

# **Living in Lancashire: Budget Consultation 2010**

Fieldwork 19 November – 10 December 2010

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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 4,026 members of the panel. In total 1,972 questionnaires were returned, giving an overall response rate of 49%.

### 1.1 Highest priority services for spending in the coming years

- **Services for older people** (58%), **primary and secondary education** (51%) and **crime prevention** (46%) are seen as the highest priorities for spending in the next year. These were also the top priorities in 2009 and 2008.

### 1.2 Lowest spending priorities in the coming years

- **Museums** are seen as the service that should be the lowest spending priority (54%), which was also the lowest priority for spending in 2009 and 2008.
- **Country parks, open spaces and picnic sites** and **trading standards** are seen as the next lowest priorities (33% and 29% respectively).

### 1.3 Level of council tax increase

- Four fifths of respondents think that the council should make no increase in council tax (79%).
- Only one in ten of respondents feel they could support an increase in council tax of 3% or more (10%).

## **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 2011/2012.

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 4,026 members of the panel on 19 November. No reminders were sent, and the fieldwork ended on 10 December 2010.

In total 1,972 questionnaires were returned, giving an overall response rate of 49%. The response rate is lower than in previous years as the panel has recently been refreshed. However, the number of responses is similar to that received in previous years.

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 1,332, 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.

The following table shows what the percentage differences between two samples on a statistic must be greater than, to be statistically significant.

Size of Sample A	Size of Sample B	50/50	70/30	90/10
100	100	14%	13%	8%
100	200	12%	11%	7%
500	1000	5%	5%	3%
2000	2000	3%	3%	2%

(Confidence interval at 95% certainty for a comparison of two samples)

For example, where the size of sample A and sample B is 2000 responses in each and the percentage result in each group you are comparing is around 50% in each category, the difference in the results needs to be more than 3% to be statistically significant. This is to say that the difference in the results of the two groups of people is not due to chance alone and is a statistically valid difference (e.g. of opinion, service usage).

For each question in the survey, comparisons have been made between different sub-groups of respondents (e.g. age, gender, disability, ethnicity, geographic area) to look for statistically significant differences in opinion. Statistically valid differences between sub-groups are described in the main body of the report.

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 2010/11 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. 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 partner organisations to help prevent crime and disorder and reduce fear of crime) are the highest priorities (58%, 51% and 46% respectively).

**Repairing roads and bridges** (including emergencies and fixing potholes) and **children's social care** (protecting vulnerable children) are the next highest priorities (38% and 32% respectively).

The same options were given on the budget questionnaires in 2009 and 2008, enabling the priorities to be compared over time. The current results are broadly similar to those in the last three years, with the top three priorities remaining the same. This shows the public's spending priorities are generally staying the same. The proportion of respondents mentioning the top three priorities has increased compared to the 2009 results. Two services that have increased in importance over the past three years are repairing roads and bridges and support for businesses/attracting investment.

#### 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 (66%), and are also more important among those aged 45 to 59 (59%) compared to younger respondents.

##### **Primary and secondary education**

This is the highest priority for those aged 25 to 44 years (61%), as it was in 2009. While still a priority, it is less important for those aged 45-59 years (48%) or 60 years or over (43%). Also, where respondents have children in

the household it is a higher priority (73%) compared to households without children (42%).

### **Crime prevention**

Crime prevention is an important priority for all respondents. However, it is significantly more important for BME respondents (64%) compared to white respondents (44%). This is a reversal of the result from last year when BME respondents were significantly less likely to say crime prevention is a high priority.

### **Children's social care**

The importance of children's social care is, unsurprisingly, more important to respondents with children in their household (49%) than those without (27%). It is also a higher priority among women (38%). Light service users are less likely to place children's social care as a high priority (29%).

