



**City of York Council
Budget Consultation
Focus Group Report**

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1. Introduction

City of York Council (CYC) appointed Pickersgill Consultancy & Planning Ltd (PCP), a York-based independent market research agency, to conduct a focus group with York residents recruited through their Talkabout Panel. The insight from this focus group will be used to inform budget allocation in 2022/23.

The results of the focus group will also be used to inform a wider quantitative study with residents, which is not included within this research project.

2. Background

Resident engagement at the council is an open process with feedback published on the open data platform and summaries included in decision session reports.

The Talkabout Panel is comprised of c1,000 residents who have committed to regularly receive council surveys with a response rate of 50-65%. The quarterly Monitor report includes information from the Talkabout Panel such as perception of council services, satisfaction with living in the city, etc. that is also used to compare the experience of living in York with neighbouring authorities. The Talkabout Panel typically responds to surveys and this is one of the first opportunities which members have been given to participate in a focus group.

Surveying remains the most cost-effective process with CYC at any point running approximately 20+ electronic consultation surveys. However, the nuances of different perspectives can be harder to surface through surveys or polling. This was demonstrated in the recent waste review consultation with survey results predominately supporting the changes whereas insight from focus groups highlighted barriers and risks. This was one of the reasons why it was felt a focus group would provide a deeper level of insight into the thoughts and opinions of local residents regarding the 2022/23 budget.

For the purposes of this exercise respondents were told to assume that in 2021/22 the Council had a net budget to spend of £100m (expenditure less income from fees, charges, other grants) and it is currently forecast that there might be an overspend in the current year of £5m on adults' and children's social care.

Looking ahead to 2022/23, CYC estimate that they have a total of £14m additional costs which they need to account for

- Social care £5m (to cover overspend)
- Pay & inflation £6m
- Cost of capital £1.6m
- Other, including reductions in grants £1.4m

So the budget for next year needs to be £114m. It would be possible to increase council tax by 4% (2% general increase and 2% for adult social care). This would generate additional income of £4m. CYC could also attempt to increase their income by up to £1m by taking measures such as increasing parking charges.

Even with the council tax increase and increased service charges, a budget deficit of £9 million would still remain. CYC needs to find ways to meet this gap as they are not allowed to have an unbalanced budget.

3. Aims and Objectives

The focus group explored which areas residents would prioritise in order to cover the deficit.

The main objectives of the focus group research were as follows:

- To understand which aspects residents like and dislike about living in York and to explore their attitudes towards CYC and its current services
- To gain insight/research into York residents' views of how the Council should allocate its budget within defined parameters
- To understand how the council should allocate budget to support the most vulnerable whilst recognising the needs of the wider population
- To gain feedback regarding what levels of service residents would accept for different areas when considering the wider impacts on other services
- To better inform future budget communication
- To provide an evaluation of the Citizen's Panel trial

4. Methodology

One focus group was conducted on Thursday 4th November 7pm at the Marriott Hotel, Tadcaster Road, York.

The discussion lasted approximately two hour in total. The group was moderated by Peter Pickersgill, PCP's Managing Director and supported by Debbie Wynn, a Senior Research Executive.

The group was also attended by Debbie Mitchell, Chief Finance Officer. Debbie provided extra support to explain the budget and to answer any specific queries should they arise. She kept her involvement to a minimum so that the group did not become purely a question and answer session. It was also an important part of the overall evaluation to see how well residents would interpret and understand the information they were provided with on their own.

The group comprised of members of the Talkabout panel who had previously stated willingness to participate in a focus group discussion. A list of 30 of these panel members was supplied to PCP who then contacted a representative cross section to invite them to take part in the group.

Respondents were paid £40 cash as a thank you for their participation in the group.

Eight respondents were recruited to attend the group. One person did not attend on the night which meant that a total of seven residents participated in the discussions.

As far as was possible a representative split of participants were chosen to participate.

The group comprised as follows:

Gender	
Male	3
Female	4

Age	
Under 45	3
Over 45	4

One member of the group was recorded as having a disability.

As far as possible participants were drawn from different wards of York. The following wards were represented: Osbaldwick & Derwent (2), Micklegate, Dringhouses & Woodthorpe, Rural West York, Holgate and Hull Road.

As it was felt by CYC that the topic under discussion is one that residents may potentially find dry and uninteresting a game was developed in order to help bring it to life. A board was provided showing the seven different budget areas. Respondents were also provided with a pile of colour coded paper notes in denominations of £500k so that they could visualise and move money between portfolios to cover the different services.

