



in Lancashire

Budget Consultation 2004

Fieldwork 24 November – 17 December

Prepared by Steven Knuckey
Research & Strategy Officer
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 2,395 members of the panel were sent one mailing. In total 1382 questionnaires were returned, giving an overall response rate of 58%.

1.1 Priorities

Panel members were given a list of twelve Lancashire County Council services and the key priorities that the Council has to improve them. Respondents were asked to rate how important each area was to develop.

- Almost all areas of council services have four in five of the panel rating them as either **very** or **fairly important** to develop.
- The most important development priorities were considered to be in **services for children and families, services for older people, waste disposal, schools** and **services for people with a disability**.
- Only **libraries** had more respondents rating it not important than important to develop.

1.2 Increase in Council Tax

Panel members were given details of Council expenditure and where the money for it comes from. They were then asked what increase in Council Tax they would be prepared to pay in 2005/6.

- A third of the panel would not accept any increase in Council Tax.
- Only one in seven (14%) of respondents would accept Lancashire County Council's preferred increase of 6.7%.
- The mean increase panel members would be prepared to pay is 2.8%, similar to the 3% found in the 2003 report.

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 recruitment undertaken in June 2004, so this effect should still 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 2005/2006.
- To obtain an understanding of what residents perceive to be an acceptable level of increase in council tax for 2005/2006.
- To compare these findings to those of a similar research project carried out from November to December 2003.

4 Methodology

This special Budget Consultation wave of Life in Lancashire was sent to 2,395 members of the panel on 24 November. No reminder was sent. The fieldwork ended on 17 December 2004.

No incentive for respondents to complete the questionnaire was given. In total 1382 questionnaires were returned, giving an overall response rate of 58%.

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 1003, 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.

5 Main Research Findings

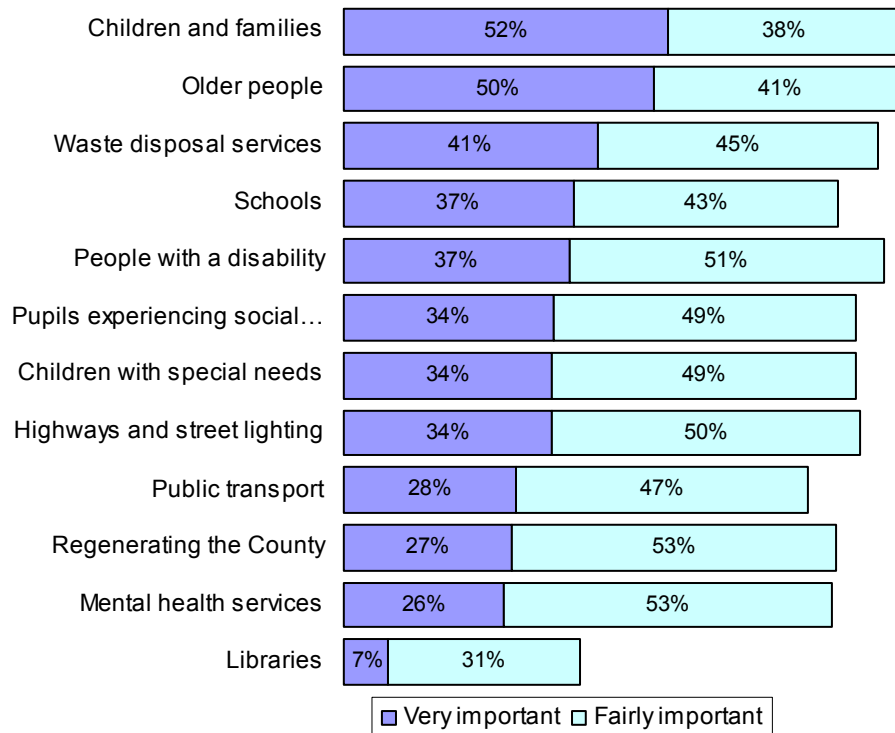
A marked up questionnaire can be found in Appendix 8.2.

