

## **UTTLESFORD VOICES**

### **SURVEY RESULTS, DETAILED FINDINGS**

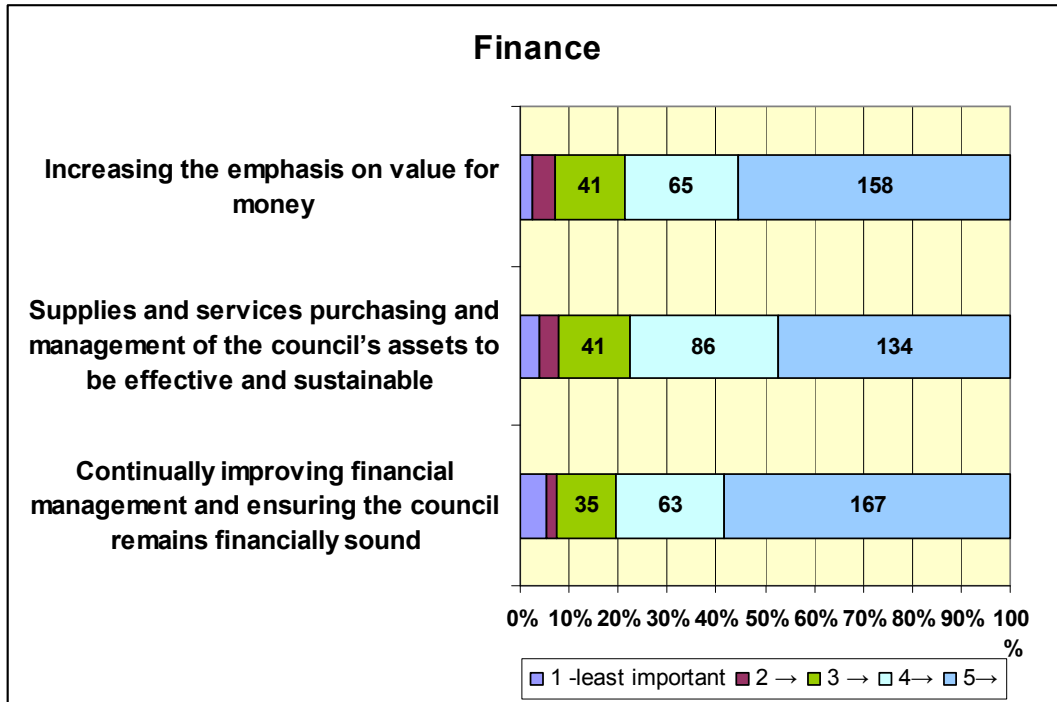
#### **1. Overview**

Each year Uttlesford District Council undertakes public consultation in preparation for the budget setting process. In order to develop the Corporate Plan which underpins future plans for the authority, officers need the views of those who work, live, visit and do business in the district. Panelists were asked to identify priority areas for improvement, to comment on the council's financial management, indicate a preferred level of council tax and to identify areas in which they thought the council should concentrate resources. Where applicable, results have been correlated against the relative returns from the 2008/9 Place Survey.

#### **2. Priority areas for improving services**

Panel members were asked to rate in order of importance elements of the council's priority areas for improving services as determined from the Uttlesford District Council Corporate Plan 2010-15.