The board provided looked similar to table shown below. The red figures showed the current budget figures and the green side provided a space for respondents to either write on themselves or to use the £500k denomination notes which were provided.

Portfolio Area	Current Budget	Budget Revisions
Transport & Highways	4,916	
Environment & Climate Change	14,027	
Economy, Planning, Partnerships, Finance & Performance	8,588	
Housing & Safer Neighbourhoods	2,946	
Health & Adult Social Care	54,211	
Education, Children & Young People	23,107	
Culture, Leisure & Communities	6,205	
Total	114,000	



Notes were provided in £500k denominations and were colour coded to match the portfolio areas.

The group was also provided with a comprehensive document outlining key consequences of different levels of budget reductions and increases within each of the seven areas. These allowed respondents to have a more informed understanding of the impact of any cuts made. The documents were handed back in at the end of the group due to their confidential nature.

Before the group began their task Debbie Mitchell provided a short presentation outlining what was included within each portfolio area.

Portfolio Area	Services Covered
Transport & Highways	Cycling infrastructure, parking services, the transport strategy and travel planning, taxi licensing, street lighting, emergency planning.
Environment & Climate Change	Waste, flood protection, street environment, air quality, climate change and sustainability, parks and open spaces.
Economy, Planning, Partnerships, Finance & Performance	Bereavement, registrars, ICT, asset management (the commercial property portfolio) the economic strategy and planning, building control, regeneration
Housing & Safer Neighbourhoods	Homelessness prevention and provision of hostels, strategy.
Health & Adult Social Care	Includes substance miss-use, mental health services, domestic violence, services for carers, services for older people, and people with learning disabilities.
Education, Children & Young People	Children's social services, home to school transport.
Culture, Leisure & Communities	Community engagement and consultation, tourism, libraries, culture, heritage, adult education.

After Debbie's presentation respondents were given 45 minutes to talk amongst themselves entirely unmoderated and to reach their own conclusions as to how the council should proceed, which areas they should make cuts in, and how large those cuts should be. After the 45 minutes took place the group then reported back and explained their decisions to the moderator.

The discussion guide used can be found in Appendix One. Due to their confidential nature the consequences provided to the participants have not been included in this report.

Important Note

It is very important to note that this report reflects the results of only one focus group and therefore should not be used to represent the views of the population as a whole. The group was not ideally represented by age or ethnicity. Normal good research practice would be to hold three or four groups in order to sample a cross-section of the population of York.

We would not recommend using the results of the focus group to inform the allocation of the 2022/23 budget unless further discussions are conducted.

5. Introductory Discussion

5.1. General Attitudes to Living in York

On the whole residents really enjoyed living in York. Its history and heritage were viewed as very positive attributes as were the green spaces and compact feel to the City.

“It’s the nicest place I’ve ever lived, I like living near the city and what I like about York in particular is it’s very compact, so it’s like a giant village if you like and there’s not really anything I don’t like about it.” Female

“I love the fact that I live near the City and can walk in down the river I’m from Manchester originally so, I like I love the fact that it’s like a big village and I, I just love it in York, the history, everything.” Female

“I suppose what I like about York is the history and the heritage.” Male

“I moved here in 2007 from the States, I also lived in Cambridge for a bit and London for a bit, so I keep coming back to York, those were just short stints. I love the history, I mean this place is older than my country by like several hundred years so I love that.” Female

“I love the green space, that’s you know part and parcel of this centre that you don’t have to leave, you don’t have to go out of the ring road to find great parks and little woodlands and things.” Female

Residents expressed some dissatisfaction in relation to some of the drunken behaviour connected to York Races and the large number of stag and hen parties taking place within the City walls.

“It’s the stag and hen nights I don’t like.” Female

“I just think it’s always had a problem with drunkenness, although it’s worse now than it has been for a long time.” Female

“What I don’t like about York is the drunks, it feels a bit like a theme park, nobody cares about Tang Hall and the poor areas, they just care about the city centre.” Male

“I have a love hate relationship with the races. Having always lived Holgate South bank, that side of town, it’s fantastic to have that green space. I just wish they never ran horses and had lots of drunk people there.” Female

Tourism was definitely viewed both positively and negatively. It clearly brought some disadvantages but at the same time residents could see the benefits it also brings to the City.

