

## **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

These groups were also asked to give their views on the vision and corporate priorities, as well as their views on how the council can capitalise on the positives in the voluntary sector response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the ongoing restrictions in the use of Marmion House.

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 2021/22 budget was open from 4<sup>th</sup> September until 4<sup>th</sup> October 2020 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 and online business news publications such as the Greater Birmingham Chamber of Commerce, a prominent feature on the Tamworth Borough Council website and through several social media posts including on Tamworth Borough Council Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn and Tamworth Enterprise Centre Facebook.

This year, paid advertising on Facebook was tried, spending £30 on a seven-day campaign. This resulted in a reach of 3,656 and 62 link clicks.

It was also shared through business Facebook groups such as Tamworth is Open and Tamworth Business to Business, as well as being emailed to our database of more than 800 businesses.

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.

More than 200 members of Tamworth Borough Council's Citizens Panel received a direct e-mail encouraging their participation.

## **Responses**

A total of 121 responses were received to the consultation and these consisted of:

- 101 residents
- 8 businesses
- 12 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 vision**

The Council's '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:

*'Very good and I agree with the statement,'*

*'This a good vision...and hope that it can continue'*

*'I would like to see reference made to the wellbeing of its people',*

*'Could also mention putting the local environment at the heart of everything'.*

### **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:

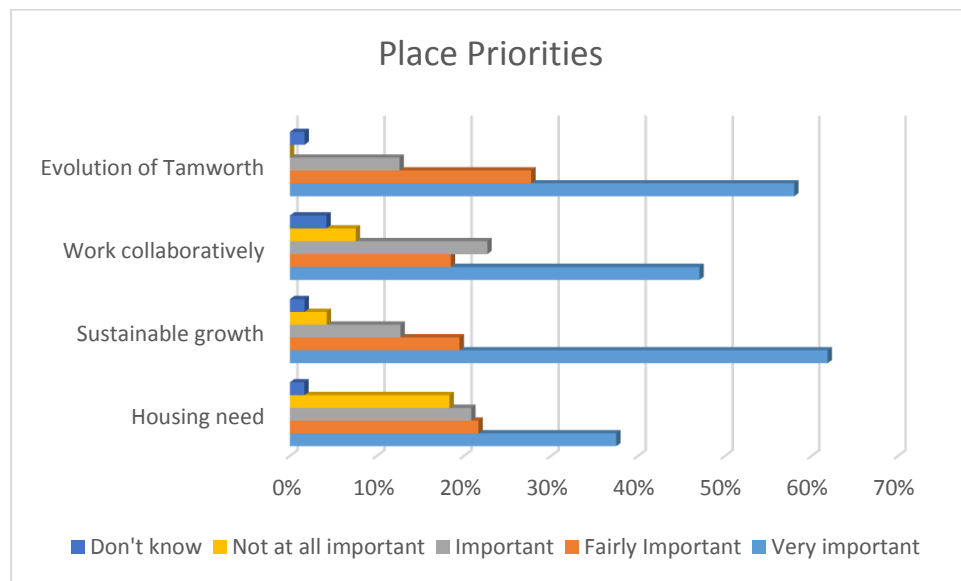
- To meet housing needs through a variety of approaches and interventions,
- To facilitate sustainable growth and economic prosperity,
- To work collaboratively and flexibly to meet the needs of our communities,
- To create a new and developing vision for the continued evolution of Tamworth, including a town centre fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

All priorities were given a high importance rating by over 60 % of respondents.

The most important priority was 'To create a new and developing vision for the continued evolution of Tamworth, including a town centre fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century'; 86 % gave this a high rating.

Considered least important was 'to meet housing needs through a variety of approaches and interventions'. However, 60 % of respondents gave this a high rating.

Respondents' views are shown in the figure below



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

Seen as important by 60% of respondents.

Comments received included:

*'Having a safe and good quality home is fundamental to health and wellbeing as well as being a major influence on education and employment prospects',*

*'Homes for single and elderly people, and especially Council housing should be a priority, please',*

*'Use empty properties for housing',*

*'Too many houses already for the infrastructure, services and facilities we have',*

*'You are allowing far too many high priced housing'*

*'Prevention of homeless should always be the first intervention'*

**To facilitate sustainable growth and economic prosperity,**

Seen as important by 81% of respondents

Comments received included:

*'Bringing more jobs to the area must remain a priority',*

*'Housing is one aspect of prosperity many others such as education, health, emergency services, recreation & care homes should be integrated and a unified plan produced',*

*'Whilst there is a need to ensure economic prosperity the infrastructure needs to be there to support it',*

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

Seen as important by 65% of respondents.

