

Budget Consultation
Co-chomhairle Buidseit **2012**



The Highland Council
Consultation Analysis
**Ways of
Working**

Budget Consultation 2012

Ways of Working

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Public Access to Council Services

Would you be supportive of your Council providing more services through the Post Office or other local outlets?

and

If we are able to increase public access in other ways would you be supportive of closing some existing Council facilities?

and

Would you be supportive of a move to introduce e-billing?

Would you be supportive of your Council providing more services through the Post Office or other local outlets?

Quantitative Analysis

The Citizens' Panel were asked about the use of Post Offices and other local outlets to provide Council services: "Your Council is committed to improving public access to services by making it easier for you to contact us, for example via the telephone or online. We have already saved money by changing our payment strategy to enable people to pay for Council services at Post Offices and Paypoints."

Respondents were then asked: "Would you be supportive of your Council providing more services through the Post Office or other local outlets?" The results are found in the table below.

Views of Respondents on the Council providing more Services through the Post Office or other local outlets

| "Would you be supportive of your Council providing more services through the Post Office or other local outlets?" | All Respondents % |
|--|--------------------------|
| Yes | 92 |
| No | 8 |
| Total | 100 |

N=1,033

These results reveal an overwhelming majority of respondents – 92% - are supportive of their Council providing more services through the Post Office or other local outlets.

Qualitative Analysis

244 separate responses were received on the question “*Would you be supportive of your Council providing more services through the Post Office or other local outlets?*” These were mainly from the online questionnaire, with other responses from ward forums, emails and posted forms. Organisational responses were received from Parent Councils and Community Councils and responses were also received from the focus groups held with Sight Action, People First and Highland Youth Voice.

The vast majority of people responding were in favour of utilising other local outlets to provide Council services, especially Post Offices. However, respondents did note that it was important for the current level of service to be maintained. There were some concerns raised about the capacity of Post Offices to provide such services and the impact upon service provision.

In favour

In the main respondents were in favour of providing Council services through the Post Office and other local outlets. It was reported that this could improve access to Council services, especially within rural communities.

Support for Post Offices

Respondents were especially in favour of the impact this could have on Post Offices. It was noted that such a move could assist in sustaining and maintaining Post Offices in local communities. The similarities in the types of service provided in Post Offices and Service Points could assist in this process.

Some concerns were expressed about the sustainability of Post Offices and one or two respondents felt that if this was to proceed, the Council would need to support a Post Office within a community if it would otherwise close.

Maintaining current services

Although in favour of making use of other providers, the importance of maintaining the current level of service was highlighted. Respondents were comfortable with other providers delivering Council services but noted that the service itself must not be compromised and the opening hours should not be reduced. It was suggested that the service would need to be provided at a separate counter from any retail provision in order to prevent queues and frustration from retail customers. It was felt that Post Offices would therefore be the preferable option.

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Saving money

Respondents reported that any change in service provision must result in a financial saving and that it was not worth progressing this idea if savings were not going to be made.

Staffing

Some respondents highlighted the importance of ensuring that staff in any new facility were appropriately trained. It was also noted that any new facility must have the capacity to undertake the work.

This was specifically highlighted in relation to Post Offices. A number of respondents, although in favour of the proposal, queried whether Post Offices had the capacity to take on this work. It was also noted that the standard of service varied between offices.

Access – local facilities

In addition to Post Offices, respondents listed supermarkets, libraries, mobile libraries and schools as potential outlets to deliver Council services. The local nature of these facilities was highlighted as the most important feature, improving the access to Council services for users. It was noted that this would be of particular benefit for rural areas. There was some concern expressed however whether this would be possible within more urban communities where the Service Point, and equally the Post Office, is very busy.

Privacy

Some concerns were expressed regarding privacy in other local outlets. This was a concern particularly noted by the focus group with Sight Action. It was reported that this challenge would need to be overcome were this to progress.

Unsure

Some respondents were unsure about the suggestion to provide Council services through local outlets. It was reported that it would depend upon the service to be provided, whilst others queried whether it would work in rural areas.

A number of respondents expressed support for the proposal only if this was an additional outlet for providing Council services and not as an alternative.

Not in favour

A small number of respondents were not in favour of the Council providing services through other local outlets. Concern was expressed about the capacity of other outlets, especially Post Offices, and the variation in standards of service. It was

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noted that another provider would not be able to provide the full service and therefore this would not be an improvement for service users.

One respondent noted that they would not feel comfortable in discussing their business with another provider.

Concern was also expressed about the wider community impact if the Council were to stop providing certain service. It was reporting the resulting loss of jobs would impact on the economy as a whole.

If we are able to increase public access in other ways would you be supportive of closing some existing Council facilities?

Quantitative Analysis

Respondents to the Citizens' Panel survey were asked: "If we are able to increase public access in other ways would you be supportive of closing some existing Council facilities?" Their views are found in the table below.

Respondents' views on closing some existing Council facilities if public access is increased in other ways

| "If we are able to increase public access in other ways would you be supportive of closing some existing Council facilities?" | All Respondents % |
|--|--------------------------|
| Yes | 72 |
| No | 28 |
| Total | 100 |

N=1,018

The result in the table reveals that 72% support closure of some existing Council facilities if public access can be increased in other ways. That leaves 28% who do not favour such closure. All but one of the categories of respondents returned a clear majority in favour of this proposition. Council tenants were the exception – some 55% answered "no" to this question.

Qualitative Analysis

228 separate responses were received on the *question "If we are able to increase public access in other ways would you be supportive of closing some existing Council facilities?"* Responses were received via the online survey, from ward forums and through email. There were responses generated through focus group discussions with Highland Youth Voice and with People First.

In general respondents were in favour of closing some existing Council facilities if public access was increased. However, as seen with responses to the Citizens' Panel survey, respondents were not as strongly in favour of increasing access to Council services if it involved closing existing facilities.

In favour

In the main people were in favour of closing some Council facilities. Respondents noted that it was vital that the current service was maintained but also that access to any alternative provision was the same or improved. It was recognised that some

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provision still requires to be provided face to face in order to meet the needs of the elderly and vulnerable who may not be able to access the internet.

A number of respondents noted that there were already too many existing Council facilities and that it would be a positive to rationalise and sell off unwanted Council assets. Some respondents also reported that it would be important to reduce the number of staff, however concerns were expressed at job losses and it was suggested that compulsory redundancies should be avoided.

Some respondents specified the types of facilities they thought could or should not close. A range of suggestions were put forward for rationalising Council facilities including consolidating Council facilities into one building, for example Service Points and libraries or libraries and Service Points into schools. Some respondents were in favour of closing Service Points, whilst others were against. It was noted by some that education facilities and libraries should not close.

A range of alternative suggestions for providing services were also put forward which included introducing mobile services and utilising village halls for 'surgeries' and community spaces for meetings.

Unsure

There were a group of respondents that were unsure whether or not some Council facilities could be closed. The general impression of this group was that it would depend upon the individual facility, how well it was used and also the impact closure would have upon the elderly and vulnerable within the community. It was suggested that a proposal to close a Council facility would require local consultation.

Respondents also suggested that if any facility was going to close then service standards would either need to be maintained or improved at the alternative provision. It was important that face to face contact be maintained.

One or two respondents suggested it would be preferable for Service Points to take on additional roles, as opposed to losing the facility completely.

A concern was expressed about the extent of training required in order to take on the provision of any Council service but that an alternative could be joint working but with video booths provided for detailed queries.

A number of respondents felt that there was a lack of detail in the question which made it impossible for them to give an opinion one way or another.

Not in favour

A small number of respondents were completely against the proposal to close existing Council facilities. Respondents cited that access to Council services was already poor; with often Service Points the only provision available.

Other respondents noted that the current provision was good and therefore this should be maintained.

One or two respondents were concerned about the impact on jobs, especially in rural communities, if Council facilities were closed.

It was suggested that opening hours be reduced as an alternative to closure.

E-billing

Would you be supportive of a move to introduce e-billing?

Quantitative Analysis

The question on e-billing was introduced as follows: “Your Council is considering a move to e-billing for Council Tax. However we will ensure that people that can’t or do not want to participate do not have to. There are a number of advantages to this approach:

- You can view, download and print your bill at any time and the system would be interactive allowing you to view your current balance.
- We can make savings on postage and paper which will also positively impact on the environment.”

Respondents were then asked: “Would you be supportive of a move to introduce e-billing?” Their responses are found in the table below.

Respondents’ Views on the proposal to move to introduce e-billing

| “Would you be supportive of a move to introduce e-billing?” | All Respondents % |
|---|-------------------|
| Yes | 71 |
| No | 29 |
| Total | 100 |

N=1020

Some 71% said they would be supportive of the move to e-billing while 29% said they would not be. A majority of respondents in all the age categories supported this move ranging from 82% of those aged 25-44 to 57% of those aged 65+. Support for the move was at its lowest amongst people who are disabled (54%) and those who are council tenants (45%) – the only category where a majority did not support this proposal.

Qualitative Analysis

222 separate responses were received on the question of “*Would you be supportive of a move to introduce e-billing?*” These were mainly from the online questionnaire, with other responses from ward forums, emails, budget blog posts, posted forms and the focus group held with Sight Action.

In the main respondents were strongly in favour of e-billing, however it was noted that this should not be compulsory and many respondents felt that e-billing would not suit everybody.

Views in favour

Those in support of a move to introduce e-billing reported that this is used by many other organisations, such as utility companies and banks, and that the Highland Council should not be left behind. Some respondents expressed surprise that e-billing had not been introduced already, with one believing that its introduction was inevitable, so it was better done sooner rather than later.

Respondents also felt that e-billing was more environmentally friendly than paper billing. Not only would e-billing be more cost effective, in terms of the savings made in postage and printing costs, but the move would have a positive environmental impact.

Some respondents suggested that e-billing should be encouraged through an ongoing campaign and that perhaps incentives could be offered, such as a discount.

Although supportive of e-billing, many respondents highlighted the need to ensure alternative options remain available. It was noted that not everyone would want to move to e-billing and that not everyone would be able to take up that option. In particular people emphasised the needs of the elderly, disabled and disadvantaged. Individuals within these groups will often not be used to paying bills electronically and may find the process difficult. For others, they may not have a bank account to enable e-billing to take place. Several suggested that the scheme should be run on an opt-in basis, with appropriate alternative provision for those who need it.

Another set of views suggested that some individuals may like to take up the option of e-billing but would need some support to do so. It was suggested that increasing access to computers via libraries, Post Offices and Service Points may assist in taking this forward.

Another key area noted by respondents was that not everyone has access to IT and that broadband issues in many areas need to be resolved. One respondent suggested that e-billing could be introduced in the future, when the Highlands had better broadband provision and programmes had been tried and tested.

In addition, respondents noted that the introduction of e-billing must result in savings and that customers need to be able to access their accounts online with appropriate security in place.

One respondent stated that cash and cheque payments should be re-introduced into Service Points.

Views against

A small number of respondents stated that they did not want e-billing introduced. In the main, these individuals appear to be answering from a position that if introduced, e-billing would apply to everyone. The concerns noted include the inability of certain individuals, especially the elderly, to access e-billing and the lack of IT equipment for others.

Concerns were also raised over security issues, and some respondents were concerned that the required technology would not work properly. Several respondents felt that the system would be expensive to implement and thought that the Council already spends too much on IT. One felt that previous IT contracts had not been well negotiated, so the Council was likely to lose money when introducing e-billing. It was suggested that people pay more attention to paper bills, so these were preferable to e-billing.

Staffing

What other areas should we be considering that would assist in making us more efficient?

and

Should the Council reduce its spending on staff and if YES how should it do this?

and

Given that the Council is introducing the living wage for lower paid staff, should the Council support the public sector pay settlement of 1%?

