

AGENDA MANAGEMENT SHEET

Name of Committee Resources, Performance & Development Overview & Scrutiny

Date of Committee 13th January 2009

Report Title Results of the Citizens' Panel Survey on the 2009/10 Budget and County Tax

Summary This report provides members with the results from the public consultation on the 2009/10 Budget and Council Tax.

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

Background papers Citizens' Panel Survey 'The Budget' and results

CONSULTATION ALREADY UNDERTAKEN:-

Details to be specified

- Other Committees
- Local Member(s)
- Other Elected Members Cllr Booth (Chair), Cllr Atkinson, Cllr Haynes
- Cabinet Member Cllr Cockburn - for information
- Chief Executive
- Legal Jane Pollard
- Finance David Clarke, Reporting Officer
- Other Chief Officers
- District Councils
- Health Authority
- Police
- Other Bodies/Individuals Paul Williams, Scrutiny Officer

FINAL DECISION

SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS:

Details to be specified

Further consideration by
this Committee

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To Council

*Council will approve the 2009/10 budget at its
meeting on 3 February 2009*

To Cabinet

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To an O & S Committee

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To an Area Committee

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Further Consultation

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Executive Summary

Results of the Citizens Panel Survey on the 2009/10 Budget and Council Tax

This report summarises the results of the citizen's panel survey to help inform members when setting the 2009/10 budget and council tax. It should be noted that the questions on the survey were prepared and issued to panel members before the full pressures on the Council's budget for 2009/10 were known.

601 replies were received, a response rate of 48%.

Highlights

80% over people agreed that the quality of our services is good overall.

Only 45% of people felt we had enough money to meet the demands on our services.

Generally, the panel felt our spend on individual services is about right. Although over 40% felt that we should spend more on Road Maintenance and Transport and Community Safety.

55% of panel members thought we should aim not to increase council tax by more than inflation even if this means a reduction in the levels of some priority services.

60% of panel members felt that funding for our priorities should be reallocated from lower priorities.

50% of responses agreed that we allocate resources to our services according to the needs and priorities of its residents.

34% of responses felt that we allocate spending fairly across different areas of the County, against 39% who didn't.

Summary

The results of the survey suggest that overall panel members think the quality of our services is good. There is some uncertainty over whether the Council has enough money to meet the demand of our services but if we wish to increase spending on services we should generate efficiencies from within our services or re-allocate funding from lower priority services.

Panel Members have indicated that they would prefer a council tax increase at or below the rate of inflation, even if this means reducing spending on some services.

Agenda No

Resources, Performance & Development Overview & Scrutiny - 13th January 2009.

Results of the Citizens' Panel Survey on the 2009/10 Budget and Council Tax

Report of the Strategic Director, Resources

Recommendation

That Members comment on the feedback received from the Citizens Panel Survey on the 2009/10 Budget and Council Tax.

