

Leicester
City Council

Cabinet
Finance, Resources and Equal Opportunities
Scrutiny Committee

3 December 2001
20 December 2001

REVENUE AND CAPITAL STRATEGY 2002/03 TO 2004/5 – PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Report of the Chief Financial Officer

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 This report informs Cabinet and Finance, Resources and Equal Opportunities Scrutiny Committee of the results of the public consultation exercise.

2. Summary

2.1 The Council agreed a draft Revenue Budget Strategy for the period 2002/03 to 2004/05 in July 2001, which was to be subject to public consultation.

2.2 The Council also submitted a Capital Strategy Statement to the Government Office in July 2001 as part of the preparations for the introduction of the “Single Capital Pot” from 2002/03, which will distribute mainstream capital resources. Amongst other things, this “statement” included the Council’s corporate capital priorities.

2.3 Social Research Associates were commissioned to carry out a public consultation exercise that sought to gain a representative view on the proposals in the revenue and capital strategies. The exercise was carried out through face to face interviews on the street and involved over 500 people. The consultation was also carried out through the corporate website. However, only 12 responses were received and therefore are not considered significant enough to adjust the findings provided by the consultants.

2.4 The Council has also carried out a resident’s survey through MORI for which the results will be announced shortly.

2.5 The full consultant’s report is attached at Appendix 1. In summary, the main findings were as follows:

- i. There was 90% support for the 4 revenue priorities
- ii. Generally, very strong support for capital priorities; (it should be noted that the consultants did not intend to rank capital priorities against each other, they simply sought to elicit levels of support for each. However, the methodology used by the consultants does lend itself to ranking priorities against each other).
 - 67% support better sporting facilities
 - 54% support the development of a Cultural Quarter

- Very high levels of support for Housing schemes (around 90% overall support), LTP (87%) and school improvements (86%)
 - Less support for Social Services and IT investment (although this potentially affected because respondents did not fully understand the service implications of the spend.
- iii. 57% of respondents identified additional spending priorities, the most significant being services for youths and children and the environment (20% of the 57% each)
 - iv. Only 1/3rd of respondents thought council spending was excessive. As last year, the main example cited was road works and traffic calming (48% of the 1/3rd) and administration (40% of the 1/3rd) was also significant)
 - v. 29% of the respondents identified additional services that the Council should provide, of which recreation and entertainment were the highest (10% of all respondents).
 - vi. Only 1/5th supported either charging more for services or charging for services that are currently free in return for a better service. Recreation and Museums were by far the most significant examples, 86% and 80% respectively (it should be noted that these service areas were used as examples by the market researchers, therefore this may have skewed the results, and in the case of Museums runs contrary to Governments Policy)
 - vii. 61% supported a Council Tax rise of 4.9% whilst 13% supported a higher rise. This can be compared to 51% and 17%, respectively, from last year's survey.
 - viii. Only 25% of respondents recognised that if Council Tax is increased by 4.9% next year that this would be the second year of such an increase.
 - ix. 59% supported Council Tax stability in future years, although there was a preference for increases not more than 4.9% and some call for inflation linked increases.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 Cabinet and Finance, Resources and Equal Opportunities Scrutiny Committee are asked to note: -
- the findings from the exercise
 - that the Council will consider the findings when considering its capital programme and revenue budget from 2002/03 onwards.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 The exercise cost £5,155

5. Author

Graham Feek
Financial Strategy Manager

CONSULTATION ON
LEICESTER CITY COUNCIL'S BUDGET PLANS:
A SURVEY OF LEICESTER RESIDENTS

**Report on the face to face
interviews undertaken by
Social Research Associates
October 2001**

Executive Summary
Social Research Associates
October 2001

1. Revenue spending

There was widespread (90%) general agreement for additional spending on the four 'revenue spending' priorities. *Strong agreement* was given by on average 45% of all respondents.

2. Capital Spending

- 2.1 Respondents were more in favour of additional spending on new sports facilities than a new cultural area in the St. George's area of the city.
- 2.2 Both educational priorities received high agreement (85%).
- 2.3 Agreement was high for the environment and development priorities. Strongest agreement was given for the *Local Transport Plan*.
- 2.4 Stronger agreement was received from respondents for additional spending on *council housing* and *changes to homes to make them more accessible to disabled people* than on renovation of private unused houses
- 2.5 The priorities for social services did not receive as strong support as the other priorities, and a relatively high number of respondents indicated that they had 'no opinion'. The proportion of those who 'agreed' to the priorities was approximately 50%.
- 2.6 There was less agreement for expenditure on Information Technology for the Town Clerk's department than for *expenditure on front line services so they are customer focused*.

3. Additional Spending Suggestions

The main suggestions for additional spending included on children and youth services, the environment, education and schools, transport issues, crime prevention, healthcare and sports and leisure activities.

4. Excessive spending by the council

The two main areas of excessive spending indicated were firstly, road works and traffic calming and secondly, administration issues within the council.

5. Additional services that the council could provide

Some of the suggestions given for additional services overlap with services that are already being provided by the council. The suggestions included additional recreational and entertainment, public facilities, improvements to roads and public transport, health and welfare of children and the elderly, and security and safety issues. This suggests that residents are not clear as to what the council does and does not provide. Furthermore, they are not necessarily aware of the nature of charges for services.

6. Increases in Council Tax

More respondents were in favour of *smaller increases* in council tax than greater increases, even if this meant cuts in service. The majority of respondents, however, felt that the 4.9% increase was fair.

7. Awareness of Council Tax Stability

Only a *quarter* of respondents were aware that the council tax increases this year had been equivalent to that of last year.

8. Tax increases that are stable

Almost 60% of respondents agreed to stable increases, although the majority of them also suggested that these increases should be inflation- or salary- linked. The respondents who did not support stable increases argued for a more flexible system which allowed for spending when needed.

