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Your View, Budget Consultation Report
January 2018

Produced by Staffordshire County Council

On behalf of Lichfield district council

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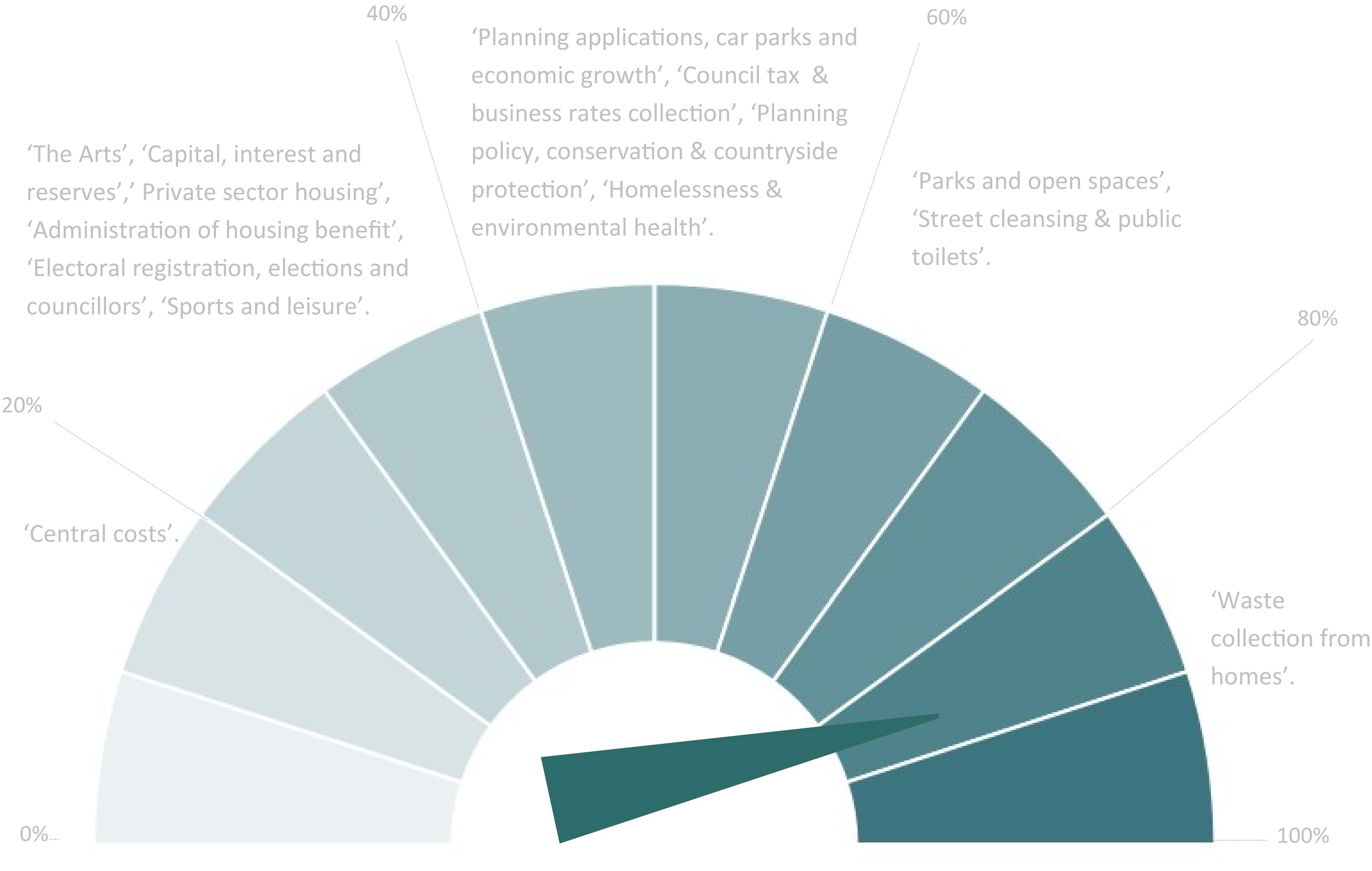
1. Executive Summary

1.1: The importance of services

The council has three strategic priorities for 'a vibrant and prosperous economy', 'healthy and safe communities' and 'clean, green and welcoming places to live'. These are underpinned by the Council's approach to 'fit for the future'.

In this consultation, respondents were invited to indicate the importance of a wide range of services, which fit beneath these priorities. Those services which were most important to respondents fitted within the priority area of 'clean, green and welcoming places to live'. These included 'waste collection from home', 'parks and open spaces' and 'street cleansing and public toilets'. Some of those services underpinning 'fit for the future' including 'central costs' and 'capital, interest and reserves' were regarded as least important by respondents. 'The arts' which fit within the priority area of a 'vibrant and prosperous economy' were also of relatively low importance.

Figure 1.1: The importance of services (%)



1.2: Services to fund and services to reduce/stop

The government has been reducing the amount of core government grant received each year and by next year the Council will get nothing. The Council will face significant challenges seeking to provide the same level of service and will either need to make further savings or generate additional income to fund future service delivery. In the consultation, respondents were asked to indicate those services which they most wanted to fund in the future. Respondents chose 'waste collection from home', 'street cleansing and public toilets' and 'parks and open spaces'. These were also those services which were most important to respondents. Respondents were most likely to say that 'central costs' and 'the arts' could be reduced or stopped. These were also identified as services which were of least importance to individuals.

