Budget Consultation Report 2015

For the 2016/17 Budget

Produced by Staffordshire County Council

On behalf of Tamworth Borough Council

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1. Executive Summary

1.1 The vision

Tamworth Borough Council's vision to 'aspire and prosper' and to be 'healthier and safer' is strongly endorsed by Tamworth's residents, businesses and voluntary and community organisations.

All priorities under 'Aspire and Prosper' were given a high importance rating by the majority of respondents with the most important priorities considered to be 'working with businesses to create more employment locally' and 'creating opportunities for business growth.' 'Creating the technology and physical infrastructure' and 'raising aspiration and attainment levels of young people' were also considered to be of particular importance to those respondents who were from the business community.

The priorities under 'Healthier and Safer' were also endorsed by respondents and the most important priority was considered to be 'tackling crime and anti-social behaviour.' This was closely followed by 'protecting those most vulnerable in the local communities' and 'tackling youth crime and antisocial behaviour.' Community and Voluntary Organisations also prioritised 'improving the health of older people' and 'tackling poor health in children'.

Respondents supported the vision, commenting that *"it's about right"* and *"I believe you are on the right track."* Some did have reservations, questioning whether it could *"be achieved"* and wanted to see evidence of *"progress"* made towards achieving the vision *"during the last two years"*.

1.2 Spend on services

Respondents expressed a high level of support for maintaining current levels of spend. This was the case in 11 out of the 12 major cost areas and respondents most wanted to maintain spend on refuse collection and recycling. 79% of respondents indicated that this was their preference. The only exception to this was for spend on 'improved access to information/customer services.' Respondents would most prefer to see less spend on this and it was also identified as one of the top two services which the Council should look at if it had to make savings.

Spending less was residents second overall priority for spend. Other services which respondents identified for less spend were on 'events' and on 'commissioning services from voluntary organisations'. Community and Voluntary Organisations themselves however had their own views and their main priority for increased spend was for 'commissioning services from voluntary organisations.'

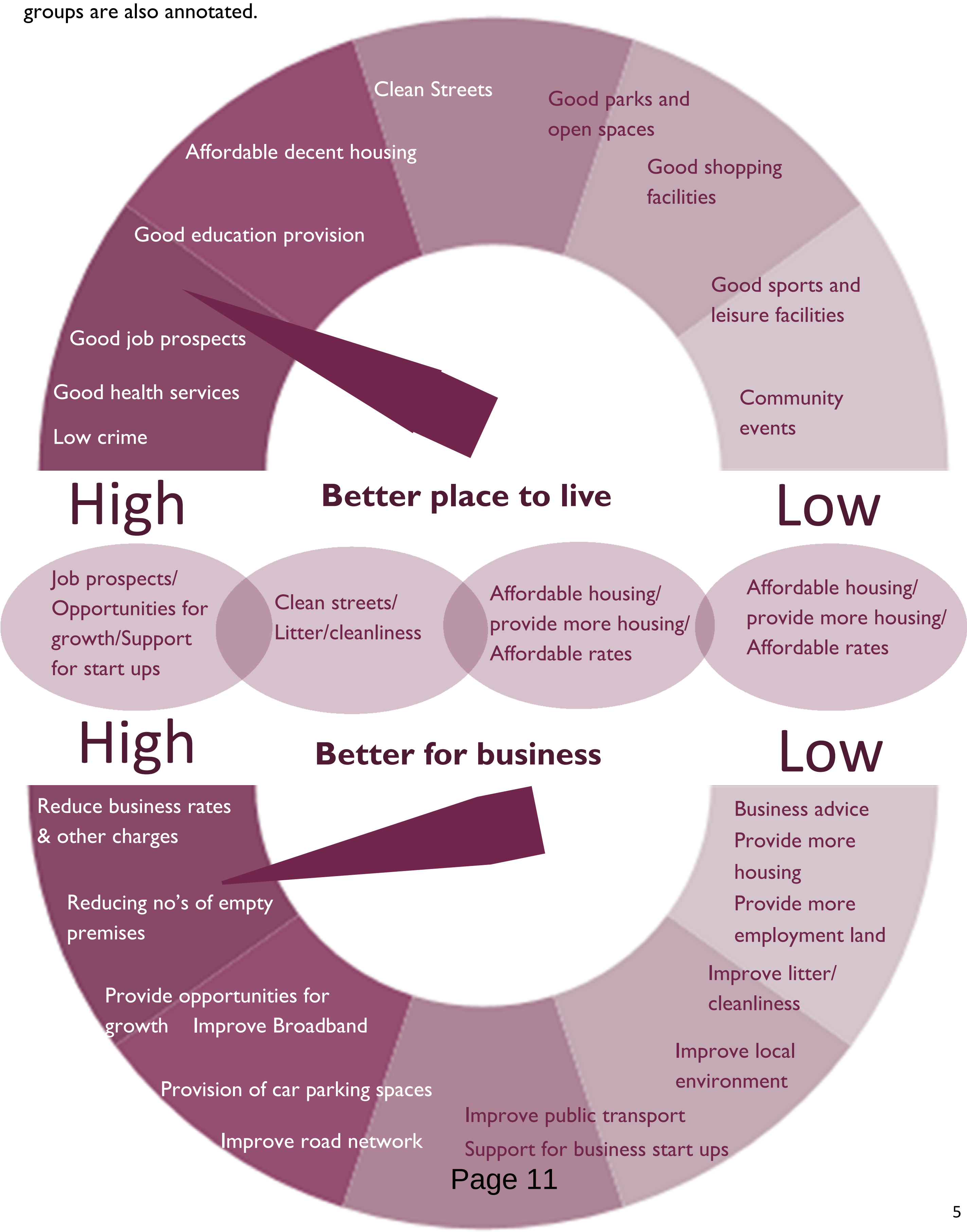
Respondents overall were least likely to indicate that they wanted to spend more on services and this was the case for 9 out of the 12 cost centres. The most notable exception to this was for spend on anti-social behaviour. 44% of respondents would still like to see more spent in this area.

If the Council were to consider changes to the charges it places upon it's services, increasing charges for leisure and other activities and for public spaces would be met with least resistance. The majority of respondents would support increased charges for these services.

Conversely, decreasing charges for car parking would be a popular move. 82% of respondents overall said that they would like to see these decreased and it would be a popular initiative amongst residents, businesses and community and voluntary sector organisations alike.

1.3 What makes Tamworth a better place to live and prosper?

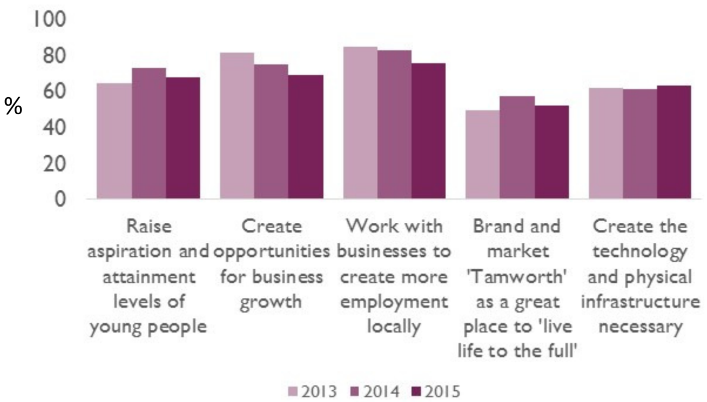
Low levels of crime, good health services and good job prospects were considered by residents to be highly important in making somewhere a good place to live. All three of these were high priorities for improvement, in making Tamworth a better place to live. For businesses, the cost of business rates was the main request for improvement. What makes Tamworth a better place to live and better for business are highlighted from high (H) to low (L) in the graphic below. Common synergies between the two groups are also annotated.



1.4 What has changed over time?

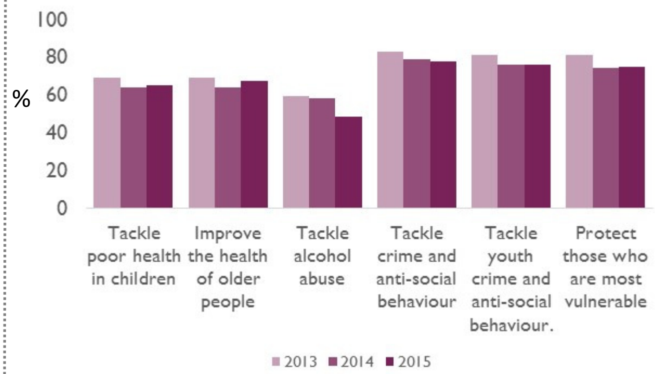
Views on Aspire and Prosper over time

The ranked order of importance of all five priorities has remained unchanged since last year. Slightly fewer respondents ranked 4 out of the 5 priorities as important this year compared to last year. ‘Creating the technology and physical infrastructure necessary’ was rated marginally higher this year when compared to last years results.



Views on Healthier and Safer over time

The ranking order of the majority of the healthier and safer priorities has remained unchanged in the last year. There has been one minor shift; ‘protect those most vulnerable in our local communities’ now ranks in second rather than third place and ‘tackling youth crime and antisocial behaviour’ now ranks in third place (it ranked in second place last year).

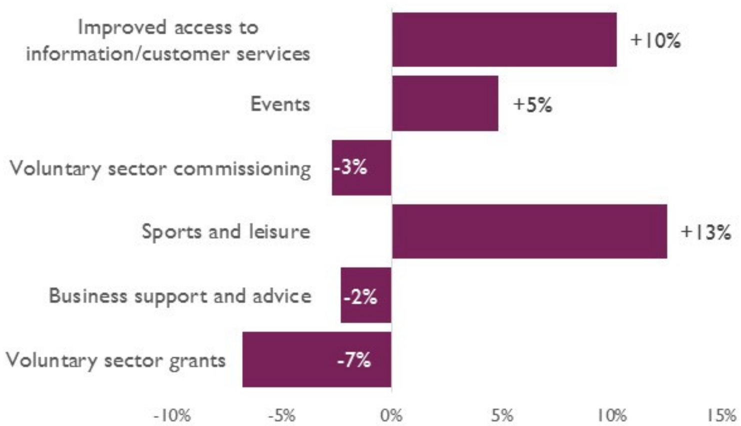


Views on spend over time

This year, as with last year, it was most common for respondents overall to say that they wanted to see the level of spend remain the same across the majority of service areas. This years results also mirrored last years in terms of respondents wanting to maintain the same level of spending on refuse and recycling services. There has been a noticeable shift in perceptions regarding reducing spend between this year and last year. Last year respondents expressed a preference for either maintaining spending or for spending more. However this year their desire to maintain spend was followed by a recognition that there should be less spending on some services.

