in Lancashire

Budget Consultation 2008

Fieldwork 11 June – 18 July 2007

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August 2008

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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. The survey was sent to all 3301 members of the panel. In total 2553 questionnaires were returned, giving an overall response rate of 77%.

1.1 Highest priority services for spending in 2009/10

- **Services for older people** (57%), **primary and secondary education** (53%) and **crime prevention** (50%) are seen as the highest priorities for spending in the next year. These were also the top priorities in 2006 and 2007.

1.2 Lowest spending priorities in 2009/10

- **Museums** are seen as the service that should be the lowest spending priority (47%).

- **Welfare rights** and **adult education** are seen as the next lowest priorities (33% and 30% respectively).

1.3 Level of Council Tax increase

- More than a quarter of the panel (28%) 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 4% increase, (the figure closest to the county council's estimate of 4.3%, based on the budget forecast for 2009/10 at the time of the survey).

- The mean increase that **all panel members** would be prepared to pay is **2.4%** (including the 28% 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 **3.4%** (72% 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 2009/2010; and
- to obtain an understanding of what residents perceive to be an acceptable level of increase in Council Tax for 2009/2010.

This work follows on from previous yearly budget consultations that have taken place since 2003.

4 Methodology

This wave of Life in Lancashire research was sent to 3301 members of the panel on 11 June. A reminder was sent on the 2 July, and the fieldwork ended on 17 July 2008.

In total 2553 questionnaires were returned, giving an overall response rate of 77%.

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 to match the effective response of 2147, 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 2008/9 and the sources of council finances. It also informed panel members of the county council budget forecast for the next two years.

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. These priorities are shown on chart one.

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) (57%, 53% and 50% respectively) are the highest priorities.

Children's social care (30%) and **keeping local bus services running** (29%) are the next highest priorities, for about three in ten of the panel.

The same options were given on the budget questionnaires in 2006 and 2007, enabling the priorities to be compared over time. The current results are broadly similar to those in 2006 and 2007, with the top three priorities remaining the same across all three years. This shows the public's spending priorities are generally staying the same. However, keeping local bus services running has become more important this year (rising 8% from 2007).

5.1.1 Individual services - high priority for spending

Services for older people
Perhaps as might be expected, the priority of services for older people is once again closely related to the age of the panel member. Older people's services are the highest spending priority for those 60 years and over (70%) compared to all younger respondents. Respondents aged 45-59 years (60%) are also more likely to say it is a priority compared to those aged 25-44 years (46%).

Primary and secondary education
This was the highest priority for those aged 25 to 44 years (62%). While still a priority, it was less important for those aged 45-59 years (49%) or 60 years or over (46%). Also where respondents have children in the household it is a higher priority (72%) compared to households without children (49%).

