in Lancashire

Budget Consultation 2005

Fieldwork 23 November – 16 December

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Lancashire County Council

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1 Executive Summary

This special wave of the Life in Lancashire panel is concerned with priorities for the county council budget and acceptable levels of council tax increase. All 3773 members of the panel were sent one mailing. In total 2220 questionnaires were returned, giving an overall response rate of 59%.

1.1 Priority services for spending 2006/7

- Primary and secondary education (56%), crime prevention (55%), and services for older people (55%) are the highest spending priorities.
- Museums and galleries are seen as the services that should be the lowest priorities for spending next year (53%).
- Country parks, open spaces and picnic sites, trading standards and welfare rights are seen as the next lowest priorities, by about one panel member in three (all 32%).

1.2 Increase in Council Tax

- A quarter of the panel (27%) thought that the Council should make no increase in council tax, with the consequence of reducing service levels.
- Over a third would (37%) support an increase to maintain Council services at current levels; 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 73% of the panel), the average increase panel members would be prepared to pay is 4.5%.
- The average increase that all panel members, (including the 27% who wanted no increase), would be prepared to pay is 3.2%.
- One in five (19%) of those prepared to pay an increase in council tax feel they could support an increase of 7% or more.[1]
- This proportion falls to one in seven (14%) if all panel members, (including those who wanted no increase), are counted.

[1] 7% was the figure estimated, before the provisional grant settlement and preparation of the detailed estimates, as necessary to maintain services at current levels.

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 2006/2007.
- To obtain an understanding of what residents perceive to be an acceptable level of increase in council tax for 2005/2006.

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

4 Methodology

This special Budget Consultation wave of Life in Lancashire was sent to 3773 members of the panel on 23 November. No reminder was sent. The fieldwork ended on 16 December 2005.

No incentive for respondents to complete the questionnaire was given. In total 2220 questionnaires were returned, giving an overall response rate of 59%.

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 1712, 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.

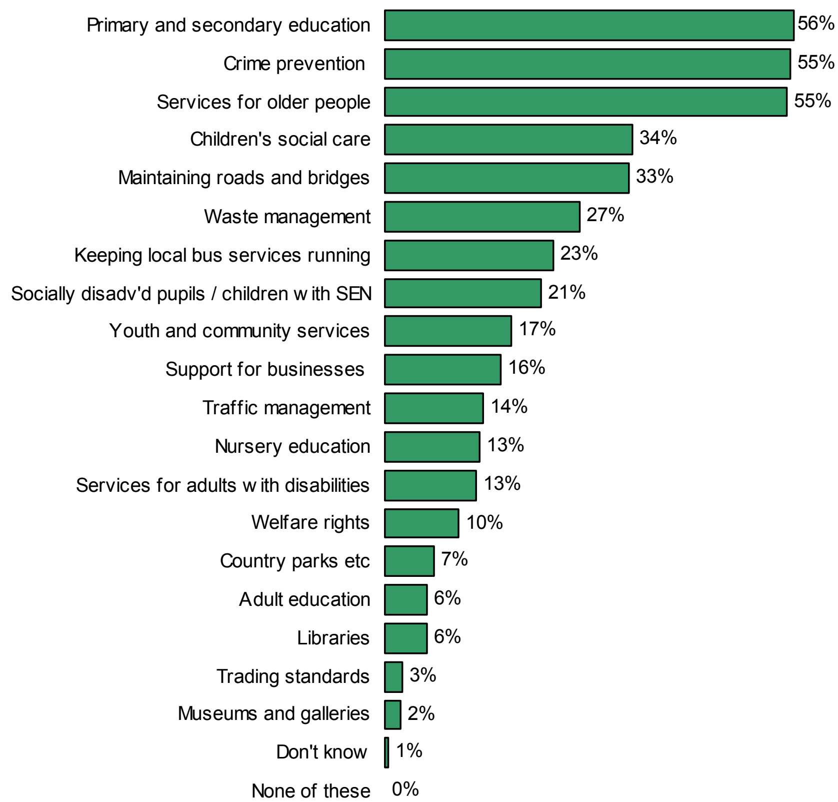
In charts or tables where responses do not add up to 100%, this is due to multiple responses or computer rounding.

