

AGENDA MANAGEMENT SHEET

Name of Committee Cabinet

Date of Committee 2 February 2006

Report Title Public Consultation on 2006/07 Budget and Council Tax: Results

Summary The report provides members with details of the results from the public consultation on the 2006/07 budget priorities and council tax.

For further information please contact: David Clarke Strategic Director of Resources
Tel: 01926 412003
davidclarketr@warwickshire.gov.uk

Joanne Harrison CIPFA Trainee
Tel: 01926 412860
joanneharrison@warwickshire.gov.uk

Would the recommended decision be contrary to the Budget and Policy Framework? No.

Background papers BMG Research Report (December 2005)
Public Satisfaction Survey, Warwickshire County Council (December 2005)

CONSULTATION ALREADY UNDERTAKEN:-

Other Committees

Local Member(s)

Other Elected Members Cllr Tandy, Cllr Roodhouse, Cllr Booth & Cllr McCarney – for information

Cabinet Member Cllr Farnell, Cllr Cockburn – cleared for circulation

Chief Executive

Legal David Carter – for information

Finance David Clarke – reporting officer

Other Chief Officers

District Councils

Health Authority

Police

Other Bodies/Individuals

FINAL DECISION

SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS:

Further consideration by
this Committee

To Council Council will approve the 2006/07 budget at its
meeting on 7 February 2006.

To Cabinet

To an O & S Committee

To an Area Committee

Further Consultation

Cabinet – 2 February 2006

Public Consultation on 2006/07 Budget and Council Tax: Results

Report of the Strategic Director of Resources

Recommendation

It is recommended that Cabinet note the feedback received from the public about the budget and level of council tax for 2006/07 and commend the information to the political groups for consideration when preparing their 2006/07 budget resolutions.

1 Summary

- 1.1 The 2006/07 public budget consultation exercise consisted of the widely distributed Citizen Panel Survey and Public Satisfaction Survey. These sought to discover the views of the people of Warwickshire on services and expenditure, service priorities and an acceptable level of Council Tax increase.

2 Executive Summary

- 2.1 2006/07 is the first year that public consultation on the budget and council tax has been incorporated as part of the authority-wide programme of consultation through the Citizen's Panel and Public Satisfaction survey. With 1,656 respondents (an overall response rate of 41%), the results provide a broader and more representative picture than has been achieved through the face-to-face consultations in previous years.
- 2.2 The Citizen's Panel Survey was undertaken by the BMG Research Group in September 2005. Warwickshire County Council undertook the Public Satisfaction Survey in September 2005. The initial results from both surveys were received in early December 2005.
- 2.3 The Citizens Panel survey asked respondents to consider service provision and funding. Crime and disorder reduction was the service respondents saw as most important. Fire and Rescue was seen to be the second most important service, closely followed by learning across childcare, nurseries, schools and out of school activities in third place. Older people and vulnerable adult social services and waste disposal were also in the top five most important services.
- 2.4 Archives, museums and arts services emerged as the least important service, out of the list of services respondents were asked to consider. This is followed by country

parks, adult and community learning, the promotion of health and wellbeing and economic development.

- 2.5 Respondents to the Citizen's Panel Survey were asked to consider whether services have sufficient resources to carry out their work to respondents expectations. Nearly half of all respondents think that some council services do not have sufficient resources. The top priorities for investment were crime and disorder reduction, followed by older people's and vulnerable adult social services.
- 2.6 However a third of respondents indicated that they think that some council services have more than sufficient resources to carry out their work. As indicated by being the least important service for respondents, the Archives, Museums and Arts service is thought to be the top priority for disinvestment.
- 2.7 Just over one in five respondents say that they would be prepared to pay more Council Tax in order to fund the improvement of services that they regard to be a priority. However the majority of respondents would not be prepared to pay more Council Tax. Of those who would be willing to pay more, the majority would be prepared to pay up to 4% more, on top of inflation.
- 2.8 Respondents were also asked whether they thought council tax should be raised in line with inflation only, reduced or kept exactly how it is. Nearly half of all respondents indicated that they think that Council Tax should be raised by inflation only. Considerably more respondents believe that the current level of council tax is not appropriate for the quantity of quality of services provided.
- 2.9 Overall the results show a very consistent picture of service's importance and the priority areas for further investment, with the proportions expressing dissatisfaction with services very low.
- 2.10 To a certain extent, the responses to the specific questions on value for money and council tax present a slightly different picture, where they were less positive. On value for money, the picture was mixed, with a broader spread of results. It was questions on the level of council tax and the willingness to pay more that had the biggest negative responses.

3 Citizens Panel Survey

3.1 Overview of Citizens Panel Survey

- 3.1.1 Questionnaires were distributed to all 1,000 members of the Citizen's Panel Survey. 637 questionnaires were completed, providing a response rate of 64%.

