Living in Lancashire:
Budget Consultation 2009

Fieldwork 18 November – 11 December 2009

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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 2758 members of the panel. In total 1957 questionnaires were returned, giving an overall response rate of 70%.

1.1 Highest priority services for spending in the coming years

- **Services for older people** (53%), **primary and secondary education** (46%) and **crime prevention** (38%) are seen as the highest priorities for spending in the next year. These were also the top priorities in 2008 and 2007.

1.2 Lowest spending priorities in the coming years

- **Museums** are seen as the service that should be the lowest spending priority (48%), which was also the lowest priority for spending in 2008.

- **Country parks, open spaces and picnic sites** and **welfare rights** are seen as the next lowest priorities (34% and 30% respectively).

1.3 Level of Council Tax increase

- A third of the panel (33%) thought that the council should make no increase in Council Tax, with the consequence of significantly reducing service levels, which is in line with the county council's proposals.

- Only two-fifths of the panel say they would be prepared to pay a 3% or more increase in Council Tax (39%).

2 Introduction

Lancashire County Council has used Living 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 Living 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 the coming years; and
- to obtain an understanding of what residents perceive to be an acceptable level of increase in Council Tax for 2010/2011.

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

4 Methodology

This wave of Living in Lancashire research was sent to 2785 members of the panel on 18 November. No reminders were sent, and the fieldwork ended on 11 December 2009.

In total 1957 questionnaires were returned, giving an overall response rate of 70%.

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 1456, 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 plans for the following 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 coming years[1]. 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) (53%, 46% and 38% respectively) are the highest priorities.

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

The same options were given on the budget questionnaires in 2008 and 2007, enabling the priorities to be compared over time. The current results are broadly similar to those in 2007 and 2008, 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, the proportion of respondents mentioning each of these priorities has fallen.

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 a higher priority for those 60 years and over (65%), and are also more important among those aged 45 to 59 (56%) compared to younger respondents.

Primary and secondary education
This was the highest priority for those aged 25 to 44 years (55%), as it was in 2008. While still a priority, it was less important for those aged 45-59 years (42%) or 60 years or over (36%). Also where respondents have children in the household it is a higher priority (58%) compared to households without children (43%).

[1] This is a slight change in wording from previous surveys where respondents have been asked for their priorities for the coming year.

Crime prevention
Crime prevention is an important priority for all respondents. However it is significantly less important for BME respondents (28%) compared to white respondents (39%).

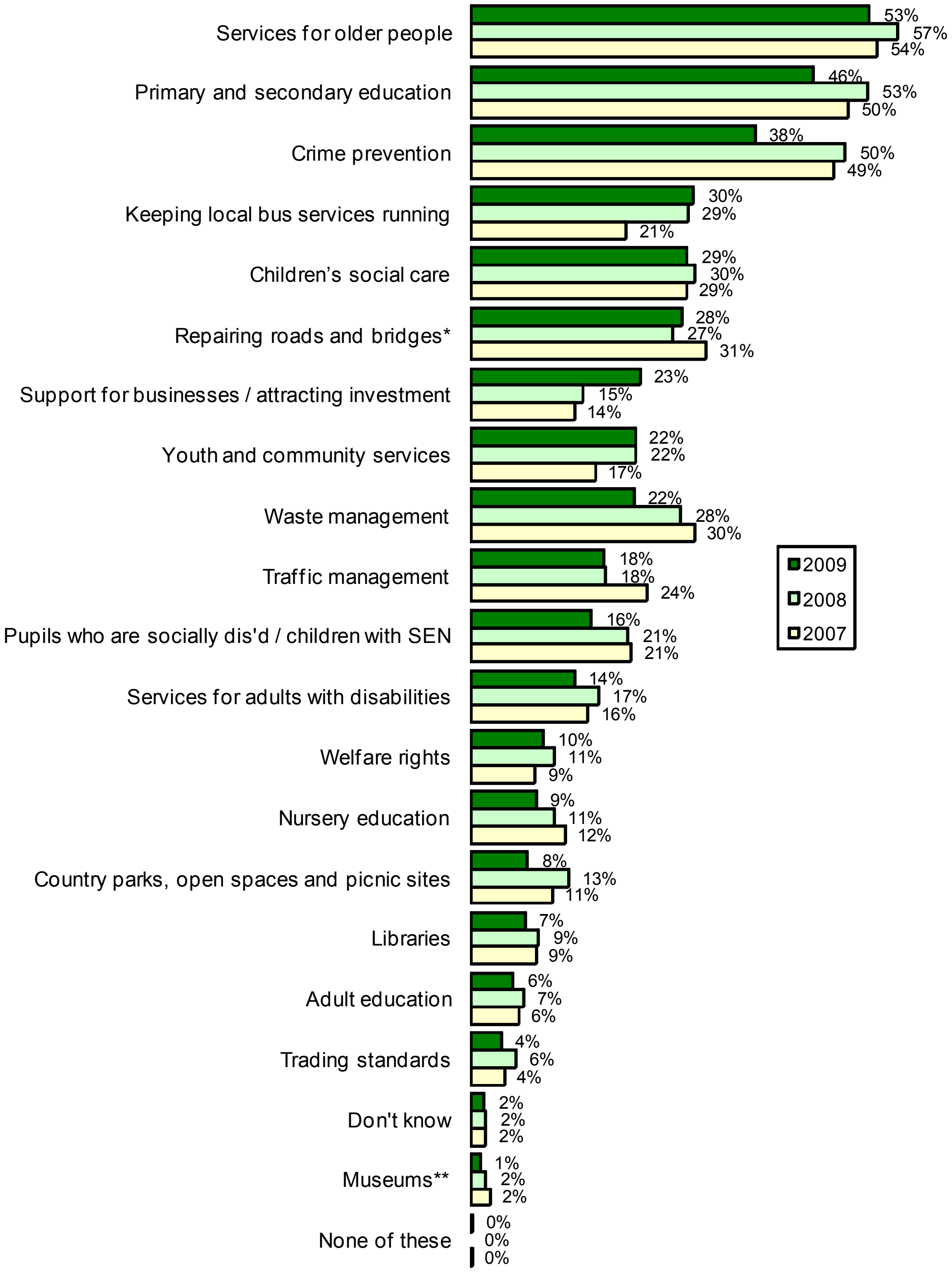
Keeping local bus services running
The importance of keeping local bus services running is more important to people who don't have access to a vehicle in their household (51%), people who live in council or housing association property (49%), the over 60s (44%), those with a disability (38%), and women (34%).