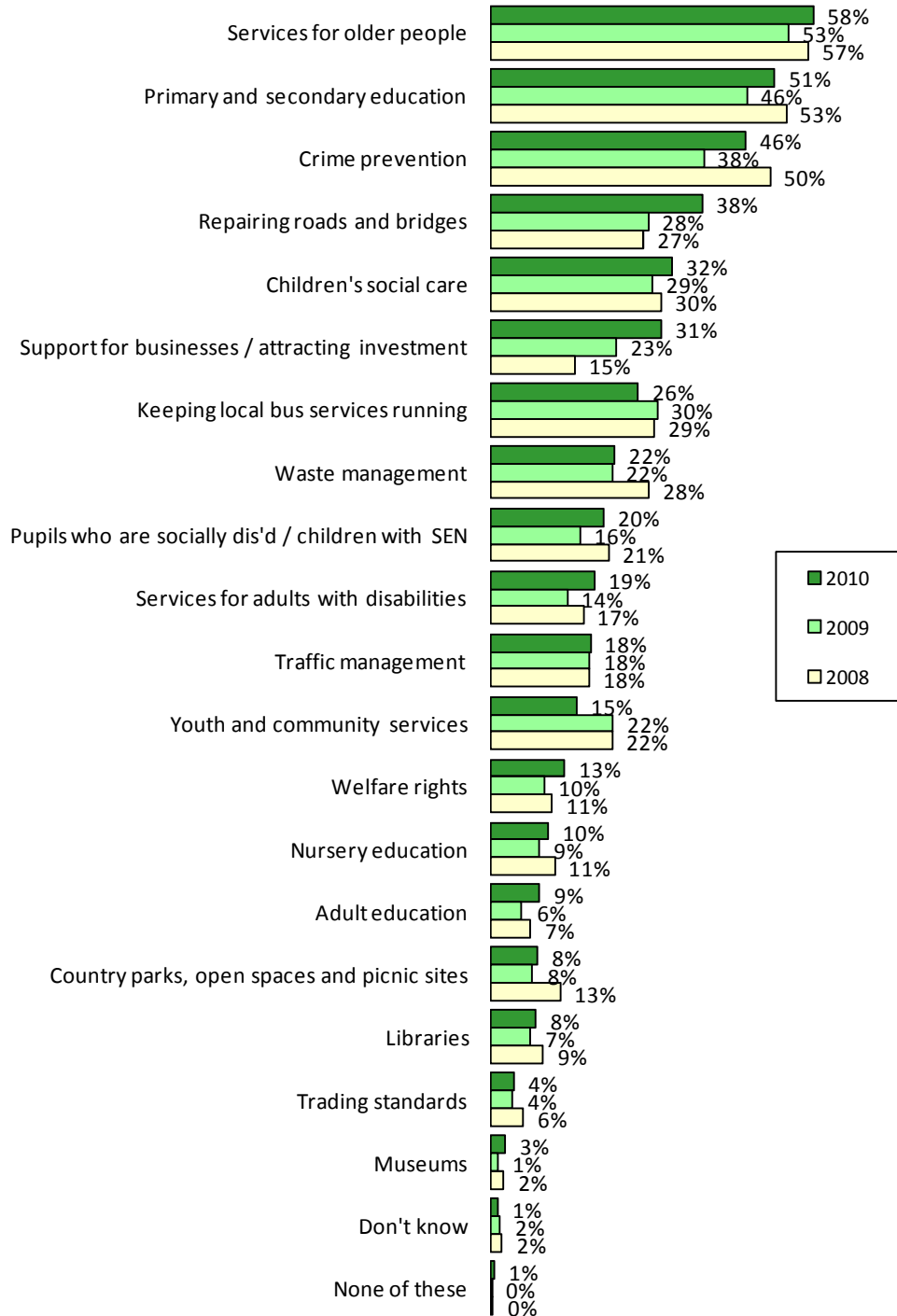
### **Other services**

Keeping local bus services running is more of a priority to respondents aged 60 and over (37%) and disabled respondents (36%). BME respondents and those with a disability are more likely to think services for adults with disabilities are a priority (33% and 27% respectively).

Welfare rights are more likely to be a high priority for BME respondents (38%) and respondents from the lowest socio-economic group (DE, 24%). Homeowners are less likely to rate welfare rights as a high priority (12%).



**Chart 1 - Which three or four of the following should be the highest priorities for spending in the coming years?**



Base: All respondents (unweighted 1,926, weighted 1,377)

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 2009 and 2008 surveys, **museums** are seen as the service that should be the lowest priority for spending next year (54%). **Country parks, open spaces and picnic sites** (33%) is the next lowest priority. **Trading standards** (29%), **welfare rights** (27%), **libraries** (27%) and **adult education** (26%) 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 (67%) and respondents in socio-economic group DE (66%) place museums as a lower priority. Country parks are a lower priority for respondents without children (38%).

