

APPENDIX H

YOUR SAY ON HEREFORDSHIRE COUNCIL'S BUDGET FOR 2021/2022: KEY FINDINGS

Version 1.1

Herefordshire Council Intelligence Unit

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CONTENTS

The consultation.....	3
Results.....	3
Satisfaction with council services (Q1)	3
The council's budget and savings programme (Q2 to Q6).....	5
Proposed savings by directorate (Q2 & Q3)	5
Impact of previous savings reductions (Q4).....	6
Ways to make services more affordable to run (Q5).....	7
Highest priorities for investment (Q6)	8
Council Tax and social care precept (Q7 & Q8)	10
Potential schemes to support vulnerable residents (Q9 to Q12)	10
General comments about the budget and council savings plan (Q13)	11
Local area and the council (Q14 to Q20).....	11



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The consultation

The formal public consultation on Herefordshire Council's budget for 2021/22 was carried out using an online questionnaire published on the council's website from 18 December 2020 to 10 January 2021. There were two separate sets of questions: one for residents and one for businesses and organisations, although several questions were common to both. The consultation was promoted via the council's social media channels, and email invitations were also sent out to Herefordshire businesses/organisations to complete the survey online.

A total of 265 responses were received to the resident's questionnaire, a similar response to last year. There was an equal split of male and female respondents. The age profile shows a slight under representation of working age (16-64 years) respondents and a marked bias from residents from Council Tax band D – H was also observed.

There were 33 responses to the organisational questionnaire: 29 local businesses and 4 voluntary or community sector organisations, compared to only three responses from organisations last year. Note that because the number of responses to the organisational survey is small, it is not appropriate to present the results as percentages. It's also difficult to draw conclusions from such a small number of responses.

This summary is structured around the residents' survey, and the responses to the organisational survey are included at the relevant points. They are marked with this symbol:



Results

Satisfaction with council services (Q1)

The first section of the questionnaire asked about satisfaction with services that Herefordshire Council provides. Different services were listed for residents and for businesses/organisations, and respondents were asked to consider services that they have used themselves in the last year.

The graph (figure 1) below is ordered by the number of people who gave an opinion^[1] on the service, with the most used services at the top. It shows three broad groupings of services in terms of usage.

Note that the percentages quoted in the text below are calculated out of only those people who had used the service, so don't match those on the chart (which shows the proportions of all respondents, to illustrate the wide variation in usage).

^[1] i.e. respondents who said that they used the services, and excluding those who answered 'don't know'.

Overall, there were five services for which at least half of users who gave an opinion¹ said they were satisfied with: waste and recycling (75%), schools (61%), parks and open spaces (58%), care for older people (58%), and public health (50%).

- Four services stand out as being used by most, and within these there is a clear distinction in satisfaction levels between 'waste and recycling' (75% of users satisfied/very satisfied) and 'parks and open space' (58%), compared to 'highways and roads' (19%).
- Amongst the lesser used services, satisfaction with services for older people is high (58% of users) – but less so for children's social services (31%) and care for physically disabled and those with learning difficulties (44%).
- Satisfaction was lowest for housing advice services but it should be noted that this was the least used service and had the highest proportion of don't knows.

Dissatisfaction was markedly higher for highways and roads than any other service (72%), followed by three other services where dissatisfaction was higher than 40%: local bus services (47%), planning (45%) and car parking (42%).