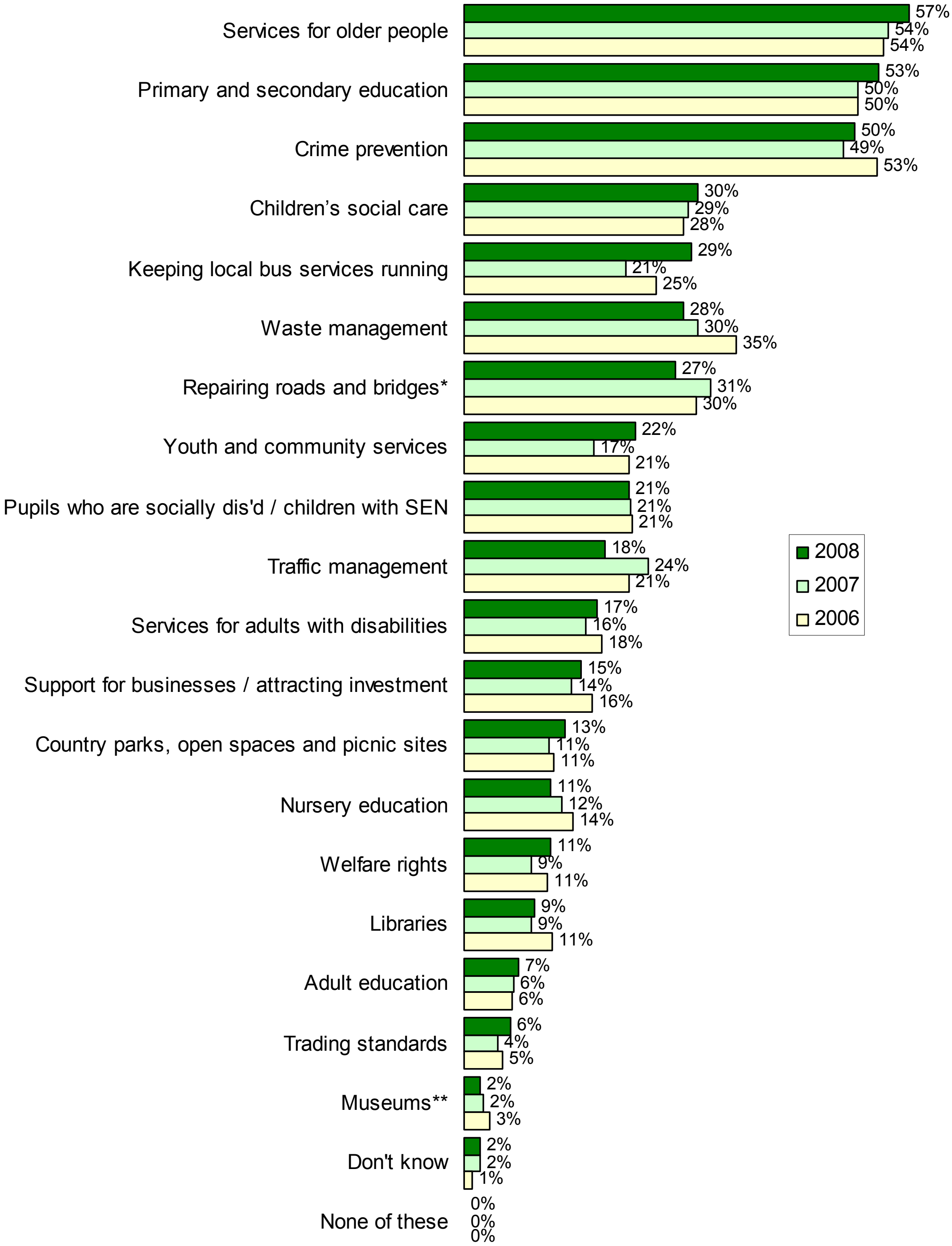
Crime prevention
Crime prevention is important to all respondents, being in the top four priorities for all age groups. However it is significantly more important for the over 60s, the second highest priority (54%), compared to respondents aged 45 to 59 years (47%).

Keeping local bus services running
The importance of keeping local bus services running is more important to the over 60s (44%), people who live in council or housing association property (39%), people who don't work (37%) and the lowest social groups (DE 35%). This could be because these people are less likely to have access to a car.

Other services
Panel members aged 25 to 44 were almost twice as likely to suggest youth and community services and country parks as the older age groups (29% and 18% respectively).

Welfare rights was much more likely to be mentioned by those who do not work (15%) (eg because of unemployment, retirement or education), and for the over 60s (16%) and those in the lower social groups (C2 18%, DE 17%). This reflects the relative importance of benefits and support amongst those who do not work or are on lower incomes.

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



Base: All respondents (Unweighted 2505, Weighted 2110)

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

From the same list of county council services, respondents were next asked to name the services that should be the lowest priorities for funding. The lowest priorities are shown on chart two.

As in the 2006 and 2007 surveys, **museums** are seen as the services that should be the lowest priority for spending next year (47%); the proportion saying so has increased by 7% since 2007 so it is now at a similar level to 2006[1].

Welfare rights (33%) and **adult education** (30%) are seen as the next lowest priorities. **Trading standards**, **support for businesses and attracting investment to Lancashire**, and **country parks** are also seen as relatively low priorities (by around a quarter of panel members). The ranking of the lowest priorities hasn't changed over the last year.

5.1.2 Individual services - low priority for spending

Museums
The oldest age group (60 years and over) (53%) are significantly more likely to put museums as a low priority for spending than those aged 45 to 59 years (46%). The highest social groups (AB) however are less likely to put museums as a low priority (39%) compared to all the other social groups (C1 46%, C2 52% and DE 53%).