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 service areas and the particular priorities the Council has for that area. Respondents then answered how important they considered it was to commit money to develop that area on a scale of very important to not at all important.

Chart 1 shows the proportion of the panel saying that the relevant service area is an important one to develop. In every area except libraries about four in five or more of the panel think it is very or fairly important to develop.

Chart 1 - Importance of Developing Service Areas



Base: All respondents (Unweighted 1382, Weighted 1003)

Services for **children and families** and **older people** are seen as the most important areas, with half the panel saying they are very important. About two in five of the panel consider **waste disposal services** (42%) services for **people with a disability** (39%) and **highways and street lighting** (37%) to be very important.

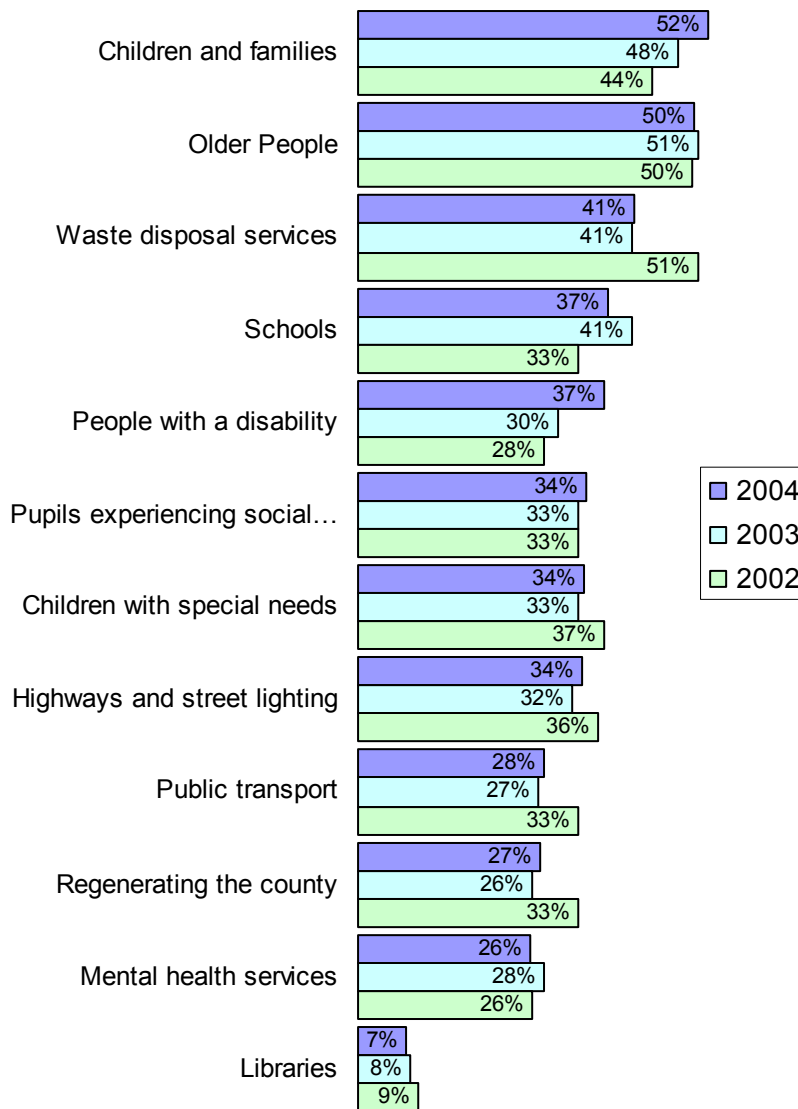
Schools (35%), services for **children with special needs** (35%) and **pupils experiencing social and educational disadvantage** (33%) are considered very important by a third of respondents.

Public transport (29%), **mental health services** (27%) and **regenerating the county** (26%) still receive high combined very and fairly important ratings, but less than a third consider them very important.