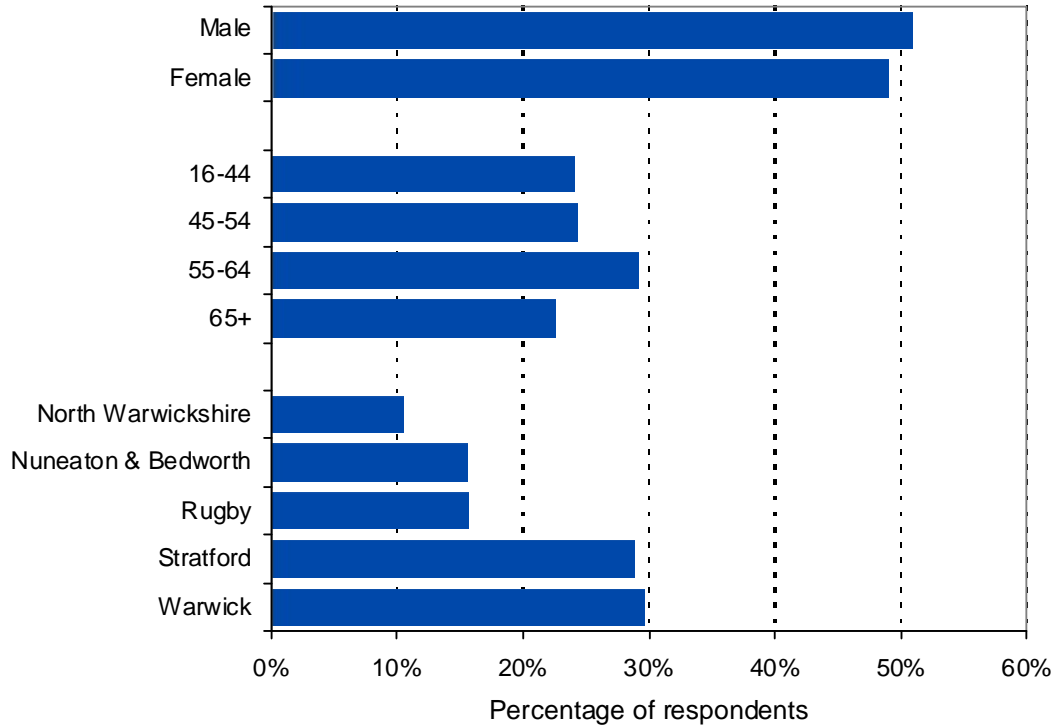
1 Background

- 1.1 For the 2009/10 budget and council tax consultation a citizen's panel survey was conducted by the Warwickshire Observatory. This report summarises the results of this survey to help inform members when setting the 2009/10 budget and council tax. It should be noted that the questions on the survey were prepared and issued to panel members before the full pressures on the Council's budget for 2009/10 were known.

2 Responses

- 2.1 The survey was sent to 1,247 members of the citizen's panel, with 601 replies being received. This is a response rate of 48%. This is in line with responses for previous year's budget consultation surveys.
- 2.2 Chart 1 overleaf, shows the breakdown of the responses by gender, age and geographic area. Approximately 75% of respondents are aged over 44 and approximately 60% of respondents were from Warwick and Stratford areas. The results included in this report have been weighted to take account of these variations.

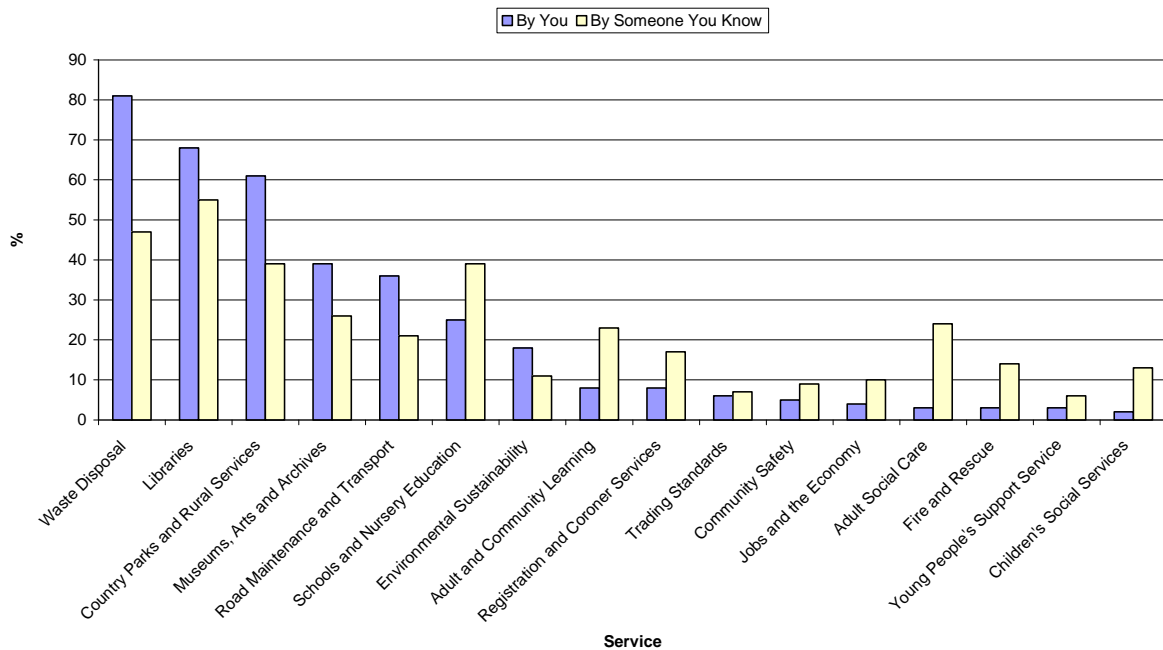
Chart 1: Percentage of respondents to questionnaire



