

Summary Report: Budget Consultation Exercises to inform the 2013/14 Budget Setting Process

Introduction

Consultation with residents and other interested parties and partners is very important to the council and we have tried various methods to consult about council spending in recent years. However, the complexity of council finances and the very wide range of services provided meant that people sometimes found it difficult to understand or to make informed choices. We have therefore tried different approaches to consult about spending this year, using traditional and more innovative methods in our “your money, your services, your say” consultation, including:

- A survey available online and on paper
- An online prioritisation tool
- A more innovative method for involving people in decision making on the overall approaches available to the council for running services

Purpose of this Report

This report draws on all the consultation activities undertaken within “your money, your services, your say” until 16 January 2013. It is an update of a report prepared in Autumn 2012, which drew on budget consultation activities undertaken to the middle of October 2012.

Other consultation activities have been taking place that will also have relevance to budget deliberations. These are not included in this analysis but they include:

- Council Tax Reduction scheme consultation
- Consultation on proposals for changes to Council Tax Discounts and Exemptions
- Consultation on a Local Discretionary Social Fund

Members have been provided with feedback from the consultation on these three areas as part of the separate decision making processes that they have undergone.

Summary of findings:

High Priority Areas	Medium Priority Areas	Low Priority Areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education • Children’s Social Services • Refuse Collection, Disposal and Recycling • Housing • Public Safety • Leisure, Parks and Open Spaces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Libraries • Adult Social Services • Housing Benefit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central Services • Council Tax Benefit • Planning and Economic Development • Highways and Traffic Management • Capital Investment

- Most respondents want service funding to be at least maintained, if not increased.
- Service areas where more people (though not the majority) are in favour of cuts are the low priority areas, and where more people are in favour of increases are higher priority areas.
- Justified increases in Council Tax would be acceptable to the majority of respondents.
- Residents are very much in favour of the exploitation of fines as a source of revenue – parking charge rises would not be welcome.
- Efficiency and transparency are critical.

Methods and Response Rates

Paper based survey

A paper based survey was issued to a random sample of 1,000 households across the city in areas identified as being likely to have lower internet access on 10 September 2012. Reminder letters were issued two weeks later. Paper copies of the survey were also available in all publicly accessible council buildings including libraries and benefits offices.

204 people responded by this method by October 2012.

Online survey

An online version of the same survey was available to anyone wishing to complete it between 10 September and 10 October 2012 on the city's Consultation Portal.

Postcards advertising the online survey and budget pages of the council website were issued to a random sample of 1,000 households evenly distributed across the city in September. Twenty people responded to this postcard campaign by completing the survey online. Posters advertising the survey and budget pages of the council website were displayed in publicly accessible council buildings between September and October 2012.

The online survey was made live again on the Consultation Portal on 26 November 2012, to coincide with the Policy and Resources (P&R) committee's initial budget meeting. It remained open until 16 January 2013 when it was closed to permit analysis and reporting to be undertaken in time for the next P&R budget committee meeting on 14 February 2013.

In total 434 people responded via this method; 283 to the first wave and 151 to the second wave.

Budget literacy and prioritisation tool

The budget pages of the council website, signposted to from the poster referred to above, the postcards issued to residents and the flyers about the public consultation event, all included a link to an interactive tool. The tool enabled residents to see how much money is spent on different service areas, where the money comes from and, if they wished, to indicate what priority they would give the service area if they were setting the budget.

1,251 people used the tool and 437 people went on to prioritise service areas via this tool by 16 January 2013.

Public event

A public event was held on the evening of 26 September 2012 at the Jubilee Library. This used a deliberative method called Crowd Wise for aiming to achieve consensus. Participants were asked to consider five different principles that the council could adopt when setting the budget and deciding spending priorities before voting on their preferences. The marketing campaign to promote the event included flyers placed in publicly accessible council buildings as well as face to face recruitment in the Jubilee library and in community libraries. One hundred and eighteen people signed up to attend the event.

30 people attended the event, and 26 people cast votes.

Note about interpreting the results

It is not possible to gauge whether respondents are representative of residents in the city as they were self-selecting and although demographic information was sought it was not frequently provided. Care should therefore be taken when interpreting the results presented here. That said, a total of 1,101 responses to the various consultations about the budget have been analysed here and there are common themes which can be taken as broadly indicative of resident views.

Results

Paper and online survey

The paper based and online surveys included the same questions across both waves so the responses have been analysed together. A combined total of 638 responses were received by the deadline of 16 January 2013.

Respondent characteristics:

The following demographic information, provided in each case by around 85% of respondents, shows a range of respondent characteristics which are broadly in line with Census 2011 results.

- Of those respondents who gave their age band (546) almost half were aged 34-54 (49%). Just 5% were aged 16-24. 15% were aged 65 or more.
- There was a relatively even gender balance, reflecting our city's profile, with 51% males completing the survey, and 47% females.
- 2% of respondents identified as a different gender to the gender they were assigned at birth.
- Just over a fifth of respondents (22%) were Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual.
- Whilst 35% identified themselves as having no religion, the same proportion identified themselves as Christian. 16% were Atheist, 3% were Agnostic. The other religions or beliefs asked about were selected by less than 2% in each case.
- Around a fifth of respondents (19%) said that their day-to-day activities were limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or was expected to last, at least 12 months.
- Just over three quarters of respondents were White British (77%). A further 14% were White 'other' or White 'unknown'. 7% were from non-white Black or Minority Ethnic backgrounds.
- 11% of the sample were carers.

- Just over a third of respondents (36%) had a BN2 postcode, whilst almost a third (32%) had a BN1 postcode. 27% had a BN3 postcode with the remainder having BN41 or 42 postcodes.

Where possible, we have mapped respondents' postcodes to wards. The results are presented in the table below, showing all wards are represented.