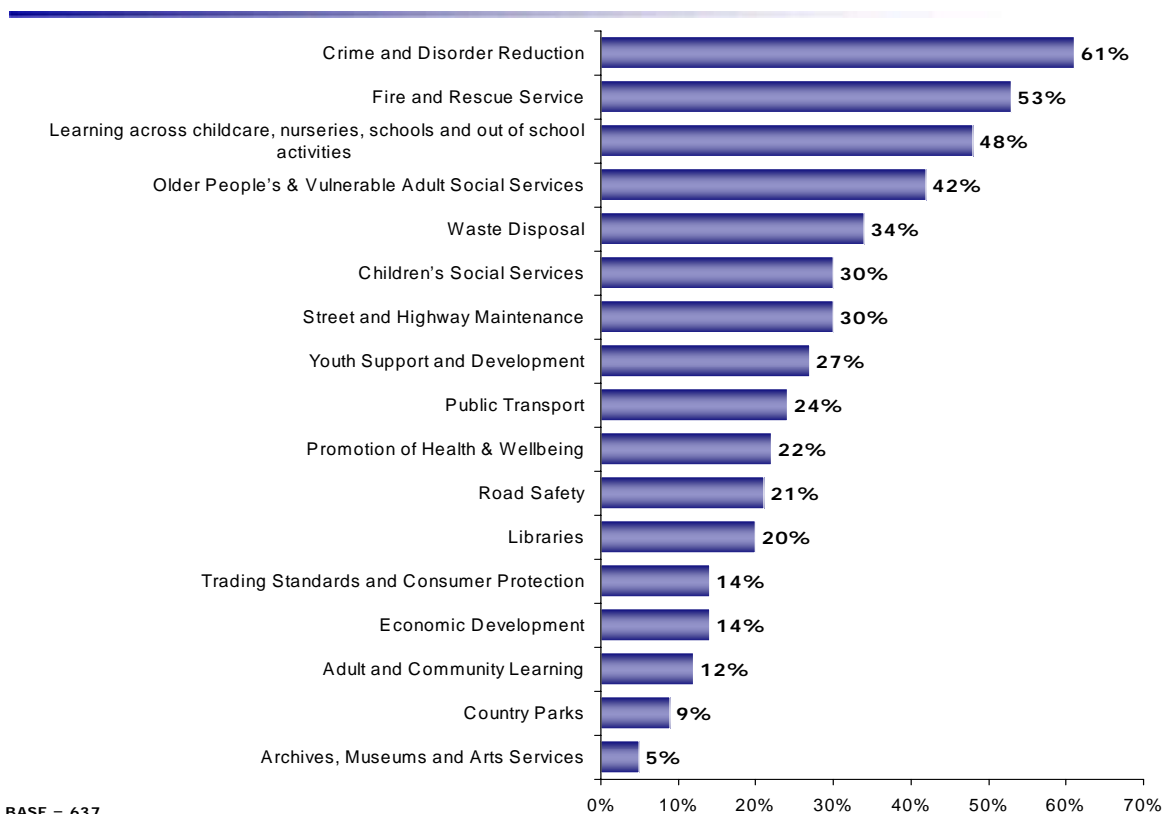
3.2 Results and Analysis

- 3.2.1 The Citizen's Panel Survey covered questions on the importance of various issues to respondents and also asked respondents to consider which service areas they feel should be priorities for investment or disinvestment. They were also asked to consider how strongly they agree with the statement that the services provided by the County Council offer good value for money. Finally, they were asked whether they think the Council Tax level is appropriate for the services provided.

3.3 Important Issues for Respondents

- 3.3.1 Respondents were asked a number of questions in the area of Service Provision and Funding. Within this, they were asked to consider a list of the services that Warwickshire County Council provides, and to identify the five services they feel are the most and least important. Figure 1 indicates the services that respondents feel are the most important.
- 3.3.2 Crime and Disorder reduction emerges as the service provided by the Council that respondents feel is most important, with 61% of respondents selecting this as one of the five most important services. This closely links with the result that in another section in the questionnaire, reducing crime and improving community safety is ranked as very or quite important by 96% of respondents.
- 3.3.3 The Fire and Rescue service emerges as the second highest service to be included in respondents top five most important priorities.
- 3.3.4 Learning across childcare, nurseries, schools and out of school activities emerged third, in respondent's top five most important priorities. The remaining highest two services ranked among the five most important services were Older People's & Vulnerable Adult Social Services and Waste Disposal.

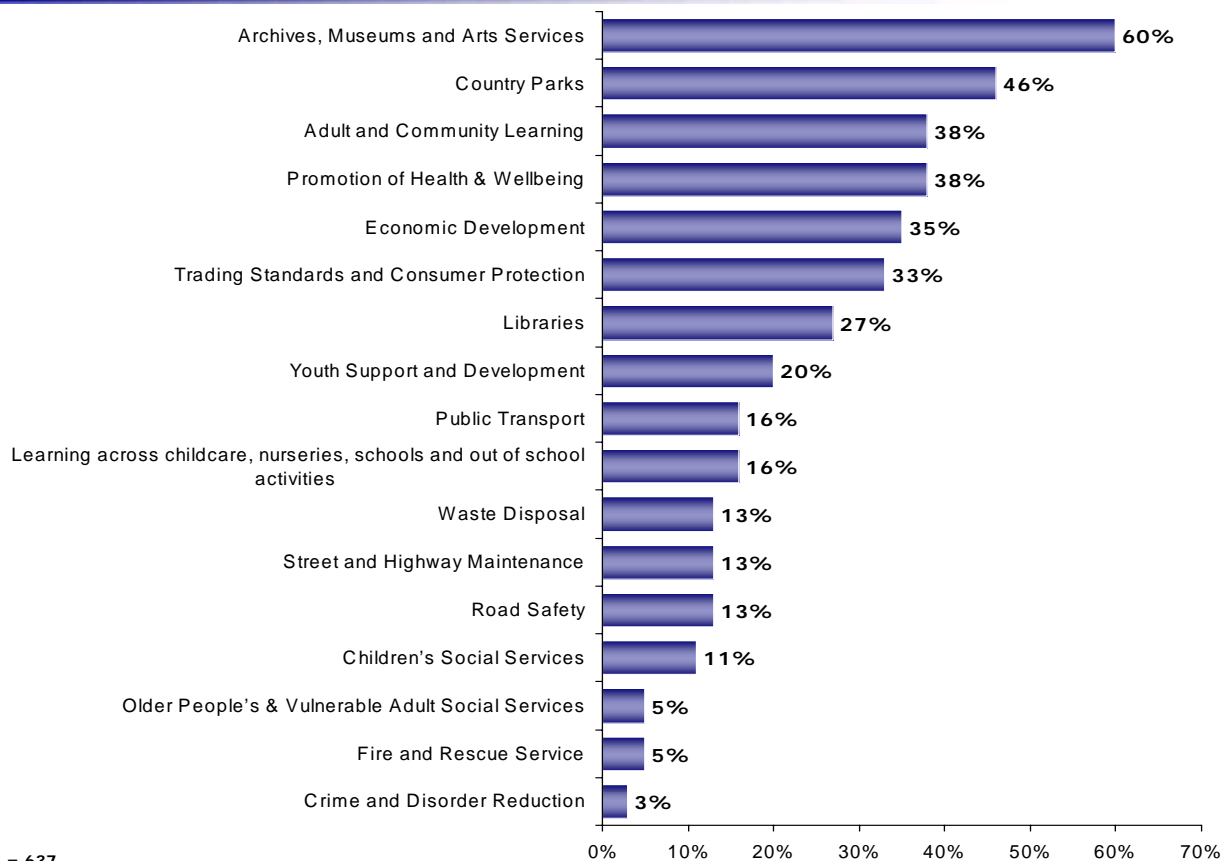
Figure 1 – Services most important to respondents that Warwickshire County Council provides



- 3.3.5 Respondents were also asked to identify which five of the above services they considered to be least important. The results of this are shown in Figure 2.

