Budget Consultation 2006

Fieldwork 23 November – 16 December 2006

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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 1850 members of the panel were sent two mailings of the survey. In total 1289 questionnaires were returned, giving an overall response rate of 70%.

1.1 Highest priority services for spending in 2007/8

- **Services for older people** (54%), **crime prevention** (53%) and **primary and secondary education** (50%) are seen as the highest priorities for spending in the next year.

1.2 Lowest spending priorities in 2007/8

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

- **Welfare rights, support for businesses and attracting investment to Lancashire, adult education** and **country parks** are seen as the next lowest priorities, by just over a quarter of panel members.

1.3 Increase in Council Tax

- Three in ten of the panel (30%) thought that the Council should make no increase in council tax, with the consequence of significantly reducing service levels.

- A third (34%) supports an increase of 5% in line with the council's proposals, which would mean some reduction in services (34%).

- Close to half of panel members are willing to accept the proposed increase of 5%, or more (43%). However more than half (57%, including those who proposed no increase), suggest a lower increase.

- Of those prepared to pay an increase in council tax (70% of the panel), the mean increase panel members would be prepared to pay is **4.7%**.

- The mean increase that all panel members (including the 30% who wanted no increase) would be prepared to pay is **3.3%**.

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. The current panel was recruited in September 2003 with a top up recruitments undertaken in 2004, and 2005, so this effect should be small.

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 2007/2008; and
- to obtain an understanding of what residents perceive to be an acceptable level of increase in council tax for 2007/2008.

This work follows on from previous budget consultations in 2003, 2004 and 2005. 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 1850 members of the panel on 8 November. A reminder was sent on 29 November. The fieldwork ended on 15 December 2006.

No incentive for respondents to complete the questionnaire was given. In total 1289 questionnaires were returned, giving an overall response rate of 70%.

All data are weighted by gender, 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 1076, 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.

A key difference of the budget consultation this year is that it took the part of a Life in Lancashire panel wave questionnaire. This meant the questions were asked as part of a larger questionnaire which also included sections on transport and communications. Previous budget consultations have been stand-alone waves of Life in Lancashire.