Priorities for savings

+/- % change in views between 2014-2015



Improved access to information/customer services was considered less of a priority for savings last year (ranking 5 out of 13), It ranked 1 out of 12 in this years results. Also, this year, 10% more would like to see this as a priority for savings when compared to last years results. This year and last year, events were identified as the second most popular service to make savings, and 5% more than last year would like to see savings made in this area.

13% more would also like to make savings in in sports and leisure services this year when compared to last years results

Views on better place to live over time

Low levels of crime, good health services and good job prospects remain those aspects which were most likely to make somewhere a good place to live. This year, slightly more prominence has also been placed on the importance of a good education in making somewhere a good place to live. The level of crime, job prospects and health services remained the top priorities for improvement having also been identified by residents as the top priorities in last years and previous consecutive years consultation responses.

2. 1 INTRODUCTION

Tamworth Borough Council reviews it's council tax and charges on an annual basis and this helps to develop the Council's budget and ensures funding is put into areas which are of priority.

Residents, businesses and the voluntary sector are always an important part of this process. Therefore this year as in previous years, all these groups were invited to share their views on priorities for the year ahead.

This report presents the analysis of the combined results from all three respondent groups and emphasises where there are differences in opinions between the different groups. Comparisons with the results of the consultation from last year have also been made in order to identify commonality or differences in opinions over time.

2.2 METHODOLOGY

The consultation for the 2016/17 budget ran from 1st August 2015 to 14th September 2015 and the three key groups (residents, businesses and the voluntary sector) were encouraged to share their views through tailored paper and online surveys.

These surveys were developed by Tamworth Borough Council in conjunction with Staffordshire County Council's Insight, Planning and Performance Team and were largely based on the surveys used to collect views on the budget in previous years.

All three surveys were promoted via a range of communications channels. These included press releases in the local newspaper (The Tamworth Herald), on the Tamworth Borough Council website and through social media including Twitter, Facebook and the Tamworth Borough Council blog.

Specific groups were also targeted to take part in the consultation:

⇒ Members of the Tamworth Borough Council Citizens' Panel and Tamworth Borough Council Housing Tenants received a direct letter or email encouraging them to participate in the Residents Survey.

⇒ Businesses received an email encouraging them to participate in the Business Survey. This was also widely promoted by the Economic Development Team.

⇒ Voluntary Sector Organisations were also emailed to encourage their involvement. Their involvement was also supported and promoted by Support Staffordshire and Tamworth Borough Council's Community Development Team.

2.3 RESPONSES

A total of 276 responses were received to the consultation and these consisted of:

- 243 residents
- 18 businesses; 50% were based on an industrial estate, 28% were in a town centre location, 11% in a local neighbourhood and 11% were based at home.
- 15 community and voluntary organisations; 57% of these were a registered charity, 21% were a company limited by guarantee, 14% were a community interest group and 7% a voluntary group.

For the purpose of analysis, responses from all three groups have been combined. Where differences were apparent by respondent type, these have been highlighted graphically or through a textual summary.

Some caution should be applied when interpreting the results, particularly in relation to those Businesses and Voluntary Organisation responses. Responses from these groups were relatively low and therefore these responses should not be viewed as representative of the overall communities which they represent.

2.4 PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS FOR THE RESIDENTS SURVEY

In total, there were 243 responses to the Tamworth residents survey. This equates to 0.4% of the adult population of Tamworth[1] and is a marked 33% increase in responses when compared to the residents survey responses from last year.

In statistical terms, the 95% confidence level has been applied to the residents survey results. This means that if the survey was repeated, in 95 out of 100 cases, the same response would be achieved.

Residents responses have an overall confidence interval of +/-6% meaning that the percentage responses they have given to any questions could fall in the range of 6% higher or 6% lower than their actual response. A confidence interval of +/-3-4% is fairly typical for a statistically robust survey[2].

When considering key demographics, responses were representative of some key characteristics but were less so of others:

⇒ The Residents Survey is representative by gender; 52% of respondents were male and 48% were female.

⇒ It was more common for older residents to participate in the residents survey and therefore the results are generally over representative of those respondents aged 55 and above and under representative of those residents aged 44 and below.

⇒ By disability, the survey results are slightly over representative of those respondents who had a disability. 32% of respondents said they had a disability compared to 18% in the overall population.

⇒ Responses are representative of the most commonly occurring ethnicities of White British and White Other. In their survey responses, 95.2% described themselves as White British and 3% as White Other.

[1] The adult population of Tamworth includes those residents who are aged 18 and above

[2] To achieve a +/-4% confidence interval for the residents survey, 500 responses would need to be achieved from Tamworth Borough Residents and to achieve a +/-3% confidence interval, 800 responses would need to be returned.

3. VIEWS ON THE CORPORATE PRIORITIES

The Council vision is for "One Tamworth, Perfectly Placed" with a focus upon working with partners to:

Aspire and prosper in Tamworth – to create and sustain a thriving local economy and make Tamworth a more aspirational and competitive place to do business.

Be healthier and safer in Tamworth - to create a safe environment in which local people can reach their full potential and live longer, healthier lives.

Respondents were asked a series of questions about the importance of a range of priorities which sit beneath the visionary themes of 'Aspire and Prosper in Tamworth' and 'Be Healthier and Safer in Tamworth.' Respondents were asked to rate how important each of the priorities were on a scale of 1-5 with one being the most important and five being the least important.

3.1 Aspire and prosper

⇒ All priorities under 'Aspire and Prosper' were given an importance rating of one or two by half of respondents or more.

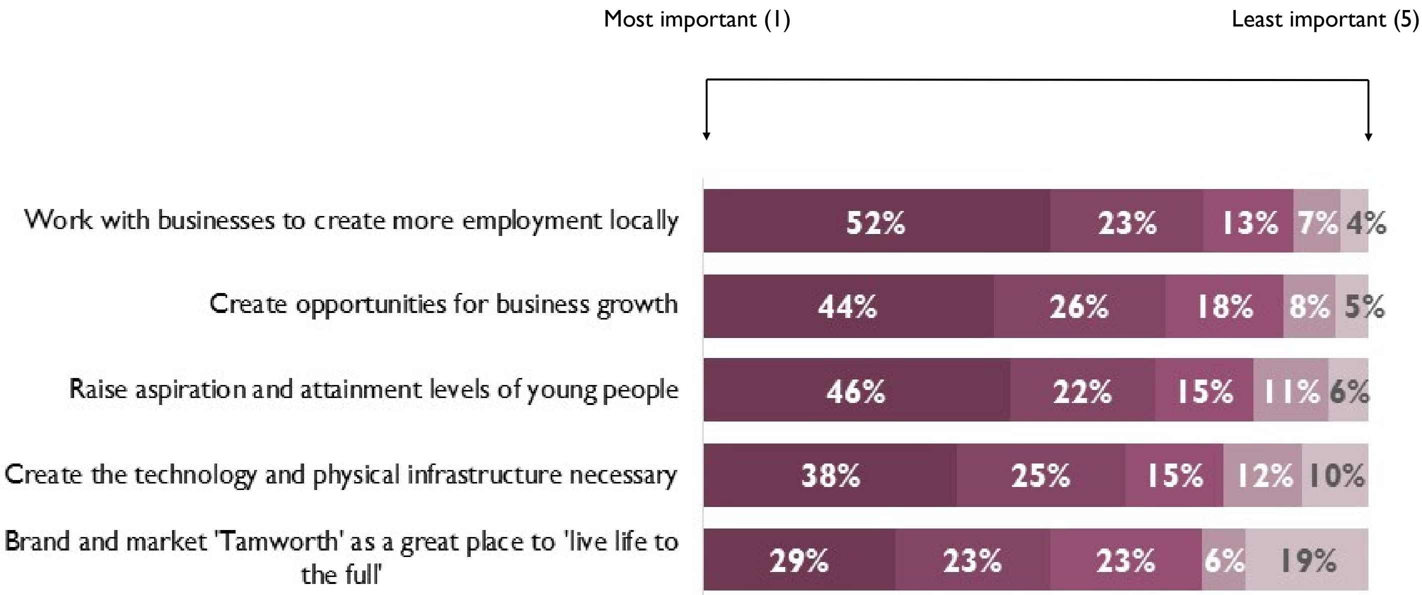
⇒ The most important priority was to 'work with businesses to create more employment locally'. This was closely followed by 'create opportunities for business growth'.

⇒ Considered least important was 'brand and market Tamworth as a great place to live life to the full.' However, 52% still gave this an importance rating of one or two.

⇒ The ranked order of importance of all five priorities has remained unchanged since last year.

⇒ Respondents overall views are documented in the figure below.