Libraries are seen as the least important of the options given. Three in five of respondents rated the service as either not very or not at all important to develop (60%).

The same priorities were sought on questionnaires in 2002 and 2003.

Chart 2 - “Very Important” Ratings - Trends



Base: All respondents

2004 (Unweighted 1382, Weighted 1003)
 2003 (Unweighted 751, Weighted 731)
 2002 (Unweighted 731, Weighted 741)

The panel given the questionnaire in 2002 and 2003 was taken from a previous recruitment in 2001. This was a smaller panel, hence the lower bases. Despite this, there are similar proportions rating service development as very important, especially with 2003. While these comparisons are not statistically conclusive, it does indicate that it is unlikely there has been any large shift in public opinion of where improvement is needed. The only large difference is that of the importance of services for disabled people. However, this could be due to the different make up of the new panel rather than any real change.

5.2 Individual services

Each service area had both its differences by subgroup within the panel and one or more objectives for development listed in the questionnaire. These are outlined below.

5.2.1 Children and families

The objective for services for children and families in the questionnaire were preventing family breakdown, promoting better life chances, protecting children from abuse and reducing the number of children in care. Overall half (52%) of the panel replied that this area was very important to develop. Women panel members (61%) are significantly more likely to rate this as very important as men (43%).

5.2.2 Older people

Half (50%) of the panel gave this the most important rating. As would be expected, and as found in previous budget consultations, the oldest age range in the panel, the over 60s, are most likely to rate services for older people as being very important to develop (67%). The key service improvement mentioned was to develop more support to enable people to stay in their own homes.

5.2.3 Waste disposal services

The example improvement for waste disposal was to minimise waste throughout the county and increase recycling. Two in five of the panel considered developing this to be very important (41%). The only significant difference was between men (38%) and women (41%).

5.2.4 Schools

Schools are seen as significantly more important by panel members with children in the household (51%), those aged 25-44 (47%), women (46%) and heavy service users¹ (47%). This compares with a third (35%) of the panel overall. The objective given was to increase funding to improve staffing ratios.

¹ Users of at least 10 Lancashire County Council services

5.2.5 People with a disability

The questionnaire gave several examples of ways to develop services for people with a disability. These were promoting independence through supported living, provision of aids to living, meaningful employment, development of day services and access to leisure and social facilities. Two in five of the panel (41%) rated this as very important to develop, with half of panel members with a disability (51%) and only one in four of social group AB² (23%).

5.2.6 Pupils experiencing social and educational disadvantage

One in three of respondents replied that this was very important to develop. Panel members from an ethnic minority (51%), women (41%) and heavy service users (41%) are the most likely to rate this as very important. The improvement named was to provide more support for these pupils to help them achieve their potential.

5.2.7 Children with special needs

Overall, a third of the panel rated services for children with special needs as very important. This increases to 40% for women, but falls to only 18% amongst social group AB. The development example in the questionnaire was to improve local provision to allow more children with special needs to attend local schools.

5.2.8 Highways and street lighting

Improvements to highways and street lighting are most important for panel members aged over 60 years (45%), social group DE (45%), low service users³ and disabled panel members (both 42%). Only 18% of panel members from Pendle consider it important however. This compares with 37% overall. The named objective was to give a higher priority to repairing highways and street lighting.

5.2.9 Mental health services

A quarter of panel members responded that they thought developing mental health services was important, with the objective given as developing formal partnerships with health agencies to ensure comprehensive, safe and supportive services. Once more women (32%) are more likely to do this than men (20%). The highest rating subgroups were panel members living in council or housing association accommodation (40%) or other non owner occupied accommodation, such as that rented from a landlord (45%).

5.2.10 Public transport

Nearly a third of the panel (29%) rated public transport as very important. The only significant differences were by housing type, with owner occupiers

² For a definition of socio-economic groups see Appendix 7.1

³ Users of six or less County Council services

at just 26%. People living in either council or housing association (42%) and other tenure types (45%) were more likely to rate public transport highly.