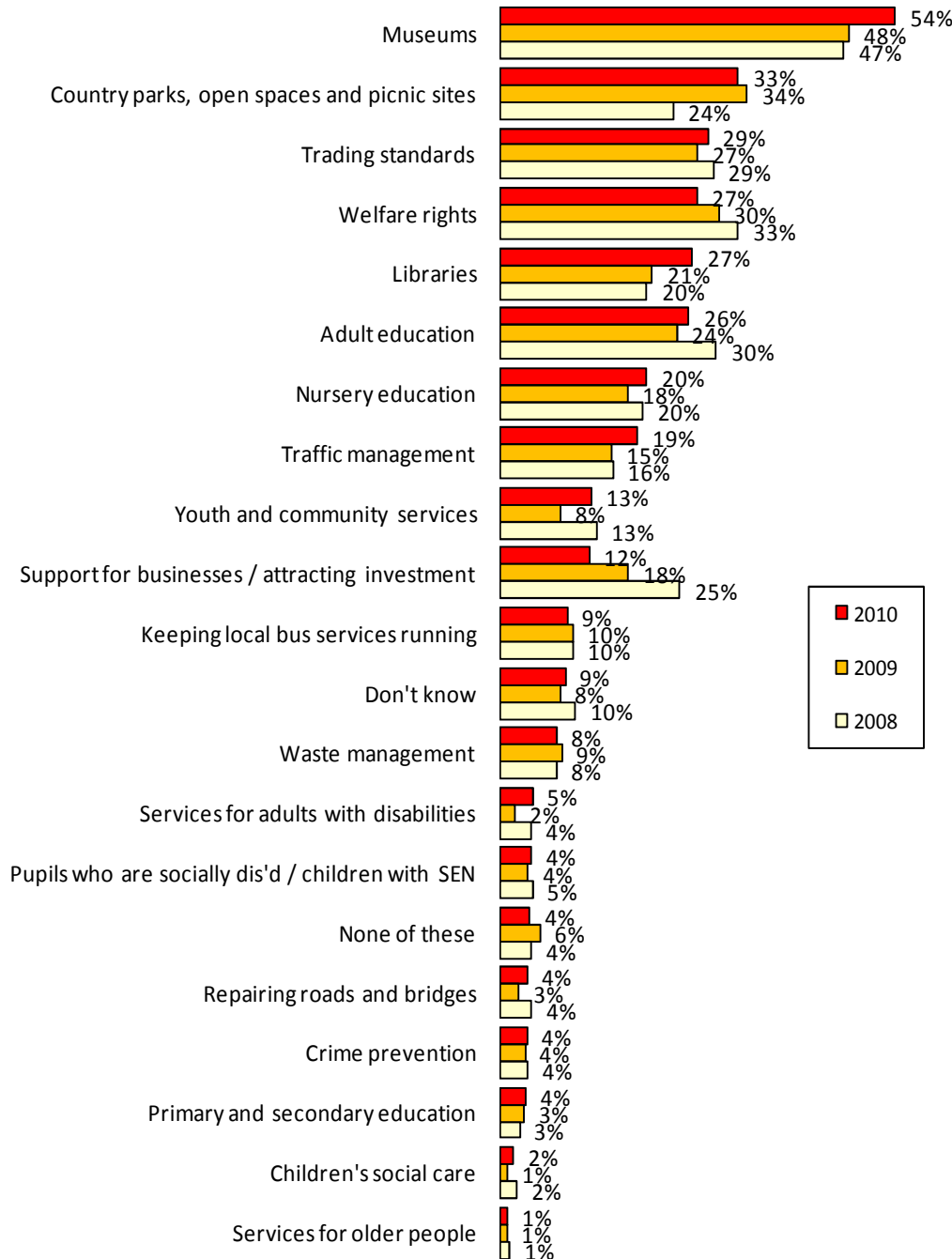
##### **Welfare rights**

The respondents who put welfare rights as a low priority are in the highest socio-economic group AB (38%), whereas respondents from an ethnic minority, disabled respondents and respondents not in employment are less likely to rate them as a low priority (12%, 17% and 20% respectively).