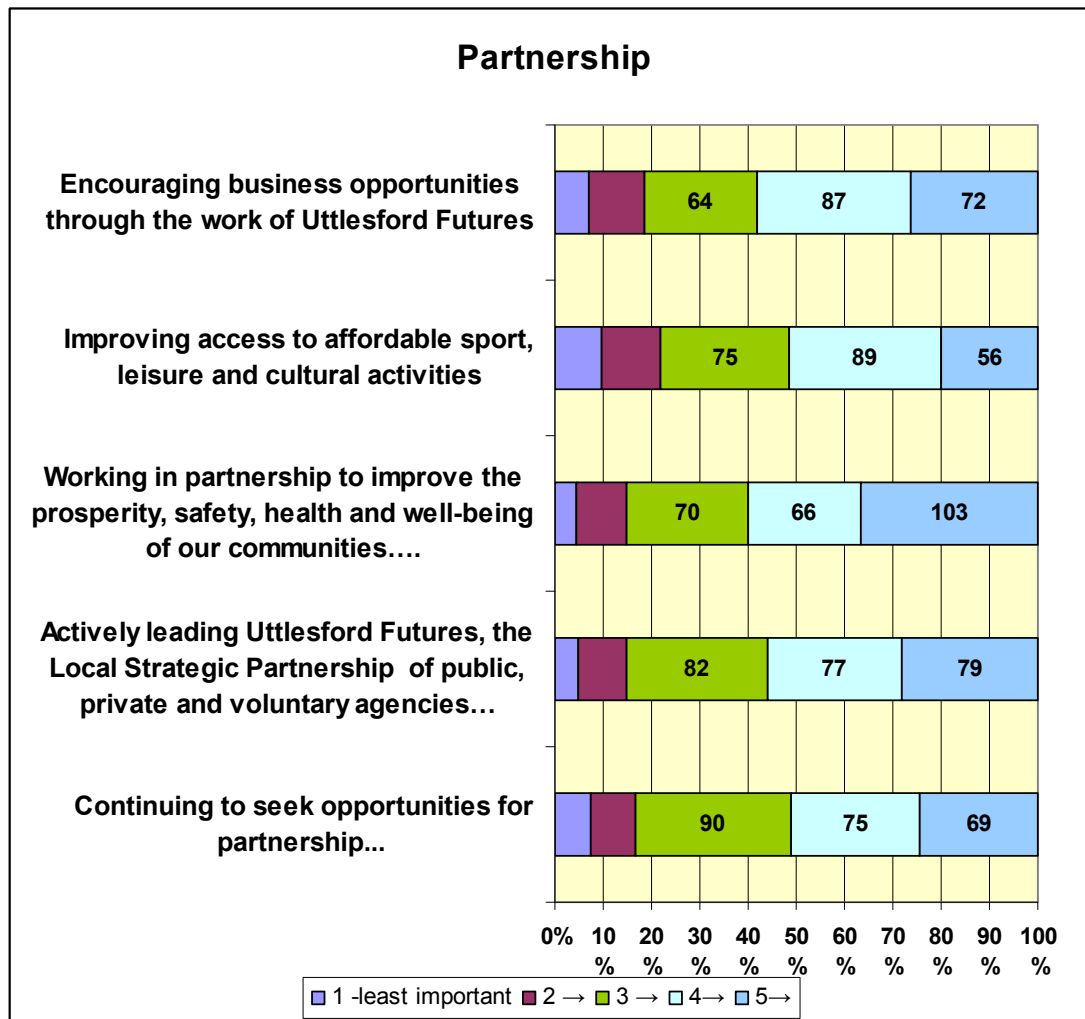
**Q2.1 Finance** Rated using a 5 point scoring system, 1 being the least important and 5 being the most important



Base 1330

All three priorities have been placed in the same chart. Well over half of respondents thought that continually improving financial management should be the most important priority (58.4%, in total 167) while 5.2% of respondents considered this to be the least important (in total, 15). Just under a half (47.3%, in total 134) indicated that they thought supplies and services were of importance to the financial good management of the council. On increasing the emphasis of value for money 55.6% thought (in total, 158) that this option was of high importance. However, between a third and half of respondents to each of the questions ticked boxes 2-4 to show that they considered the options to be neither very important nor unimportant.