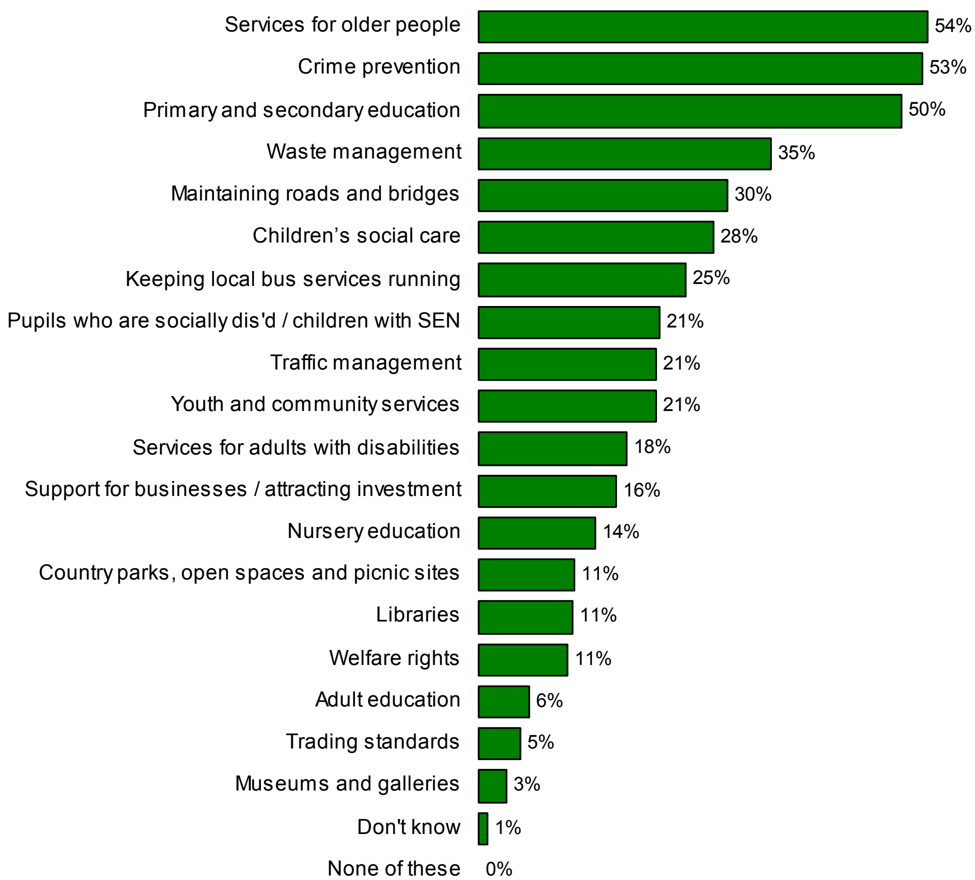
5 Main Research Findings

5.1 Priorities for service development

The first section of the budget consultation questionnaire gave the proportion of and actual expenditure on a wide range of services Lancashire County Council provides. It gave details on council expenditure in 2006/7 and the sources of council finances. It also informed panel members that in 2006, the county council agreed to limit council tax increases for 2007/8 to 5%; this would require a combination of efficiency savings and reduction in services.

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

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



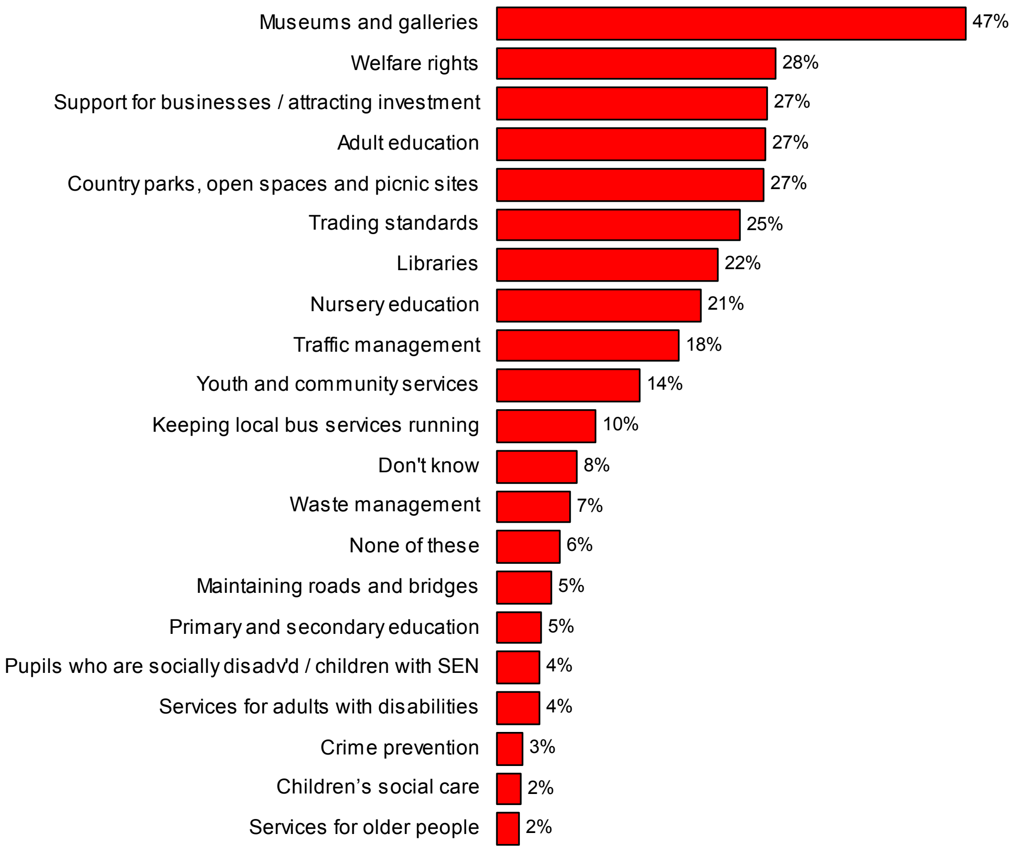
Base: All respondents (Unweighted 1289, Weighted 1076)

Services for older people (including care in their own homes and in residential homes) **crime prevention** (working with partners to help prevent crime and disorder and reduce fear of crime) and **primary and secondary education** (54%, 53% and 50% respectively), are the highest priorities.

Waste management (35%) and **maintaining roads and bridges** (30%) are the next highest priorities, for about a third of the panel.

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

Chart 2 - Which three or four 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 are seen as the services that should be the lowest priorities for spending next year (47%). **Welfare rights, support for businesses and attracting investment to Lancashire, adult education** and **country parks** are seen as the next lowest priorities, by just over a quarter of panel members.

