

Budget Consultation Report 2020/21

Introduction

Tamworth Borough Council reviews its council tax and charges on an annual basis and this assists in developing 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, these groups were invited to share their views on these priorities for the forthcoming financial year. This year, these groups were also asked to give their views on the revised vision and corporate priorities.

This report summarises the views of those who participated. While this is not fully representative of Tamworth opinion it provides a useful addition to the information that will inform the Council's budgeting decisions for the year ahead.

The report presents the analysis of the combined results from all three respondent groups.

Methodology

The consultation for the 2020/21 budget ran from 18th July to 27th September 2019 and three key groups were encouraged to share their views through paper and online surveys.

All three surveys were promoted via a range of communication channels including press releases in the local newspaper, a prominent feature on the Tamworth Borough Council website and through social media including Tamworth Borough Council Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn, Tamworth Enterprise Centre Facebook. Hard copies of all three surveys were made available at the Marmion House reception.

Councillors were e-mailed the resident's survey and encouraged to share with their constituents.

The voluntary sector survey was put on the Support Staffordshire website and sent to the Staffordshire Council of Voluntary Youth Services for sharing amongst their members. Hard copies of this survey were also made available at the Tamworth CIC café.

The business survey was promoted by the Economic Development team, the Tamworth Enterprise Centre and posted on Tamworth Enterprise Centre Facebook page. Hard copies of the survey were also made available at the 'Tamworth...what's next?' sessions.

Members of Tamworth Borough Council's Citizens Panel received a direct e-mail encouraging their participation.

Responses

A total of 84 responses were received to the consultation and these consisted of:

- 73 residents
- 6 businesses
- 5 community and voluntary organisations.

For the purpose of analysis, responses from all three groups have been combined. Some caution must be applied when interpreting the results due to the low level of participation.

Views on the revised vision

The Council's revised vision is 'To put Tamworth, its people and the local economy at the heart of everything we do'.

Respondents were supportive of the revised vision and this was reflected in the comments received:

"It is a good statement and I would wholeheartedly agree with it, I would personally prefer for it just to say first!"

"Spot on, especially our local economy as this generates the wealth for our public services"

"I totally agree with the statement of vision but would put the Tamworth people before Tamworth town. To be fair all three points are interactive and one vision will not work without the other"

"Sounds like a good vision if the council remains true to it".

Views on the corporate priorities

Respondents were asked a series of questions about the importance of the priorities under the headings of 'People and place' and 'Organisation'. They were asked to say how important each priority was to them and also invited to make comment on each of those priorities.

People and place priorities

Respondents were asked to rate in terms of importance and give their views on the four priorities under this heading:

- To meet housing needs through a variety of approaches and interventions,
- To facilitate sustainable growth and economic prosperity,

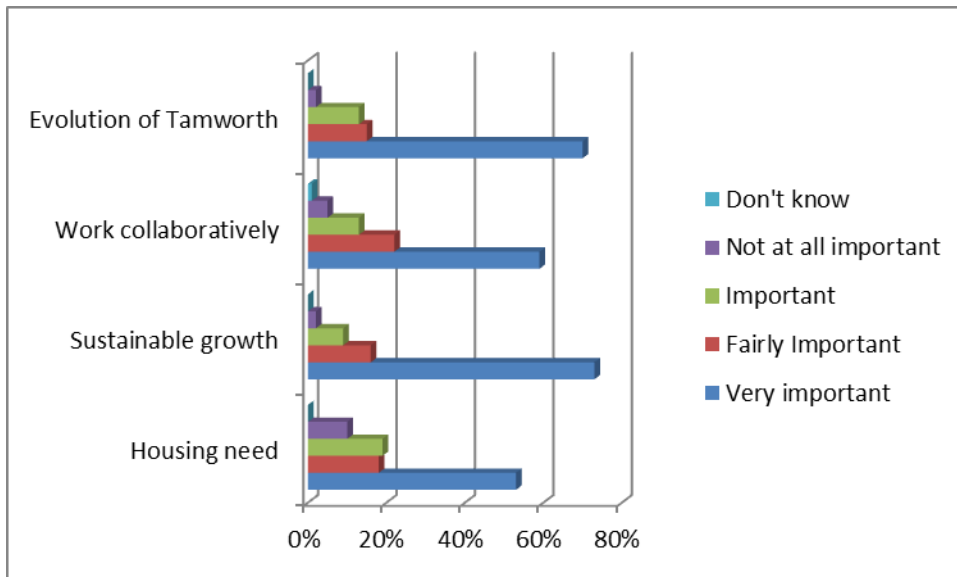
- To work collaboratively and flexibly to meet the needs of our communities,
- To create a new and developing vision for the continued evolution of Tamworth, including a town centre fit for the 21st century.