What other areas should we be considering that would assist in making us more efficient?

Quantitative Analysis

The Citizens' Panel were not asked the question on areas the Council should be considering in making it more efficient.

Qualitative Analysis

Similar responses were received for the first two Staffing questions. Here, any comments associated with efficiency of systems or processes have been described under the “*What other areas should we be considering that would assist in making us more efficient?*” question, and any suggestions to reduce spending related to employees have been detailed in relation to the question, “*Should the Council reduce its spending on staff and if YES how should it do this?*”

147 separate responses were received for the question, “*What other areas should we be considering that would assist in making us more efficient?*”

Responses to both questions were mainly from individuals through the online questionnaires or from emailed or posted forms. Responses were also received from discussions at ward forums. Organisational views included Community Councils, Parent Councils and the focus groups with Sight Action, Highland Users Group, People First and members of minority ethnic and faith groups. A Highland Council employee also expressed their views.

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The most common suggestions made to increase efficiency involved the use of technology, outsourcing, monitoring performance and reviewing processes. In general, respondents believed that the Council should act more like a private company to become more efficient.

Technology

Many respondents felt that the Council could be made more efficient through the use of technology. Several respondents were in favour of the use of video and teleconferencing for meetings, which would reduce travel time and costs.

It was suggested that technology could be used for more effective communication with the public. Respondents reported that queries could be dealt with online, with less contact in service centres. A live chat online help service and the provision to speak to Council employees via Skype were also proposed.

It was noted that technology could be used to report more regularly on Council activities, with Councillors regularly reporting to constituents via their own website or newsletters, so that the public are aware of discussions before decisions are made. It was also suggested that all of the Council's expenditure, including expenses for office bearers and Councillors, should be made available on the Council website.

A further suggestion was that school meals could be paid for online, which would be more efficient than the current system with cheques.

It was noted that greater use of technology could be used to reduce paper use, with a view to having paperless offices. Respondents commented that fewer letters, bills and payslips for pensions should be printed and sent out, and that use should be made of online billing and online notification of benefits.

One or two respondents suggested rationalising the different technical systems used in the Council into one system. Using Skype instead of landlines was also suggested, as well as replacing commercial software with open source alternatives and replacing servers with open source distributions and database systems. It was noted that more would have to be invested in IT in order to facilitate more mobile ways of working.

It was reported that giving employees a smart phone would increase productivity, although this may be at the expense of work-life balance.

Outsourcing

Several respondents suggested that the Council could become more efficient through outsourcing, although there was some opposition to this view.

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A number of respondents were in favour of outsourcing, suggesting that contractors would provide more efficient services in areas such as construction, roads, ground maintenance and vehicle maintenance. One respondent reported that everything the Council is not legally required to provide should be given to third sector or other community groups.

Some respondents believed that contracts and tendering exercises should be managed better, so that less time was spent trouble shooting or re-tendering. It was suggested that there should be more competition and less restriction on the companies used to provide services, so that cheaper options can be chosen. However, it was noted that the Council should also consider quality, and not necessarily go for the cheapest option. The use of an experienced negotiator was recommended to get a good deal on contracts, and one respondent suggested replacing large commitments with availability contracts. It was noted that, if services were outsourced, employment should be kept local. It was reported that the Council should go back to using local contractors.

Respondents not in favour of outsourcing reported that it was a false economy and raised concerns that this leads to surplus staff. It was noted that some contractors took advantage of the Council, providing a poor standard of work which caused more expense in the long run.

Monitoring performance and reviewing processes

Several respondents suggested that there should be greater performance management of staff and processes. It was noted that there should be more use of self-assessment processes and regular appraisals of staff, with dismissals or redundancies of staff who do not perform to a good standard. It was suggested that staff should be continually asked about their manager's competence and that efficient disciplinary procedures should be used for all staff where necessary. A respondent noted that there should be more supervision of road and grass workers, to ensure that they are working efficiently.

It was noted that strict guidelines, for example 28 days, should be set for staff to deal with enquiries from the public.

Some respondents suggested scrutinising spend on staffing and services more closely, to ensure that this is necessary and services are carried out well. However, one respondent noted that the Council should not audit Citizens Advice Bureaux every six months, especially when they are already audited by other organisations.

A number of respondents suggested streamlining processes to make them more efficient. They mentioned less time being spent in meetings and reducing administration and red tape. However, it was noted that a good filing system should be ensured so that information is easy to find. A usability study was suggested to

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improve productivity of staff on systems. In particular, respondents reported that inefficiencies should be reduced in HR, and that paperwork for police officers should be completed by administration assistants at a lower hourly rate. One respondent suggested each sector of the Council carrying out a review of another Council department.

One respondent noted that libraries should be reviewed to make them more efficient. They suggested that closing some and renting out e-readers instead. Alternatively, books could be stored in a warehouse and posted out, as DVDs are by some rental companies.

Centralising or combining departments

A number of respondents were in favour of Council departments being centralised or combined, although some respondents noted that it was important to keep local ways of working and local decision making.

Respondents who were in favour of centralisation mentioned business support, procurement, school administration, school management teams and the combination of human resources and general administration officers. It was noted that greater use of technology would aid this centralisation. It was proposed that school resources, such as their laminator, printer and photocopier could be centralised within a school building. One respondent suggested consolidating all offices in Highland into one central hub, but keeping Service Points throughout the area.

However, it was reported that most Highland services are line managed from Inverness, with information only passed down rather than up. It was noted that, if services were delivered locally, the service providers would know how to be efficient and make savings. One respondent was in favour of delegation of cost control to every Council employee, with every employee managing their own budget.

Use of space

Several respondents suggested that staff should work from home. This was suggested in relation to customer service call staff in particular, and it was noted that this arrangement would be family friendly. Some respondents suggested reducing space used, for example through reducing desk ratios, and selling off unused properties or those that are no longer viable. One respondent noted that staff should not work in old buildings which require a high level of energy and running costs.

Skills and training

Some respondents noted that efficiency could be improved by ensuring that staff have and share appropriate skills. It was noted that training should be better quality and that more of this should be provided in-house rather than by outside agencies. It was suggested that distance learning or video conferencing could be used for training. One respondent reported that training should be matched to the current

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skills of the employee, as some cleaning staff are currently receiving excessive training.

One or two respondents noted that staff high up in education should have a background in education and a strong understanding of the department, so that they are able to make good decisions. It was suggested that teachers and Head Teachers meet regularly to exchange knowledge and experiences.

It was noted that staff members should be taught efficient meeting etiquette to ensure that all meetings are productive.

Communication within the Council

Some respondents reported that there should be better communication between Council departments and from managers to other staff. It was suggested that more Council staff should be 'team players', and that employees could job share for a better understanding of other departments.

Should the Council reduce its spending on staff and if YES how should it do this?

Quantitative Analysis

The question on reducing staffing was introduced as follows: "51% (£309.9m) of your Council's net budget is on staff expenditure. If we were to make savings in our staffing budget this could include identifying savings from the following areas: vacancy management, review of vacant posts, flexible working arrangements and consideration of targeted reviews or restructurings in certain service areas."

Respondents were then asked: "Should your Council reduce its spending on staff in these ways?" Their answers are found in the table below.

Views on Council reducing its spending on staff in specified ways

| "Should your Council reduce its spending on staff in these ways?" | All Respondents % |
|--|--------------------------|
| Yes | 81 |
| No | 19 |
| Total | 100 |

N=1,007

Some 81% of respondents said they would be supportive of reducing spending on staff in the ways specified while 19% said they would not be supportive of this proposal.

Qualitative Analysis

202 separate responses were received for the question “*Should the Council reduce its spending on staff and if YES how should it do this?*” Responses were mainly from individuals through the online questionnaires or from emailed or posted forms. Responses were also received from discussions at ward forums. Organisational views included Community Councils, Parent Councils and the focus groups with People First and Highland Youth Voice. A Highland Council employee also expressed their views.

Many respondents were in favour of the Council reducing its spending on staff, believing that this could be achieved through measures such as reviewing wages, reducing the numbers of staff and Councillors and reducing staff and Councillor expenses. Those who were not in favour of a reduction in spending on staff felt that too many cuts had been made already and that further reductions would be detrimental to the Council and the community.

Respondents in favour

Most respondents were in favour of the Council reducing its spending on staff. Many suggested that this should be achieved by the Council behaving more like a private company, through activities such as cutting or freezing pay, reducing staff numbers and reducing staff expenses.

Reviewing wages

Many respondents suggested a pay freeze or cut for staff. It was noted by some that this was preferable to jobs being cut. However, most felt that this should only apply to higher paid members of staff. The definition of lower paid staff varied, with some mentioning those earning below the national average wage, and others referring to staff earning below £15,000, £20,000 or £30,000 per annum. One respondent noted that salaries should be reviewed for those earning over £50,000 per year.

While some respondents noted that spending should not be reduced for frontline staff and staff in education, others reported that NHS staff, teachers and customer service employees should not be treated differently, and should receive similar pay cuts to other Council staff.

It was suggested that managers should accept pay cuts in return for shorter working hours. One respondent reported that committee chairs should not be paid extra, while another felt that no more committees should be established.

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Some respondents suggested introducing performance-related pay.

One or two respondents noted that salaries should be standardised throughout the Council area for similar jobs. It was noted that this could be phased in over 2 or 3 years.

Reduce staff numbers

Many respondents reported that staff numbers should be reduced, but opinion was divided over how this should be handled. Some were in favour of reviewing vacant posts as they arose, while others suggested reviewing the need of every post. It was proposed that the Council should employ someone from a successful business background to consider staffing levels in all sections.

Some respondents believed that reductions in staff numbers should be achieved through voluntary redundancies and early retirement packages. It was suggested that the Council should provide retraining options so that employees can be redeployed elsewhere. Transition services were also proposed for people who would like to move on but have difficulties finding a job or accommodation.

Some respondents, however, felt that compulsory redundancies should be made, with one reporting that no pay offs should be given to staff. One respondent noted that redundancies should be focussed on high earners and those over 50 who have been employed for a long time.

It was proposed that the numbers of staff needed could be reduced through multi-tasking, with staff performing multiple roles. However, respondents noted that the Council should ensure that rural areas do not lose out in a blanket approach to staff cut backs.

Respondents reported that fewer staff members could often be used to get something done, and that staff who were not performing well should be dismissed. In particular, one respondent mentioned Council architects who, they reported, sometimes worked on private projects while at work.

Several respondents noted particular areas where they felt that staff numbers should be reduced:

Management structure

A number of respondents suggested that staff numbers could be reduced by reviewing the Council's management structure. It was believed that there were too many managers in the Council, and that the number of middle managers, in particular, should be reduced. It was noted that the number of high-level staff and those in advisory roles should be reduced before other staff, such as teachers,

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librarians and refuse collectors. However, one respondent noted that there should be more supervision of road and ground maintenance workers.

A number of respondents noted that management roles should be restructured and streamlined, so that there was a flatter management hierarchy. It was suggested that managers should manage more than one department in the Council, with the comment that this should be achievable if Head Teachers can manage more than one school.

It was suggested that school management should be reduced in particular, especially in small schools.

Councillors

Several respondents reported that there should be fewer Councillors in Highland, noting that the current number was not in proportion with the number of Highland residents.

School staff

Some respondents suggested that staff should be reduced in schools, although these were mainly non-teaching staff. Two respondents noted that the janitor quota for secondary schools should be reduced, with another suggesting that schools could share craft and science technicians. It was noted that school librarians and crossing attendants should be cut, with parents taking on the responsibility of getting their children to school safely.

Respondents suggested redeploying Quality Improvement Officers and reducing staff outwith schools, stating that the Council should not duplicate the work of HMIE.