The responses are very similar to those of 2005 for both the highest and lowest priorities. The highest three priorities then were again services for **older people** (55%), **crime prevention** (55%) and **primary and secondary education** (56%). The most mentioned low priority was **museums and galleries** (53%) followed by **welfare rights**, **country parks** and **trading standards** (all 32%).

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

5.2 Individual services - high priority for spending

5.2.1 Services for older people

Services for older people are the highest spending priority for respondents aged 45-59 years (62%) and those over 60 years (66%). The result for the over 60 age group is significantly higher than that for the under 25s (32%) and those aged 25-44 years (42%).

5.2.2 Primary and secondary education

Respondents aged 25-44 years, or under 25, were significantly more likely to give primary and secondary education as a priority (63% and 61%) compared to those aged 45-59 years (53%) or 60 years or over (46%). Part-time workers (63%) and heavy service users (60%) were also more likely than average to name it.

5.2.3 Waste management

Panel members aged 25-44 years were more likely to mention waste management compared to any other group.

People living in council or housing association housing were significantly more likely to mention services for pupils who are socially disadvantaged and children with special educational needs (34% compared with 22% overall). They were also twice as likely to mention services for adults with disabilities as the panel overall (37% compared with 18%), and three times as likely to prioritise welfare rights (34% against 10%). This may reflect a greater dependence on these services by people in rented accommodation.

5.3 Individual services - low priority for spending

5.3.1 Museums and galleries

Women (51%) are significantly more likely to put museums and galleries as a low priority for spending than men (42%).

5.3.2 Welfare rights

The welfare rights service is the second most mentioned low priority for spending next year, however the proportion naming varies from 36% of socio-economic group AB (professional, managerial roles), to only 20% of group DE (semi-skilled to unskilled manual and state dependant). This reflects the greater need for the service amongst less affluent groups.

5.3.3 Adult education

Respondents from socio-economic group C2 (skilled manual workers) were most likely to place adult education as a low priority (42% against 27% overall).

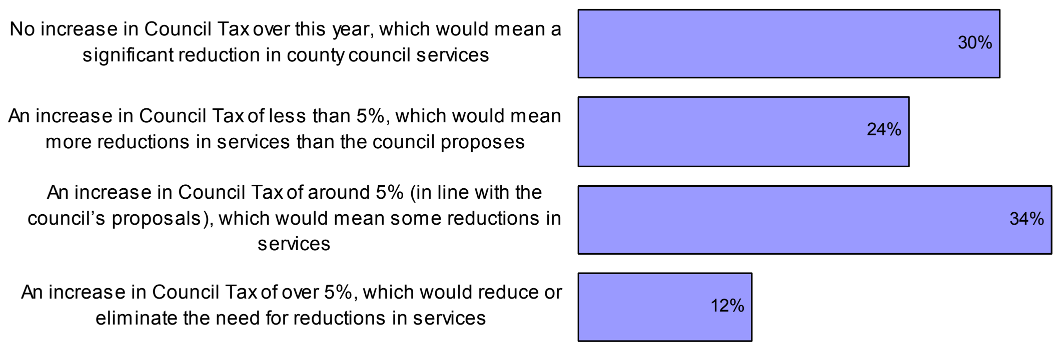
5.3.4 Libraries

Libraries are only the seventh lowest priority for spending next year but by socio-economic group the proportion varies from only one in seven of group AB (13%), to over a third of group C2 (36%).

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 of around 5% in line with the county council's proposals (34%), which would mean some reductions in services. However more than half suggests a lower increase (54%). Three in ten would accept no increase in council tax (30%).

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

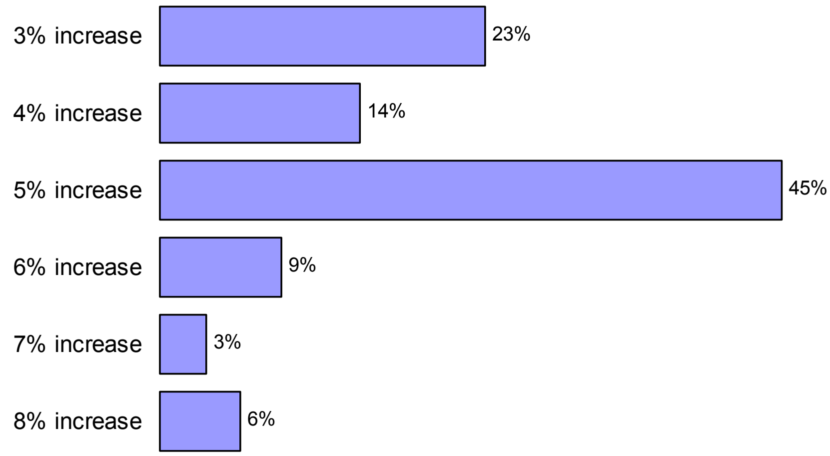


Base: All respondents (Unweighted 1289, Weighted 1076)

