Budget Engagement
Increasing Efficiency

Respondents were asked five questions through either online survey application SurveyMonkey, or during group conversations, as follows:

Q1 ***Would you be comfortable to access a broader range of services online (via a tablet, smartphone or computer)?***

- Out of a total of 889 respondents, 885 answered this question, with 84.6% answering **Yes** and 15.4% **No**.

Q2 ***If you have said 'No' please tell us why in the box below.***

A total of 95 respondents answered this question. **Key themes** included:

- **Limited computer access/knowledge/ability** – 51% of respondents noted that many people do not possess the necessary skills, hardware or software to access services online. A number also expressed concern that this may preclude or disadvantage certain sections of society, particularly the elderly.

- **Preferred personal interaction** –28% tended to favour some form of personal interaction as opposed to utilising the internet. There were various reasons for this. While a number cited limited IT skills (as above), others also noted that talking to people was often faster, less frustrating and generally more effective than accessing services online, which was described by some as an 'impersonal' method of communication.

- **Poor connectivity** –14% expressed dissatisfaction at the speed of their internet connection, and described mobile connectivity as poor or patchy in certain parts of Aberdeenshire. In a similar vein, a number of respondents (7%) noted that online services (or indeed technology generally) were poor or otherwise unreliable.

Q3 ***Do you support the principle of spending money in advance if it will deliver savings later on, for example investing in digital technology to widen the range of services available online?***

- Out of a total of 890 respondents, 811 answered this question, with 86.9% answering **Yes** and 13.1% **No**.

Q4 ***As our services change the council reviews the management and staffing support required. Should the council continue with this approach?***

Out of a total of 891 respondents, 809 answered with 93.6% answering **Yes** and 6.4% **No**.

Q5 *Please provide us with any general comments about these efficiency savings or any other suggestions.*

A total of 373 respondents answered this question. **Key themes** included:

- **Streamline staff costs/improve procedures & working practices/general efficiencies** –39% noted that efficiency savings could be made by:

    o **Streamlining costs associated with staff**, particularly those in managerial positions. Approximately 22% generally believed that there were too many supervisory roles and layers within the council, and that management could be streamlined to protect or augment those who deliver services 'on the ground'.

    Some respondents also believed that a proportion of council workers were less than 'dynamic' in terms of executing their role. A number of these respondents generally believed the council was unwieldy and overly bureaucratic (generally in comparison to the private sector).

    o **Improving working practices and procedures** and other more general efficiencies. Approximately 11% of respondents variously suggested this as a way of delivering efficiency savings. A number of suggestions were made, including improving procedures or working practices in relation to procurement or Human Resource Management. The general feeling appeared to be one of reducing duplication and repetition.

- **Long-term approach/evidence-base /solutions-focused** –21% generally expressed a need to carefully plan and fully consider any major change prior to embarking on a course that cannot be easily reversed. These respondents generally believed efficiency savings should be viewed holistically, based on evidence and as a solution to an identified problem. Some cautioned that the fast-paced nature of technology rendered hardware and systems software obsolete within a relatively short period, and that greater reliance on IT solutions may necessitate greater resources being apportioned to support them, thereby negating efficiency savings made previously.

- **Technology/digital services** – Approximately 12% of respondents variously supported increasing or promoting the use of technology and/or digital services, believing it to be more convenient and/or efficient (the main caveat being: the technology must work).

    Approximately 11% also noted that increasing use of technology may preclude certain sections of society, i.e. those who do not possess the necessary skills, hardware or software to access services online, and that it was important to maintain a balance between personal interaction and the adoption of technology as a means of delivering efficiencies.

    A number of respondents also believed that increasing the use of technology should not equate or lead to a rationalisation (i.e. loss) of jobs. Some, on the

other hand, were less concerned about the potential impact of technology on staff numbers, believing rationalisation to be an inevitable or a natural consequence of technological progress.

- **Invest in/support staff** – Approximately 8% of respondents noted that staff development and support were important factors to consider when seeking to deliver efficiencies. Some urged the Council to recognise the potential strains and stresses in the system and to ensure that its workforce are cared for and appropriately supported to do their job. Some felt that, by streamlining too much, or by implementing new systems without sufficient training, it would place a burden on staff members, which could lead to inefficiencies further down the line in terms of staff sickness and dissatisfaction, which could in turn lead to inferior services and public disapproval.