One respondent stated that staff in Gaelic education should be reduced, but that these staff should be redeployed elsewhere.

It was noted that fewer supply teachers should be employed on a regular basis as this is expensive. Permanent teaching staff should be employed if needed.

Support and clerical staff

One or two respondents noted that clerical staff should be reduced, with managers taking responsibility for their own paperwork. It was suggested that support staff should be cut for services considered non-essential, such as translation services.

Other areas for staff reduction

Other areas where respondents suggested a reduction in staff numbers were:

- Planning and building control, especially as there has been a reduction in new house building and construction work;
- Housing benefit staff, when universal credit is introduced;

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- Highlife Highland staff;
- HR officers;
- Staff involved in the Toilet of the Year Awards.

One or two respondents queried the role of ward managers, commenting that they do not exist in other parts of Scotland. It was suggested that ward management could be combined, or that ward managers could do fewer hours.

One respondent suggested that non-essential services, such as business development, should be stopped completely, reducing staff considerably. It was noted that the Council should monitor the number of relief staff used.

Staff and Councillor expenses

A number of respondents noted that spend on expenses for staff and, in particular, Councillors, should be reduced. It was suggested that travel expenses could be reduced through holding more meetings via video conferencing, sharing cars, using mini-buses and using fleet vehicles rather than paying for private care mileage. It was suggested that the geographical remit for staff could be reduced, and that journeys to rural communities could be rationalised. One respondent noted that Council vehicles should only be used while staff are working, and not to transport them to and from work.

Respondents noted that lunches should not be provided at training or other events, and that hospitality events should be curtailed. If refreshments were provided at events, respondents proposed that attendees paid for these. It was suggested that all meetings were held on Council property, rather than private venues.

It was noted that expense claims should be carefully scrutinised to ensure that individuals were choosing the cheapest travel and accommodation options and not making money out of them. One respondent suggested an internal independent audit of Councillor spending.

Employee benefits

Several respondents noted that Council employees should receive less favourable benefits. It was noted that Council staff should receive less favourable pensions, with suggestions that all pensions should be privatised or that stakeholder pensions should be introduced for new employees.

One or two respondents reported that other employee benefits should be brought in line with those offered in the private sector. In particular, they mentioned maternity leave, annual leave, sick pay, vouchers towards spectacles required for work and extra pay for working on Sundays. One respondent noted that Council employees should not be given bonuses.

Types of staff

It was suggested by a number of respondents that the Council use volunteers or community groups to carry out some services. It was noted that part-time volunteers could assist Council employees, and carry out tasks such as interpretation. Some respondents suggested that people undertaking community service could carry out tasks such as litter picking.

Respondents proposed that the Council offered internships, or employed parents or people who had retired on a part time basis.

One respondent noted that vacancies should be filled internally, while another questioned the use of agency staff, querying why the Council did not directly employ staff if they were needed.

Absenteeism and sickness

Some respondents noted that levels of absenteeism and sickness should be reduced. One respondent reported that a culture change was necessary in the Council, and that they should get tough on absenteeism. Another recommended investigating how staff could be supported to increase efficiency and reduce sickness.

Staff hours

Respondents reported that savings could be made if staff hours were reviewed, with suggestions that all staff worked 4 days a week or worked one hour less per day. However, one respondent felt that staff should work longer hours. One or two respondents reported that flexi-time should not be used, although another suggested that a clocking in and clocking out system would be beneficial.

Respondents not in favour

Respondents who were not in favour of reducing spending on staff reported either that there had been too many cuts made already, or that reducing spending on staff would have a detrimental effect on the Council and the community.

Respondents who felt that there had been too many cuts made already noted that there had already been a pay freeze for two or more years. It was felt that many areas of the Council were understaffed currently, since vacancies had not been filled.

In particular, 'hands on' staff in roads and transport were mentioned, with respondents from People First noting that there are currently too few social workers.

One respondent noted that Council workers were essential, so spending on them should not be reduced.

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It was reported that jobs were important, and that it would cost more to the community overall if people were made redundant and were unemployed. One or two respondents noted that reducing staff causes more stress, and therefore more sickness.

Respondents suggested that, instead of reducing the amount spent on staff, the Council should work on working more efficiently instead. It was believed that employees should be asked for their suggestions on how to do this.

Reducing in certain circumstances

A number of respondents stated that they would be in favour of reducing spending on staff, but not if this impacted negatively on performance or service delivery. It was noted that front line staffing should certainly not be reduced.

Some respondents commented that whether reductions were made depended on individual cases, and noted that each service should be considered separately. A further view was that spending on staff should be reduced in ratio to savings made from each department.



Ways of Working

Given that the Council is introducing the living wage for lower paid staff, should the Council support the public sector pay settlement of 1%?

Quantitative Analysis

The question on public sector pay settlement was introduced as follows: “This is the 2nd year of a two year pay freeze for staff. The UK Government is recommending a public sector pay settlement capped at 1% increase per annum for the next 2 years. Your Council has committed to introducing the living wage of £7.20 per hour, by April 2013 at the latest, which will affect approximately 700 Council staff (approx. 230 full time equivalents) on the lowest pay grades.”

Respondents were asked: “Should your Council support the public sector pay settlement of 1%?” Their views are found in the table below:

Respondents’ Views on the Council supporting the public sector pay settlement of 1%

| “Should your Council support the public sector pay settlement of 1%?” | All Respondents % |
|--|--------------------------|
| Yes | 68 |
| No | 32 |
| Total | 100 |

N=1,018

Some 68% of the entire sample said they would support the public sector pay settlement of 1% while 32% said that they would not support it.

Those respondents who answered “no” to the question above were then asked “would you support a lower amount or a higher amount?” Their views are found in the table below.

Views of the respondents who did not endorse the Council supporting the public sector pay settlement of 1%

| “Would you support a lower amount or a higher amount?” | All Respondents answering ‘No’ to Council supporting a pay settlement of 1% (%) |
|---|--|
| Support for a higher amount | 79 |
| Support for a lower amount | 18 |
| No response | 3 |
| Total | 100 |

N=322

Some 79% of respondents disagreeing with the proposal that the Council support a pay settlement of 1% favour a “**higher amount**” while 18% support a “**lower amount**”. Some 3% provided no response.

Qualitative Analysis

197 separate responses were received for the question “*Given that the Council is introducing the living wage for lower paid staff, should the Council support the public sector pay settlement of 1%?*” Responses were mainly received from individuals through the online questionnaire and from discussions at ward forums. Responses were also received through emailed and posted forms. Organisational responses were received from Community Councils, Parent Councils, the focus groups with People First and Highland Youth Voice and a meeting of the Joint Consultation Group.

Respondents interpreted this question in different ways. Some answered from the perspective of whether there should be a pay rise at all, while others commented on whether pay rises should be capped at 1%. Most respondents were in favour of the Council supporting the 1% pay settlement, although several believed a per cent pay rise for all employees was unfair, and that other arrangements should be made.

Some respondents considered the living wage and the pay settlement to be separate issues, with some believing that one should be introduced and not the other.

In favour of a pay rise and/or introducing the living wage

Many respondents who stated that they were in favour of the Council supporting the pay settlement appeared to be answering in favour of a pay rise, as opposed to a continued pay freeze. It was noted that, because of the pay freeze, the public sector had effectively had a pay cut for a number of years. One respondent commented that, to support the economy, public sector workers must have money to spend in the community. Rising costs of living were mentioned, in particular rent and heating costs.

Some respondents raised concerns about staff morale if a pay freeze continued, reporting that the Council could potentially lose its best staff, and that there could be a threat of strike action.

Several respondents noted that the living wage was important, and should be introduced regardless of other pay settlements. While some respondents stated that those who were given the living wage should not also be given a 1% increase, one respondent felt that all employees should be given a 1% pay rise, including those who were paid the living wage.

One respondent noted that, if the living wage was introduced, it was only fair that the public sector pay settlement was supported.

In favour of a pay settlement capped at 1%

A number of respondents were supportive of a pay rise but specified that this should be capped at 1%. Respondents who were in favour of capping a pay rise at 1% stated that everyone must suffer in terms of wages. It was noted that it was better to have people in work with lower pay rises, than not in work at all. One respondent noted that private sector employees had received a similar level of pay rise after a period of frozen pay.

A small number of respondents noted that it was not up to the Council to seek public support for the proposal. The Joint Consultation Group noted that this should be decided through annual negotiations between Trade Unions and COSLA. Two other respondents believed that the pay settlement should be supported as it had been dictated by the Government.

One respondent stated that they were in favour of the 1% pay settlement, but only if there was another pay review a year later.

Distribute pay rise differently

A number of respondents stated that the 1% pay rise should only be given to lower paid staff, or offered suggestions about how pay should be redistributed. Respondents noted that a 1% pay rise should only be given to lower paid staff, for example people earning under £25,000 per annum or those earning below the living wage. One respondent suggested that people earning below the living wage should be given a higher increase than those earning above it, with a view to the living wage being introduced by April 2014 at the latest. They queried whether employees should not get the working wage through their tax credits anyway. Another respondent felt that non-teaching staff should be given a pay rise.

A view expressed by a number of respondents was that a per cent increase in wages was unfair, as this widened the gap between the richest and poorest employees. It was suggested that an equal amount should be given to all employees, by dividing the amount available for wage increases by the total number of employees. Several other respondents felt that money should be cut from the salaries of higher paid staff to facilitate others earning the minimum wage. However, one respondent was against this proposal.

Some respondents suggested introducing performance-related pay, with one stating that the 1% pay rise should only be given when merited. However, it was noted by one respondent that performance-related pay should not apply to management.

Not in favour of a pay rise and/or introducing the living wage

Respondents who felt that there should continue to be a pay freeze reported that public sector employees were well off compared to those in the private sector, and that private sector employees were not getting a pay rise. Some respondents noted that the priority was keeping jobs, so there should be no pay rise until there is budget stability. A respondent noted that the Council was there to provide a service to the public, not provide overpaid jobs.

A small number of respondents stated specifically that the Council should not introduce the living wage, believing that it cannot afford this.

Finding money for a pay rise

Some respondents suggested that the Council should make cuts in order to facilitate a pay rise. As noted above, respondents felt that money should be cut from the salaries of higher paid employees to facilitate a rise in the pay of lower paid employees. Others proposed that staff numbers should be cut, with a focus on higher paid staff, but a respondent noted that important services should be identified and protected.

A small number of respondents proposed that Council Tax should be increased to facilitate a pay rise.

Care Services

Do you think that the Council and NHS Highland should do more to support people to live longer in their own homes and delay or prevent their admission to residential homes or hospital?

and

If people can arrange their own care at less cost than the Council, should this be encouraged?

and

Where people seek funding to make their own arrangements, what should the Council do if a traditional service is no longer affordable for the Council to run?

Do you think that the Council and NHS Highland should do more to support people to live longer in their own homes and delay or prevent their admission to residential homes or hospital?

Quantitative Analysis

The question relating to supporting people in their own homes was introduced as follows: “The people of Highland have been telling us through the Community Care Plan consultation that they would value the opportunity for older people to remain in their own homes and be independent for as long as possible, before they might need to move into care homes. This means spending more on community services, to support people to live at home after a period in hospital, and less on residential/institutional care. This will save money in the longer term too, if the overall age at which people move into residential or nursing care is delayed. Over the past few years, there has been a move to giving people more control over the care services they receive. This approach does not suit everybody, but some people want to have more control and choice over their care and support. Many people also say they can do this at a lower cost. At a time when savings are required, the challenge for us in giving people more control is to balance individual choice against the need to protect existing traditional services that others may prefer.”

Panel Members were then asked: “Do you think that your Council and NHS Highland should do more to support people to live longer in their own homes?” Their views are found in the table below.