Ward	Number of respondents from each ward	Proportion of sample from each ward
Hanover and Elm Grove	38	9%
St. Peter's and North Laine	35	8%
Goldsmid	33	8%
Queen's Park	32	8%
Hollingdean and Stanmer	29	7%
Withdean	27	6%
Preston Park	26	6%
East Brighton	25	6%
Rottingdean Coastal	22	5%
Patcham	21	5%
Central Hove	17	4%
Brunswick and Adelaide	16	4%
Hangleton and Knoll	15	4%
Regency	13	3%
Wish	12	3%
South Portslade	12	3%
Westbourne	11	3%
Moulsecoomb and Bevendean	11	3%
Woodingdean	10	2%
Hove Park	10	2%
North Portslade	8	2%
Total	423	100%
Not known	215	
Total	638	

Whilst the very different sample sizes for wave one and two constrain our ability to draw meaningful conclusions by comparing the responses to each wave, notable differences, of + or – 10%, have been highlighted throughout this report. In relation to respondent characteristics there were three notable differences as follows:

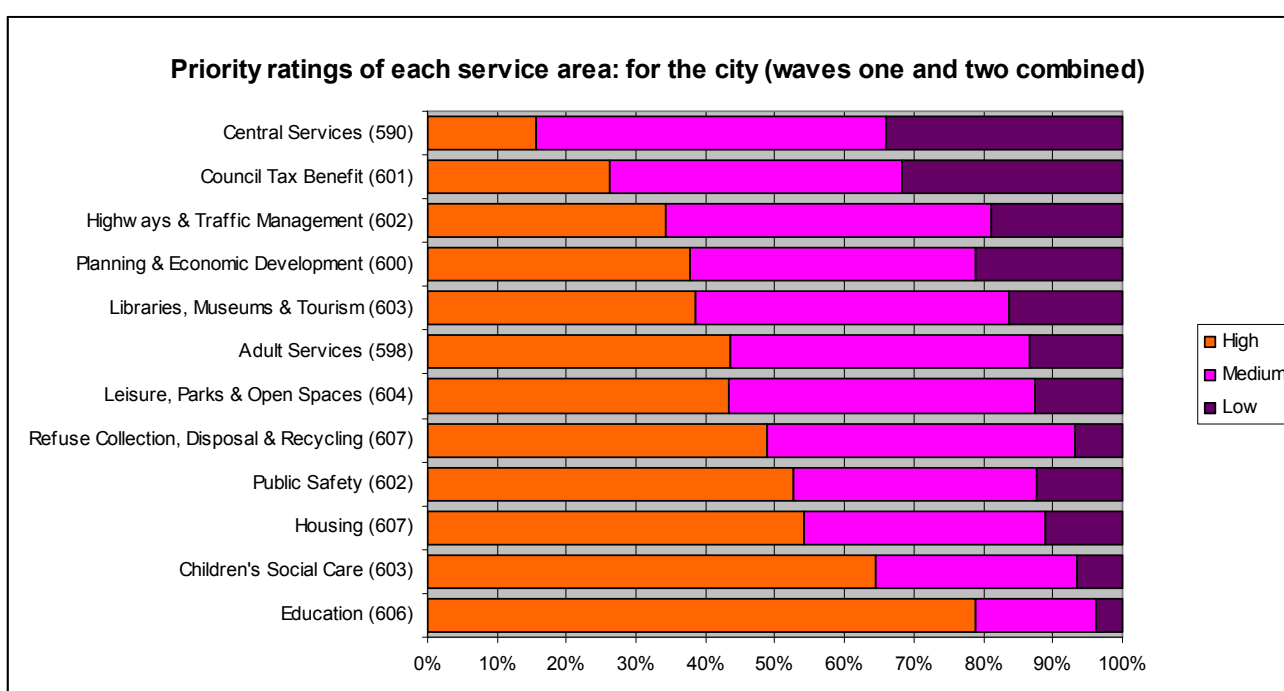
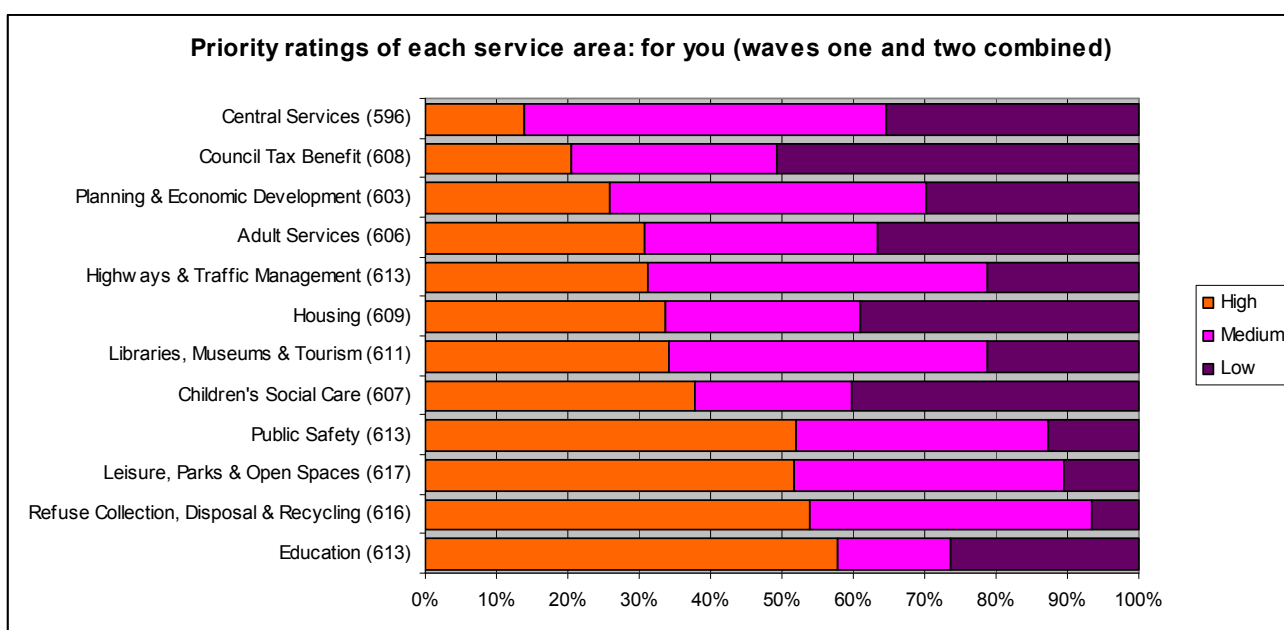
- In wave two 14% fewer respondents identified themselves as carers (8%, compared to 22% in wave one).
- In wave two 12% more respondents were male (60%, compared to 48% in wave one).
- In wave two 10% more respondents were Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual (29% compared to 19% in wave one).