Figure 3.1: Please tell us how important our priorities under 'Aspire and Prosper' are to you/your business/organisation, with 1 being most important and 5 being the least important (%)



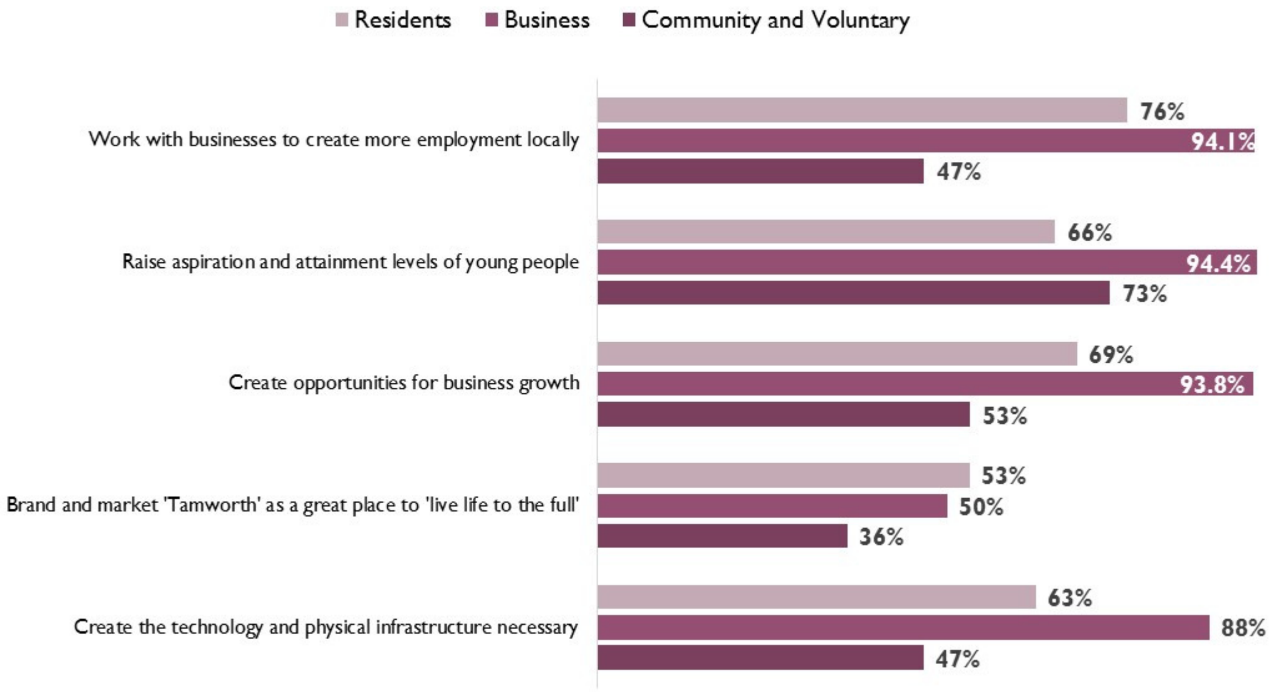
3.2 Comparing results by respondent group

The graph below illustrates the breakdown of responses for each priority by respondent group type. The results shown are the proportion of each group who felt that each of the priorities were of high importance (i.e. respondents provided an importance rating of one or two).

There were some differences by respondent group. The most important priority overall, ‘working with businesses to create more employment locally’ was considered a greater priority for businesses (94% gave it an importance rating of one or two), than it was by residents (76% gave it an importance rating of one or two) and community and voluntary groups (47% gave it an importance rating of one or two).

Residents ranked ‘working with businesses to create more employment opportunities locally’ as their highest priority whilst businesses and community and voluntary organisations ranked ‘raising aspirations and attainment levels of young people’ as their highest priority.

Figure 3.2: The importance of priorities under 'Aspire and Prosper’ by respondent group (%)



Broadly speaking, the top three priorities of ‘working with businesses to create more employment locally’, ’creating opportunities for business growth’ and ’raising aspiration and attainment levels of young people are mirrored across all three groups.

However, it is clear that ‘creating the technology and physical infrastructure’ is considered to be of far greater importance to businesses than it is to residents and the community and voluntary sector. This was also of greater importance to businesses in last years results.

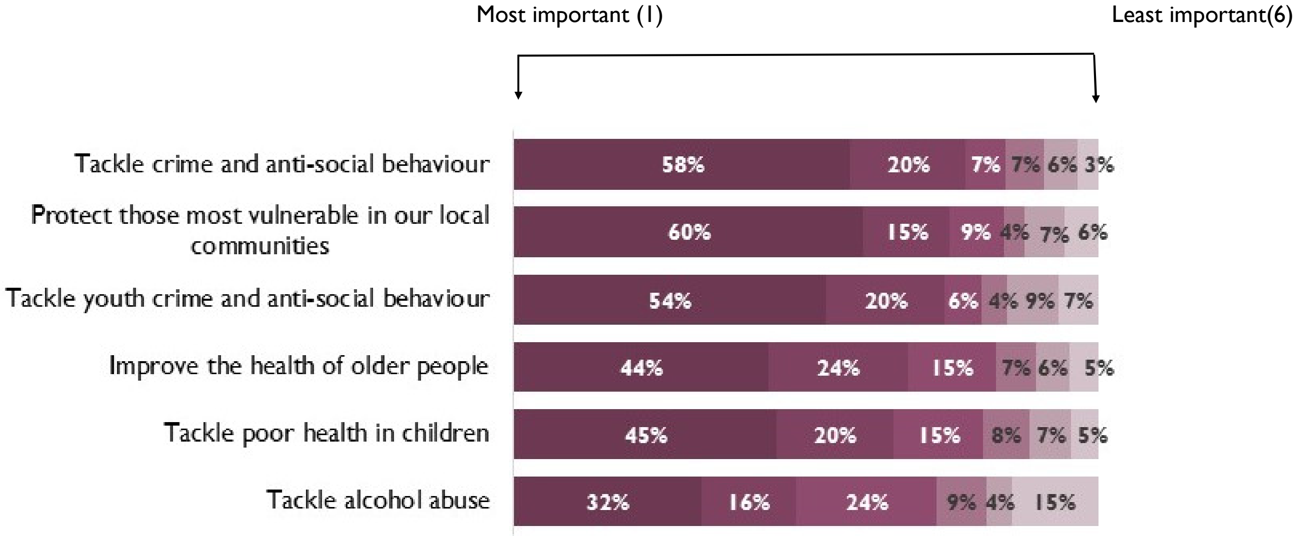
When drawing conclusions from these responses, it is important to remember that the business respondent group and the community and voluntary organisation responses are considerably smaller than the residents response group, therefore results may not be representative of their overall group type.

3.3 Be healthier and safer

The majority of priorities under be healthier and safer were considered important by two thirds of respondents or more. The exception to this was 'tackling alcohol abuse'. Still, nearly half (48%) said this was an important priority to them.

The most important priority under 'be healthier and safer' was to 'tackle crime and anti-social behaviour'. This was followed by 'protecting those most vulnerable in our local communities' and 'tackling youth crime and anti-social behaviour.' Respondents overall views are documented in the figure below.

Figure 3.3: Please tell us how important our priorities under 'be healthy and safer in Tamworth' are to you/your business/organisation, with 1 being most important and 6 being the least important (%)



There has been one minor shift; 'protect those most vulnerable in our local communities' now ranks in second rather than third place and 'tackling youth crime and antisocial behaviour' now ranks in third place (it ranked in second place last year).

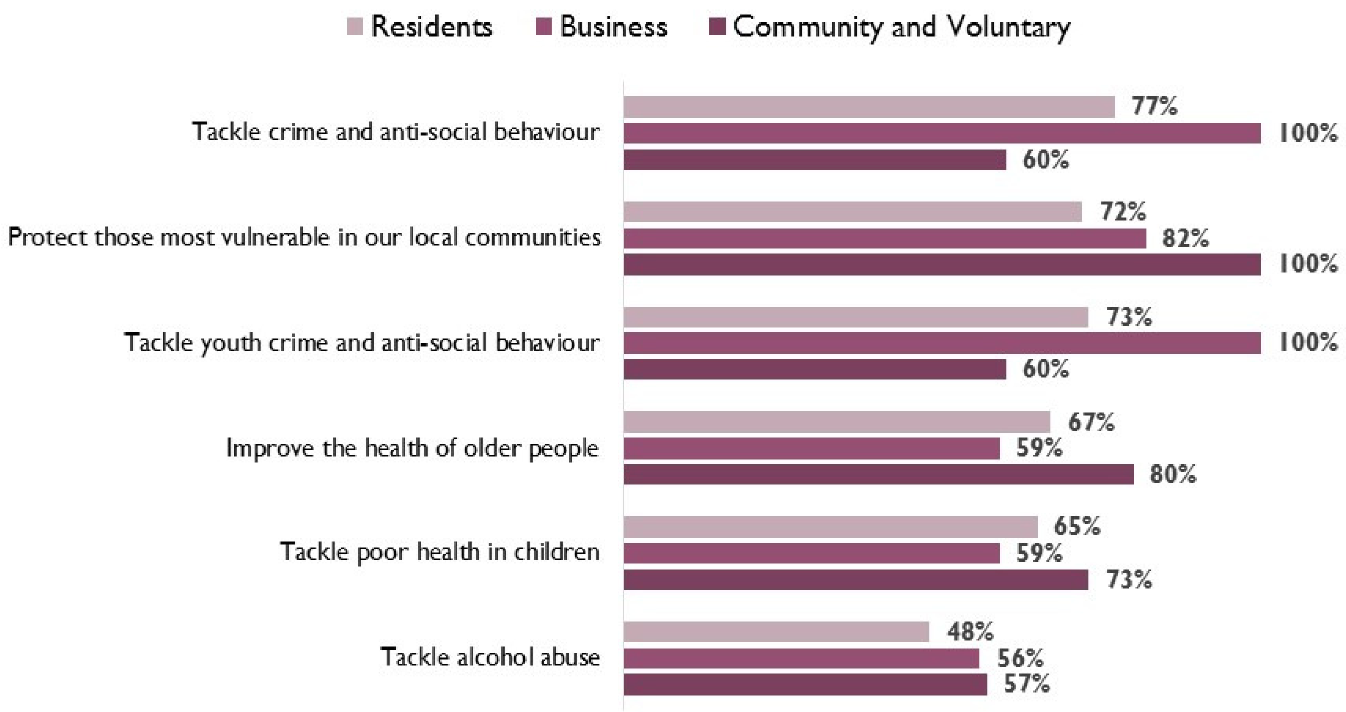
3.4 Comparing results by respondent group

The graph below illustrates the breakdown of responses against each priority by respondent group type. The results shown are the proportion of each group who felt that each of the priorities were of high importance to address.

There was some commonality in the responses by group type. The top three priorities for both residents and businesses were the same. These were ’tackling crime and anti-social behaviour’, ’tackling youth crime and anti-social behaviour’ and ’protecting the most vulnerable in our local community’.

Whilst community and voluntary groups also ranked ‘protecting those most vulnerable in our community’ in their top three priorities, they ranked this more highly, in first place. Their second and third priorities also differed. Their second most important priority was to improve the health of older people and they ranked ‘tackling poor health in children’ as their third most important priority.

Figure 3.4: The importance of priorities under 'Be healthier and safer’ by respondent group (%)



Residents top three priorities have remained unchanged since last year. Whilst businesses have also consistently prioritised ’tackling crime and anti-social behaviour and ‘tackling youth crime and anti-social behaviour’, last year they gave a higher priority to ‘tackling’ alcohol abuse’ than they have done this year.

