

4 2021-22 BUDGET ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

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Index ECM/ Subject/ 2021-22 Budget

Attachments Nil

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Not applicable.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council note the report by the Director Corporate Services to the Services & Organisation Committee Meeting dated 9 February 2021 and endorse the proposed engagement process for the 2021/22 budget which includes the use of both online and face to face solutions to maximise feedback.

REPORT**Background**

Council has committed to undertaking engagement with the community for the development of the 2021/22 budget. In September 2020 feedback was sought from the community via Your Say Noosa (on Council's website) regarding the preferred public consultation model for the 2021/22 budget process.

The community was asked to rank the following options in priority order:

- Establish a Community Reference Group via an expression of interest process;
- Conduct an online engagement process, seeking feedback on a range of budget areas and key projects;
- Conduct a series of community workshops across the shire; and
- Councillors should continue to make budget decisions as elected community representatives.

From the 156 responses received 94% of respondents had in their top 3 priorities that they wanted to see Council conduct an online engagement process for the budget. In October 2020 Council subsequently resolved to "note the community's preference for online community budget engagement process for future budgets and request staff to report back to a future Council meeting with options".

Investigation of Budget Engagement Tools and Options

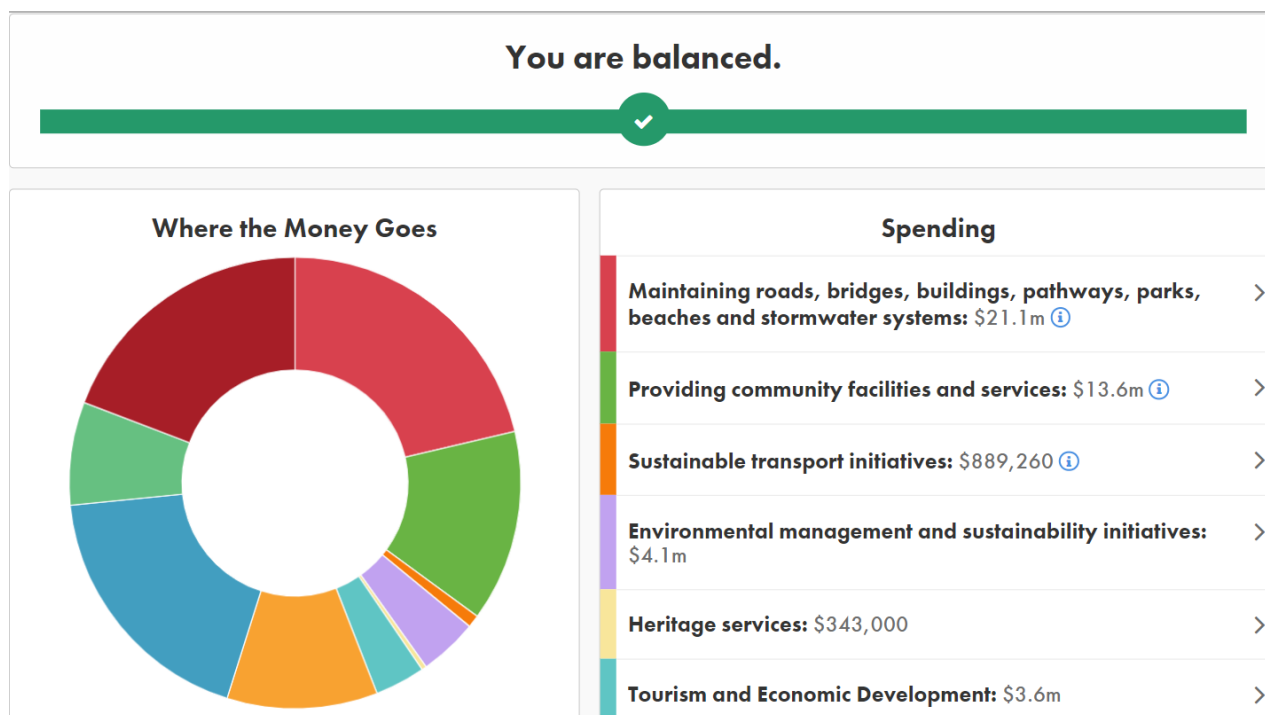
Consideration has been given to what engagement channels could be employed as part of the 2021/22 budget process that would be meaningful to ensure the community's budget priorities could be understood and considered by staff and Councillors as part of budget deliberations.

Online participatory budgeting tools have been in place for a number of years in other countries to both educate communities regarding how Council budgets are developed and funded, and to elicit feedback regarding what an individual's priorities are for their Council to deliver. A number of Queensland councils have or are beginning to implement online budget engagement processes that employ tools that ask residents / ratepayers and other users to not only determine priorities but 'balance the budget', with the intention to educate the user as to the need for financially responsible decision making.

Recommended Online Approach

Council currently utilises the *Your Say Noosa* platform via its website for a range of community engagement solutions. This platform allows information to be disseminated via a web page view, and offers survey/ polling options to engage with the community on particular issues.

The Your Say platform allows additional licencing of its participatory budgeting tool for a minimal cost. This tool (screenshot below) can be used to engage the community regarding Council’s budget, and allow a resident / ratepayer to sit in a Councillor’s shoes to recommend spending priorities and ensure that the budget is balanced by either increasing revenue or reducing spending in other areas. It is recommended that the ‘balance the budget’ participatory tool be used as both an educational tool for the community on how Council’s budgeting process works, and to also help Council to understand whether the spending priorities of users aligns with Council’s current and future spending priorities. Any significant funding misalignment can then be explored and understood as part of the budget process.