5 Main Research Findings

5.1 Priorities for service development

The first section of the budget consultation questionnaire gave the proportion of and actual expenditure on a wide range of services Lancashire County Council provides. Panel members were then given a list of services and respondents answered whether they thought the area was one of the three or four 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?

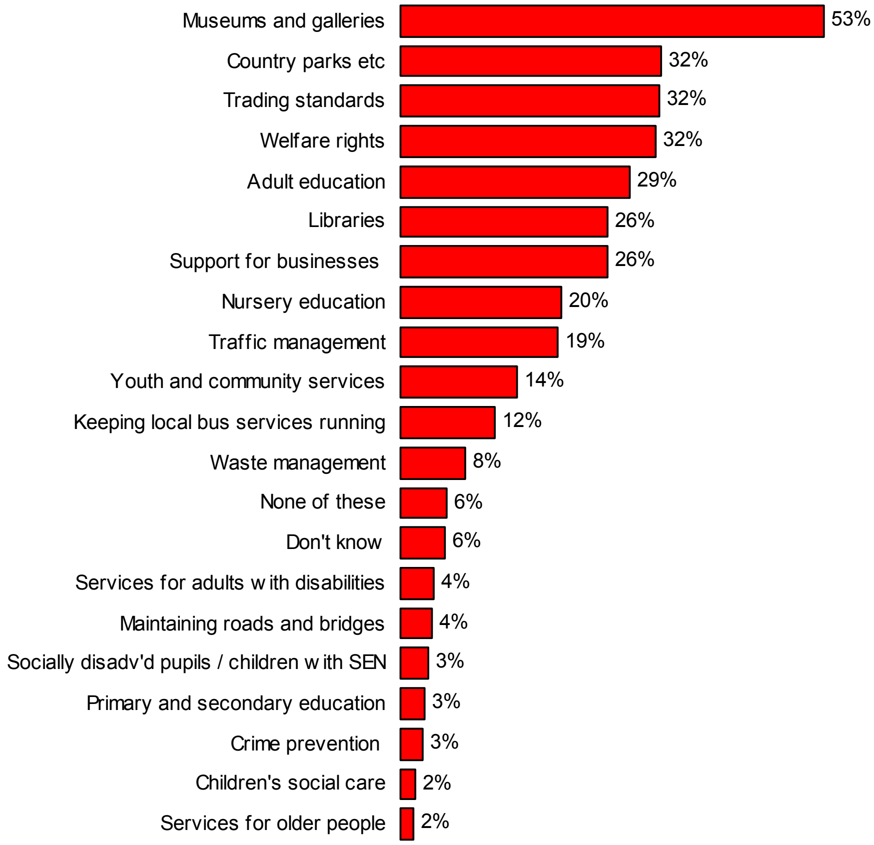


Base: All respondents (Unweighted 2220, Weighted 1712)

Primary and secondary education (56%), **crime prevention** (working with partners to help prevent crime and disorder and reduce fear of crime) (55%), and **services for older people** (including care in their own homes and in residential homes) (55%) are the highest priorities.

Children's social care (34%) and **maintaining roads and bridges** (33%) are the next highest priorities, for about a third of the panel.

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 2220, Weighted 1712)

Museums and galleries are seen as the services that should be the lowest priorities for spending next year (53%). **Country parks**, **open spaces and picnic sites**, **trading standards** and **welfare rights** are seen as the next lowest priorities, by about one panel member in three (32%). **Adult education** (29%), **libraries** (26%) and **support for businesses and attracting investment to Lancashire** (26%) are seen as lower priorities by about a quarter of respondents.

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 Primary and secondary education

Respondents aged 25-44 years being significantly more like to give primary and secondary education as a priority (67%) compared to those aged 45-59 years (53%) or 60 years or over (46%). Perhaps unsurprisingly, those with children in their household (75%) were much more likely to name this as a priority than those without (49%). Panel members from an ethnic minority (68%) were also more likely to name this than white respondents (55%).

5.2.2 Crime prevention

Crime prevention is the most important priority for the socio-economic groups[2] C2 (60%) and DE (61%).

5.2.3 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 (24%) and those aged 25-44 years (45%).

5.2.4 Children's social care

Children's social care was seen as the fourth highest priority overall, with significantly more women rating it as a priority (41%) than men (26%).

5.2.5 Maintaining road and bridges

About a third of the panel considered maintaining roads and bridges to be a top priority (32%), with more importance for men (39%) than women (29%). Residents from Rossendale were almost twice as likely to mention this however (57%). All other priorities are independent of the location, but this is the most common priority in Rossendale.

