

Evaluation of sector-led improvement

Companion Report: survey of users and non-users of the YouChoose online budget simulator

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Evaluation of sector-led improvement

This report forms part of the Local Government Association (LGA) evaluation of sector-led improvement. Other outputs from the evaluation can be found here: <http://www.local.gov.uk/research-performance-and-improvement>.

Sector-led improvement

With changes to the nationally imposed inspection and assessment regime, a new approach to improvement has been developed by local government. This was set out in the LGA's document 'Taking the Lead' in February 2011, supplemented in June 2012 by "Sector-led improvement in local government"¹ which describes a coordinated approach to sector-led improvement across local government, the support being provided and where to go for further information and advice.

The approach is based on the following key principles:

- councils are responsible for their own performance and improvement and for leading the delivery of improved outcomes for local people in their area
- councils are primarily accountable to local communities (not government or the inspectorates) and stronger accountability through increased transparency helps local people drive further improvement
- councils have a collective responsibility for the performance of the sector as a whole (evidenced by sharing best practice, offering member and officer peers, etc.)
- the role of the LGA is to maintain an overview of the performance of the sector in order to identify potential performance challenges and opportunities – and to provide tools and support to help councils take advantage of this new approach.

'Taking the Lead' identified a small core set of activities that are commonly undertaken by councils who proactively take responsibility for their own performance and improvement. This common set of activities provides the framework for sector-led improvement across councils' services and activities.

¹ <http://www.local.gov.uk/sector-led-improvement>

It is also the framework around which the LGA's offer of support to councils is based, as follows:

- strengthening local accountability
- inviting challenge from one's peers
- learning from good practice and through regional structures and networks
- utilising transparent and comparable performance information
- investing in leadership.

The evaluation

The LGA's evaluation looks at both the overall approach to sector-led improvement and the specific offers of support. It is running over a two year period, with the main aim of understanding whether, in the context of reduced resources within the sector:

- the approach to sector-led improvement has the confidence of the sector and the government, and the trust of the public
- the sector has been able to strengthen local accountability
- the sector is adopting the sector-led improvement approach and continues to improve with a reduced burden of inspection, and in the absence of top down performance assessment
- the tools offered to the sector have had a positive impact on the sector's capacity to improve itself.

A baseline report was published in February 2013. In addition, a number of companion reports, of which this is one, are being published alongside the main evaluation reports, looking at specific issues in more detail. This companion report complements the final evaluation report, which can be found here: <http://www.local.gov.uk/research-performance-and-improvement>.

Executive summary

Introduction

YouChoose is an online budget simulator, provided at no cost to English and Welsh councils by a partnership of the Local Government Association (LGA), the London Borough of Redbridge and YouGov. Between 17 July and 7 August 2012 the LGA conducted an online survey of users and non-users of YouChoose in order to understand how people had heard about the tool, what they thought about it and, where councils were not using it, the reasons for this.

Methodology

An invitation to participate in the survey was sent to 165 officers in councils who had either expressed an interest in using YouChoose, or had requested to be set up to use the tool. There were 46 responses to the survey giving a response rate of 28 per cent.

Key findings

The research found that people who had used the tool were generally positive about it and found the tool easy to use, easy to administer and easy for residents to understand.

On the other hand some respondents found that YouChoose took a lot of officer time to set up and some were not happy with the data output, as this was not in a format that they could easily analyse themselves.

Respondents who had previously used YouChoose were more likely to say they planned to use the tool in the future than those who had not previously used it. Around half of respondents who had asked to be set up to use YouChoose had not in fact gone on to use it as part of a budget consultation. This leaves a pool of potential new users who know about the tool, but need further encouragement to use it.

Summary of results

- The most common sources from which respondents had first heard of YouChoose were YouGov (eight respondents / 17 per cent) and LGA bulletins (eight respondents / 17 per cent).
- Of the 38 respondents who had been set up to use YouChoose, 17 (45 per cent) had used it as part of a budget consultation.
- Of the 17 respondents who had used YouChoose, most (14

respondents / 82 per cent) had found it either fairly useful or very useful.

- Specifically, respondents generally said they found it easy to use, easy to administer and easy for residents to understand. They did not agree however that it only took up a small amount of officer time.
- There were positive comments about the design of YouChoose, the fact that it is free and about its ability to help residents understand the difficult financial decisions that councils need to make.
- Some respondents however commented that the tool was not as customisable as they would like. Others were disappointed that they were not able to conduct the analysis they had hoped for due to the format of the data output.
- Nineteen respondents (46 per cent) were either planning to use YouChoose in the future or explore the possibility of using it. Respondents were more likely to use or consider using YouChoose if they had used it in the past.
- The most common reason for not using YouChoose was that councils would not use any budget simulators because their other consultation arrangements were sufficient (nine respondents / 50 per cent).
- Most respondents said they their organisation had never used any other budget simulator (39 respondents / 85 per cent).
- Respondents commented on the methods they used to ensure budget consultations in general are representative of the local population; these included use of existing forums, surveys and sampling techniques, communications campaigns, stakeholder events and specific events for hard to reach groups.