Ways of Working

Respondents' Views on whether the Council and NHS Highland should do more to support people to live in their own homes

| “Do you think that your Council and NHS Highland should do more to support people to live longer in their own homes?” | All Respondents % |
|--|--------------------------|
| Yes | 96 |
| No | 4 |
| Total | 100 |

N=1,024

An overwhelming majority of respondents - 96% - thought that their Council and NHS Highland should do more to support people to live in their own homes.

Qualitative Analysis

182 separate responses were received on the question “*Do you think that the Council and NHS Highland should do more to support people to live longer in their own homes and delay or prevent their admission to residential homes or hospital?*” These were mainly from online, emailed and posted questionnaires, with responses also received from ward forums. Organisational responses were received from Parent Councils and Community Councils and from the focus group held with People First.

There was strong support from respondents for the Council and NHS to do more to support people to live longer in their own homes. Respondents suggested however that the individuals' needs, what they and their families want, and costs, need to be taken into account. There were a group of respondents who were unclear whether this approach should be taken forward, the general feeling that this required to be assessed on a case by case basis. A small number of respondents were against this approach citing poor care in the community and the sense of isolation for the individual concerned.

In favour

In the main respondents were in favour of the Council and NHS maintaining people within their own home. The costs of residential care and the wellbeing of individuals were cited as key reasons for this support. However, most respondents suggested that this approach should only be progressed if certain factors were considered.

Some respondents felt that it was important that this policy was adopted only if it was what the person and their family wanted. It was noted that it was important that the person still had a choice and acknowledged that for some, residential care may be best.

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A further consideration was that this option was financially appropriate. It was suggested that maintaining someone in their home must be cost effective and also that there would need to be more invested in this area in order to provide the support to maintain people at home.

The appropriate support for individuals was seen as critical by many respondents. In some cases there would be the need for homes to be adapted and the quality of care provided was regarded as important. It was suggested that maintaining someone in their own home should not be based on the availability of family and relatives and that external support was required. However, the alternative view was that families need to do more. It was noted that support needs to be available immediately when required.

Some respondents suggested that the needs of the person need to be considered prior to determining whether they can stay in their own home. It was suggested that consideration is required about whether staying at home is appropriate from a health and safety point of view. If an individual needs to be in hospital or residential care then they should be. It may not be their wish but sometimes the level of care needed will mean it necessary. One view was that the assessment of an individual's needs must be on a continuous basis.

One respondent suggested that there needs to be a more modern approach to the provision of care services and that this may mean doing things in a slightly different way than previously. A further view was that locally managed and delivered services would be appropriate in these circumstances.

People First highlighted that this is not just an issue for elderly individuals but also younger people with learning disabilities who want to remain within their own homes and not be placed in residential care.

Unsure

There were some respondents who were unsure whether the approach to maintain people in their homes is positive. It was suggested that each case should be assessed on an individual basis.

There was a view that people will want to remain in their homes but without the appropriate support this could have a negative impact on them and that sometimes people cling to their homes longer than feasible. It was also noted that some people can be very lonely within the community and that there was a need for more community groups

Not in favour

A small group of respondents were not in favour of maintaining people within their homes. It was reported that people can get very depressed at home, that individual circumstances are the key and that it needs to be acknowledged that it is not necessarily the best option to remain at home.

A further view was that the appropriate support for individuals to remain at home was often not available and that currently care in the community is often poor.

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If people can arrange their own care at less cost than the Council, should this be encouraged?

and

Where people seek funding to make their own arrangements, what should the Council do if a traditional service is no longer affordable for the Council to run?

Quantitative Analysis

Respondents were then asked: “If people can arrange their own care at less cost than your Council, should this be encouraged?” Their views are found in the table below.

Respondents’ Views on encouraging people to arrange their own care if it is at less cost than the Council

| “If people can arrange their own care at less cost than your Council, should this be encouraged?” | All Respondents % |
|--|--------------------------|
| Yes | 85 |
| No | 15 |
| Total | 100 |

N=1,017

Some 85% of respondents thought that encouragement should be given to people if they can arrange their own care at less cost than their Council. Some 15% disagreed.

A follow-on question was then posed: “Should this be encouraged if it impacts on the viability of your council’s services and therefore the ability to provide services for those who do not wish to arrange their own care?” Their views are in the table below.

Respondents’ views on encouraging people to arrange their own care if it impacts on the viability of their Council’s services

| “Should this be encouraged if it impacts on the viability of your Council’s services and therefore the ability to provide services for those who do not wish to arrange their own care?” | All Respondents % | People with a Disability % |
|---|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Yes | 35 | 43 |
| No | 65 | 57 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |

N=989

Some 65% all respondents and 57% of those with a disability thought that people should not be encouraged to arrange their own care if it impacted on the viability of their Council's ability to provide services for those who do not wish to arrange their own care. That means 35% of all respondents and 43% of those who have a disability were in favour of encouraging the arrangement of such care even if it impacted on the viability of the provision of Council services for those who do not wish to arrange their own care.

Qualitative Analysis

216 separate responses were received on the question "*If people can arrange their own care at less cost than the Council, should this be encouraged?*" These were mainly from online, emailed and posted questionnaires, with responses also received from ward forums. Organisational responses were received from Parent Councils and Community Councils and from the focus groups held with People First and Sight Action.

There was strong support from respondents in favour of people being able to arrange their own care. Choice for individuals was regarded as important but this sat alongside the need to ensure that services were monitored. A small number of respondents were not supportive of the proposal, indicating that this would lead to unregulated care and the ability of people to arrange their own care. There was confusion amongst respondents about the principle of people arranging their own care, with many believing that this also meant funding their own care.

In favour

In the main respondents were in favour of people being able to arrange their own care, although it was highlighted by some that this should be accepted rather than encouraged. It was important for a number of respondents that this would not mean that people would have to pay for their own care and noted that everyone was entitled to the same funding provision. There was confusion even amongst those who were in favour of the approach that this may mean people having to pay for their own care.

Amongst those in favour of people arranging their own care, it was reported that this should only happen if the services are monitored closely. It should be the Council's responsibility to do this as a way of ensuring that the individual was receiving a quality service. Some respondents noted that anybody chosen by an individual or their family to provide care must be qualified.

Many of the respondents in favour of people arranging their own care felt that it was only if the individual wanted to do so. It was seen as a positive decision for people to

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want to take control over their lives but only if this was their choice to do so. It was acknowledged that not everyone would be able to arrange their own care and that people should be assessed as whether competent to do so.

It was suggested that families would need support to enable them to do this and that it would take a lot of work to ensure that the care provided was efficient and effective.

The focus group with People First highlighted that arranging your own care could be beneficial as often people are placed in certain accommodation and then left there although the individual feels that it is not appropriate. This approach could help prevent this and ensure the right hours of care were received. The focus group with Sight Action also saw this as a positive approach, highlighting that currently they don't always get the same home carers which they feel is degrading so employing someone personally would be a positive.

It was questioned why any other provider would be able to provide this cheaper than the Council.

It was also suggested that the current system is too complicated and that it needs to be more straight forward in order to assist people arranging their own care. A further suggestion was that there need to be opportunities for families to share experiences and good practice.

Not in favour

A small group of respondents were not in favour of people being able to arrange their own care. It was reported that consistency and quality are required in the provision of care and it therefore need to be administered by one body which is the Council. There was a suggestion that this could lead to unregulated care which would be bad for the individual.

A further concern was that people would not have the capacity to arrange care for themselves at the appropriate level.

One respondent saw this as a move to privatisation.

It appears that some respondents indicated that they were not in favour of the approach due to the misapprehension that it was unfair for the Council expect people to fund care and support themselves.

Where people seek funding to make their own arrangements, what should the Council do if a traditional service is no longer affordable for the Council to run?

168 separate responses were received on the question *Where people seek funding to make their own arrangements, what should the Council do if a traditional service is no longer affordable for the Council to run?* These were mainly from online, emailed and posted questionnaires, with responses also received from ward forums. Organisational responses were received from Parent Councils and Community Councils and from the focus groups held with People First and Sight Action.

Respondents were divided in their views on what the Council should do if, following people arranging their own care, traditional Council services become unaffordable. Some respondents felt that the Council run service should be stopped, however others reported that the service should continue or change in order to be efficient. A number of respondents were unsure what should happen, with some citing that they felt they did not understand the question or that it was unclear.

Stop providing the service

A number of respondents reported that if the Council can no longer afford to run a service due to people making their own arrangements then the provision should be stopped. It would be important to ensure that a suitable alternative is available for people to access. It was noted that the quality of the service is the key and not who provides it. It was suggested that the Council should look to transfer/contract out to social enterprises, charities, the private sector or the community.

Some respondents highlighted that there would be a need to ensure that there is advice and support for individuals on where else they can get the service and assistance to find out which is the best option for them.

Continue providing the current service

A further group of respondents held the opposing view – that even though the service is unaffordable, the Council should continue to provide it. Respondents noted that there would always be someone who cannot, or doesn't want, to make their own arrangements therefore a Council service needs to be in place. It was felt that the Council has a legal responsibility and if people need a service then it must be provided.

It was suggested that if the service is required then the finance needs to be found to pay for the service. Suggestions for finding cash included reducing pensions for Council staff and not building new offices.

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Some respondents suggested that there was a need to improve Council run services to ensure that people want them and a need to make Council services more cost effective.

One view was that the Council should not allow people to arrange their own care or only allow people to arrange care up to a certain point where a Council run service is still cost effective.

One respondent suggested that there was a need to continue providing the service and suggested that this was a back-door way of the Council cutting services and then blaming it on the people who need the service.

Change the current service

A number of respondents were neither in favour of stopping the service entirely or continuing it in its current form. This group of respondents suggested that there was a need to change the way current Council services are provided. It was felt there was a need to be creative and flexible and to 'think outside the box'.

It was suggested that the Council should look to other service providers for ideas and perhaps the opportunity to combine services or work with others to provide a more efficient model.

Respondents reported that there was a need to make Council services more competitive and cost effective. It was suggested there would be a need to make savings and a need to make Council services as efficient as those provided elsewhere.

Some respondents felt that there was a need to improve the way Council services are provided in order to encourage more people to want them. The focus group with People First suggested that if people are paying other providers to provide a service then it suggests that the Council are not providing the right service.

A view from one respondent was that Council Tax should be increased in order to fund the service as everyone should have to pay.

Unsure

A number of people felt unable to answer the question, reporting that they either didn't understand the question or that the question was unclear. As with the previous question on people arranging their own care, not all respondents appeared to understand the approach.

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A further view was that there was a need to understand why costs are so high in the public sector and to address the cause of this. There was confusion why services would not be affordable, especially when other providers can do so.

Some respondents felt that if these circumstances were to arise then there would be a need to consult with people using the service as to what they would like to happen. It would be important to provide individuals with all the options available.

It was suggested that a way in which to avoid this situation occurring would be to allow people to arrange their own care but that the Council contribution is capped at an affordable level and the person has to pay the rest themselves. A further suggestion was that the Council needs to provide what is legally required but no more as there should be the same level of service received by all groups.

One respondent felt that the situation outlined was unlikely to occur.

Working with Partners and Other Organisations

Should the Council be working more with public sector partners to share functions and reduce costs? If yes, please suggest potential areas/functions where joint working would lead to savings.

and

The Highland Council and NHS Highland believe that management and administrative costs can be reduced through better integrated services. Do you support this approach?

and

In relation to the funding that we provide to partner organisations, should we expect them to find efficiency savings of 3% on the element of their activity the Council funds?

and

In the future, when we are buying services from private or third sector organisations, should we be seeking annual efficiencies from organisations in line with the Council's efficiency targets?

and

Should the Council consider reducing all grants and discretionary funding – in line with the Council's efficiency targets?