“Well, it’s a double edged sword really, York’s great because of all the tourism that comes here. We’ve got all of the cinemas, theatres, restaurants, everything else. However I hate the tourists!” **Male**

“I appreciate what you say about the tourists, I feel a bit the same, it’s fun to live somewhere where everyone wants to come and visit, but sometimes they do get under your feet. Overall though I don’t really mind.” **Female**

“Tourists I’m not so keen on but I was once a tourist and then moved here so you have to take the rough with the smooth.” **Female**

There were some other individual comments regarding dislikes of living in the City these included the perceived gentrification of some areas of York, a lack of racial diversity and a lack of affordable housing.

“What I dislike about York is creeping gentrification forcing locals out. I live near the Nestle factory which has been converted into £300,000 apartments.” **Male**

“I really don’t like how white it is and there’s a kind of underlying racism about the place.” **Male**

“As a renter it sucks, I’ve been a renter for 15 years and I couldn’t afford to buy where I live. I love it but the tenancy situation isn’t great, and I know that’s not only York but still it’s hard.” **Female**

5.2. General Attitudes to CYC Services

The waste collection service was felt to be a reliable aspect of the council's service even after the recent driver shortages.

“Yes it's [waste collection] reliable and a lot of other places don't have recycling still and even recently then there was the HGV driver shortages and we just lost one green waste collection and so actually I'm quite impressed with that.” **Female**

Respondents, were quick to comment on the state of the local roads.

“Well, I think something that is quite poor is looking after the roads and pavements, I think part of that is that there is so many separate companies, I mean take BT for example and all these internet providers, all private companies that come and dig the road up, just outside my gate has been dug out about four times, they never repair it properly, the place looks a mess from my point of view and I don't know what the council can do about that or what their role in it is. But I think that is a problem and the road surfaces are actually quite bad, I mean Walmgate Road has got some huge dips in it, I'm not surprised there was that sinkhole in Dalton Terrace and I'm sure there will be more to come.” **Female**

“Yes, I agree about the roads, and certainly on my street, occasionally you get a bloke come round with a barrel and put some tarmac in the hole and that's it, you know the whole thing needs resurfacing.” **Female**

Two respondents commented on the negative publicity they had recently seen about pay offs to Chief Executives and also the bailing out of Make It York. They felt this represented the council wasting their money.

“They need to stop wasting their money on payoffs for Chief Executives, four hundred and four thousand was the figure I think. Oh, and bailing out Make it York with 600 odd thousand pounds. I worked out they spent I think it was 6,800 something band e properties' council tax on things that were not for the locals.” **Male**

“I think they do earn it in terms of provision of services, which I think are good, against the background of austerity. What I think is lacking is strategic leadership. And that's a mixture of maybe senior officers but also the politicians. And I think the, as you say, about the mishandling of the chief executive sacking or whatever it was, but also, I think the fact they haven't got a development plan and that means at any time London could come in and just take over, you know, the sort of, that's a major problem.” **Male**

There were some feelings expressed within the group that more communication was needed to explain to members of the public how the council operate and how they spend their money.

“I feel they are not always great at explaining to residents what they actually do, where all this money goes, how it is actually used, what the realities of the difficulties they face are or, I don’t necessarily encourage them to pass the buck as such, but there are things they get blamed for which are absolutely out of their control but I don’t feel they are very good at communicating that either.” Male

“It’s more that maybe people aren’t aware how they can access what this committee has done or what this project is etc etc, so as we’ve said they can get blamed for something they haven’t done or written thoroughly without understanding the reality of the kind of situation they are dealing with in the council.” Male

The group also made it clear that they hoped the focus group was not just being used as a ‘tick box’ exercise.

“If they listen to us, there’s a lot of ticking in boxes for different types of things you have to put a flag up for these days. Ticking box, whether they listen and do anything with that data that’s important.” Male

Participants agreed on an overall score of 6 out of 10 in terms of how satisfied they were currently with the council services overall.

6. Main Task

6.1. Introduction to the Task

Debbie Mitchell gave a short presentation to the group to provide some context around the challenges that the council is facing. She explained that it is not just York that has a budget deficit but the same situation applies to every council in the country.

Debbie asked respondents to assume that in the current financial year there will be an overspend of £5 million. That overspend comes exclusively from adult and children's social care.

The council are currently looking ahead to plan their budget for the next financial year which starts in April 2022. Currently it is estimated that the council have £14 million additional costs which they need to deal with. So next year the council require a budget of £114 million and have a budget gap of £14 million. It is a statutory, legislative requirement that the budget must balance and therefore the council must find a way to cover the £14 million gap.