When drawing conclusions from these responses, it is important to remember that the business respondent group and the community and voluntary organisational responses are considerably smaller than the residents response group and therefore results may not be representative of their overall group type.

3.5 Comments on the 'vision' and 'priorities'

Vision

This year, as with last year, the general consensus was very much in support of both the vision and the priorities which lie beneath it. Comments on the vision included, *"I applaud your vision," "the vision as quoted sounds just about right",* and "*I believe you are on the right track showcasing Tamworth's lovely heritage."* Whilst respondents clearly expressed their support, this was not without it's reservation. Concerns about *"how the vision could be achieved"* were evident from some whilst others felt they *"had not witnessed much progress during the last two years."*

Respondents from community and voluntary organisations were supportive of the vision whilst recognising that there was room to enhance it. *"We feel that part of the vision for Tamworth should include promoting this positive culture of a mutually supportive community, We help each other, share resources and collaborate on events and activities. There is much to celebrate about our community and the great benefits we bring. This needs to be included as part of the vision."*

Priorities

Respondents commented on the priorities, providing suggestions on practical actions which they felt would help to ensure the priorities could be achieved. Underneath the priority to 'Aspire and Prosper,' respondents felt that the following improvements would help Tamworth to meet it's economic priority:

⇒ Create opportunities for business growth: Under this priority, respondents commented that the Council could find ways to improve the quality of jobs. Whilst *"warehouse jobs have helped create more employment, we now need to grow wealth and drive quality of life."* Also, *"do something to increase tourist spend."*

⇒ Create the technology and physical infrastructure necessary: It was considered that improvements to infrastructure and technology were needed. In particular it was recognised that *"broadband access needs to be improved."* This would encourage businesses to locate in and remain in Tamworth.

⇒ Raise aspiration and attainment levels of young people: It was felt that young people needed help to enable them to find jobs. "*Provide school leavers with a better chance of getting an apprenticeship or a way to obtain a paid job."*

Respondents were also keen to comment on the priority for a 'Healthier and Safer Tamworth', providing their suggestions and comments on the priority aim.

⇒ Tackling crime and antisocial behaviour would be beneficial: This was a view which was consistently shared across respondent groups. *"For businesses this would mean less chance of being vandalised/ burgled - which is obviously good!"*

⇒ Tackling poor health in children and improving the health of older people: Respondents provided support for both these priorities but some did question how they would be achieved. Others highlighted issues they had noticed in the local area and suggested solutions. Some respondents for example generally considered that there were *"too many overweight parents and kids, feeling that more could be done to tackle obesity".* It was generally considered that there were *"too many bakeries and cafes in the town centre." "More restaurants could provide healthier alternatives." Cooking lessons at school, could also provide the opportunity to teach young people how to make food from scratch."*

⇒ Tackling alcohol abuse: Voluntary and community organisations expressed a preference for softer terminology in the wording of this priority—for example consider *"offering intervention and support to those with alcohol dependency"* as an alternative.

4. SPENDING ON SERVICES

Respondents were provided with planned spend on major cost areas for 2015/16 and were asked whether they felt the Council should increase, decrease or keep spending the same. Their collective responses are illustrated in the graph below:

Figure 4.1: Spend for 2015/16 on major cost areas (%)

4.1 Maintain levels of spending

It was most common for respondents across the majority of service areas to say that they would prefer the level of spending to remain the same. This was particularly apparent regarding spend on refuse and recycling with 79% wanting to maintain the same level of spending on this service. Over half of all respondents also wanted to maintain the same level of spending on parks, open spaces, street cleaning (58%) and sports and leisure (52%).

This year, as with last year, it was most common for respondents overall to say that they wanted to see the level of spend remain the same across the majority of service areas. This years results also mirrored last years in terms of respondents wanting to maintain the same level of spending on refuse and recycling services.

This year, there was some similarity but also some difference in views by respondent type. Whilst residents views generally mirrored those of the overall results (as they were the largest group), businesses and community and voluntary groups did have some different ideas about which services should retain the same amount of spend.

Businesses, like all respondents, did want to maintain levels of spending on refuse collection and recycling (69%). However, they also wanted to maintain the same level of spending on sports and leisure (75%) and business support and advice (71%).

Those respondents from the community and voluntary sector, mirrored the overall results by wanting to maintain levels of spending on refuse collection and recycling (86%) and parks, open spaces and street cleaning (80%). However, a much higher proportion of these respondents wanted to maintain the same level of spend on tackling anti-social behaviour (79%).

4.2 Reduce levels of spending

The sentiment for maintaining levels of spend was generally followed by a desire to spend less. Respondents were most likely to say that they wanted less spend on improving access to information/ customer services. Nearly half of all respondents (48%) would like to see less spent on this cost area. Respondents overall were also most likely to want to see spend reduced on events (39%) and commissioning services from voluntary organisations and charities (39%).

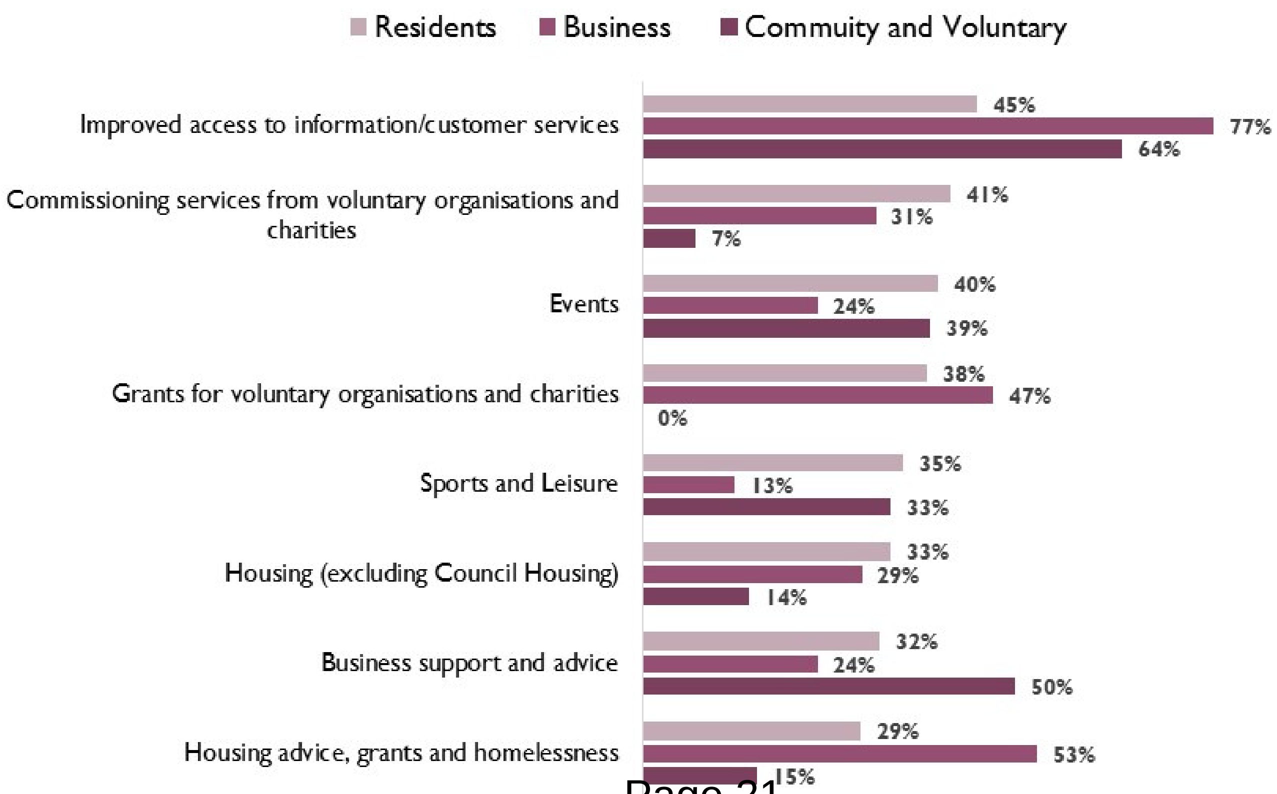
There has been a noticeable shift in perceptions regarding reducing spend between this year and last year. Last year respondents expressed a preference for either maintaining spending or for spending more. However this year their desire to maintain spend was followed by a recognition that there should be less spending on some services. Spending less was the second most popular preference in relation to 7 of the 12 cost areas.

This years results reflect that there were some similarities but also some differences in views by respondent type regarding reducing levels of spend. Whilst residents views generally mirrored those of the overall results (as they were the largest group), there were some differences expressed by both businesses and community and voluntary organisations.

Businesses did mirror the overall preference for less spend on improving access to information/customer services albeit with a higher strength of feeling with 77% wanting to see less spend on this. However their second and third preferences for reduced spend were different. They were most likely to want to see reduced spend on housing advice, grants and homelessness (53%) and grants for voluntary organisations and charities (47%).

Community and voluntary organisations also mirrored the overall results, most wanting to see a reduction in spend on improved access to information/customer services (64%) and events (39%). However half of these respondents (50%) also expressed a preference for seeing a reduction in spend on business support and advice.