Introduction

YouChoose² is an online budget simulator, provided at no cost to English and Welsh councils by a partnership of the Local Government Association (LGA), the London Borough of Redbridge and YouGov. It allows members of the public to make choices about the funding of services in the context of keeping council tax increases to a minimum. During summer 2012, the LGA conducted an online survey of users and non-users of YouChoose in order understand how people had heard about the tool, what they thought about it and what reasons there were for councils not using it.

² <http://www.local.gov.uk/YouChoose>

Methodology

The survey was conducted by the LGA's Research and Information team using an online form. For a full list of the questions asked, please refer to Annex B. An email containing a closed link was sent to 165 officers in councils who had either expressed an interest in using YouChoose, or had requested to be set up to use the tool. Accordingly all respondents had heard about YouChoose to some extent. Around eight out of 10 (78 per cent) of the officers in the sample had previously requested to be set up to use the tool, with the remainder seeking only further information.

The field work period was open for an initial two week period between 17 and 31 July 2012. Following this the field work period was extended for a further week, closing on 7 August 2012, in order to improve the response rate.

Emailed (n)	Completed (n)	Response rate (%)
165	46	28

In total 46 completed the survey, giving a response rate of 28 per cent. This level of response means that these results should not be taken to be more widely representative of councils expressing an interest in YouChoose. Rather, they are a snapshot of the views of this particular group of respondents. In addition, statistical bases of some of the questions are particularly low due to a lower number of respondents being asked those questions. These instances are highlighted when necessary throughout this report.

Of the 46 who responded, 38 (83 per cent) had been among those who had specifically requested to gain access to YouChoose (Table 1). The remaining eight respondents had only requested further information.

Table 1 – whether respondents had requested to be set up to use YouChoose

	Value (n)	Value (%)
Not requested	8	17
Requested	38	83
Total	46	100

The composition of the response base (i.e. the group of respondents of whom the question was asked) is described below each table or chart.

Full results

Finding out about YouChoose

Respondents were asked to identify from a pre-defined list how they had first heard about YouChoose. The most popular sources for hearing about the tool were YouGov and LGA bulletins, both of which first informed eight respondents each (17 per cent) about the tool. The London Borough of Redbridge and “a fellow employee at my organisation” informed seven respondents each (15 per cent).

Eight respondents (17 per cent) did not know where they had first heard about YouChoose. For a chart showing the sources from which people heard about YouChoose see Figure 1.

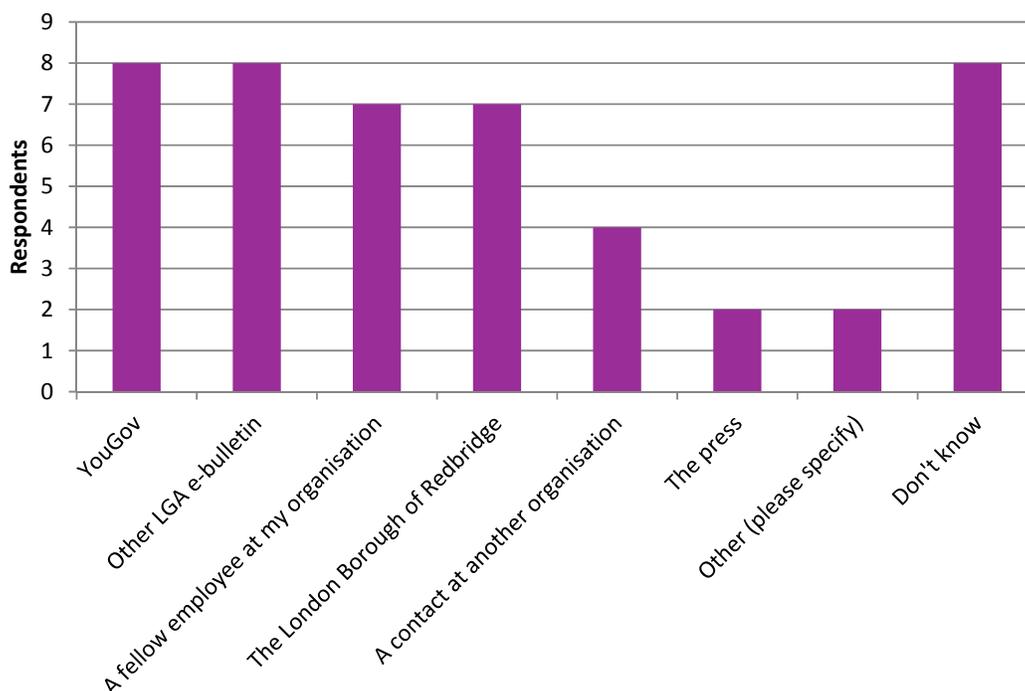


Figure 1 - how did you first hear of YouChoose?

Base: asked to all respondents; 46 answered

Two respondents indicated that they had first heard about YouChoose from a source other than those listed. This was through “an internet search of budget consultation tools” and a “SOLACE update”.

Using YouChoose

Seventeen respondents (37 per cent) said that they had used YouChoose as part of a budget consultation. This is lower than might be expected, since we are aware that 38 respondents (83 per cent) had been set up to use the tool upon their request.