Debbie went on to explain that the council are allowed to increase council tax by a maximum of 2% and they can also levy another 2% for adult social care. Broadly speaking 1% in council tax generates £1 million in income so if they were to increase council tax by 4% that would mean around £4 million resulting in a budget gap of £10 million.

Tourism and specifically the cost of parking is a real income generator for the council and the council has the option to increase their car parking charges which will generate up to an additional £1 million.

The task for the group was to read through the consequences of the proposed budget cuts in each area and decide amongst themselves where, and to what extent, cuts should be made in order to generate the necessary savings. The group were given 45 minutes, unmoderated, to discuss amongst themselves and then to report back and explain their decisions.

The available options are shown below:

Portfolio Area	Available Options
Transport & Highways (£4m)	+xm, no change, -£1m,-£2m, -£3m
Environment & Climate Change (£13m)	+xm, no change, -£3m,-£6m, -£8m
Economy, Planning, Partnerships, Finance & Performance (£5.5m)	+xm, no change, -£1m,-£2m, -£4m
Housing & Safer Neighbourhoods (£2m)	+xm, no change, -£0.5m,-£1m, -£2m
Health & Adult Social Care (£50.7)	+£5m, no change, -£3m,-£5m, -£7m
Education, Children & Young People (£19.6)	+£5m, no change, -£3m,-£5m, -£7m
Culture, Leisure & Communities (£5m)	+xm, no change, -£1m,-£2m, -£3m

6.2. Initial Queries

One participant asked if there were any future demographic predications available to help them with their deliberations, for example, the projections for the number of elderly people and the child population going forward. It was felt that this information would have been useful to assist with decision making.

“Do we know how a sort of future demographics is going to affect any of these figures, like for instance the number of elderly people, is that going to decline and, what is the child population doing? So are any of these figures going to automatically drop?” **Female**

Given that the task concerned the allocation of the budget for just the immediately following year, it was agreed that it was reasonable to ignore longer term considerations for the purposes of the current discussion.

6.3. Agreeing a Target

The group began their task by agreeing a target. Given the circumstances they decided that they would accept a 4% council tax increase in order to help reduce the cuts which would need to be made from other areas of the budget. They felt that the majority would be able to afford this and that for those who found this increase difficult there might be help available.

“As a resident of York, I’m happy to take that hit financially, to make our city better.”
Female

“A 4% increase is about £40-£60 a year isn’t it. I can stretch to that.” **Female**

“I’m hoping that the people that can afford to pay the council tax will be able to afford it, and the ones that can’t will get help.” **Male**

The group unanimously agreed that the council should try to increase their income by at least 1 million by, for example, increasing parking charges. A couple of members of the group argued that the council should be looking to increase their income by more than a million bearing in mind the perceived wastefulness of past ventures and had to be brought back to the main exercise at hand of saving money rather than exploring other areas by which the council could increase income.

“I think it’s easier, it was a no brainer to me, to increase income from parking and any other way we can think.” **Female**

“I mean doing that is so much easier than all these Sophie’s choices we are faced with.” **Male**

The group therefore set themselves a target of £9million worth of cuts.

6.4. Summary of Group Discussion about possible Budget Cuts

The group began their debate into potential reductions by ruling out instantly a reduction in the health & adult social care sector (reduction options included -£3m, -£5, and -£7m). The group felt it was simply not an option to reduce funding in this area.

“I don’t think we can cut the health and adult social care bill.” Female

“We have no choice, we have to pay for social care.” Male

The first area the group selected to potentially make cuts within was culture, leisure and communities (reduction options included -£1m, -£2, and -£3m). As one member of the group explained it is almost an obvious target because it is an area which cannot be easily quantified.

“It’s an easy target because you can’t quantify it, but I don’t necessarily think it should be. You can’t quantify exactly the impact of the cuts.” Female

Some members of the group thought that residents could instead be asked to pay for some of the cultural attractions within the City whilst others argued this could result in people missing out on cultural experiences.

“I mean for me personally, and other people may not agree, the end one, culture leisure and communities, it’s kind of an easy target. A lot of things are free, which is good, but perhaps we should be paying something for them. Even if it’s not very much, how much money would that generate?” Female

“For that year yeah, but then you’re alienating people that can’t afford that fee, that then can’t have access to culture.” Female

“And likewise, young people it provides them with opportunities they wouldn’t necessarily get otherwise so, yeah, I mean I agree. There is, are no good decisions are there?” Female

Nobody in the group particularly wanted to cut this area but most agreed that compared to providing health & social care it had to be less important.