Should the Council be working more with public sector partners to share functions and reduce costs? If yes, please suggest potential areas/functions where joint working would lead to savings.

Quantitative Analysis

Working more with public sector partners to share functions and reduce costs

Respondents were asked: "Should your Council be working more with public sector partners such as health, the police and the Post Office, to share functions and reduce costs?" Their views are found in the table below.

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Respondents' views on their Council working more with other public sector partners

| “Should your Council be working more with public sector partners such as health, the police and the Post Office, to share functions and reduce costs?” | All Respondents % |
|---|--------------------------|
| Yes | 93 |
| No | 7 |
| Total | 100 |

N=1,023

An overwhelming majority of all respondents – 93% -agreed that their Council should be working more with public sector partners to share functions and to reduce costs.

Qualitative Analysis

174 responses were received on the topic of the Council working more with public sector partners. Responses were mostly from the online form and from discussions at ward forums, with other responses from posted forms and email comments. Responses were also received from organisations such as Community Councils and Parent Councils and from discussions at focus groups with Highland Users Group, People First and Highland Youth Voice.

Many respondents were in favour of the proposal, provided that services continued to be run efficiently. The main areas suggested for joint working were the sharing of buildings and back office functions, as well as working with volunteers and third sector organisations. Several respondents mentioned that there was duplication of work and services, which should be reduced through joint working.

Sharing buildings

Many respondents suggested that the Council should share buildings with other organisations. Respondents were not always specific about which services should share buildings, with some stating that this should be done wherever possible.

The citing of Service Points was frequently mentioned, with respondents suggesting that they should be situated in Post Offices, libraries, supermarkets or Tourist Information Offices or with police and fire services. However, one respondent noted that Service Points should not be situated where there is already a joint school and public library. It was commented that Post Offices should be used as much as possible as they need support. (The use of Post Offices is discussed in more detail in the responses to *Public Access to Council Services*)

Some respondents suggested that schools, community centres and sports centres shared a communal space, or that youth organisations shared buildings and equipment. One respondent suggested moving job centres into Community Offices

and setting up a Wi-Fi point. The Wi-Fi could then be rented out to local businesses and offered to their customers.

Working with the Public Sector - sharing administrative/back office functions

Several respondents suggested sharing back office functions, giving examples of payroll, finance, human resources, IT, mailing, training and administration. Sharing administration was mentioned particularly in relation to the police and fire services.

A number of respondents were also in favour of the Council sharing vehicles with other organisations. In particular, sharing car maintenance contracts with the police was mentioned. One respondent raised the issue of public transport in rural areas, mentioning that post buses had been appreciated, and suggesting that local tour operators could be used to provide rural public transport. It was suggested that third sector organisations could be used to provide transport by car in remote areas, instead of ambulances being used.

It was suggested that there should be better liaison between the Council and organisations that are currently heavily involved in tackling unemployment. Examples given were Skills Development Scotland, Job Centre Plus and third sector organisations. It was noted that the Highland Council should not be developing a website for young people and planning to work with unemployed young people when other organisations were providing similar services. A respondent also suggested working more with Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

Working with third sector organisations and volunteers

A number of respondents suggested working jointly with third sector organisations and volunteers, for example Citizens Advice Bureaux (CABx). Respondents noted that giving funding to third sector organisations like the CABx to provide services was more economical than providing them in-house, as many CABx staff are volunteers. Respondents also mentioned that CABx, along with other third sector organisations, provided valuable support to people with mental health conditions. This support was particularly important in the light of welfare reforms, to prevent people feeling more isolated and leading to greater stress.

Respondents also proposed that more third sector organisations or volunteers were used to run services for the Council as they would be on a not-for-profit basis. For example, it was suggested that the Council work more with Community Councils to arrange volunteers for services such as grass cutting.

A number of respondents suggested that the Council should work with local Housing Associations. One respondent suggested transferring Council stock to Housing Associations with an improved marketing campaign, believing that this would save money and improve services to tenants. It was also suggested that the Council should use a local Housing Association to carry out repairs.

Providing care and social services

It was suggested by several respondents that the Council and NHS work together to provide social and care services. This was mentioned in particular in relation to social work, community nursing and care homes.

Some respondents proposed that the Council work with other unspecified organisations to provide care services. In particular, respite care for relatives of elderly or disabled people, residential care homes for children and foster care was mentioned.

One or two respondents suggested working jointly to provide meal services for those in need. It was suggested that elderly people should be given access to school meals, or that existing meal clubs should be shared across groups of people with different needs, such as elderly people or people with learning difficulties. It was suggested that arrangements be made with supermarkets to buy fresh food near its sell-by date at a reduced rate.

One respondent suggested joint working with health education and social work.

Working with other Councils

A number of respondents suggested working with other Councils to increase purchasing benefits. However, one respondent advocated purchasing locally, if possible.

A further respondent suggested integrating Moray and Highland Councils, while another proposed that all public sector organisations should be subsumed into one super-efficient organisation.

It was suggested that a review of other Councils in the UK should be carried out to determine areas where joint working has been productive previously.

Maintenance, the environment and tourism

Some respondents suggested that local groups could be used to provide maintenance, such as Community Councils providing services like grass cutting. It was suggested that groups were sponsored to do maintenance in their local area. (Further details on this are provided in the section on '*Working with Communities*')

Respondents suggested working with other unspecified organisations to provide environmental services such as refuse collection, street cleaning and grass cutting.

It was proposed that the Council works with Transport Scotland to provide highway maintenance and Registered Social Landlords to deliver housing maintenance services. One respondent suggested reducing planning costs through greater co-

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operation with Scottish Natural Heritage, Forestry Commission and Scottish Environment Protection Agency, while another proposed working with Scottish Water.

It was noted that financial gains from projects such as wind farms should be better used by a wider section of the community.

One respondent suggested that the Council work with Visit Scotland to provide more joined-up services through tourism, events and Inverness city centre in general.

Other suggestions

Outsourcing - There was some support for outsourcing to private organisations, with respondents noting that staff in the private sector are paid less than those in the Council. One respondent suggested that private firms should be brought in to take projects forward and get rid of 'dead weight' in the Council. It was noted that a realistic period should be made for procurement for outsourcing, and not necessarily annually.

Local planning - One or two respondents stressed the need for local planning, with agencies being encouraged to work with each other locally. It was reported that, even with joint working, people should be able to continue making decisions relevant to their area.

Sharing staff expertise and best practice - A respondent suggested that the Council should work with other organisations to share staff expertise and advice for best practice.

Armed services - It was suggested by one respondent that the Council should work together with the armed forces to deliver services.

Respondents not in favour/with caveats

While a small number of respondents noted that they were not in favour of joint working, a number expressed caveats about organisation efficiency and maintaining levels of service. There were concerns that employees in private and other public sector organisations do not work as hard as Council staff, which would lead to reduced services. It was noted that, if the only incentive in joint working was to reduce costs, services were likely to be reduced. One respondent commented that, at present, every public sector partner is seeking to, "cost less and do less".

A number of respondents suggested introducing mechanisms to monitor the efficiency of organisations working together. There were concerns that inefficiencies

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would be multiplied through joint working. It was reported that a multidisciplinary team head would be necessary, and that this may be difficult to administer.

Concerns were raised that joint working would cost, rather than save, money. It was believed that public sector partners would take advantage of the Council and charge excessive amounts. Some respondents were concerned that joint working would be costly to set up, and advised the Council not to get tied into long contracts. A further concern was that these costs would have to be met by the taxpayer. A respondent commented that the NHS did not make redundancies, which could be problematic. They noted that flexibility in joint working was needed.

Some concerns were raised about staffing issues. One respondent noted that staff must not be given too high workloads if functions were to be joined, while another was concerned that local jobs would be lost.

Some respondents commented that their answer depended on the circumstances, in particular on which public sector partners were being considered. Respondents from one focus group noted that it would be a good idea to amalgamate services in rural areas, but that this would not work in Inverness.

A further view was that there were few services left which could be shared, or that other organisations would not want to work with the Council. Others noted that joint working could make things more complicated, and that it seems to involve more committees and discussions.

The Highland Council and NHS Highland believe that management and administrative costs can be reduced through better integrated services. Do you support this approach?

Quantitative Analysis

The Citizens' Panel were not asked the question on the integration of services between the NHS and the Council.

Qualitative Analysis

169 separate responses were received on the topic of the Highland Council and NHS Highland integrating services. Responses were mainly from individuals through the online form, posted forms and email comments. Responses were also received from discussions at ward forums, from the focus group with Highland Youth Voice, and from organisations such as Community Councils and Parent Councils.

There was strong support for the Council and NHS Highland having better integrated services. Reported benefits of this approach included reduced bureaucracy, a more holistic service and reduced costs. Some respondents felt that certain conditions should be met if the approach was to be adopted, such as a reduction in management staff or more localised management structures. Others supported the idea in principle but raised concerns about how it would work in practice. A very small number of respondents were against the proposal, stating, for example, that the Council and NHS had different aims and outlooks.

Respondents in favour

Many respondents were in favour of the approach, but a relatively small number provided explanations for their answers. A key theme among those in favour of integrating Council and NHS services was the belief that this would lead to more effective service provision. A number of respondents felt that there were currently too many administrators in the Council and the NHS, and not enough front-line workers. They noted that integration would reduce bureaucracy and red tape, leading to increased service quality.

Some respondents noted that integration would lead to more joined-up solutions to problems and a more holistic service. South Lanarkshire was given as an example of a joined-up service where all areas shared an office and clients could be discussed informally. The respondent reported that this meant problems were dealt with quickly and efficiently.

A small number of respondents were in favour of the approach because of its potential to reduce costs. It was noted that sharing administration staff was sure to lead to savings.

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One respondent felt that the Council could learn from the NHS and so integrated services would be beneficial.

Conditions

A number of respondents were in favour of the proposal, as long as certain conditions were met. Many of these respondents noted that there should be a reduction, and not duplication, in management staff as there were too many managers in the Council and the NHS currently. One respondent stated that they were in favour of the proposal if it meant there were fewer working parties and quangos.

Some respondents noted that more management should be done at a local level. One respondent commented that integrating senior management centrally in Inverness does not work and suggested that there should be a return to local delivery, managed by local personnel. One respondent suggested that NHS hospitals should be allowed to source their own furniture, which would set up competition. Another proposed that local tradesmen should be used.

Some respondents stressed that the approach needs to provide services that are better, and not just cheaper, than before. Respondents suggested that the processes should be closely monitored by committed staff on both sides, to ensure that both partners operate efficiently and do not lower the standards of their work.

Some respondents raised concerns that partners would not work constructively together, suggesting that different partners would jockey for power or may try to 'pass the buck'. It was noted that clear roles and responsibilities would need to be established to try to prevent this. One respondent was concerned that administration for front-line staff may increase in order to demonstrate compliance with procedures. The need for very good communication, co-operation and collaboration was also highlighted.

Concerns were raised about staffing arrangements, with comments that redundancies should be handled fairly. It was noted that all remaining staff should be trained properly so that they understand all of the areas that they cover.

One respondent noted that they were in favour of the proposal, as long as confidentiality could be assured.

Unsure

A key theme emerging for those unsure about the proposal was that it seemed good in principle, but there were concerns about how it would work in practice. Several respondents noted that their answer depended upon what was involved in integrating services, while others were unsure whether the costs involved in setting up the

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system would be worthwhile. It was suggested that pilot schemes should be used to troubleshoot and quantify benefits before introducing the scheme Highland-wide.

One respondent raised concerns about integrating the computer systems of the Council and NHS, noting that both systems were less than perfect.