##### **Libraries**

This is more likely to be mentioned as a low priority by respondents in socio-economic group DE (37%) and by BME respondents (39%).

**Chart 2 - And which three or four of the following services should be the lowest priorities for spending in coming years?**

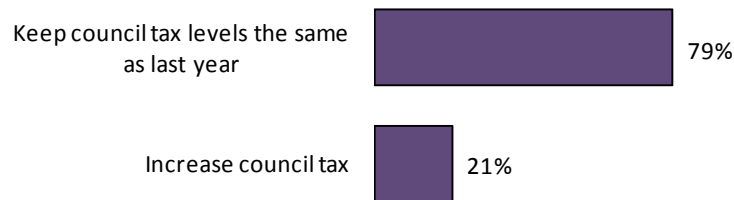


Base: All respondents (unweighted 1,778, weighted 1,276)

## 5.2 Opinion on acceptable levels of council tax increase

Panel members were then asked whether the council should increase council tax next year or keep it at the current level. Four fifths of respondents think the council should **keep council tax levels the same as last year** (79%).

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

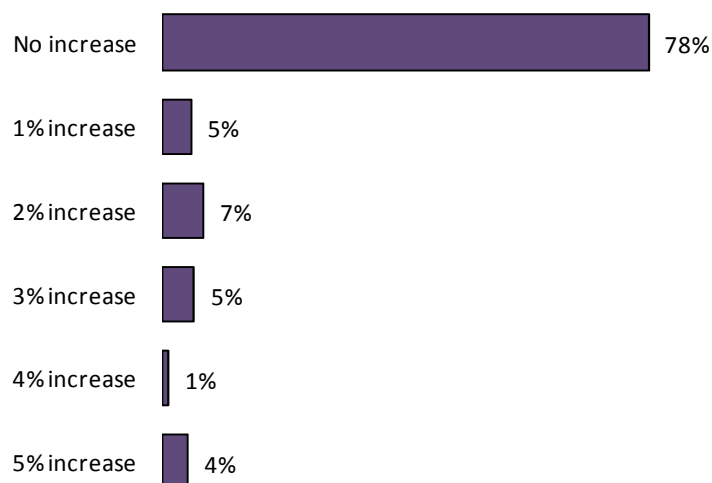


Base: All respondents (unweighted 1,850, weighted 1,339)

BME respondents are more likely to think that council tax levels should be kept at the same level as last year (87%). Medium and heavy service users and respondents from socio-economic group AB are more likely to think there should be an increase in council tax (27%, 31% and 31% respectively).

Respondents who think there should be an increase in council tax were asked what level of increase they feel they could support. 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 council tax increase do you feel you could support?**



Base: All respondents (unweighted 1,905, weighted 1,364)

By subgroup for the above measure, those panel members in the lowest socio-economic group (DE) and respondents in eastern districts of Lancashire 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 a fifth of the panel feel they could support an increase in council tax (22%).

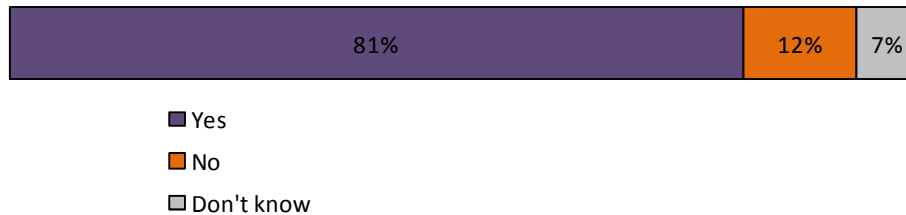
**Table 1 - Proportions of respondents prepared to pay increase**

Increase in Council Tax 2010/11	Proportion of all respondents prepared to pay increase	Cumulative % of all respondents prepared to pay increase
No increase	<b>78%</b>	<b>100%</b>
1%	<b>5%</b>	<b>22%</b>
2%	<b>7%</b>	<b>17%</b>
3%	<b>5%</b>	<b>10%</b>
4%	<b>1%</b>	<b>5%</b>
5%	<b>4%</b>	<b>4%</b>

Base: All respondents (unweighted 1,905, weighted 1,364)

Every year the council sends a leaflet out with council tax bills explaining how council tax is spent. Panel members were asked whether they remember receiving this leaflet. The majority of respondents do remember receiving the leaflet (81%).