Comments received included:

*'Partnership and collaboration is always essential and agree should be at the heart of the council's approach to communities',*

*'There is a lot that the council cannot undertake itself, because the skills lie elsewhere, but the volunteer section who support the community need financial and advisory support to do so',*

*'the council needs to ensure that partnership working doesn't become an end in itself and should regularly check that positive results are being achieved which are proportionate to the resources and efforts put in by the partner agencies',*

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

Respondents felt this was the most important priority under 'people and place' (86 % of respondents).

Comments received included:

*'The days of the traditional town centre and shopping precinct is over and one of the best ways to preserve the best of what we have left is to move people in',*

*'Need a radical re think of our town centre and not just build more shops that will stay empty. Shopping has changed and the centre needs to be a space*

*that draws people in via other means such as leisure and culture creating footfall and a sense of community’,*

*‘This has to be a priority to bring businesses and money to Tamworth’*

## Organisation priorities

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

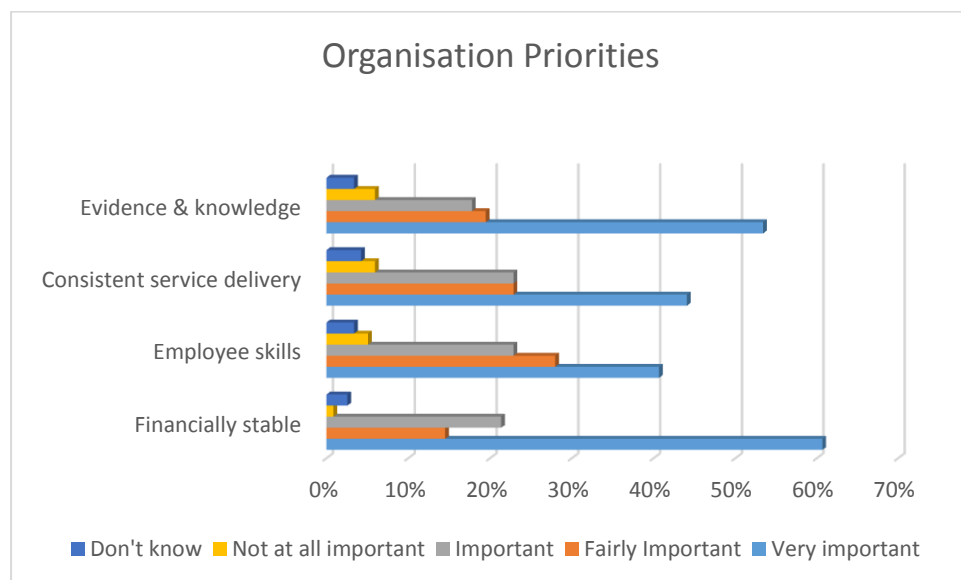
- To be financially stable,
- To ensure our employees have the right skills and culture to help our residents, visitors and businesses,
- To ensure our service delivery is consistent, clear and focussed,
- To ensure our decisions are driven by evidence and knowledge.

All priorities were given a high importance rating by 67% or over of respondents.

The most important priority was ‘to be financially stable’, 76% gave this a high rating.

Considered least important was ‘to ensure our service delivery is consistent, clear and focussed’. However, 67% of respondents gave this a high rating.

Respondent’s views are shown in the figure below



### **To be financially stable,**

This was seen as the most important priority under 'organisation' by 76% of respondents.

Comments received included:

*'Residents need to be kept informed of the difficult financial choices that are required as a result of Covid. Unfortunately it is not reasonable to expect the Council to be able to provide the usual level of services without additional funding'*

*'Need to live within means and therefore need to look at new ways of increasing revenue'*

*'Vitaly important that the books are balanced and you don't spend more than you can afford'*

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

Seen as important by 69% of respondents.

Comments received included:

*'People and their skills and development are important; however, ultimately it is outcomes that matter',*

*'Training for staff and elected members is vital. Also experienced staff should be valued. Their knowledge shouldn't be underestimated',*

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

Seen as important by 67% of respondents.

Comments received included:

*'Think this should also include maximising digital opportunities so residents can do more online',*

*'What matters is the quality of services',*

*'What is being wasted currently owing to a lack of / poor promotion of standards of service? It is helpful for people to know what to expect, what services can be provided and what can't be provided'*

## To ensure our decisions are driven by evidence and knowledge.

Seen as important by 72% of respondents.