Residents were invited first to rate as high, medium or low, the priority they would give to different service areas for themselves and their family, then to do the same prioritisation exercise for the city.

Not everyone who completed the survey rated every service area so the number of people rating each service is given in brackets on the graphics below. For example, only 596 respondents rated Central Services, whereas 613 rated Education.

A very small number of respondents only rated services for themselves and their family and did not go on to rate them for the city as well.

The results show that there are differences in how people rate the priority of service areas for themselves and for the city, unsurprisingly with more polarisation when rating services for themselves; if a family has children we may assume that education and children’s social services would receive high priority ratings from that family, whereas a single person may be more likely to rate them low. However, when thinking about the city as a whole the prioritisation may change.



Higher priority areas:

- Education was the highest priority regardless of whether people were rating it for themselves or the city, with 79% rating it a high priority for the city and just 4% rating it low.
- Over 90% rated Education, Children's Social Care and Refuse Collection, Disposal and Recycling as high or medium priorities for the city.
- Housing was considered the third highest priority for the city, whereas for individuals it was 7th out of the 12 areas enquired after.
- When rating service areas for themselves and their families rather than the city, Children's Social Care and Education were less important (at 60% and 74% respectively rating them high or medium priorities) but Refuse Collection, Disposal and Recycling retained a high rating with 94% rating it a high or medium priority.
- Leisure, Parks and Open Spaces also received a high rating for respondents and their families with 90% rating it as a high or medium priority. This puts it as the third highest ranked area for individuals and their families, whilst it ranks sixth when respondents think about the city overall.

Lower priority areas:

- Central Services was the lowest rated area with around a third of respondents rating it a low priority area and only around 15% rating it as a high priority, either for themselves (14%) or the city (16%).
- For themselves and their families, respondents rated more services as of lower importance with at least a third rating the following low: Council Tax Benefit (51%), Children's Social Care (40%), Housing (39%), Adult Services (37%) and Central Services (35%).
- For the city, only one service area was rated a low priority by at least a third, Central Services (34%). Council Tax Benefit was also rated a low priority by 32%.
- The same two service areas were rated lowest by respondents regardless of whether they were rating them for themselves or the city. These were Central Services and Council Tax Benefit. Highways and Traffic Management and Planning and Economic Development were also rated as low ranking priorities.

Areas with the widest spread of opinion:

- When rating services for themselves there was more variance than when rating services for the city. As mentioned before, this is likely to be as people rate services that they currently use, or are more likely to use, higher and services that they don't use, lower.
- The widest spread of opinions when rating services for themselves and their families were Children's Social Care (38% high, 40% low), Housing (34% high, 39% low), Adult Services (31% high, 37% low) and Planning and Economic Development (26% high, 30% low).
- Service areas where views were divided over the priority for the city were Planning and Economic Development (38% high, 21% low), Council Tax Benefit (26% high, 32% low) and Highways and Traffic Management (34% high, 19% low).

Whilst the analysis presented here is based on all responses to the survey, across both waves as this provides a larger, more robust sample, there are a small number of notable

differences (of + or – 10%) comparing the results of each wave. These are summarised below.

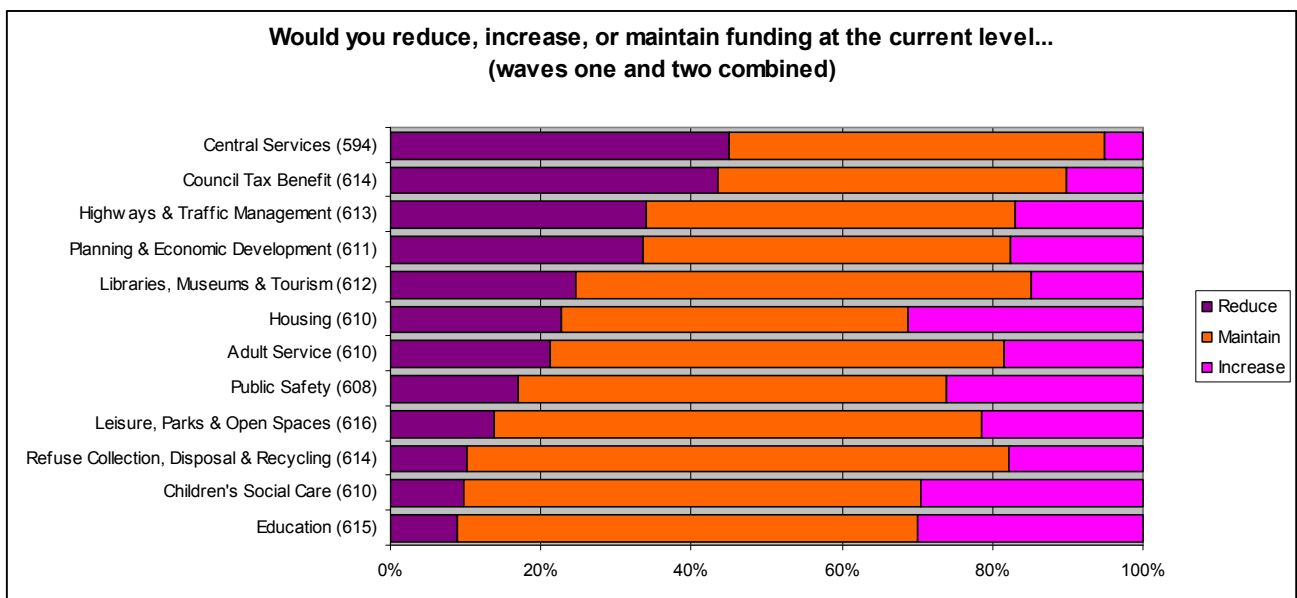
When asked to respond in relation to the priority for “you and your family”:

- Council Tax Benefit was rated a lower priority in wave two (60% low compared to 45% low in wave one).
- Highways and Traffic Management was more likely to be rated a high priority in wave two (38% high compared to 29%).

