

London Borough of Richmond upon Thames

**Budget and Council Tax Consultation in
Richmond 2008/09**

Submitted to

Prepared by

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Contents

Page

1	Introduction	1
2	Main Findings	5
3	Conclusion	20

Appendices

	Topic Guide	23
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1 Introduction

Background and objectives

For the past six years the London Borough of Richmond has undertaken targeted consultation with residents to inform its decision making around the annual budget and spending priorities. As part of this consultation process the Council commissioned ORC International, the independent market research company, to undertake an evening workshop involving a cross section of residents from across the borough. As in previous years, it was intended to meet a number of objectives:

- To engage a group of residents in the processes and issues faced by the Council when setting the budget;
- To inform the Council about residents' broad budget priorities;
- To identify views on council tax in the light of the budget discussions;
- To demonstrate to residents generally that the Council wants to listen to their views.

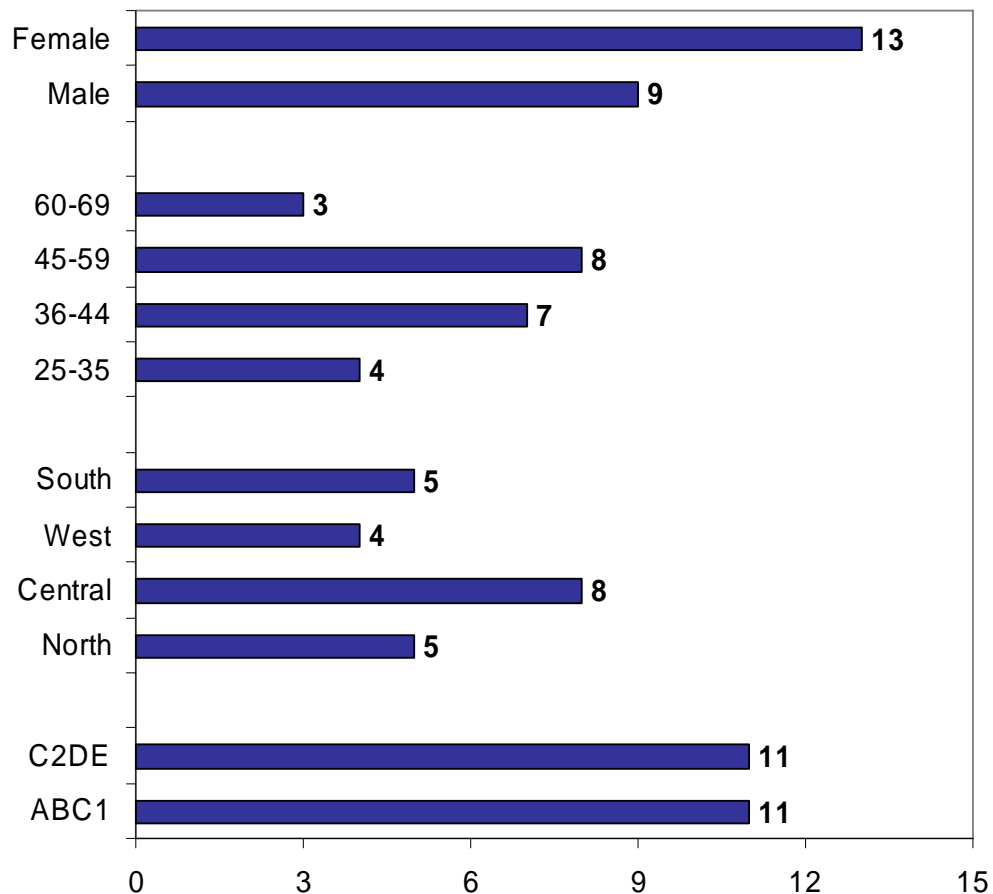
The discussion evening was held on Thursday, 18 November 2007 between 7pm and 10pm at the Richmond Business School, Parkside, Richmond, TW9 2RE

