in Lancashire

Budget Consultation 2007

Fieldwork 21 November – 14 December 2007

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Lancashire County Council

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1 Executive Summary

This wave of the Life in Lancashire panel dealt with priorities for the county council budget and acceptable levels of Council Tax increase. All 1742 members of the panel were sent a single mailing of the survey. In total 1172 questionnaires were returned, giving an overall response rate of 67%.

1.1 Highest priority services for spending in 2008/9

- **Services for older people** (54%), **primary and secondary education** (50%) and **crime prevention** (49%) are seen as the highest priorities for spending in the next year. These were also the top priorities in 2005 and 2006.

1.2 Lowest spending priorities in 2008/9

- **Museums** are seen as the service that should be the lowest spending priority (40%).

- **Welfare rights** and **adult education** are seen as the next lowest priorities (35% and 31% respectively).

1.3 Level of Council Tax increase

- A quarter of the panel (24%) thought that the Council should make no increase in Council Tax, with the consequence of significantly reducing service levels.

- Only just over a quarter (27%) of the panel answer they would be prepared to pay a 5% increase, (the figure closest to the county council's estimate of 4.9%).

- The mean increase that **all panel members** would be prepared to pay is **2.9%** (including the 24% who wanted no increase).

- Of those **prepared to pay an increase** in Council Tax, the mean increase panel members would be prepared to pay is **3.8%** (76% of the panel).

2 Introduction

Lancashire County Council has used Life in Lancashire regularly since August 2001. A panel of willing participants is recruited and is approached on a regular basis to seek their views on a range of topics and themes. Panel members are voluntary participants in the research they complete and no incentives are given for completion.

The panel has been designed to be a representative cross-section of the county's population. The results for each survey are weighted in order to reflect the demographic profile of the county's population.

The panel provides access to a sufficiently large sample of the population so that reliable results can be reported at a county wide level. It also provides data at a number of sub-area and sub-group levels.

Each Life in Lancashire wave is themed. Firstly, it enables sufficient coverage on a particular topic to be able to provide insight into that topic. And secondly, it comes across better to the residents completing the questionnaires if there is a clear theme (or 2-3 clear themes) within each survey.

The panel is refreshed periodically. New members are recruited to the panel and some current members are retired on a random basis. This means that the panel remains fresh and is not subject to conditioning i.e. the views of panel members become too informed with county council services to be unrepresentative of the population as a whole.

3 Research Objectives

The objectives of this consultation are:

- to obtain an indication of the service areas that residents believe should be budget priorities for 2008/2009; and
- to obtain an understanding of what residents perceive to be an acceptable level of increase in Council Tax for 2008/2009.

This work follows on from previous budget consultations in 2003, 2004, 2005 and 2006. Some questions have been changed slightly for this questionnaire, preventing direct comparisons with these earlier projects.

4 Methodology

This special Budget Consultation wave of Life in Lancashire was sent to 1749 members of the panel on 21 November. No reminder was sent, and the fieldwork ended on 14 December 2007.

In total 1172 questionnaires were returned, giving an overall response rate of 67%.

All data are weighted by age, ethnicity and district to reflect the Lancashire overall population, and figures are based on all respondents unless otherwise stated. The weighted responses have been scaled down to match the effective response of 969, which is the equivalent size of the data if it had not been weighted and was a perfect random sample.

4.1 Limitations

The table below shows the sample tolerances that apply to the results in this survey. Sampling tolerances vary with the size of the sample as well as the percentage results.

Number of respondents	50/50 + / -	30/70 + / -	10/90 + / -
50	14%	13%	8%
100	10%	9%	6%
200	7%	6%	4%
500	4%	4%	3%
1000	3%	3%	2%
2000	2%	2%	1%

On a question where 50% of the people in a sample of 1000 respond with a particular answer, the chance are 95 out of 100 that the answer would be between 47% and 53% (ie +/- 3%), versus a complete coverage of the entire Lancashire population using the same procedure.

In charts or tables where responses do not add up to 100%, this is due to multiple responses or computer rounding.

5 Main Research Findings

5.1 Priorities for service development

The first section of the budget consultation questionnaire gave the proportion of spending and the actual expenditure on a wide range of services Lancashire County Council provides. It gave details on council expenditure in 2007/8 and the sources of council finances. It also informed panel members that despite £8 million of efficiency savings, the council expected to still need to raise Council Tax by 5.3%. (This assumed the council would receive the same amount in subsidy from the government as the previous year).