All priorities were given a high importance rating by over 70% of respondents.

The most important priority was ‘to facilitate sustainable growth and economic prosperity’; 89% gave this a high rating.

Considered least important was ‘to meet housing needs through a variety of approaches and interventions’. However, 71% of respondents gave this a high rating.

Respondent’s views are documented in the figure below



To meet housing needs through a variety of approaches and interventions,

Seen as important by 71% of respondents.

Respondents identified empty homes, social house building and infrastructure as important issues.

“It is obviously important everyone has a place they can call home, I would like to see more being done about empty homes and places that could maybe used for housing”.

“You need to concentrate on building social housing”

“Housing is very important but do we really need large estates with expensive houses taking up the countryside. Is the whole infrastructure looked at before planning permission is given? I think most of this housing goes to people

outside Tamworth. Growth is great as long as we have the school places, doctor surgeries etc. and the right road structures.”

To facilitate sustainable growth and economic prosperity,

Respondents felt this was the most important priority under 'people and place' (89% of respondents).

“It is great that the Borough backs local businesses. The Business Hub in Corporation Street has been very successful in supporting new business”,

“Economic prosperity is the life blood for Tamworth we need the prosperity to grow”,

“Our local economy generates our wealth. Tamworth is in an ideal location to attract businesses and people”,

“This needs doing before new houses”

“Sustainability is important and needs to be tied with economic growth but not at the expense of the wider environment of Tamworth. With HS2 creating a barrier around two thirds of the town it is essential connectivity is maintained and where possible enhanced”

To work collaboratively and flexibly to meet the needs of our communities,

Seen as important by 81% of respondents.

“Certainly working together with other agencies and sectors can be a very positive approach in terms of efficiencies and cost saving. However, I don't have any awareness of the collaborations you mention - what are they, what benefits have been achieved?”

“Partnerships are needed to be more all-encompassing, i.e. Police, social, welfare, community group initiatives etc. all working together without one dictating”,

“All groups should be treated equally, with the council willing to work with any groups that help them with their aims”

To create a new and developing vision for the continued evolution of Tamworth, including a town centre fit for the 21st century

Seen as important by 80% of respondents.

This priority attracted the most comments which focussed on regenerating the town centre with a wider variety of niche shops, restaurants and new housing schemes.

“Tamworth is a fantastic town, the nucleus is there and needs to be built on, and the council can encourage this and should lead from the front, and work with anyone willing to help”,

“I believe the council need to look to increase residential and business space in the town and reduce retail since it is in decline. Need to enhance evening economy”,

“Excellent recommendation and suggestions came from the public meetings recently held in the Council chamber and chaired by the Leader. Their implementation should be a priority”,

“Yes the funding for the town centre is very important. Better car parking facilities and lower prices would help”,

“Tamworth town centre looks tired and dated. It needs to reduce its retail sector as people now shop at the retail parks or online. The centre needs to incorporate more housing and places for people to gather, relax, exercise and socialise”

“To boost the local economy more emphasis needs to be placed on the town centre which has been neglected ever since the first units opened on Ventura Park. Connecting the two areas is key to achieving a rebalance. Perhaps with Ventura being the main shopping space and the town centre being the main social area”.