Comments received included:

*'Information and knowledge about the local community is key to knowing what services/organisations are needed in the locality',*

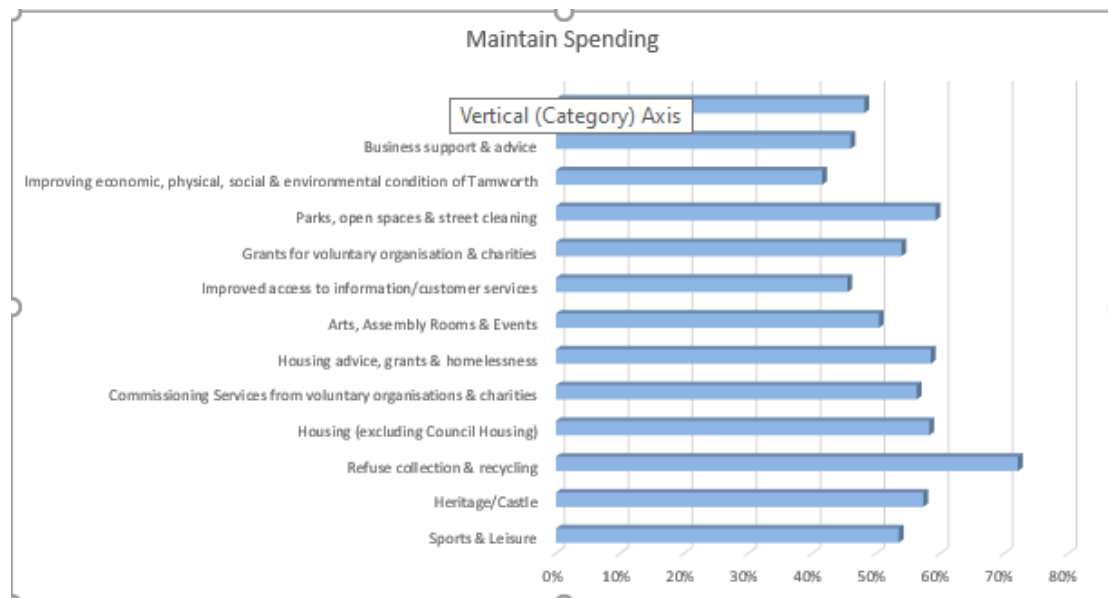
*'Evidence is key to good decision making'*

## Spending on services

Respondents were provided with planned spend on major cost areas for 2020/21 and were asked whether they felt the Council should increase, decrease or keep spending the same.

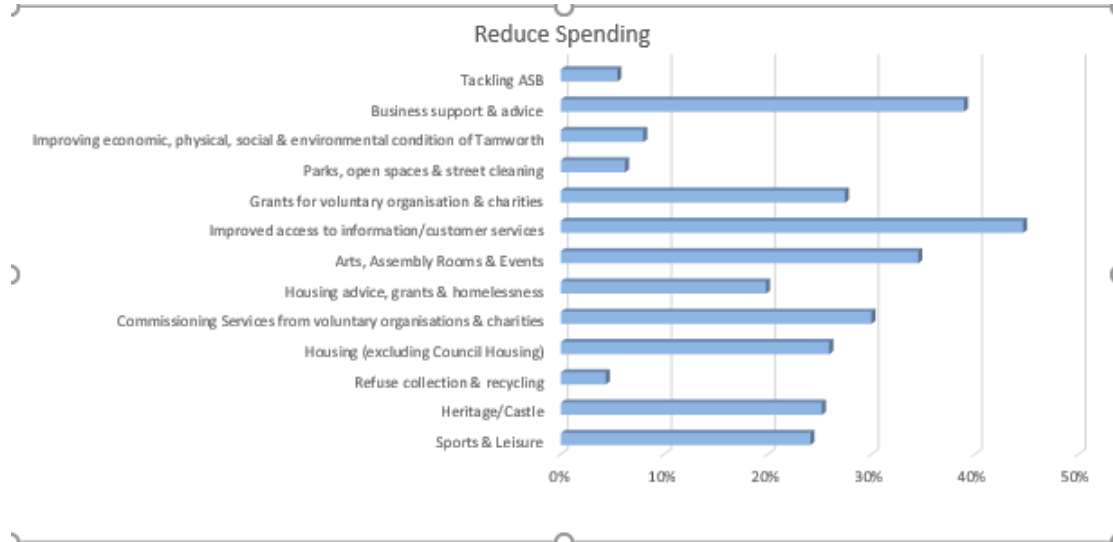
### Maintain levels of spending

It was most common for respondents to say they would prefer that current levels of spend remained the same; this was the case in 9 of the 13 major cost areas. Respondents most wanted to see maintained level of spend on 'refuse collection and recycling' (72%).



