

Your Membership Number is:



in Lancashire

1. Please read the background information before answering the two questions.
2. Please use blue or black pen to fill in the questionnaire.
3. Return your completed questionnaire in the reply paid envelope provided.

Lancashire County Council Budget and Priorities

We want to ask you some questions on what you think about the County Council's service priorities, and the council tax we charge. Each question first has some brief background information on the budget and on council tax.

Priorities

Background

In the financial year April 2004 to March 2005 the County Council will spend £1,408 million.

£328 million of that total spending is funded from Government grants for specific services, and from fees and charges that the Council make.

This leaves £1,080 million. The table below shows how this is spent.

Spending	£million	%
Education	618	57
Social Services	265	25
Highway Maintenance	60	6
Recreation, Tourism and Libraries	20	2
Waste Disposal	30	3
Planning	4	-
Magistrates' Courts	2	-
Public Protection (Trading Standards, County Analyst, Registrars)	6	1
Subsidising bus routes	8	1
Cultural Services (museums, arts and archives)	3	-
Supporting economic development in Lancashire	3	-
Other services, including contributions to financial reserves	27	2
Financing of borrowing costs for capital schemes	34	3
Total	1,080	100

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The services below are those Lancashire County Council would like to develop in the coming year. This will mean committing money to achieve these objectives.

In your opinion how important or unimportant is it for the County Council to commit money to develop them? PLEASE TICK ONE BOX FOR EACH SERVICE

	Very important (1)	Fairly important (2)	Not very important (3)	Not at all important (4)	Don't know (5)
(a) Children and Families: preventing family breakdown, promoting better life chances, protecting children from abuse and reducing the number of children in care	52%	38%	6%	2%	2%
(b) Pupils experiencing social and educational disadvantage: more support for these pupils to help them achieve their potential	34%	49%	12%	2%	2%
(c) Highways and Street Lighting: giving a higher priority to repairing highways and street lighting	34%	50%	15%	1%	0%
(d) Schools: increase funding to enable schools to improve staffing ratios	37%	43%	15%	3%	1%
(e) Mental Health Services: developing formal partnerships with health agencies to ensure comprehensive, safe and supportive services	26%	53%	15%	3%	3%
(f) Older People: developing more support for older people to remain in their own homes and reduce the number admitted to residential care	50%	41%	7%	1%	1%
(g) People with a disability: 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.	37%	51%	9%	2%	2%
(h) Libraries: introducing more convenient opening hours	7%	31%	46%	14%	2%
(i) Public Transport: continuing to improve public transport information and services	28%	47%	20%	4%	1%
(j) Children with special needs: improving provision in primary and secondary schools so that more children with special needs can attend schools nearer their homes and be with other local children of the same age	34%	49%	11%	4%	2%
(k) Regenerating the County: regenerating both deprived urban areas and rural areas	27%	53%	16%	3%	2%
(l) Waste disposal services: minimising waste throughout the county and increasing recycling	41%	45%	11%	2%	0%

Council Tax

Background

For 2004/05 the County Council's spending of £1,080 million that we outlined in Section 1 is funded from the following sources:

Source		£ million	%
Business rates	The rates paid by businesses across the whole country are collected into one national pool by the Government. This money is then divided up by the Government and given to local authorities as an amount per head of local population.	288	27
Revenue support grant	This is a general grant paid to the County Council by the Government. It is to support all of the County Council's services. It comes from the funds which the Government raises from different types of national taxation. The Government sets the amount it will pay to the County Council.	446	41
Council tax	This is set locally by the County Council according to how much is still needed to fund spending after the two sources of money shown above.	346	32
Total		1,080	100

Each household receives one council tax bill, sent out by the borough or district council. The bill is made up of an amount set by the borough council itself, and amounts set by the Police Authority, Fire Authority and the County Council. (An amount for the local parish council may be included as well, if they set a tax.)

Here we are only concerned with the County Council's part of the total council tax, and the services we deliver.

The Government assessed that the spending level for the County Council should be £1,015 million.

The amount of business rates and revenue support grant we receive from the Government to help fund that spending is a fixed cash sum. This year we receive £734 million from the Government in this way.

The County Council has to raise the difference of £281 million from Council Tax.

However, the budget set by the County Council for this year at £1,080 million was £65 million higher than the Government's assessment. Therefore in fact the County Council had to raise a total of £346 million from Council Tax: the £281 million assumed by the Government, plus the further £65 million.

For a household in Band D this means a Council Tax of £927.11 per year, or £17.83 per week.

The County Council's actual council tax increase for this year was 3.5%, adjusted for the change in funding of the Fire and Rescue Service. This was higher than councillors would have liked, and was achieved only after some £3 million of spending reductions. Despite a below average grant settlement from the Government, this was in fact the second lowest increase of the 35 shire county councils, and below the average increase.

Next year

The full details of the Government's plans for next year are not yet known. However, in July the Government published the 2004 Spending Review, its forecast of Public Sector expenditure, which includes Local Government, for 2005/06 to 2007/08. Whilst formula spending share has increased by 5.8% and formula grant by 5.3%, next year (2005/2006) the Government may expect local authorities to increase council tax by about 6.7% in setting these levels of grant funding.

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For the year 2005/2006 Government funding towards the cost of County Council services is likely to be set on the assumption that the County Council will increase council tax by about 6.7% next year. Lancashire County Council would like to improve the areas listed in question 1. To fund a budget for next year which maintains existing services and begins to make these improvements will probably require a further council tax increase over the Government's assumption.

Are you and your family prepared to pay next year to fund a budget which maintains existing services and begins to make service improvements, and if so at what level? Or, would you be willing to see budget reductions and cuts in services to permit lower levels of Council Tax increases as set out in the table below?

PLEASE TICK ONE ONLY (Note: figures are shown for Band D, and for the lowest and highest bands, A and H, to illustrate the full range. To save space we have not included all the other bands, but the effects for them would fall within the ranges shown.)

	Band A	Band D	Band H	
Current 2004/5 council tax per week	£11.89	£17.83	£35.66	
no increase	£11.89	£17.83	£35.66	32%
with a 1% increase	£12.01	£18.01	£36.02	9%
with a 2% increase	£12.13	£18.19	£36.37	13%
with a 3% increase	£12.25	£18.36	£36.73	15%
with a 4% increase	£12.37	£18.54	£37.09	6%
with a 5% increase	£12.62	£18.72	£37.44	9%
with a 6% increase	£12.48	£18.90	£37.80	5%
with a 7% increase	£12.60	£19.08	£38.16	5%
with an 8% increase	£12.72	£19.26	£38.51	3%
with a 9% increase	£12.96	£19.43	£38.87	0%
with a 10% increase	£13.08	£19.61	£39.23	4%

Please return the questionnaire in the reply paid envelope by 17 December.
Thank you for being part of Life in Lancashire.

Life in Lancashire, Lancashire County Council,
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