Organisation priorities

Respondents were asked to rate in terms of importance and give their views on the four priorities under this heading:

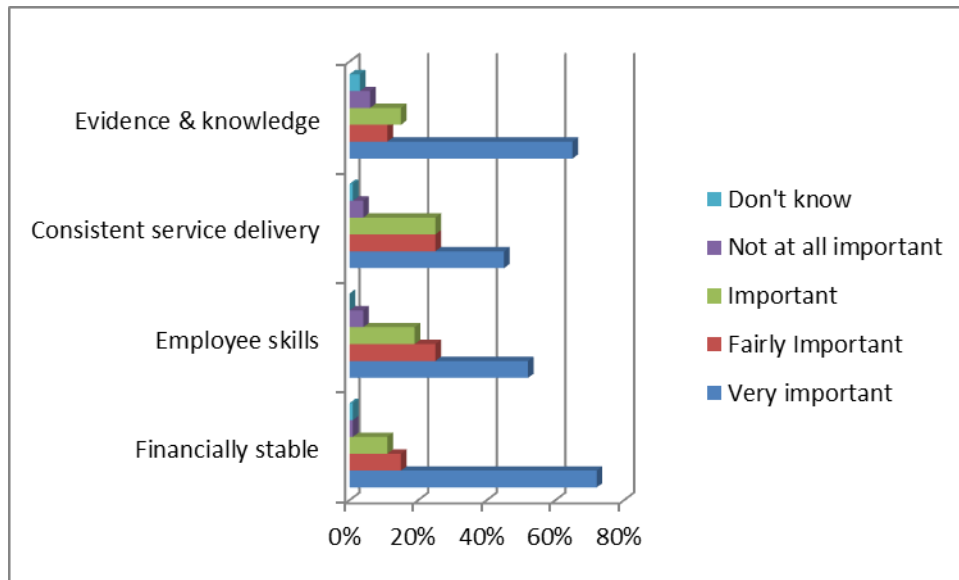
- To be financially stable,
- To ensure our employees have the right skills and culture to help our residents, visitors and businesses,
- To ensure our service delivery is consistent, clear and focussed,
- To ensure our decisions are driven by evidence and knowledge.

All priorities were given a high importance rating by 70% or over of respondents.

The most important priority was 'to be financially stable', 87% gave this a high rating.

Considered least important was 'to ensure our service delivery is consistent, clear and focussed'. However, 70% of respondents gave this a high rating.

Respondent's views are documented in the figure below



To be financially stable,

This was seen as the most important priority under 'organisation' by 87% of respondents.

“Very important as without financial stability, everything else within your plans will be difficult to achieve”

“I'd rather see an increase in Council tax than cuts to services - as long as you are providing value for money and don't waste money”

“But it includes a reality check on local taxation. It is not simply about investing our nest egg for the best return it's about ensuring we have the regular income to provide the services we want at the standards we expect. We cannot cut our way to a better town, we must be honest with the electorate, if necessary holding a local referendum to challenge the national governments definition of what we should spend locally. This is a local issue, let's decide it locally”

To ensure our employees have the right skills and culture to help our residents, visitors and businesses,

Seen as important by 77% of respondents.

"It is good to see training has been improved in this area, it must also be ensured as well as training people have the right equipment to do the job, it needs to be up to date, work and be fit for purpose",

"This is important but mustn't be prioritised over other services. Money spent should be gauged very carefully against the potential return. Employing the right people is the first step",

"I would think this goes without saying - every business regardless of whether public or private sector should ensure that its staff are qualified, have the necessary skills and knowledge to undertake their role".

To ensure our service delivery is consistent, clear and focussed,

Seen as important by 70% of respondents.

"Communication is key",

"This is a good ambition and the council deserves credit for this",

"I have found that Tamworth is pretty good already when they see people need help and information. Yes there are times when you think you need to grab a hammer and chisel to get an answer but as indicated clear standards and measuring/monitoring from the top should be great",

"Everyone can "talk the talk". Residents are sceptical and need convincing that actions will follow on".

To ensure our decisions are driven by evidence and knowledge.

Seen as important by 76% of respondents.

Comments on this priority identified the need to take the views of people into account in making decisions

"I attend open Council meetings. I have my say. Please listen to the people who live/work here",

"The current issue is that the views of the next generation and the millennial's are not being considered, the decision makers throughout the council are institutionalised and therefore don't see the town or its needs from a 'modern' perspective. The old school of thought needs to be replaced by the voice if the people living and owning businesses in Tamworth that are current, or that are

employed and adding value through tax contributions and spend back into local market”,

“I believe to ask the residents there opinions as well as utilising any data or statistics will help the council come to a better informed decision”.

