

Committee:	Cabinet
Date:	22 January 2019
Title of Report:	Core Offer Engagement
By:	Chief Executive
Purpose of Report:	To inform Cabinet of the results of the engagement carried out on the Core Offer

RECOMMENDATION:

To note the report and agree to continue the discussion about the Core Offer approach to inform Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources (RPPR)

1. Background

1.1 As part of its work on RPPR, it was agreed that the Council should develop a Core offer for its services. The Core Offer is intended to establish the minimum outcomes a competent and efficient Council could expect to be able to provide by 2020/21 having regard to our agreed priorities and the resources we anticipate having available over the next three years. The Core Offer is intended to be ambitious but realistic: seeking to maintain our track record of delivering excellent services, innovation and providing good value for money. It is an articulation of what we believe local people most need from the County Council and includes both our statutory duties and the most critical elements of early intervention. It should be stressed that the Core Offer is by no means an ideal; rather it is a realistic assessment of what is most important for the Council to deliver given the limited resources available to us; it therefore seeks to set out, transparently, what is achievable at a time of continued austerity.

1.2 The Core Offer was intended to:

- Help us have a dialogue with residents, businesses, the Government, our partners and stakeholders about what is most needed from the Council for children and young people in the county, for adults with disabilities or who are vulnerable, for older people and what our universal offer is to all residents;
- Inform our lobbying with Government about the funding issues we face, what was important to local people and to help us make the case for a realistic level of funding we need to continue to serve local people adequately;
- Help to shape our service and budget planning over the next three years.

1.3 The Core Offer as set out in the State of the County report contributed to raising the profile of the need for sustainable funding for local government nationally and has been instrumental in achieving some one-off funding for the sector as a whole as part of the national budget and local government settlement. Although this has been one-off, it has helped to mitigate some of the savings proposed for 2019/20 and closed the gap between identified resources and need. It will continue to be used to press for funding ahead of the next Comprehensive Spending Review, both in the short and long term.

2. Engagement

2.1 Between 14 November and 26 December 2018 members of the public were asked to comment on the proposed Core Offer through a questionnaire on the Council's website. Partners, other public sector bodies, staff and the voluntary and community sector organisations were made aware of the questionnaire and invited to give their views. The questionnaire was also publicised via social media.

2.2 1204 responses to the questionnaire were received. A full analysis of the results are on the report at Appendix 1 and all the comments received in response to the free text questions are available in the Members' room. A summary of the key points are set out below.

3. Key points

3.1 Most people either supported or were neutral about the statement that the Council currently provides good value for money (65%). When asked about their preferred solution to the immediate funding issues, more people would prefer higher council tax (56%) to reductions in service (44%). In the longer term, most people considered that the Government should allocate more funds to meet the financial gap (78%). The next highest preference was for housing growth (9%) with reductions in services being the least popular answer (4%).

3.2 44% of people felt that the Core Offer was a reasonable response to the current funding pressures, and 40% felt it was not. 16% were unsure. Most of those who responded to the survey would be affected, either somewhat or greatly, by the changes to the universal service offer (88%).

3.3 53% said they would be affected greatly or somewhat by changes to services for vulnerable people. Older people and rural residents were less likely to say they would be affected. Those who consider themselves disabled as set out in the Equality Act 2010 were more likely to say they would be affected greatly or somewhat (63%)

3.4 52% think they would be affected by changes to services for schools either greatly or somewhat. The perceived effect was less among older respondents, people in rural areas and those with disabilities.

3.5 25% of those who responded felt that there were services in the core Offer which should not be included, however the actual figure is likely to be lower, as a number of people used the free text box available with this question to flag services that services should be protected. There was, however, little consistency about which services these were. In answer to the question "are there services not in the Core Offer which you think should be included", 33% of those who responded said yes. Most services suggested for inclusion are already in the Core Offer and it may be that those who responded were indicating that they would not wish to see more savings in these areas. There were a number of areas which were identified which are not provided by the County Council (eg homelessness services). Of those service areas the County Council provides, the most frequently suggested for inclusion were services for those with an impairment, schools/education and services for families.

3.6 Most people (58%) did not suggest that there are more services that volunteers could do more to provide or work with us to provide; with the most frequent comments being that volunteers shouldn't be relied on/already do too much; that there were not services that volunteers and communities could provide and that trained professionals should run services. Of those who identified areas where volunteers could do more, 83 people said library services and 73 people said maintenance of public spaces and the environment. All other suggestions were by fewer than 50 people.

3.7 The two highest priorities for funding in the future were older people's (23%) and children's (22%) social care. comparing the responses for particular groups of respondents with the overall response:

- Older people prioritised older people's social care and highways services more highly;
- People with disabilities also gave slightly higher priority to adults and older people's social care and to highways;
- Those in rural areas prioritised highways and economic development more highly.

3.8 When asked which charges we might reasonably ask people to pay if we were legally permitted, 33% said home to school transport for those who could afford it, 22% said an annual library membership fee and 22% said half fare on busses for pensioners and those with a disability.

4. Conclusion and Next Steps

4.1 The results of consultation have confirmed the value of the transparency of the Core Offer model and the conversation it enables us to have with local residents, partners, staff and businesses. The responses confirm the proposed Core Offer represents the minimum expected from East Sussex County Council in this time of continued austerity and that residents would have considerable concerns if the Council were to consider restricting services to a level below what has been identified in the Core Offer.

4.2 The results of the consultation exercise will be used to influence our lobbying with Government and in conversations with partners and stakeholders. It will also inform the work on our priority setting, budget deliberations and development of services as part of the work leading up to the next State of the County report in the summer.

BECKY SHAW
Chief Executive