**Q2.2 Partnerships** Rated using a 5 point scoring system, 1 being the least important and 5 being the most important



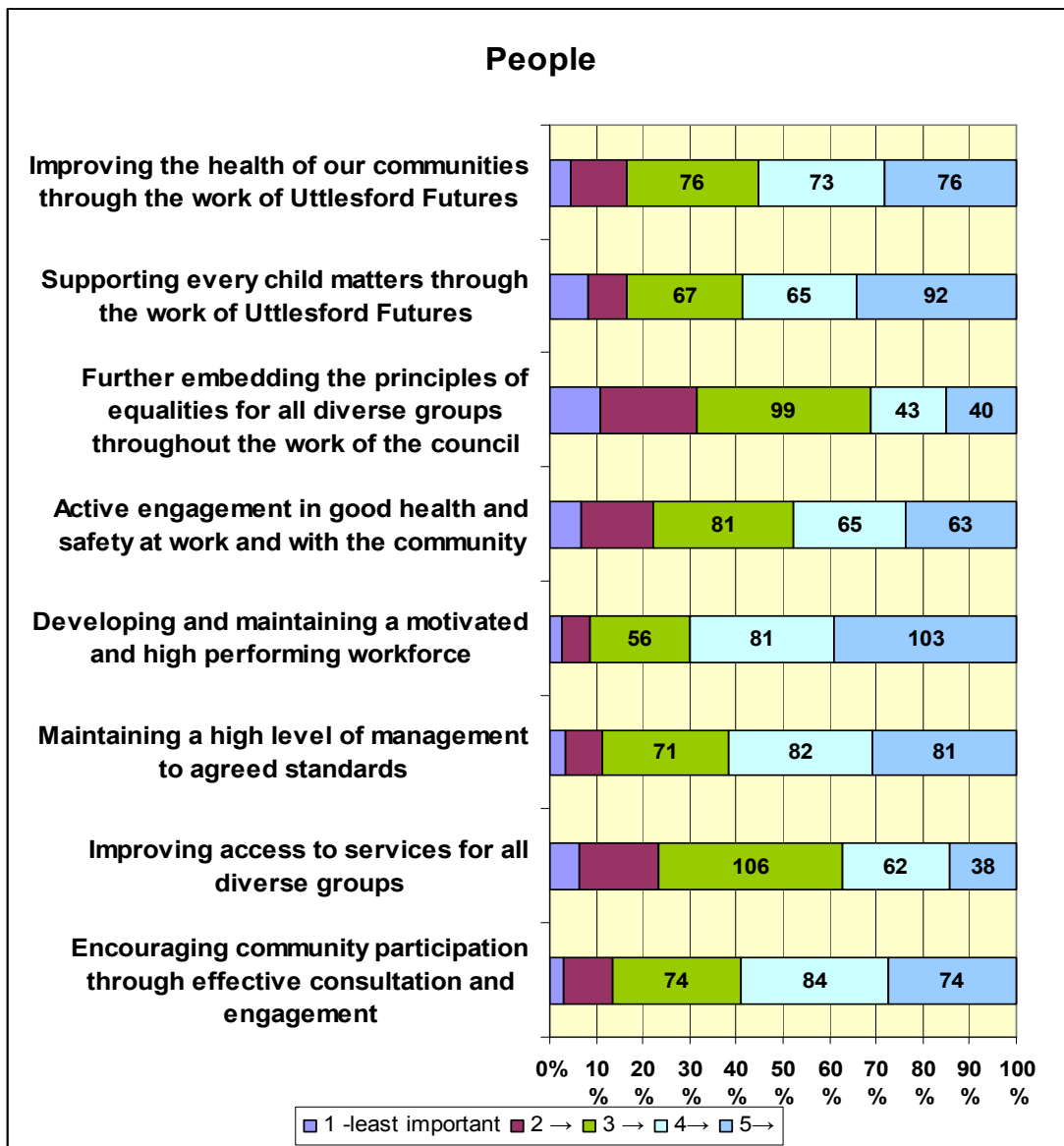
Base 1396

For ease of analysis all the partnership priorities have been grouped together into a single table instead of analysing each separately. This facilitates comparison and the identification of any emerging trend in relation to respondents' preference when it comes to gathering information about where they consider resources should be concentrated. Respondents were also asked to tick all options that applied, hence the higher base number.

The most highly rated option, as answered by respondents, was 'working in partnership to improve the prosperity, safety, health and well-being of our communities, particularly to meet the needs of people affected by the current

recession' with 36.7% (in total 103) considering this to be a highly important priority. 'Continuing to seek opportunities for partnership with other organizations' was considered to be important by just under a quarter (24.6%, in total 69) and 'actively leading Uttlesford Futures' was highly rated by 28.3% (in total 79). By comparison, 'improving access to affordable sport, leisure and cultural activities' was considered to be the least important overall with only 19.9%, (in total 56) rating it highly and 9.6% (in total 27) thinking it should be rated as a low priority.