5.3 Individual services - low priority for spending

5.3.1 Museums and galleries

Museums and galleries were most likely to be seen as a low priority amongst all sub-groups (53%). Respondent aged over 60 years (57%) and 45-59 years (53%) were significantly more likely to see it as a low priority as those aged 25-44 years (50%) or less than 25 years (42%). Panel members from the lowest socio-economic group DE (60%) were more likely to rate the services as low priorities as the highest AB group (45%).

[2] See appendix 7.1 for socio-economic group definitions

5.3.2 Country parks, open spaces and picnic sites

The likelihood of rating these services as a low priority again increases with age. Only about one in six of those aged 16-24 years rate these as a low priority (18%), compared with 22% of 25-44 year olds, over a third of 45-59 years (36%) and close to half of the oldest 60+ age group (44%). This may be because older respondents use the service less. In a wave of Life in Lancashire March 2005, the highest use of the service was by 16-24 year olds (64%).

There was also a difference between respondents from an ethnic minority, (42% rating parks as a low priority), and those from a white background (32%). Also those without children in their household (36%) rate the service to be less important than those that do (25%), possibly because people with children value the service more.

5.3.3 Trading standards

People without a disability (35%) are significantly more likely to rate trading standards as less important than people who are disabled (26%). This may reflect a higher need for the service from vulnerable people.

5.3.4 Welfare rights

The welfare rights service is seen as less important by the highest AB social groups (42%) than the lower C2 (21%) and DE (24%) groups. People from these lower social groups are clearly more likely to have need for the service than people from the top social groups on probably higher incomes. As for trading standards, people with no disability rate welfare rights lower (36%) than those with a disability (23%).

5.3.5 Adult education

Adult education is seen as a low priority by three in ten of the panel (29%). It is seen as a lower priority by men (32%) than women (25%).

5.3.6 Libraries

A quarter of the panel considered libraries to be a low priority (26%). It was rated significantly lower by the lowest socio-economic group DE, and council or housing association tenants (both 36%).

5.3.7 Support for businesses

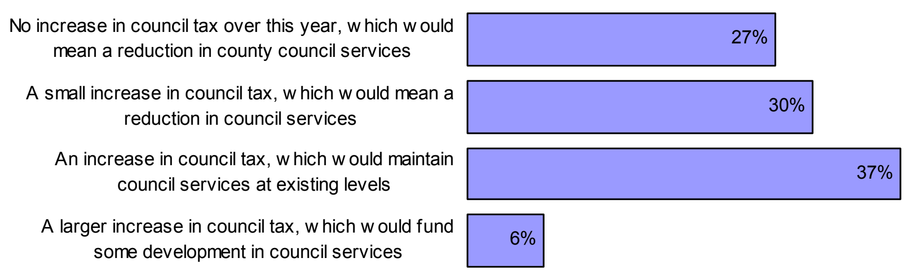
There was a split by social-economic group for this service, with the professional and managerial AB (29%) and non-manual C1 groups (28%) both significantly more likely to rate business support as a low priority compared to the skilled-manual C2 group (17%).

5.4 Opinion on acceptable levels of Council Tax increase

Panel members were given details of council expenditure and where the money for it comes from. They were also given information on the changes to the way the county council is funded, with the Government holding back some of its grant to fund the dedicated schools grant. The question explained that the assumption at the time of fieldwork was that the Government had assumed a council tax increase of 5% in the spending review of 2004. The panel members were then informed that a council budget which maintained services and began to make improvements would probably require a council tax increase in excess of the Government's assumption, with a possibility of over 7% being needed to fund the level of spend planned by the government.

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 to maintain council services at current levels (37%), however more than half suggest a lower increase (57%). Just over a quarter would accept no increase in council tax (27%).