In fact, around half of those who had been set up to use the tool (21 respondents / 55 per cent) had not used it. To see the data related to this question and comparison with access to YouChoose, see Table 2.

Table 2 – crosstabulation: respondents who had used YouChoose compared against respondents who had requested access

Whether previously requested access to YouChoose		Has your organisation ever used YouChoose as part of a budget consultation?	
		No	Yes
Not requested	Value (n)	8	0
	Value (%)	100	0
Requested	Value (n)	21	17
	Value (%)	55	45
Total	Value (n)	29	17
	Value (%)	63	37

Base: asked to all respondents; 46 answered

Of those who had used YouChoose, most (14 respondents / 82 per cent) indicated that the tool was either fairly useful or very useful to their organisation. Please see Table 3.

Table 3 - overall, how useful was YouChoose to your organisation?

Response	Value (n)	Value (%)
Very useful	7	41
Fairly useful	7	41
Not very useful	2	12
Not at all useful	0	0
Don't know	1	6
Total	17	100

Base: asked to all those who had used YouChoose; 17 answered

Conducting an online consultation with YouChoose

The 17 respondents whose councils had used YouChoose as part of a budget consultation were asked to read five statements and indicate to what extent

they agreed or disagreed with them. The majority of answers were positive about the tool, but again it should be noted that the small number of responses to these questions overall means the data can only be taken as indicative of the views of this group of respondents.

Respondents generally agreed that the tool was easy to use (13 respondents / 76 per cent), easy to administer (13 respondents / 76 per cent) and that the tool is easy for residents to understand (11 respondents / 65 per cent). Most respondents also agreed that YouChoose produces results that are easy to analyse, albeit to a lesser extent compared other statements they were asked about (nine respondents / 53 per cent).

Most respondents did not agree that the tool only takes up a small amount of officer time (six respondents / 35 per cent agreed).

Summary data for these statements can be found in Table 4, below. The full data can be found in Annex A, Table 8.

Table 4 - to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Statement		Summary : agree ³	Neither agree nor disagree	Summary : disagree	Don't know
YouChoose is easy to use	Value (n)	13	2	2	0
	Value (%)	76	12	12	0
YouChoose is easy to administer	Value (n)	13	0	3	1
	Value (%)	76	0	18	6
YouChoose only takes up a small amount of officer time	Value (n)	6	2	9	0
	Value (%)	35	12	53	0
YouChoose is easy for residents to understand	Value (n)	11	2	2	2
	Value (%)	65	12	12	12
YouChoose produces results that are easy to analyse	Value (n)	9	2	5	1
	Value (%)	53	12	29	6

Bases: asked to all those who had used YouChoose; 17 answered

³ The full response scale was strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree, don't know

What is good about YouChoose

Respondents were asked to outline what they felt was good about YouChoose. Eleven comments were received in total and these are summarised below.

The design of the tool

Six respondents commented positively on the design of the tool, including one comment that pointed to the “look and feel of the product from a customer perspective”. Also noted was the fact that it could be used “off the shelf”, was easy to customise and was “easy for the public to understand”.

The cost of the tool

Three respondents indicated that what they felt was good about the tool, partly at least, was that it was free for councils to use. One respondent did point out however that it was not entirely free, presumably referring to consultancy costs for when councils wanted more detailed analysis than the tool automatically provides.

Helping the public to understand difficult decisions

Three respondents highlighted the value of the tool as a means to help the public understand that difficult decisions need to be made in order to make savings. One respondent stated that “it has real educational value” and another said that the tool has the “ability to help residents understand the potential impact of budget changes on services and on council tax levels”.

Other comments

Other open text responses to this question included:

- “Enabled contact with a wider range of age groups (attracted to the online basis of the model) than we have traditionally obtained by existing methods”
- “We did a budget consultation in 2010/11 using YouChoose and decided to use only the online option. Residents found it very easy to use, and the very few people that needed mediated access, achieved that in the libraries. Very easy to set up, use and share with customers”

One respondent also took the opportunity to highlight an aspect of the tool that could be improved:

- “The raw data isn't 'analysis ready' - it would be better if it could be

imported straight into SPSS, snap etc.”

The full list of comments open text responses received for this question are found in Annex A, Table 9.

How YouChoose could be improved

Respondents were asked to comment about how they thought YouChoose could be improved. Ten responses were given and these summarised below.

Design of the tool

Five respondents commented on aspects related to the design of the tool. These included the amount of work needed to set the tool up and the extent to which the tool was adaptable to the needs of councils. One comment for example said that they would like to be able to “request some bespoke changes... such as extra ethnic categories”. Another respondent commented that “it was hard to fit our budgets to the categories included; our organisational structure and the services we provide seemed quite varied to the model used [provided in the tool]”

Analysis of the results⁴

Three comments mentioned the ability to analyse the results data from YouChoose consultations. Two respondents found it “disappointing” that the raw data could not be “exported in a readable format [and] therefore had to rely on the top line results” and that the fact that data wasn’t available in Excel or CSV format represented a “hidden cost” as they would have had to pay for additional analysis by YouGov.