1.3: Views of fees, charges, income and other opportunities

Respondents were asked to articulate their views on the current approach to fees and charges and upon the Council's approach to setting these. Responses on 'waste collection' and 'car parking' charges were most common. The majority of those commenting on 'waste collection' were unhappy with the charge for brown bins. Similarly for 'car parking', the majority of those commenting felt *"car parking charges were too high"* and discouraged *"footfall"* in the town centre.

1.4: Income opportunities

Respondents were invited to suggest income opportunities because generating more income, will be important as further cuts to funding streams are likely. Suggestions covered a wide range of themes and these included 'car parking', 'council tax', 'business rates', 'events', 'promotions' and 'staff efficiencies'.

1.5: Setting Council tax

Lichfield is one of the lowest charging districts in the country but to meet the funding gap, the Council will consider increasing the amount of council tax it charges. The majority of respondents (69%) said that a five pounds increase to council tax would be acceptable for the 2018/19 budget. The majority of the 31% who said 'no' to this option would prefer 'no increase' to council tax at all.

2.1 Introduction

Lichfield District Council will spend over £11 million in the current financial year (2017/2018) delivering a range of public services from leisure centres and planning to emptying bins, providing benefits and supporting local businesses. Over £6 million of this is funded from council tax and over £4 million from business rates, core government grant and New Homes Bonus.

The government has been reducing the amount of core government grant which is received every year and by next year the core grant will cease to exist altogether. This means the Council will face significant and ongoing challenges in providing the same level of service and will either need to make further savings or generate additional income to fund the services which are delivered.

Residents of Lichfield District play a key role in shaping the decisions which the Council face and as such were invited to help shape the budget for next year, including the council tax which is charged.

Residents responses have been summarised and analysed in this report which has been produced by Staffordshire County Council on behalf of Lichfield District Council. Resident responses will be fed into the budget setting process.

2.2 Methodology

Lichfield District Council developed it's budget survey in partnership with Staffordshire County Council's Strategy Team.

To help respondents to answer the questionnaire, the consultation was accompanied by an overview of Lichfield District Council's financial position. This included providing an understanding of finances, council tax collection and council tax spend.

The survey was launched on 20th November and ran until 22nd December 2017. It was advertised on-line and also in the November edition of LDC News. Additional participation was encouraged through social media channels.

Weekly updates of responses and demographics were provided to Lichfield District Council to assist with targeting additional responses.

2.3 Respondent Profile

A total of 129 respondents participated in the survey. This equates to 0.2% of the adult population of Lichfield[1]. Whilst the responses cannot be considered statistically robust, they do provide meaningful insight into the services provided, views of funding, fees charged, income opportunities and council tax.

A full respondent profile can be found in the Appendix. Some key points about respondents include:

⇒ Responses being received from all age groups but two thirds of respondents being aged 55+ (64%).

⇒ Responses being received from all wards with the exception of Bourne Vale, Fazeley and Mease Valley.

⇒ Respondents being more likely to have a disability or long term health condition (25%) than in the resident population overall (18%).

⇒ Survey respondents being more likely to be male (66%) than female (34%). In the resident population 49% are male and 51% are female.

[1] The adult population of Lichfield includes those residents who are aged 18 and above in the Mid Year Population Estimates, 2016 (MYPE, 2016).

3. Results - services provided

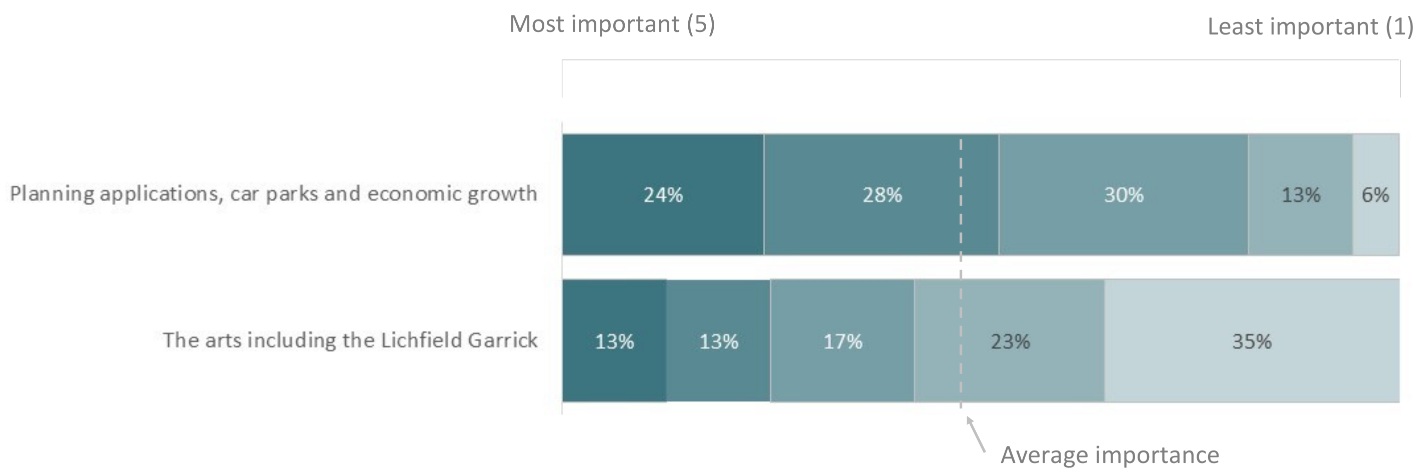
Respondents were asked a series of questions about the importance of a range of services provided underneath the following themes of 'a vibrant and prosperous economy', 'healthy and safe communities', 'clean, green and welcoming places to live' and 'a council that is fit for the future'. Respondents were asked to rate how important each of these services were on a scale of 1-5 with one being the least important and five being the most important. Scaled responses of 4-5 have been combined to provide an overall indication of importance. Responses received are documented below.