In order to keep the rise to 4.9%, the council would need to save another £1.6 million by reducing services, which was suggested to be saved through changes to social care and bus services.

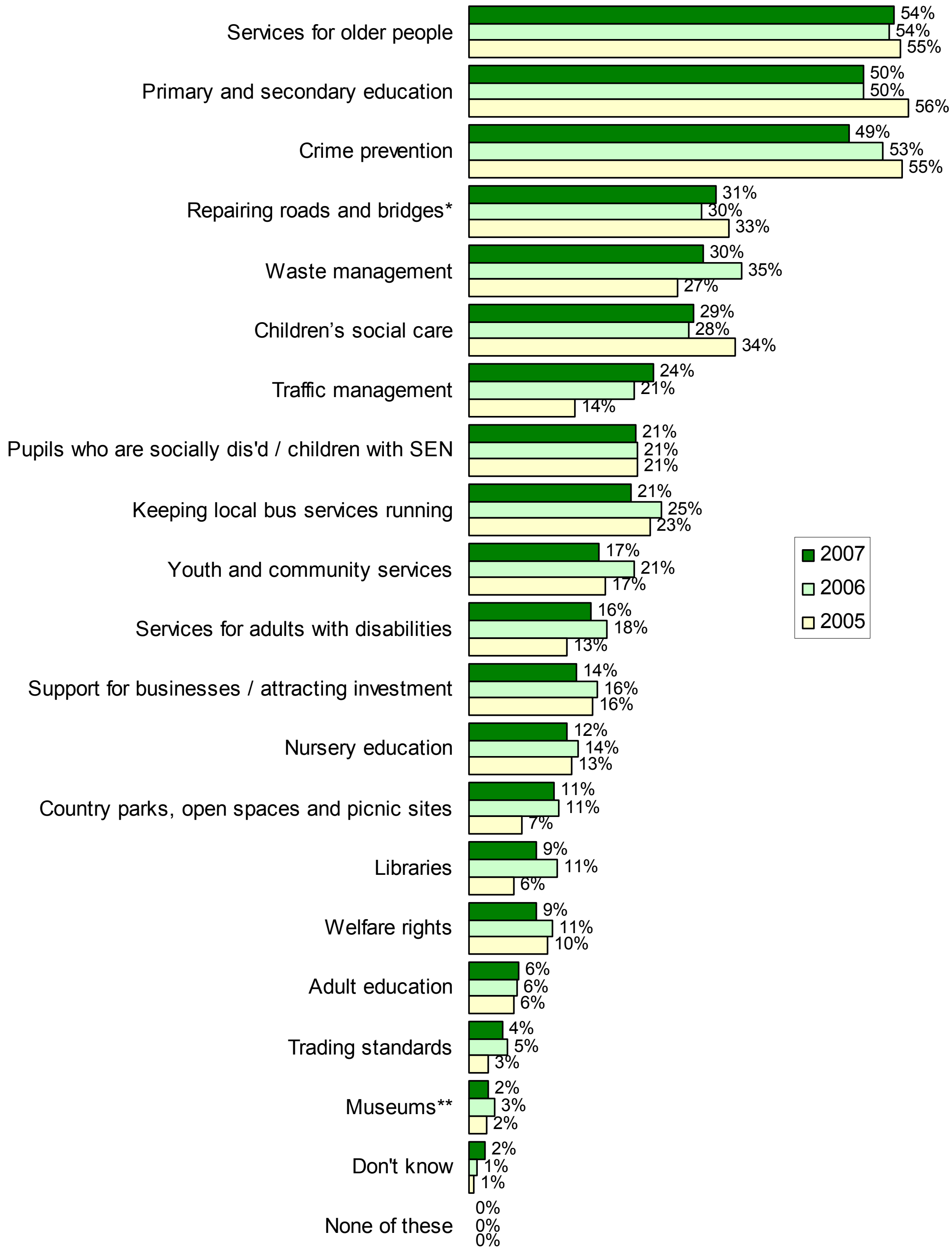
Panel members were then given a list of county council services and asked which three or four should be the highest spending priorities for the next year.

Services for older people (including care in their own homes and in residential homes), **primary and secondary education** and **crime prevention** (working with partners to help prevent crime and disorder and reduce fear of crime) (54%, 50% and 49% respectively), are the highest priorities.

Repairing roads and bridges (31%) and **waste management** (30%) are the next highest priorities, for about three in ten of the panel.