Another respondent commented that “it would be helpful if information about respondents such as their age and postcode could be extracted and cross referenced more easily against responses”.

Other comments

Other open text responses to this question included:

⁴ Since the close of the fieldwork period for this research the London Borough of Redbridge has improved the way in which data is downloaded, including making it available in an easy to analyse format.

- That the tool should have “better links to social media channels”
- “How good it is depends on the information that the authority puts in - so that the effects of cutting budgets gives realistic outcomes. The big worry for me is that organisations use YouChoose as their only budget consultation and think that they have ticked the consultation box. However, in my view, it is more about raising awareness of the difficult decisions that have to be made.”

The full list of comments open text responses received for this question are found in Annex A, Table 10.

Plans to use YouChoose in the future

All respondents, whether having previously used YouChoose or not, were asked to indicate whether they had any plans to use the tool as part of their current or future budget consultations. Six (13 per cent) responded that they did plan to use YouChoose and 15 (33 per cent) indicated that were exploring the possibility of using it.

On the other hand, 17 respondents (37 per cent) had no current plans to use YouChoose, but only one respondent said that they would not be using the tool as part of current or future budget consultations.

A further seven respondents (15 per cent) said that they did not know.

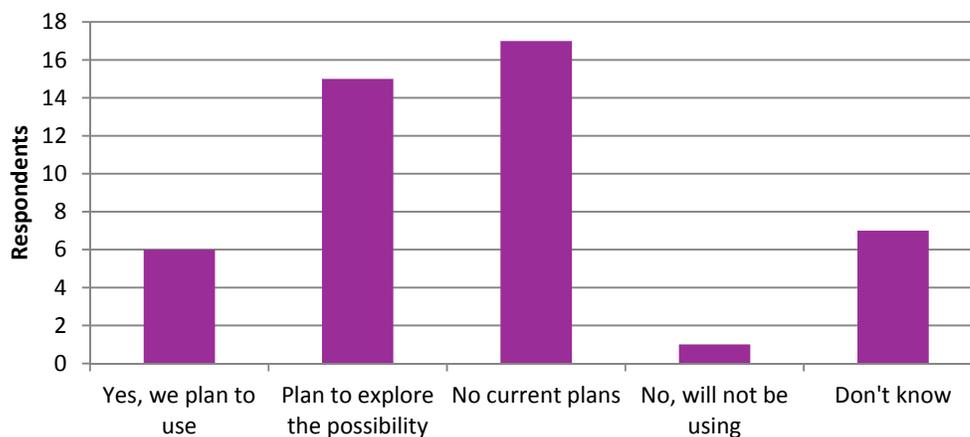


Figure 2 - do you plan to use YouChoose as part of your council's current or future budget consultation?

Base: asked to all respondents; 46 answered

Further analysis shows that councils that had used the tool in the past were more likely to answer that they will use or consider using the tool in the future compared with those who had not previously used it (12 respondents or 70 per cent of those who had used the tool compared with 9 respondents or 31 per cent of those who had not used the tool). Please see Table 5 for this data.

Table 5 - crosstabulation: previous use of YouChoose as an indicator of whether councils are likely to consider using it in the future

Whether previously used YouChoose		Do you plan to use YouChoose as part of your council's current or future budget consultation?				
		Yes, we plan to use	We plan to explore the possibility	No current plans	No, we will not be using	Don't know
No	Value (n)	1	8	14	1	5
	Value (%)	3%	28%	48%	3%	17%
Yes	Value (n)	5	7	3	0	2
	Value (%)	29%	41%	18%	0%	12%
Total	Value (n)	6	15	17	1	7
	Value (%)	13%	33%	37%	2%	15%

The 17 respondents who answered that they had no current plans to use YouChoose, plus the one respondent that said that they would not be using YouChoose were asked to give reasons for this from a predefined list. Nine (50 per cent) indicated that they didn't plan to use any online tools as other arrangements for budget consultation were sufficient. Please see Table 6.

Table 6 - why do you not plan to use YouChoose as part of a budget consultation?

	Value (n)	Value (%)
We do not have plans to use any online budget simulation tool as our other arrangements for budget consultation are sufficient	9	50
We have no political support for online budget tools	1	6
We have no political support for any form of budget consultation	1	6
Other (please specify)	6	33
Don't know	1	6
Total	18	100

Base: asked to all those who indicated that they were not using, or not planning to use YouChoose; 18 answered

Six respondents (33 per cent) said that they had a reason other than those listed. These reasons were:

- “From what I can remember there was a greater cost involved than we wanted to spend.”
- “Have looked at online before but did not get the support needed for the financial data, so currently undertake a telephone survey and business breakfast.”
- “Our budget plan is set for three years, so for the foreseeable future, we can't do true consultation as it is set.”
- “The amount of work involved in setting up the tool properly so it is effective and in analysing the information is prohibitive to us.”
- “We have no support at senior management or political level for any form of budget consultation.”
- “We would potentially like to, but until we can be reassured that we can download the results, we feel there is no point.”

Using other budget simulators

Respondents were asked about whether their organisation had used another budget simulation tool in the past, as part of a budget consultation process. Most (39 respondents / 85 per cent) said their organisation had not used any other budget simulation tool.

