present were able to provide some answers to these questions, but it was clear during the subsequent discussions that there was an appetite amongst participants for more detailed information about the costs of running services. Primarily participants wanted to understand:

- More specific information about what the money was spent on, particularly for services with large expenditure such as social care, services for people with learning disabilities / mental health problems, provision of temporary accommodation etc. which many participants did not have first-hand experience and therefore found it difficult to envisage what services were provided and why they should cost so much.
- Where previous cuts and reductions had already been made.
- Whether the figures presented were accurate. Some participants questioned whether they had been manipulated so they did not tell the whole story and possibly hid areas of increasing Council income.
- Why the savings were allocated at varying levels across the next five years and how the Council had calculated this.
- How Redbridge's expenditure and expenditure choices compares to other similar Councils.
- The degree to which the Council was obtaining good value for money from its third-party contractors. Some participants wanted to know more about the extent to which third parties were delivering value for money from running services, particularly where they had experienced a decline in service levels e.g. Vision overseeing parks/leisure services, but not providing adequate maintenance of specific parks.
- Why the Council was not doing more to reduce the growth in population for example by not accommodating people from other boroughs such as Westminster (where they have been priced out).
- Whether the budget deficit meant that Council Tax would be increased. A number of participants were concerned about this.

More specific questions which may be useful to address upfront in future engagement activities included:

- Why are the £42.6m savings spread across the 5 years in this particular way, with different amounts of savings for each year?
- How accurate is the budget deficit forecast? What is the margin of error?
- More explanation about population growth – why is it growing so quickly? What can the Council do to manage this better? (explanation of limits of Council's ability to intervene)

- What is the Council doing about providing affordable housing which is sufficient for families? (as opposed to one/two bedroom flats) a lot of development in area (especially Ilford) is high rise luxury – not for local people
- Where do 16-18 year olds fit in service provision?
- Can the Council work smarter – pay fewer levies to other organisations?
- Is Adult Social Care about checking up on service provision or providing services?
- How much 'profit' does the Council make from recycling? Can it make more money from recycling as well as encourage more recycling, especially in high rises where all rubbish goes down central chute and is not recycled?
- Where do the profits go from parking fines?
- Does the Council outsource to companies within the borough?
- Can the Council gain from selling land and use capital for revenue? Or invest to build houses?

Appendix 2 – Participant Profile

An ideal profile was set for the general resident workshops, broadly in line with the Redbridge population. 30 participants were recruited in knowledge that there would be some drop-out on the day of the session. Attendance levels varied with the average attendance being 23.

	Ideal Profile	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Gender								
Male	15	11	13	15	10	13	10	17
Female	15	14	10	8	15	8	13	6
Age group								
18 – 29	10	4	6	8	6	6	4	6
30-59	10	9	8	10	10	5	13	9
60+	10	12	9	5	9	10	6	8
Ethnic background								
White British	No more than 13	11	12	10	11	12	12	11
BME Background	At least 17	14	11	13	14	9	11	12
Working status								
Employed (part or full time)	18	16	9	14	11	10	13	9
Unemployed	2	2	4	3	3	2	3	1
Retired	6	4	7	3	8	6	6	7
Studying/other	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	6
Social grade								
AB	10	8	11	9	9	8	8	11
C1C2	10	12	5	7	9	8	7	6
DE	10	5	7	7	7	5	8	6
Housing tenure								
Own home	16	15	16	12	11	13	7	13
Privately rented	8	3	1	6	9	7	3	4
Socially rented	5	4	3	2	4	-	11	3
Other	1	1	3	3	1	1	2	3
Disability								
Has a long term health condition / disability	At least 5	6	9	5	12	5	11	8
Lifestyle								
No dependent children	Flexible	10	18	15	16	18	15	17
Dependent children	At least 8	15	5	8	9	3	8	6
Total	30	25	23	23	25	21	23	23

Appendix 3 – Research Instruments

Adult workshops



Final agenda.docx



Full slide set.pptx



Handout on
Spending Areas.xlsx

Young people's workshop



Final agenda.docx



Final slide set.pptx

Appendix 4 – Workshop Evaluation

At the end of each workshop, participants were asked to complete an evaluation form to provide feedback on the process and organisation of the workshop and to suggest areas that could have been improved. The same evaluation form was used with all adult audiences, with a slightly amended and shortened version used with young people.

Table 1 summarises the responses to the initial scale-based assessment questions across all seven adult resident workshops. The results were strongly positive across all of the workshops. Almost 100% of participants agreed or agreed strongly that they had enjoyed taking part, that the workshop was well structured and organised and that everyone had a fair chance to have their say.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't know / blank
I enjoyed taking part in the event	107 67%	50 31%	1 1%	1 1%	-
Everyone was given a fair chance to have their say	115 72%	41 26%	2 1%	-	1 1%
The event was well organised and structured	116 73%	42 26%	1 1%	-	-

Table 1 – Adult Participants' Evaluation Responses (159 completed)

Table 2 summarises the responses to the initial scale-based assessment questions amongst the young people who participated in that workshop.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't know / blank
I enjoyed taking part in the event	11 85%	2 15%	-	-	-
Everyone was given a fair chance to have their say	10 77%	3 23%	-	-	-
The event was well organised and structured	10 77%	3 23%	-	-	-

Table 2 – Young People's Evaluation Responses (13 completed)