

## **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 2022/23 budget was open from 6<sup>th</sup> September until 10<sup>th</sup> October 2021 and three key groups were encouraged to share their views, predominantly through online surveys, although paper copies could be requested.

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 a social media campaign on Tamworth Borough Council Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn and Tamworth Enterprise Centre Facebook.

It was also shared through business Facebook groups such as Tamworth is Open and Tamworth Business to Business.

Several direct mail-outs were sent to a variety of partners and stakeholders including a database of 850 businesses, 300 Citizens Panel members and 40 Community Champions.

The voluntary sector survey was shared with our network of voluntary sector contacts, including Support Staffordshire, Staffordshire Council of Voluntary Youth Services, Tamworth Community Together CIC, Heart of Tamworth and many more.

## Responses

A total of 83 responses were received to the consultation and these consisted of:

- 73 residents
- 4 businesses
- 6 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'. Views put forwarded included:

*Seems to have a good focus.*

*Good vision for the future.*

*Great statement, I hope it turns out to be true.*

*Too wordy. Our focus is the people of Tamworth.*

*Sounds very good but basically meaningless.*

*The climate and ecological emergency must be placed at the heart of everything we do as well, otherwise there won't be people or an economy to deal with in the future.*

### 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,

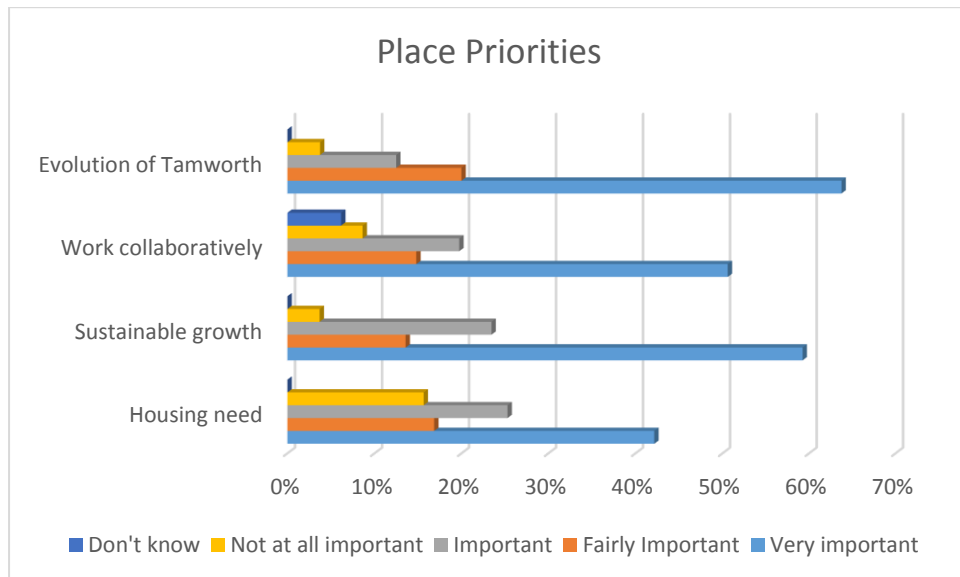
- To work collaboratively and flexibly to meet the needs of our communities,
- To create a new and developing vision for the continued evolution of Tamworth, including a town centre fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

All priorities were given a high importance rating by over 58% 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’; with 84 % giving this a high rating.

Considered least important was ‘to meet housing needs through a variety of approaches and interventions’. However, 59% of respondents still 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 59% of respondents. Comments received included:

*There is an enormous amount of house building in Tamworth, but the infrastructure is being ignored.*

*The housing application currently in by Cornerstone is a great example of the types of housing that is desperately needed in our town.*

*There needs to be some mention of sustainable, affordable and quality accommodation here.*

*What are the council doing about the empty shops and living accommodation dotted around the town centre and beyond? Don't see TBC rushing to accommodate the homeless by using these properties. WHY?*

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

Seen as important by 73% of respondents. Comments included:

*I would like to see something about facilitating quality employment linked to this.*

*The town needs revitalising and if successful everyone will benefit.*

*I love the mix of green space and convenient shopping areas in Tamworth and would like to see this continue in future works. On a side note, I loved seeing wild flowers on the central reservation near the Snowdome.*

*This should be at the heart of all planning decisions.*

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

Seen as important by 66% of respondents. Comments included:

*Engagement and collaboration is important to ensure the funding received through taxes etc are used to the best advantage of the residents.*

*Then you need to increase the number of mental health services in the town as our most vulnerable are those who struggle with mental illnesses.*

*The community deserves the council's best efforts..... the council is there to serve and support the community.*

**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' (84 % of respondents).

*It's an exciting time for our town centre.*

*Not "build it and they will come". That's a joke. Shrink it and make space for affordable housing with fewer shops/commercial footprint. It's not needed in these days of 38% online and teetering Ventura to boot.*

*More needs to be made of Tamworth's history and heritage.*

*This is a wonderful opportunity to showcase town centres of the future.*

## Organisation priorities

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

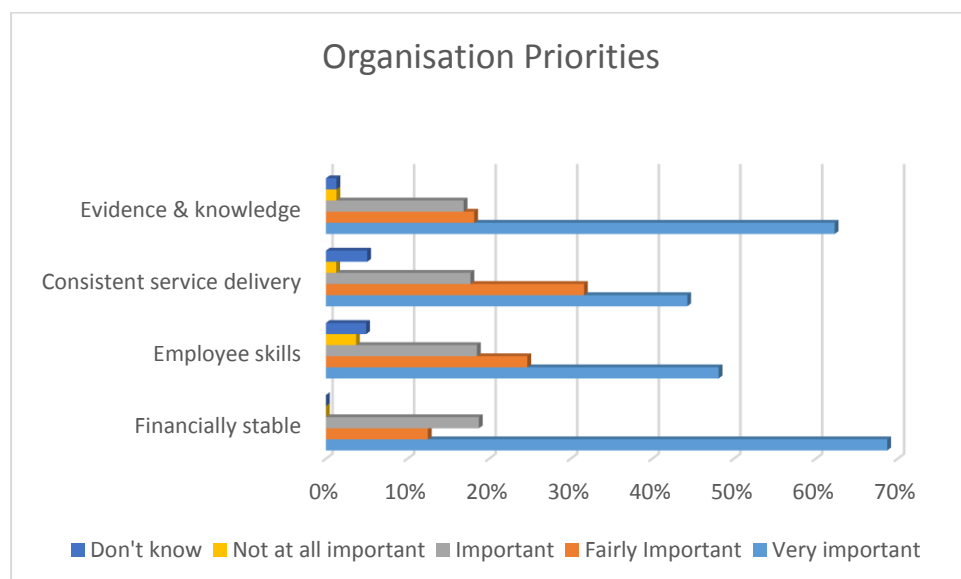
- To be financially stable,
- To ensure our employees have the right skills and culture to help our residents, visitors and businesses,
- To ensure our service delivery is consistent, clear and focussed,
- To ensure our decisions are driven by evidence and knowledge.

All priorities were given a high importance rating by 73% or over of respondents.

The most important priority was 'to be financially stable', 82% gave this a high rating.

Considered least important was 'to ensure our service delivery is consistent, clear and focussed'. However, 76% of respondents gave this a high rating.

Respondents' views are shown in the figure below



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

This was seen as the most important priority under 'organisation' by 82% of respondents.

Comments received included:

*Of course this is important and should be one of the council's basic aims.*

*Increase local taxes and give us the services we need and deserve. Don't use government cuts as an excuse.*

*All opportunities should be considered in full & evaluated; however, more direct consultation & opinion of the town's residents needs addressing. All opinions have a merit in some form so the more the better.*

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

Seen as important by 73% of respondents. Comments received included:

*Elected members need to show empathy for local issues and ensure impartiality not based on national political lines.*

*You really need to bring back opportunities for your staff and elected members to engage with the community face to face. If they aren't accessible they aren't truly accountable.*

*Whilst training is very important, ensuring the budget isn't blown on learning 'how to do something' rather than 'actually doing something' is important.*

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

Seen as important by 76% of respondents.