Recommended Face to Face Approach

Face to face interaction as part of the budget process is important, particularly for those residents and ratepayers without access to online tools. Whilst face to face engagement has occurred in the past with specific elements of the community (i.e. business associations for special levy development etc.) broader face to face opportunities have not occurred.

The preferred face to face approach for the 2021/22 budget process is as follows:

1. Two initial Councillor led half day sessions to allow residents to meet with Councillors to discuss their budget priorities. The sessions would be 30 minutes in length, and be by prior appointment to ensure that time is productively used. Feedback would be documented and then considered during the broader budget deliberation process.
2. Face to face support for those residents / ratepayers that require assistance in understanding specific budget issues or completing the online ‘balance the budget’ participatory tool. Those residents keen to contribute to the process and requiring support will be encouraged to contact Council and book a time to attend a Council facility where staff will be available to assist with discussing particular issues and also completing the online tool.

It is proposed that for the initial budget consultation process the face to face approaches above

be used, and then be reviewed and refined to determine their effectiveness and use for future budget engagement.

Recommended Budget Engagement Timetable

The following timetable is proposed to ensure that consultation can occur effectively and that Council's budget adoption timeframe (i.e. adopted on 30 June 2021) can be met.

Month	Planning / Engagement Actions
February 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special Council meeting – 2021/22 budget scene setting session • Council budget consultation webpage setup • Finalise 'balance the budget' software configuration • Determine budget engagement online survey and polling approach • Establish software feedback reporting process and dashboards • Promote budget engagement process including online and face to face approaches
March 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council budget engagement goes live via Your Say Noosa – feedback encouraged • "Balance the Budget" support in place (including any face to face requests) • Online survey and polling commences
April 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Councillor / community face to face sessions completed • Online survey and polling closes • "Balance the Budget" online submissions close (including any face to face requests) • Feedback from consultation presented to Special Council meeting for discussion
May 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft budget documents published for community feedback
June 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback on draft budget presented to Special Council meeting for discussion • Meeting to adopt 2021/22 budget and operational plan

Summary

This will be Council's first attempt at undertaking a consultation process for the budget, and there will likely be learnings and improvement opportunities for future budget engagements. As such a relatively simple and cost effective approach has been recommended which, if successful, can be built on and expanded in future years once the cost benefit has been established.

Should the state government mandate budget consultation for councils across Queensland (which is expected), Council will be well placed to adapt as needed to any regulatory change.

Previous Council Consideration

Ordinary Meeting Minutes, 15 October 2020, Item 7, Page 23

That Council note the report by the Director Corporate Services to the General Committee Meeting dated 12 October 2020 and:

- A. *Note the outcomes of the community budget consultation undertaken between 7–27 September 2020, provided as Attachment 1 to the report;*
- B. *Note that Council will consider the priorities identified in the feedback when undertaking future 2020-21 budget reviews; and*
- C. *Note the community's preference for online community budget engagement process for future budgets and request staff to report back to a future Council meeting with options.*

Ordinary Meeting Minutes, 18 June 2020, Item 6, Page 10

That Council note the report by the Director Corporate Services to the Services & Organisation Committee Meeting dated 9 June 2020 and:

- A. *Following Council's adoption of the 2020/21 Budget, agree to engage with the community via Your Say Noosa on:*

1. *How the allocation of any additional funding should be prioritised if it becomes available through the financial year; and*
 2. *Where services/expenditure should be reduced if further budget reductions are required.*
- B. *Agree to engage with the community on their preferred public consultation model for the 2021/22 budget process; and*
- C. *Request the Chief Executive Officer to provide a report to Council on the outcomes of both public consultation processes for Council’s consideration before it meets to consider its scheduled Budget Review 2 in November 2020.*

Finance

Whilst the majority of resources required to facilitate the budget engagement process can be absorbed with existing levels, some additional software licencing and project support will be required. Estimated additional costs (estimated at \$12,000) are as follows and can be absorbed within the current 2020/21 budget:

- Additional software licencing – \$8,000
- Estimated casual project support – \$4,000

Risks & Opportunities

Risks

Reputational – Council has progressed down the path of consultation on future Council budgets. Community trust will likely be eroded should Council determine to abandon future budget consultation.

Priorities – Engagement processes with the community can achieve sub optimal outcomes and priority misalignment should wide engagement not occur as intended.

Opportunities

A budget consultation process is an opportunity to understand the spending priorities of our community and ensures that effective engagement continues to retain community confidence in Council processes and decision making.

Consultation

External Consultation - Community & Stakeholder

Nil.

Internal Consultation

Community Engagement
Chief Executive Officer

Departments/Sections Consulted:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Chief Executive Officer Executive Officer Executive Support	<input type="checkbox"/> Community Services Director Community Development Community Facilities Libraries & Galleries Local Laws Waste & Environmental Health	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Corporate Services X Director X Financial Services ICT Procurement & Fleet Property Revenue Services
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Executive Services Director X Community Engagement Customer Service Governance People and Culture	<input type="checkbox"/> Environment & Sustainable Development Director Building & Plumbing Services Development Assessment Economic Development Environmental Services Strategic Land Use Planning	<input type="checkbox"/> Infrastructure Services Director Asset Management Buildings and Facilities Civil Operations Disaster Management Infrastructure Planning, Design and Delivery