Consultation on Leicester City Council's Budget Plan
Report on the Face-to-face Interviews

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Appendix A - Questionnaire schedule and show cards (not attached)

Appendix B - Breakdown of areas in which the council should spend more money, areas of excessive spending and additional services it could provide.

1. Introduction and context

Leicester City Council was interested in exploring the opinions of Leicester residents on what should be the priorities for revenue and capital spending. In addition it wanted to assess public awareness of council tax increases and reactions to changes in these. Public consultation in the form of face-to-face interviews was conducted. This report deals exclusively with the results of these interviews.

1.1 The Face to Face Interviews

A survey of Leicester residents was carried out based on questions that the council was interested in pursuing. A copy of the survey questionnaire is attached at Appendix A. The interviews allowed for comment and also gave participants the opportunity to clarify questions. 'Show cards' were used so that participants could more easily read and answer questions. These are also attached at Appendix A.

Leicester is a multi-cultural city, and care was taken to ensure representation of all groups. Interviewers were chosen who could explain the questions in different languages in order to include individuals for whom English was not their first language. The age, sex and ethnic breakdown figures of persons interviewed are shown at the end of the report.

1.2 Methodology

Interviews started on the 16th of September 2001 and were completed by the 29th of September at six agreed locations within the city. They are

- Leicester City Centre
- Belgrave/Melton Road
- Queen's Road
- Beaumont Leys
- Highfields
- Saffron Lane

Altogether 505 questionnaires were completed.

All interviewers were briefed beforehand regarding the specific issues within the questionnaire, particularly the definitions of revenue and capital spending and how council tax changes affects spending.

2. The Results of the Survey

2.1 REVENUE SPENDING

Question 2: How strongly do you agree or disagree with these priorities for additional spending to improve services?

- Raising educational standards,
- Improving health and social care,
- Tackling crime and
- Revitalising deprived neighbourhoods and communities.

Substantial support was given to all four priorities for increased spending. In total, 90% of respondents either 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' with the priorities.

Approximately 50% of respondents 'strongly agreed' and 40% 'agreed' to additional spending on *raising educational standards, improving health and social care and tackling crime*.

41% of the respondents 'strongly agreed' and another 50% 'agreed' to *revitalising deprived neighbourhoods and communities*.

Approximately 3% of respondents 'disagreed' to additional spending on all four priorities.

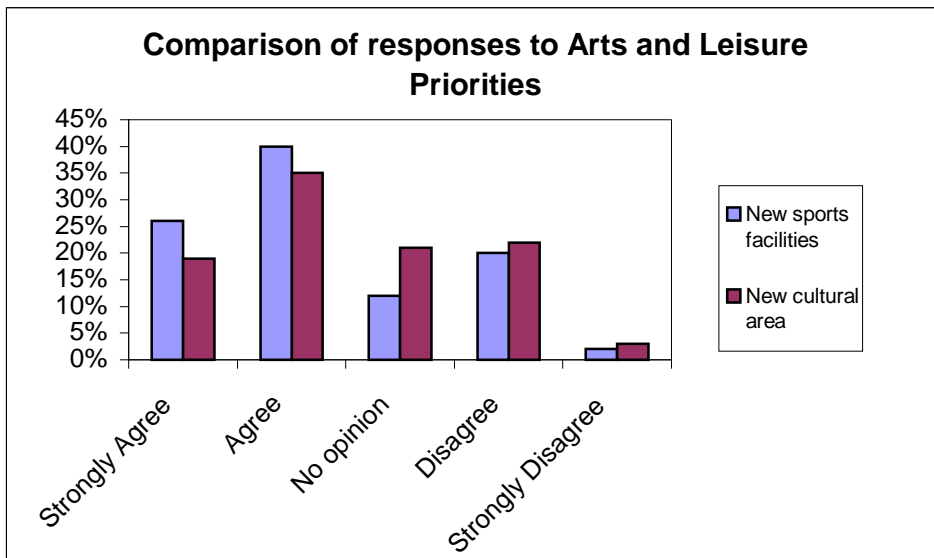
2.2 CAPITAL SPENDING

2.2.1 Arts and Leisure

Question 3. How strongly do you agree or disagree with these priorities for additional spending on ARTS AND LEISURE?

- **New sports facilities where needed**
- **New cultural area within the St. George's area of the city- with entertainment facilities including a new theatre**

More support was obtained for spending on 'new sports facilities where needed' than a 'new cultural area within the St. George's area of the city'. 27% of respondents 'strongly agreed' with the first priority and a further 40% indicated that they 'agreed'. Only 19% of respondents 'strongly agreed' with the development of the new cultural area, with 35% indicating they 'agreed'.

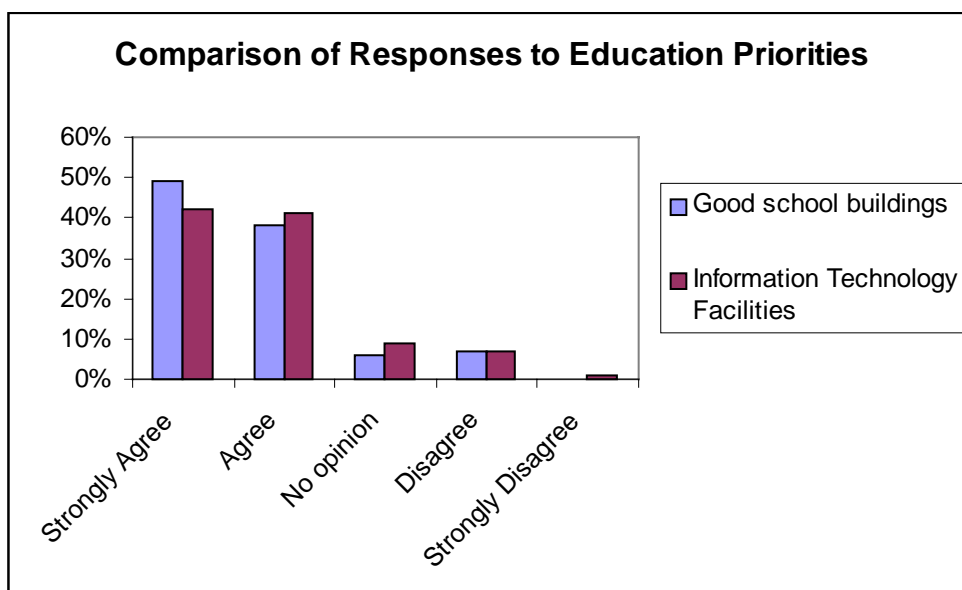


2.2.2 Education

Question 4. How strongly do you agree or disagree with these priorities for additional spending on EDUCATION?