Other services
Children's social care is a higher priority for those living in council or housing association property (42%), and among women (34%). Services for adults with disabilities are more important priorities for respondents from an ethnic minority (24%), those with a disability and those in the lowest socio-economic groups DE (21% both).

Panel members aged 25 to 44 were significantly more likely to suggest youth and community services and country parks as the older age groups (28% and 15% respectively).

Welfare rights were much more likely to be mentioned by those who are in the lowest socio-economic groups (DE, 18%) and by respondents from an ethnic minority (21%). Respondents from an ethnic minority were also more likely to prioritise support for pupils who are socially disadvantaged or with special educational needs (34%).

Chart 1 - Which <u>three or four</u> of the following should be the highest priorities for spending in the coming years[2]?



Base: All respondents (Unweighted 1817, Weighted 1438)

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

[2] Question wording has previously been "Which <u>three or four</u> of the following should be the highest priorities for spending next year?".

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 2008 and 2007 surveys, **museums** are seen as the services that should be the lowest priority for spending next year (48%). **Country parks, open spaces and picnic sites** (34%) is the next lowest priority, with significantly more respondents mentioning it than in 2008 (10% increase). **Welfare rights** (30%), **trading standards** (27%), **adult education** (24%) and **libraries** (21%) are also seen as relatively low priorities.