ORC International recruited 25 residents for the evening. In the event the workshop was attended by 22 participants. In order to ensure broad representation from all groups in Richmond, quotas were set by gender, age and social class as well as by postcode/geographical region in order to ensure the groups included a cross section of residents from across the borough. For the purposes of this research participants were recruited from four different areas within the borough as follows:

- North: Barnes, East Sheen, Kew, Mortlake, Palewell;
- Central: Central Twickenham, East Twickenham, Ham & Petersham, Richmond Hill, Richmond Town;
- West: Heathfield, South Twickenham, West Twickenham, Whitton;

- South: Hampton, Hampton Hill, Hampton Nursery, Hampton Wick, Teddington.

The demographic profiles of participants attending on the evening are shown in the next table.



Base: All participants attending workshops

As a qualitative project, the main purpose of the evening was to consider residents' views in depth, understanding attitudes rather than measuring them.

The structure of the evening is set out in the topic guide, appended. In summary it comprised:

- Introductions and objectives;
- Break out groups: views on living in Richmond, attitudes towards Council and the services it provides;

- Briefings in a plenary session on the Council's finances and priorities by Mark Maidment (Director of Finance and Corporate Services) and Graham Russell (Assistant Director of Finance); followed by Q&A session with the speakers.
- Break out groups: discussion on the priorities of the Council
 - Environment & Sustainability issues, including recycling, transport pollution and congestion;
 - Education and children's services, including youth services;
 - Community Safety issues, including crime and fear of crime;
 - Health, Housing and Well-being, including provision of social care.

For the purpose of the break out discussion groups, participants were split by age into two groups:

- 18-44 year olds (younger group);
- 45+ year olds (older group)

In each group there was a mix of social class, gender, and location.

ORC International researchers Richard Abraham and Peter Myant moderated the evening and the two break out groups.

Interpreting the findings

This report includes findings from qualitative consultation. It should be remembered that these are the perceptions of the 22 participants. Their perceptions may, therefore, not agree with the actual facts.

Qualitative Findings. With respect to the qualitative findings, these findings provide readers with an understanding of the issues from the participants' perspective, but are not statistically reliable. The qualitative nature of this consultation exercise was designed to avoid atypical responses by ensuring people with different perspectives were recruited for the discussion.

The discussion evening allows a cross-section of Richmond to participate in an informal and interactive discussion. Any verbatim comments included in the

report should not be taken as defining the views of the groups as a whole but rather to give insight into particular bodies of opinion.

Qualitative research differs from quantitative research (i.e. surveys and questionnaires) where a sample is drawn of sufficient size to enable statistically reliable data to be collected on the views of residents/stakeholders and then to relate these views to the population of residents as a whole.

1. Main Findings

Life in the borough is generally quite good...

Participants were asked to reflect on their life in the borough, attitudes to the Council and its services and what they thought needed improving locally. Setting the scene in this way is important as it allows participants to start thinking generally around the subject before getting into more specific budgetary issues. It helps to set any comments into context, helping to provide a greater understanding of why individuals or the group take the positions they do.

Similar to previous years, heritage and aesthetics are common mentions. Parks, open spaces are mentioned by both groups as contributing to the high quality of life.

Lots of things, the park, the river... I love Richmond Park, it's a lovely walk.

Younger group

I know we've got the theatre there but it's pretty strong on culture generally, arts, art displays, museum, I think it is very good for a London borough.

Older group

With respect to Community Safety, it was raised by both groups that the borough was relatively safe.

One other thing it's got is a fairly low crime level

Older group

It's safe. Compared to other boroughs it's fairly safe.

Younger group

Other benefits of living in Richmond that were mentioned included easy access to central London and the countryside (M25), good reputation of schools, shopping facilities, recycling and cycle routes.

We have excellent rubbish collection, they're brilliant. The dustman they take everything that you leave out on the road, they take all the recycling. It's really good.

Younger group

Cycle routes, cycle paths, brilliant. The (Council) is making them much more accessible now.