When asked to respond in relation to the priority for “the city”:

- Again, Council Tax Benefit was rated a lower priority in wave two (40% low compared to 29% low in wave one).
- Public Safety was rated a lower priority in wave two (21% low compared to 10% in wave one).

Respondents were then asked to say whether they would reduce, increase or maintain service area funding at the current level. Results are shown below.



Reduce funding:

Respondents generally didn't want funding reduced with the majority opting to either maintain or increase funding for all areas.

That said, 45% would reduce funding for Central Services, 43% would reduce funding for Council Tax Benefit, 34% would reduce funding for Highways and Traffic Management and 34% for Planning and Economic Development.

Increase funding:

At the other end of the spectrum just under a third of respondents wanted to increase funding for Housing (31%), Education and Children's Social Care (both 30%).

Maintain funding:

The areas where around two thirds were happy to maintain current funding levels were Refuse Collection and Disposal and Recycling (72%) and Leisure, Parks and Open Spaces (65%). Other areas where high proportions wanted to maintain funding were Education, Children's Services (61% each), Adult Services and Libraries, Museums and Tourism (60% each).

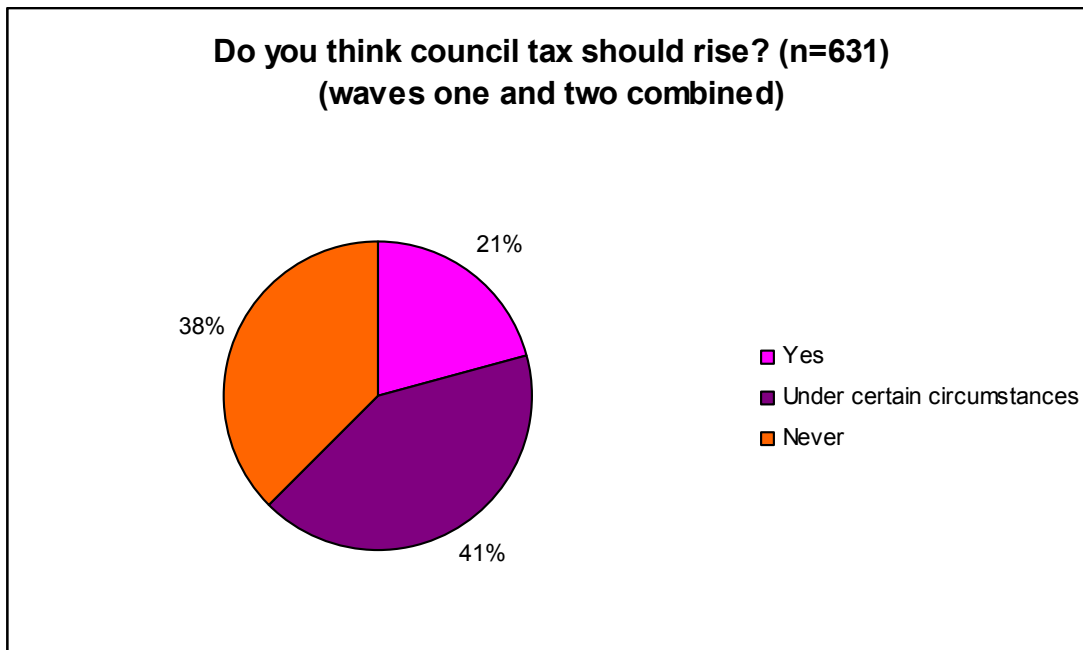
Widest spread of opinion on funding levels:

Housing was the area where opinion was most divided with 23% thinking funding should increase and 31% thinking it should decrease.

The proportion of wave two respondents saying they would reduce funding was higher in the second wave across all services they were asked about. There were a couple of notable differences (of + or – 10%) between wave one and wave two results as follows:

- In wave two more were in favour of reducing Council Tax Benefit (53% compared to 41% in wave one).
- Less were likely to want to maintain spending on Adult Services in wave two (63% compared to 52%) and more were likely to want to reduce funding (27% compared to 20% in wave one).
- More were in favour of reducing funding for Public Safety in wave two (25% compared to 15% in wave one).

Respondents were then asked if they felt Council Tax should ever rise to reduce pressure on the council's finances.



38% of respondents were against any rise in Council Tax, whilst the largest proportion (41%) felt an increase could be justified in certain circumstances. In principle then, 62% of respondents could be amenable to a rise in Council Tax.