“That’s true but wouldn’t they rather have social care and health care? I mean you know it would be, obviously, we should have both but if your backs against the wall, which it is by the sounds of it, it’s got to be health and adult social care and the children, young people and education. I mean in terms of priorities, to me it seems like a no brainer, it’s not good and it’s not what you want for a good societal experience” Female

“You know these are impossible questions we’re asked to do, but it seems to me that, I mean I’m quite involved with it the arts, Cathedral and this sort of thing. But actually, I think that if it’s a choice between children who are in risk of going to care and that sort of thing and children attending events then I admit that absolutely I mean it’s terrible that we are faced with this, but it does seem to me that it becomes the lesser of impossible evils.” **Male**

One respondent commented that it would be useful to have some further information regarding the use of leisure and community facilities in York:

“It would be interesting to know who uses the facilities, in particular what proportion of the population use them. You know also whether it’s people who actually have the money to pay for it, or whether it’s people who are less well off. I mean we don’t know that so it’s hard to make these decisions.” **Female**

The group also commented that how CYC communicates any cuts in this area would be very important and they need to make it clear the reasons why the cuts are having to be made.

“We should be actually, talking about communication, we should all think part of the thing should be what we communicate. You’re absolutely right, we shouldn’t be taking this away from children but this is because of austerity and the government cuts. So, I think the message should be that we’re not, we’re not doing this willingly, but we’ve got no option.” **Male**

The group debated for some time over whether to make a £1m or a £2 million cut. Since there was no consensus at this point in the discussions they decided to reduce by £1million and then review their decision once all other areas had been discussed.

The group next evaluated the options within highways and transport (reduction options included -£1m, -£2, and -£3m). Comments were made about the reduction in traffic regulation enforcement as several members of the group felt currently little was done in this regard.

“What surprises me with some of this is the reduction in traffic regulation enforcement, parking, speeding and stuff like that, we see hardly any of it at the moment. I don’t know how much more they can reduce. I mean speeding, the police aren’t interested in looking at anything in a city anymore, speed wise.” **Male**

“If they are able to speed within the City then they are doing well!” **Female**

“I mean nobody’s been done for driving in the bus lanes in York because nobody, nobody checks it. The police aren’t interested, the council are not.” **Male**

“There hasn’t been hardly anything anyway, so I don’t think we’d notice a reduction.” **Male**

It is worth noting at this point that the group needed an explanation of supported bus services as they had incorrectly interpreted this service until they were corrected by Debbie Mitchell. If this exercise were to be carried out again it would be worth providing an explanation on this point.

Respondents did not make a decision at this stage on highways and transport and instead moved on to discuss environment & climate change (reduction options included -£3m, -£6, and -£6m).

Respondents discussed the possibility of less frequent bin collections and whilst they agreed it does depend on the size of the household the majority felt they could manage with less frequent collections.

“For me personally, the waste collection is so frequent that half the time I don’t even put the bins out because there’s nothing in there. I know that’s not every household, but I think it could be scaled back a bit without it being the end of society. I think having it every three weeks instead of two would be acceptable.” **Female**

Some respondents also commented that education would be a better way to help with bin collections.

“I think that kind of boils down to education and what people are prepared to do, because I put my bin out maybe every 6 weeks, 8 weeks. But my neighbour puts theirs out every single collection and its always overflowing.” **Female**

“I think you’re right with education about recycling.” **Female**

Respondents also felt that clear communication could help people accept less frequent bin collections:

“But then then that’s where we go into communication, because what we’ve actually got to get over, they’re absolutely right, it is, I don’t want my bins to be done less, but I’d rather my bins were done less than children or the elderly being put at risk.” **Male**

Respondents also felt that, although clearly nobody wanted to see fly tipping, it was something which they would be able to put up with if necessary.

“I mean if you look at the three million reduction in this area it seems to me quite a good target there, ok you know fly tipping that’s unfortunate, but people can sort that out themselves.” **Male**

“I mean some fly tipping it’s the lesser of other evils, isn’t it?” **Female**

The group decided that in this area they would agree to see a £3million reduction.

The group then moved on to economy & planning (reduction options included -£1m, -£2, and -£4m). They discussed their willingness to have delays in planning applications and it was agreed this would be something they could tolerate. Some

respondents were willing because they felt it did not really matter too much and others because it already takes a long time anyway.