Half of respondents from an ethnic minority suggest no increase in council tax (50%). This is significantly more than the proportion of white respondents (29%). Over a third of panel members with a disability also answered no increase (37%), compared with only a quarter of those without a disability (27%).

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. The mean increase for all who would support some increase is 4.7%. This compares with a mean of 4.5% in 2005, though the question then gave slightly different options.

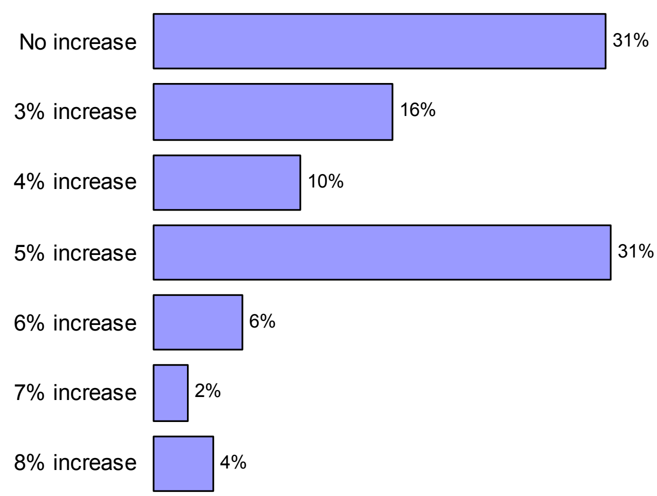
Chart 4 - And what level of increase do you feel you could support?



Base: All responding the county council should establish some increase (Unweighted 820, Weighted 683)

Three in five of those prepared to accept an increase agree with the council's recommendation of 5%, or more (62%). This does not include the proportion who would not accept any increase. The chart below adds these panel members in, to give a clearer picture.

Chart 5 - What level of increase do you feel you could support?



Base: All respondents (Unweighted 1289, Weighted 1076)

Over two in five of all respondents would be prepared to accept the county council's proposed 5% council tax increase (43%). By subgroup, respondents from socio-economic groups DE (35%) are significantly more likely to say they would accept no increase. By tenancy type council or housing association tenants (49%) and other tenure types (42%) are more likely to support no increase than owner occupiers (28%). Light service users are also more likely to do this (38%) than medium or heavy users. The mean increase across all respondents from the above chart is 3.3%, which compares with 3.2% the previous year.

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.

Table 1 - Proportions of respondents prepared to pay increase

Increase in Council Tax 2007/8	Proportion of all respondents prepared to pay increase	Cumulative % of all respondents prepared to pay increase
No increase	31%	100%
3%	16%	69%
4%	10%	53%
5%	31%	43%
6%	6%	12%
7%	2%	6%
8%	4%	4%
Base: All respondents (Unweighted 1289, Weighted 1076)		

6 Summary

6.1 Priority services for spending in 2007/8

- **Services for older people** (54%), **crime prevention** (53%) and **primary and secondary education** (50%) are seen as the highest priorities for spending in the next year.

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

- **Welfare rights, support for businesses and attracting investment to Lancashire, adult education** and **country parks** are seen as the next lowest priorities, by just over a quarter of panel members.

6.2 Increase in Council Tax

- Three in ten of the panel (30%) thought that the council should make **no increase in council tax**, with the consequence of significantly reducing service levels.

- A third (34%) support an increase of 5% in line with the council's proposals, which would mean some reduction in services (34%).

- Close to half of panel members are willing to accept the proposed increase of 5%, or more (43%). However more than half, (57%, including those who proposed no increase), suggest a lower increase.

- Of those prepared to pay an increase in council tax, (that is 69% of the panel), the mean increase panel members would be prepared to pay is **4.7%**.

- The mean increase that all panel members, (ie including the 30% who wanted no increase), would be prepared to pay is **3.3%**.

7 Appendix

7.1 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