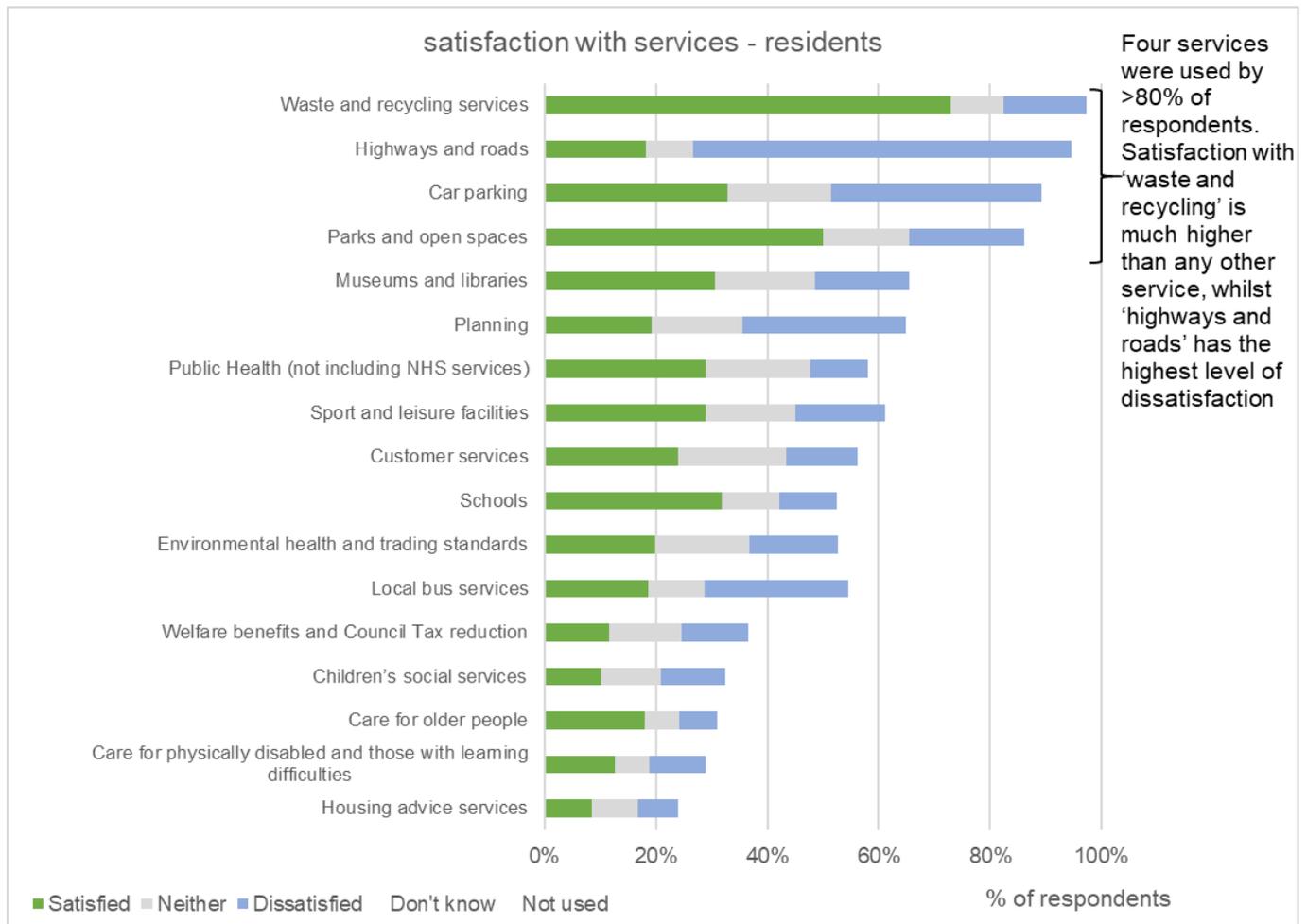


There appeared to be a broadly similar pattern in terms of the services with the highest and lowest satisfaction levels. Two services had been used by more organisations than the rest, and of these there was a strong level of dissatisfaction with 'maintenance of roads, footpaths and cycle paths', whilst the majority were satisfied with 'street cleansing and lighting'.



Organisational users of the services who gave an opinion were also relatively satisfied with 'health and safety', 'business support resource' and 'commercial waste'. Conversely, the other services with the highest levels of dissatisfaction amongst organisational users were 'sustainable transport', 'parking', 'planning' and 'contracts and tenders'.

Figure 1: Residents' satisfaction with council services (ordered by usage)



The council's budget and savings programme (Q2 to Q6)

This section asked for views on the council's proposed plan of savings for the next year and for the next 5-10 years. Also respondents were asked to select their three highest priorities of investments which form the County Plan commitments. The questions in this section were common for both residents and organisations.