**Q2.3 People** Rated using a 5 point scoring system, 1 being the least important and 5 being the most important.

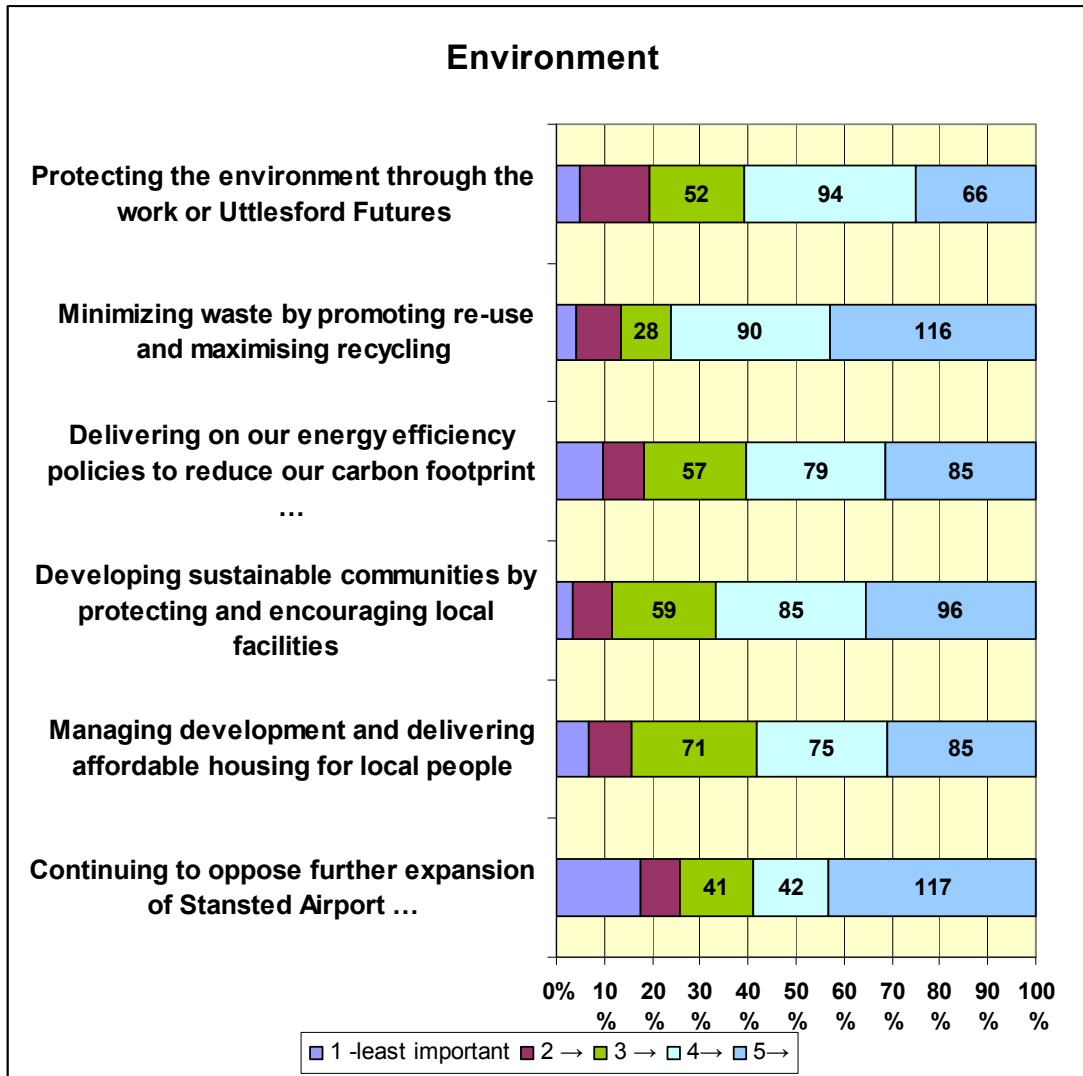


Base 2134

For ease of analysis all the people priorities have been grouped together into a single table instead of analysing each separately. This facilitates comparison and the identification of any emerging trend in relation to respondents' preference when it comes to gathering information about where they consider resources should be concentrated. Respondents were also asked to tick all options that applied, hence the higher base number.

The top two options as answered by respondents were 'developing and maintaining a motivated and high performing workforce' (39.2%, in total 103) and 'supporting every child matters through the work of Uttlesford Futures' (34.3% in total 92). However, 106 panel members (39.6%) said they had no opinion on 'improving access to services for all diverse groups' and only 40 (15%) thought that 'further embedding the principles of equalities for all diverse groups throughout the work of the council' should be considered important.

**Q2.4 Environment** Rated using a 5 point scoring system, 1 being the least important and 5 being the most important



Base 1619

Again, the reason for the high base number is because respondents were asked to rate all options using a scale of one to five with one representing the least important to five being their most important representing priority.

The top two environmental priorities when the two top scores were correlated are:

1 Continuing to oppose further expansion of Stansted Airport while noting its role in the regional local economy (43.3%, 117 in total)

2 Minimizing waste by promoting re-use and maximising recycling (43%, in total 116)

‘Developing sustainable communities’ and ‘improving environmental management’ were also considered to be of relative significance with 35.4% and 35.5% of panellists according them a ‘highly important rating’.

As illustrated on the table, the least popular option was that of ‘protecting the environment through the work of Uttlesford Futures’ with 25.1% (66 in total) stating that they thought that this should be of high priority.

**Q 2.5** Respondents were given the option to comment on any other priorities that they thought that the council should be concentrating on. A top line summary of the results is listed in the table below and a full list of responses can be found in Appendix 2.

<b>Major Themes</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Reducing costs	<p>“Reducing overheads and costs on administration and bureaucracy and improving value for money rather than increasing taxes</p> <p>“Reduce very expensive pensions provision and securing more of the tax paid for UDC rather than ECC</p> <p>“Not to waste money on unnecessary leafleting, advice sheets etc. To minimise government.</p>
Planning	<p>“Ensuring section 106 planning agreements are fully delivered on by developers</p> <p>“Encourage community participation for local planning and development issues</p> <p>“Wrap up the local development framework as a matter of urgency.</p>
Roads and transport	<p>“Filling the hundreds of potholes in the roads.</p> <p>“Car parking needs to be top priority if any new developments are to take place in this area.</p>
Waste and environment	<p>“Providing more glass recycling</p>

	centres “Promotion of cycling and initiation on public transport. “Regular inspection of locally used areas - the Flitch and surrounding woods and regular maintenance of footpaths there. “Supporting local farmers wherever possible and protecting the countryside and historic buildings
Young people	“Social services for young people “Something for young people to do to stop them hanging around.
Crime	“Need to see a policeman now and again on foot on the beat. “ Reducing anti-social behaviour and criminality “Managing petty thieves and vandals known in areas

## Financial management

**Q2.6** Panel members were asked to say whether they agreed or disagreed with a number of statements about the council’s current financial position and how this position is communicated to the public.