Figure 4.2: Reduce levels of spend for 2015/16 on major cost areas (%)



4.3 Increase levels of spending

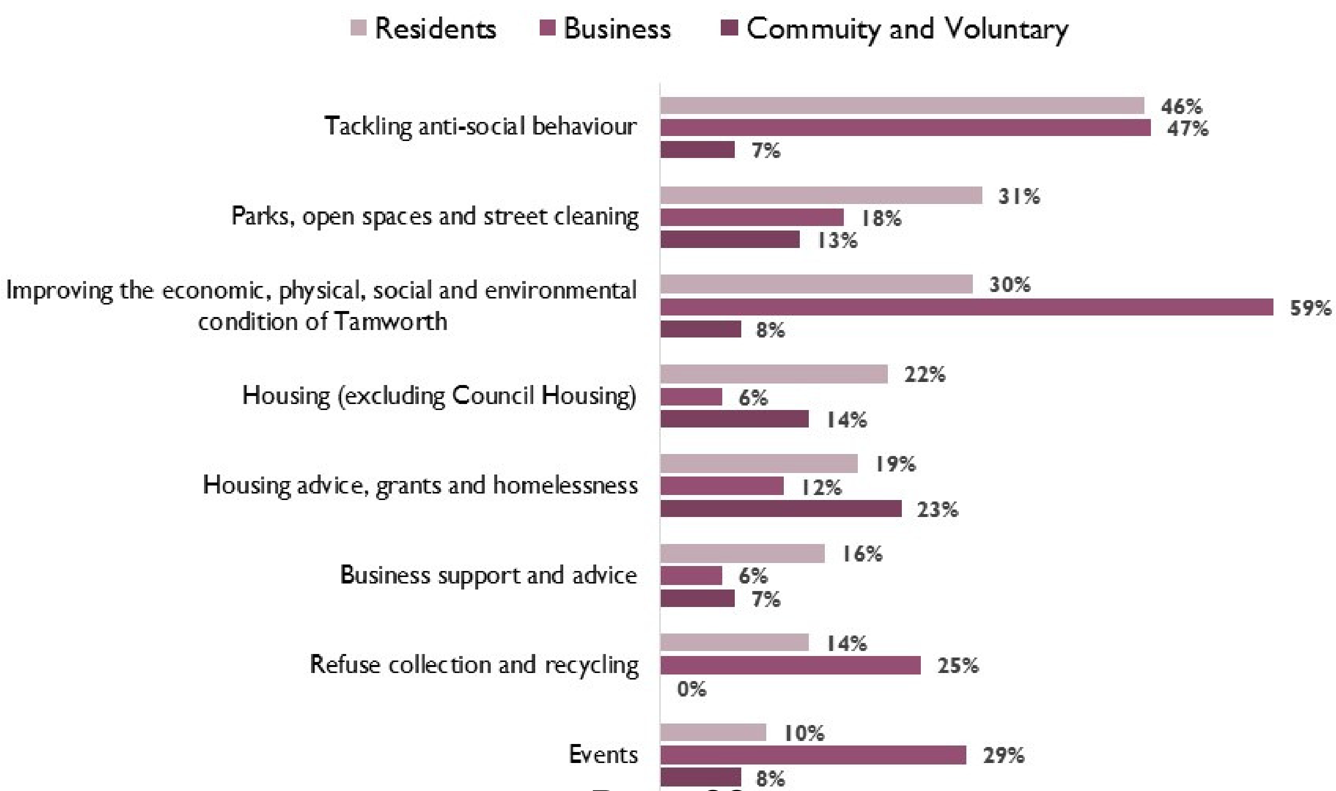
Respondents were generally least likely to say that they wanted to spend more on services and this was the case in 9 out of the 12 cost areas. The most notable exception to this was for spend on anti-social behaviour. 44% of respondents still said they would like to see more spend on this cost area (tackling anti -social behaviour was also the most popular area for spend last year). The second most popular area for increased spend with under a third was improving the economic, physical, social and environmental condition of Tamworth (31%). The third was parks, open spaces and street cleaning with 29% expressing an interest in increased levels of spending on this cost area.

With increased levels of spending, there was some similarity but also some difference in views by respondent type. Once again, residents preferences generally mirrored those of the overall results (as they were the largest group), but there were some differences in viewpoints from businesses and community and voluntary organisations.

Businesses did mirror the overall results in some of their preferences for increased spending. Two of their top three priorities for increased levels of spending were the same as the overall, albeit with a varying strength of feeling from the overall responses. These were improving the economic, physical, social and environmental condition of Tamworth (59%) and tackling anti-social behaviour (47%). Their third priority for increased level of spend was for events with 29% of businesses wanting to see increased spending in this cost area.

The top three priorities for spend from community and voluntary organisations were different from the overall. The top priority for these respondents was grants for voluntary organisations and charities with 73% expressing that this was the cost area where they would most like to see increased spend[4]. 71% also wanted to see increased spend on commissioning services from voluntary organisations and charities[5] with the third most popular option for spend (with nearly one quarter of this group, 23%) being for housing advice, grants and homelessness.

Figure 4.3: Increase levels of spend for 2015/16 on major cost areas (%)



[4] This is not shown in the figure above as it was a low priority for spend by respondents overall

[5] This is not shown in the figure above as it was a low priority for spend by respondents overall

4.4 Comments on spend

There was a general consensus amongst residents that value for money should be a key component of all decisions on spend. This was evidenced by one respondent who commented that it was important to *"ensure that the council spends monies wisely and gets the best value for money."* To ensure value for money, it was generally considered important to *"reduce areas of waste", "to drive up efficiency"* and to *"monitor work carried out by other agencies."*

There were mixed views on whether private contractors could provide this value for money. Those in support agreed that *"most private companies put their contracts out to tender to get the best value without compromising on quality. There is no reason why the council can't do the same."* Those not in support were more likely to agree that *"some prices paid to outside companies do not seem value for money, they just seem to be a cash cow for these type of companies."*

All types of respondents generally agreed that tackling the roots causes of problems will most likely reduce the need to spend. For example, *"many truants and young people in trouble turn out to have undiagnosed SEN. It's the root cause of troubles that need to be tackled, which may then ease the financial burden of dealing with the outcomes".*

In terms of spend on specific services, businesses identified that they would like to see more money spent on road repairs. One business also sought clarification on what the £168,000 for business support and advice was for as they hadn't received any business support or advice themselves.

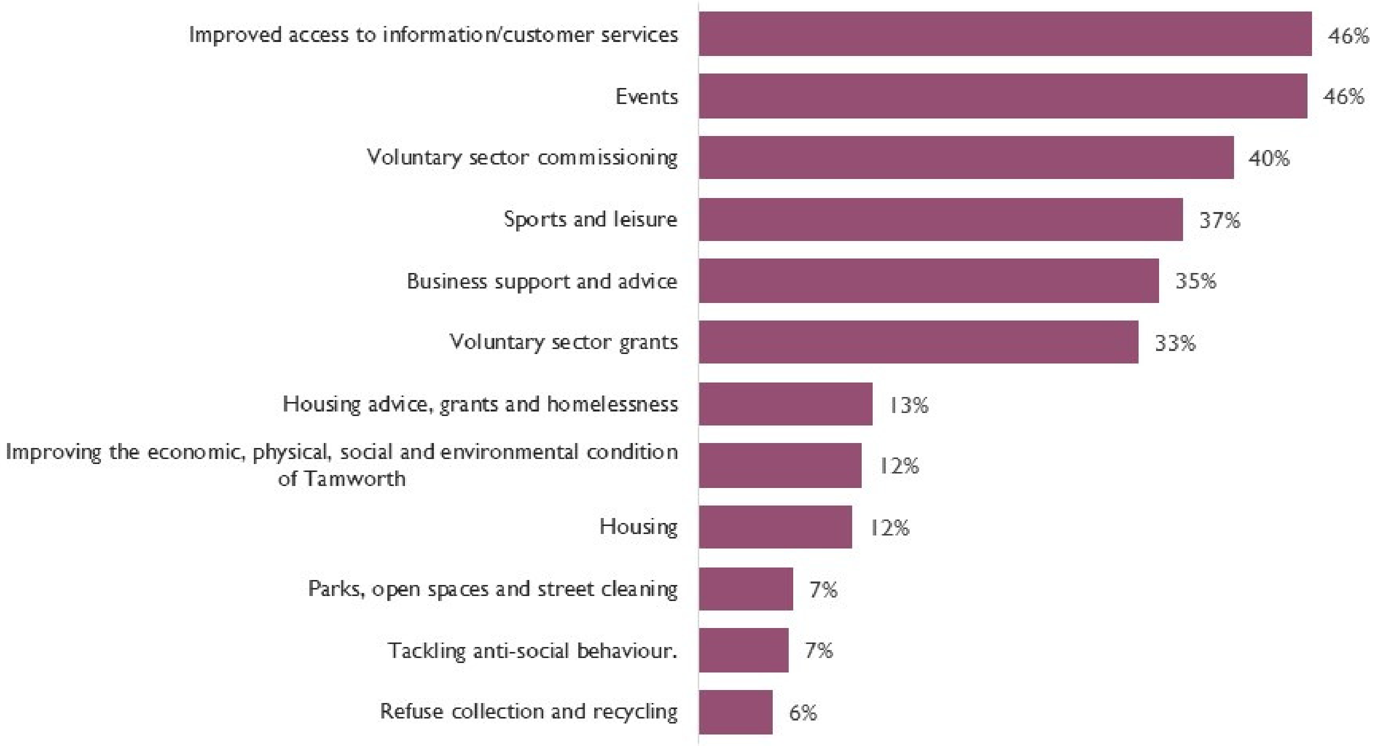
There was a general reluctance to identify areas of reduced spend. This was identified in respondents comments and was also reflected by the fact that relatively few comments were received to this question. Those comments which were received were very much individual in their nature and therefore not generally representative of respondents views.

4.5 Savings and reducing costs

Respondents were provided with a list of services and asked to indicate up to three where they either felt savings could be made or costs could be reduced. It was most common for respondents to indicate that they would like to see savings or reduced costs made in the following two service areas; improved access to information/customer services and events.

In both cases, 46% of respondents overall would like to see savings or reduced costs made. Events was also identified as the second most popular service to make savings or reduce costs to in last years results. At this time, improved access to information/customer services was considered less of a priority for savings or reduced costs (ranking 5 out of 13) compared to ranking 1 out of 12 in this years results.

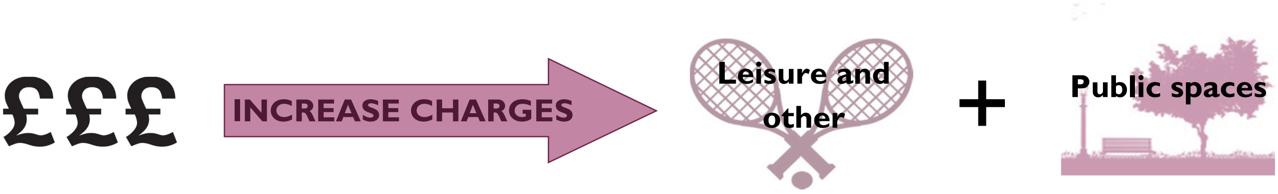
Figure 4.4: Which THREE services should the Council look at if they had to make savings or reduce costs? (%)



Both residents and businesses responses mirrored the overall top priorities for savings or reduced costs. Community and voluntary organisations also mirrored these in terms of most wanting to see savings or reduced costs for improving access to information/customer services. Their other top priorities for savings/reduced costs were however different. 60% of them wanted savings/reductions in costs to business support and advice and 47% wanted these for sports and leisure services.