Proposed savings by directorate (Q2 & Q3)

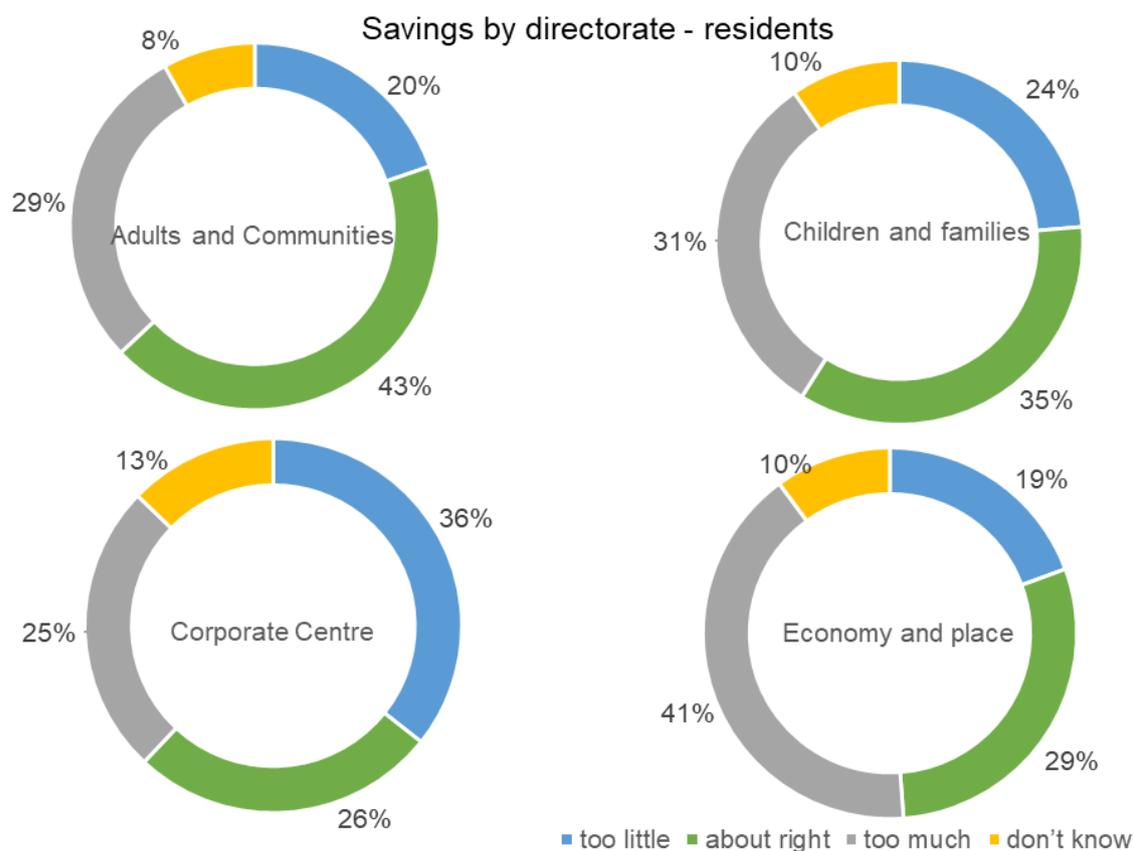
See figure 2: in summary, residents indicated that the proposed savings for:

- Adults and Communities were 'about right' (43% of respondents)
- Children and Families are either 'about right' (35%) or 'too much' (31%)
- Economy and Place are 'too much' (41%)
- Corporate centre aren't enough (36%)



Responses to the organisation survey were broadly similar, although the most common response for Economy and Place was that the level of savings was 'about right'.

Figure 2: Opinion of the proposed amount of savings by directorate



Around 100 residents provided a comment on the proposed savings by directorate. The most common theme (about one third of comments) were complaints about the council’s performance and service, including being inefficient and not providing value for money. On the other hand, the next most common theme (about a fifth) expressed concern about the size of the proposed cuts and the impact that they may have on services.

Impact of previous savings reductions (Q4)

Of the 119 comments answering this question, three common themes emerged:

- Almost half mentioned transport infrastructure – for example the state of the roads, or complaints about the bypass not being built.
- Another common theme was about the running of the council – for example not providing value for money / wasting resources / being badly run.
- Conversely, a number of comments raised concern about the impact of previous and future savings on services for children, families and vulnerable people.

Ways to make services more affordable to run (Q5)

Figure 3 shows the options given in order of the number of resident respondents who said they strongly agreed or tended to agree. Two stood out as being most favoured:

- making more efficient use of council assets such as land and buildings (88%)
- changing working practices to make better use of technology and more efficient ways of working (87%)