3.1: Importance of a vibrant and prosperous economy[2]

⇒ There was a 'moderate' level of support for 'planning applications, car parks and economic growth' with 52% feeling these were important. These services ranked seventh out of the 14 services being consulted upon[3].

⇒ There was 'some' support for 'the arts including the Lichfield Garrick'. One quarter regarded this service as important and the service ranked 13 out of 14.

Figure 3.1: The importance of 'a vibrant and prosperous community' (%)



Comments

⇒ ***Planning applications, car parks and economic growth:*** Five comments were received about 'planning applications, car parks and economic growth'. Most were expressing views on car parking charges. For example *"charges should be abolished as it deters people from spending money in the city centre"* and/or *"members should be encouraged to pay to park on Frog Lane car park when not on council business".* One respondent also acknowledged overall support for *"economic activity".*

⇒ ***The Arts:*** Nine comments were received about 'the arts including the Lichfield Garrick'. These respondents felt such initiatives should become *"self funding in post—Brexit austerity"* or they should be *"paid for by the people who use them".* Respondents expressed the viewpoint that the Council budget should be spent on *"vital services".*

[2] Where the 'level of support' is quoted within this report, this is defined as:

High: 75% - 100% agree the service is important

Moderate: 50% - 74% agree the service is important

Some: 25% - 49% agree the service is important

Low: 0% - 24% agree the service is important

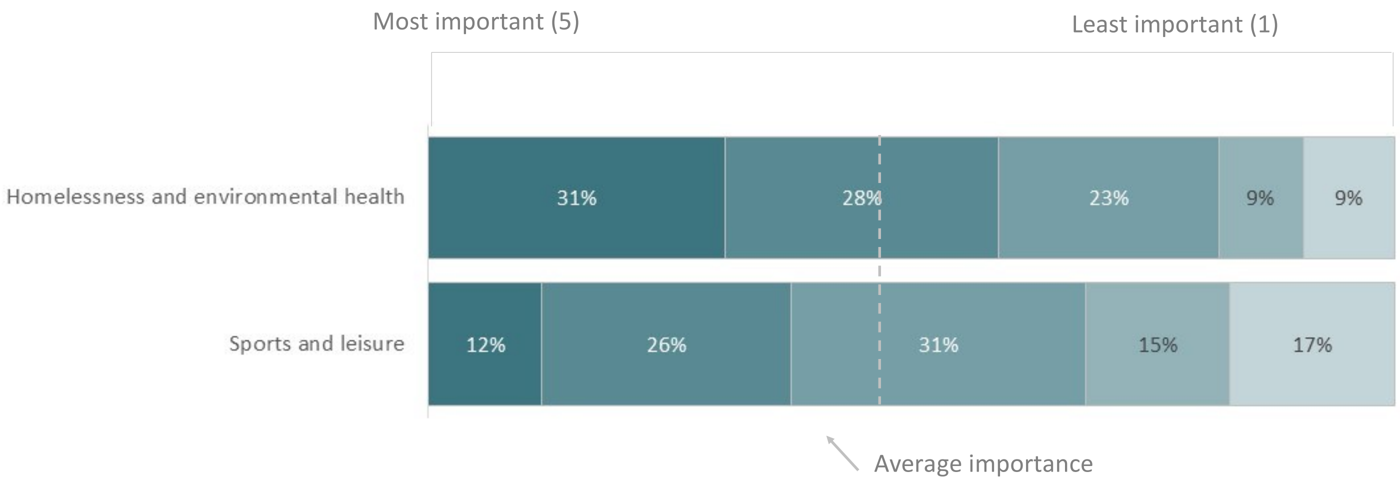
[3] The service ranked as 'one' is of the highest importance and the service ranked '14' is of lowest importance.

3.2: Importance of healthy and safe communities

⇒ 'Homelessness and environmental health' were regarded as 'moderately' important. 59% felt these services were important and they ranked fourth out of the 14 services being consulted upon.

⇒ 'Sports and leisure' were important to 'some' respondents. 38% indicated this service was important to them and it ranked eighth out of 14.