Older group

Although there are some problems

However, participants did feel that there were some things that were not so good in Richmond. They were concerned with the cost of living in Richmond, including the high levels of council tax that residents pay. This was a key concern for participants in both groups.

My daughter who lives up in Leeds just cannot afford to move back here, she would love to.

Older group

If you're a family and your children want to stay near you, it's impossible

Older group

They were also concerned that there was an uneven spread of services, including transport. Whilst there was good links into the centre of Richmond, to get around the borough was perceived to be more difficult.

'I do think that unless you live in Richmond Town Centre, I think the epicentre is pristine and it has the services, and its treated slightly differently from the rest... I do think there is a division between the public and private sector of housing'

Younger group

'I don't have very good public transport to get from Teddington to Richmond, so I find it quite difficult. It takes me so long, there's no direct bus service from where I live.'

Older group

Whilst some participants thought the schools had good reputations, some thought that there was a pressure on school places.

'I think there's a pressure on the schools I find with my grandchildren to get to the local primary, so much pressure to get into the local primary schools'

Older group

'Totally oversubscribed'

Older group

Participants in the younger group raised the issue of a lack of facilities for children and adolescents.

'In Ham they're doing things like basketball, urban basketball, dance things. But it all seems to concentrate in on one area in the whole borough'

Younger group

A lack of social housing was raised by the younger group as being problematic.

'I don't know how people live in these things. I don't think we have affordable housing in the Richmond borough.'

Younger group

Other problems that were raised included traffic, airport noise, parking permits (and the cost of parking) and traffic calming measures.

'Slightly over-zealous road, I don't know how you'd describe it, bumps ... Traffic calming'

Older group

Attitudes towards council services

In the next section of the discussion, participants were asked to focus on the services that the council provides. They were first asked what services they thought that the council provided, and were then asked whether they thought these services were good or poor.

Both groups considered that school provision was mixed. They thought that the primary schools were excellent, but the secondary schools were less good. Looking at past consultations this has been a consistent issue for residents with secondary schools viewed less positively than the primary school provision.

'We've got excellent primary schools but they go slightly downhill when they get to secondary. The difficulty that blurs the issue is ...how many children come from outside Richmond borough to get places because they live very near on the edge of the borough to a Richmond school and that particularly happens at secondary school level.'

Older group

Some members of the younger group considered that the Council provided excellent play areas for children. However, there was concern raised that one playground may be closed down due to redevelopment in the area.

Richmond borough, they've done a fantastic job with the playgrounds haven't they? ... There's one in Hampton and it is fantastic. There's a disabled one, they've got a disabled playground that is absolutely brilliant ... they're amazing, absolutely fantastic

Younger group

There were several issues where views on the level of service seemed to vary depending on which part of the borough the participants lived in. One such issue being that some thought that their recycling service was very good while others disagreed. Another issue that seemed to vary was street lighting where some residents felt there was inadequate street lighting and other inappropriate street lighting, the quotation below give a flavour of that discussion:

'I'd like to comment on the street lighting. I can't even see to put my key in my front door it's so poor in the road which I live.

It's extremely poor, particularly if you're thinking about encouraging people to go out in the evening

It's much more specific, it's just too bright outside my home'

Older group

Some of the other concerns are:

' . . . (rubbish) collection day . . . you leave your rubbish outside (at night) and then you have the foxes ... in the morning it's dirty everywhere'

Younger group

'Roads and pavements on the safety front it's one of those functions that only the council can deal with'

Older group

The discussion groups after reflecting on the different council services that are provided, were asked whether they thought that the council was spending wisely or not. Reactions to this were mixed, whilst some participants stated that they thought that the Council was wasting money there were not many concrete examples.

'I think that they probably can't do all the things they want to do. I'm not sure there's huge areas of waste'

Older group

'I'm thinking about the bus lane they put up in Hampton Wick and then took it out because it was grossly unsafe, caused lots of accidents and cost the council tax payers quite a large sum of money'

Older group

'I think they spend a ridiculous amount of money sending you booklets and leaflets in twenty different languages, which ... you don't need ... all you need is a notice board in each block in each block of flats.'