The same options were given on the budget questionnaires in 2005 and 2006, enabling the priorities to be compared over time. These are shown on the next page. The current results are broadly similar to those in 2005 and 2006, with the top three priorities remaining the same across all three years. This shows the public's spending priorities are generally staying the same.

Chart 1 - Which three or four of the following should be the highest priorities for spending next year?

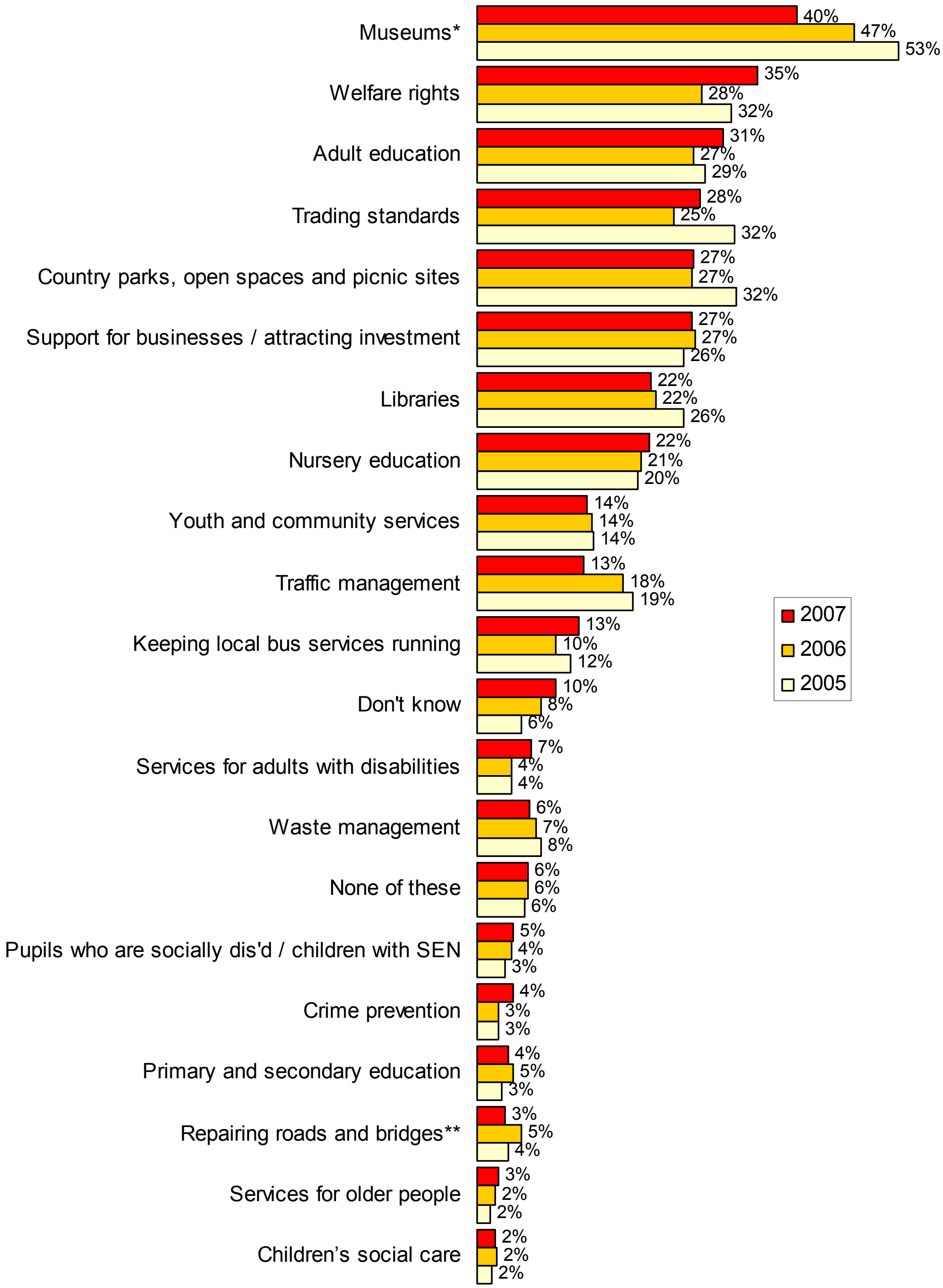


Base: All respondents (Unweighted 1172, Weighted 969)

* **Maintaining roads and bridges** in 2006 and 2005
** **Museums and galleries** in 2006 and 2005

From the same list, respondents were next asked to name the services that should be the lowest priorities for funding.