Not in favour

Few respondents were completely opposed to the proposal. One or two respondents noted that the Council and NHS are very different entities, with differing ideals and concerns. Others noted that similar arrangements had proven to be problematic and not reduce expenditure in other Council areas. One respondent raised concerns about increased staff workload, noting that overworked people are not efficient and that overworking of NHS staff could potentially be very dangerous.

In relation to the funding that we provide to partner organisations, should we expect them to find efficiency savings of 3% on the element of their activity the Council funds?

Quantitative Analysis

The question regarding efficiencies was introduced as follows: “Your Council funds a number of partner organisations, such as NHS Highland, to provide services on our behalf and spends a significant amount of its money on purchasing services from external organisations. We are required annually to meet savings through efficiency targets set by the Government. In 2011/12, £13.2m in efficiencies was made.”

Respondents were then asked: “In relation to the services we buy from other public and voluntary organisations, should we expect them to find the same efficiency savings of 3% on the element of their activity we fund?” Their views are found in the table below.

Respondents’ views on expecting other public and voluntary organisations to find efficiency savings of 3%

| ‘In relation to the services we buy from other public and voluntary organisations, should we expect them to find the same efficiency savings of 3% on the element of their activity we fund?’ | All Respondents % |
|--|--------------------------|
| Yes | 80 |
| No | 20 |
| Total | 100 |

N=1,014

Some 80% of respondents agreed – while 20% disagreed – with the proposition that in relation to the services the Council buys from other public and voluntary organisations, the Council should expect them to find the same efficiency savings of 3% on the element of their activity funded by the Council.

Respondents were then asked: “In relation to the services we buy from private organisations, should we expect them to find the same efficiency savings of 3% on the element of their activity that we fund?” Their views are found in the table below.

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Respondents' views on expecting private organisations to find efficiency savings of 3%

| “In relation to the services we buy from private organisations, should we expect them to find the same efficiency savings of 3% on the element of their activity that we fund?” | All Respondents % |
|--|--------------------------|
| Yes | 83 |
| No | 17 |
| Total | 100 |

N=1,007

Some 83% of all respondents agreed and 17% disagreed with the proposition that in relation to the services the Council buys from private organisations, the Council should expect them to find the same efficiency savings of 3% on the element of their activity that it funds.

Qualitative Analysis

155 separate responses were received for the question “*In relation to the funding that we provide to partner organisations, should we expect them to find efficiency savings of 3% on the element of their activity the Council funds?*” Responses were mainly from individuals through the online form, posted forms and email comments. Responses were also received from discussions at ward forums, from the focus group held with People First and from organisations, including Community Councils, Parent Councils, Caithness Labour Party and a property consultancy.

Many respondents were in favour of the proposal, with a common explanation being that savings should be spread across everyone. Several respondents noted that this should depend on certain circumstances, such as the type and level of need of an organisation. A small number of respondents disagreed with the proposal completely, believing, for example, that a reduction in funding would lead to a decreased level of service.

In favour

Many respondents were in favour of partner organisations finding efficiency savings of 3% on the element of their activity that the Council funds. A key theme among those in favour of the proposal was that savings need to be spread across everyone, and so this is a fair and reasonable expectation.

One or two respondents noted that most partner organisations had already made more efficient savings than the Council. Conversely, it was noted that some organisations should have their efficiency questioned anyway, and that some organisations should review their staffing and the way that they work.

One respondent noted that 3% should be a minimum efficiency saving that partner organisations are asked to find.

Not in favour of 'blanket' approach

A number of respondents were in favour of some organisations being asked to find 3% efficiency savings, but noted that this should depend on the type of organisation, its value to the community and/or how it would cope with less funding.

Several respondents reported that voluntary groups, community groups and third sector organisations often do not have the core funds to cut back. One respondent suggested that, if anything, funding to third sector organisations should be increased to underpin new ways of working.

It was noted that services may suffer if organisations were required to make savings and that this would be detrimental to members of the public. Respondents reported that many Social Enterprises provided services to the public which the Council would find difficult to replace if the organisation did not have enough funding to continue them. It was also noted that, when the Council pays an organisation to provide a service, it sometimes spends less money than it would delivering the service itself. It was argued that this should already be counted as an efficiency saving. One respondent commented that partner organisations should not be asked to find efficiency savings if they were expected to take on work that the Council is cutting in its own services.

A number of respondents reported that different levels of efficiency savings should be required, depending on the organisation's needs and circumstances. It was noted that 3% efficiency savings may be too much for some organisations to find and too little for others. One respondent suggested that the efficiency savings asked for should depend on how much savings the organisation has been asked to make in, for example the past five years, while another noted that funding should be based on need, not efficiency savings.

Council must also demonstrate efficiency savings

Several respondents were in favour of a 3% efficiency saving for partner organisations, but only if the Council demonstrated tangible efficiency savings at the same level. One respondent commented that, for the Council to set the same example, it must deal with the 'disasters' of the Caithness Heat and Power Scheme and its contract with Fujitsu.

Methods of measuring efficiency

Some respondents were in favour of partner organisations being asked to find efficiency savings on the element of their activity that the Council funds, but

mentioned that efficiency must be carefully measured. One respondent noted that efficiency savings cannot be found every year and that, if they can, there is something wrong. Another respondent warned against “double counting” of efficiency. It was also noted that the efficiency savings asked for should be made on discretionary spend, and not on fixed costs such as capital invested in premises or paid in rents.

Terms of contracts

Tight standards for funding

Some respondents were not necessarily in favour of expecting 3% efficiency savings, but reported that there should be tight standards for funding and that this should be awarded based on proven outcomes. It was commented that funding should be considered thoroughly in terms of value for money and enrichment of communities.

Include criteria about wages

One or two respondents were in favour of asking partner organisations to find efficiency savings but noted that partner organisations should also be required to pay certain wage levels. One respondent suggested that the Council should only use contractors who pay their employees living wage, while another suggested that the Council should not fund organisations where an employee or director is paid more than five times the national average wage.

Re-negotiate contracts

One or two respondents noted that contracts with partners should be re-negotiated to incorporate savings, stating that it should be up to the Council to reduce provision to partners, rather than partners being asked to find savings on the amount that they are provided with. A respondent noted that it was acceptable to re-negotiate the terms of a contract if the period agreed for funding had come to an end, but not to reduce funding levels part-way through an agreed funding period.

Additional suggestions

Some respondents made suggestions of alternative ways that savings could be made. One respondent suggested that each community should have its own hub, noting that this would save costs as the individuals providing support would have an idea of the logistics of providing their services.

Another respondent suggested having a two-way dialogue with partner organisations, asking for ideas on improving or changing service offering without necessarily increasing or reducing funding.

Not in favour

Few respondents were not at all in favour of asking partner organisations to provide efficiency savings. These respondents reported that there must have been a reason that organisations got funded originally and that it may be impossible to make savings without reducing services. One respondent commented that partners work together and so one partner should not dictate to the other.

In the future, when we are buying services from private or third sector organisations, should we be seeking annual efficiencies from organisations in line with the Council's efficiency targets?

Quantitative Analysis

The Citizens' Panel were not asked the question on seeking annual efficiencies.

Qualitative Analysis

165 separate responses were received on the question "*In the future, when we are buying services from private or third sector organisations, should we be seeking annual efficiencies from organisations in line with the Council's efficiency targets?*" Responses were mainly from individuals through the online form, posted forms and email comments. Responses were also received from discussions at ward forums, focus groups with Sight Action and People First and from organisations, including Community Councils and Parent Councils.

Most respondents were in favour of the proposal, with similar themes emerging to those in the responses to the previous question.

In favour

A key theme among those in favour of the proposal was that this should be done already as part of the tendering process. It was noted that annual efficiency savings should be a key strand within negotiations, and that the main point of buying services from other organisations was that they should provide a better and more efficient service than the Council.

As noted in the responses to the previous question, several respondents noted that the economic situation was affecting everyone, so everyone should work towards the same efficiency guidelines.

One respondent noted that they were in favour of the proposal because the Council should not be outsourcing at great cost. Another respondent mentioned that the Council should expect to receive even greater efficiencies when buying services, based on the volume of services contracted.

Conditions/Suggestions

Not if important service suffers

Many respondents were in favour of seeking annual efficiencies from organisations from which the Council buys services, but only if the quality and continuity of service did not suffer. One respondent noted that organisations would need to be paid more if their workload increased. For example, if they provided a service for elderly people, their workload may increase if the number of elderly people in the area increased.

One or two respondents noted that it depended on the service, or on whether the organisations had been asked to cut back already. It was noted that seeking efficiency savings may put cultural organisations such as museums and art galleries in danger, risking the loss of their collections, expertise and community identity.

Ensure that the contracts are clear and sensible

Some respondents noted that contracts should be clear and that organisations should understand their full implications. One respondent commented that partner organisations should be consulted before any changes were implemented, and another stated that any expected efficiency savings should clearly be stated at the commencement of a contract, or new terms should be negotiated.

It was noted that any contracts should be carefully monitored, and that employees should not be paid less than the minimum wage. One respondent reported that organisations should not be expected to find efficiency savings if they take on work which the Council is cutting in its own services.

Queries about buying services from other organisations

Several respondents queried why the Council was buying services from third parties, believing that this would be more expensive than delivering the services in-house. It was noted that in-house experience and ability should be better utilised and one respondent raised concerns that, if external organisations provided services more cheaply than the Council, these organisations may not have properly trained staff.

Other arrangements

Some respondents noted that other arrangements may need to be put in place to make the proposal successful. A respondent suggested introducing extended length contracts, like a loyalty bonus. Another respondent suggested that the Council could share profits with some organisations. They mentioned that this already works well in the construction industry, as it makes it worthwhile for contractors to propose efficiency savings and to deliver their contract on time and on budget.

One or two respondents proposed different ways of working to raise efficiency, giving the example of staff working at home to reduce office costs. It was suggested that the Council should consider a 'star chamber' of local business owners and managers

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to advise them on working more efficiently. Since the managers would give their time for free, this would allow the private sector to 'give something back'.

Methods of measuring efficiency

Some respondents were in favour of the proposal, but mentioned that efficiency must be carefully measured. It was noted that efficiency savings cannot be found every year and that, if they can, there is something wrong. Another respondent warned against "double counting" of efficiency (*as described above*). It was also noted that the efficiency savings asked for should be made on discretionary spend, and not on fixed costs such as capital invested in premises or paid in rents.

Only if Council show similar savings

As outlined in the responses to the question above, some respondents were in favour of the proposal, but only if the Council also showed tangible efficiency savings at the same level. One respondent said that they would only support the proposal if the Council reduced the wage bill of management by the same amount, while another suggested finding efficiency savings from every Council employee and Councillor.

Some respondents commented that other organisations were likely to be more efficient than the Council anyway. It was noted that other organisations would probably scrutinise their own efficiency as a standard practice, and that they were likely to be more efficient than the Council through creative income generation, bringing in national grants, voluntary support and packages of services.

Support local businesses

One or two respondents noted that efficiency savings should not mean that larger companies are automatically in line for contracts. It was believed that local businesses should also be supported.

Seek opinions from service users

One respondent suggested that the Council should seek opinions from service users to ascertain whether provision is good and to make sure that money is not wasted.

Respondents not in favour

A key theme emerging among those who were not in favour of the proposal was that cheaper was not always better, and that seeking efficiency savings could have a detrimental effect on the organisations and their staff. It was believed that requests for efficiency savings encourage cutting corners, poorer service and eventually higher costs. One respondent noted that competitive tenders are already excellent value for money and that it would be unethical to ask for savings on already low prices.

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Some respondents noted that seeking efficiency savings would lead to more paperwork and staff expenditure for the Council. It was reported that the procurement process is very costly as it is, and that this would create further work in management, administration and chasing organisations.

One respondent noted that seeking efficiency savings from other organisations was unrealistic as private companies would continue to put their costs up.