Figure 3.2: The importance of 'healthy and safe communities' (%)



Comments

⇒ ***Homelessness/environmental health:*** Two respondents commented on 'homelessness/ environmental health'. One expressed the need to *"focus on the homeless"* and to *"provide emergency housing if possible in Lichfield, keeping people closer to family and the area they are familiar with".* The other felt *"homelessness was an issue which could be debated, unlike environmental health where reductions could backfire on the Council".*

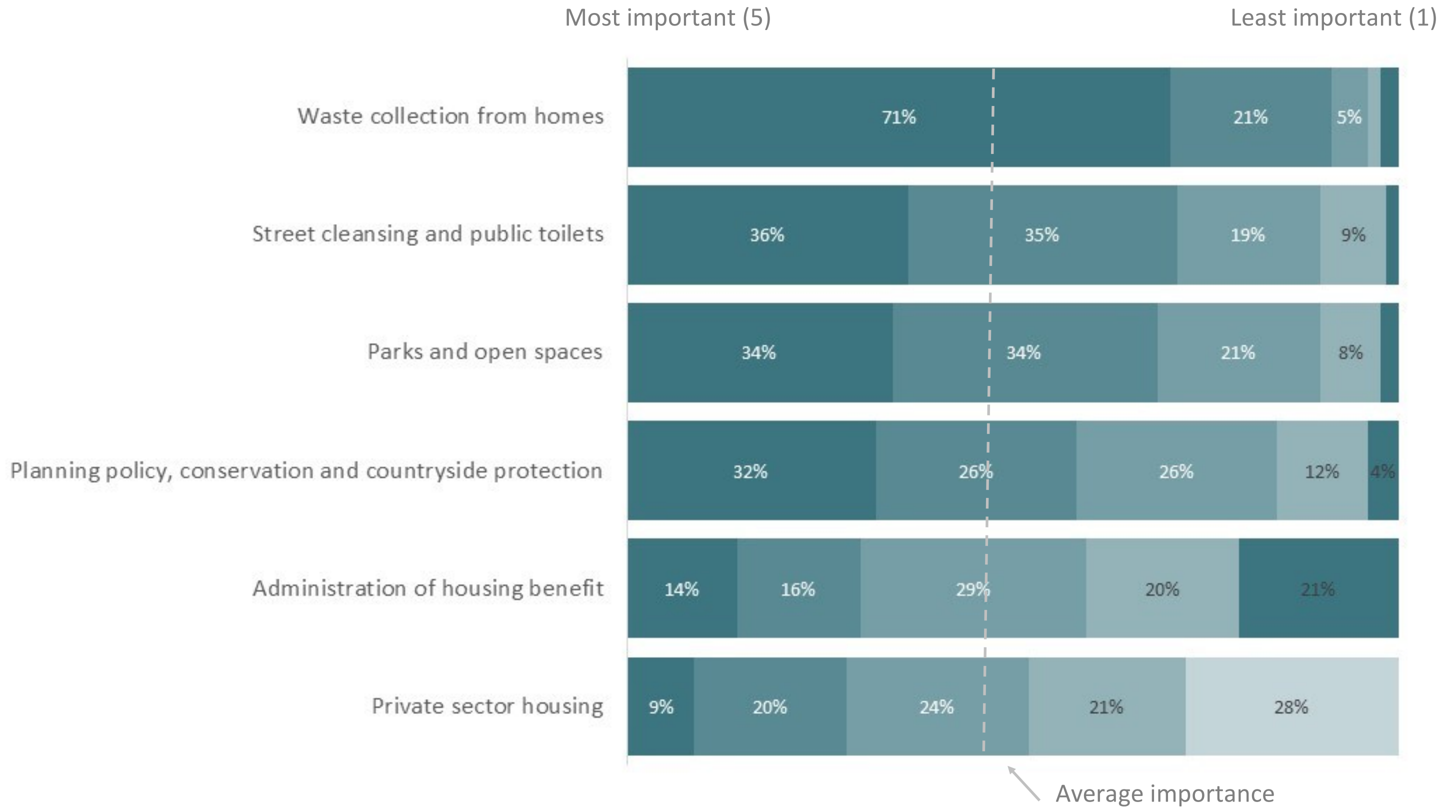
⇒ ***Sports and leisure:*** One respondent commented on 'sports and leisure' believing the focus of the organisation should be on its residents and the places they live in. *….."because sports and leisure facilities lead to healthy, happy communities".*

3.3: Clean, green and welcoming places to live

⇒ A 'high' proportion of respondents felt 'waste collection from home' was important and this service ranked in first place in terms of overall importance.

⇒ 'Some' importance was attributed to 'private sector housing' and this service ranked 11th out of the 14 priority services included in the consultation.

Figure 3.3: The importance of 'clean, green and welcoming places to live' (%)



Comments: Comments were received about four of the six services and these are documented below.

⇒ ***Waste collection from home:*** This was a popular topic with eight respondents expressing a viewpoint. Views shared included a resistance to *"paying"* for *"brown bin collections"*, especially because the cost has previously been *"included in the budget"*. Concern about the *"co-ordination of bin collections in adverse weather"* was also raised. Respondents felt this could be improved.

⇒ ***Parks and open spaces:*** Two respondents commented on this service with responses including that public spaces were considered an asset which *"everyone can enjoy"*. They were also viewed as important for the economy because they *"attract visitors who spend money"*.

⇒ ***Administration of housing benefit:*** One respondent felt this should be a number one priority because *"it helps to keep people in work and prevent further issues down the line"*.