- Good school buildings that are able to withstand wind and poor weather and which help good teaching
- Provide Information Technology facilities in schools to support better education

Almost half of the respondents 'strongly agreed' with spending on better school buildings and another 38% showed general agreement. Information technology facility provision also received good support with 42% who 'strongly agreed' and 41% 'agreed to additional spending'. 7% of respondents disagreed with both priorities.



2.2.3 Environment and Development

Question 5. How strongly do you agree or disagree with these priorities for additional spending on the ENVIRONMENT and DEVELOPMENT?

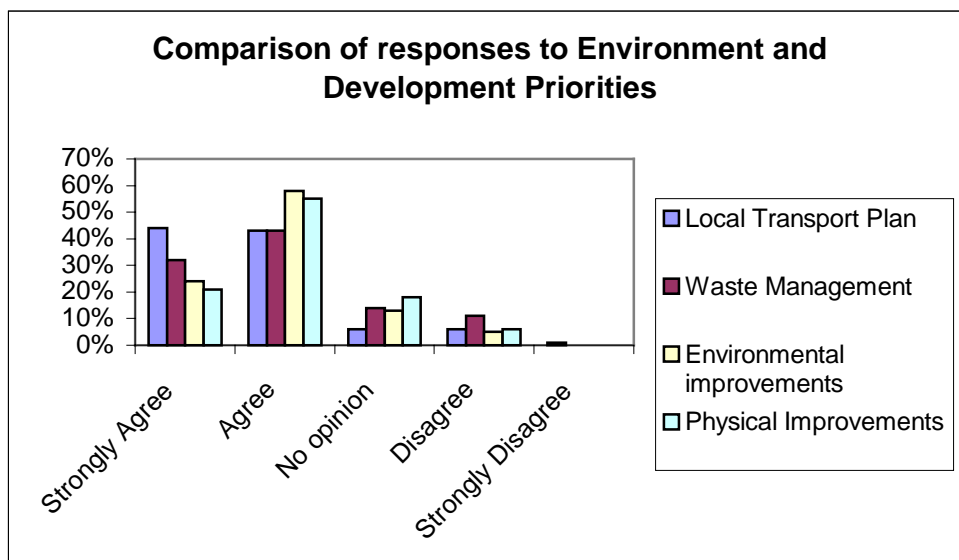
- Implement (put into practice) the Local Transport Plan, maintaining existing roads and pavements and investment in new transport schemes to improve traffic conditions for all road users, including pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles.
- Waste Management (collection and disposal of waste)
- Environmental improvements to the city centre and riverside
- Physical improvements across the city including Frog Island, Abbey Meadows, St George's and the Old Town Area.

There was the strongest support for additional spending on the Local Transport Plan: 44% of the respondents 'strongly agreed' and 43% 'agreed' to additional spending.

Waste Management received substantial support: 32% of respondents 'strongly agreed' and 43% 'agreed' to additional spending. 14% of respondents had 'no opinion' and 11% 'disagreed'.

There was also support for additional spending on environment improvements. While only 24% of respondents strongly agreed to additional spending, a large proportion, 58% 'agreed' and 13% did not have an opinion. Only 5% disagreed.

Similar results were found for additional spending on physical improvements: More respondents (55%) simply 'agreed' rather than 'strongly agreed' (21%) to additional spending. Almost 20% voiced no opinion. Only a small number (6%) disagreed.



2.2.4 Housing

Question 6. How strongly do you agree or disagree with these priorities for additional spending on HOUSING?

- Getting council housing to a reasonable standard within 10 years.
- Renovation of private unused houses so they can be used
- Make changes to homes so that disabled people can live independently in their own homes

Spending on council housing received substantial support:

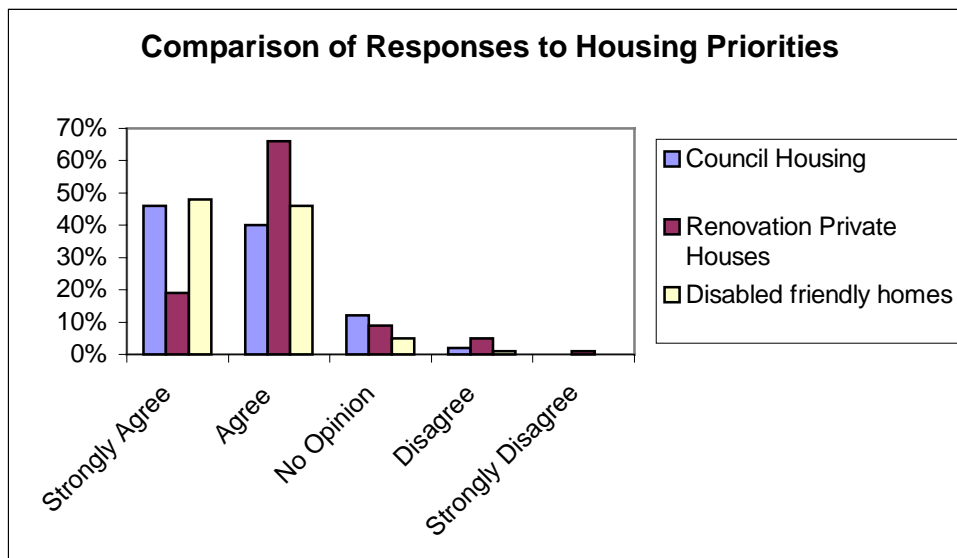
It was strongly agreed by 46% of respondents that spending should be prioritised to get council housing to a reasonable standard within 10 years. Another 40% of respondents simply 'agreed'.