Younger group

Communication with council

The discussion groups were asked to reflect on customer service in general and then to focus in on the levels of customer service they receive from the Council. This approach helps as it makes the group think about what they consider good customer service so that they can rate the Council against this. Generally they were positive about the levels of customer service the Council provides:

'I do think their customer service is good, I think it has got a bit better'

Younger group

'They are certainly polite. You might be on the phone for a little while but they are polite when you do get through. They do tend to try and rectify or answer your query. So I think whatever staff training you've been doing has paid off.'

Younger group

However, one participant raised the possibility of having more localised customer service.

Is there no way we can have it like a GP surgery, so you have someone for whatever your area, somewhere where it is a public place ... it is more in the community isn't it because they are then having real contact with you guys ... so getting back involved in the community.

Younger group

The discussion groups were asked to reflect on how well informed they are kept by the council of what they are doing. Some of the participants considered that they were kept well informed and that Council publications were a source of good information, but others were concerned over the impartiality of the information presented:

'Anything it publishes has to reflect the views of the political majority party or parties, everything that's written about the council is always glowing and rosy, it's all the good things, they're doing such a good job compared to the last lot'

Older group

'I think they can do that in a better way. In the supermarket or library or public housing ... I'd rather have a poster for 30 people in my block rather than 30 prints, 30 stamps'

Younger group

'As far as keeping informed is concerned, I find there's an absolute lack of information really apart from when you get the council tax return (explaining) how the money is spent, ... I'm against assuming that people are on the Internet and it will be communicated by the Internet'

Older group

Whilst some participants considered the Arcadia magazine, the Council newsletter, to be good, there was some concern over the regularity that it is delivered:

'Yes, (Arcadia) is really good... glossy ... but I don't get it regularly'

Older group

In terms of improving communication, one participant raised the possibility of getting more localised council information:

'I don't know about ward by ward newsletters, I know the parties do those which are obviously quite one-sided but if the council could think of a way itself of getting information to us on a news sheet perhaps every few months but more localised highlighting things like, different parts of the boroughs, on the things that the council committees (are doing), the Cabinet has been or will be discussing affecting your part of the borough.'

Older group

Council Presentation - Spending Priorities

Midway through the discussions, Council officers gave all participants key contextual background on the issues facing the borough. This included:

- Second highest Council tax in London

- Little prospect of increased grants from Government
- A small population relative to other London Boroughs
- Legislative demands and nationally negotiated pay settlements that place pressure on the Council's budget
- Relative choices the Council makes when setting funding for services

As in previous years, participants were surprised at the difficult position that the Council finds itself in:

I knew that Richmond's government grant was very low, I didn't realise it was such a low proportion, 19% ... that's what shocked me is what comes across is how little scope there seems to be for doing anything really with such a [low amount of funding] from the government'

Older group

At that level if they take off 1% of adult social care that may have an incredible detriment of the quality of the care they are giving'

Younger group

Discussion of specific priorities . . .

For the remainder of the evening, the discussion focused on specific areas where the Council could or was prioritising its spending. During these discussions, council officers answered questions about services and spending, allowing the participants to become increasingly informed.

- Discussion focussed on:
 - Environment & Sustainability issues, including recycling, transport pollution and congestion;
 - Education and children's services, including youth services;
 - Community Safety issues, including crime and fear of crime;
 - Health, Housing and Well-being, including provision of social care.

Environment & Sustainability issues

There was agreement that it was welcome that the Council was treating recycling as an increasing priority. This was partly due to an acknowledgment by some of the rising costs of rubbish landfills, but regardless of this many still felt that residents should be encouraged to recycle more. There was some discussion on how this should be done, some suggested including using recycling to generate income for the Council, while others highlighted the work other Councils were doing in this area, with Hounslow's procedure being commended:

'I go back to Hounslow Borough, because I've got experience of how good they are. You don't mess around, you just throw everything into a black box and they will sort it, they will take the cardboard, they take engine oil, they take tins'

Older group

There was not universal knowledge within the groups that the Council was placing additional financial resources on recycling because of expected increases in waste disposal costs that will come into effect in 5 years time. This

may be an area where the Councils may wish to concentrate some effort on communicating this message to residents more effectively.