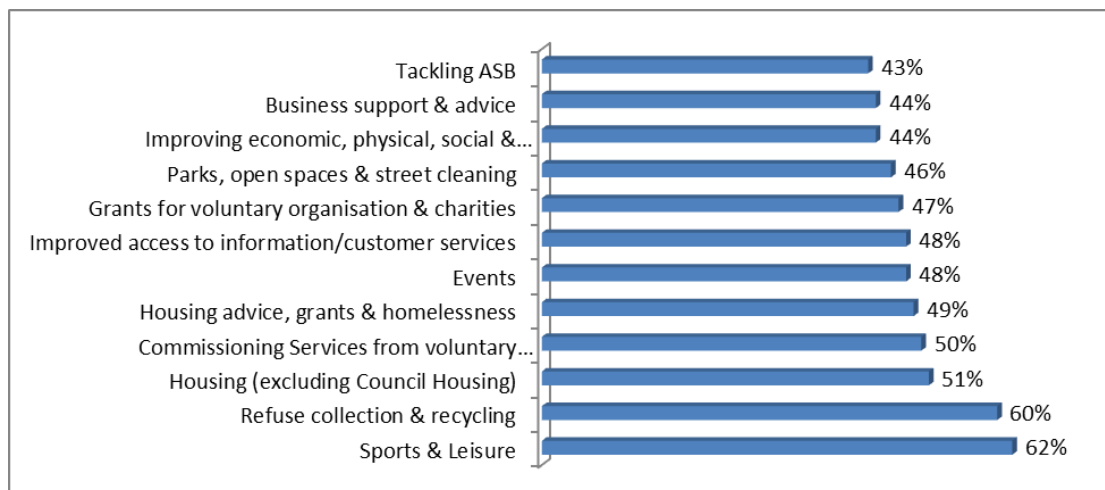
“Complex issues need to be disseminated in a clear to understand but not patronising way”.

Spending on services

Respondents were provided with planned spend on major cost areas for 2019/20 and were asked whether they felt the Council should increase, decrease or keep spending the same.

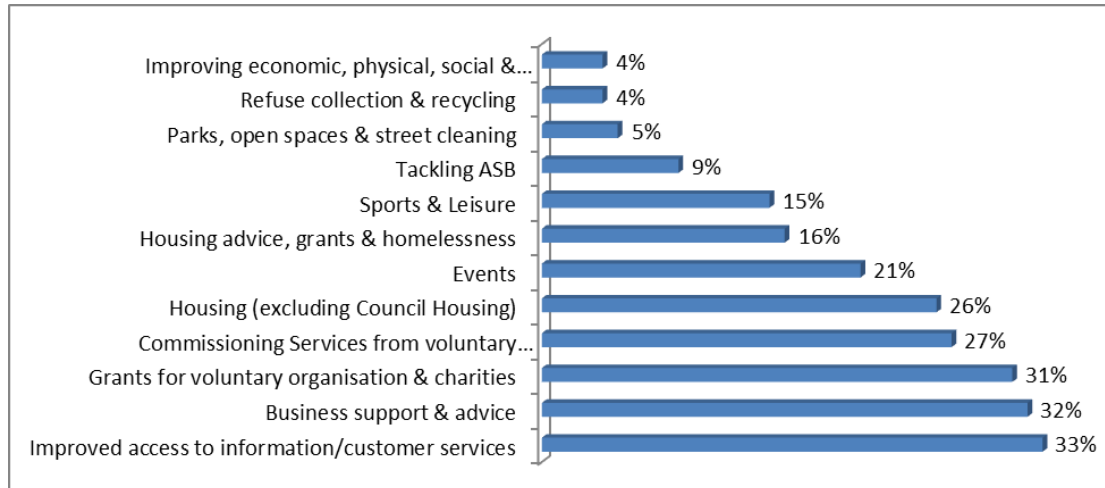
Maintain levels of spending

Respondents said they would prefer that current levels of spend remained the same in 9 of the 12 major cost areas. Respondents most wanted to see maintained level of spend on ‘sports and leisure services’ (62%), closely followed by ‘refuse collection & recycling (60%).