Renovation priorities to private houses received some support:

While 19% of respondents 'strongly agreed', 66% 'agreed' to additional spending.

On disabled friendly homes:

48% of participants strongly agreed for changes to homes so that disabled people can live independently in their own homes. 46% showed general agreement.



2.2.5 Social Services

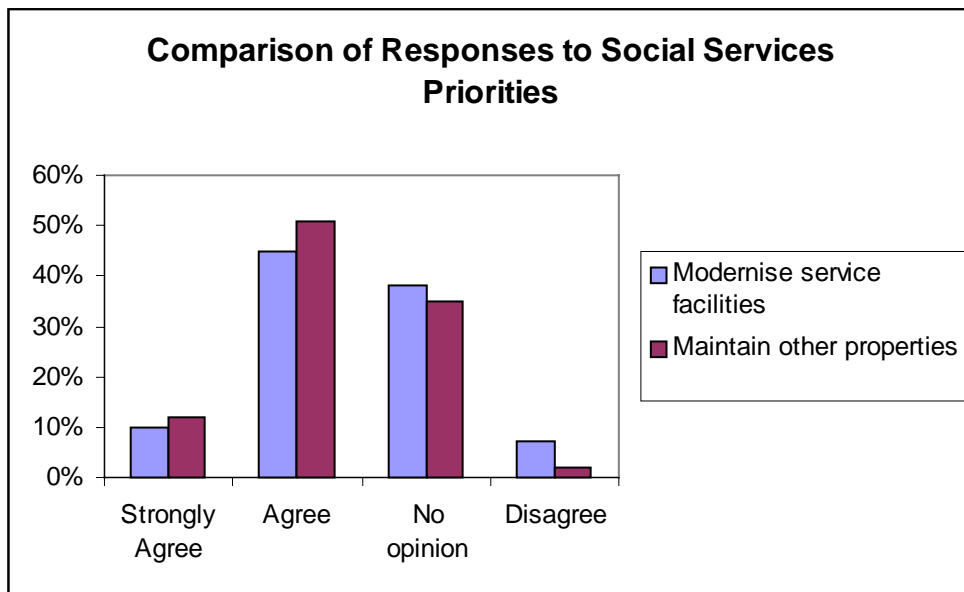
Question 7. How strongly do you agree or disagree with these priorities for additional spending on SOCIAL SERVICES?

- Making service facilities more modern and focused, to suit the needs of the users with the possibility of having less properties although of better quality
- Maintaining the other properties and ensuring they are suitable for the purpose they are intended

There was little strong support for the social services priorities:

Only 10% of respondents were in strong agreement to make service facilities more modern and focused to suit the needs of users. However 45% did indicate general agreement. 38% gave no opinion, and this can be attributed to a lack of understanding of the services in question. Similarly

for the priority on maintaining 'the other properties', 12% of respondents were in 'strong agreement', 51% in 'agreement' and 35% gave no opinion.



2.2.6 Town Clerk's

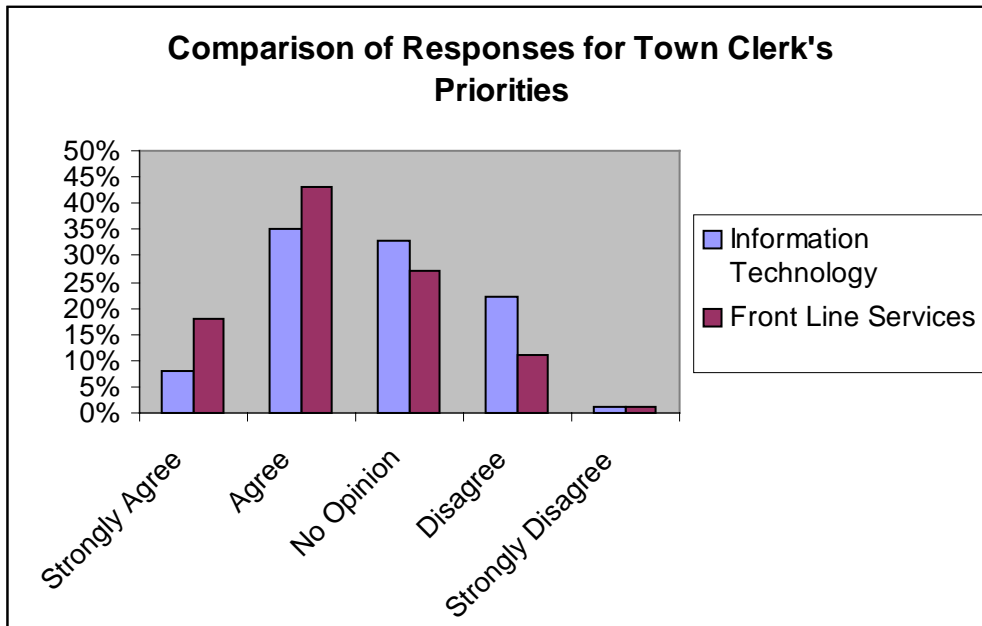
Question 8. How strongly do you agree or disagree with these priorities for additional spending on TOWN CLERK'S?

- More spending on Information Technology for better and cheaper provision of services
- More spending on front line services (first point of contact) so that they are customer focused particularly for disabled service users

There was some support for the Town Clerk's priorities. Stronger support was given for spending on front line services than Information Technology:

Only 8% of respondents strongly favoured expenditure on Information Technology; 35% indicated they 'agreed', and 22% said they disagreed. For spending on front line services, 18% strongly agreed and 43% agreed. 11% of respondents showed disagreement.