	Total	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Base	554	38	243	119	27	127
Uttlesford District Council provides enough information to residents	280	21	<b>151</b>	65	19	24



about its financial performance and management						
Uttlesford District Council provides better value for money now compared to a year ago	274	17	92	54	8	<b>103</b>

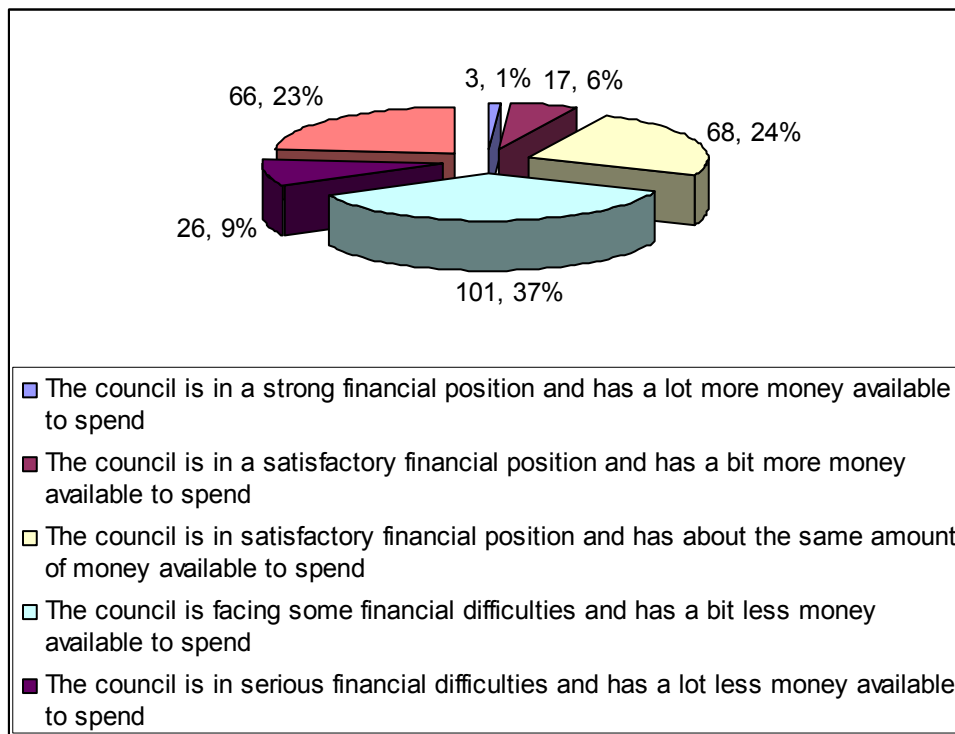
Headline view: 

The majority of panellists (53.9%, in total 151) tended to agree that the council provides enough information to residents about its financial performance and management as against those, 19 in number (6.8%), who considered that they were not provided with sufficient detail on the fiscal situation of the authority. Balancing the 'agrees' against the 'disagrees' produces a net score of 88 or a net 31.4% of those who expressed an opinion. In the 2008/9 Place Survey respondents were similarly asked to comment on how well informed they considered they were on the way their council tax had been spent. Then, 19% considered they were very well informed, 47% fairly well informed with 8% being not informed at all. This generated a net 35% score.

Just over one third conceded that value for money had been improved over the past year (33.6%, 92 in total) with 54 members (19.7%) tending to disagree. However, a relatively high proportion of respondents (37.6%, in total 103) indicated that they had no opinion on this statement. When asked in 2008 as part of the 2008/9 Place Survey (section 7.4), more than a third (36%) of respondents agreed that Uttlesford District Council provided value for money; however, there was a larger proportion of neutral responses with 39% opting to give no opinion. In the 2008/9 Place Survey respondents were asked to comment on how well informed they considered they were on the way their council tax had been spent.

**Q2.7** In order to identify how residents perceive the council's current financial situation, all panel members were asked to select one of five statements indicating how much money they felt the authority has to spend. Please note, that a sixth option for those with no opinion was also offered.