Comments received included:

*Should be a given and not arise as a 'priority' because again that's a standard, not an added bonus!*

*Other than getting my bins emptied once a fortnight, (gee, thanks, in exchange for £1500 a year in council tax) you. Haven't delivered me anything.*

*Again, modern technology offers so many ways you active this.*

*Don't presume that everyone has online capacity or capability.*

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

Seen as important by 80% of respondents.

Comments received included:

*This should really include finding out what residents think. We do get asked but very little seems to happen and no feedback on why things are done or not done.*

*As long as the evidence base is neutral and independent.*

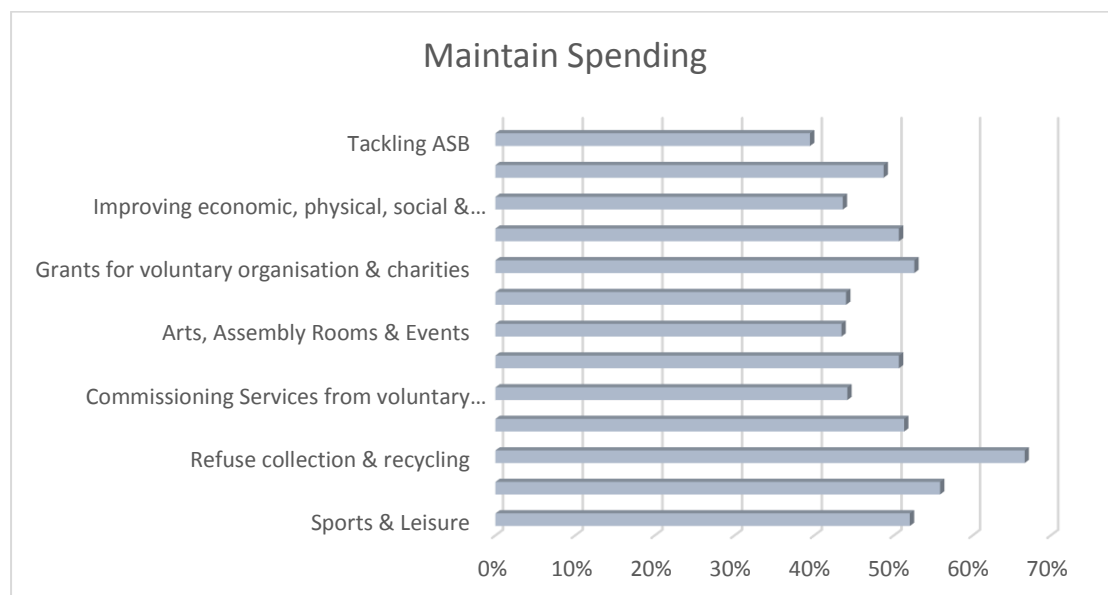
*Easier contact methods for the community to use would be a starting point for TBC. A local community workshop ran monthly would be an excellent opportunity to engage with people from all areas of Tamworth to voice their opinions and concerns.*

## Spending on services

Respondents were provided with planned spend on major cost areas for 2021/22 and were asked whether they felt the Council should increase, decrease or keep spending the same.