Table 7 - Has your organisation used an online budget simulation tool other than YouChoose in the past, as part of a budget consultation?

Response	Value (n)	Value (%)
No	39	85
Yes	6	13
Don't know	1	2
Base: asked to all respondents	46	100

Base: asked to all respondents; 46 answered

The six that indicated that their organisation had used another tool were asked which ones they had used. Two said they had used SIMALTO, two had used an in house survey method and two had used Delib.

campaigns in order to engage the population widely. This included advertising the consultation methods they used “to a wide range of residents through different communication channels.”

Stakeholder events

Six comments referred to stakeholder events, whereby meetings were hosted with interested groups including “voluntary and community sector groups, businesses and unions”. Sometimes this included focus groups with communities of interest. One council said that annually it held three budget events “in various locations (one for young people) which set out the financial challenges, plus an interactive workshop designed to highlight priorities”. There was also a “question and answer session chaired by the leader of the council”.

Specific events for the hard to reach

Five of the responses specifically referred to the council’s efforts to target “groups that are traditionally underrepresented”. One respondent stated that they are “using the demographic monitoring questions in YouChoose to track responses”, but that they were also “working with third sector groups... and designing an offline version [of YouChoose] to allow people to take part without internet access”.

The full list of open text responses to this question can be found in Annex A, Table 11.

General comments

The final question in the survey asked respondents for any further comments they might have, whether about YouChoose, another online budget simulator or budget consultation in general. There were seventeen comments in total and the key points are summarised below.

Positive feedback about YouChoose

There were four comments from respondents that were happy with YouChoose. One for example said that they “have been using YouChoose since 2010 and it has proved very useful, by providing a new and interesting way for people to contribute their views”. Another said “I absolutely loved YouChoose and if we can open up consultation again, that would be the product I’d like to use.”

How to improve YouChoose

There were three comments from people that were less than satisfied with YouChoose. One of these pointed to the fact that it focusses on the council tax increase. A consultation they had run with YouChoose had suggested a 15 per cent decrease and “needless to say council tax wasn’t reduced at all”. They further suggested that it would be “far better to ask people to prioritise services, and let elected members allocate pounds and pence against these priorities”. Another respondent was more clearly dissatisfied saying that it “seemed like a great idea and a really useful tool. Unfortunately it was a complete let down at the last hurdle”. It is likely that the respondent was referring the format in which the consultation data is downloaded, which was reported as disappointing elsewhere in the survey (please see on page 13, above).

Feedback about budget simulation

There were three comments that offered feedback about budget simulation in general. One commented that it is “very hard to use standardised models to express individual councils’ budget situation” and that they “would welcome more participatory approaches to budget setting rather than simple trade offs”.

Political and management support

Three respondents suggested lack of political or managerial support for online budget simulators. One said, for example that they can be “seen as ‘cost cutting’ and are therefore subject to political sensitivity”. Another commented that the senior leadership of the council “decided that a YouChoose budget consultation would be monopolised by those individuals who had a particular

Conclusions

Respondents whose organisations had used YouChoose valued the tool as a means of engagement. In general, respondents found YouChoose easy to use and valued its ability to help residents understand the difficult decisions councils have to make.

It is clear however that some found the data output difficult to use to conduct their own analysis. Since the fieldwork period for this research the data output has been improved, and is now in an easy to analyse format.

Respondents who had previously used the tool were more likely to use or consider using the tool in the future than those who had not previously used it. However, there is a pool of councils who have expressed an interest in YouChoose, even asking to be set up to access the tool, but that have not actually used it as part of a budget consultation.

This suggests a need for follow up support for councils that have been set up to use the tool, as this may provide additional impetus they need to start using it.

Annex A

Table 8 - to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (Full data)

Statement		Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
YouChoose is easy to use	<i>Value (n)</i>	4	9	2	2	0	0
	<i>Value (%)</i>	24	53	12	12	0	0
YouChoose is easy to administer	<i>Value (n)</i>	4	9	0	3	0	1
	<i>Value (%)</i>	24	53	0	18	0	6
YouChoose only takes up a small amount of officer time	<i>Value (n)</i>	1	5	2	6	3	0
	<i>Value (%)</i>	6	29	12	35	18	0
YouChoose is easy for residents to understand	<i>Value (n)</i>	2	9	2	2	0	2
	<i>Value (%)</i>	12	53	12	12	0	12
YouChoose produces results that are easy to analyse	<i>Value (n)</i>	1	8	2	4	1	1
	<i>Value (%)</i>	6	47	12	24	6	6

Table 9 - please use the space below to tell us, in your own words, what is good about YouChoose (full list of comments)