As with the responses for social services priorities, there was quite a high rate of respondents offering 'no opinion'. This could be partly due to a lack of understanding of 'Information Technology' and 'Front Line Services' and how changes or improvements would be implemented.



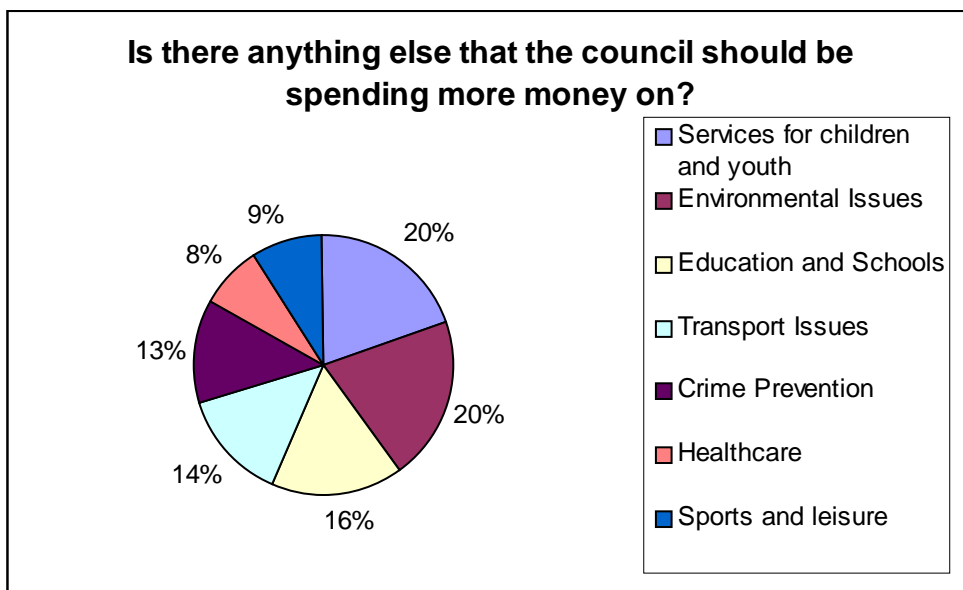
2.3 Views on additional spending

Question 9. Is there anything else that the council should be spending more money on (e.g. services it provides, buildings for facilities)?

57% of those interviewed said 'Yes'. The suggestions that were given are summarised below to reflect the main ideas with detailed explanations of each category provided in Appendix B.

Services for children and youth, for example childcare services, activities and facilities for youth and improvements and expansion of libraries, were a high priority.

Environmental issues were also raised, especially investment into cleaner streets, better pavements, park maintenance and better roads and buildings.



2.4 Views on excessive spending by the council

Question 10. Are there any services on which the council spends too much money?

40% of the respondents did not think that there was excessive spending and a quarter was not sure. A third of those interviewed thought that there was an area (or areas) on which the council spent too much money. These areas are explained below.

Two major issues emerged from the respondents who answered 'Yes'. These were

- 48% suggested **road works and traffic calming**
- 40% suggested **administration issues within the council**

There was some mention of

- Asylum seekers and benefits (1%)
- Cultural/religious/arts events and centres (1%)

Further suggestions are shown in Appendix B.

2.5 Additional services that the council could provide

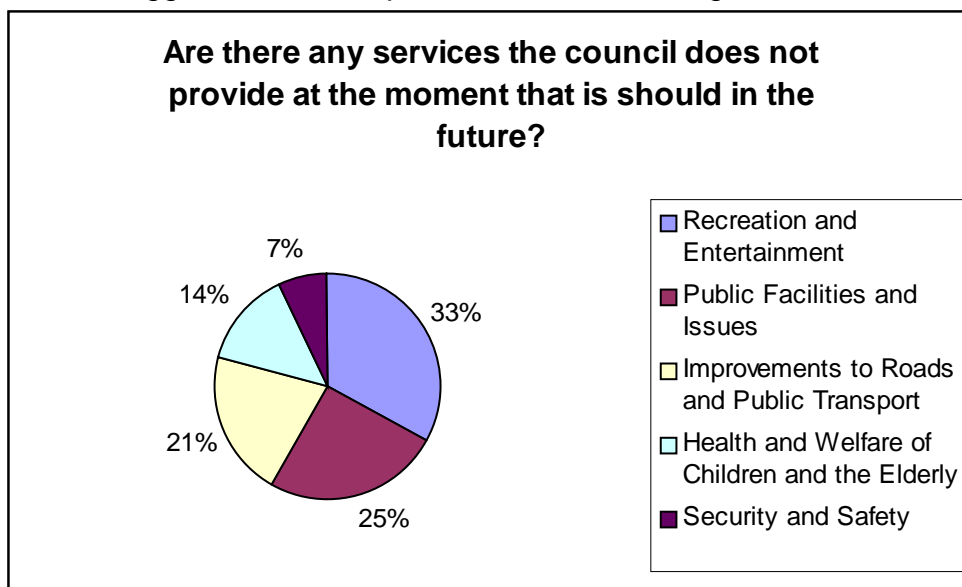
Q11. Are there any services the council does not provide at the moment that it should in the future?

Almost one third of those interviewed (29%) thought that there should be additional services provided by the council.

Recreation and entertainment received most support (this made up one third of the suggestions made, equivalent to about 10% of the total of those surveyed). Examples included spending on community centres, leisure centres, libraries, sports and swimming facilities, youth activities, internet cafes, computing facilities, funding for theatre and arts, and interpreters.

Spending on public facilities and other public issues also received strong support. These included expenditure to clean up streets, on housing, lighting, parks, public toilets, recycling, buildings repairs and school busses.