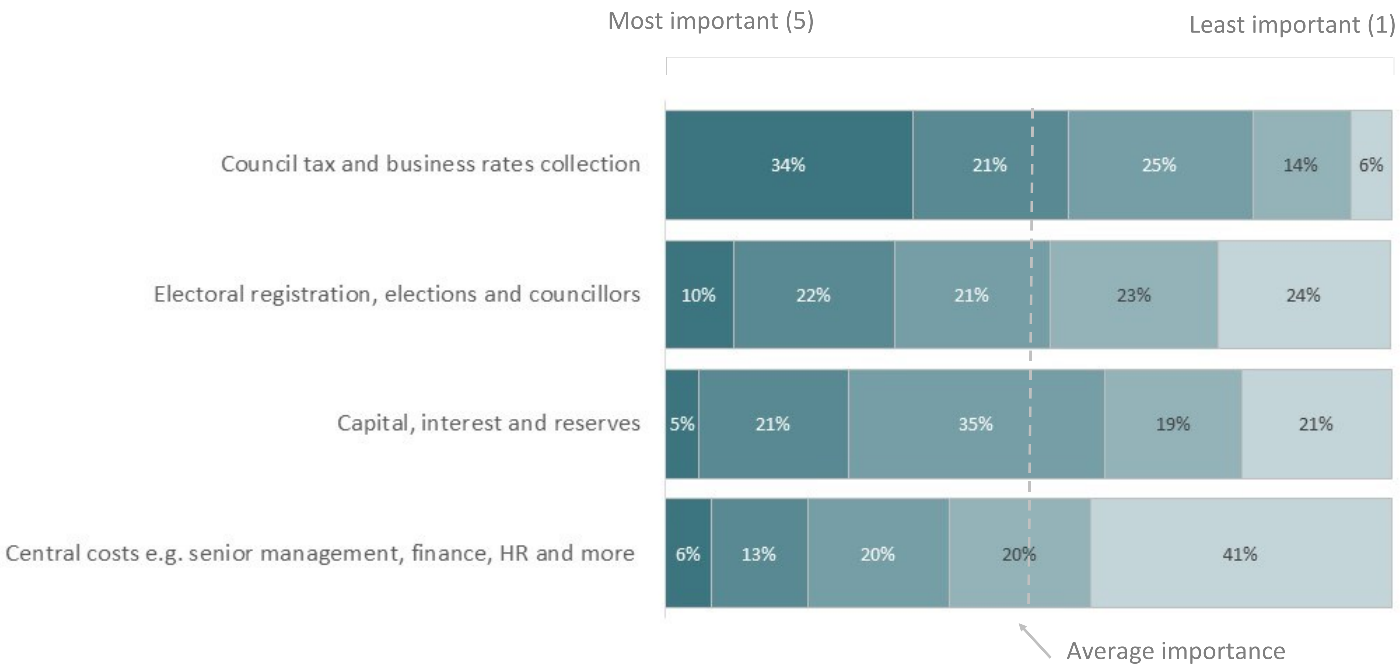
⇒ ***Private sector housing:*** Four commented on this theme and comments covered housing need and impact of new developments upon services, the economy and local communities. Comments included the need for "*more genuinely affordable social housing*" and *"supporting services in terms of schools and health services"*. A concern that "*new residents will surely commute to higher paid jobs"* was also raised because *"this was not considered to be good for the town and 'community'"*.

3.4: A Council that is fit for the future

⇒ There was a 'moderate' level of importance attributed to the 'council tax and business rates collection' service and this service ranked sixth out of the 14 services consulted upon.

⇒ 'Central costs such as senior management, finance, HR and more' were viewed as being of 'low' importance' by respondents. One fifth regarded these as important and this service area ranked lowest (14 out of 14) of the services included in the consultation.

Figure 3.4: The importance of a council that is 'fit for the future' (%)



Comments

⇒ **Council tax and business rates collection:** Respondents commenting on council tax collection and charges questioned why they paid their council tax—*"what is it for?"*. They were also concerned about increasing council tax bills with respondents feeling that these had *"gone up by far more than many other councils"*. Associated concerns included respondents wanting assurances that efforts would be directed towards ensuring that *"all council tax debts would be collected"*.

⇒ **Electoral registration, elections and councillors:** Councillors were the main subject of debate in comments received on this service area. Respondents commenting felt that Councillor roles and responsibilities could be *"rationalised"* and *"expenses"* and *"allowances"* could be *"reduced"*. Respondents additionally wanted to see *"proactive councillors"* operating in their local area.

⇒ **Capital, interest and reserves:** One respondent expressed a view on this service area commenting that *"interest and reserves are an essential part of the budget"*, but as they *"did not have experience of them (unlike waste collection, planning etc.) it was difficult to identify with them"*.