<p>It is a free, off-the-shelf tool that can be customised and incorporated into wider budget consultation activity.</p>
<p>We did a budget consultation in 2010/11 using YouChoose and decided to use only the online option. Residents found it very easy to use, and the very few people that needed mediated access, achieved that in the libraries. Very easy to set up, use and share with customers.</p>
<p>Enabled contact with a wider range of age groups (attracted to the online basis of the model) than we have traditionally obtained by existing methods</p>
<p>Good interactive tool to show difficult decisions the Council has to make.</p>
<p>The raw data isn't 'analysis ready' - it would be better if it could be imported straight into SPSS, snap etc.</p>
<p>It was free to use</p>
<p>It has real educational value as it helps people to understand the difficulties involved in making savings. They can see the potential consequences of their decisions on services and council tax. It is also quick and easy for people to complete and there is not too much work involved in getting it up and running.</p>
<p>The ability to help residents see the potential impact of budget changes on services and on council tax levels. Putting them in our shoes!</p>
<p>very simple edit function, simple game yet allows lots of detail to be added by editors to inform participants</p>
<p>Look and feel of the product from a customer perspective</p>
<p>It was a simple tool for the public to use and understand. Some of it is free great, but not all, not so great.</p>

Table 10 - please use the space below to tell us how you think YouChoose could be improved (full list of comments)

<p>It felt that a lot of effort was required to get the tool working as we wanted it to.</p>
<p>N/A</p>
<p>Some people got to the end and because they didn't make the required savings, and felt they had to start again simply terminated. We had a large drop off rate of people who started the survey but didn't complete it.</p>
<p>I found it very difficult to analyse the 'back office' results despite speaking to You Choose officers. I couldn't export the data into a readable format, therefore, had to rely on top line results only, which was disappointing.</p>
<p>Better links to Social Media channels</p>
<p>How good it is depends on the information that the authority puts in - so that the effects of cutting budgets gives realistic outcomes. The big worry for me is that organisations use You Choose as their only budget consultation and think that they have ticked the consultation box. However, in my view, it is more about raising awareness of the difficult decisions that have to be made.</p>
<p>It would be helpful if information about respondents such as their age and postcode could be extracted and cross referenced more easily against responses.</p>
<p>More flexibility within the template. We used it again this year but we had to supplement it with another survey because it couldn't do what we wanted it to do.</p>
<p>Allow some bespoke changes, we have asked for minor additions such as extra ethnic categories, but despite offering to pay, have been refused by Yougov.</p>
<p>Amount of information required to work out scenarios etc.</p>
<p>1 - While we found the onscreen results easy to use and understand, at the point of wanting to download them for use in the reporting and budget setting it was impossible. We didn't have access to the software that could read the only file type you could download the results in. Excel or CSV was not an option and yet all other surveying packages allow this. When I enquired about the problem, I was told we would have to pay to get any alternative results format as this was included in a full analysis package. This was contradictory to the 'free to councils' approach which attracted us to using it. This sort of hidden cost, that is only found out when you are trying to report on the survey really disappointed us and prevented us from using it last year. There was no point if the only way to use results was a screen shot, as this offers no opportunity of</p>

analysis and understanding the response patterns or comparing customer responses. 2 - It was hard to fit our budgets to the categories included, our organisational structure and the services we provide seemed quite varied to the model used for YouGov, not sure if this is because we are a district council or not. 3 - The public gave us feedback saying they felt it was too simplistic, but this may have been because we struggled to populate the more detailed levels and had to rely on the more strategic level - this related to point 2 above.

Table 11 - as part of your budget consultation process, whether by YouChoose or any other method, what measures if any do you have in place to ensure the local population is fairly represented? (full list of comments)

- Use our Your Voice membership scheme - Hold events for groups that are traditionally underrepresented
Alongside the online simulator we also conduct a series of budget workshops with different, representative groups eg businesses, residents, voluntary and community sector, town and parish councils, staff, ward councillors etc.
Annually, three "budget events" are held in various locations (plus one for young people) which set out the financial challenges, plus an interactive workshop designed to highlight priorities and a question and answer session chaired by the leader of the council.
As the budget is set for three years, consultation isn't useful.
Budget consultation road shows
Citizens Panel is stratified to represent the whole population. We also run community forums and conduct an Equality Impact Assessment
engagement campaign
Making use of the Council's Citizens' Panel
None in place

One of the drawbacks of relying on You Choose is that it excludes people who don't have internet access.
Probably use it on our Residents' Panel
Provide a variety of mechanisms by which people can respond.
run through our customer intel team to fit our audience segmentation
SIMALTO used quota sampling to reach a representative number of residents
strong comms to promote consultation meetings, local committees, invitations to specific VCS groups, businesses and unions.
Survey questionnaires in newsletter and online.
This all depends on what you mean by 'fairly represented'! Survey using representative sample Opportunity for anyone to take part in online survey or phone survey Stakeholder meetings Focus groups with communities of interest
Use of citizens' panel Own in-house web consultation used in past
Using a research company
We are using the demographic monitoring questions in YouChoose to track response, but first making sure the invite goes to a wide range of residents through different communication channels, via our representative Citizens' Panel, and by working with the third sector. We are also designing an offline version to allow people to take part without internet access.
We carry out an annual sampled survey of residents which includes questions on priorities.
We compare the response rate to the profile of the city to ensure we have a representative profile. Our citizen panel is representative of the community.

We conduct Citizen Panel surveys and general population surveys to tease out broadly defining residents priorities. Any proposals are tested through a cycle of public/partnership meetings were detailed debate and feedback can be undertaken.

We currently use our Citizen Panel which is representative of our local population for events and a survey.