It was hotly contested whether having less regular bin collections would encourage more recycling, with participants thinking that it would cause more problems rather than increasing the level of recycling. Communication was raised as being key, ensuring that residents were fully aware of what could be recycled. Another suggestion was to get people involved in recycling from an early age:

'some schools recycle everything so they know from a very young age. So now they are getting it at a young age so it will become second nature. So they get the message at home and at school'

Younger group

Many participants agreed that it was not only up to the Council to encourage, with supermarkets blamed for creating too much non-recyclable waste:

'what (the Council is) doing, what we are doing, is we are being dustman for the huge manufacturers . . . we're running around recycling and (manufacturer are) packaging excessively'

Older group

Participants thought that **traffic congestion** was a problem for Richmond Council. Some participants considered that traffic calming measures had caused more congestion; with roads *"all been narrowed down and everyone's at a standstill"* (older group). Other causes that were cited by participants included development of shopping centres, for example building a new Sainsbury's.

Group members were divided as to what could be done to improve the situation. Some considered that traffic congestion was inevitable for as long as *"we all use our cars to the same extent that we do now, that traffic is going to be there"* (Older group). The public transport network was also seen as a problem that was preventing a solution:

'So I want to take my daughter to Richmond, for example, I'm going to go in my car, otherwise it's going to take me an hour and a half because I have to take two buses and go virtually via Hounslow into Twickenham'.

Older group

In this sense it was felt that the Council had a duty to communicate better with Transport for London concerning Richmond Council's transport priorities. Other problems that were seen to be causing traffic congestion and pollution included school runs:

'Parents should not be driving them to school... they can be walking'.

Younger Group

However, it was thought that the Borough's education system was contributing to this problem with

children from our primary school who are way out of the borough ... are having to drive in from the other side of Richmond because they can't fit into a school nearer.

Younger group

When asked to consider **differential rates for resident parking**, many participants were broadly supportive, but urged some caution. Whilst many agreed that it was a good idea to charge people more for environmentally unfriendly cars, some stated that some residents needed a car for work and that some larger families needed bigger cars and may be unfairly penalised.

Others felt that differential rates and residential parking generally have unanticipated consequences and can be unfair. For example, if you live near, but not in a resident only parking zone then residents in that zone will park on your street to avoid paying the fee. Additionally residents who pave their front yards avoid paying the fee and some questioned since residents need planning permission to pave over their front gardens why this permission was being granted as it is both environmentally unfriendly and causes a loss of revenue for the Council.

Some participants also felt that the Council did not also ways spend funds on transport wisely. One person cited the view that the Council would put in a new bus stop and then remove it 6 months later. While others mentioned the amount of traffic calming measures and the costs of these.

Education and children services

When the discussion focused on primary and secondary education, participants perceived there to be a big difference in the quality of primary and secondary schools. It was stated that whilst primary schools were very high quality, there was considerable pressure or oversubscription on the 'good primary schools'.

Secondary schools received a more mixed review with *'some very good secondary schools but there are some others that are not so good'* (Younger group). There was a common perception that this perceived discrepancy between the sectors was due to the wealth of the borough, with a *'high proportion of people who send their children to private schools'*, with *'a lot of the more able children who go to state primaries then go to private schools'* (Older group).

There was some support for providing more money for **after-school facilities**. However, there was some concern that it was not feasible, with one participant stating *'if they don't like school they are not going to want to go back and revisit it out of school'* (Younger group). Other concerns included whether the facilities would actually be used by young people:

'the standards that young people expect is part of the problem . . . most young people nowadays are not prepared to go down and play billiards in a church hall'

Older group

Community Safety issues

Whilst participants thought that they were fairly safe in Richmond, there were some situations which made them feel less safe. Richmond Green was mentioned as being an area where anti-social behaviour can occur, it was also suggested that *'alcoholics'* by the river made that a sometimes intimidating place to go. However, some participants suggested that it was not really unsafe but it was *'just, you develop a sort of innate nervousness when you're out in the dark'* (Older group).