5.2.11 Regenerating the county

One panel member in four (26%) considered regeneration to be very important to develop, with regenerating both deprived urban and rural areas named as the key objective. Heavy service users (33%) were significantly more likely to rate this as important, compared to the rest of the panel.

5.2.12 Libraries

The improvement example for libraries was to introduce more convenient opening hours. Only 7% of the panel considered this very important. Panel members from an ethnic minority are more likely to however (28%).

5.3 Service development priorities by demographic group

Different groups have different priorities for increases in County Council spending. The top three priorities for twelve groups are given below.

Table 1 - Top 3 priorities by group

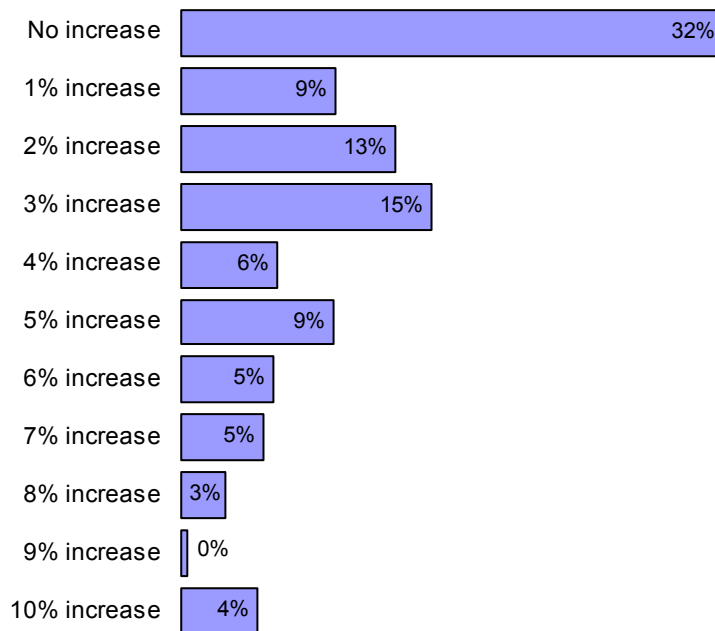
Group	1st Priority	2nd Priority	3rd Priority
16-24 years	Children and families	Regenerating the county	Waste disposal
25-44 years	Children and families	Schools	Waste disposal
45-59 years	Older people	Children and families	Waste disposal
60+ years	Older people	Children and families	Highways
Men	Older people	Children and families	Waste disposal
Women	Children and families	Older people	Schools
Panel members with a disability	Older people	Children and families	People with a disability
BME	Children and families	Schools	Pupils experiencing disadvantage
Social group AB	Older people	Children and families	Schools
Social group C1	Children and families	Waste disposal	Older people
Social group C2	Older people	Children and families	Children with special needs
Social group DE	Children and families	Older people	Highways

5.4 Opinion on acceptable levels of Council Tax increase

The questionnaire then gave panel members details of where the funds for Lancashire County Council expenditure come from. It informed them of the Council’s preferred Council Tax increase of about 6.7%. The questionnaire then asked what increase respondents would be prepared to pay, if at all. The corresponding Council Tax value per week was given for each one percent increase from 0% to 10% for three tax bands.

Three in ten of the panel responded that they would not accept any increase. Over half (56%) would accept some increase less than the 6.7% expected and only one in seven (14%) of the panel would be prepared to support the preferred increase. The exact proportions are shown in Chart 3 below.

Chart 3 - Summary of increase residents would be prepared to pay



Base: All respondents (Unweighted 1382, Weighted 1003)

The proportion of the panel that would be prepared to pay each percentage increase is shown in Table 2 below.