Should the Council consider reducing all grants and discretionary funding – in line with the Council’s efficiency targets?

Quantitative Analysis

The question on grants and discretionary funding was introduced as follows: “Your Council provides grant funding across all services including grants of £500 to small groups and larger amounts for community projects.”

Respondents were then asked: “Should we consider reducing all grants to community groups and voluntary organisations – in line with our efficiency targets?” Their views are found in the table below.

Views of respondents on reducing grants to community groups and voluntary organisations in line with the Council’s efficiency targets

| “Should we consider reducing all grants to community groups and voluntary organisations – in line with our efficiency targets?” | All Respondents % |
|--|--------------------------|
| No | 58 |
| Yes | 42 |
| Total | 100 |

N=1,021

Some 58% of respondents thought that the Council should not reduce all grants to community groups and voluntary organisations in line with its efficiency targets while 42% thought the Council should reduce grants in that way.

Qualitative Analysis

200 separate responses were received on the question “*Should the Council consider reducing all grants and discretionary funding – in line with the Council’s efficiency targets?*” Responses were mostly from online forms and from discussions at ward forums, with other responses from posted forms and email comments. Responses were also received from discussions at focus groups with People First and Highland Youth Voice, and from organisations such as Community Councils and Parent Councils.

Opinion on the proposal was divided, with many respondents believing that the funding for each organisation should be considered individually.

Look at each organisation individually

Many respondents felt that grants and discretionary funding should be reduced to some organisations but not others. It was noted that not all causes were equally important and that some costs are unavoidable for organisations. It was felt that reducing all grants and discretionary funding would not be the most efficient way of delivering services and that the Council had a duty to ensure value for money, rather than the setting of arbitrary targets.

Several respondents noted that there should be a realistic assessment of the need and use of grants and discretionary funding. It was reported that accountability was important, and suggested that the Council should look at previous grants to check that they were used correctly. It was noted that there would be no use in providing a grant or funding if it did not meet the needs of an organisation.

A number of respondents gave examples of areas where they felt it was either acceptable or unacceptable to make cuts in funding. It was noted acceptable to make cuts if projects are no longer having the impact that they did previously. Respondents reported that non-essential management should not be funded by the Council. One respondent noted that discretionary housing grants could be stopped, as well as Council Tax discounts for people with a severe mental disability. It was noted that Community Councils were often given money that they struggled to spend and that they sometimes deliberately spend this before the end of the financial year. One respondent noted that, in some cases, complete abandonment of funding to organisations may be appropriate.

Respondents commented that it was unacceptable to reduce funding to local museums, particularly the West Highland Museum, as well as to people on a low income, organisations attached to improving communities, small organisations and some organisations which provide services to disabled or elderly people. One respondent commented that reductions should be considered very carefully if they would result in the closure of something, such as a village hall or a club. It was also noted that funding for some organisations, such as Citizens Advice Bureaux, may need to be increased to contribute to preventative measures.

Need for transparency and strict criteria

Several respondents noted that there must be transparency and stricter criteria for grants and discretionary funding. It was noted that there should be a high level of scrutiny on discretionary spend and that any funding must be value for money and in line with the Council's policies. For example, it should be linked to the Council's priorities in areas such as employment or health improvement. It was suggested that applications should include detailed information about benefits to the community and any savings that may be made following the grant or funding.

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One or two respondents were concerned that LEADER funding and ward discretionary funds were used for 'pet projects' by Councillors or single-interested groups. It was suggested that these should be made more transparent and considered carefully.

One respondent suggested that funds for Community Councils should be held centrally and that a bids panel should be used to ensure that money is spent on necessary services, not luxuries.

A respondent noted that grants should continue, but that the Council should stop stipulating that particular tradesmen are used, because they are often incompetent.

Explore with caution

Some respondents reported that a reduction in all grants and discretionary funding might be appropriate, but that this idea should be explored with caution.

Respondents mentioned that funding should not be ceased suddenly, but that a reduction should be taken into account when grants and discretionary funding are agreed at the start of the financial year. One respondent stated that a reduction in grants and funding should only be considered if savings cannot be found in other areas, while another suggested that consultation should be carried out at a micro-level before decisions are made.

Another respondent suggested that, rather than reducing all grants and funding immediately; they could be frozen and then increased lower than the cost of living.

Respondents in favour

A key theme among respondents in favour of the proposal was that a large amount of money is now available for organisations from other sources, such as wind farm community funds, lottery funds and national funds.

It was noted that a reduction in grants and discretionary funding was inevitable, as the Council could not afford to continue providing this at the same level. One respondent suggested that the Council should provide what is legally required and then review its finances. If more resources are available, the Council should use them.

Respondents not in favour

Respondents who were not in favour of the proposal either felt that grants and discretionary funding were very important for recipients, or noted that these funds could save and make money for the Council.

Very important for recipients

Many respondents not in favour of the proposal argued that grants and discretionary funding were very important for organisations. It was noted that grants are usually

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the lifeline to keep community projects going and that discretionary funding was particularly important in rural areas. It was noted that costs are increasing for organisations and that a reduction in funding would lead to a lack of long-term security for charities, which often do not have the scope to make efficiency savings. It was reported that a reduction in funding could mean that some valuable organisations can no longer operate. This may affect people who are worst off, since some grants are used to support vulnerable communities.

It was noted that local grants facilitated many 'feel good' activities and led to happier, more sustainable communities. A young person noted that there would be a lack of motivation and aspiration among young people if additional funding was not provided for youth services.

Respondents commented that discretionary funding was often used to provide services that were previously provided by the Council. It was noted that the Council cannot give up all of its responsibilities, and that grants and discretionary funding make up a small part of the Council's budget but are highly significant to recipients.

Grants and discretionary funding can save money and make money for the Council
Respondents not in favour of reducing grants and discretionary funding noted that this funding can be used very effectively by local organisations to both save money and make money for the Council. It was noted that there are no overheads when voluntary workers are used, which means that voluntary organisations can run more cheaply than those with paid workers. Respondents reported that local organisations were effective at providing services as they could prioritise according to the needs of the community.

It was noted that discretionary funds generate more money and more external funding and that funding given to organisations can be used to invest further in the area to bring national profile and community strength to the Highlands.

One respondent stated that grants and discretionary funding had already been reduced and should not be reduced further.

Working with Communities

What additional activities could your community do to contribute to more efficient service provision?

And

Should communities be encouraged to run services for themselves with some support from the Council, where it will lead to overall savings?

And

How can the Council help make the services which communities provide become sustainable?

What additional activities could your community do to contribute to more efficient service provision?

Quantitative Analysis

The Citizens' Panel were not asked any questions on the additional activities communities could do.

Qualitative Analysis

There was an overlap between responses for all of the questions about working with communities. Here, comments relating to activities or services to which communities could contribute have been described in relation to the first question, opinions on whether communities should be encouraged to run some services for themselves have been presented for the second question and suggestions for support that the Council could give to community-run services have been included with the third question.

138 separate responses were received for the question, "*What additional activities could your community do to contribute to more efficient service provision?*" Responses were mainly received through the online form and through discussions at ward forums. Views were also collected through emailed and posted forms.

Organisational responses included Community Councils, Parent Councils and responses from the focus groups held with People First and Highland Youth Voice.

Respondents made suggestions about activities that communities could do, and about how these could be organised effectively.

Suggestions for activities

Ground maintenance

Many respondents proposed that their community could take on ground maintenance tasks, such as grass cutting, path maintenance, hedge clearing, weeding, litter picking, street cleaning and roadside ditch clearing. It was suggested that communities could be responsible for road clearing in winter, as long as there were enough grit bins and they were kept sufficiently supplied. Respondents at a focus group commented that all residents could be asked to keep the area in front of their house free from ice, although it was noted that this would only work if everyone was willing to participate. One respondent noted that a road sweeper came very rarely to their village, but that, if they were given warning of this, the community could ensure that paths were free of leaves.

Community care and childcare services

It was reported by several respondents that individuals could be trained to contribute to homecare for elderly people. Befriending schemes and lunch clubs were also mentioned, with the suggestion that hotels should be used in winter to house lunch clubs. It was noted that some ethnic minority groups were trying to introduce projects to bridge age gaps.

Some respondents suggested that volunteers should be used to provide after school clubs and facilities, or to supervise children during school break times.

Running community facilities

A number of respondents proposed that communities take on responsibility for community facilities. In particular, it was suggested that volunteers run libraries, with the possibility of incorporating a work experience project for secondary school pupils. One respondent noted that more use should be made of mobile libraries. Other community facilities mentioned were sports facilities, play areas, halls and community centres and public toilets.

Transport

It was noted that community transport schemes could be set up in areas where there is little or no public transport. It was suggested that the Council could provide a vehicle and then the community could run the service. One respondent mentioned that the community transport “Where 2 Today” scheme, based in Aviemore, has been successful and would benefit from increased Community Challenge Funding. A respondent also noted that communities could assist with cycle paths.

Recycling and waste

Respondents noted that residents could personally drop less litter and ensure that they take dog waste home. It was reported that members of the community could take on litter warden or dog warden roles. Respondents felt that the Council could help with recycling and waste disposal by providing more and bigger litter bins, local recycling areas for items such as garden waste and furniture and assistance with composting. It was suggested that residents could take their bins to a communal collection spot to be collected.

Communication with the Council

A small number of respondents felt that communities could come together to communicate problems with the Council and monitor repairs that were being carried out. It was noted that this could be done through Community Councils.

Additional suggestions

Respondents provided some additional suggestions of activities that communities could do:

- Infrastructure projects, such as building bus shelters;
- Painting garages and underpasses, for example, which it was felt the Council had done poorly;
- Creating neighbourhood watch schemes;
- Devolved management of housing, planning, health and environmental services, working closely with Ward Managers, Councillors and Council staff;
- Volunteers working at Service Points or doing administration for the NHS.

Suggestions for the organisation of activities

How activities should be managed

Several respondents reported that community activities would need a central focus or organiser. A number of people felt that Community Councils should take on this role. It was suggested that, to encourage individuals to join Community Councils, they should be made more dynamic, with a two or three year term in office.

Other respondents believed that projects should be run by other voluntary or community groups, or that community social enterprises should be created, with Council services contracted out to them. However, one respondent felt that community businesses were ineffective and expensive. It was commented that village stores and Post Offices should be supported so that they can become the hub of the community, promoting community spirit.

A respondent noted that schools should have more control of their own budgets via Parent Councils, which would reduce the centralised management system.

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Some respondents felt that different structures should be in place in order to facilitate community activities. It was suggested that current Community Councils should be combined to create groups big enough to deliver services. This would mean that grants could be divided between fewer Community Councils. One or two respondents suggested having local forums to identify and plan to meet social needs, possibly leading to a Highland-wide representative group. Others proposed that a Borough Council be invented, or District Councils be reinstated.

Who could do activities

Several respondents suggested that activities could be done by volunteers. It was proposed that volunteering could be made less of a weekly commitment, with volunteers signing up as and when they had time. Another respondent reported that community days could be organised for tasks such as cleaning up parks. A Parent Council suggested that school-aged children should be involved in helping the community.

Respondents noted that individuals were more likely to get involved in helping the community if a sense of community spirit was encouraged. Respondents stated that being neighbourly and helping others should be promoted, and a feeling of belonging should be fostered. It was reported that this could be done by individuals, and helped by the Council through investment in halls and projects. One respondent noted that communities must be willing to change rather than sticking to the way things were always done.

A number of respondents reported that people doing community service could take on tasks such as grass cutting, litter picking and street cleaning. A group of young people felt that offenders should complete community service in their own community, while another respondent suggested that prisoners could do tasks such as street cleaning on pre-release work programmes.