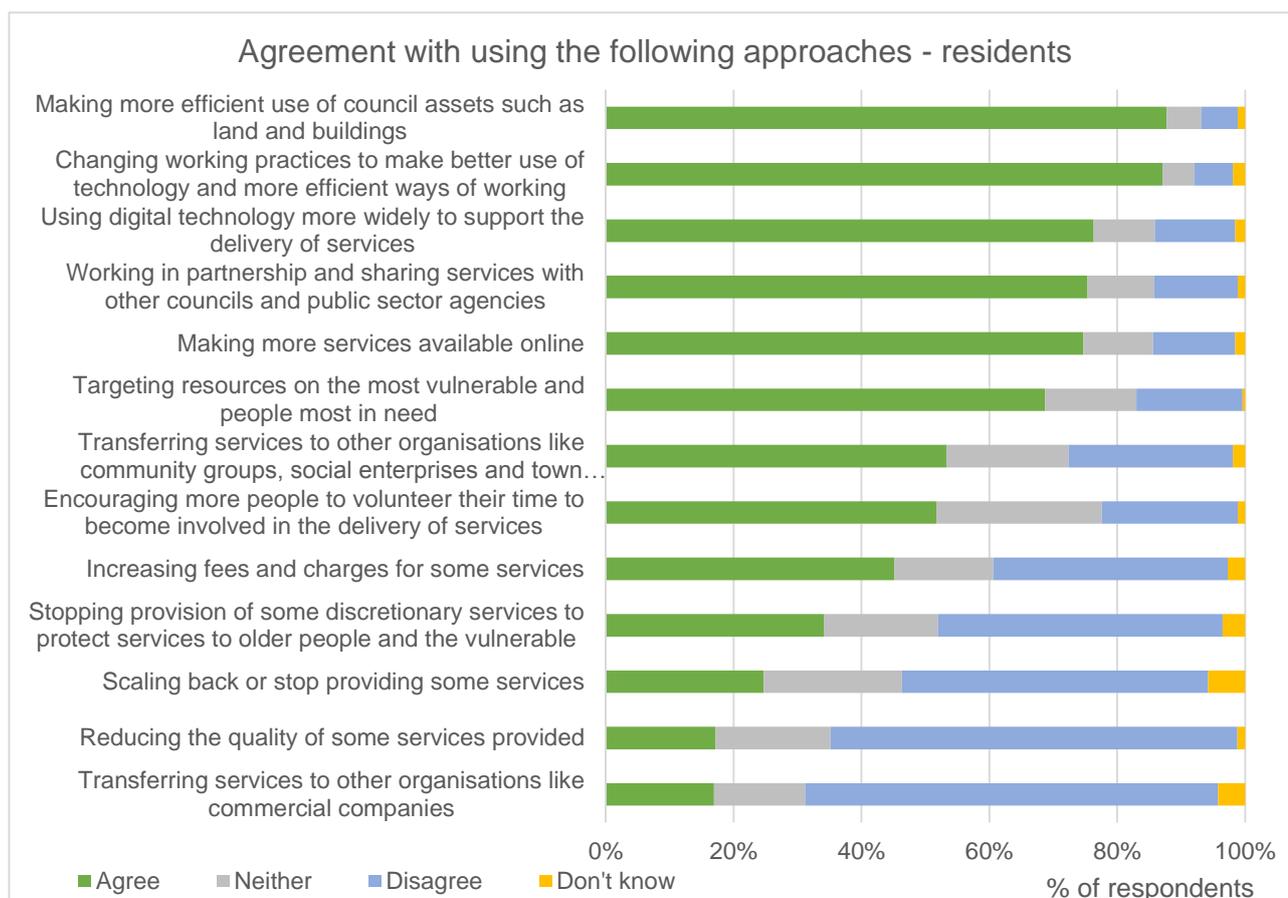
Those with the highest levels of disapproval were:

- transferring services to other organisations like commercial companies (65% strongly/tend to disagree)
- reducing the quality of some services provided (64%).



Organisation responses were broadly similar with regard to the most and least favoured, with just a slight variation in the order.

Figure 3: Degree of support for different options for savings (ordered by level of agreement)



Highest priorities for investment (Q6)

This question asked respondents to rank their top three priorities from the list in figure 4. The results are based on a weighted average of those responses.