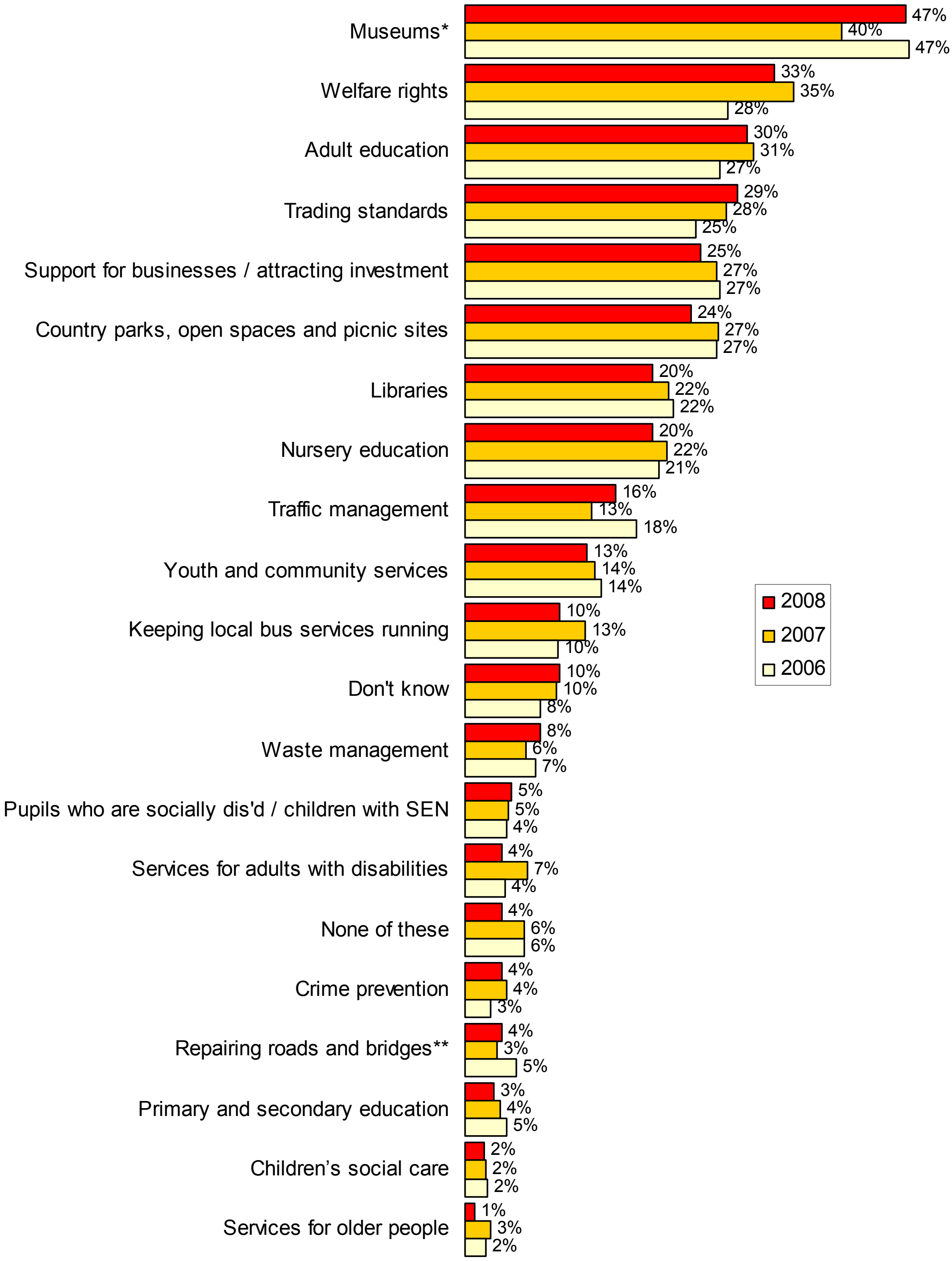
Welfare rights
The welfare rights service is the second most mentioned low priority for spending next year (32%). This is a significantly lower priority for those in full-time work (41%) and for people in the highest social groups (AB 46%).

Adult education
Adult education is more likely to be mentioned as a low priority by the over 60s (36%) compared to those aged 25 to 44 (27%) and 45 to 59 (28%).