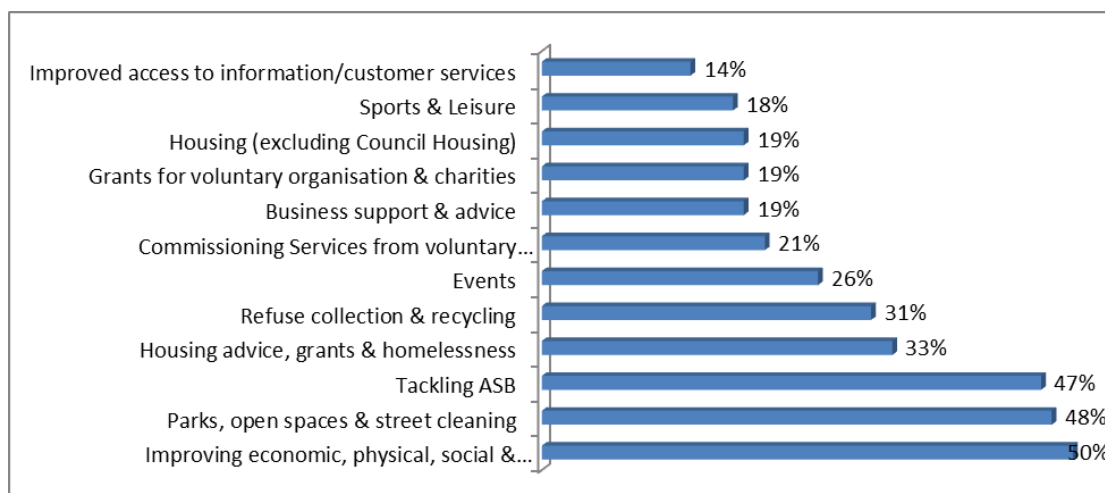
Reduce levels of spending

Respondents did not strongly feel that spending should be reduced in any of the twelve areas. The three areas where it was felt spending could be reduced were 'improved access to customer services' (33%), 'business support and advice' (32%) and 'grants for voluntary organisations and charities' (31%).



Increase levels of spending

The three areas where respondents wanted to see more spend were 'improving the economic, physical, social and environmental condition of Tamworth' (50%), 'parks, open spaces and street cleansing' (48%) and 'tackling anti-social behaviour' (47%).



Comments on spending

One theme that was evident in some comments was that some of the Council's free events should attract a minimal fee

"Tamworth Borough Council is on the whole well run that is clear to see. I believe with events such as the fireworks either a voluntary collection should be taken or people charged a small fee. This could then be ploughed back into events and they would cost less",

"I was dismayed to learn that although the St George's day event cost thousands no one was charged admittance. Even a nominal fee of £1 would have done",

"Have donation buckets at the amazing free events so that those who can afford it can pay a little to help offset the cost",

Another theme in comments was that of more community involvement to reduce costs

"People should be encouraged to get involved in community initiatives, maybe having litter champions, green space champions etc. There are many people willing to help which could again save money",

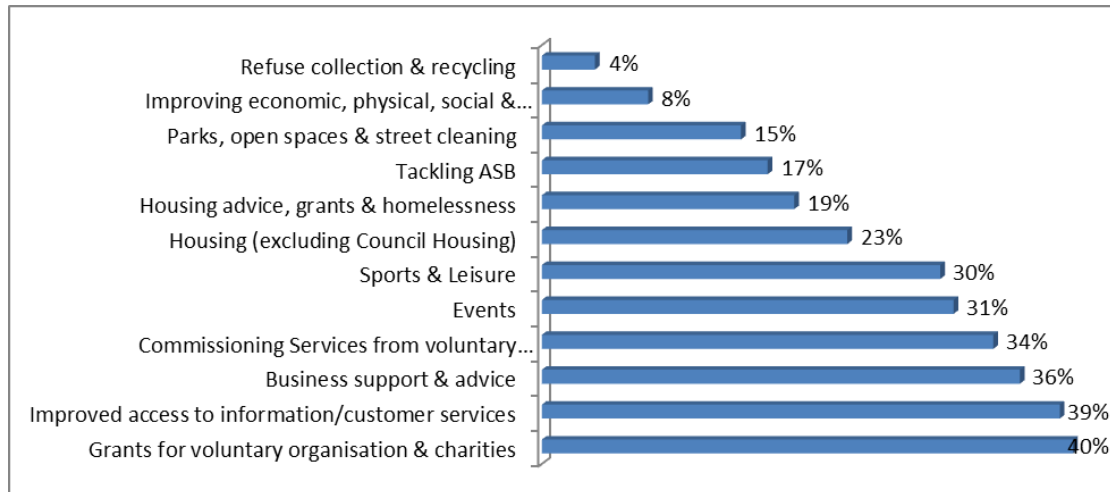
"It is important that residents should be made properly informed of their own responsibilities, especially regarding waste and their necessity to adhere to cleanliness within the community and recycling expectations",