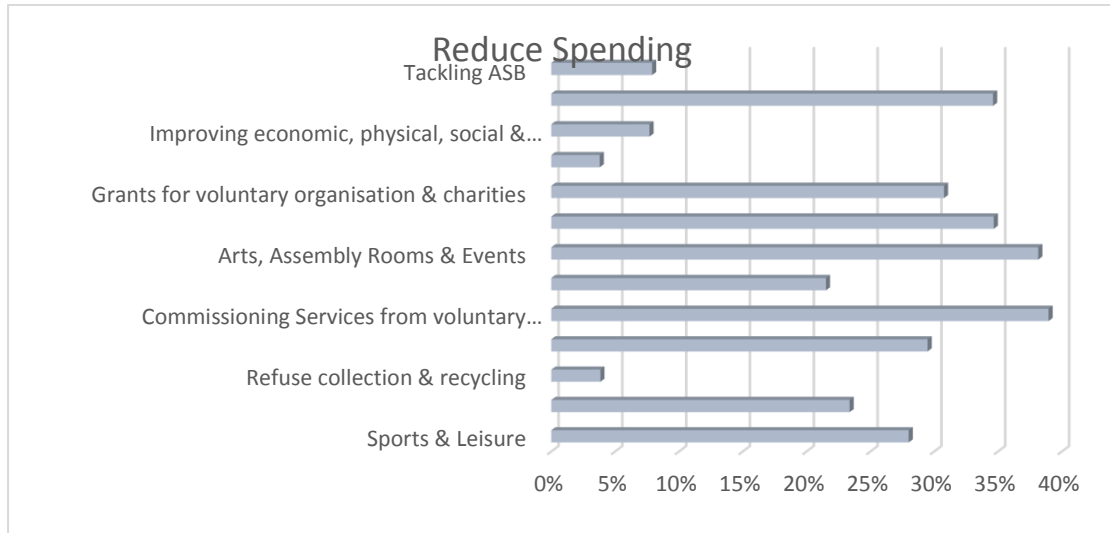
### Maintain levels of spending

It was most common for respondents to say they would prefer that current levels of spend remained the same; this was the case in 7 of the 13 major cost areas. Respondents most wanted to see maintained level of spend on 'refuse collection and recycling' (67%).



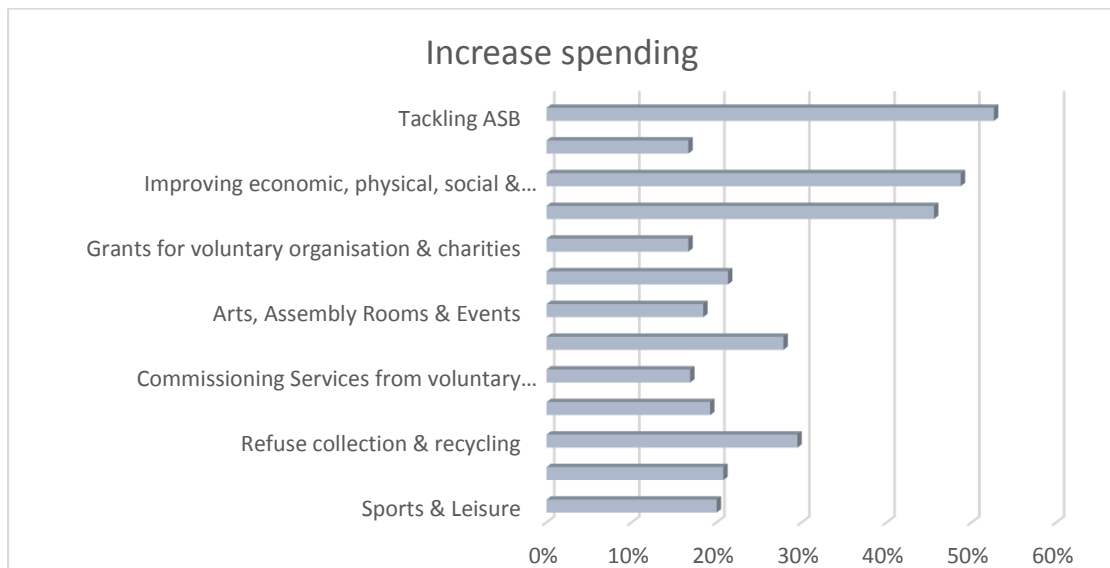
## Reduce levels of spending

Respondents wanted to see less spend in the following areas 'Commissioning Services from voluntary organisations & charities (39%) and Arts, Assembly Rooms & Events (38%).