Chart 2 - Which <u>three or four</u> of the following services do you think should be the lowest priorities for spending next year?



Base: All respondents (Unweighted 1289, Weighted 1076)

* **Museums and galleries** in 2006 and 2005
** **Maintaining roads and bridges** in 2006 and 2005

As in the 2005 and 2006 surveys, **museums** are seen as the services that should be the lowest priorities for spending next year (40%), though the proportion saying so has decreased across the three surveys. (This was listed as **museums and galleries** on the previous surveys, which may have had an effect on the response).

Welfare rights (35%) and **adult education** (31%) are seen as the next lowest priorities. **Trading standards**, **country parks** and **support for businesses and attracting investment to Lancashire** are also seen as relatively low priorities, by just over a quarter of panel members.

Several service areas have significant differences in the priorities by subgroup within the panel. These are outlined below.

5.2 Individual services - high priority for spending

5.2.1 Services for older people

Perhaps as might be expected, the priority of services for older people is closely related to the age of the panel member. Older people's services are the highest spending priority for respondents aged 45-59 years (61%) and those 60 years and over (70%). The result for both groups is significantly higher than that for the under 25s (25%) and those aged 25-44 years (39%).

5.2.2 Primary and secondary education

This was the highest priority for those aged 16 to 24 years (67%), and 25 to 44 years (62%). While still a priority, it was less important for those aged 45-59 years (47%) or 60 years or over (39%).

5.2.3 Crime prevention

The importance of crime prevention also increases with age. It is the second highest priority for those aged 60 years and over (58%), 45 to 59 years (49%) and 25 to 44 years (43%). It is of relatively low priority to Lancashire residents aged less than 25 (25%).

5.2.4 Other services

Panel members aged 16 to 24 years were particularly likely to mention children's social care as priority for spending (58%, the second highest for the group). Those in the oldest age group (60 years and over) were twice as likely to suggest keeping local bus services running as any other age group (33%). Welfare rights was much more likely to be mentioned by those who do not work (14%), (eg because of unemployment, retirement or education) than those that work full time (5%) or part-time (3%). This reflects the relative importance of benefits and support amongst those who do not work.

5.3 Individual services - low priority for spending

5.3.1 Museums

The oldest age group (60 years and over) (44%) are significantly more likely to put museums as a low priority for spending than those aged 16 to 24 years (27%) and 25 to 44 years (39%).

5.3.2 Welfare rights

The welfare rights service is the second most mentioned low priority for spending next year (35%). This is a significantly lower priority for those in work (42% versus 28%).

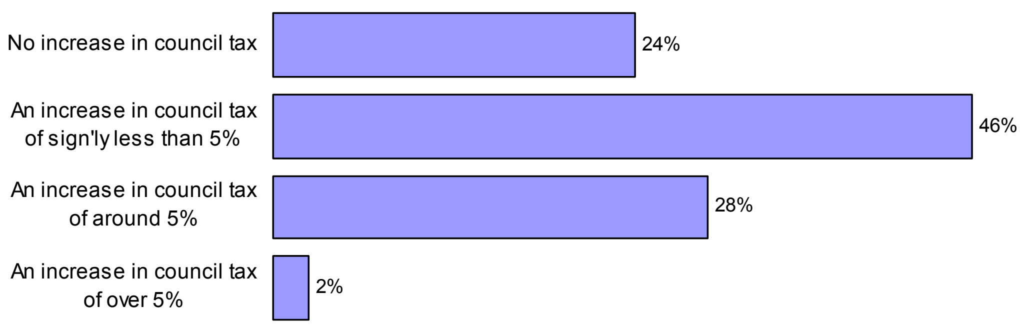
5.3.3 Support for businesses and attracting investment to Lancashire

This is significantly more likely to be a low priority in the seven districts of west Lancashire (29%) than the five districts of east Lancashire (21%). This possibly reflects the relative prosperity of the two halves of the county.

5.4 Opinion on acceptable levels of Council Tax increase

Panel members were then given a set of options on what the council should do about increasing Council Tax next year. The highest individual proportion would support **an increase in Council Tax of significantly less than 5%** (46%), which would mean some reductions in services. Around three in ten would accept an **increase in Council Tax of around 5%, in line with the council's current proposals** (28%). A quarter would only accept **no increase in Council Tax** (24%).

Chart 3 - Which of the following most closely matches your opinion on what the council should do about increasing Council Tax next year?