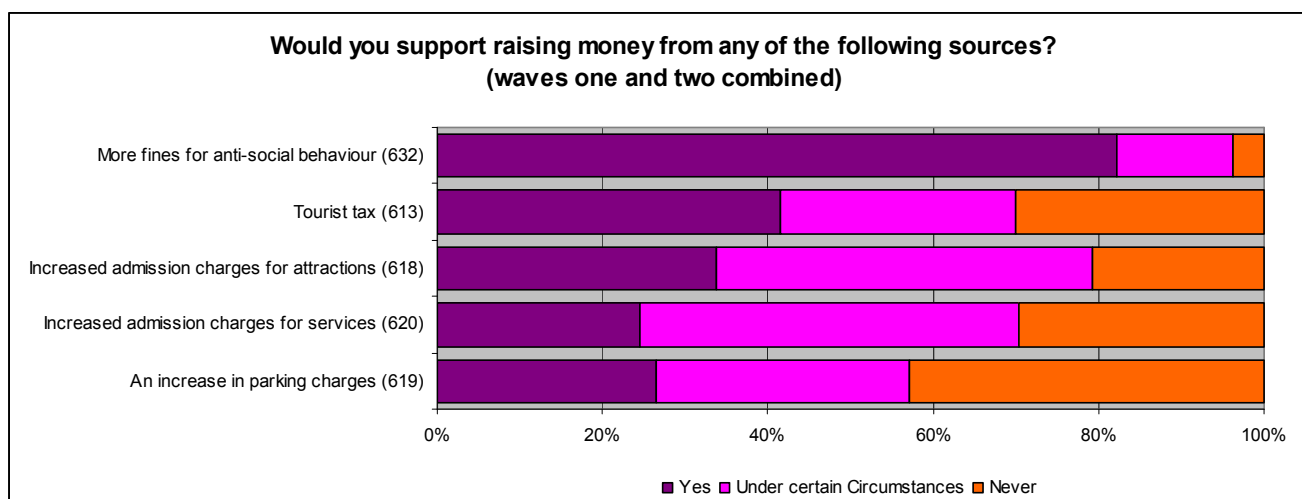
Comparing wave one and wave two responses to this question, wave two respondents were more likely to say that Council Tax should never rise, with 46% taking this stance

compared to 35% in the first wave. The proportion saying it should rise was the same across both waves at 21%.

Analysis of the comments around circumstances in which people would be accepting of an increase suggests that any increase would need to be clearly justified; the most vulnerable members of society would need to be protected, both in terms of affordability and in terms of what the increase was used to fund; and, ideally, noticeable improvements would be made, rather than just maintenance. Means testing, either on income or property value, was another frequently mentioned situation in which people may tolerate an increase in Council Tax.

Many comments related to an appreciation of the need for Council Tax to rise at least in line with inflation to maintain the current levels of service provision.

Respondents were then asked if they would support raising money from any of five different sources.



With 82% of people in favour, fines for antisocial behaviour such as litter, dog fouling and noise were well supported as ways of increasing council revenue.

There was mixed support for the other options respondents were presented with but the least popular suggestion was increasing parking charges, which 43% of respondents opposed.

The idea of a Tourist Tax divided opinion with 42% in favour and 30% saying this should never be a way to raise revenue.

Wave one and two results to these questions were broadly similar with a couple of notable exceptions (of + or – 10%) as follows:

- Wave two respondents were more likely to say they would never support raising council revenue from increasing parking charges (51% compared to 40% in wave one).
- Wave two respondents were more likely to say they would never support a tourist tax (39% compared to 27% in wave one).

Analysis of respondents' other suggestions for increasing income to support the budget reveals a very wide range of ideas, many of which are in competition with each other. For example, whilst some commentators think the key to unlocking the city's potential is to reduce parking charges, others think that increasing parking charges is a good way to increase revenue. What is clear is that people have a lot of ideas, with 329 of the 638 respondents (52%) taking the time to make suggestions.

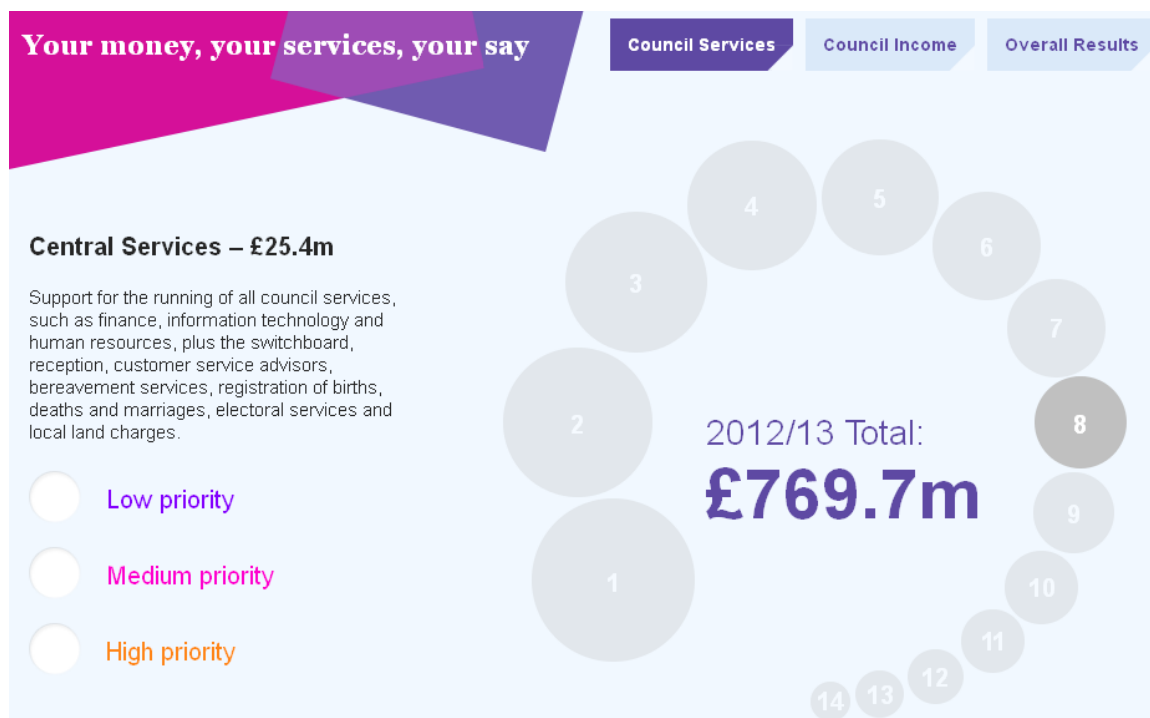
Common themes from suggestions made include raising revenue through:

- Better enforcement of, and increases in the value of fines for antisocial behaviour such as dog fouling, littering and drunkenness.
- More rigid enforcement of the law, especially in relation to traffic violations, particularly parking offences and cyclists committing violations.
- Increasing efficiency within the council through working smarter, not producing different language leaflets, reducing senior management salaries and staff pensions etc.
- Curbing spend on roadworks, especially those related to cycle paths.
- Charging Council Tax for second homes and empty properties.
- Decreasing benefit payments.
- A stepped/more tactical approach to business rates.
- Making people pay more for parking permits, especially for second vehicles.