## Increase levels of spending

Two areas where respondents wanted to see more spend were 'improving the economic, physical, social and environmental condition of Tamworth (49%) and 'tackling anti-social behaviour' (53%).

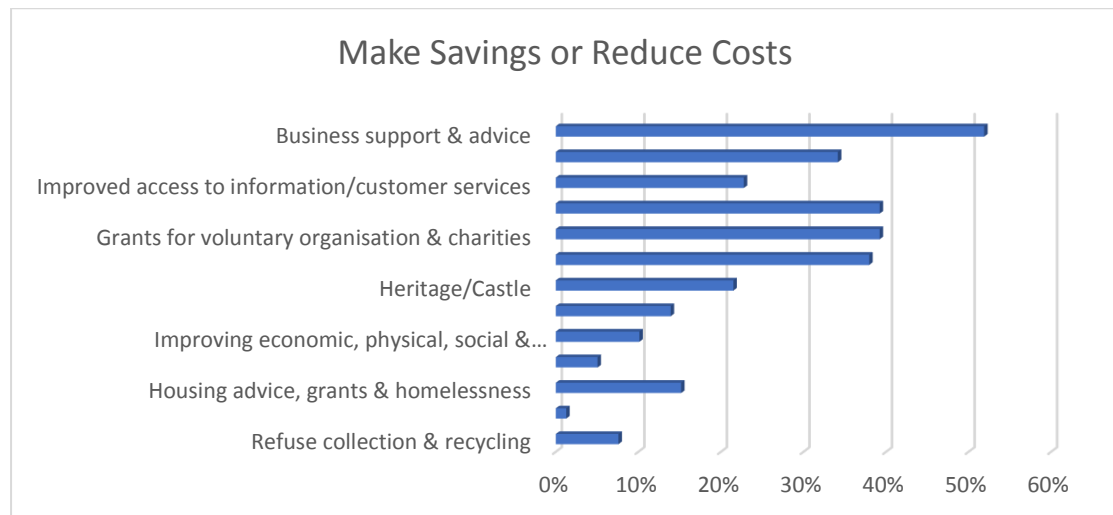




## Savings and reducing costs

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' (52%); 'grants for voluntary organisations and charities' (39%) and 'sports and leisure' (39%).