"Prevention is better than cure. More money should be put into educational and information awareness of things that prevent situations from occurring".

Savings and reducing costs

Respondents were provided with a list of services and asked to indicate up to three which could be prioritised for savings or reducing costs.

It was most common for respondents to say that they would like to see savings or reduced costs in the following areas: 'grants for voluntary organisations and charities' (40%), 'improved access to information/customer services' (39%) and 'business support and advice' (36%).

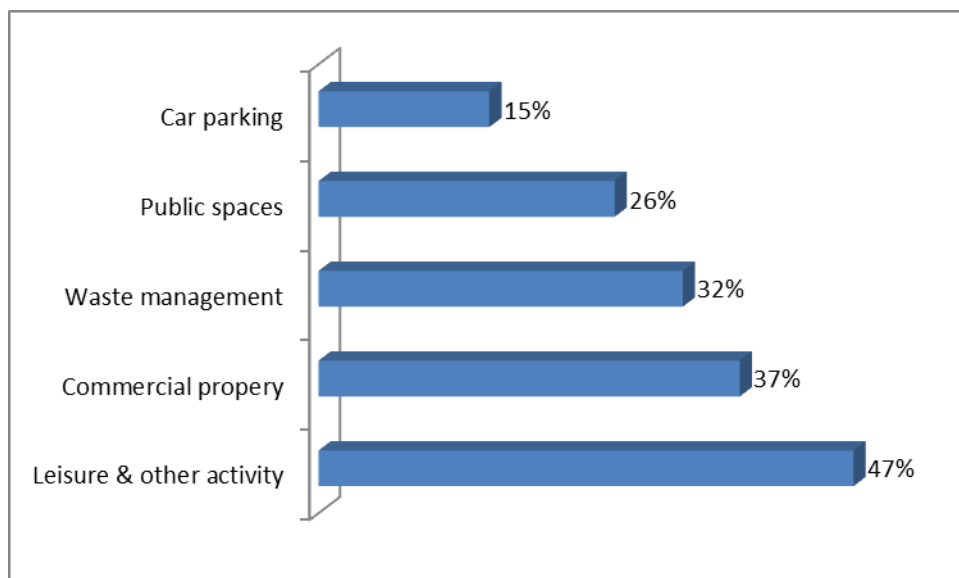


Fees and charges

Respondents were asked in which two areas they would increase charges and in which two areas they would decrease charges