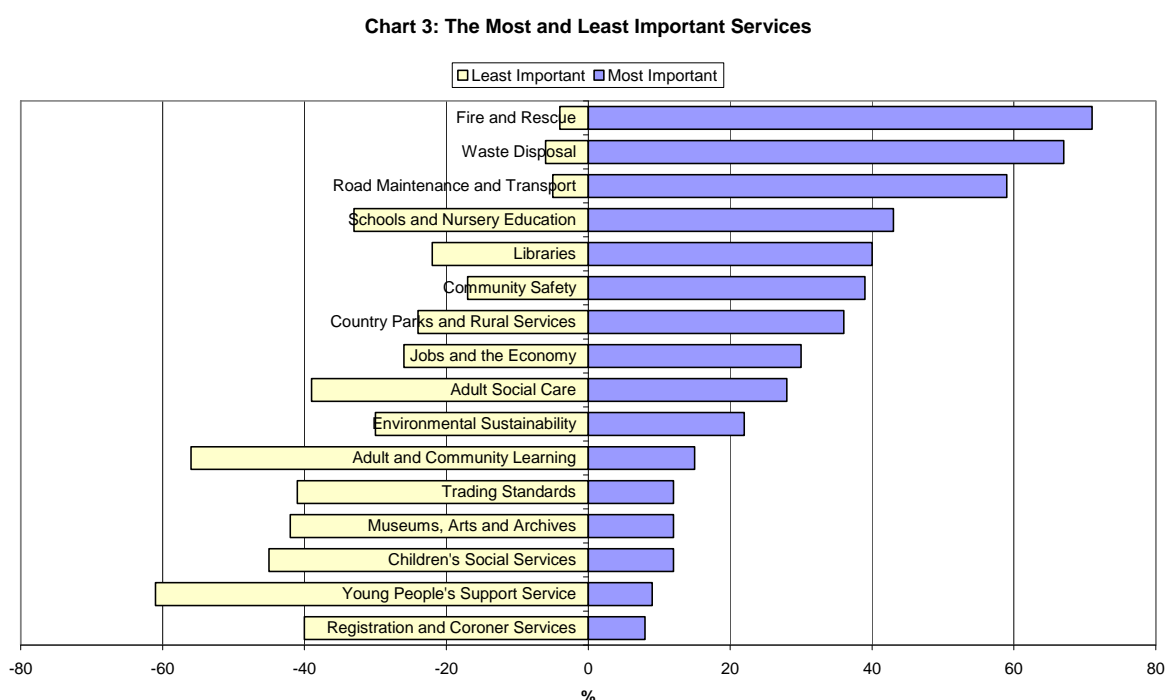
3 Services

3.1 Panel Members were given a list of services provided by the County Council and asked which services they had used and which services had been used by someone they know in the last 12 months. Chart 2 below shows the results.