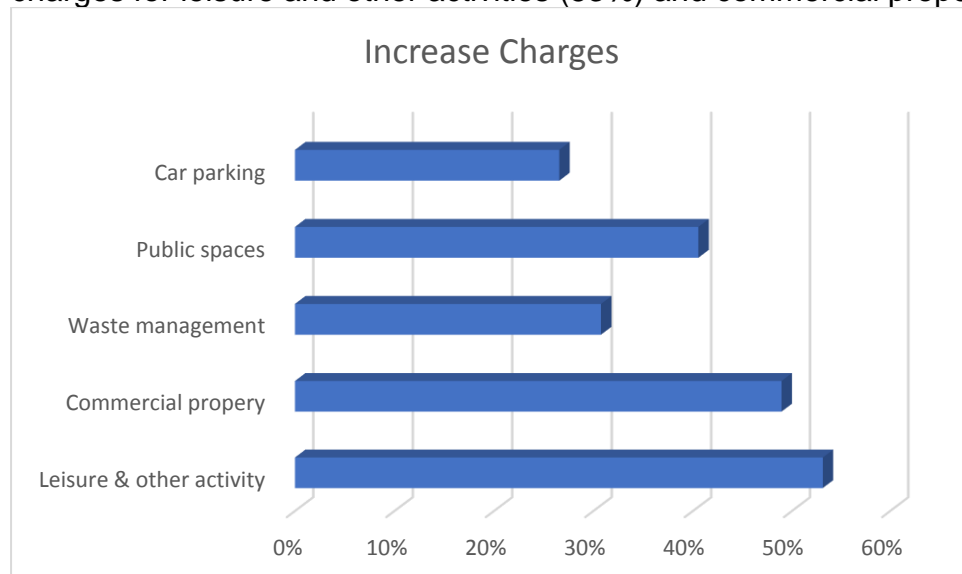


## Fees and charges

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

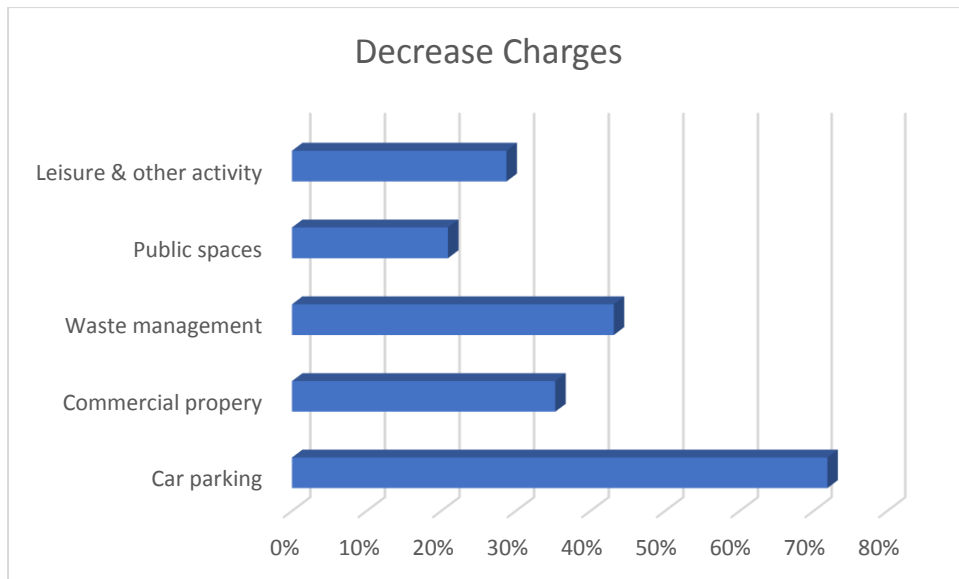
### Increase charges

It was most common for respondents to see the need to increase public charges for leisure and other activities (53%) and commercial property (49%).



## Decrease charges

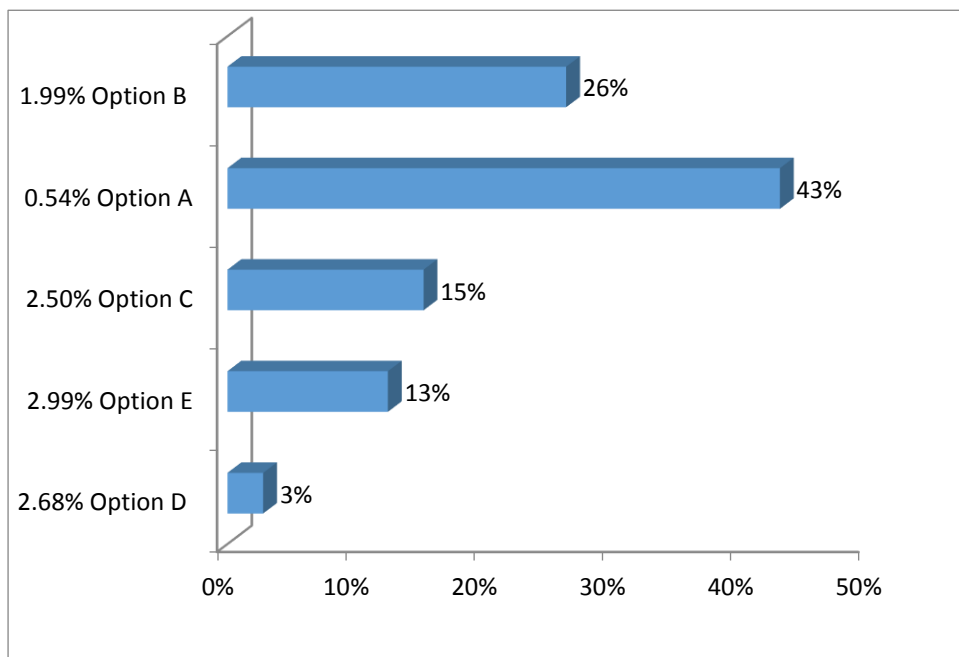
Respondents were most likely to say that they would like to see decreased charges for car parking (72%) and was by far the most popular choice.