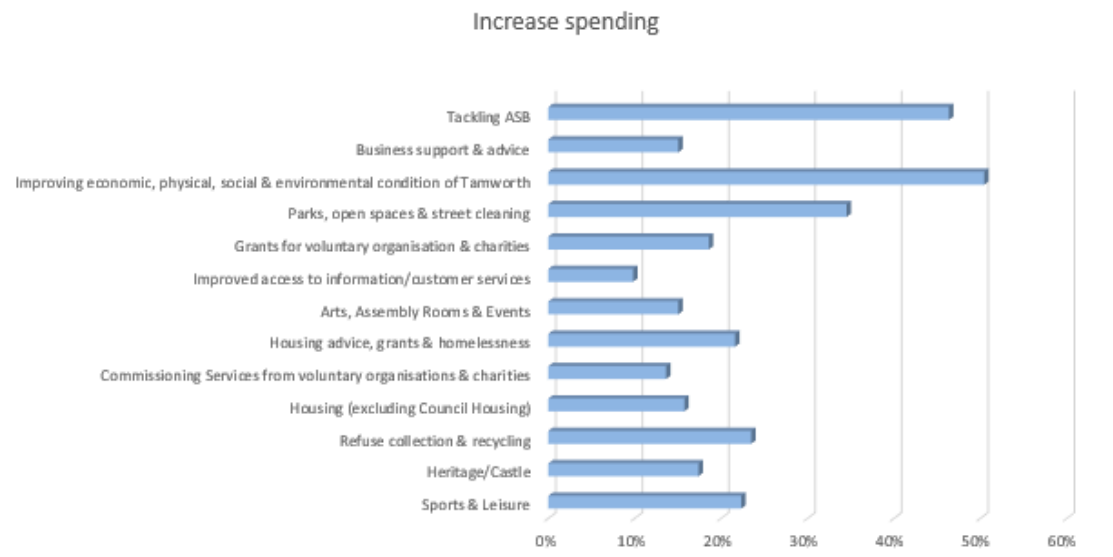
## Reduce levels of spending

Respondents wanted to see less spend in the following areas 'improved access to information/customer services (45%) and business support and advice (39%).



## Increase levels of spending

Two areas where respondents wanted to see more spend were 'improving the economic, physical, social and environmental condition of Tamworth (50%) and 'tackling anti-social behaviour' (46%).





## Comments on spending

Comments received included:

*'It will be very difficult for the council budget to fulfil its commitments without there being an increase through the various ways revenue is obtained',*

*'Times will be tough, I don't envy the decisions you may be forced to make',*

*'Keep within budget, try to secure more value for money'*

*'I think that radical cuts should be made in line with support from local residents. Inform every household you are going to take drastic and severe cuts, sensible people will accept and the most vulnerable can be shadowed and concentrated on*

## 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.

Respondents wanted to see less spend in the following areas 'business support and advice' (45%); Arts, Assembly Room and Events (39%) and 'improved access to information/customer services' (38%).