*“An increase in time for planning applications, well that might be unfortunate for individuals or for property developers, but does it really matter?” **Male***

*“It’s already rubbish so I don’t see how it could get much worse actually, so we might as well cut all of it.” **Male***

*“But a lot of time is taken up where with property developers who get permission to build and they’re going to have affordable houses and then once they’ve started they come back in and say actually we can’t do the affordable you know, so I’m not sure I’d be that worried.” **Male***

However, the group were all concerned about potential delays in processing benefits which were a consequence of any cuts to this area.

*“I’d be concerned about the delays in processing benefits, because I think that’s going to push some people to real hardship.” **Female***

*“Delays in registrations you don’t really want that because a delay in registering a birth can then stop somebody applying for a benefit.” **Female***

*“Those delays could actually be putting children in poverty.” **Female***

*“I think you’re right about benefits, and about births and deaths and so on. I mean just the emotional thing that people are going through, so you don’t want to hold that up.” **Male***

At this point in the discussion Debbie Mitchell interjected to say that if the group really wanted to cut this area but not have the delays in registration and processing benefits then they could state this as a term by which they would be willing to accept the cut. The group therefore decided they would be happy to cut £2 million in this area with that proviso in place.

The group then decided to look for where else they might be able to make the remaining cuts. They went back to highways & transport (reduction options included -£1m, -£2, and -£3m) and decided that they would be willing to take a £1 million cut even though they had complained at the start of the group about York’s road conditions.

*“Do you remember at the beginning when we all said we hated potholes! Still I don’t think we have much choice here.” **Male***

They all felt it was a difficult area to cut from as it may lead to further problems down the line.

“It’s difficult isn’t it, because if you’re only gritting the major roads, actually that’s gonna lead to loads of accidents. It’s going to disproportionately affect people who live in rural areas.” **Female**

“And, and reducing bus services does affect people that don’t have cars by definition. Some of them at least will be people who are in the low social economic groups.” **Male**

The group debated at this point removing £2 million rather than £1 million but thought that the £2 million cuts were a step too far. They were particularly not keen on the fact that the £2million cuts might result in only major roads being gritted and they were also concerned about a reduction in lighting. They felt both of these elements could have extremely serious consequences for residents’ safety.

“But so is road safety schemes and gritting major roads, so I think we are going to end up taking so much out that I don’t know that two million is particularly do-able” **Female**

“We could cut two million but we don’t want to cut from the bus services and I personally wouldn’t want to cut from like footpaths and street lights, because that’s a safety issue from walking home from the city, walking around the city.” **Female**

As the group could not justify cutting two million from highways they checked which areas they had not reduced and moved to look at housing and safer neighbourhoods (reduction options included -£0.5m, -£1, and -£2m). Although they also did not want to cut from this area they felt they had little choice.

“We don’t have a choice.” **Male**

“We would still have to cut a million from housing.” **Female**

“I mean, the outcome of reducing by a million is reducing housing and economic growth, more anti-social behaviour and rough sleeping increases, which are all horrible but none of the options here are anything other than horrible.” **Male**

It is worth noting that the group had some debate over what type of housing would be reduced and whether this was social or council housing. They felt some further information on this point would have been useful.

They debated between reducing this area by £0.5 or £1million but eventually agreed it had to be a £1million cut as they did not want to take further from elsewhere.

However, this still left the group with £1 million to find so they went back again to discussing culture, leisure and communities (reduction options included -£1m, -£2, and -£3m).

“I still think we should be harder on culture, leisure and communities. I mean I would say that fewer people would be affected than by the other cuts.” **Female**

Again, the group expressed a desire at this point to have some more information on the use of community facilities in their area and to have a slightly more detailed explanation of what services are covered.

“When we are talking about culture, leisure and communities, I know culture comes first but presumably we are not just talking about museums and stuff, we are talking about libraries, we are talking about community centres are we?” **Female**

One respondent from the Tang Hall area stated how important their community centre was to their area.

“Because the community centre in Tang Hall is a massive big draw for the community, if that was cut that would be awful.” **Male**

Respondents also argued for the value of library services especially for those who do not have access to the internet at home:

“Libraries are really important for the internet access, if you can’t afford internet access.” **Female**

“And with literacy, if you can’t afford to buy books for yourself or for the children, libraries might be the only way you can.” **Female**

The group deliberated at some length the importance of community facilities but kept coming back to the fact that they had to cut some money from somewhere.