Chart 2: Use of Services In the last 12 months



- 3.2 The service most used by panel members in the past 12 months was the Waste Disposal service. Children’s Social services was the least used, which in view of the age range of the panel members responding is perhaps not too surprising.
- 3.3 It is interesting to note that although panel members used some services very little many of them did know people who had used the service in the last 12 months. This was particularly true of Adult Social Care and Adult and Community Learning which again may be a reflection on the age range of the panel members responding.
- 3.4 Panel members were then asked to pick the 5 services most important and the 5 services least important to them now or in the future. Chart 3 below shows the results:



- 3.5 The Fire and Rescue service was thought to be the most important service to panel members and Young People’s Support Service the least important service. It is interesting to note that those services deemed less important are not necessarily those deemed to be the least important.
- 3.6 The results are broadly in line with previous years with only Schools and Nursery Education moving into the top five most important services (ranked 6th last year). The five services deemed least important are the same as those identified last year.

4 Spending

- 4.1 Panel Members were given the spend per head per service including and excluding Government grants and were asked whether they felt spending on each service should increase, decrease or remain the same. Over half of all

respondents felt that spending should remain the same for each service. The only exception was Community safety where 49% felt spending should remain the same against 41 % who felt spending should be increased.

4.2 The table below shows the top five services and the percentage of panel members who felt an increase or decrease in spending was required.

Table 1: Services that should have increased/decreased spending

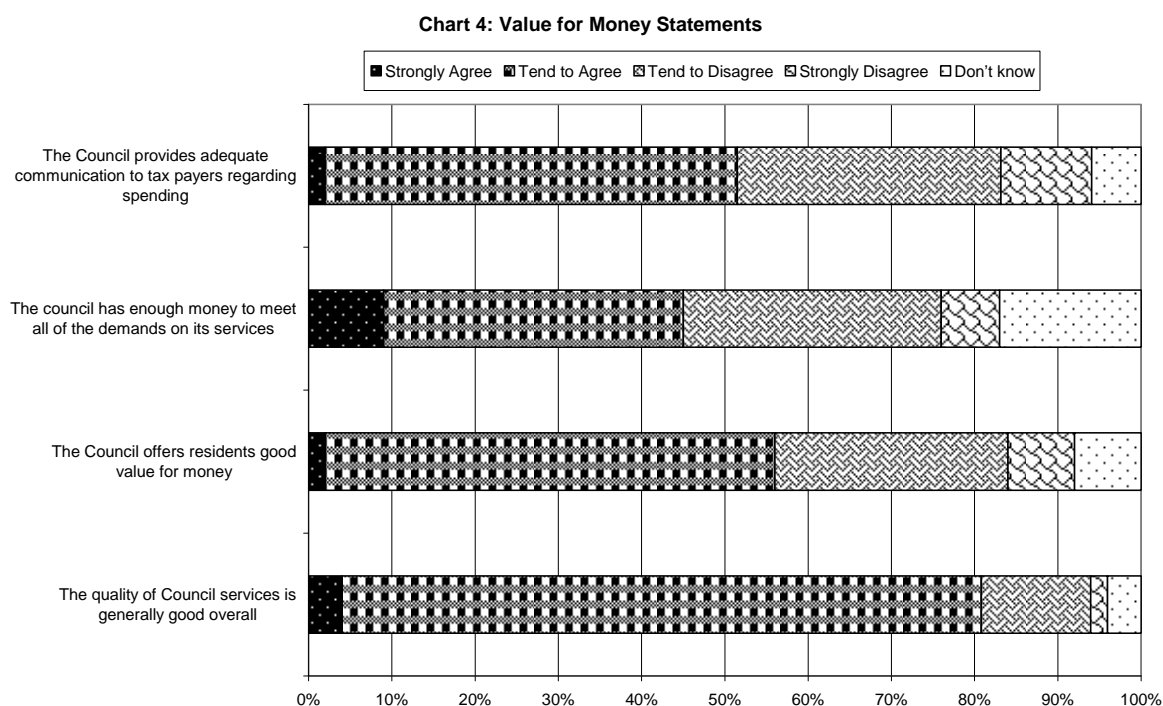
Rank	Increase Spending		Decrease Spending	
	Service	%	Service	%
1	Road Maintenance and Transport	42	Museums, Arts and Archives	24
2	Community Safety	41	Adult Social Care	22
3	Environmental Sustainability	35	Libraries	21
4	Fire and Rescue	34	Trading Standards	20
5	Schools and Nursery Education	28	Young Peoples Support Services	20

4.3 When asked how the Council should increase spending on these services, 63% said we should increase efficiency within our services with 20% stating we should decrease spending in other areas.