The majority (36.1%, in total 101) felt that the council is 'facing some financial difficulties and has a bit less money available to spend', whilst 24.3% (68 in total) considered the council to be in a 'satisfactory financial position and has about the same amount of money available to spend'. Just under a quarter of respondents (23.6%, in total 66) declined to express an opinion with only 3 (1.1%) saying they felt the council to be in a strong financial position and 26 (9.3%) thinking that the authority is in 'serious financial difficulties'.



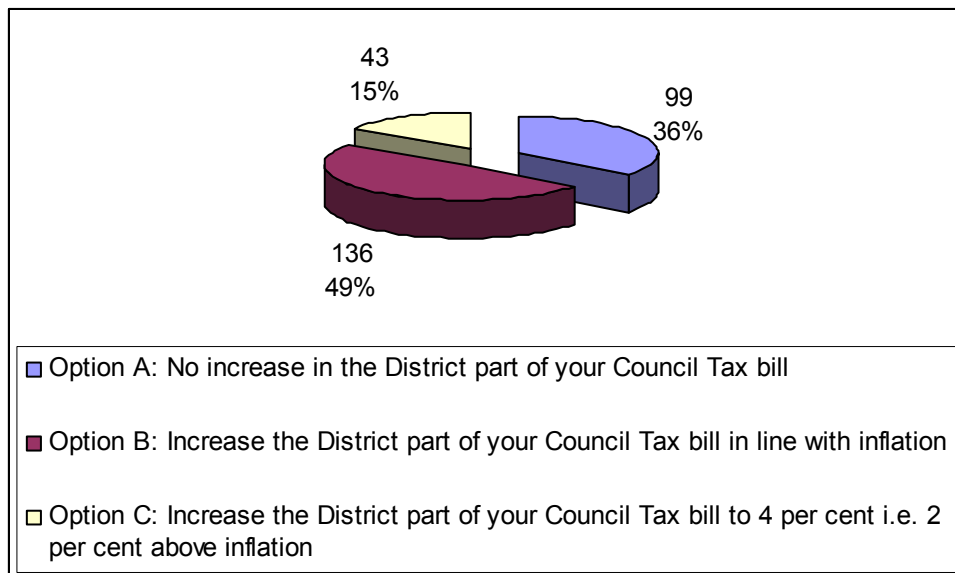
Base: 280

## Council tax increases

**Q2.8** Panellists were informed that each year the council needs to collect £49.2 million in council tax. For every £1 of council tax the District Council receives 10p. The remainder is shared between Essex County Council, Essex Police Authority, Essex Fire Authority and Parish and Town Councils.

The Government has proposed there should be a freeze on council tax for the 2011- 2012 tax year. However, the council may yet be given the authority to increase the district part of the council tax bill. Panel members were asked to consider the impact on services and select one of three options which represented the level of increase in the district part of their council tax bill they would be willing to support.

Option	Respondents number	Respondents %
Option A: No increase in the District part of your Council Tax bill	99	35.6%
Option B: Increase the District part of your Council Tax bill in line with inflation	136	48.9%
Option C: Increase the District part of your Council Tax bill to 4 per cent i.e. 2 per cent above inflation	43	15.5%



Base: 278

This question was formulated prior to the Government's announcement to freeze Council Tax in England for at least one year and seek to freeze it for a further year, in partnership with local authorities.

Of the three options, 48.9% panelists strongly indicated that they would favour an increase in the district part of the Council Tax bill in line with inflation over those (35.6%) who wanted no increase in the district part of the Council Tax bill. This represents a 13.3% majority. Only 15.5% wanted an increase in the district part of their Council Tax bill to 4 per cent i.e. 2 per cent above inflation.

## Services

**Q2.9** Panellists were asked to consider the services provided by the Council and select whether more money, the same amount of money, or less money should be spent on providing the service. They were not provided with any information on the specific expenditure made by the council on individual services but were expected to make their judgements on their general perceptions of service delivery.

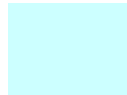
The results are summarized in the table below and indicate that residents consider that the authority should continue to maintain the same level of spend on the majority of its services. This includes dealing with abandoned vehicles, collecting business rates, council house repairs, the museum and planning enforcement. Benefits fraud was the only area indentified by panellists (55%, 153 in total) as requiring extra funding. By comparison, 56.2% (155 in total) felt less money should be spent on committee information and a narrow majority (45.8% - spend less against 44% maintain current level of expenditure) considered Council Housing Right to Buy should warrant a funding decrease. The website, though, was singled out as being overfunded by 61% (166 in total) and with only 2 people (0.7%) in favour of spending more on this resource, though, as for all services, they were not provided with information on the council's expenditure in this area.