- 3.3.6 Archives, Museums and Art Services emerged as the service, which seemed to be thought as the least important, with 60% of respondents saying this is one of the five least important services provided. This ties in with the fact only 5% of people considered this to be one of the most five important services provided by the County Council.
- 3.3.7 County Parks and Adult and Community Learning emerged as the next two services to be ranked least important by respondents. Over a third of respondents considered these to be one of the five least important council services. Again, both of these services were in the bottom three when respondents were asked about the five most important services.
- 3.3.8 There was a slight degree of disparity in responses to the promotion of health and wellbeing. 22% of people considered this to be one of the five most important services provided, and this was not in the bottom five for most important services. However, 38% of people ranked this as one of the five least important services, making this fourth on the list.
- 3.3.9 Economic development completed the list of the five services considered least important. Again this was among the lowest five services when respondents were asked to state the five most important services.

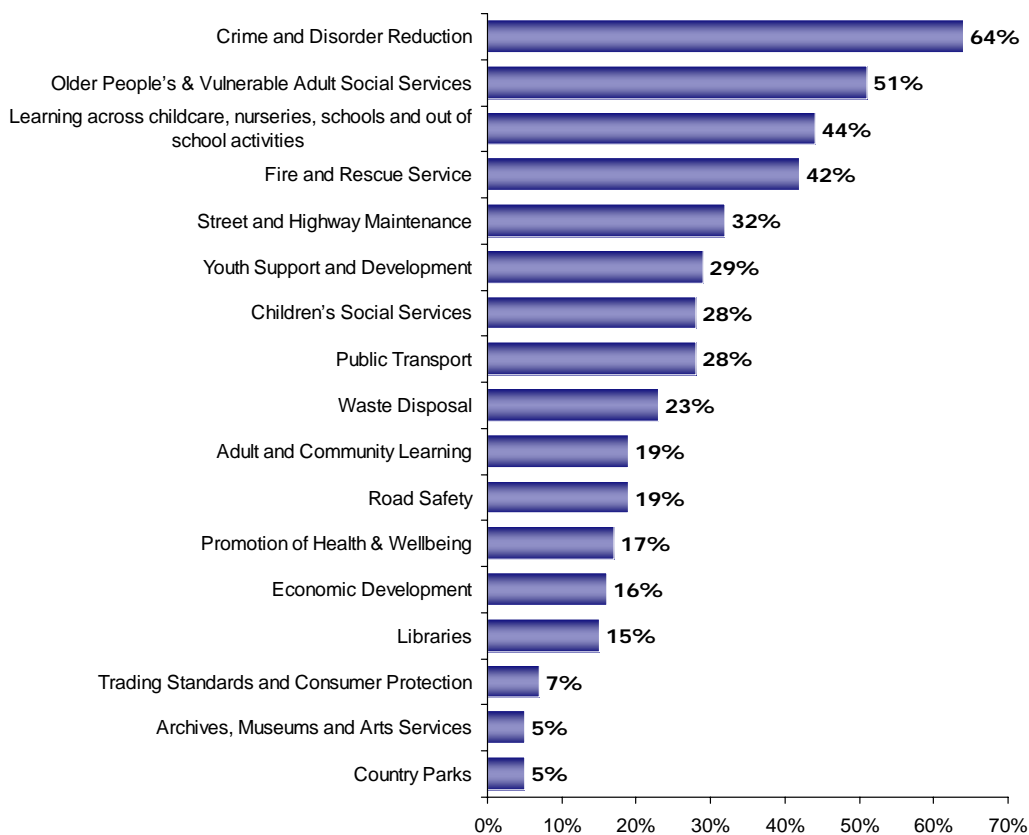
Figure 2 – Services least important to respondents that Warwickshire County Council provides



3.4 Resources, Priorities for Investment and Priorities for Disinvestment

- 3.4.1 Respondents were also asked whether they think any of the above services do not have sufficient resources to carry out their work to respondent's expectations. If they answered yes, they were asked to list five services they feel should be priorities for investment.
- 3.4.2 The services where respondents feel there should be priorities for investment are summarised in Figure 3. Nearly two thirds of respondents feel that the crime and disorder reduction service is in need of investment. This service was also the service considered to be most important, when respondents were asked to identify the five most important services.
- 3.4.3 Older peoples and vulnerable adult social services, learning across childcare, nurseries and schools and out of school activities and the fire and rescue service clearly emerge as the second, third and fourth priorities for investments, according to respondents. Again all of these services were in the top four of priorities for respondents. Respondents clearly feel there are not sufficient resources invested in their priority areas.

Figure 3 - Service respondents feel should be priorities for investment (Where respondents feel there is not sufficient resources to carry out work)