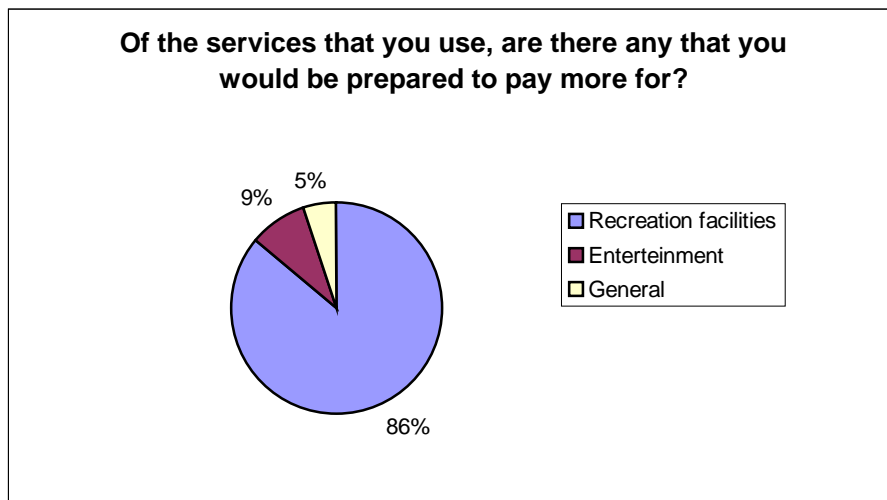
Further suggestions and expansions of these categories are found in Appendix B.



2.6 Charging more for Council services

Q12. The council charges people to use some of its services (*for example using sports facilities and swimming*). Of the services you use, are there any that you would be prepared to pay more for?

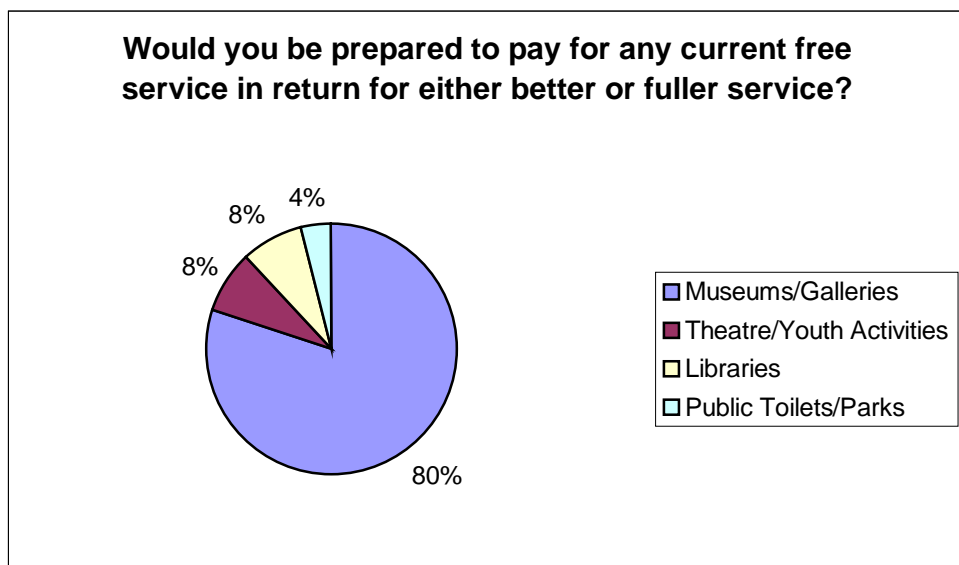
Approximately **one fifth** (22%) replied 'Yes' to this question, and their suggestions are shown below. These include **recreational facilities** (86%, which is just under one fifth of the whole sample surveyed) such as sports facilities, swimming pools, golf courses and leisure centres and **entertainment** (9%, which is less than 2% of the entire survey), for example theatre, youth facilities and libraries. The 'General' category encompasses a myriad of general services. A majority (69%) replied were not prepared to pay more for the services that they use.



2.7 Charging for services currently provided without charge

Q13. Would you be prepared to pay more for any current free service that you use in return for either better service or fuller service?

Only **one fifth** of the participants supported the idea of paying for a service currently provided without charge (22%). Examples given to those surveyed included entrance to museums and galleries, theatre and youth activities, and public facilities such as toilets and parks, and therefore responses tended to be based on these suggestions. It was felt by the interviewers that respondents were generally not aware of what services are currently provided without charge hence could not come up with more suggestions. There was minimal support for paying for anything other than museums or gallery admission, and this only received support from one person in six surveyed. 73% indicated that they were against the idea of paying.

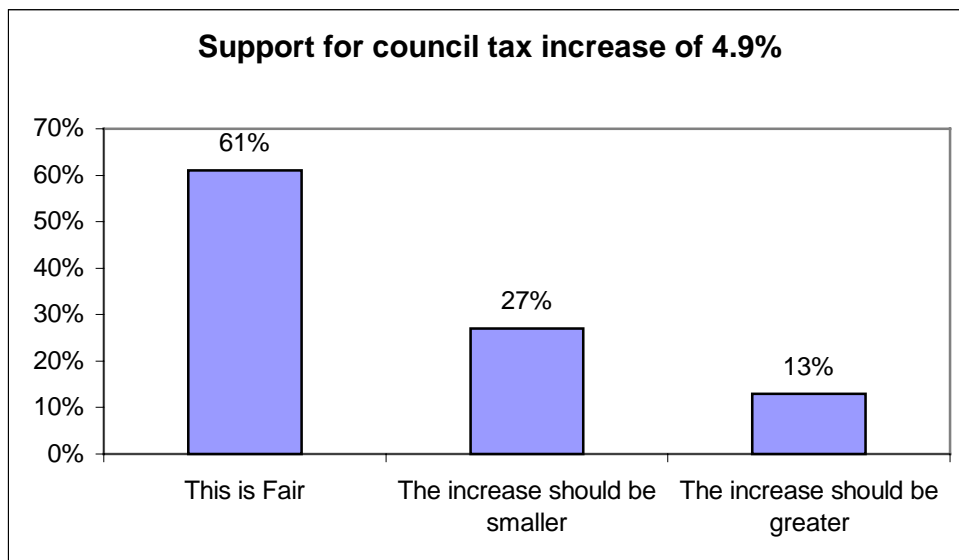


2.8 COUNCIL TAX

2.8.1 Council tax increases

Q14. Every 1% reduction in council tax will mean the Council has to reduce its revenue spending by £500,000 (half of one million). What do you think of its plan to limit the increases in 2002 to less than 5% (around 4.9%)?