**Chart 5 - Do you remember receiving the council tax leaflet at the beginning of this year?**

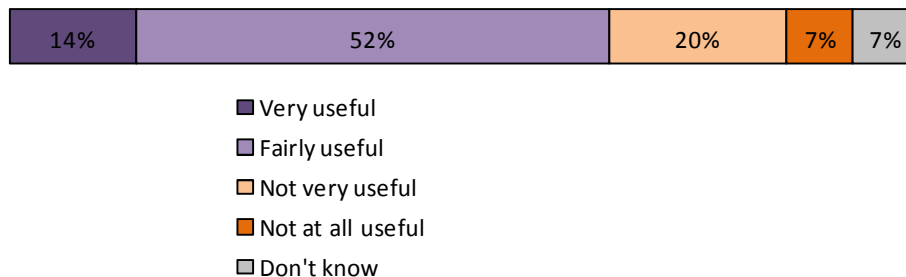


Base: All respondents (unweighted 1,929, weighted 1,387)

BME respondents were less likely to remember receiving the council tax leaflet (60% answered 'yes').

Panel members were then asked how useful they find that type of leaflet at explaining how council tax is spent. Around half of respondents find the leaflet fairly useful (52%) but only one in seven finds it very useful (14%). Around a third of respondents don't find the leaflet useful (27%).

**Chart 6 - And generally, how useful do you find this type of leaflet at explaining how your council tax is spent?**



Base: All respondents (unweighted 1,930, weighted 1,389)

## 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 with 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

<b>Which three or four of the following should be the highest/lowest spending priorities for spending in the coming years?</b>		
	<b>Highest priorities</b>	<b>Lowest priorities</b>
Services for older people (including care in their own homes and in residential homes)	58%	1%
Primary and secondary education	51%	4%
Crime prevention (working with partner organisations to help prevent crime and disorder and reduce the fear of crime)	46%	4%
Repairing roads and bridges (including emergencies and fixing potholes)	38%	4%
Children's social care (protecting vulnerable children)	32%	2%
Support for businesses and attracting investment to Lancashire	31%	12%
Keeping local bus services running	26%	9%
Waste management (household waste disposal and recycling)	22%	8%
Pupils who are socially disadvantaged and children with special educational needs	20%	4%
Services for adults with disabilities	19%	5%
Traffic management (making road travel safer and reducing congestion)	18%	19%
Youth and community services (activities and support for young people)	15%	13%
Welfare rights (helping people get the financial support they are entitled to)	13%	27%
Nursery education	10%	20%
Adult education	9%	26%
Country parks, open spaces and picnic sites	8%	33%
Libraries	8%	27%
Trading standards (consumer protection)	4%	29%
Museums	3%	54%
Don't know	1%	9%
None of these	1%	4%
<b>Unweighted base</b>	<b>1,926</b>	<b>1,778</b>
<b>Weighted base</b>	<b>1,377</b>	<b>1,276</b>



<b>Which of the following most closely matches your opinion on what the council should do about increasing council tax next year?</b>	
Keep council tax levels the same as last year	79%
Increase council tax	21%
<b>Unweighted base</b>	<b>1,850</b>
<b>Weighted base</b>	<b>1,339</b>

<b>What level of council tax increase do you feel you could support?</b>	
1% increase	39%
2% increase	27%
3% increase	18%
4% increase	3%
5% increase	13%
<b>Unweighted base</b>	<b>627</b>
<b>Weighted base</b>	<b>446</b>

<b>Every year you receive a leaflet from Lancashire County Council with your council tax bill, explaining how your council tax is spent. Do you remember receiving this leaflet at the beginning of this year?</b>	
Yes	81%
No	12%
Don't know	7%
<b>Unweighted base</b>	<b>1,929</b>
<b>Weighted base</b>	<b>1,387</b>

<b>And generally, how useful do you find this type of leaflet at explaining how your council tax is spent?</b>	
Very useful	14%
Fairly useful	52%
Not very useful	20%
Not at all useful	7%
Don't know	7%
<b>Unweighted base</b>	<b>1,930</b>
<b>Weighted base</b>	<b>1,389</b>