5 Value for Money

5.1 Panel members were given three statements concerning the County Council and Value for Money. Approximately 60% of responding panel members thought that Council services are delivered when people want them; the way people want them and where people want them.

5.2 Panel members were then given a further 4 statements. The results are shown below:



- 5.3 The results show that the majority of panel members tended to agree or strongly agreed that we provide adequate communication to taxpayers regarding spending and offer good value for money.
- 5.4 It is very encouraging to see that over 80% of panel members either tended to agree or strongly agreed that the quality of our services is good overall.
- 5.5 On whether the Council has enough money to meet all of the demands on our services only 45% of panel members tend agreed or strongly agreed that we did, with 38% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. In the same question last year 57% of panel members felt the Council had enough money. This may be a reflection of the harsher economic times being faced by the panel members in Warwickshire or a realisation of the increased demand facing the authority.

6 Council Tax

- 6.1 Panel members were asked to think about the following options:
- We should **maintain** current levels of service even if this means increasing council tax by more than inflation.
 - We should **improve** current levels of service even if this means increasing council tax by more than inflation
 - We should aim not to increase council tax by more than inflation even if this means a **reduction** in the levels of some priority services.
- 6.2 The level of council tax seemed to be the driver behind the responses to the question rather than service levels with 55% of panel members feeling we should aim not to increase council tax by more than inflation even if this means a reduction in the levels of some priority services.
- 6.3 This answer reflects quite strongly panel members views expressed in paragraph 4.3 on increasing efficiency within our own services and with paragraph 5.5 where less than half of respondents felt we had enough money to meet all of the demands on our service.
- 6.4 Panel Members were then informed that the council tax helps subsidise the Councils services and were asked which of the services mentioned previously should be provided at full cost to the user.
- 6.5 Panel Members felt that most services should be offered free of charge to the user. There were 6 services where the majority opinion of panel members was to charge for the service at a reduced rate. These services (and the percentage of respondents who felt they should be offered at a reduced rate) are:
- Adult and Community Learning (56%)
 - Adult Social Care (44%)
 - Museums, Arts and Archives (41%)
 - Environmental Sustainability (36%)
 - Jobs and the Economy (35%)
 - Trading Standards (35%)

6.6 There were no services where panel members felt they should be charged at full cost.

7 Priorities

7.1 Panel Members were given the councils four priorities and asked how the council should increase funding to these services. 60% of panel members felt that funding should be reallocated from lower priorities. This is in line with the answers on spending and council tax earlier in the survey.

7.2 Panel Members were asked if the Council allocates its resources to its services according to the needs and priorities of its residents. 50% of responses either strongly agreed or tended to agree with the statement. With only 26% disagreeing although it should be noted 24% did not know.

7.3 Panel members were also asked whether the Council allocates its spending fairly across different areas of the County. The results were much closer with 34% agreeing that the Council did against 39% who didn't (27% didn't know).

8 Medium Term Financial Planning

8.1 Finally, panel members were asked whether we should take account of the effect on future taxpayers and costs when making decisions today. 93% of panel members were in agreement that we should take into account the future effects when taking decisions today

9 Conclusions

9.1 The results of the survey suggest that overall panel members think the quality of our services is good. There is some uncertainty over whether the Council has enough money to meet the demand of our services but if we wish to increase spending on services we should generate efficiencies within our services or re-allocate funding from lower priority services.

9.2 Panel Members have indicated that they would prefer a council tax increase at or below the rate of inflation, even if this means reducing spending on some services.

DAVID CLARKE
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22 December 2008