Online budget literacy and prioritisation tool

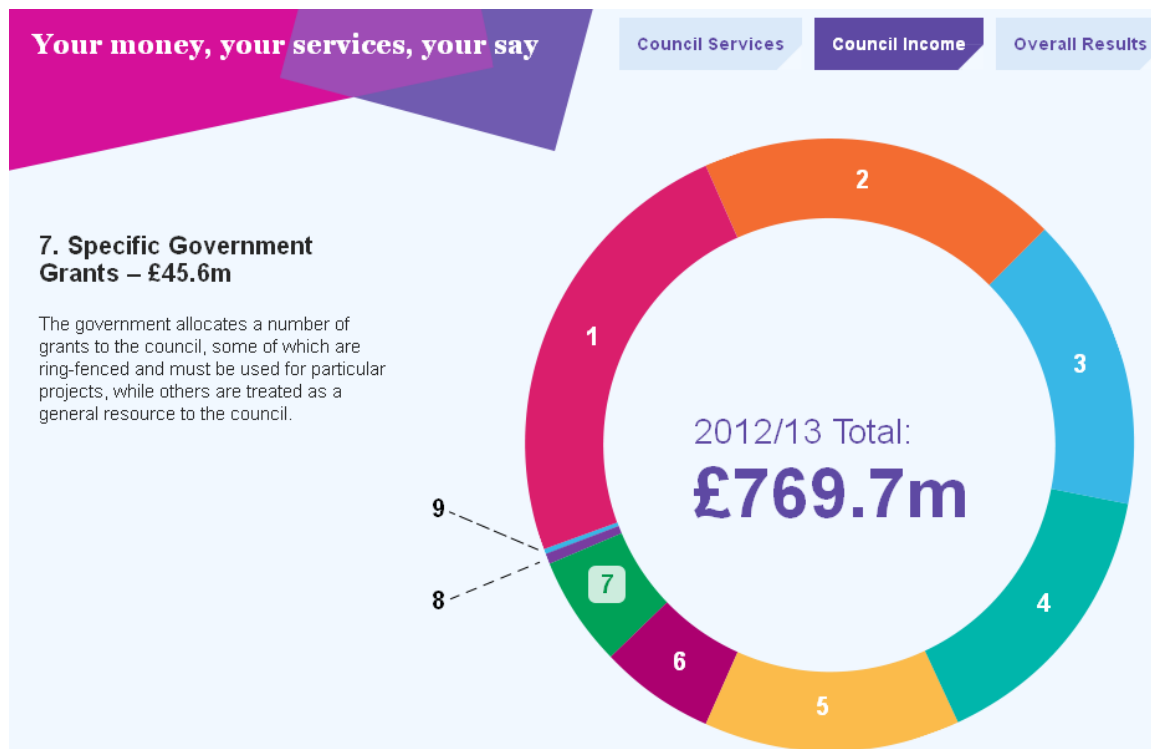
By mid January 1,251 people had used the online interactive budget tool which shows how much money is spent on different service areas. On the first screen, when a user clicks on a particular service area, details of what each area includes appear, as well as how much the service area cost in 2012/13.

The screenshot below shows the tool when the user has clicked on central services.



Users of the tool have the opportunity to rate the 14 different service areas with a priority rating of high, medium or low. Not all users chose to do this, and the tool is as much about budget literacy as it is about gathering feedback. So, whilst 1,251 people have looked at the tool (these are individuals looking at the tool rather than the number of visits to the tool website which is 1,940 at the time of writing) a maximum of 437 have gone on to prioritise service areas.

On the second screen users can find out where council income comes from. In the screenshot below the user has clicked on the green area of the chart, the seventh largest source of income for the council which is made up of specific government grants.