	Spend less money on service	Maintain current level of spending	Spend more money on service	Conclusion
Abandoned vehicles	29.70 %	<b>68.50 %</b>	1.80%	Maintain current level of spending on service
Animal warden	32.60 %	<b>62.30 %</b>	5.10%	Maintain current level of spending on service
Benefits fraud	4.70%	40.30 %	<b>55.00 %</b>	<b>Spend more money on service</b>
Building control	15.80 %	<b>72.20 %</b>	12.10 %	Maintain current level of spending on service
Business rates	30.40 %	<b>65.20 %</b>	4.40%	Maintain current level of spending on service
Car parks and on-street parking enforcement	42.40 %	<b>48.20 %</b>	9.40%	Maintain current level of spending on service
Committee information - Public meetings and elected councillors	<b>56.20 %</b>	41.30 %	2.50%	<b>Spend less money on service</b>
Community Safety	17.40 %	<b>61.20 %</b>	21.40 %	Maintain current level of spending on service
Concessionary travel	27.60 %	<b>65.10 %</b>	7.40%	Maintain current level of spending on service
Council Housing - Adaptations	34.30 %	<b>56.50 %</b>	9.20%	Maintain current level of spending on service
Council Housing - Day centres	19.40 %	<b>67.80 %</b>	12.80 %	Maintain current level of spending on service
Council Housing - Homelessness	21.00 %	<b>63.20 %</b>	15.80 %	Maintain current level of spending on service
Council Housing - Housing benefits	45.10 %	<b>49.80 %</b>	5.10%	Maintain current level of spending on service

Council Housing - Rent	32.60 %	<b>63.70 %</b>	3.70%	Maintain current level of spending on service
Council Housing - Repairs	21.50 %	<b>70.80 %</b>	7.70%	Maintain current level of spending on service
Council Housing - Right to buy	<b>45.80 %</b>	44.00 %	10.30 %	<b>Spend less money on service</b>
Council Housing - Sheltered housing	17.30 %	<b>69.10 %</b>	13.60 %	Maintain current level of spending on service
Council Housing - Tenant Liaison	40.70 %	<b>56.40 %</b>	2.90%	Maintain current level of spending on service
Council tax - Benefits and enquiries	39.00 %	<b>56.10 %</b>	4.80%	Maintain current level of spending on service
Elections and electoral register	41.70 %	<b>56.20 %</b>	2.20%	Maintain current level of spending on service
Environmental Health - air/water/noise complaints	18.40 %	<b>66.50 %</b>	15.10 %	Maintain current level of spending on service
Flytipping	9.00%	<b>57.40 %</b>	33.60 %	Maintain current level of spending on service
Land charges	34.10 %	<b>64.40 %</b>	1.50%	Maintain current level of spending on service

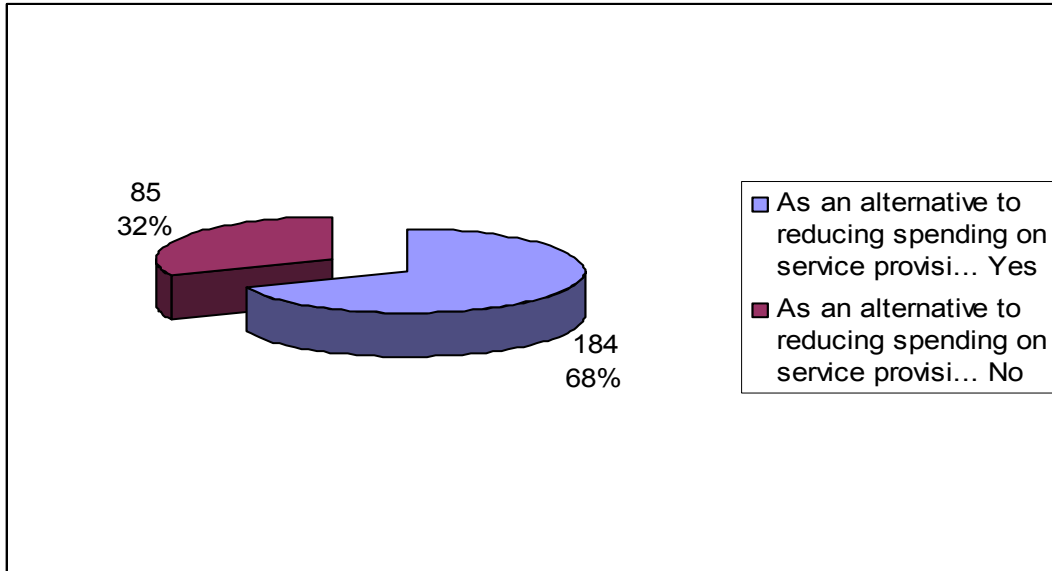
Leisure centres	23.60 %	<b>62.20</b> %	14.20 %	Maintain current level of spending on service
Licensing (e.g. taxis, premises)	32.20 %	<b>66.30</b> %	1.50%	Maintain current level of spending on service
Littering	8.40%	<b>66.90</b> %	24.70 %	Maintain current level of spending on service
Museum	31.00 %	<b>60.60</b> %	8.30%	Maintain current level of spending on service
Pest control	14.10 %	<b>76.90</b> %	9.00%	Maintain current level of spending on service
Planning advice	29.90 %	<b>66.50</b> %	3.60%	Maintain current level of spending on service
Planning applications	29.20 %	<b>68.60</b> %	2.20%	Maintain current level of spending on service
Planning enforcement	20.80 %	<b>58.00</b> %	21.20 %	Maintain current level of spending on service
Septic tank emptying	19.20 %	<b>75.70</b> %	5.10%	Maintain current level of spending on service
Waste and recycling	8.70%	<b>62.80</b> %	28.50 %	Maintain current level of spending on service
Website	<b>61.00</b> %	38.20 %	0.70%	<b>Spend less money on service</b>