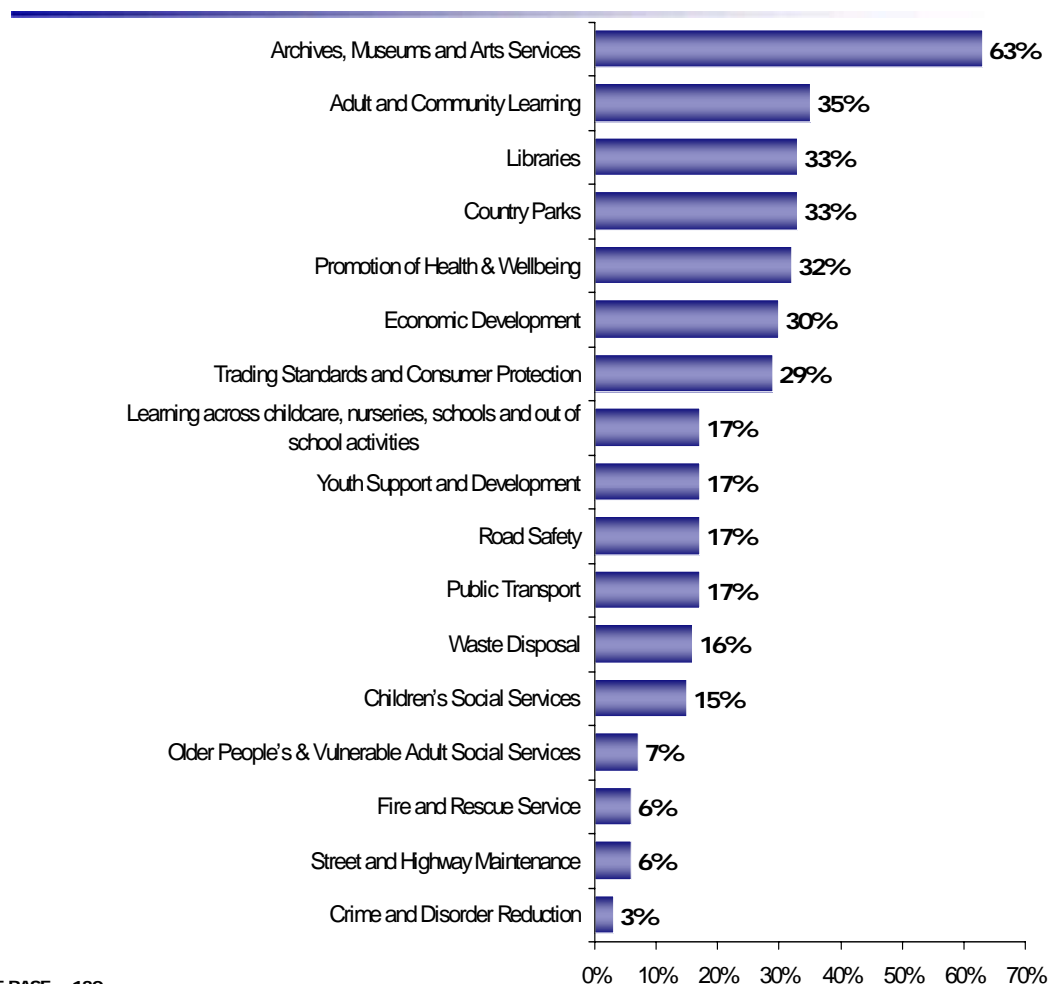
- 3.4.4 Nearly a third of respondents indicated that they think that some of the council services have more than sufficient resources to carry out their work to their expectations. Where this was the case, they were asked to state which services

they think should be prioritised for disinvestment. The results of this are shown in Figure 4.

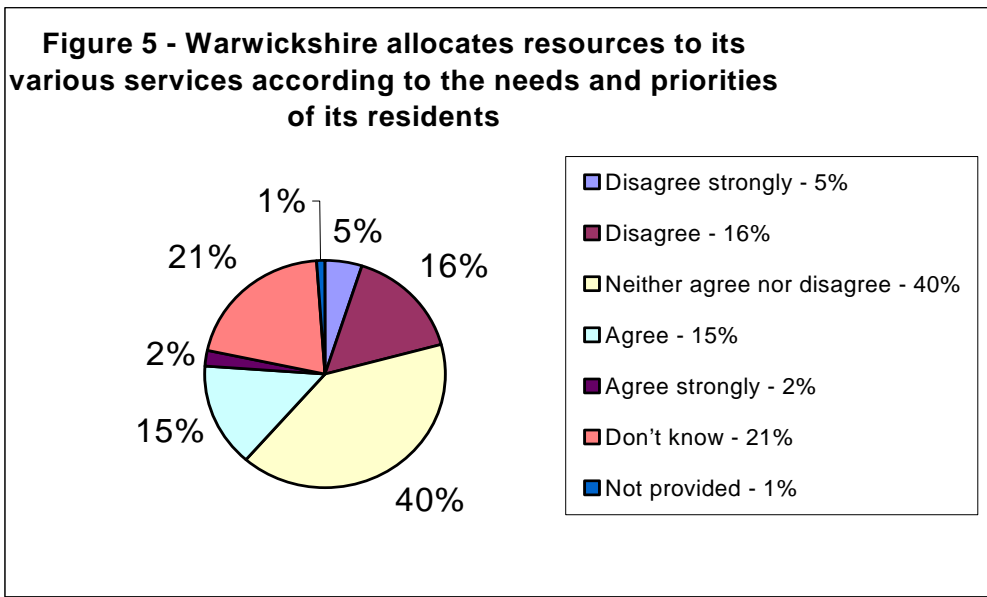
3.4.5 Archives, Museums and Arts services clearly emerges by a large margin as the highest priority for disinvestment. This service also clearly emerged as the least important service to respondents.

3.4.6 There is a clear group of six services which follow Archives, Museums and Arts Services for disinvestment. These are adult and community learning, libraries, county parks, promotion of health and wellbeing, economic development and trading standards and consumer protection. All of these services are included in the top seven least important services for Warwickshire residents. This indicates respondents believe the areas they consider least important already have more than sufficient resources to carry out their work.

Figure 4 – Services respondents feel should be priorities for disinvestment (Where respondents think some services have more than sufficient resources to carry out their work)