One respondent felt that unemployed people should do tasks like litter picking and ground maintenance in return for their benefits.

It was suggested that multi-functional village officers should be used to do tasks such as ground maintenance and painting, and should report directly to Community Councils. Alternatively, outdoor workers could be put on retainer to provide local services such as clearing areas of snow and ice, or local handymen services could be expanded for routine maintenance tasks.

Should communities be encouraged to run services for themselves with some support from the Council, where it will lead to overall savings?

Quantitative analysis

Respondents to the Citizens' Panel were asked: "Should communities be encouraged to run services for themselves with some support from us, where it will lead to overall savings?" Their views are found in the table below.

Respondents' Views on communities being encouraged to run services for themselves with some support from the Council

| "Should communities be encouraged to run services for themselves with some support from us, where it will lead to overall savings?" | All Respondents % |
|--|--------------------------|
| Yes | 84 |
| No | 16 |
| Total | 100 |

N=1,017

Some 84% of all respondents thought communities **should be encouraged to run services for themselves** – with some Council support – where this leads to overall savings, while 16% disagreed with such encouragement being offered.

Qualitative analysis

179 separate comments were received for the question, "*Should communities be encouraged to run services for themselves with some support from the Council, where it will lead to overall savings?*" Most responses were received through the online form and from discussions at ward forums. Responses were also collected from posted and emailed forms and from the budget blog. Organisational responses were provided by Community Councils, Parent Councils and the focus groups held with minority ethnic and faith groups and Highland Youth Voice.

As with the Citizens' Panel feedback, most respondents were in favour of the proposal, believing that this could lead to more efficient service provision and save money. Some respondents noted that they would only support the proposal if certain conditions were met, while others felt that services would be decreased due to a lack of willing and effective volunteers.

In favour

Service delivery could be improved

A number of respondents noted that services could be improved if they were run by communities. It was commented that communities know their area and its issues well, and could provide a more immediate service than the Council. It was believed that communities could be flexible about when work is done, and that planning would be more appropriately scrutinised.

One or two respondents noted that communities running services would give them more pride and responsibility for their environment, improving the area. It was also reported that communities would be more aware of the real costs involved with services.

Savings could be made

A group of respondents who were in favour of the proposal noted that it would lead to savings, and that they would be content to support it if the alternative was losing services. It was noted that savings could be made particularly in rural areas, where the cost of travel leads to services being more expensive.

A small number of respondents noted that savings could be made by cutting Council staff, especially managers, who were previously responsible for services. However, one respondent felt that volunteers should not replace existing staff, and that savings should be made by not employing new staff instead.

A respondent stated that Community Councils were given annual grants, and that they should make use of these to help communities.

Examples of current community-run services

One or two respondents gave examples of community-run services which they thought were effective: the Bradbury Centre, for care of elderly people, Lochaber Action for Disability in Fort William and community organised flowers in Invergordon High Street.

Conditions

A number of respondents stated that they would only be in favour of the proposal if certain conditions were met.

Adequate funding

Several respondents reported that adequate funding must be available for communities to run services. It was noted that individuals would be unlikely to work for nothing, and it was requested that some money be available for volunteers. One respondent suggested that communities should be paid like a social enterprise, but

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another noted that the amount that the Council offers is often such a significant cut that some services are unattractive or unsustainable for communities to run.

Communities should not be forced to provide services

Respondents noted that communities should not be forced to provide services and that this should only be done if communities are enthusiastic about it. It was reported that communities should not be penalised if they are unable to run a service themselves due to lack of facilities or personnel, and that the Council should be able to take over services if communities can no longer provide them.

One respondent noted that community-run services should not replace Council-run services, but just augment them.

Importance of benefit to communities

A further view stated was that respondents would only support the proposal if there was a real benefit to communities, rather than the Council just saving money. It was noted that the Council should monitor the results of community-run services and ensure that services are effective in the long run. One respondent reported that there should be no opportunity for individuals to gain personal financial benefit.

Depends on the community and the service

It was stated that it may be more effective for some communities to provide services than others, with some respondents suggesting that this would work well in small communities in remote or rural areas. It was reported that communities should be asked what services they could provide, and that the Council should note that different models of service provision will be appropriate in different areas.

Respondents from a Community Council requested further clarity on the type of services which would be considered for community involvement, believing that services such as education would be unlikely to be considered.

How long communities should provide services for

Some respondents felt that communities should only provide services in the short-term, with the Council taking these over at a later date where possible. However, others mentioned the sustainability of services, reporting that they would only support the proposal if a sustainable plan was put in place. One respondent noted the importance of building up community capacity and participation for the future.

Concerns that Council will not provide appropriate support

A group of respondents were generally in favour of communities running services, but raised concerns that the Council would not provide adequate support to communities. One respondent said that they had not seen evidence that the Council had skills and knowledge to support community groups, while another queried how communities could be supported when Community Learning and Development

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workers had been made redundant. One or two respondents noted that it would be too hard to overcome Council red tape, or noted that the Council may set up over-bureaucratic support systems, which would be expensive and unhelpful. A respondent mentioned that the Council had withdrawn funding from the Golspie Recycling and Environmental Action Network, and stated that they did not trust the Council to maintain support for future projects.

Possible legal issues

Some respondents raised possible legal issues, such as public liability and the need for disclosure and insurance. However, it was noted by minority ethnic and faith groups that risks should not deter people, but should be identified and minimised. It was suggested that the Council could assist in dealing with these issues.

Not in favour

Too few volunteers

Several respondents raised concerns that there would be too few volunteers to take on services, either through apathy, a lack of time or a small number of people in certain communities. Respondents stated that a growing sense of apathy was displayed by community members, which would either leave a small group of people running all of the service, or would mean that the service would disappear completely.

One or two respondents stated that, since most people work, they would have little time to volunteer. Concerns were raised about rural areas, where there may not be enough people to support causes. It was noted that these areas suffer from unemployment, and that this would increase if volunteers were expected to do too much.

It was stated that savings would only be made if volunteers offset some service running costs, but that this could be problematic, as described above. However, a respondent suggested that 'volunteer banking' could be introduced, where residents could advertise skills to their communities.

Too few services provided currently

A group of respondents from rural areas, particularly islands, reported that they receive very few Council services for the tax that they pay, and felt that these should not be reduced further.

A small number of respondents felt that they contributed enough already to service provision, through activities such as litter picking, ground maintenance and fundraising for local and national causes.

No reduction in Council Tax

Some respondents stated that they paid Council Tax for the Council to provide services, and believed that it was unfair to ask communities to run services without a reduction in this.

Ineffective organisation

Respondents raised concerns that the quality of services would decrease because of in-fighting, disagreements and regular changes among organisers. It was noted that communities were not trained to provide services and was suggested that apathy would be particularly strong if there was no one to oversee the work and there was a lack of accountability.

One respondent raised concerns that consistency, confidentiality and trust would not be maintained.

Alternative suggestions

A small number of respondents reported that, instead of communities running services, the Council should work on reducing their own inefficiencies. It was suggested that people should be taught to have pride in their communities so there would be less demand for services such as litter picking.

How can the Council help make the services which communities provide become sustainable?

Quantitative Analysis

The Citizens' Panel were not asked any questions on the additional activities communities could do.

Qualitative Analysis

128 separate responses were received for the question “*How can the Council help make the services which communities provide become sustainable?*” These were mainly from individuals through the online form and posted and emailed forms. Responses were also received through discussions at ward forums. Organisations that provided their opinions included Community Councils and Parent Councils, and responses were received from the focus groups held with People First and Highland Youth Voice.

Respondents reported that communities should be given maximum support from the Council when they are running services. Common themes were funding support, help with planning and getting started and having effective lines of communication.

Provide funding

Many respondents felt that the Council should fund community-run services or assist communities in obtaining funding from other sources.

Respondents who believed that the Council should provide access to funding stated that the Council should be realistic about providing a budget, considering not just capital expenditure but also on-going costs. It was suggested that the Council could fund start-up costs for communities, but that they could eventually be run at ‘arm’s length’. One respondent proposed that community-run facilities be exempt from certain taxes.

A number of respondents noted that a regulator function should be in place, with annual reviews of funding and audit controls to ensure that value for money is achieved. Some respondents suggested a payment by results arrangement, with incentive grants for good performance. Others proposed sharing either profits or savings with communities, to encourage them to exceed targets.

At an individual level, one respondent suggested either taxing individuals who did not give time to help their community or rewarding people who did volunteer.

Some respondents reported that the Council could help communities raise funds from other sources, either by providing information on sources such as lottery

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funding or by providing a specialist to assist with this. It was suggested that the Council could help with advertising or gaining funding from businesses. For example, if communities can demonstrate improvement in services, large banks with branches in those communities could match or provide a funding break for costs.

Planning and getting started

Respondents stated that the Council should plan carefully before asking a community to run a service, only running projects if they had a good chance of succeeding. It was noted that the Council should ensure that there is real demand for a service, and research which services are already provided by the third sector. One respondent suggested that services should be planned jointly from the beginning, making use of local knowledge, skills and labour.

Some respondents felt it important that the Council assist with the setting up of services, but a number stated that minimal support would be needed after this. One respondent noted that communities should start with activities that will be noticed by the rest of the community, so they may wish to help as well.

It was noted that the Council should share their business knowledge to ensure that transitions go well and that communities have sustainable, long-term business plans for providing services.

Effective communication

Several respondents noted that the Council should provide advice and support where needed, but that they should also ask for and listen to opinions of communities. One respondent reported that the Council should ask all local people for their opinion, not just those on committees. It was noted that the Council should treat partnerships with communities as genuine ways of devolving and sharing responsibilities, rather than just cutting costs.

Respondents felt that the Council should make clear exactly what is needed and provide encouragement and appreciation for the community's work. It was reported that the public should be made aware of services and that they should be kept transparent.

Training

A number of respondents noted that the Council should provide training to community members, perhaps by teaching a small group who could then teach others, or by providing long-term training. It was suggested that mentoring should be offered locally from a pool of experts.

Reduce red tape

It was suggested that the Council should reduce red tape for communities, cutting bureaucracy and providing assistance with issues such as insurance, disclosure and health and safety.

Help from personnel

Some respondents suggested that a member of staff should be provided to offer communities supplies or give help quickly if needed. It was noted that this did not need to be a Council employee. Respondents noted that facilitation officers or liaison officers should be used to help with communication, encourage volunteering and oversee group meetings. One respondent suggested that the Council could provide secretarial support to communities.

Give communities more power

A group of respondents felt that the Council should not get involved with communities running services, and should instead give communities and Community Councils more power. It was noted that communities should be given the flexibility to develop services and employ individuals according to their own needs, rather than a model which has been based on different communities. One respondent felt that the Council should take risks to minimise bureaucracy and reporting, giving Community Councils more freedom. Another respondent mentioned a voluntary homecare organisation, where a manager from the Council determines whether a client's needs can be met by homecare. They felt that the group should be able to decide this. However, one respondent believed that the Council could support communities by providing management for them.

Involve Councillors

Some respondents noted that Councillors and Ward Managers should be involved by regularly attending Community Council meetings and taking part in decision making.

Equipment and facilities

Respondents suggested that the Council could share equipment with communities or provide initial support for equipment. It was proposed that Council buildings could be used for community meetings and events, or that the Council could charge less for lets of premises. Members of the focus group with minority ethnic and faith groups mentioned that it would be useful to have a database of community facilities, such as community centres.

Encourage and create partnerships

Respondents reported that the Council should promote joined-up thinking, so that organisations support, rather than compete against, each other. It was suggested that the Council amalgamate where there is duplication, and create new partnerships that will benefit communities, such as with local suppliers. It was noted that this

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would also benefit local community enterprise. One respondent proposed that the Council research what has worked in other areas of the UK and adopt this.