There were several suggestions for improving safety in the borough. This included *'more policemen on foot, not driving around in cars, you need six footers who handle these 16 year olds'* (Younger group). Improved lighting was also thought to be an important method of tackling fear of crime, with some areas lighting considered *'pretty appalling'*.

It was also suggested that there should be a greater responsibility put on landlords, with pubs not *'serving someone when they are paralytic'* and the need for them to be *'responsible'*. The current culture was also seen as an issue that needed to be tackled:

'we are in the middle of a particular phenomena in terms of culture ... ultimately it is changing our behaviour ... making us change, it becomes a more leisurely endeavour and Richmond doesn't become this place that we can drink all night long ... it becomes a bit more of a relaxed environment and even a pedestrianised environment.'

Younger people

Health, Housing and Well-being

Participants generally were very supportive of funding services for vulnerable people and that it was very important that funding continued. Participants were asked their views on self-directed care and the government's move towards giving people a pot of money from which they can help select their own care. There was some support for this proposal, with it viewed as giving more control over how the money is spent to the individual.

In the group composed of slightly older residents, they viewed care for vulnerable residents as one of their priorities areas (along with increased provision of youth services). There was some discussion over the "post code lottery" of personal care with one participant citing that his mother-in-law who lived outside of London received free personal care that would have to be paid for personally if she resided in Richmond borough.

3. Conclusion

Generally, participants expressed a positive view concerning both living in Richmond and the work of the Council itself. When viewed in the context of past budget consultations, this year's results show a continued improvement overall in the view of the Council and its budget priorities.

The views and aspirations of residents should be viewed within the context of so called "liveability" issues. The term liveability generally refers to government objectives to build sustainable communities that seek to transform the environment of the UK's towns and cities (i.e. cleaner, safer, greener issues). Through targeting efforts and funding on liveability issues, it is argued, government action can directly and positively affect an individual's quality of life.

Throughout the past 5 years or so the Government has supported local initiatives through funding mechanisms such as the Liveability Fund and the Safer and Stronger Communities Fund to develop and to pilot projects that will lead to significant and sustainable improvement in the delivery of 'liveability' services. For example littering, fly-tipping, flyposting, graffiti, abandoned vehicles, street cleansing, tackling anti-social behaviour, improving the "look and feel" of local streets (i.e. Streetscene), enhancing quality of life through improve local authority service delivery, and developing ways for local authorities to share best practice including joint commissioning of services.

Positives about the borough. Issues related to "liveability" were generally viewed highly and highly valued by participants. They enjoyed the quality of life provided by the parks and open spaces, cultural activities, easy access to both London and the countryside, quality of primary schools and personal and property safety. Most were positive about the Council's efforts with respect to recycling.

Areas for improvement in the borough. Issues again related to “liveability” were some of the ones cited by participants as areas for improvement. These included the amount of traffic leading to congestions and pollution, “excessive” traffic calming measures, airport noise (as planes approach Heathrow), generally poor public transport especially buses, pressure on primary school places and poorer quality secondary schools, lack of local jobs and affordable housing for local residents and their children.

Views of the Council. Participants seemed generally well informed that Richmond had one of the highest Council taxes in the country. And equally that the grant it received from Government was amongst the lowest in the country, although some expressed surprise that the percentage of the overall budget derived from Central Government grants was so low.

Generally, participants felt that the Council spends its money wisely although there were some who did not agree with this view. In terms of raising income, differential parking permit costs were viewed to have both unintended consequences (i.e. moving parking onto adjacent streets not in the zone) and to be unfair (i.e. if you have a front driveway then you do not have to pay it).