Which TWO of the below income areas do you think the Council could/should <u>increase</u> and <u>decrease</u> charges for?

It was most common for respondents to stress the need to increase public charges for leisure and other activities (66%) or public spaces (60%).



However, respondents comments reflected a genuine reluctance for increases in charges to any of the four identified areas of spend. For example *"although I appreciate the council need extra revenue I don't think any of the above can be increased"* and *"none of the above, they are all important to the people of Tamworth!!!!"*

Not charging any more for car parking in the town centre was a common comment— *"look at the effect it has already had"*. Some businesses did suggest *"charging for car parking at Ventura to encourage more people into the town centre."*

Respondents were most likely to say that they would like to see decreased charges for car parking, 82% of respondents overall indicated that they would like to see these decreased.

Car parking featured prominently in respondents comments. These should be *"eliminated!!"* or *"car parking charges should be reduced in the town by a pound all day to help increase sales for the shops in the town Thursday Friday Saturday"* or *"drop the parking by 5% - 10% and more people would be able to afford to use them as a result income would increase not decrease."*

The figure below illustrates the responses by group type. On the whole there was most commonality in responses between residents and businesses. Community and voluntary organisations, did however express some different viewpoints for example they indicated more of a preference for increased charges for waste management services and decreased charges for public open spaces.

Figure 4.5: Which TWO of the below income areas do you think the Council should increase charges for (%)

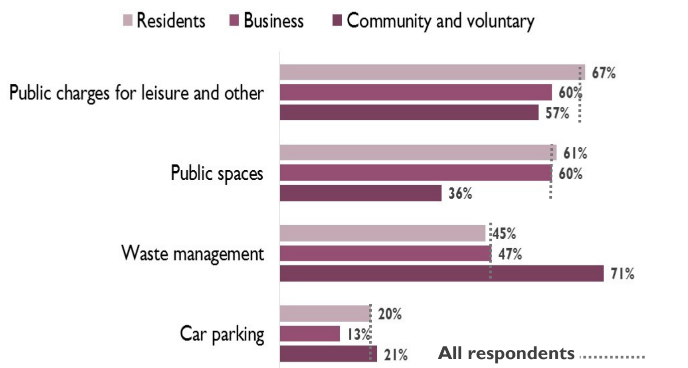
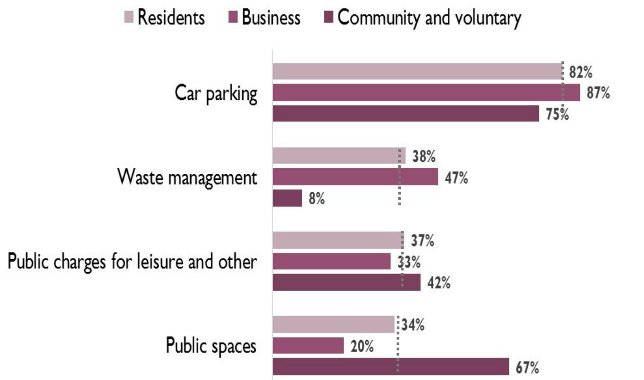


Figure 4.6: Which TWO of the below income areas do you think the Council should decrease charges for (%)



5. MAKING TAMWORTH A BETTER PLACE TO LIVE

The following questions were posed to those respondents who were participating in the consultation as a local resident.

5.1 What makes somewhere a good place to live?

The word cloud below depicts the answers selected by residents, the size of the font reflects the number of times that each element was selected. It is clear to see that low levels of crime, good health services, good job prospects and good educational provision were considered to be those aspects which were most likely to make somewhere a good place to live. The first three of these were also highlighted in last years consultation as being most important in making somewhere a good place to live. This year, slightly more prominence has also been placed on the importance of a good education in making somewhere a good place to live.

Figure 5.1: What makes somewhere a good place to live? (%)

5.2 What would make Tamworth a better place to live?

The word cloud below illustrates that the level of crime, job prospects and health services are the top three priorities for improvement in Tamworth. They remain the top priorities for improvement having been identified in last years and previous consecutive years consultation responses from residents. These three priorities were closely followed by cleanliness of streets and affordable decent housing. These were also the fourth and fifth priorities for improvement in last years consultation responses. Therefore the five main priorities for improvement in Tamworth remain the same.

Figure 5.2: What would make Tamworth a better place to live? (%)

5.3 What would make Tamworth a better place to live

Residents of Tamworth were invited to suggest improvements which they felt would make Tamworth a better place to live. Respondents were keen to comment providing suggestions across a range of themes including the town centre, parking and leisure services. Their comments are documented below.

Shopping facilities

Investing in the town centre (and not in Ventura) was a key suggestion which would be warmly welcomed by Tamworth residents. This theme was exemplified by one resident who agreed: *"we need better shops in Tamworth town centre - no more charity, card or cafes please! How about some up-market shops to encourage people."* Another who similarly agreed felt it would be better for Tamworth to *"invest in the town but not in one off events which left no lasting legacy"*.

Sports and leisure facilities

A common theme amongst residents was the lack of affordable leisure facilities in the town. Respondents commented that Tamworth Borough Council make *"no provision for their citizens to access affordable gym/ leisure facilities."* It could massively benefit the local population to lose weight and to become healthier if provision were made for these.

Parking

Whilst parking was not considered one of the key criteria of what makes somewhere a good place to live, it was clearly of importance to residents of Tamworth. Comments on parking were plentiful and these ranged from the cost of parking in Tamworth town centre to parking in locations which were considered inappropriate. Regarding car parking charges in the town centre, residents generally agreed that these should be *"free"* or at least *"more affordable, this would help!"*

The parking of vehicles on *"pavements, grass verges and near junctions"* were raised as an issue in some localised areas. One resident for example who lives in Lakeside commented that *"there are regularly vehicles parked half on the pavement in front of my house, which is on a corner. It's the same on the other side of the road. Anybody with an invalid carriage or even a pushchair has to go in the road! Access for emergency vehicles would be severely restricted."*

Cleanliness of streets

Residents were unanimously in support of encouraging local people to *"take pride"* in their local area. *"Litter dropping and dog fouling"* were acknowledged to be problems in the local areas and encouraging people to take pride in their local area was viewed as a key mechanism to encourage future improvements. For example, *"litter, cans, bottles and fast food wrappers litter our streets. More needs to be done with keeping Tamworth clean and litter free, schools should be encouraged to take pride in where they live"*. Cleanliness and tidiness was also considered to be an issue in parks and open spaces and therefore encouraging people to *"take pride"* in these would also encourage improvements to their appearance.

Health services

Provision of health services was recognised to be *"a national problem and not just a local one." However,* despite this recognition, some respondents were unhappy that they had to travel out of the town to access a hospital and accident and emergency services: "*An A & E Department would be a first, we used to have two proper hospitals, we now have a minor injuries unit."* Others also felt that there was a need for *"more doctors surgeries."* This town is *"growing and we need to grow with it!."*

Education provision

The subject of education was mentioned by a minority of participants. Those that did so generally made some commentary on academies. One felt there should be at least *"two state run schools within the town—one should be on the North side and one should be on the south side and then one school could be academy run."* Others were less supportive of academies for example, *"one sixth form college dished out to private academy was a disgrace and please realise that it's good teachers that make good schools, NOT academy status."*

Parks and open spaces

A handful of comments were received on parks and open spaces. One commented that Tamworth has *"lovely parks and open spaces and these are well maintained".* Others however did provide the suggestions for improvements which were being sought. Amongst those commenting it was considered key to keep parks and open spaces clear of *"litter"* and *"dog fouling."*

Affordable decent housing

Whilst this was generally regarded as an important issue which needs improving, it was not a thematic issue which residents generally chose to comment on. Of the few that did comment, *"building new council homes was considered vital—not so they can be sold but so they can be used to help people get on the ladder. These could be for a maximum four year tenancy."*

Events

Events were another of the themes not commonly referred to in residents comments. Those residents who did comment reflected diverse and individual viewpoints. One respondent felt that *"investment into the town centre"* would be better than *"spending money on one off events which left no lasting legacy for the town".* Another felt that Tamworth would benefit from *"community events".* These could reflect the needs of people living in these local areas. These for example could be held *"on estates, for the people who live there"* and they could be anything from *"street cleans to fun days out for the kids".*

Good job prospects

Whilst job prospects were not a common theme amongst those residents who were commenting, one respondent did suggest a potential improvement whereby advisers could go into schools and offer children a variety of options, all of which could eventually lead to good job prospects. For example *"my son did not want to go to university much to the disappointment of his teachers and me, he did not know what he wants to do and was drifting but I signed him up to an AAT course at college (evening classes) and now he is a part qualified accountant!"*

5.4 What would you consider to be an acceptable Council Tax increase for the 2016/17 budget?

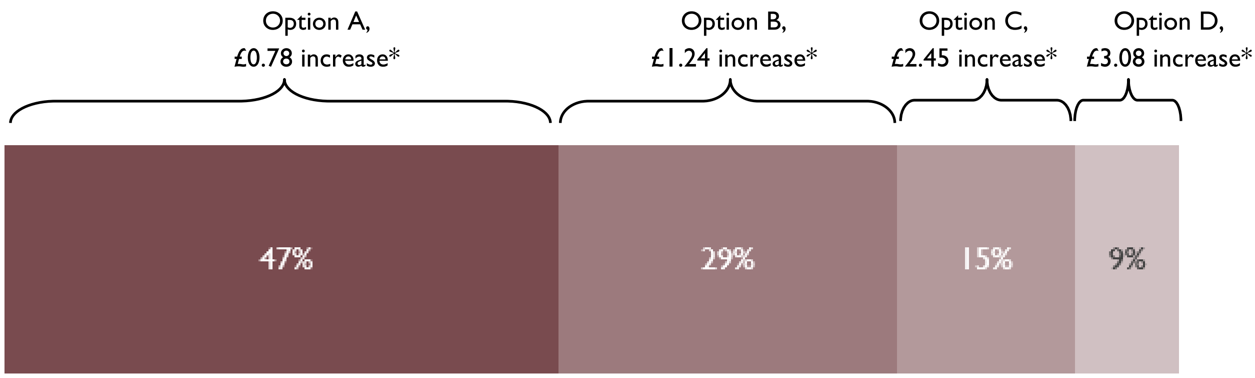
The largest proportion of respondents would prefer the lowest level of increase offered with nearly half of all respondents (47%) selecting option A as their preferred choice.