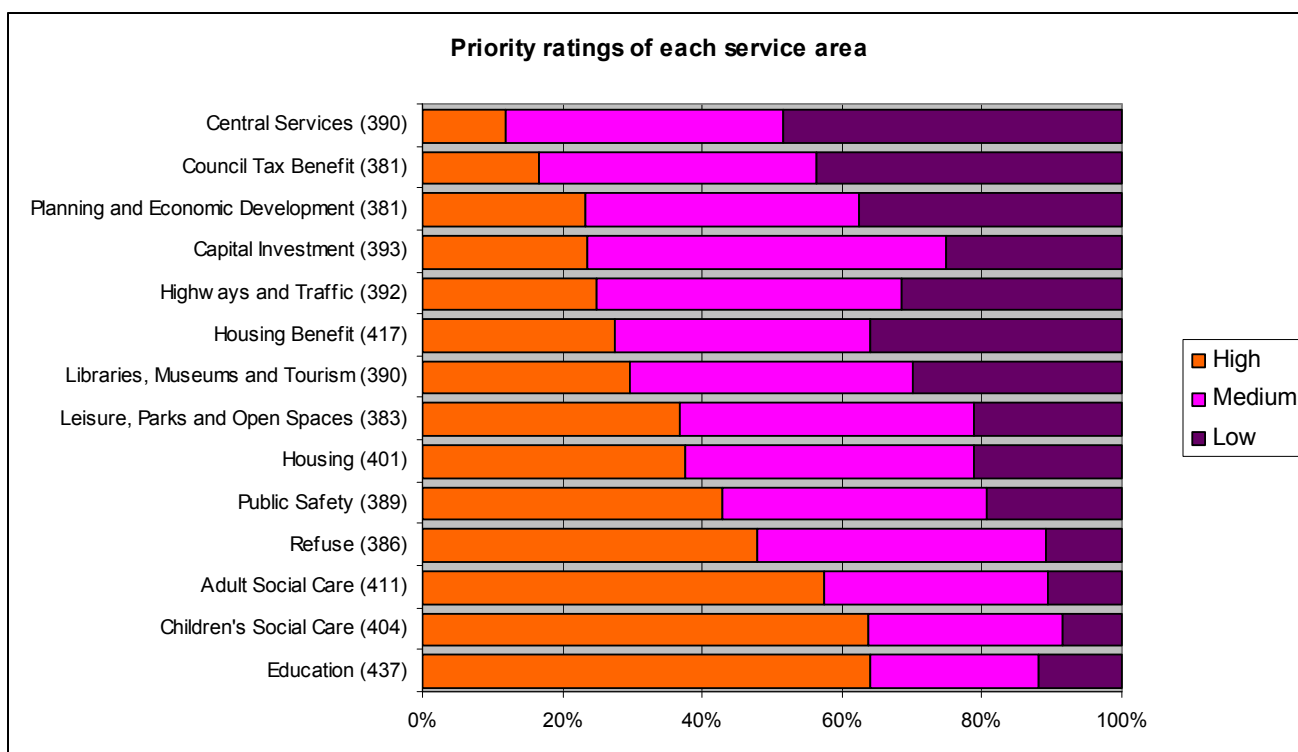


On the final screen of the tool users can see the average results of how users of the tool up to that point have prioritised services.

Not all users who prioritised any services as high, medium or low prioritised all services – they missed out rating some. So, for example, 437 users have given education a priority status but only 390 users have given Central Services a priority status.

The chart below shows the percentages of all users of the tool (staff and non-staff) rating each service as high, medium or low. The number of people who actually rated the service is given in brackets for each service.

Note that there are two additional service areas to the ones asked about in the survey outlined above; Housing Benefit and Capital Investment. Also the term “Adult Social Services” is used on the tool where “Adult Services” was used in the survey, “Refuse” is used as shorthand for “Refuse Collection, Disposal and Recycling” and “Highways and Traffic” is used instead of “Highways and Traffic Management”.



Higher priority areas:

- The areas that were rated as the highest priority were Education and Children's Social Care, each with 64% rating them as a high priority¹. Adult Social Care was also rated as a high priority by the majority of people (57%). In each of these cases at least 80% rated them as a high or medium priority with Children's Social Care being rated as such by 92%.
- Refuse was also rated a relatively high priority with just under half (48%) giving it a high ranking. 89% rated it as either high or medium.
- Public Safety, Housing and Leisure, Parks and Open Spaces were all rated similarly, with around 80% rating them as high or medium priorities (81%, 79% and 79% respectively).
- These results are all within a couple of percentage point differences to the first results drawn in October 2012.

Lower priority areas:

- There were four areas rated as being a low priority by at least a third of users of the tool: Central Services (48%), Council Tax Benefit (44%), Planning and Economic Development (38%), and Housing Benefit (36%).
- Central Services was the lowest rated area with just 12% of users of the tool rating it a high priority area.

Areas with the widest spread of opinion:

- Housing Benefit was rated high by 28%, and as medium or low by 36% each, showing little agreement over the priority status that this area should be afforded.

¹ Note that Education was rated high by 64.1% compared to Children's Social Care at 63.9%, hence the ordering on the chart, with Education as the highest priority.

The other benefit users were asked to rate, Council Tax Benefit, was rated as a low priority by 44% and a high priority by just 17%.

- Libraries, Museums and Tourism was rated high by 30%, medium by 40% and low by 30% again revealing a range of opinion about its priority status.
- Highways and Traffic, Housing and Leisure, Parks and Open Spaces all received relatively split ratings.

Differences by Brighton & Hove City Council staff users and non-staff users of the tool:

The number of B&HCC staff users of the tool is relatively low (a maximum of 136 staff prioritised services) which limits the ability to draw meaningful conclusions by comparing staff results to non-staff results. However, analysis of the ratings of council staff against non-staff reveals only minor differences in priority ratings with a couple of notable exceptions, as follows.

Areas which staff thought were a higher priority compared to non-staff:

- Adult Social Care, which was rated as a high priority by 64% of staff compared to 54% of non-staff.
- Children's Social Care, which was rated as a high priority by 73% of staff compared to 59% of non-staff.
- Housing Benefit, rated a high priority by 35% of staff compared to 24% of non staff (26% of staff rated it low compared to 40% of non-staff).
- Central Services, rated a high priority by 23% of staff compared to just 6% of non-staff (37% of staff rated it low compared to 54% of non-staff).

Areas which staff thought were a lower priority compared to non-staff:

- Highways and Traffic, which was rated a high priority by 28% of non-staff compared to 18% of staff.
- Refuse, which 53% of non-staff rated as a high priority compared to 36% of staff.
- Leisure, Parks and Open Spaces, which was rated a high priority by 40% of non-staff compared to 30% of staff.

Public event using Crowd Wise methodology

At the event participants were presented with five guiding principles, or philosophies, that the council could adopt when deciding spending priorities and setting the budget as follows:

A: 'Just the basics'

Aside from some services that it must undertake, the council could provide only basic services (like social care, refuse collection, council housing) and charge for everything else as and when people want it.

B: 'Prevention rather than Cure'

The council focuses spending on services which tackle problems like anti-social behaviour and alcohol and drug misuse that lead to higher costs for the council in the future.

C: 'Keeping services not cutting them'

The council delivers all services on the basis of need without any extra charges. This means people paying for services they may not use but which are vital to others.

D: 'Partnership Council'

Services are still provided to businesses and residents but not necessarily delivered directly by the council.

E: 'Go for Growth'

The council re-directs more funding, for example on the transport system, to help build the local economy.

Participants were invited to add guiding principles if they wanted. In fact, two new guiding principles were created and one, D, was effectively replaced.

The new guiding principles were:

F: 'Community Co-operative Coproduction'

Services are still provided to businesses and residents but are not necessarily delivered directly by the council, but rather by co-operatives, with an emphasis on user involvement and empowerment. Services would be run on a not-for-profit basis, with any surplus being reinvested. This could reduce the cost of those services to the council and council taxpayers.