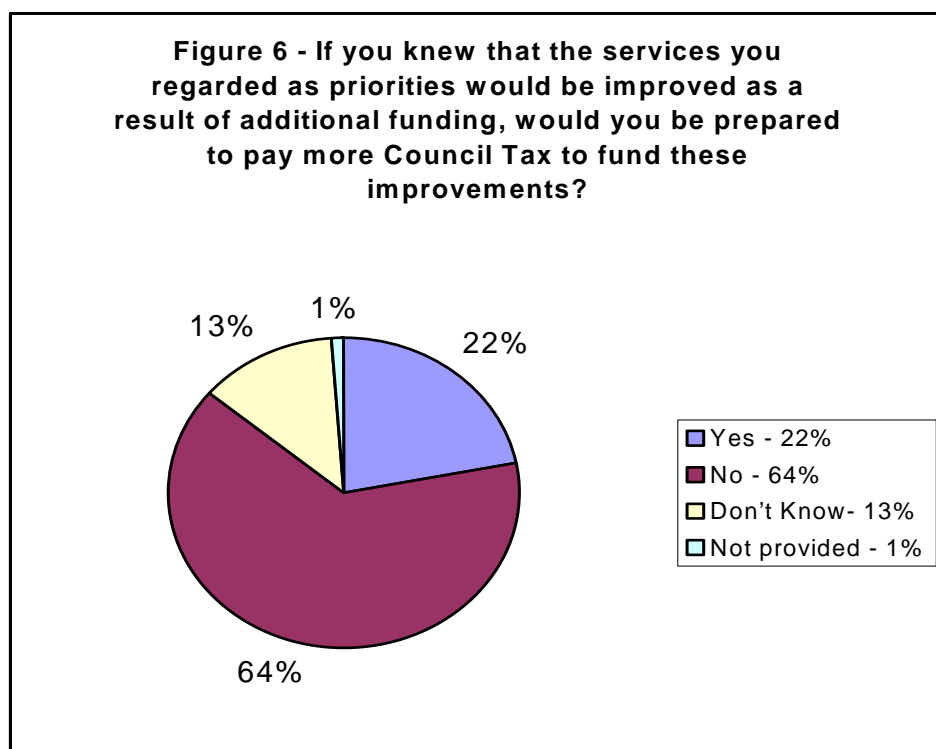


3.4.7 Respondents were also asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statement that Warwickshire allocates resources to its various services according to the needs and priorities of its residents. The results of this are summarised in Figure 5.



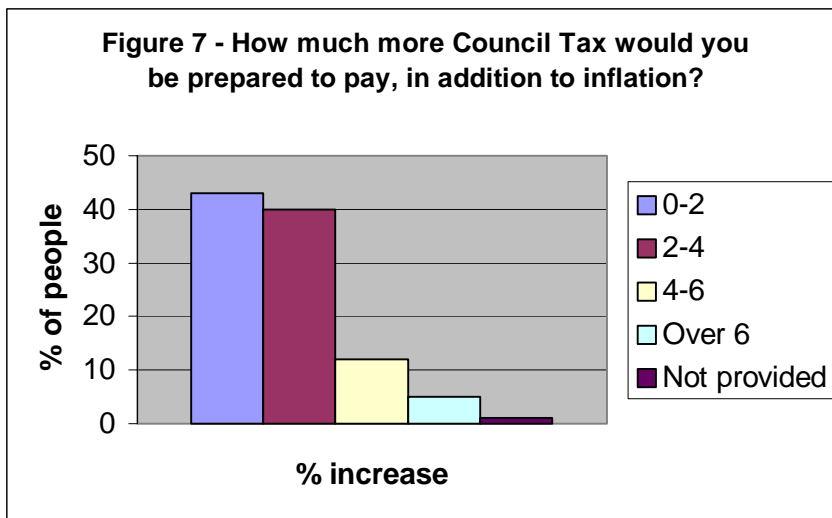
3.4.8 Feelings about the allocation of resources amongst respondents are mixed. 40% of people indicated they neither agree nor disagree with the statement, and 21% of people stated they did not know. A further 21% of people indicated that they disagree to some extent with the statement, with slightly fewer (17%) indicating that they agree with the statement.

3.4.9 Respondents were also asked that if they knew that the services they regarded as priorities would be improved as a result of additional funding, would they be prepared to pay more council tax to fund these improvements. Figure 6 summaries the responses to this question.

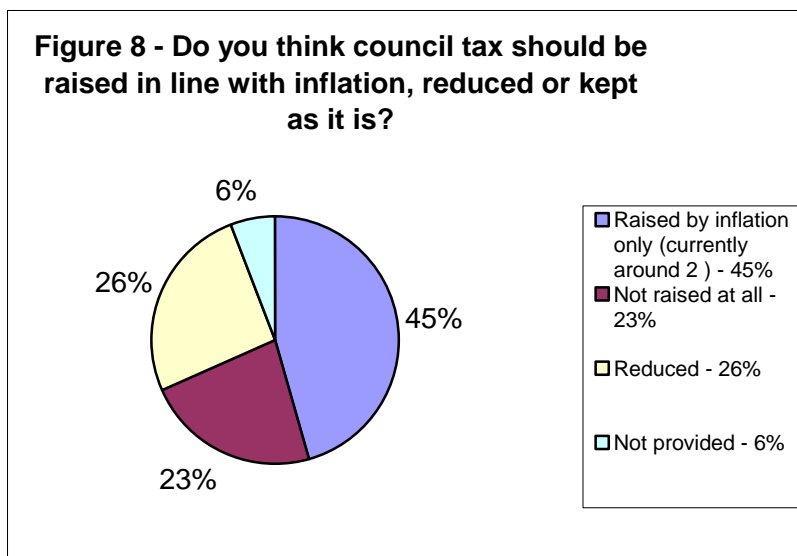


3.4.10 22% of respondents indicated that they would be prepared to pay more Council Tax to fund the improvements of their priority services. This is in contrast to the 64% of respondents who would not be willing to pay more Council Tax to fund improvements.

3.4.11 Where respondents indicated they would be willing to pay more council tax to fund the improvement of their priority services, they were then asked to indicate how much more they would be willing to pay, in addition to an inflation increase of 2%. The results of this are shown in Figure 7. 43% of respondents indicated they would be willing to pay up to 2% more in Council Tax. A similar number (40%) indicated that they would be willing to pay between 2-4% more in Council Tax. There was still 12% of respondents who indicated they would be prepared to pay between 4-6% more, although only 5% indicated they would be prepared to pay more than 6% increase.