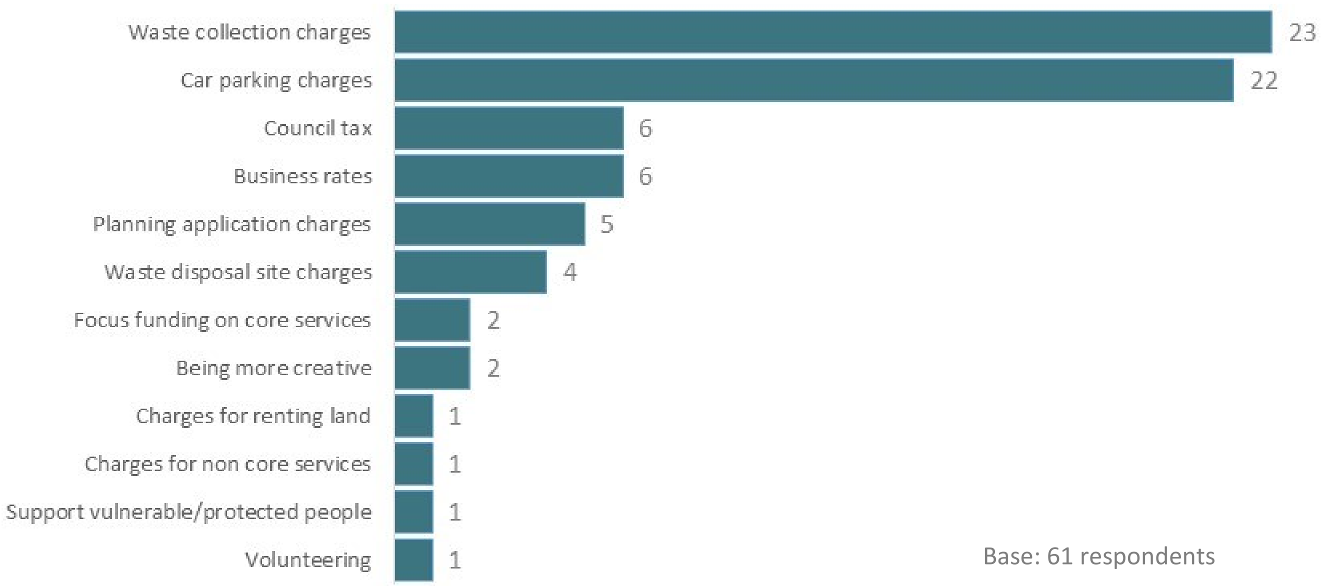
⇒ **Central costs:** Respondents commenting on 'central costs' felt there was *"a minimum need for officers (and cabinets and councillors) because so much is contracted out"*. Some also felt that senior manager salary savings should be considered to *"help fulfil the budget short fall"*.

4. Results - views of fees, charges, income and other opportunities

4.1: Views on charges and the approach to setting these

Respondents were asked to articulate their views on the current fees and charges and upon the Council's approach to setting these. 61 respondents chose to share their comments with some commenting on multiple themes. In total, 74 comments have been analysed and themed and these are outlined in the graphic below.

Figure 4.1: Views of fees, charges, income and other opportunities (%)



Waste collection charges: It was most common for respondents to express their opinions on the green waste collection service. The majority of those commenting were *"unhappy with the charge"* and/ or felt it should be covered through *"a small increase in rates"*. Some did feel that it was a *"sensible and proportionate charge"*. Others who agreed with it highlighted that they would be *"totally against any further charges e.g. for the blue bin collection, feeling that this would lead to further roadside dumping of waste and increase council removal costs"*.

Car parking charges: The majority of respondents commenting on car parking charges indicated that the *"car parking charges are way too high"* and *"discourage visitors"* and *"footfall for local shops"*. Other viewpoints on car parking were shared by a minority of respondents and these included: *"car parking charges are reasonable but need to be more flexible with some free parking targeting underused car parks e.g. Stowefields"* and *"parking charges should be higher and the extra income used to fund parks, open spaces, sports and healthy lifestyles"*.

Council tax: Respondents commenting on council tax were of the view that *"any rise in charges for council tax must never exceed inflation"*. They also felt that *"the cost of all services should definitely be covered by charges"*.

Business rates: These were considered to be too high, affecting businesses adversely and ultimately leading to "*urban dereliction*". Respondents questioned whether new businesses could be given a lower business rate charge to support them whilst they become established.

Planning application charges: Respondents were supportive of *"increasing fees for planning applications so they reflect the actual costs involved and avoid subsidising services unnecessarily"* but felt it should be made easier to pay for these services…. "*it took weeks to register when other councils take days".*

Waste disposal site charges: *"Charging for waste collection and disposal at tips will only encourage fly tipping which is expensive to clear up"* with one respondent citing an example of where this had *"happened elsewhere".*

Focus funding on core services: Respondents felt that too much attention is invested in *"non core services"*, meaning *"less funding for important ventures and projects".*

Being more creative: These respondents felt there is *"not enough attention given to creative ways in which to generate revenue in order to protect valued services".* They suggested being *"more imaginative",* and this for example included securing *"sponsorship for shopmobility", "selling advertising in public toilets"*, *"charging more for big planning applications", "making developers pay for bins for new homes"* and *"increasing section 106 money and using it better".*

Additional responses: One response was also received on each of the following; implementing charges for *"use of council land and assets which reflect the actual cost",* introducing charges for *"non-core services"*, supporting people who are *"vulnerable/need protecting"* and encouraging people to become *"good citizens"* for example by *"setting up volunteer/action groups to look after the city".*

4.2: Service areas which the Council should reduce/stop OR definitely fund

Respondents were asked to share their views on funding—both on service/priority areas to reduce/stop and also for service/priority areas which the Council should definitely fund. Respondents were most likely to select 'central costs' and 'the arts' for being reduced or cut. They were most likely to select 'waste collection from home', 'street cleansing and public toilets' and 'parks and open spaces' as the service/ priority areas they would most like to see funded.