5.1.2 Individual services - low priority for spending

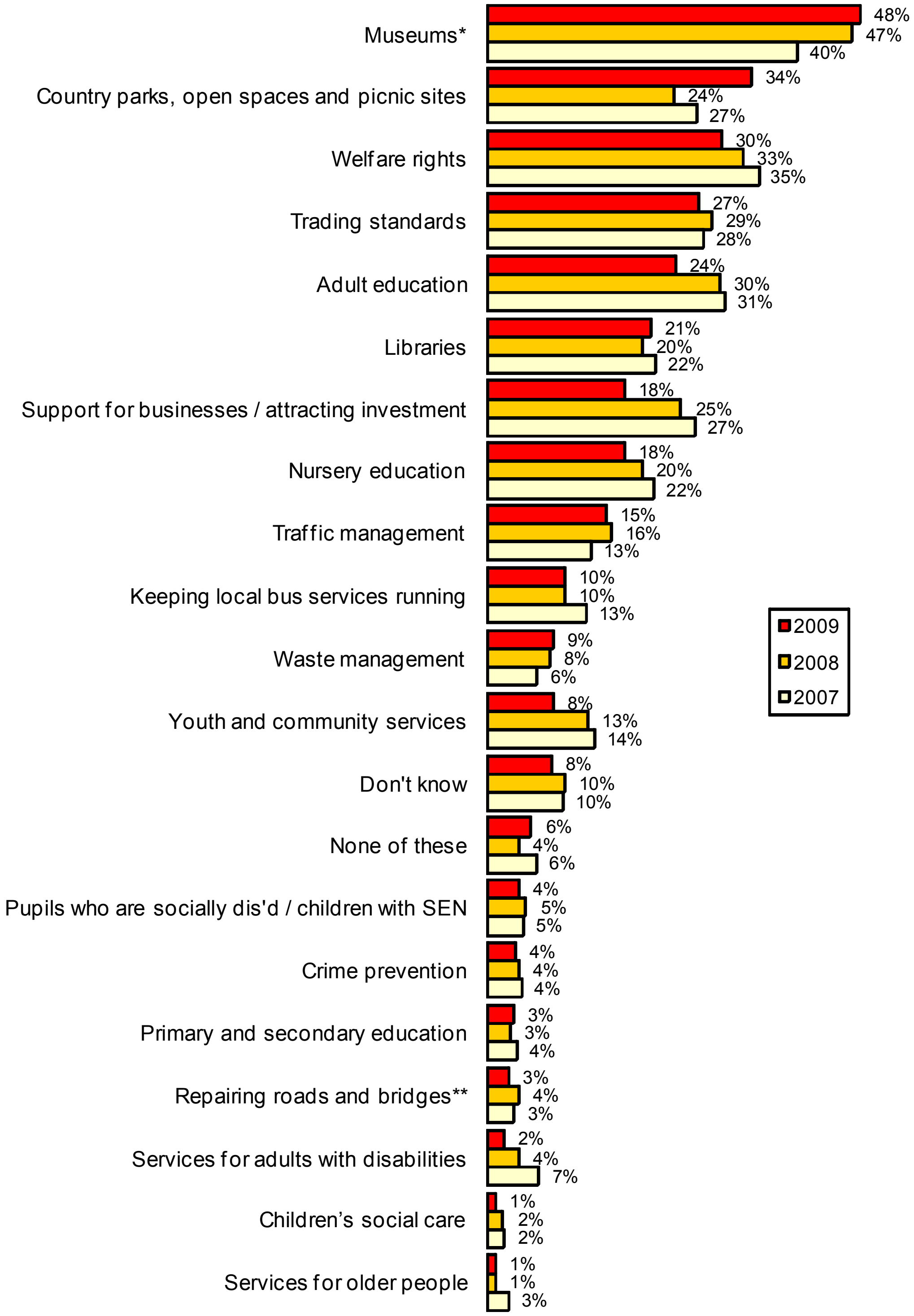
Museums and country parks
Museums and country parks are consistently mentioned by all the different demographic groups as a low priority for spending. However, respondents from a BME background (56%) and respondents who don't have children under 18 in the household (35%) place country parks as a lower priority.

Welfare rights
The respondents who put welfare rights as a low priority are in the highest socio-economic group AB (44%), whereas respondents from an ethnic minority are less likely to rate them as a low priority (20%).

Adult education
Adult education is more likely to be mentioned as a low priority by the over 60s (31%) compared to those aged 25 to 44 (17%), and it is more likely to be suggested a low priority among men and part-time workers (29% both).

Libraries
This is significantly more likely to be mentioned as a low priority by those living in council or housing association property (39%), BME respondents (32%), those with children in the household (27%) and men (26%).

Chart 2 - And which <u>three or four</u> of the following services do you think should be the lowest priorities for spending in coming years?[3]



Base: All respondents (Unweighted 1650, Weighted 1308)

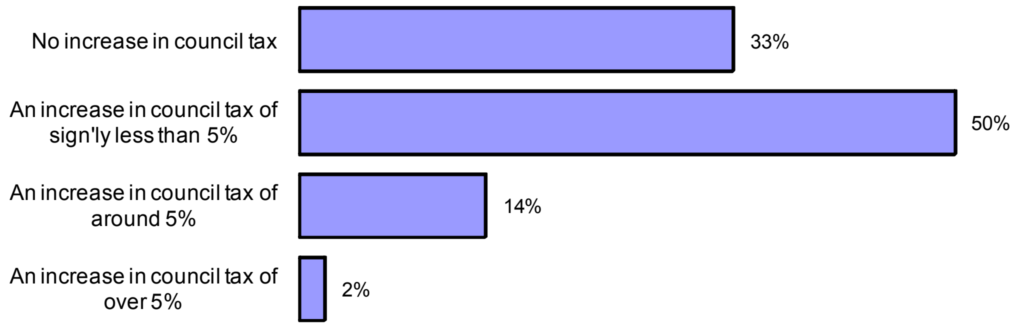
* **Museums and galleries** in 2006 and 2005
** **Maintaining roads and bridges** in 2006 and 2005

[3] Question wording has previously been "Which <u>three or four</u> of the following services do you think should be the lowest priorities for spending next year?".