We do two major surveys a year with our Citizens Panel members (approx 700 people). They tend to be satisfaction type surveys but we also do a priority setting type survey to help with budget setting.

We engage with our residents throughout the year, and they continuously give feedback on our services.

We have a "People's Panel" who are consulted regularly

We have in the past conducted budget consultation campaigns, face to face, roadshows and online consultations both surveys and social media.

We publicise budget consultation widely, ensuring that public meetings and consultation documents are held and available across the borough as part of a mixed programme of consultation activity.

We undertake a random residents telephone survey which is split across the district. We also conduct a business telephone survey, again split by employee numbers.

We use a wide range of different consultation methods in an effort to involve as many people as possible. This includes consultation with a representative cross section of the local population drawn from our citizens' panel. We also have specific consultation activities targeting hard to reach groups.

we work with partner organisations to spread the word about the consultation among their groups, this includes equality and diversity organisations who represent the harder to reach members of our community. We also monitor consultation results to ensure a representative cross section of our community are responding and if not further promote the consultation to these groups and put in measures for them to respond in different ways if needed. This monitoring isn't possible with YouChoose though, as far as I'm aware as you can only monitor it if you ask those questions.

Table 12 - do you have any further comments, whether about YouChoose, another online budget simulator or budget consultation in general? (full list of comments)

- Very hard to use standardised models to express individual councils budget situation - You get out of it what you put in - there is a lot of effort needed in the set up to explain the processes - Would welcome more participatory approaches to budget setting rather than simple trade offs
Detailed budget type surveys are seen as "cost cutting" and are therefore subject to political sensitivity. We have looked at the online simulator scenario but as we always do a hard copy version as well, we have decided that a simulator type tool is not needed within our council.
Feeding back to those taking part is vital if you are to maintain the confidence and participation of residents in the future.
Getting the general public interested in taking part in consultation on the Council's budget can be a real challenge. We have been using YouChoose since 2010 and it has proved very useful, by providing a new and interesting way for people to contribute their views.
Given the scale of the changes undertaken so far, and those required in the future it can be difficult to incorporate this within a budget simulator. Also the complexity of some of the proposals for savings don't lend themselves to the style of short vignettes style description. However, we do think this is a useful tool and would like to use it in the future.
I absolutely loved YouChoose and if we can open up consultation again, that would be the product I'd like to use.
I have the product set up, it's just finding the right time to run the consultation
Online budget simulators do enable people to gain an idea of the impact on services from changes to the budget. They are a means of improving communication and engagement.
Only that in my view You Choose makes it easy for the organisation to tick the consultation box without really effectively consulting with residents. If it is used it should be part of a wider consultation.
seemed like a great idea and a really useful tool. Unfortunately was a complete let down at the last hurdle.
Senior leadership decided that a YouChoose budget consultation would be monopolised by those individuals who had a particular axe to grind and would not reflect the views of the community as a whole.
SIMALTO was very complex and needed to be done face to face through researchers, didn't find their online version particularly user friendly so we set a simple multiple choice survey online to complement our SIMALTO exercise. from

what i can remember of YouChoose I still think it wasn't particularly straight forward for residents and would like it to be simpler - it may have changed a lot since I last looked

The model itself is simple to use but as an authority we learnt not to get too ambitious or complicated in what we loaded into the model

The tool was demonstrated to the Corporate Management Team in 2011 and it was decided not to pursue online consultation at the time. In 2012 it was again decided not to pursue it although the issue of online consultation is likely to be revisited in the future.

The YouChoose simulator I used last year suggested that a 15% cut in Council Tax was achievable for the council in question. Needless to say council tax wasn't reduced at all, and this cut was probably unachievable. So why offer it in a budget simulator? Indeed what do we elect councillors for if not to decide where to spend public money. So why offer choices that are not real choices? Far better to ask people to prioritise services, and let elected members allocate pounds and pence against these priorities. The YouChoose tool is not this tool, so we will not be using it or any other budget simulator.

Though online surveys can give more details about a subject, it is difficult to generate a fair representation - only the very interested take part and very often have very strong views.

We have an elderly population, many not online, so it would not be representative

We've not used it yet, because we've wanted to have a face-to-face conversation with residents about the Council's budget; about the numbers and the policy and service delivery choices.

Annex B

Questionnaire

Welcome

Welcome to the YouChoose survey.

All information provided will be treated confidentially within the LGA. Only aggregated information will be used in any publication, and no identifiable information about any individual or their authority will be published without prior permission.

Please note that this survey is compatible with a number of mobile devices as well as desktop web browsers.

If you have any queries about the survey, please contact Matt Vincent at the LGA's Research and Information team on --- ---- ---- or ---.---@---

Whether the respondent has heard of YouChoose

Have you heard of YouChoose, the online budget simulation tool that is offered at no cost to councils by the LGA ?

- Yes (1)
- No (0)

Information about YouChoose

YouChoose is an online budget simulation tool that is provided in partnership by the Local Government Association, the London Borough of Redbridge and YouGov. It is offered at no cost to councils in England and Wales.