Figure 4.2: Service/priority areas the Council should reduce or stop (%)

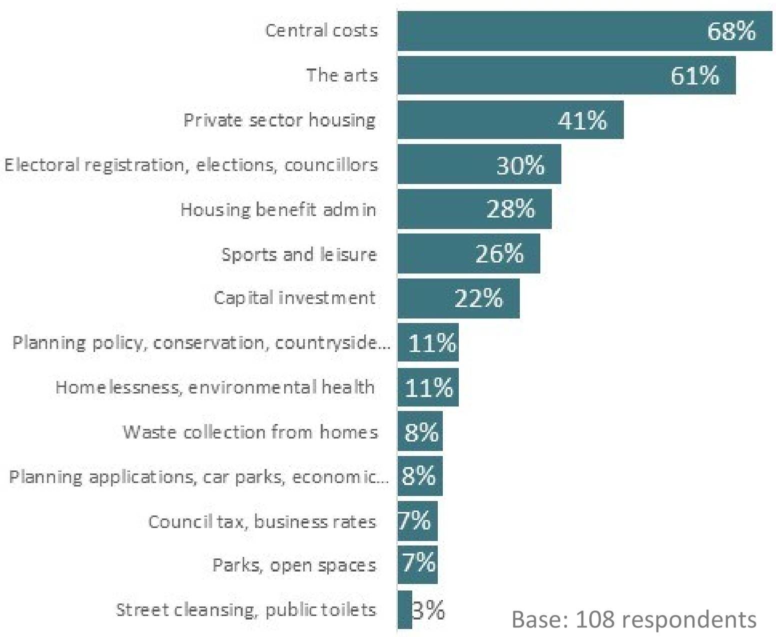
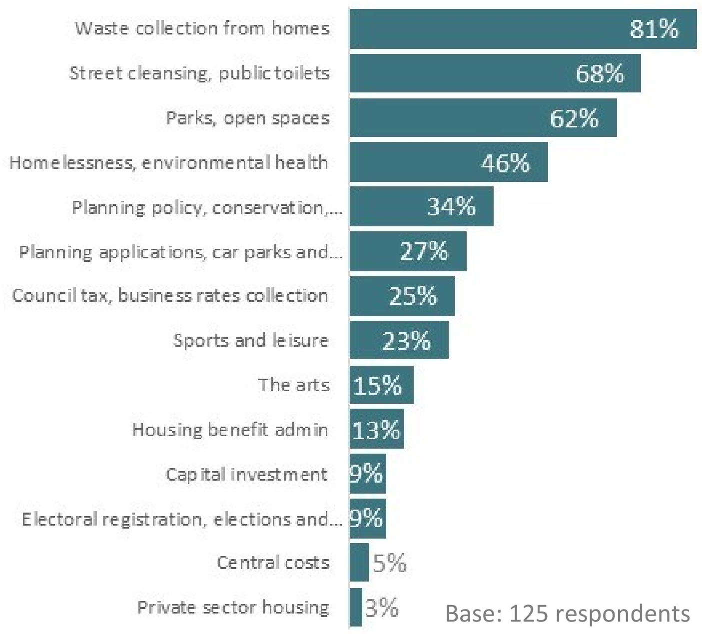


Figure 4.3: Service/priority areas the Council should definitely fund (%)



4.3: Other areas which should be funded

Respondents were asked to identify 'any other areas' which they felt should be funded. These responses which were very much individual in their nature, are documented below.

The services/priority areas from those respondents who shared other ideas included *"local policing", "winter gritting of roads/streets"* and *"a joint communications hub for trains and buses".*

Some respondents also raised questions in this section. These focused on housing with one respondent wanting to understand the cost of providing *"private sector housing"* services and another highlighting the need to encourage developers to provide *"more social housing".*

One respondent also expressed the view that *"all charges should be reviewed on a more regular basis".*

4.4: Income opportunities to investigate

Respondents were asked to identify any areas which were potential income opportunities to investigate. 71 validated comments which covered 33 themes have been analysed and reported on and these have been included in figure 4.4 below. Those themes which were discussed most commonly have also been documented in the text below. To understand the detail of the comments, reading the original comments is also recommended.

Figure 4.4: Income opportunities (using Wordart)

Base: 77 responses

Car parking (16 comments):

Views on car parking were diverse and included *"increasing charges"* to generate income, *"reducing charges"* to encourage *"greater town centre footfall"*, enforcing/monitoring of car parking *"fines"* and *"automating"* entry/exit to reduce the need for monitoring.

Council tax (5 responses)

Enforcement/monitoring to ensure *"everyone is paying what they should be"* and *"debts are collected"* were both raised as ideas. *"Increases in council tax"* and/or *"people in larger homes paying more"* were also suggested to fund cores services and to *"support those people in greatest need".* It was suggested that national government could be lobbied about *"relaxing limits on council tax, to compensate for loss of grant".*

Business rates (4 responses)

Ideas included a general "review" of rates as well as suggestions for charging *"higher"* rates for charity shops and *"lower"* rates to support businesses.

Events (4 responses)

Ideas included *"using Beacon Park for more events"* and considering the introduction of *"a small ticket price"* for events held in the park. Organisers of *"food festivals"* could be asked to pay "*a small contribution"* towards co-ordination and clean up of events.

Staff efficiencies (4 responses)

Ideas under this theme included an examination of *"staff numbers", "staff wages"* and staff benefits e.g. *"transport".*

Marketing/promotion of Lichfield (4 responses)

Continuing to develop Lichfield as *"an all year round tourist attraction, particularly targeting the national 'grey market' out of season, and the local family market during the holidays"* was suggested. Furthermore, *"highlighting the city's assets, including the arts, education and event promotion to encourage tourists from further afield, at a national level would help boost the local economy".*

Locally, trial the use of *"electronic screens in all council buildings for commercial advertising such as shops, pubs and restaurants"* and consider *"capital investment in a big screen for Beacon Park during periods of high footfall for commercial advertising".*

4.5: Other ideas or suggestions on council priorities and budget

Respondents were asked if they had any other ideas or suggestions in terms of the council's priorities and budget. 63 validated comments which covered 28 themes have been analysed. Those themes which were discussed most commonly have been documented below. To understand the full detail of all responses to this question, reading the original comments is also recommended. Please be aware that some of the discussions raised in this section are reflective of themes already documented earlier in this report.