“I agree that the getting rid of community centres would be bad and should be avoided, but you know the rest of it, given what else there is to have to cover.” **Female**

In the end rather reluctantly it was agreed to take £2million from culture, leisure and communities.

“I’m not happy but I appreciate that actually I can’t see any alternatives to be honest, so I have to agree.” **Female**

“Well I work in a museum so no I am not particularly happy, no, but you know I have to go with it.” **Female**

At this point the group were running out of time so they recapped over their decision which was nothing from social care, highways and transport one million, environment and climate change three million, economy, planning, partnerships two million, housing and safer neighbourhoods one million and culture, leisure and communities two million.

Whilst nobody would describe themselves as ‘happy’ with these cuts it was generally agreed that this was the best that could be done in such a difficult situation. All respondents in the group were prepared to accept this as a consensus view.

6.5. Summary of Decision Made

Category	Agreed Saving
Council Tax	£4m (Willing to accept a 4% increase)
Increasing income e.g. by increasing parking charges	£1m (Willing to accept increases in parking charges)
Health & Adult Social Care £50.7m	No change
Children, Young people & Education £19.6 m	No change
Highways & Transport £4m	£1m
Environment & Climate change £13m	£3m
Economy, Planning, Partnerships, Finance & Performance £5.5m	£2m Note: With the proviso that there would not be delays in registrations or delays in dealing with customers and processing benefits
Housing and Safer Neighbourhoods £2m	£1m
Culture, Leisure and Communities £5m	£2m
	£14m

6.6. Summary of Group Thoughts by Service Area

After the group had finished their task the moderator led a discussion to understand how the recommended cuts had been arrived at.

Council Tax and Parking Increases – Accepted

The group unanimously agreed to accept an increase in council tax and also in parking charges because they felt they could not find sufficient savings otherwise. They also felt that residents would be expecting an increase in their council tax anyway.

“And as a resident of York, I’m happy to take that hit financially, to make our city better.” **Female**

“I think it’s easier, it was a no brainer to me, to increase income from parking and any other way we can think.” **Female**

“To be honest I think people will expect a council tax rise anyway. It’s been happening for the last 5, 10 years hasn’t it? It’s been going up about 4% every year it seems to me anyway.” **Male**

Health & Adult Social Care/Children, Young people & Education – No Change

The group felt that there was simply no way at all that these two areas could be cut.

“I think it’s a safeguarding obligation, we have an obligation to safeguard those two groups in a way that we don’t have to for other areas. I mean, I think the museums are really important, but not as important as children in care.” **Male**

“As a society, we have to look after our young and our old. The young are going to take over and the old you know, we have to look after them. That’s my point certainly.” **Male**

“I think it affects most people in York in some way or another, either themselves or through relatives, everyone knows somebody who you know will be impacted by cuts in these areas. So any cuts in these areas would be very far reaching.” **Female**

Highways & Transport – £1m reduction

The group felt that although a £2million cut would have too much impact a £1million cut might be tolerable.

“For me, personally, I thought if you cut 2 million you start to have a real impact on safety. Whereas 1 million, would have an impact but it wouldn’t necessarily be an impact on safety in the same way.” Female

Although the group had spontaneously mentioned potholes and general road conditions as being an issue in York they were prepared to tolerate these continuing as a lesser of evils.

Environment & Climate Change – £3m reduction

Respondents concurred that they would be willing to take a cut in the frequency with which their bins were emptied. They also felt that they could cope with some additional fly tipping.

“Well I would be happy to take a cut in the amount of time, the amount of time my bins are emptied, it could go longer.” Female

“I think it comes back to cutting and that it’s better to cut that than it is to cutting the child and adult social care, you know.” Female

Economy, Planning, Partnerships, Finance & Performance - £2m reduction

The group would tolerate a cut in this area but were clear they did not want to see delays in registration and benefits processing as this could push people into serious difficulties.

“Yeah, we wanted to make sure that there wasn’t a delay to dealing with benefits or registering births, deaths and marriages, because we felt that could push more people into hardship.” Female

“I think once we got those two services red-ringed, again it’s a background where we don’t want to do any of it but we could just about bear that.” Male

Housing and Safer Neighbourhoods - £1m reduction

It was felt that whilst the consequences of reducing this area by £1million were not ideal they would be manageable.