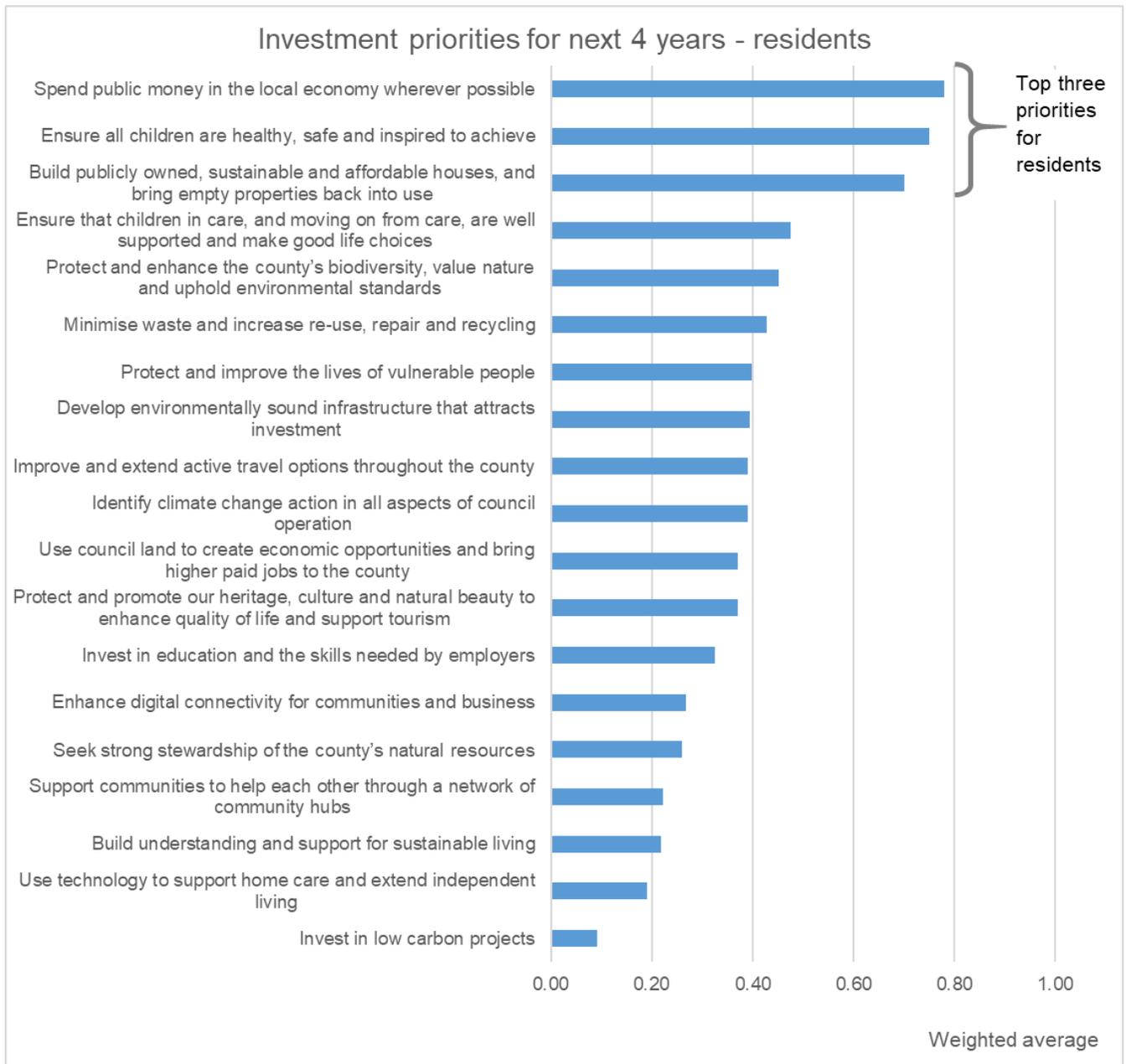
There were three clear priorities for respondents to the residents' survey:

- Spend public money in the local economy wherever possible
- Ensure all children are healthy, safe and inspired to achieve
- Build publicly owned, sustainable and affordable houses

In respect of organisational responses, although numbers were again too small to draw meaningful conclusions, two priorities did stand out from the rest: Spend public money in the local economy wherever possible and Build publicly owned, sustainable and affordable houses.

Investment in low carbon projects was the lowest priority for both residents and organisations, but it should be noted that this priority would be implicit in some of the other, higher priority choices.

Figure 4: Investment priorities order by weighted score – residents



Council Tax and social care precept (Q7 & Q8)

In this section, residents were asked about their preference on the level of Council Tax increase that the council should consider for 2021/22: increase Council Tax by 4.99%, or by 3.99%. A further question asked about support for a larger increase if the government were to allow it.