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

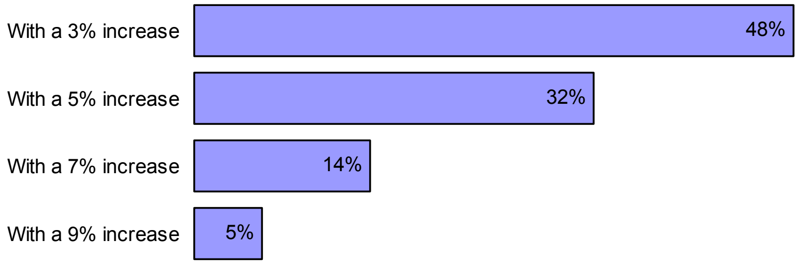


Base: All respondents (Unweighted 2220, Weighted 1712)

Panel members from the youngest age group (16-24 years) were significantly more likely to suggest there be no increase in council tax (45%) compared to other ages. There were also significantly more respondents from an ethnic minority suggesting no increase in tax (44%) compared to white respondents (29%), and more women saying no increase (29%) than men (23%). People from the highest AB social groups were twice as likely to propose the largest increase in council tax, funding development in services (12%), reflecting this group's relative affluence to other groups.

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 4.5%.

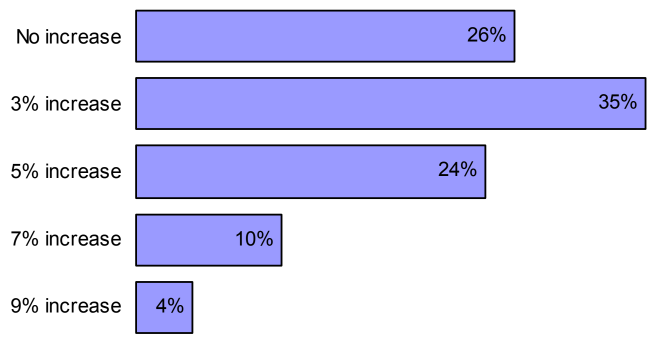
Chart 4 - And what level of increase do you feel you could support?



Base: All respondents having answered they would support some increase in council tax (Unweighted 1581, Weighted 1197)

However a quarter (27%) of respondents said they could not support any increase in council tax levels, so adding this in gives a truer picture.

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



Base: All respondents (Unweighted 2220, Weighted 1712)

Only one in seven (14%) of all respondents feel they could support an increase of the county council's expected rise of 7%. This is only a sixth of the proportion who said they would support an increase in council tax which would maintain services at current levels or improve them, as in chart 3 (43%). This suggests that either respondents did not understand or believe that the council need a 7% increase to maintain services, or that while many would prefer services to be maintained, a 7% increase in tax would be too much for them. The mean increase across the entire panel is 3.2%.

Looking by demographic subgroup, we see the same significant differences as earlier, with 16-24 year olds and respondents from an ethnic minority again the most likely to propose no increase and the more affluent AB socio-economic group are more likely to support a larger increase, with 21% supporting an increase of 7% or more.

Table 1 shows the proportions of the panel that are prepared to pay each increase option.

Table 1 - Proportions of respondents prepared to pay increase

Increase in Council Tax 2005/6	Proportion of all respondents prepared to pay increase	Cumulative % of all respondents prepared to pay increase
No increase	26%	**100%**
3%	35%	**74%**
5%	24%	**38%**
7%	11%	**14%**
9%	4%	**4%**
Base: All respondents (Unweighted 2220, Weighted 1712)		

6 Summary

6.1 Priority services for spending 2006/7

- **Primary and secondary education** (56%), **crime prevention** (working with partners to help prevent crime and disorder and reduce fear of crime) (55%), and **services for older people** (including care in their own homes and in residential homes) (55%) are the highest priorities.

- **Museums and galleries** are seen as the services that should be the lowest priorities for spending next year (53%).

- **Country parks**, **open spaces and picnic sites**, **trading standards** and **welfare rights** are seen as the next lowest priorities, by about one panel member in three (32%).

6.2 Increase in Council Tax

- A quarter of the panel (27%) thought that the Council should make **no increase in council tax**, with the consequence of reducing service levels.

- Over a third would (37%) support an increase to **maintain Council services at current levels**; 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 73% of the panel), the mean increase panel members would be prepared to pay is **4.5%**.

- The mean increase that all panel members, (ie including the 27% who wanted no increase), would be prepared to pay is **3.2%**.

- One in five (19%) of those prepared to pay an increase in council tax feel they could support an **increase of 7% or more**.[3]

- This proportion falls to one in seven (14%) if all panel members, (including those who wanted no increase), are counted.

[3] 7% was the figure estimated, before the provisional grant settlement and preparation of the detailed estimates, as necessary to maintain services at current levels.

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