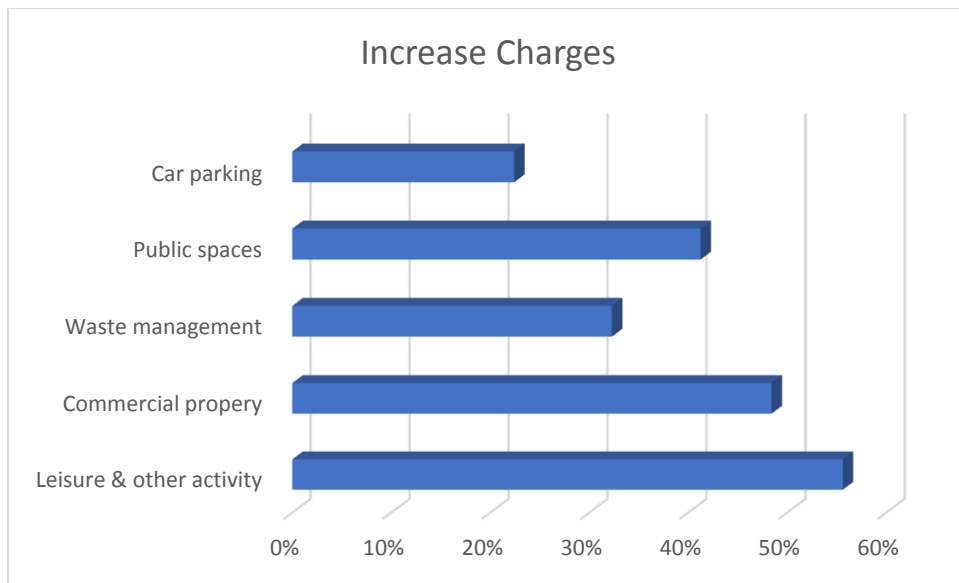


## Fees and charges

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

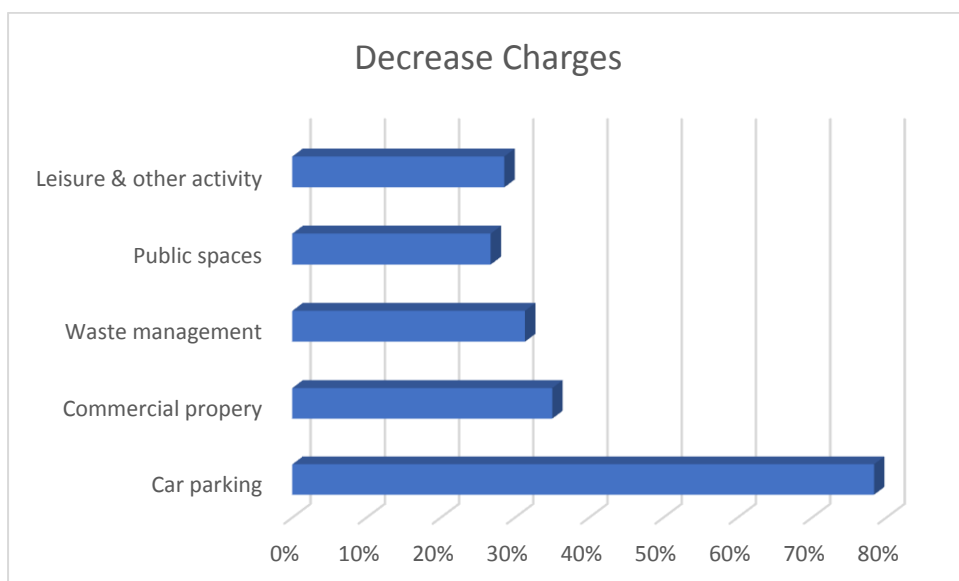
### Increase charges

It was most common for respondents to see the need to increase public charges for leisure and other activities (56%) and commercial property (48%).



### Decrease charges

Respondents were most likely to say that they would like to see decreased charges for car parking (78%) and was by far the most popular choice.



## Comments on savings and charges

Comments received included:

*'Work from smaller premises, or home where possible'*

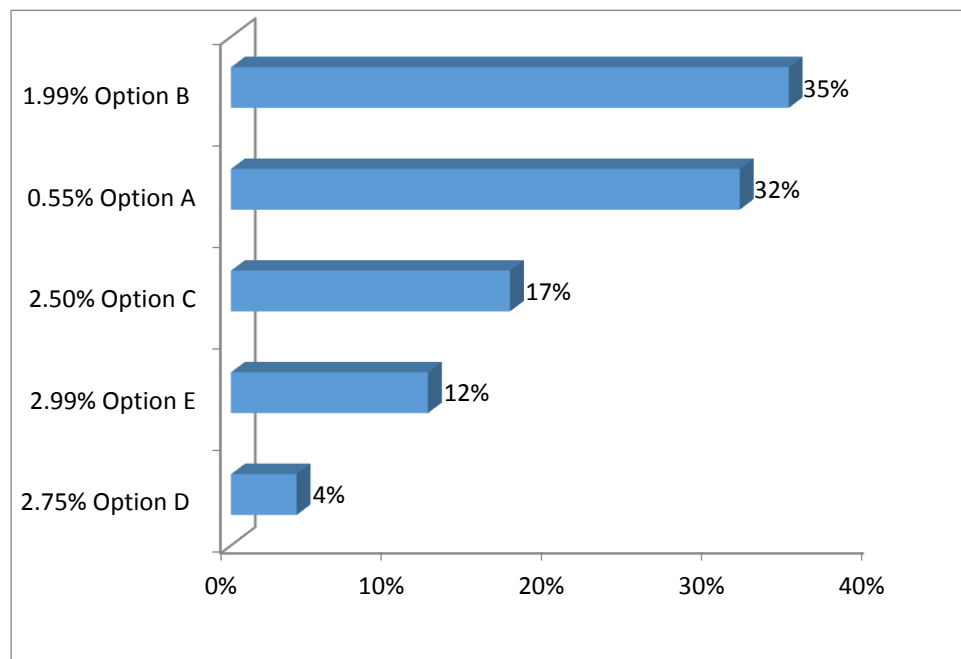
*'Councillors - we don't need 30 of them'*