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%** (50%). Around one in seven would accept an **increase in Council Tax of around 5%** (14%). A third would only accept **no increase in Council Tax** (33%).

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

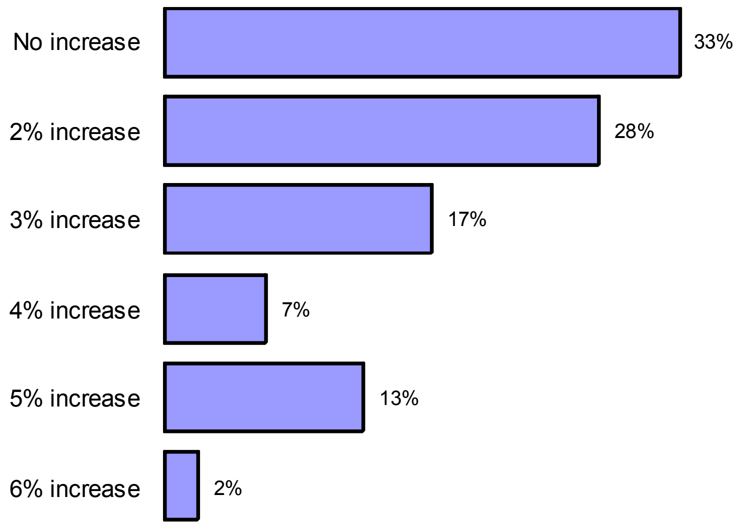


Base: All respondents (Unweighted 1835, Weighted 1442)

By subgroups there are some differences, with half of respondents from an ethnic minority suggesting no increase in Council Tax (50%). This is significantly more than the proportion of white respondents (31%). Panel members with children in the household were more likely to answer no increase (42%), than those without children in the household (31%). Panel members in the lowest social groups (C2 and DE) were more likely to say they wanted no increase (38% and 37% respectively), as were respondents who are light users of council services (37%, use six or less local services in the last year).

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 from the previous question, to give a clearer picture.

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



Base: All respondents (Unweighted 1842, Weighted 1448)

By subgroup for the above measure, again those panel members from an ethnic minority or in the lowest socio-economic groups (C2 and DE) and light service users who are less likely to suggest a higher increase.

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 two-fifths of the panel (39%) answer they would be prepared to pay a 3% increase.

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	**33%**	**100%**
2%	**28%**	**67%**
3%	**17%**	**39%**
4%	**7%**	**22%**
5%	**13%**	**15%**
6%	**2%**	**2%**
Base: All respondents (Unweighted 1842, Weighted 1448)		

6 Appendix

6.1 Appendix 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

6.2 Appendix 2: marked up questionnaire

Which three or four of the following should be the highest/lowest spending priorities for spending in the coming years?	Highest priorities	Lowest priorities
Services for older people (including care in their own homes and in residential homes)	53%	1%
Primary and secondary education	46%	3%
Crime prevention (working with partner organisations to help prevent crime and disorder and reduce the fear of crime)	38%	4%
Keeping local bus services running	30%	10%
Children's social care (protecting vulnerable children)	29%	1%
Repairing roads and bridges (including emergencies and fixing potholes)	28%	3%
Support for businesses and attracting investment to Lancashire	23%	18%
Youth and community services (activities and support for young people)	22%	8%
Waste management (household waste disposal and recycling)	22%	9%
Traffic management (making road travel safer and reducing congestion)	18%	15%
Pupils who are socially disadvantaged and children with special educational needs	16%	4%
Services for adults with disabilities	14%	2%
Welfare rights (helping people get the financial support they are entitled to)	10%	30%
Nursery education	9%	18%
Country parks, open spaces and picnic sites	8%	34%
Libraries	7%	21%
Adult education	6%	24%
Trading standards (consumer protection)	4%	27%
Don't know	2%	8%
Museums	1%	48%
None of these	0%	6%
Unweighted base	**1817**	**1650**
Weighted base	**1438**	**1308**

Which of the following most closely matches your opinion on what the council should do about increasing Council Tax next year?	
No increase in council tax, which would mean reductions in county council services	33%
An increase in council tax of significantly less than 5%	50%
An increase in council tax of around 5%	14%
An increase in council tax of over 5%	2%
Unweighted base	1835
Weighted base	1442

And what level of increase do you feel you could support?	
2% increase	41%
3% increase	26%
4% increase	10%
5% increase	19%
6% increase	3%
Unweighted base	1279
Weighted base	1001