Areas for improvement included:

- **Communications** with most not receiving or recall receiving Arcadia, the Council newsletter.
- **Communications related to recycling**, while most were supportive of the Council’s efforts to increase recycling, a significant number participants did not know that one of the key drivers for the Council investment in recycling was the fact that landfill pricing will increase to punitive levels in 5 years time. The message of “invest to save” in relation to landfill pricing was not one that was generally understood by all participants.

- **Tendency to have a good idea, but then to go too far** with the growth in the sheer number of playgrounds and of traffic calming measures given as examples.
- **Co-ordination with other agencies** with the issues of the building and removal of bus stops given as example of lack of co-ordinated action between the Council and Transport for London.
- **Co-ordination within the Council** with the example of the planning division granting permission for paving over front lawns for driveways while another division of the Council is seeking to increase the cost of parking permits for vehicles.
- **Lack of facilities and activities for young people** was cited as a concern.

Appendix A: Topic guide

London Borough of Richmond – Budget Consultation TOPIC GUIDE

ARRIVAL, REGISTRATION & LIGHT SUPPER (18:15/30 to 19:00)

BACKGROUND TO RESEARCH (19:00 to 19:10)

- Introductions
- ORC International as an independent research company
- Thank participants for coming and giving up their time this evening
- Procedures and how discussion groups will work
- Confidential / anonymous – comments will not be attributed – both ORC International and Richmond representatives are bound by this
- Permission to record.
- MRS Code of Conduct.
- Everyone's opinion counts.
- No right or wrong.
- Respect each other's views and opinions and rights to speak.
- Timing and housekeeping (Breakout rooms)
- How groups will be divided (each will have a name tag with one of two colour dots on it)
- Mobiles

INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH (19:10 to 19:15)

Richmond Council have asked us to come here tonight to discuss how you feel about the borough – what you think is good about living in Richmond and areas where you think it can be improved

So throughout this evening we will talk about this and about some of the council's current priorities and whether you think these are the right ones that will help you and your family.

Part of this is helping the Council to decide how best to achieve these aims, and are therefore seeking your opinion on how they should spend their budget for the forthcoming year (i.e. 2008/9)

So to begin this evening we'll break into smaller groups.

- Name badges / coloured dot
- Any questions??

BREAK OUT SESSION (19:15 to 20:00)

Respondent introductions

Each respondent to...

- Give their name
- Say how long they have lived in Richmond
- Say if they have any children
- Say what they do (i.e. employed/unemployed, in education, retired, etc.), and if they work in Richmond

Views on living in Richmond

- What's good about living in Richmond? Why?
- What's not so good about living in Richmond? Why?

Views on LBR

- What council services are you aware of/do you think the Council provides?
- Do you think the Council provides good services? Why? Why Not?
- What services are important to you? Why is that?

- Of all these we have listed which are most important to you? Why?

- Of all these we have listed which do you think are well run? Why?

- Which of these services are not run well? Why do you say that? How could they be improved?

Customer service

Now moving away from the Council specifically and just thinking generally about Customer Service

- Just thinking about customer service
- What are the things that make good customer service?
- What makes poor customer service
- In your experience with the Council when you have dealt with them?

Spend Wisely

- Does it spend your money wisely? Why? How could it spend its funds more wisely?

Keep you informed

- Does the Council keep you informed about what it does? How does it do that (how do you find out about what is going on)? How could it be improved?

PLEANARY – COUNCIL PRESENTATION & Q&A (20:00 – 20:20)

PowerPoint presentation from the Council

- Overview of what the Council does
- Overview of how the money to run Council services is obtained/generated?
- Priorities of the Council (Education, Crime, Environment and Youth)
 - Environment - Recycling
 - Environment – more fuel efficient cars “rewarded”
 - Social Services – self directed care
 - Education – Primary and Secondary, out-of-borough imports at secondary)

Q&A In response to the presentation

COFFEE & TEA BREAK (20:20 to 20:30)**BREAK OUT SESSION (20:30 to 21:30)****Reaction to Presentation**

- So what did everyone think?
- What is your immediate reaction to the presentation? Any surprises? If surprised, why do you say that?
- Do you agree with the priorities of the Council? Why? Why not?
- Are there other areas you would like to see them concentrate on? Why is this?