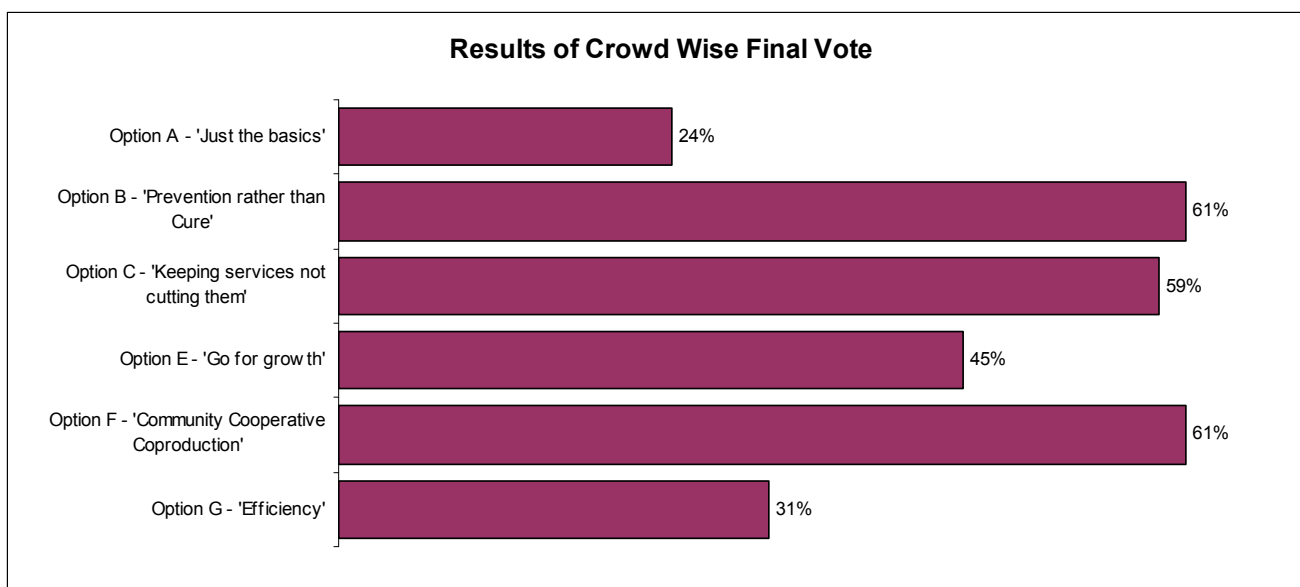
The council would play a supportive role in making sure that services were delivered in a way that best suits local communities and the city.

G: 'Focus on Efficiency'

The council is transparent about its spending and seeks to make efficiency savings wherever it can. Examples of where costs could be reduced include: lowering wages to staff, reducing council pensions through staff purchasing their own pensions, reducing spend on items such as stationery and raising revenue through hiring out council venues.

At the end of the event, after lively discussions about the relative merits of the different approaches, participants were asked to put the principles in order of preference. The results of the voting are expressed as percentages below. The percentage score for each principle represents the extent to which participants agreed that principle was a preferable one for the council to adopt.

Note that principle D was replaced by F so was not included in the final vote. The results are presented below.



The results suggest that the favoured principles the council should consider adopting when deciding on spending priorities and setting the budget are a mix of focusing on prevention rather than cure, working with communities and users to co-produce services whilst aiming to keep services rather than cut them.

The discussions on the night built on these principles. The overall guiding principles suggested from the event are therefore:

1. Keep services at roughly their current level, but seek to do them more efficiently.
2. Provide services in an enabling way, both through partnership with users and the voluntary sector, and through emphasising prevention.
3. Provide services on the basis of need, with the prevention of future problems part of that need.

Participants were not opposed to increases in council tax in order to keep services at the level they are currently, and participants realised that focusing on prevention rather than cure might lead to increases in council costs in the short-medium term. There was an appetite for the council to exploit other sources of revenue, aside from council tax.

Common themes

Drawing on all the budget consultation and engagement activities discussed in this paper there are common themes:

- Education and Children's Social Care are rated as top priorities and areas with most support for increasing funding.
- Refuse Collection, Recycling and Disposal, Housing, Public Safety and Leisure, Parks and Open Spaces are also relatively high priorities.
- Central Services, Council Tax Benefit, Planning and Economic Development and Highways and Traffic Management are consistently rated as lowest priority areas.
- The majority of respondents don't think funding for any service areas should be reduced, although efficiency savings should be sought.
- An increase in Council Tax would be acceptable to the majority, as long as reasons are clear and warranted. This could mean that the increase is necessary to maintain

services at the current level, to provide services for the most vulnerable, to make a noticeable improvement or as an “invest to save” strategy.

- Respondents are broadly in favour of the exploitation of other sources of council revenue, especially fines, but not parking charges.
- A focus on prevention rather than cure is desirable, even if this costs more in the short term to save in the longer term. The value of education to most respondents could be construed as part of this focus on prevention.
- Services should be provided on the basis of need, with a focus on vulnerable people, such as older people and those who are out of work – especially in light of changes to the welfare system. The relatively high priority rating for social services (children’s and adults) supports this.
- The council could act as more of an enabler, working with service users and community and neighbourhood groups to enable them to deliver what is needed, adopting a co-production model.
- Efficiency and transparency are critical.

Evaluation of Consultation Methods

The council is committed to continuing to improve engagement and consultation on its budget and the setting of its spending priorities. An evaluation of the various methods of engagement and consultation used to inform the 2013/14 budget setting process will be undertaken and reported through the cross-party Budget Review Group. The outcome of the evaluation and discussions with the Budget Review Group will be included in a report to Policy & Resources Committee at the outset of the 2014/15 budget setting process (usually at the July Policy & Resources meeting). This report will set out the principles and approach to be adopted for the next budget setting round, including proposed methods of consultation and engagement.