Support for businesses and attracting investment to Lancashire
This is significantly less likely to be mentioned as a low priority in Burnley (9%) compared to the districts in west Lancashire (where it is around three times more likely to be mentioned in each district). This possibly reflects the relative prosperity of the different districts.

[1] This was listed as **museums and galleries** on the 2006 survey, which may have had an effect on the response

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



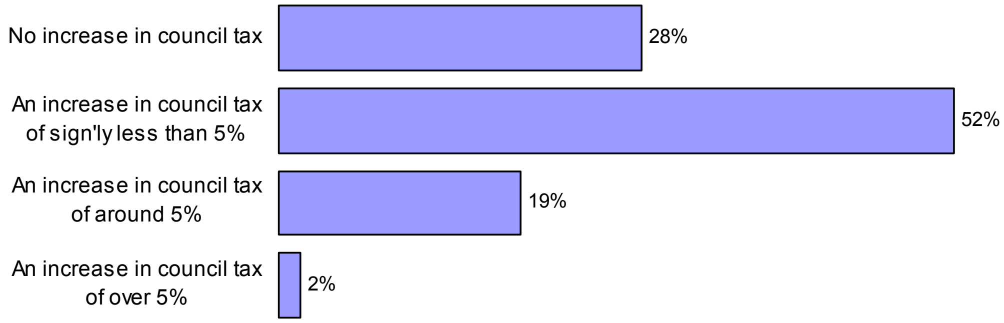
Base: All respondents (Unweighted 2243, Weighted 1916)

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

5.2 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%** (52%). Around one in five would accept an **increase in Council Tax of around 5%** (19%). A quarter would only accept **no increase in Council Tax** (28%).

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

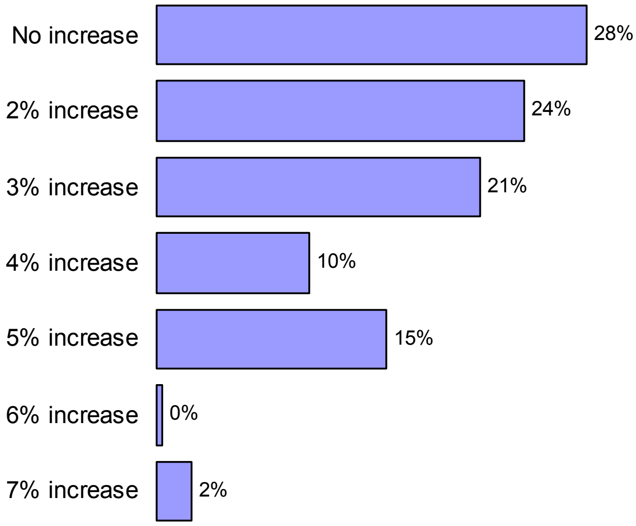


Base: All respondents (Unweighted 2399, Weighted 2039)

By subgroups there are some differences, with three-fifths of respondents from an ethnic minority suggesting no increase in Council Tax (60%). This is significantly more than the proportion of white respondents (26%). Panel members with children in the household were more likely to answer no increase (36%), than those without children in the household (26%). Whereas panel members in the higher social groups (AB) were more likely to say they can accept a higher increase (30% an increase in Council Tax of around 5%).

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 2399, Weighted 2044)

By subgroup for the above measure, again those panel members from an ethnic minority or with children in the household are less likely to suggest a higher increase. Respondents from the highest AB social grade[2] 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 high service users (34% answer no increase).

The mean increase for all who would support some increase is **3.4%**. The mean increase for all respondents, including those who did not want any increase is **2.4%**. This mean increase figure has fallen since the 2007 survey (2.9% mean increase), perhaps because of rising living costs and economic uncertainty.

[2] 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 of the panel (27%) answer they would be prepared to pay a 4% increase (the figure closest to the county council's estimate of 4.3%, based on the budget forecast for 2009/10 at the time of the survey).

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	**28%**	**100%**
2%	**24%**	**72%**
3%	**21%**	**48%**
4%	**10%**	**27%**
5%	**15%**	**18%**
6%	**0%**	**3%**
7%	**2%**	**2%**
Base: All respondents (Unweighted 2399, Weighted 2044)		

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