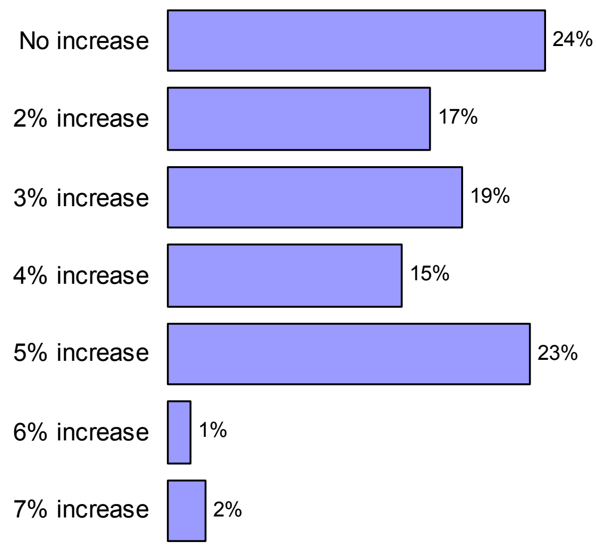


Base: All respondents (Unweighted 1289, Weighted 1076)

By subgroups there are some differences, with almost two-thirds of respondents from an ethnic minority suggesting no increase in Council Tax (64%). This is significantly more than the proportion of white respondents (22%). Panel members with a disability were more likely to answer no increase (27%), than those without a disability (22%).

For the final question, those who answered they would support some increase in Council Tax were asked what increase this would be. Chart 4 shows the response to this, with the proportion answering that they would only accept no increase, to give a clearer picture.

Chart 4 - What level of increase do you feel you could support?



Base: All respondents (Unweighted 1126, Weighted 936)

By subgroup for the above measure, again those with a disability and panel members from an ethnic minority are less likely to suggest a higher increase. Respondents from the highest AB social grade[1] are more likely to suggest a higher increase than any other socio-economic group, reflecting their higher average wealth. Respondents who are light service users (using six or less local services in the last year) are significantly less likely to suggest an increase than medium or high service users (30% answer no increase).

The mean increase for all who would support some increase is **3.8%**. The mean increase for all respondents, including those who did not want any increase is **2.9%**. (This 2.9% figure corresponds with an average of 3.3% on the 2006 survey. This survey is not truly comparable however, since it gave the question with slightly different options, with an 8% option and no 2%).

[1] See appendix 6.1 for definitions

Table 1 shows the proportions of the panel that are prepared to pay each increase option, and the total proportion of the panel who would be prepared to pay each option or more. Only just over a quarter (27%) of the panel answer they would be prepared to pay a 5% increase, (the figure closest to the county council's estimate of 4.9%).

Table 1 - Proportions of respondents prepared to pay increase

Increase in Council Tax 2008/9	Proportion of all respondents prepared to pay increase	Cumulative % of all respondents prepared to pay increase
No increase	**24%**	**100%**
2%	**17%**	**76%**
3%	**19%**	**60%**
4%	**15%**	**41%**
5%	**23%**	**27%**
6%	**1%**	**4%**
7%	**2%**	**2%**
Base: All respondents (Unweighted 1126, Weighted 936)		

6 Appendix

6.1 Socio-Economic-Group Definitions

These groups are based on Market Research Society definitions and on the respondent. They are graded as A, B, C1, C2, D and E.

Group A

- Professional people, very senior managers in business or commerce or top-level civil servants.
- Retired people, previously grade A, and their widows

Group B

- Middle management executives in large organisations, with appropriate qualifications
- Principle officers in local government and civil service
- Top management or owners of small business concerns, educational and service establishments
- Retired people previously grade B, and their widows

Group C1

- Junior management, owners of small establishments, and all others in non-manual positions
- Jobs in this group have very varied responsibilities and educational requirements
- Retired people, previously grade C1, and their widows

Group C2

- All skilled manual workers, and those manual workers for responsibility for other people
- Retired people, previously grade C2, with pensions from their job
- Widows, if receiving pensions from their late partner's job

Group D

- All semi skilled and unskilled manual workers, and apprentices and trainees to skilled workers
- Retired people, previously grade D, with pensions from their late job
- Widows, if receiving pensions from their late partner's job

Group E

- All those entirely dependant on the state long term, through sickness, unemployment, old age or other reasons
- Those unemployed for a period exceeding six months (otherwise classified on previous occupation)
- Casual workers and those without a regular income