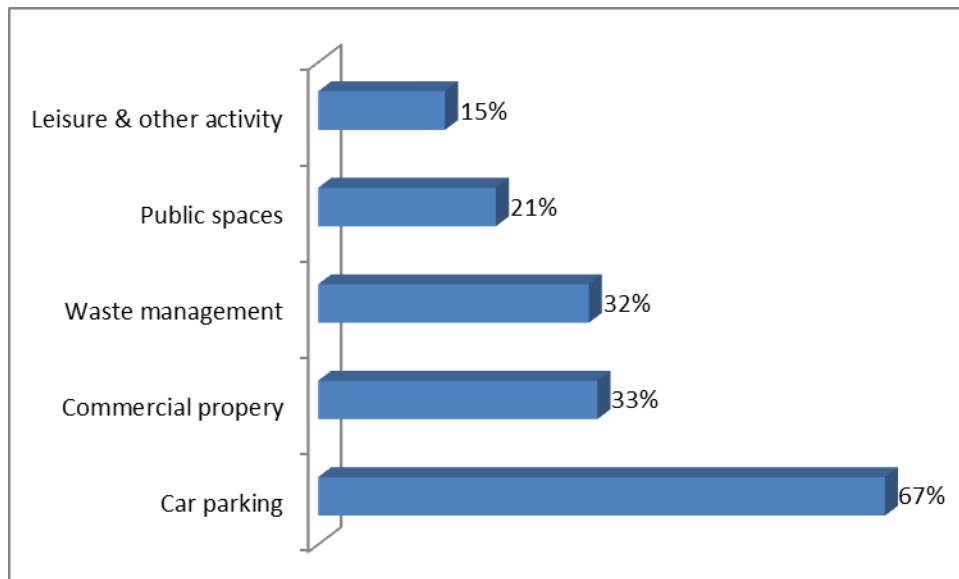
Increase charges

It was most common for respondents to see the need to increase public charges for leisure and other activities (47%), commercial property (37%) or waste management (32%).



Decrease charges

Respondents were most likely to say that they would like to see decreased charges for car parking (67%) and was by far the most popular choice.



Comments on savings and charges

Respondents offered a number of suggestions on how the Council could save money.

Reducing the number of councillors was offered as a suggestion by some respondents

“Members allowances, costs of the mayor, high paid officers, reducing the number of elections”,

“Reduce the number of councillors by a third”

Some respondents questioned the money spent on Britain in Bloom

“No more Britain in bloom flowers”

“Get rid of free events, fireworks etc. and stop spending in flowers immediately”

“The flowers and displays around the town are very nice but at what cost to other facilities?”

Other suggestions centred on Council office accommodation

“Moving to smaller council buildings”,

“Rental space for business at Marmion House”,

“Reducing staffing levels across the organisation or smaller premises. Look at reducing council assets which is what other councils are doing”

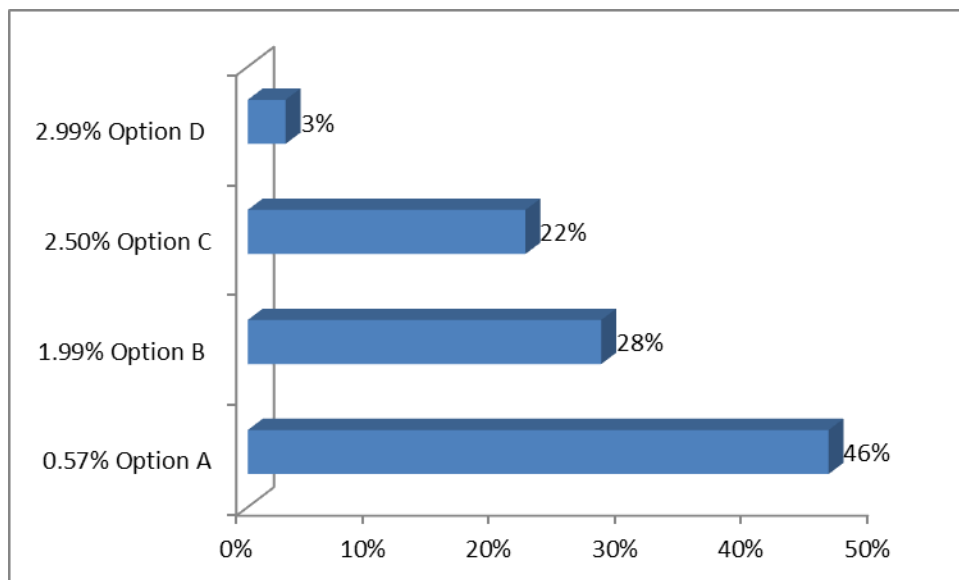
One respondent did feel that savings could not be made without further costs

“Not without making further cuts to essential services. I think the authority is as lean as it currently can be”

Acceptable level of Council Tax increase

Residents were asked what they would consider to be an acceptable Council Tax increase for the 2020/21 budget.

The largest proportion of residents would prefer the lowest level of increase offered with 46% selecting option A (0.57% increase).



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