Please click the link below for more information about YouChoose, including the opportunity to try out the tool.

www.local.gov.uk/YouChoose

	Strongly agree (1)	Agree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Disagree (4)	Strongly disagree (5)	Don't know (DK)
YouChoose is easy to administer (2)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
YouChoose only takes up a small amount of officer time (3)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
YouChoose is easy for residents to understand (4)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
YouChoose produces results that are easy to analyse (5)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

What is good about YouChoose in own words

Please use the space below to tell us, in your own words, what is good about YouChoose.

How YouChoose could be improved

Please use the space below to tell us how you think YouChoose could be improved.

Whether the organisation has used another tool in the past

Has your organisation used an online budget simulation tool other than YouChoose in the past, as part of a budget consultation?

- Yes (1)
- No (0)
- Don't know (DK)

Names of past tools

Please give us the names of up to three online budget simulation tools, other than YouChoose, that your organisation has used in the past.

Where there are more than three, please state the most recent

- Tool 1 (most recent) (1) _____
- Tool 2 (2) _____
- Tool 3 (least recent) (3) _____

Whether the organisation plans to use YouChoose in the future

Do you plan to use YouChoose as part of your council's current or future budget consultation?

Please tick the statement that best suits your organisation's position

- Yes, we plan to use YouChoose as part of a current or future budget consultation (1)
- We plan to explore the possibility of using YouChoose as part of a current or future budget consultation (2)
- We have no current plans to use YouChoose as part of a current or future budget consultation (3)
- No, we will not be using YouChoose for current or future budget consultations (4)
- Don't know (DK)

Why YouChoose is not used

Why do you not plan to use YouChoose as part of future budget consultations?

Please tick the statement that best reflects your organisation's position

- We plan to use an online budget simulation tool other than YouChoose (1)
- We have developed or are developing our own local online budget simulation tool (2)

- We do not have plans to use any online budget simulation tool as our other arrangements for budget consultation are sufficient (3)
- We have no political support for online budget tools (4)
- We have no political support for any form of budget consultation (5)
- Other (please specify) (98)_____
- Don't know (DK)

Whether the organisation plans to use any tool

Does your organisation plan to use any online budget simulation tool for a current or future budget consultation?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Don't know (DK)

Name of tool

What is the name of the tool you plan to use?

Reason for using other tool

Why do you plan to use ^f('ToolName')^, rather than YouChoose?

Tick all that apply

- ^f('ToolName')^ is easier than YouChoose to set up (1)
- ^f('ToolName')^ is easier than YouChoose to administer (2)
- ^f('ToolName')^ takes up less officer time than YouChoose (3)
- ^f('ToolName')^ is easier than YouChoose for residents to understand (4)
- ^f('ToolName')^ produces results that are easier to analyse than with YouChoose (5)
- Other (please specify) (98)_____
- Don't know (DK)

The most important reason for using a another tool

Of these, which is the most important reason for using ^f('ToolName')^ instead of YouChoose?

- ^f('ToolName')^ is easier than YouChoose to set up (1)
- ^f('ToolName')^ is easier than YouChoose to administer (2)
- ^f('ToolName')^ takes up less officer time than YouChoose (3)
- ^f('ToolName')^ is easier than YouChoose for residents to understand (4)
- ^f('ToolName')^ produces results that are easier to analyse than with YouChoose (5)
- ^f('WhyTool_98_other')^ (98)
- Don't know (DK)

Why no tool is planned

Why do you not plan to use any online budget simulation tool as part of your budget setting process?

Please tick all that apply

- Online budget simulation tools are time consuming (1)
- Online budget simulation tools are not effective (2)
- We do not have the capacity to use an online budget simulation tool (3)
- Our other arrangements for budget consultation are sufficient (4)
- No political support for online budget simulation tool (5)
- No political support for any form of budget consultation (6)
- Other (please specify) (98)_____
- Don't know (DK)

The most important reason that no tool is planned

Of these, which is the most important reason for why you do not plan to use any tool?

- Online budget simulation tools are time consuming (1)
- Online budget simulation tools are not effective (2)
- We do not have the capacity to use an online budget simulation tool (3)
- Our other arrangements for budget consultation are sufficient (4)
- No political support for online budget simulation tool (5)
- No political support for any form of budget consultation (6)
- ^f('WhyNotTool_98_other')^ (98)
- Don't know (DK)

Ensuring the whole population is represented

As part of your budget consultation process, whether by YouChoose or any other method, what measures if any do you have in place to ensure the local

population is fairly represented?

Please use the space below

Respondent comments

Do you have any further comments, whether about YouChoose, another online budget simulator or budget consultation in general?

Please use the space below

Complete – Thank you

STOP

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this survey. It will help us understand the needs of the sector and improve our offer of support.

For more information please contact

Matt Vincent
Local Government Association

Local Government House
Smith Square
London SW1P 3HZ

Email: matt.vincent@local.gov.uk
Telephone: 020 7664 3000



Local Government Association

Local Government House
Smith Square
London SW1P 3HZ

Telephone 020 7664 3000
Fax 020 7664 3030
Email info@local.gov.uk
www.local.gov.uk

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please contact us on 020 7664 3000.
We consider requests on an individual basis.