Now for the next little while, I like us to talk about some of these priorities. But first it might help to place the priorities in context

- Second highest Council tax in London
- A small population relative to other London Boroughs

- A generally wealthier population than other London boroughs. But 5 areas of relative deprivation.
- Little prospect of increased grants from Government
- Legislative demands and wage settlements that place pressure on the Council's budget
- Implications of inward migration

Does that generally make sense to everyone? What are your thoughts?

Environment Sustainability – Recycling investing heavily

- One of the Council's priorities is the environment. Generally do you agree or disagree that it is an area where the Council should concentrate its efforts/money? Why? Why not?
- Do you think there are enough areas for you as a resident to recyclable waste? (PROBE: specific areas being talked about)
- Does anybody know what the Council does to recycle and manage waste in a sustainable way? (Probe on Green boxes and separate waste – do they know why it is done and appreciate any benefits of this approach to recycling?)
- What do you like about it?
- Do you think it can be improved? How?
- Would you like for the Council to treat recycling (sustainable waste management) as a priority for Richmond?

Environment – Transport

- Does anybody feel traffic pollution and/or congestion is a particular problem within the borough? Where does this happen? When does this happen?
- What do you think should be done to reduce traffic pollution and/or congestion?
- The Council has introduced differential rates for resident parking depending on the size of your car (from £50 for a residents permit to £400).
- What is your reaction to this? Is it a good idea? A bad idea? Do you think it will work? Why? Why not? Are there better ways to limit traffic pollution and/or congestion?

Education and Childrens Services Including Youth Services

- Do you think the schools in Richmond are good? What makes you say this? (PROBE: specific examples of schools – primary/secondary split)
- Do you think they need to be improved? If so, in what respect?
- Do you think more schools need to be provided? What makes you say this?

Youth Diversion

- Do you think there are enough play and youth services available? What is needed? – Recent budget increases in this area of £250k pa on revenue and a £1m fund set up to provide new/improved facilities
- Do you think more money should be invested in after school and diversion activities (i.e. after school clubs), and would you be willing to pay more council tax to pay for this?

Fear of Crime

- Generally speaking do you think the borough is a safe place to live?
- If safe, why?
- If not safe, why? How is it unsafe? Is it area based? Where?
- How do you think safety can be improved? If they mention increased police/community support – Would you be willing to pay more Council tax to pay for this?

Social Services - Self-directed care

- Do you think there's enough support for vulnerable people (i.e. elderly, disabled, ill)? What makes you say this?
- How do you think it should be improved? What do you think needs to be on offer/provided?
- Do you think this is a key area for Richmond Council to focus upon?

One of the ways Government is looking to help these people is to provide a person with a block of money from which they can select the care they need. Currently, the care is provided directly to individual either through Council services or through a care agency funded by the Council/Health.

- What generally is your reaction to this idea?
- What are the positives and why?
- What are the negatives and why?

CONCLUSION (21:30 to 21:45)

We have spoken tonight about a range of services and your expectation for the quality and availability of these services.

The Council has to make some key decisions about spending plans for the next year. They are faced with 3 choices.

They can either:

1. Maintain current levels of service, even if this means a modest increase in council tax
2. Improve current levels of service, even if this means a greater increase in council tax
3. Reduce the levels of some services to keep any council tax increase to a minimum

So, thinking about those choices, which do you feel the Council should do?

- What makes you say this?
- Do any of you feel differently?

Just looking at the lists we created earlier this evening – when we prioritised.

Top two priorities and least priority

- So of the service areas, which two do you feel are the most important? What makes you say this?
- Which do you think is the least important?
- Any other areas not mentioned that are important and why?

If the Leader of the Council was here now and you had to give him one message about how he runs the council and council services. What would that key message be?

THANK YOU