*'Staff and councillor costs'*

## Acceptable level of Council Tax increase

Residents were asked what they would consider to be an acceptable Council Tax increase for the 2021/22 budget.

The largest proportion of residents (35%) would prefer the second lowest level of Council Tax increase (a 1.99% increase). The lowest level of increase (a 0.55% increase) was the second most popular option; 32% of residents chose this option.



## Ongoing restrictions in the use of Marmion House and the delivery of services by digital means.

Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, Marmion House has been closed to the public. There were mixed views on these restrictions.

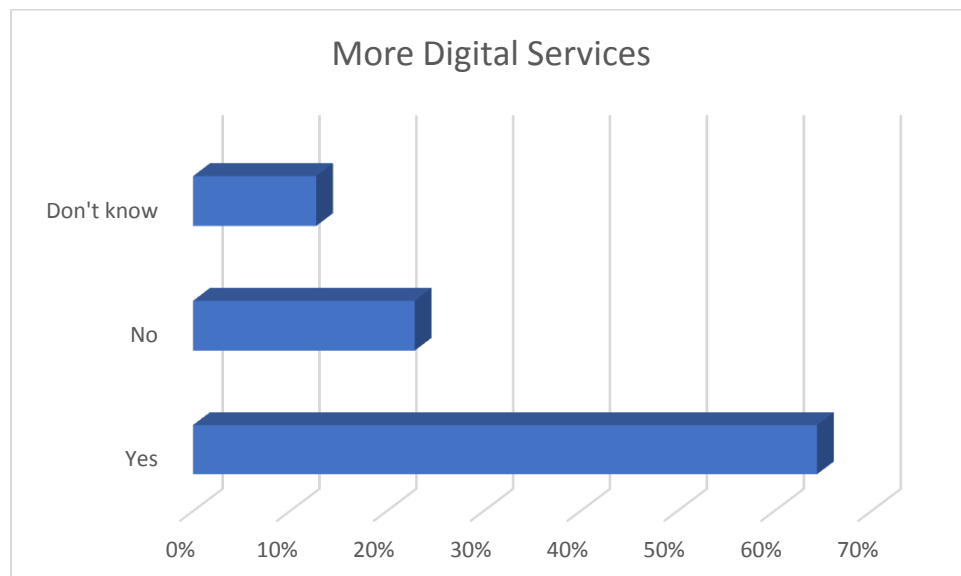
*'If the same service can be achieved by staff working from home then perhaps Marmion House can be used differently'*

*"Having a limited team on the front desk is better than No Team at all"*

*'People working at Marmion House should be able to work from home when not required to be in the office'*

*'I think that access to Marmion House and the opportunity to communicate with staff in person is vital. Those who lack confidence with digital forms of communication and those who may be in distress because of personal issues need to talk through their issues and problems face to face and experience the empathy and reassurance that only live interaction can offer'.*

When asked would you like to see more services delivered digitally via telephone, webchat or the internet, 64% of respondents indicated that they would.



## **Investing in communities and capitalising on the positives in the voluntary sector response**

Ultimately the greatest and most lasting impact of the pandemic will be experienced by the most vulnerable in our society. However, the positives include the considerable community effort which has been made to support vulnerable people, close working by the Council in support of the voluntary sector and of numerous acts of kindness and neighbourliness by individuals. Respondents were asked whether the Council should continue to consider new ways to invest in communities and capitalise on the positives in the voluntary sector response.

Comments received included:

*'I think the Council and the voluntary sector should work hand in hand to deliver services to our vulnerable residents, who need comfort, practical help and the sense of someone knowledgeable working alongside them. The vulnerable need to feel cherished and important members of society',*

*'Voluntary Services are important and very necessary, investing with these services can be more rewarding, but Training is also important to make them work effectively'*

*'The council cannot do everything and community organisations are a key part of service delivery and often have better access to harder to reach communities',*

*'I think voluntary sector is key. I've seen the work the CiC has done through the pandemic and would love to see more projects',*

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