Generally speaking, the higher the level of the increase, the less attractive it was as an option for residents.

Whilst this trend is not dissimilar from those responses expressed by residents last year, it is noticeable this year that a higher proportion of residents selected the lowest level of increase available (£0.78).

This level of increase (£0.78) is similar to the average level of increase witnessed for all authorities in the West Midlands of (£0.80) according to CIPFA's latest annual council tax survey.

Figure 5.3: What would you consider to be an acceptable Council Tax increase for the 2016/17 budget?



*All increases shown are for a Band B property

6. MAKING TAMWORTH BETTER FOR BUSINESS

Respondents who completed the questionnaire from the perspective of a local business were asked to provide their opinions and comment on a number of business related questions in order to gather a picture of how Tamworth can be made better for businesses.

A total of 18 businesses responded to the survey (a 29% increase since last year, with four more businesses participating in this years survey compared to last years). This section will explore the questions businesses were asked and the responses that they gave.

6.1 Business type and location

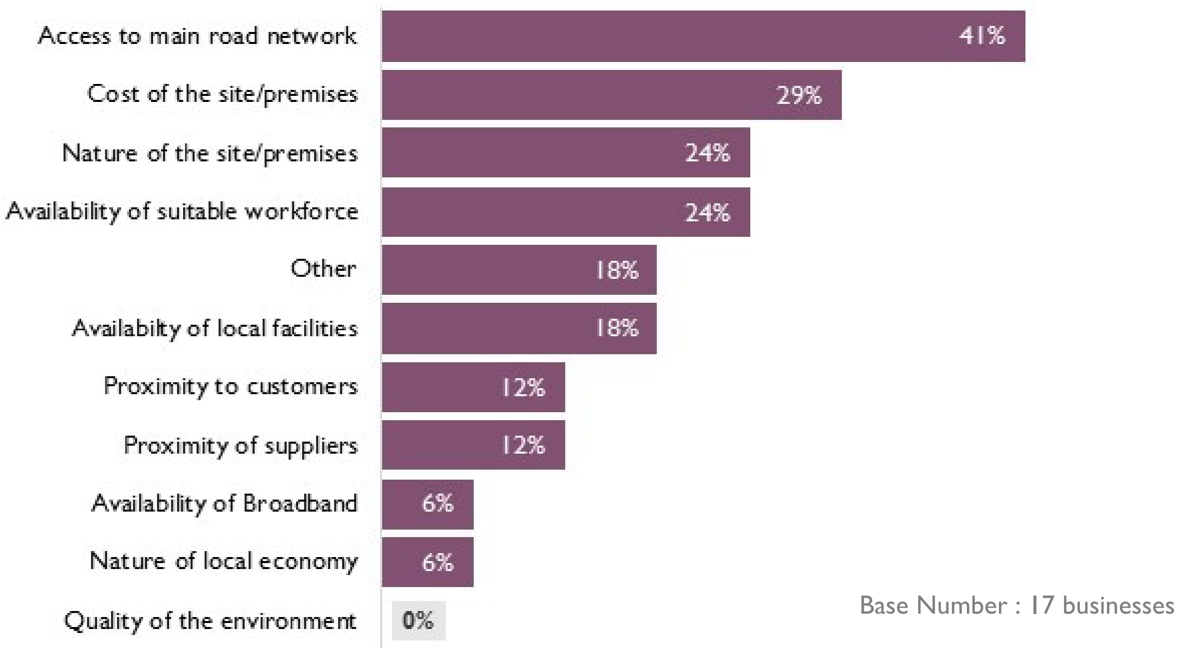
Of the businesses that responded to the consultation, half were based on an industrial estate (50%), 28% were in the town centre, and 11% were based either at home (11%) or within a local neighbourhood area (11%).

The majority of them were independent with no other branches (78%). 11% were a head office and 6% (1 business) a branch or subsidiary of a larger group. 6% (1 business) described themselves as another type of business and qualified that they were a church/community business[3].

Respondents stipulated that access to main road networks was the main reasons for their base (41%). Access to main road networks was also given as the main reason for location in last years consultation responses. Those companies who said access was important were most likely to be based on industrial estates.

The cost of the site/premises was also given as a reason for location by 29%. The quality of the environment wasn't a consideration for any of the respondents. Responses from all businesses are documented in the figure below.

Figure 6.1: What are the main reasons why your company is based here?



[3]Business responses have not been statistically analysed by type as the number of responses does not allow this. Commentaries have however been included where the results suggest it is more common for given types of businesses to answer questions in a similar manner.

6.2 Future business needs

Businesses were asked to indicate whether their current premises were likely to be suitable for their future needs. Whilst the majority did think that they were (89%), 11% (or two businesses) did not feel this was the case for them. Both of these businesses described themselves as head offices.

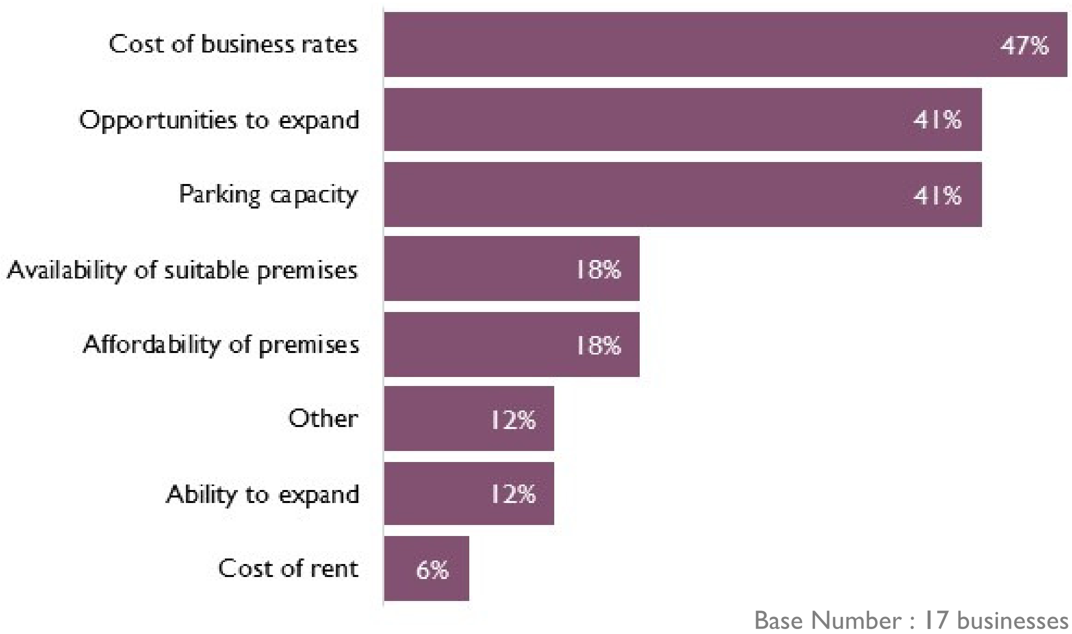
The majority of businesses (63%) intend to stay in the same location, whilst just over a third (37%) were considering expanding. Those considering expanding are currently based in a variety of locations which included industrial estates, the town centre and local neighbourhood areas.

6.3 Barriers to business expansion

As identified in the vision and priorities, the Council is keen for local businesses to grow and therefore needs to be aware of what barriers need to be broken down in order for this to happen. Respondents were asked to identify what they felt were the main barriers to business expansion.

The cost of business rates was viewed as the main barrier to expansion. Nearly half of all respondents selected this as an option (47%) and this was also the main barrier to expansion in last years consultation results. Opportunities to expand (41%) and parking capacity (41%) were other common barriers to expansion this year.

Figure 6.2: What are the barriers to business expansion?



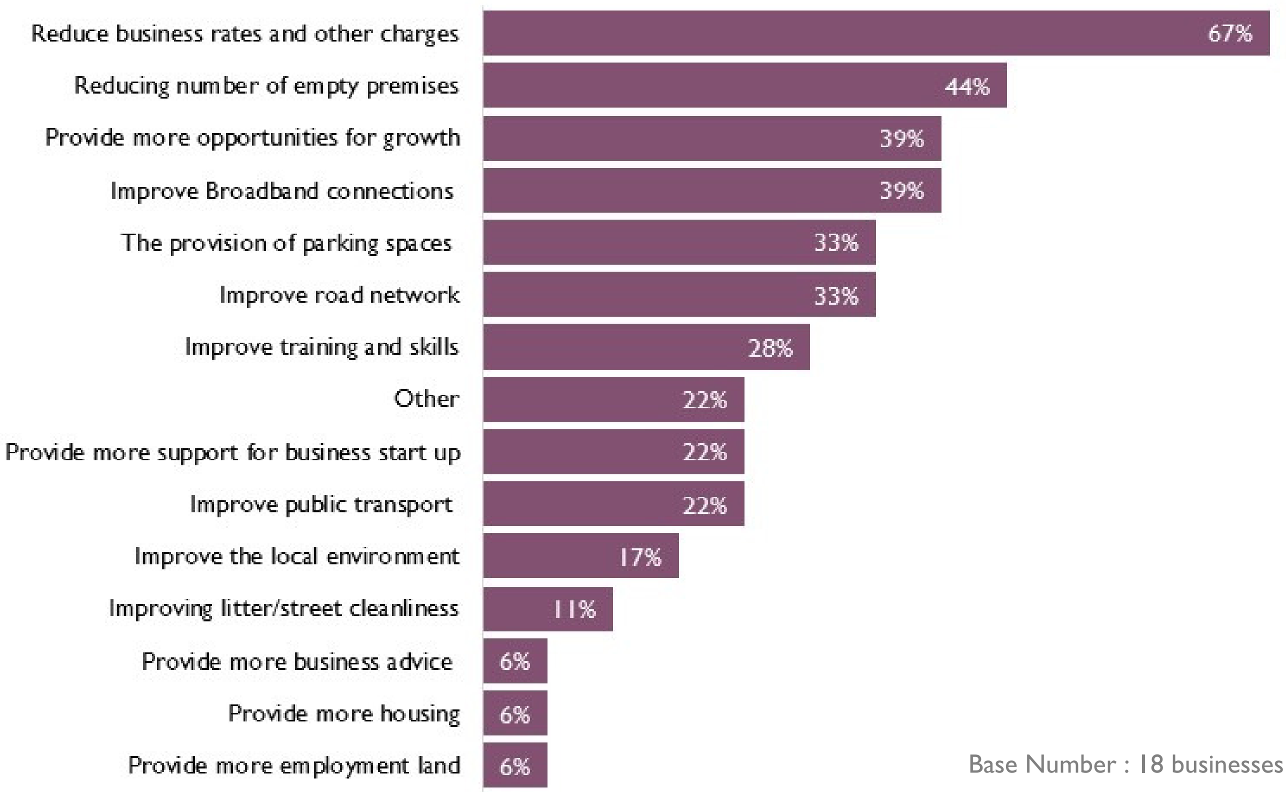
"Unreliable and slow broadband" and *"poor infrastructure on the Lichfield Road Industrial Estate"* were identified as other barriers to business expansion.