- 71% of respondents supported an increase of either 3.99% or 4.99%, with notably more in favour of the higher increase (41%). There wasn't an option of a lower increase, but 27% of respondents said that they preferred neither option.
- If the government were to relax the current thresholds and allow a bigger increase, a clear majority of respondents (65%) were opposed to the council increasing Council Tax by more than 4.99%.

Potential schemes to support vulnerable residents (Q9 to Q12)

Residents were asked if they would be prepared to pay more Council Tax to help households on low incomes. They were also asked if they would support a voluntary scheme that would allow them to contribute towards community schemes, for example to help create the best start in life for children and young people.

- Whilst 41% of respondents indicated that they would be willing to pay more Council Tax if the increase was used to help households on low incomes, 59% said they wouldn't.
- A majority (61%) would support a Herefordshire Community Contribution Scheme, with respondents almost equally divided as to whether they would consider making a contribution to such a scheme: 51% yes, 49% no. A large majority of residents who indicated that they would support the scheme would also consider making a contribution (79%).
- The majority of people who would be prepared to pay more Council Tax to support households on low incomes would also support a Community Contribution Scheme, and would consider paying into it (69%). However, it is also interesting to note that a significant proportion of people who were not willing to pay more Council Tax towards helping people on low incomes, would consider paying into a community contribution scheme (49% of 156 people).

Of the 103 people who indicated they would not be prepared to contribute and also provided a comment, over half expressed a view that they didn't feel it was for them to be making these kinds of contributions. For example, they thought that it should be left to individual charities or the government, or that they could not afford to contribute. The next biggest theme (about a third) was that they were not confident that the council would spend the money wisely.

Notably, almost one third of those who would be prepared to contribute raised trust issues, raising concerns around whether the council would spend the money appropriately or as the contributor intended. A third also indicated that they would want some kind of control or choice as to how the money was used, or reassurance that it would only be used for purposes they approved of. More

positively, over half the people who said they would contribute felt it was their responsibility, or moral duty to make such a contribution.

General comments about the budget and council savings plan (Q13)

The most common themes amongst the 144 answers to this question were:

- 69 respondents expressed dissatisfaction with or mistrust of the council.
- 29 indicated that they either can't afford any more increases in Council Tax, raised concerns about the size of the proposed increases or thought more funding should come from central government.
- 24 respondents thought the council should be doing more to support the most vulnerable and/or the environment.

Local area and the council (Q14 to Q20)

The final section asked about respondents' views of the council generally and their local area.

Satisfaction with local area (Q14 to Q16)

- Over three quarters of residents (76%) were satisfied (fairly or very) with their local area as a place to live.
- However, almost half (46%) felt that Herefordshire has become a worse place to live in the past two years; 36% thought it was the same and 15% that it has become a better place.

Of the 33 comments from people who thought things had got better, most were positive comments about the council and/or the new administration.

Amongst the people who thought things had got worse, three main themes emerged:

- Complaints about the state of the roads, congestion, the bypass cancellation or parking issues (67 comments).
- Dissatisfaction with the way the council has been running things (53).
- Comments about a worsening of the environment in its widest sense – a view that the county has become more run-down, for example concerns about empty shops, litter, lack of facilities, crime or anti-social behaviour.

General opinions of the council (Q17 to Q20)

- Responses were fairly evenly split about the way the council runs things: 43% dissatisfied and 41% satisfied. However, of those who were dissatisfied, almost half (20% of total) were very dissatisfied, whereas 6% of respondents were very satisfied.
- 23% of residents agreed that the council provides value for money whereas 50% thought that it doesn't, half of whom strongly disagreed.
- There was a strong association between satisfaction and perceived value for money, almost a fifth of people who were fairly satisfied with the way the council runs things tended to

disagree that it provides value for money.



The organisational response to both questions was broadly similar, but slightly more positive with regard to perceived value for money (about a third agreeing).

Responses to the questions about communication and influencing decisions are shown in figure 5 (Residents):

- A fairly significant minority (42%) agreed that the council keeps them informed.
- There was an equal split on being kept informed about proposals for change (40% agreed, 39% disagreed).
- However, there was much less agreement about being able to influence decisions affecting their local area; 20% agreed and 63% disagreed.



Organisations tended to disagree to a greater extent than residents with all three of these statements.

- The majority (69%) of respondents felt that the council doesn't act on the concerns of local residents with a quarter thinking it doesn't at all. A third of respondents believed it does.



Organisations shared a similar view.

Figure 5: Communication and influencing decisions