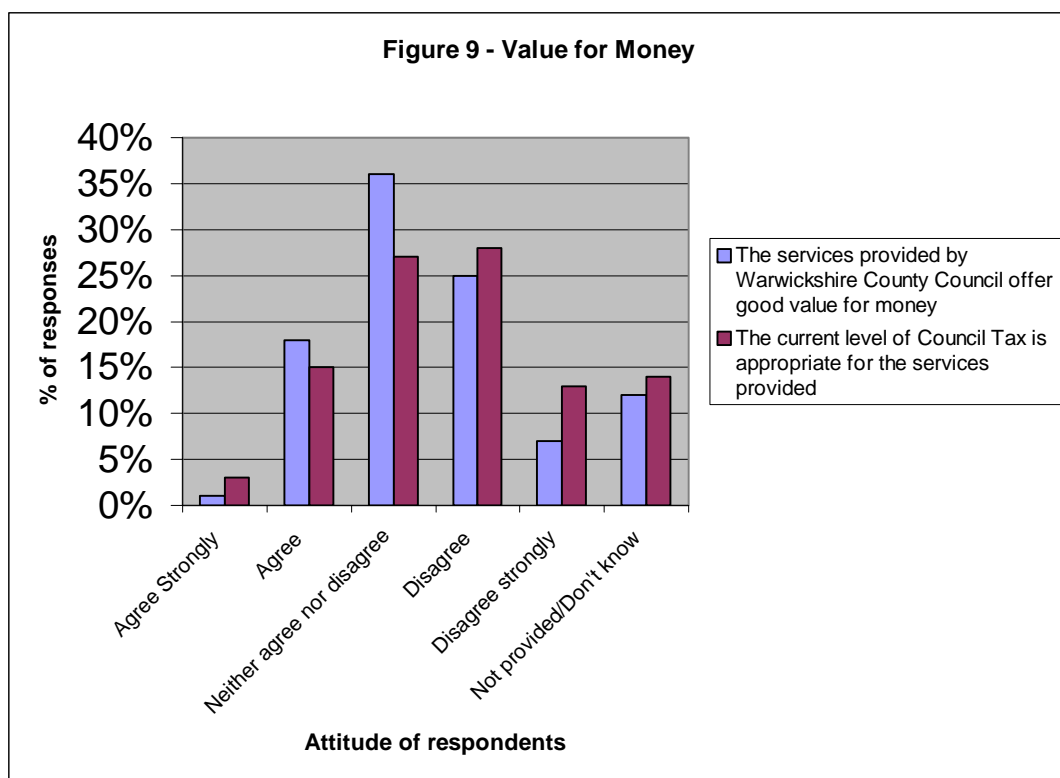


3.4.12 All respondents were asked whether they think the Council Tax should be raised in line with inflation only, reduced, or kept exactly how it is. As expected from the question about being prepared to pay for additional funding, the majority of respondents indicated that they thought council tax should be raised by inflation only. The responses to this question are shown in Figure 8.



3.5 Value For Money

3.5.1 The next section in the questionnaire considered the issue of Value for Money. Respondents were asked to indicate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with two statements. The first of these was that “The services provided by Warwickshire County Council offer good value for money.” The second statement was, “The current level of Council Tax is appropriate for the services provided.” The responses to these two statements are shown in Figure 9.

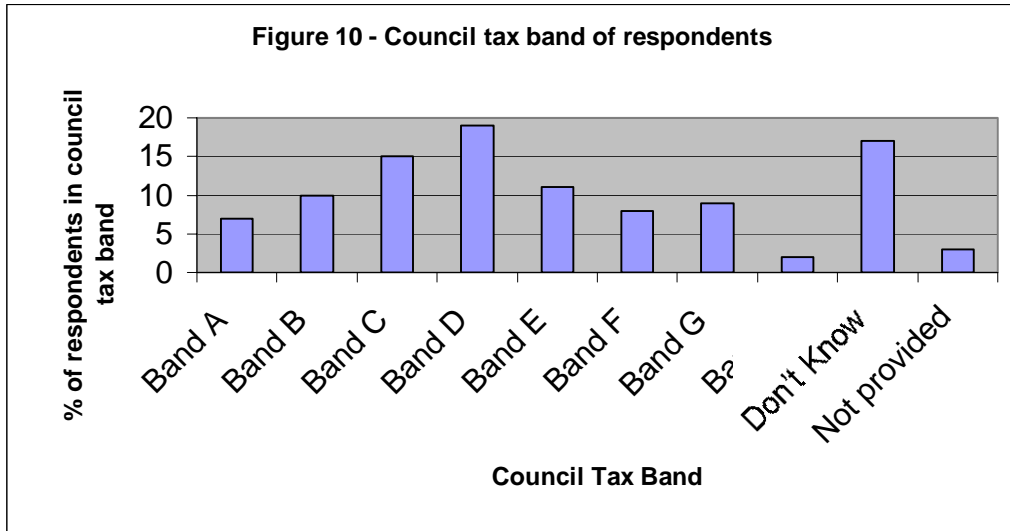


3.5.2 As shown in the Figure, with regards to the first statement, the highest proportion of respondents neither agree nor disagree with the statement that the services provided by Warwickshire County Council offer good value for money. However, it is worth noting that the proportion of respondents that either disagree or disagree strongly with the statement (32%) is higher than the proportion of respondents that either agree or agree strongly with the statement (19%).

3.5.3 With the second statement that the current level of council tax is appropriate for the services provided, disagreement is much higher than agreement. In total 41% of respondents indicated they disagreed with this statement, with 13% disagreeing strongly. In contrast only 18% indicated they agreed to a certain extent with the statement, with only 3% strongly agreeing to it. The remaining respondents neither agreed nor disagreed, or indicated they did not know.

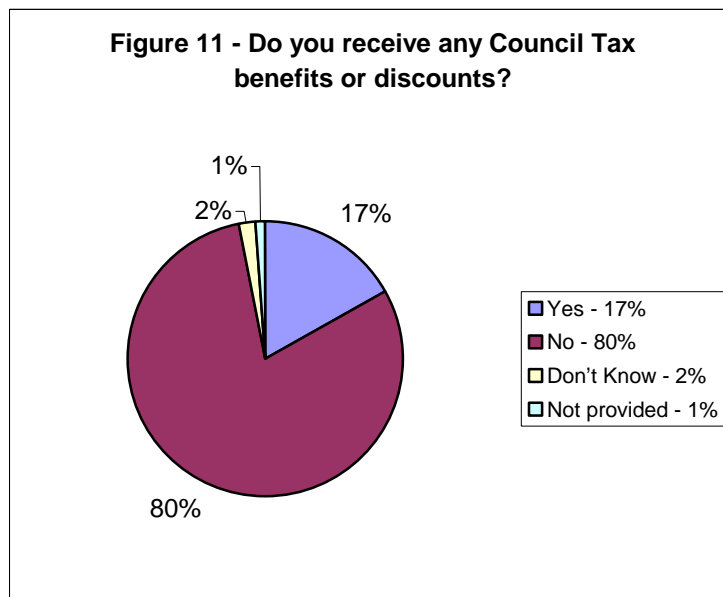
3.6 Demographics

3.6.1 Respondents were also asked to indicate which Council Tax Band their home falls into, in order to gauge information about the demographics of the respondents. The results of this are shown in Figure 10.



3.6.2 20% of respondents either did not know or did not provide details of which Council Tax band their property falls into. Of those who did know, the highest proportion fall into Band D, followed by Band C. Respondents were least likely to be living in a property that falls into Band H.