## Acceptable level of Council Tax increase

Residents were asked what they would consider to be an acceptable Council Tax increase for the 2022/23 budget.

The largest proportion of residents (43%) would prefer the lowest level of Council Tax increase (a 0.54% increase).



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

Since the start of the pandemic, Marmion House has been closed to members of the public. There is also an acceptance that services are capable of being delivered differently. Views on this were mixed and included:

*Wow, what an admission. It took an epidemic for us to realise that things could be done better if we changed.*

*Knock it down! Use an empty shop in town as a customer drop in centre and develop hubs around estates for Housing management and work remotely in the community.*

*Personally I like to speak to people face to face however if I send an email I do expect an acknowledgement and to know what will happen next not just be left wondering if it has been seen or actioned!*

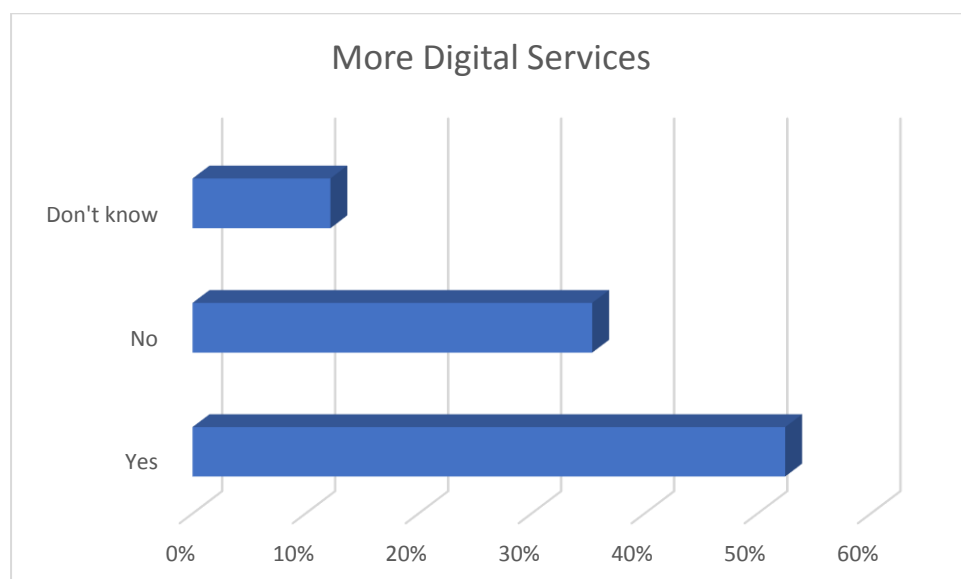
*How can anyone learn from others when there is no direct contact. I do not wish to be forced into asking questions online or reporting highway matters "on the portal".*

*We need to learn and embrace some of the positive changes that the lockdown and restrictions brought to the workplace.*

*I have only visited the building twice in over 30 years of residency. In a world of online access, a front of house is all that's needed in my opinion.*

## Digital services

When asked 'would you like to see more services delivered digitally via telephone, webchat or the internet?' 52% of respondents indicated that they would.



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

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:

*Take all offers from community support.*

*Almost too many voluntary groups, some overlapping in what they do but very vital not just in the pandemic. What council resources are used to coordinate the work of such groups?*

*Any support that can be offered to help community efforts is appreciated. Perhaps you can promote these more so that residents can be aware and might encourage more volunteers to step forward.*

*It's all about using volunteers??? We pay more and more in council tax and are getting less and less.*

*This is the way forward post Covid.*