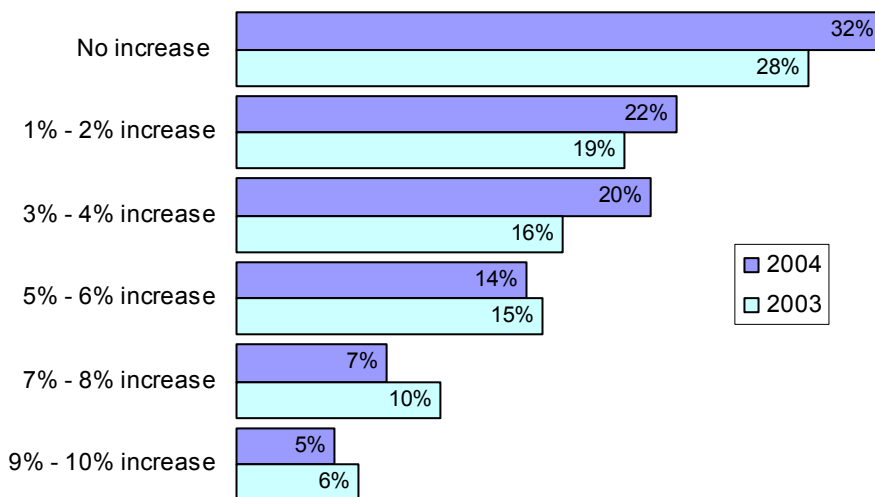
Table 2 - Cumulative % of respondents prepared to Pay Increase

Increase in Council Tax 2005/6	Cumulative % of respondents prepared to pay increase
No increase	100%
1%	68%
2%	59%
3%	47%
4%	32%
5%	26%
6%	18%
7%	12%
8%	7%
9%	5%
10%	4%

Base: All respondents (Unweighted 1382, Weighted 1003)

The overall mean increase given by the panel members is 2.8%. This is similar to the mean in 2003 of 3%. The two years' responses are shown in the chart below. There appears to have been no great shift in opinion in the last 12 months. While there were a higher proportion of the last panel willing to accept the proposed 6.7% increase, there is not a large enough change to be sure there are really less people across the Lancashire population willing to pay the increase.

Chart 4 - Comparison of 2004 vs 2003 increase in Council Tax Life in Lancashire panel members would be prepared to pay



Base: All respondents 2004 (Unweighted 1382, Weighted 1003)
 2003 (Unweighted 751, Weighted 731)

Looking by demographic subgroup, there are several differences in the mean increase the group is prepared to pay. The largest is between white (2.9%) and ethnic minority panel members (1%). There are also significant differences between panel members with a disability (2.5%) and without (2.9%) as well as light (2%), medium (2.8%) and heavy service users (3.3%).

6 Summary

6.1 Priorities

- Almost all areas of council services have four in five of the panel rating them as either **very** or **fairly important** to develop. The key very important rating varied from half to a quarter of all respondents amongst these.
- Only libraries receive a low importance, with only 7% of the panel rating it as very important.

The five service areas with the highest very important ratings, along with the specific objectives are:

- **Children and families** (52%) “Preventing family breakdown, promoting better life chances, protecting children from abuse and reducing the number of children in care.”
- **Older people** (50%) “Developing more support for older people to remain in their own homes and reduce the number admitted to residential care”.
- **Waste disposal** (41%) “Minimising waste throughout the county and increasing recycling.”
- **Schools** (37%) “Increase funding to enable schools to improve staffing ratios”.
- **People with a disability** (37%) “Working with health and housing partners to promote independence through supported living; the provision of aids to daily living and adaptations to property; meaningful employment; the development of local day services; and access to leisure and social facilities.”

6.2 Increase in Council Tax

- A third of the panel would not accept any increase in Council Tax.
- Only one in seven (14%) of the panel would accept Lancashire’s preferred increase of 6.7%.
- The mean increase panel members would be prepared to pay is 2.8%, similar to the 3% found in the 2003 report.

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

7.2 Marked Up Questionnaire