3.6.2 Respondents were also asked whether they receive any Council Tax benefits or discounts. As shown in Figure 11, only 17% receive any benefits or discounts.



4 Public Satisfaction Survey

4.1 Overview of Public Satisfaction Survey

4.1.1 Questionnaires were distributed to over 3000 Warwickshire residents. 1019 replies were received, giving a response rate of 34%.

4.2 Results and Analysis

4.2.1 The Public Satisfaction Survey asked respondent's to consider how satisfied they were with a number of services provided by Warwickshire County Council. They were also asked to state how satisfied or dissatisfied they were, with the way the authority runs things, and whether they think the County Council gives residents good value for money. Finally respondent's were asked to indicate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with a statement about the current level of council tax being appropriate for the quantity and quality of services provided.

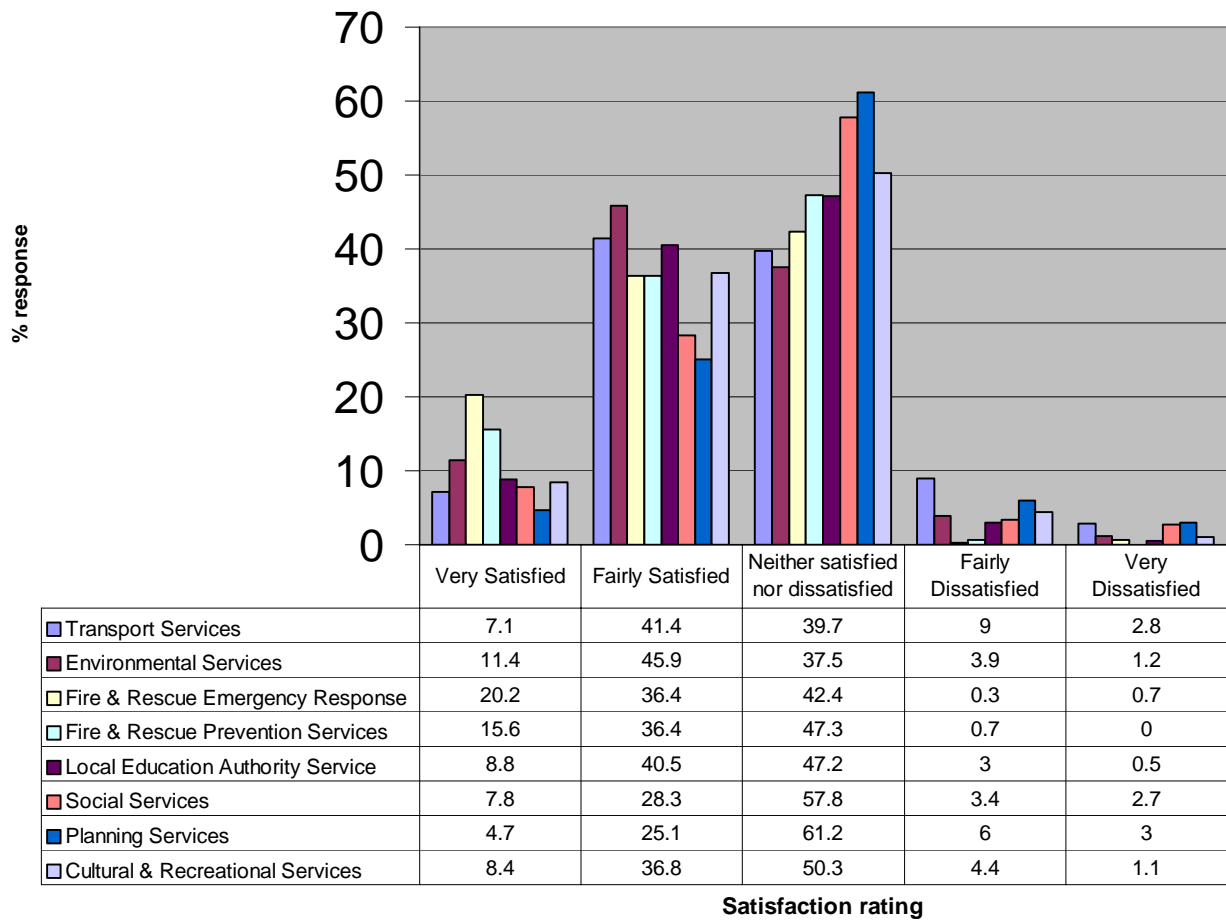
4.3 Satisfaction with services

4.3.1 Respondents were asked to indicate how satisfied or dissatisfied they are overall with a number of services provided by Warwickshire County Council, regardless of whether or not they have used these services. The responses to this are indicated in Figure 12.

4.3.2 Figure 12 shows the responses from the first question. Key points from the Figure are:

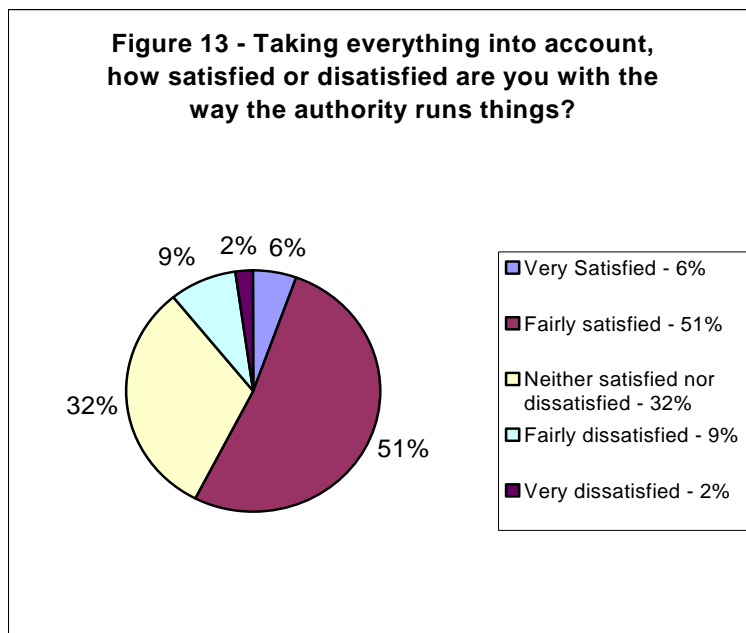
- More people are very satisfied with the Fire & Rescue Emergency Response service than with any other service. Overall nearly 57% of respondents were satisfied with this service, and only 1% of respondent's indicated they were dissatisfied with this service.
- The Fire & Rescue Prevention Services also scored highly on public satisfaction. 52% of respondent's indicated they were satisfied with the service, and less than 1% indicated that they were dissatisfied with the service.
- Environmental Services also scored highly, as slightly over 11% of people were very satisfied with this service. Nearly 46% of people also indicated they were fairly satisfied with the service. However slightly over 5% of people indicated they were dissatisfied with the service, to a certain extent.
- The highest levels of dissatisfaction are seen in transport services. Although slightly over 48% of people are very or fairly satisfied with these, nearly 12% of people indicated they were very or fairly dissatisfied with the level of service in this area.
- There are also high levels of dissatisfaction with planning services. Just less than 30% of respondent's indicated that they were very or fairly satisfied with these. However, 9% of respondent's indicated that they were very or fairly dissatisfied with these.