These issues were discussed more fully by all businesses in section 6.4 and the results are illustrated in the figure overleaf.

6.4 How can Tamworth be improved to assist business and the economy?

Respondents were invited to indicate up to five priorities which could assist businesses and the economy and help to improve Tamworth. Respondents were able to select their priorities from a list of 15 potential priorities and their responses are illustrated in the figure below. The majority (67%) felt that reducing business rates and other charges would assist business and the economy. This was also the most popular priority in last years results.

Figure 6.3: How can Tamworth be improved to assist business and the economy?



6.5 Additional comments on how Tamworth can be improved to assist business and the economy

Five businesses provided additional comments on how Tamworth could be improved. These are very much individual commentaries from businesses and as such cannot be considered to be representative of businesses overall. They do however still provide useful feedback of issues which could be explored in more depth to understand if they are improvements which would be of wider benefit to businesses and the economy.

⇒ *"Provide communication with regard to what is happening in the town centre, and can we be part of the growth".*

⇒ *"More business friendly pubs, restaurants and meeting places".*

⇒ *"Improvement of roads through industrial estates is needed - Mariner is in a terrible state".*

⇒ *"Provide more opportunities for local businesses to contract and tender to instead of looking elsewhere".*

⇒ *"Provide free parking for say 3 hours in town centre car parks to compete with out of town shopping areas".*

7. Community and Voluntary services organisations

Those respondents who completed the questionnaire from the perspective of a community or voluntary organisation were asked to provide their opinions and comment on a number of questions posed to gather a picture of the impacts of public sector cuts and how the organisations and their clients have been impacted by the economic downturn.

In total, 15 Community and Voluntary Organisations participated in the survey. This is a significant increase in responses since last year when there was one respondent representing this sector.

7.1 Type of organisation

Over half of those community and voluntary organisations participating described themselves as a registered charity (57%). One fifth were a company limited by guarantee (21%), 14% were a community interest company and 7% were a voluntary group.

7.2 The impact of budget cuts and the economic downturn on the services provided by Community and Voluntary Organisations

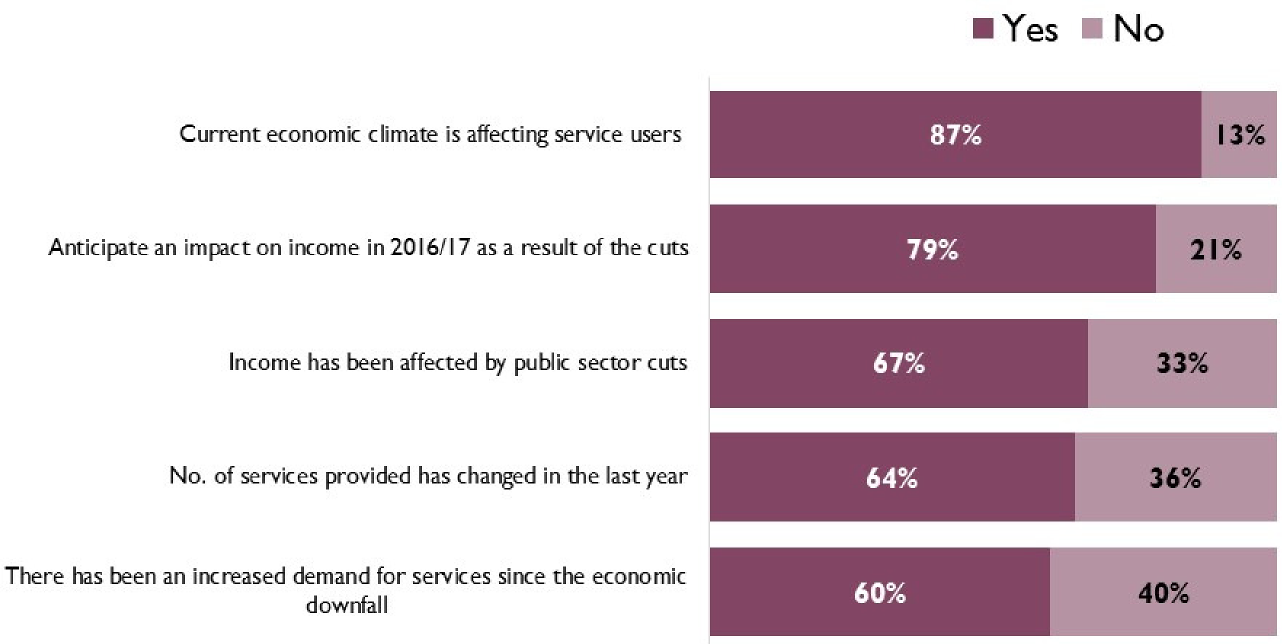
Respondents were invited to answer 'yes' or 'no' to a range of questions about the impact of the budget cuts and the economic downturn. It was most common for organisations to return an answer of 'yes' to all the questions asked.

This was most apparent regarding the question on whether the current economic climate was affecting service users, with the majority (87%) of respondents saying this was the case.

Whilst organisations were least likely to say that there has been an increase in demand since the economic downfall, 60% did still say that this was the case.

The views shared by all organisations are illustrated in the figure below.

Figure 7.1: Community and Voluntary Organisations responses to a range of questions about the impact of budget cuts and the economic downturn (%)



Base Number: 15 Organisations

Respondents were encouraged to explain how service users had been impacted by the economic downturn and where organisations identified an increase in demand for services, they were asked to explain how this had affected them. Their responses to both questions have been summarised below.

7.3 The current economic downturn is affecting service users

The majority of organisations (87%) did feel that their service users had been affected. It was common for respondents to have observed that more people were turning to them for support and their clients were generally facing much greater daily struggles since budget cuts had come into force. The majority of organisations did share examples of the affects that they had observed and these have been summarised below.

Unemployed/benefits:

⇒ *"Unemployed adults with literacy issues are seeking our support. They are finding it hard to meet job application targets as literacy assessment and practical support seems to have been cut at the Job Centre".*

⇒ *"Some vulnerable people have a hard time at the job centre and are pressed to take work which they are unable to sustain for more that a few weeks before they are unemployed again, either because of stresses which impact on their mental health, or because they cannot work to the level required by the employer".*

⇒ *"Customers are more likely to be destitute and having to rely on for example food banks. Often this is due to benefit exclusions which are not justified and can be challenged with the right support".*

⇒ *"Increased risks of homelessness - for example difficulties paying rent due to bedroom tax".*

Families:

⇒ *"Families are not getting timely support from schools due to budget cuts, so come to us instead".*

Mental health:

⇒ *"More customers are experiencing mental health problems - depression, low mood".*

⇒ *"They are being signed off mental health services too soon and just end up at the beginning of the cycle again. Interventions are too short to have an impact meaning that the cost to the public purse is more in the long term".*

Physical health

⇒ *"Hospital discharge is not always well planned by health professionals which can lead to sudden housing crises".*

⇒ *"They are having to source and pay for care and support to stay at home. People are stuck in hospital due to lack of community based services free a point of delivery".*

7.4 There has been an increased demand in services since the economic downfall.

60% of organisations identified that they had witnessed an increase in demand and organisations had responded to this demand in a variety of ways. Some had increased the range of services they were providing for example *"we have now had to provide separate services for adults," "there has been increased demand for individual appointments for children due to constraints experienced by schools,"* and *"we have increased our outreach programme."* Others were making greater use of volunteers to ensure the services which were needed could be delivered. Some expressed concern about the ability to continually sustain the delivery of services, for example *"we are reaching capacity with this [using volunteers]"* and *"we are struggling to raise enough money to cover costs," "we have had to withdraw services for children"* and *"we have greater waiting times for our services".*

APPENDIX 1: RESIDENTS RESPONDENT PROFILE

Are you male or female?

	Survey responses		MYE 2014
	No's	%	%
Male	123	52%	48%
Female	116	48%	52%

Do you consider yourself to have a disability?

	Survey responses		Census 2011
	No's	%	%
Yes	72	32%	18%
No	151	68%	82%

What is your age?

	Survey responses		MYE 2014
	No's	%	%
18-24	1	0.4%	10%
25-34	12	5.1%	17%
35-44	23	9.8%	17%
45-54	39	16.6%	18%
55-64	62	26.4%	16%
65-74	73	31.1%	13%
75+	25	10.6%	9%

What type of disability do you have?

	Survey responses	
	No's	%
Communications	1	1.4%
Hearing	14	19.4%
Learning	0	0.0%
Mental Health	11	15.3%
Mobility	40	55.6%
Physical	27	37.5%
Visual	3	4.2%
Other	10	13.9%

What is your ethnicity?

	Survey responses		Census 2011
	No's	%	%
Asian/Asian British/Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi	0	0.0%	0.8%
Black or Black British	2	0.9%	0.51%
Chinese	0	0.0%	0.2%
Mixed Heritage	1	0.4%	1.0%
White British	219	95.2%	95%
White Other	7	3.0%	2.3%
Other	1	0.4%	0.1%

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