61% of respondents felt that the plan to limit the increases in 2002 to less than 5% (around 4.9%) was fair. 13% felt that the increase in council tax should be greater to improve services and avoid cuts in service. A larger proportion (27%), however, felt that the increase in council tax should be *smaller*, even if this means cuts in services.



2.8.2 Increase of 4.9% for next year

Q.15. Did you realise that if the council increases council tax by 4.9% next year this will be the second year that the tax has risen by this amount?

Only a **quarter** of respondents were aware of this fact.

2.8.3 Stable Increases in council tax

Q.16. Should the council aim to continue to have stable council tax increases in future years?

59% of participants agreed that the council should aim to have stable council tax increases in the future years. The reasons given for why it should and should not aim for stable increases are explained below.

Yes to stable increases

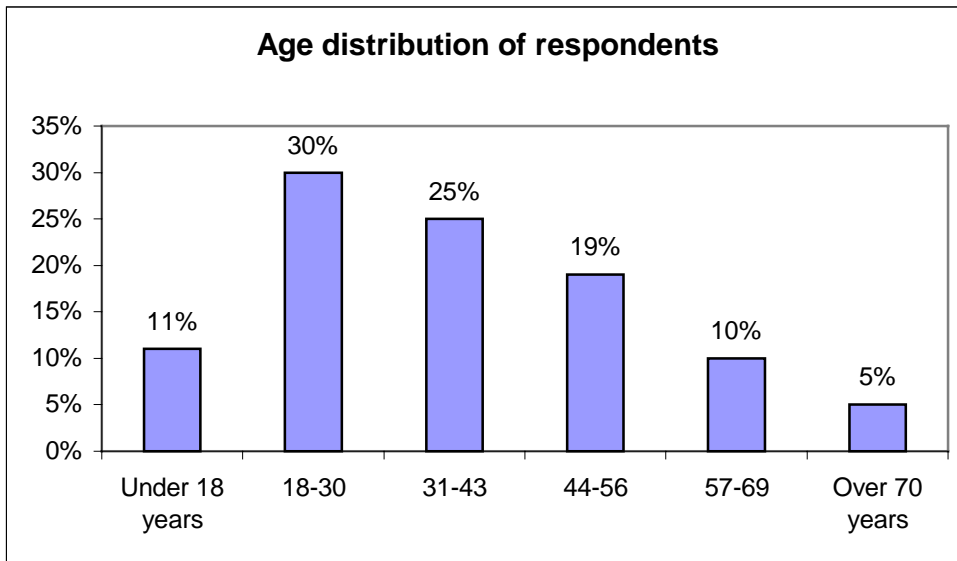
- The main argument given was that stable increases allows for planning.
- Respondents also suggested that the increases should be inflation linked, follow rise in salary, and be no more than 4.9%.

No

- Those who felt that the increases should not be stable argued that 'things change', hence it would be unwise to aim for stable increases. Instead increases should contribute towards ensuring that services are improved and the city is regenerated as and when necessary.

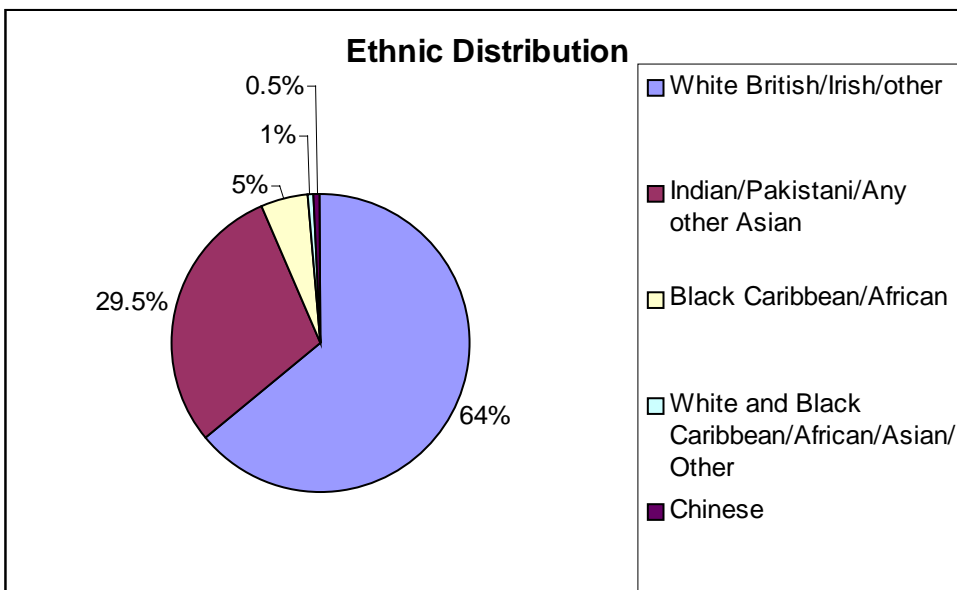
3 AGE, SEX AND ETHNICITY

3.1 Age Distribution



55% of the respondents were between 18 and 43 years of age.

3.2 Ethnic Distribution



The majority (64%) of participants belonged to the White British/Irish/Other groups. A representative sample of different races was achieved, with almost 30% of the respondents belonging to the Asian Indian/Pakistani/Any other Asian categories. Black Caribbean/African residents represented 5% of the sample, White and Black Caribbean/African/Asian/Any other mixed groups 1% of the sample, and Chinese residents 0.5% of the sample.

3.3 Sex Distribution

The sample comprised 48% male and 52% female respondents.

4 SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

REVENUE SPENDING

There was widespread (90%) general agreement for additional spending on the four 'revenue spending' priorities. *Strong agreement* was given by on average 45% of all respondents.