Figure 12 - How satisfied or dissatisfied are you overall with the following services provided by Warwickshire County Council?



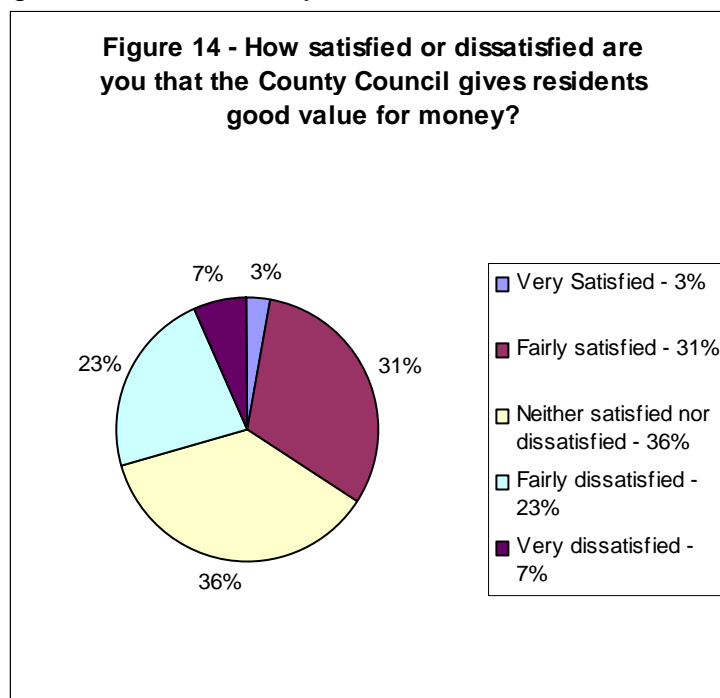
4.4 Satisfaction with the Authority

4.4.1 Respondents were asked, taking everything into account, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way the authority runs things. The results of this are shown in Figure 13. As this shows, the majority of people are at least fairly satisfied with the way the authority runs things. Over 57% of people are either very or fairly satisfied, in contrast to only under 11% who are fairly or very dissatisfied with the way the authority runs things. However, over 30% of people indicated that they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the way the authority runs things.

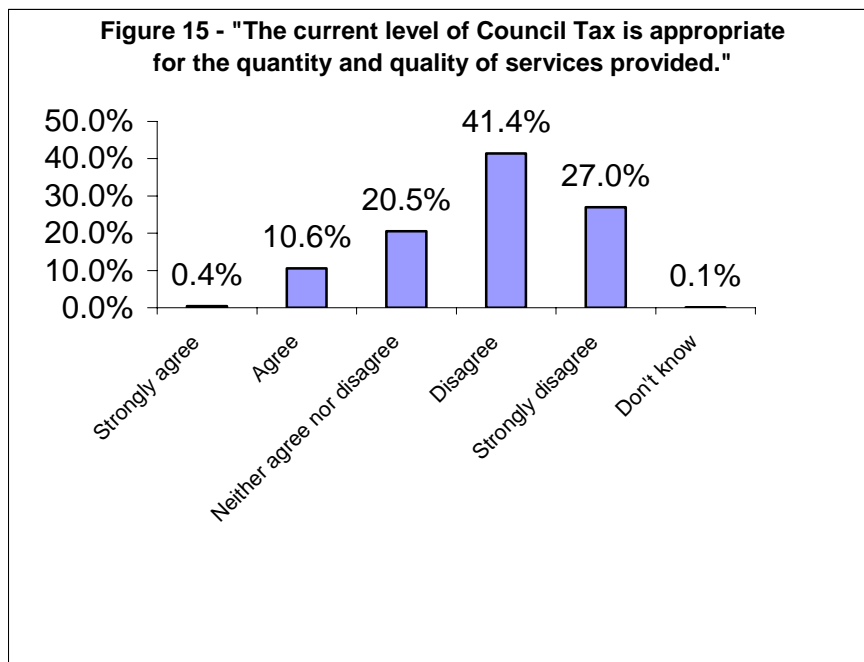


4.5 Value For Money

4.5.1 Respondents were then asked how satisfied or dissatisfied they are that the County Council gives residents good value for money. The results of this are shown in Figure 14. Respondents indicated that they were slightly more satisfied than dissatisfied. However the difference was not that great. Just over 34% of respondents indicated that they were either very satisfied or fairly satisfied that the County Council gives good value for money. However only 3% were very satisfied with this statement. Significantly, there were just fewer than 30% of respondents who were either fairly dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the statement that the County Council gives residents good value for money. Of these, nearly 7% were very dissatisfied. Still significantly, over a third of respondents indicated that they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied in terms of the County Council providing residents with good value for money.



4.5.2 Respondents were also asked how strongly they agree or disagree with the statement that, "The current level of Council Tax is appropriate for the quantity and quality of services provided." The results of this are shown in Figure 15. The results reflect the results from the Citizen's Panel Survey, which asked a similar question, namely that respondents are more likely to disagree than agree with the statement. Only 11% of respondents indicated that they agree with the statement, with only 0.4% strongly agreeing. In contrast slightly over 68% of respondents disagreed with the statement, with 27% disagreeing strongly.



DAVID CLARKE
Strategic Director of Resources

Shire Hall
Warwick

January 2006