“There are consequences there for a million but, it seems like, they are mostly survivable, those consequences.” Female

“With the reduced housing it depends what type of housing it is anyway.” Male

Culture, Leisure and Communities - £2m reduction

Nobody was happy with cutting cultural services but they felt it had to be done as these services were less essential in comparison to other areas. There was much debate in this area as to whether it should be a £1million cut or £2 million and the group went back and forth over this. In the end, because the group did not want to cut further in other areas they had to settle on £2million.

“Happy is the wrong word to use but we will have to accept it when you hold it up against the impact of cuts in other areas.” Female

Respondents felt it would be important to clearly communicate to the general public the reasons why these cuts were being made and the alternative choices which had been weighed up.

6.7. Ranking of the Savings

Respondents were asked to rank the order in which they would make the savings within the different sectors. They chose the first £1 million reduction from culture and leisure as their first choice to reduce and highways and transport as their last. Although the group were most reluctant to make cuts with regards to environment and climate change and highways & transport.

1.	Culture, Leisure and Communities (£1 million reduction)
2.	Economy, Planning, Partnerships, Finance & Performance
3=	Housing and Safer Neighbourhoods Culture, Leisure and Communities (second £1 million reduction)
5.	Environment & Climate Change
6.	Highways & Transport

Appendix One: Discussion Guide

CYC Discussion Guide: Budget Consultation

Participants: 6-8

Length of focus group: 2 hours maximum

Time	Discussion Topics	Led by
2 mins	<p>PCP Introduction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PCP welcome and explain format for the group • Explain confidentiality and MRS Code of Conduct • Explain recording of the group • Define key objective as to consider how best to balance the CYC budget for 2022/23. 	PCP
7 mins	<p>Respondent Introductions</p> <p>Respondents introduce themselves - where they live, time lived in York, size of household and any general thoughts on the positives and negatives of living in York.</p>	Respondents
10 mins	<p>Attitude to CYC and its Services</p> <p>Discuss respondents' attitude to CYC and services it provides. Do respondents feel they obtain value for money from the council tax they pay? Which services currently work well and which could be improved?</p>	PCP
7 mins	<p>Present projected 2022/23 Budget and Savings required</p> <p>Show preliminary allocation of 2022/23 budget.</p> <p>Explain services included under each heading.</p> <p>Explain net saving required under different options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £10 million if Council Tax increased by maximum allowed (1.99%), social care precept increased by 2% and income streams kept at current projected level; • Up to additional £5m required if Council Tax kept at 2021 level or increased by less than 1.99%; • Up to additional £2.5m required if increase in social care precept less than 2%; • Up to £1m less required if income streams increased. 	D Mitchell (DM) PCP
7 mins	<p>Preliminary Discussion</p>	

Time	Discussion Topics	Led by
	<p>Discuss group's preliminary thoughts on which level of cuts (£9m, 10m or more) group will seek to achieve and why that option is preferred.</p> <p>Set group task to recommend appropriate re-allocation of budget to achieve that level of saving. Stress that group can switch to different option in course of their deliberations if necessary.</p>	PCP
5 mins	<p>Explain group task and how to play game</p> <p>Introduce game concept and show how to play and record savings proposed.</p> <p>Issue summary of possible 'consequences' of making cuts to each service, for reference during discussions.</p> <p>Explain group has 45 minutes to seek group consensus on how to achieve the required savings. If can't achieve group consensus, allow minority report from subgroup(s) of respondents.</p> <p>Explain D M will be available if required to provide further details of consequences of reducing budget for a particular service, but stress that is their views on what 'feels right' that we are seeking and that we do not expect them to understand exactly how each budget is determined.</p>	PCP
45 mins	<p>Respondents play game.</p> <p>Respondents talk amongst themselves (without moderation), debating merits of making savings to different services and seeking consensus recommendations. If necessary, can request further information on consequences from DM.</p> <p>If struggling to achieve required savings, group can decide to switch to alternative of £10m or £9m in cuts assuming they are not already working to that scenario.</p> <p>DM and PCP not involved in discussion unless queries arise, but they are available to ensure that objectives are understood and that progress is being made.</p> <p>Keep group aware of how much longer they have to complete task.</p>	Respondents
30 minutes	Discuss Group Recommendations	PCP

Time	Discussion Topics	Led by
	<p>Respondents' spokesperson summarises their recommended allocation of budget cuts. Allow alternative minority recommendations if necessary.</p> <p>PCP then leads discussion of why group recommended increasing/ decreasing / leaving unchanged the budget for each service heading. Respondents asked to prioritise different ways of achieving required savings.</p> <p>Establish level of concern, if any, around each recommendation.</p>	
	Thank and close group	