CAPITAL SPENDING

- A) Respondents were more in favour of additional spending on new sports facilities than a new cultural area in the St. George's area of the city.
- B) Both educational priorities received high agreement (85%).
- C) Agreement was high for the environment and development priorities. Strongest agreement was given for the *Local Transport Plan*.
- D) Stronger agreement was received from respondents for additional spending on *council housing and changes to homes to make them more accessible to disabled people* than on renovation of private unused houses.
- E) The priorities for social services did not receive as strong agreement as the other priorities, and a relatively high number of respondents indicated that they had 'no opinion'. The proportion of those who 'agreed' to the priorities was approximately 50%.
- F) There was less agreement for expenditure on Information Technology for the Town Clerk's department than for *expenditure on front line services so they are customer focused*.

Additional Spending Suggestions

The main areas suggested for additional spending included on children and youth services, the environment, education and schools, transport issues, crime prevention, healthcare and sports and leisure activities.

Excessive spending by the council

The two main areas of excessive spending indicated were firstly, road works and traffic calming and secondly, administration issues within the council.

Additional services that the council could provide

Some of the suggestions given for additional services overlap with services that are already being provided by the council. The suggestions include additional recreational and entertainment, public facilities, improvements to roads and public transport, health and welfare of children and the elderly, and security and safety issues. This suggests that residents are not clear as to what the council does and does not provide. Furthermore, they are not necessarily aware of the nature of charging for services.

Increases in Council Tax

More respondents were in favour of *smaller increases* in council tax than greater increases, even if this meant cuts in service. The majority of respondents, however, felt that the 4.9% increase was fair. A majority of residents were in favour of increases that are inflation- or salary- linked.

Awareness of rate

Only a *quarter* of respondents were aware that the council tax increases this year had been equivalent to that of last year.

5 CONCLUSION

Two strong points emerged from the survey:

- There was ambiguity with regard to the range of council services provided in particular the distinction between services that are charged for as well as those that are free to use.
- It would be useful to conduct *focused* discussions with residents, as the questionnaire did not entirely capture the subtle and often in-depth views of residents, and many could have elaborated on their answers if they had been given an opportunity. Representatives of community groups could be contacted to assemble groups of local residents who would be interested in sharing their views.

Breakdown of areas in which the council should spend more money, areas of excessive spending and additional services it could provide.

1. Areas in which council should spend more money (Question 9)

Percentages given below indicate the proportion of the 57% of respondents who contributed to each category. Specific suggestions within each category are also listed in order of popularity.

The services asterisked below were mentioned spontaneously by respondents. They have been included, although they are not a Local Authority responsibility. It perhaps underlines the uncertainty that exists in the public mind about where specific areas of responsibility lie for service delivery.

Services for children and youth (20% of 57% who responded)

- Childcare centres/services
- Activities, facilities and services for youth
- Facilities for leisure for children
- Improvements to central library
- More libraries in Leicester

Environment Issues (20% of 57% who responded)

- Cleaner streets
- Better pavements
- Park maintenance
- Better Roads
- Better buildings
- More play fields
- Better drainage

Education and Schools (16% of 57% who responded)

- School busses introduced
- Better education facilities

Transport Issues (14% of 57% who responded)

- Cheaper bus fare
- Better maintained busses
- Learning to drive*
- Road safety issues
- Cycle lanes

Crime Prevention (13% of 57% who responded)

- More policing*
- Safety
- Lighting especially in parks
- More security including CCTV cameras

Sports and leisure (9% of 57% who responded)

- More sports facilities
- More leisure centres
- More and better swimming pools
- Athletics track

Healthcare (8% of 57% who responded)

- Improvements to hospitals*
- More medical services*
- Elderly services

Further suggestions included

- Night shelters/Homeless hostels
- Traffic management and control
- Racial Issues
- Disabled facilities
- Social services
- Cultural Activities

2. Services on which the council spends too much money (Question 10).

Only one third of those interviewed thought that there were areas in which the council spent too much. The two pertinent areas included

Road works and traffic calming (48% of the one third who responded positively)

Comments included spending on road humps, speed ramps and general road works.

Internal council administration and bureaucracy (40% of the one third who responded positively)

It was strongly felt by those who responded that there was too much money spent on administration and red tape within the council.

Two other areas suggested included expenditure on **Housing asylum seekers, and providing benefits (1%) and Cultural arts and religious events and centres (1%)**

Other one-off suggestions included

- Parking restrictions and wardens
- Decorations
- Haymarket
- Housing
- Inadequate crime prevention
- On minorities/Race relations
- Redevelopment/ Building demolition
- Sports facilities
- Statues

3. Additional Services that the council could provide (Question 11)

Under one third of those interviewed (29%) thought that there should be additional services provided by the Council. Some of these suggestions clearly fall outside Local Authority Areas of responsibility, underlining, as mentioned above, the uncertainty about what the Council can provide. Within each category, there were numerous suggestions, which have been listed according to popularity.

Recreation and Entertainment (33% of the 29% who responded)

- Community Centres
- Leisure Centres
- Library
- Sports (tennis, golf) and swimming facilities
- Youth activities
- Internet Cafes
- Theatre/Arts Funding
- Computing facilities
- Interpreters

Public Facilities and Issues (25% of the 29% who responded)

- Cleaning of streets
- Housing
- Lighting on streets
- Parks
- Public Toilets
- Recycling
- Buildings Repairs
- Employment
- School busses
- Education
- Ethnic Minorities

Improvements to Roads and Public Transport (21% of the 29% who responded)

- Better roads
- Better Pavements and footpaths
- Cycle Lanes
- Trams
- Park and Rides

Health and Welfare of Children and the Elderly (14% of the 29% who responded)

- Healthcare for the elderly
- Childcare
- Help for single parents

Security and Safety (7% of the 29% who responded)

- Better security
- General safety
- Road safety
- Truant officers