Headline view:



Base 264-278

**Q2.10** Following on from the corporate priority identified in Q2.2 and as an alternative to reducing spending on service provision, panellists were asked if they would be happy for services to be delivered by another organization, or another council, or by Uttlesford District Council in conjunction with another council.



Base 269

The majority view of respondents was hugely in favour of the council pursuing partnership options with 68.4% (a total of 184) saying 'yes', as against only 31.6% (85 in total) saying 'no'. This represents a majority view of 36.8%.

**Q2.11** With reference to Council Tax and Q2.8, panellists were asked to comment on whether they thought the council has the right level of tax relative to other councils and if they felt that this provided value for money. Just over half, (54.4%, 153 in total) agreed that council tax is set at the right level, although a comparatively high number, 21% (59 in total) considered that they had no opinion on this matter. Similarly, 54% (150 in total) agreed that the council provided good value for the tax, although, 24.1% (67 in total) tended to disagree with this statement and 2.5% (7 in total) strongly disagreed.

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion	Base
Uttlesford District Council has the right level of council tax, relative to other councils	4.3%	54.4%	18.1%	2.1%	21.0%	281
Uttlesford District Council provides good value given the tax residents pay	6.1%	54.0%	24.1%	2.5%	13.3%	278



## Value for money

**Q2.12** In the current financial year council tax from residents contributes £4.9m towards council services, which works out at approximately £150 per Uttlesford District household. The questionnaire reproduced a table which summarized at an upper tier the total amount the council spends on each service set against the contribution made by each resident in the district through council tax. It was noted that not all the funding for these services comes from council tax as other public sector organisations, such as the Police and Essex County Council, also have some responsibility for funding some of these services.

When asked to consider whether a selection of front line services represented good value for money based on the information provided, panel members gave an overwhelming endorsement for refuse collection and recycling with 80.1% (229 in total) considering that the service represents good value for money. Similarly, 67.5% (193 in total) thought street cleaning and litter collection provided good value as did 62.5% (177 in total) in respect of public health. The Museum and Community Services however, still considered to represent good value, had a less clear endorsement with 46% and 40.2% approval respectively.

Members, elections and democracy, though, was not considered to represent very good value by a more than 2:1 majority (138 to 62). Planning and Building Control was also considered to represent less than good value by 39.4% (113 in total) as against 91 (31.7%) who thought that this service does represent good value.

	I think it represents good value for money	I do not think it represents good value for money	Don't know	Conclusion
Planning and Building control (advice, applications and enforcement)	31.7%	<b>39.4%</b>	28.9%	<b>Not good value</b>
Refuse collection and recycling	<b>80.1%</b>	17.5%	2.4%	<b>Good value</b>
Members, elections and democracy	22.3%	<b>49.6%</b>	28.1%	<b>Not good value</b>
Sport and leisure	<b>53.4%</b>	28.8%	17.8%	<b>Good value</b>
Public health (food safety inspection, pest control, animal warden, noise, air and water pollution, fly-tipping, abandoned vehicles)	<b>62.5%</b>	18.4%	19.1%	<b>Good value</b>
Housing benefit and council tax benefit	<b>36.7%</b>	32.2%	31.1%	<b>Good value</b>
Street cleaning and litter	<b>67.5%</b>	27.3%	5.2%	<b>Good value</b>
Saffron Walden Museum	<b>46.0%</b>	28.4%	25.6%	<b>Good value</b>
Community services (community safety, funding grants)	<b>40.2%</b>	22.8%	37.0%	<b>Good value</b>
Public conveniences	<b>52.4%</b>	30.1%	17.5%	<b>Good value</b>

Headline view:



Base 281-287