Councillors (8 responses)

Ideas/suggestions within this theme included *"charging"* Councillors for *"car parking spaces"* as well as reducing *"Councillors allowances", "expenses"* and *"wages".* Additional suggestions included giving due consideration to *"reducing"* the overall number of councillors.

Managers (8 responses)

These respondents felt that fewer *"executive/management wages"* would help the Council to achieve it's budget.

Core services (7 responses)

Preferences for core activities to be prioritised included; *"household waste"* (regular collections); *"brown bins"* (included as core), provision of *"affordable homes",* provision of *"public toilets"* (more and updated), funding of "*library services"* (to keep these open) and supporting *"market traders"* (as they are vital for the local economy).

Staff (7 responses)

Other ideas/suggestions for staff were varied and included; *"reducing staff/management in non front line services",* having *"more workers/fewer managers", "reducing salaries",* "*stopping flexitime" (*to reduce the need to fund overtime for co workers who are covering posts), *"employing local people"* and giving consideration to *"outsourcing work".*

Infrastructure (3 responses)

"Integrating transport systems", for example *"bus and trains",* would greatly improve *"commuting"* and linking these with new leisure facilities such as *"shopping, bowling and the cinema"* were suggested as ways to *"increase visitors to the city".* Furthermore, developing a *"park and ride"* e.g. at Hilliards Cross, Fradley and linking these to *"Birmingham trains"* would also be *"brilliant for commuters".*

Planning (3 responses)

"Increasing fees for large planning applications" was reiterated in this section. Respondents also felt developers should be *"charged"* to compensate for the impacts of their developments upon *"schools", "roads"* and other vital *"services".* One respondent felt that the planning department could be more effective at holding *"large scale developers to task"* and that the service would benefit from being *"slimmed down and streamlined".*

Running costs (3 responses)

These respondents were very much in favour of the Council reducing it's own *"administration costs"* first, to show that it is serious about *"making savings".* You should firstly examine your *"own delivery of statutory and discretionary services, looking for areas that can be re-designed". "Residents need to know what steps you have already taken to minimise the financial impact for local residents".*

5. SETTING COUNCIL TAX

5.1: Council tax increase 2018/19

Respondents were asked to indicate whether a £5 increase in council tax would be acceptable for the 2018/19 budget.

Figure 5.1: Views on a £5 council tax increase for the 2018/19 budget (%) Base: 129 respondents

69% said 'yes' a £5 increase in council tax would be acceptable for the 2018/19 budget.

31% said 'no' a £5 increase in council tax would not be acceptable for the 2018/19 budget.

Those respondents who answered 'no' to the above question (31%) were asked to give their views on three other alternative options; no increase, a 2% increase and a 2.9% increase. The most popular response, with three quarters of this respondent group was 'option A: No increase'.

Figure 5.2: Preferred alternative option (%) Base: 39 respondents

6. APPENDIX 1: ABOUT YOU, RESPONDENT PROFILE

Are you male or female? (18+ population)

Base:	Survey responses		Lichfield MYE 2016
	No's	%	%
Male	84	66%	49%
Female	44	34%	51%

What is your age?

Base:	Survey responses		Lichfield MYE 2016
	No's	%	%
18-24	2	2%	9%
25-34	10	8%	13%
35-44	13	10%	15%
45-54	22	17%	19%
55-64	30	24%	16%
65-74	43	34%	17%
75+	7	6%	12%

What is your ethnicity?

Base:	Survey responses		2011 Census comparison
	No's	%	%
White	117	96%	97%
Mixed/multiple	1	1%	1%
Asian/Asian British	1	1%	2%
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	0	0%	0%
Other ethnic group	3	3%	0%

Do you consider yourself to have a disability or long term health condition?

Base:	Survey responses		2011 Census comparison
	No's	%	%
Yes	32	25%	18%
No	95	75%	82%

Where do you live? (18+ population)

Base:	Survey		Lichfield MYE 2016	Base:	Survey		Lichfield MYE 2016
	No's	%	%		No's	%	%
Alrewas & Fradley	8	8%	6%	Hammerwich with Wall	3	3%	4%
Armitage with Handsacre	3	3%	7%	Highfield	3	3%	4%
Boley Park	18	18%	4%	Leomansley	11	11%	7%
Boney Hay & Central	4	4%	6%	Little Aston & Stonnall	1	1%	5%
Bourne Vale	0	0%	3%	Longdon	1	1%	2%
Chadsmead	8	8%	4%	Mease Valley	0	0%	2%
Chase Terrace	3	3%	5%	Shenstone	4	4%	6%
Chasetown	5	5%	4%	St John's	8	8%	2%
Colton & the Ridwares	1	1%	2%	Stowe	11	11%	6%
Curborough	6	6%	4%	Summerfield & All Saints	3	3%	6%
Fazeley	0	0%	4%	Whittington & Streethay	1	1%	5%