

# BUDGET CONSULTATIONS 2006

## Results from a series of Public Meetings

November 2006

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## **BUDGET CONSULTATION RESULTS 2006**

### **REPORT OF RESULTS FROM PUBLIC MEETINGS**

During the latter part of November 2006, three public events were held to allow the public a chance to talk about the County Council budget for the financial year 2007/2008. The main purpose of each event was to ascertain from the public which services, if any, should be looked at closely to find savings and or reduce if budget constraints required hard choices to be made. Letters were sent out to some members of the People's Voice Panel asking them to attend, but the event was open to all.

At the events, the public were invited to participate in an electronic voting session, where people could find out more about the Council's budget and constraints in an interactive quiz. The public were also able to show their opinion on the importance of various services during a "Target Game". The Chief Executive, Dr Keith Robinson, and the Leader of the Council, Cllr Jane Scott, were also at the meetings to discuss with people any concerns they may have about the Corporate Plan and budget etc, and also at the end of the event in a "Question & Answer" session. A short presentation by the County Treasurer was also made.

### **KNOWLEDGE ON THE COUNTY COUNCIL'S BUDGET**

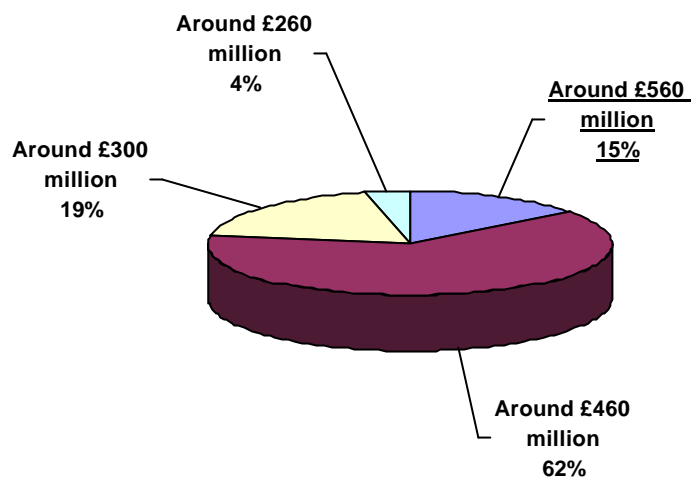
The public's knowledge of the County Councils budget was as follows. The results were, taken from the three public meetings and represent a consensus of ideas for each table of participants. In total, there were 5 tables over the four meetings each with between 5 and 7 individuals. Approximately 30 people attended the events and the locations were as follows:

- 16<sup>th</sup> November 2006 – Malmesbury Town Hall
- 27<sup>th</sup> November 2006 – Devizes Corn Exchange
- 30<sup>th</sup> November 2006 – Salisbury City Hall

The following ten questions were completed by people anonymously using electronic Voting Handsets.

In the following graphs the correct answer is shown underlined.

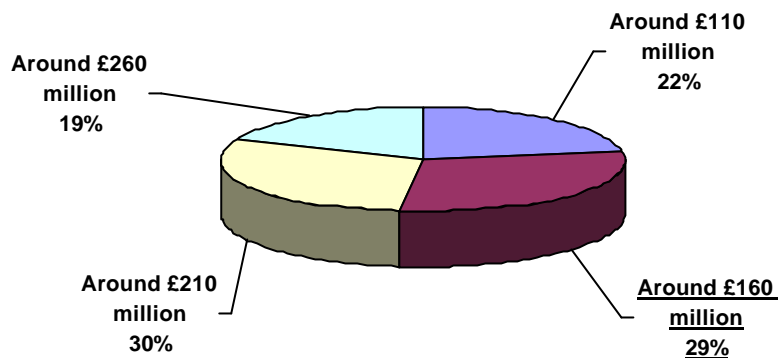
Q1. How much do you think the County Council gross budget was for 2006/2007?



Answer; 14.8% of people correctly identified that the budget was £560 million. Well over 60% of the people thought it was much less at £460m.

Option	Q1. How much do you think the County Council gross budget was for 2006/2007?	Total	Percent	Malmesbury	Devizes	Salisbury
1	£560m	4	14.8%	0	3	1
2	£460m	17	63.0%	5	6	6
3	£300m	5	18.5%	1	2	2
4	£260m	1	3.7%	1	0	0
		<b>27</b>				

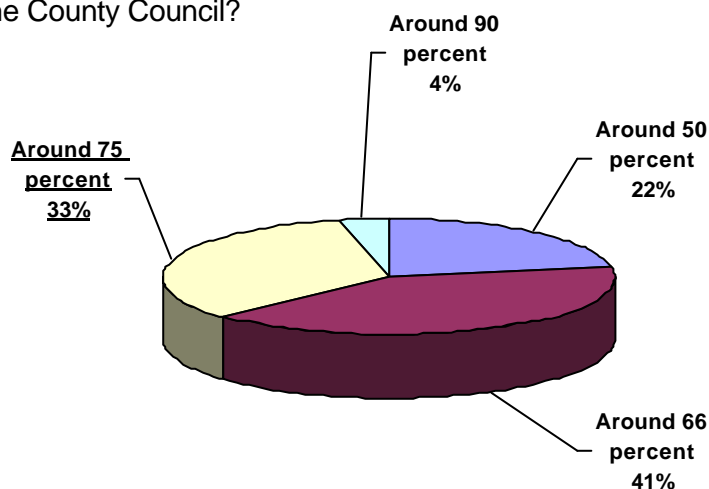
Q2. Only part of the County Council's budget comes from the council tax. We spend £557 m each year on services, how much do you think comes from council tax payers?



Answer; 29.6% correctly identified that the percentage of the Councils budget raised by local Council Tax was £160 million. 48.1% of people thought that it was much higher at £210 million or £260 million.

Option	Q2. Only part of the County Council's budget comes from the council tax. We spend £557 m each year on services, how much do you think comes from council tax payers?	Total	Percent	Malmesbury	Devizes	Salisbury
1	£110m	6	22.2%	1	2	3
2	£160m	8	29.6%	3	3	2
3	£210m	8	29.6%	1	5	2
4	£260m	5	18.5%	2	1	2
		<b>27</b>				

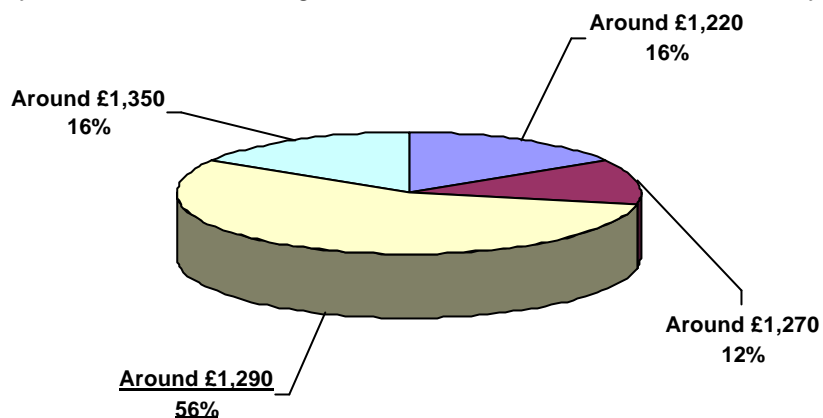
Q3. The average household in Wiltshire pays £1,272 in 2006/07. How much of this goes to the County Council?



Answer; A third of the people, 33.3%, correctly identified the answer as 75%. However, the majority of respondents thought it was lower with 40.7% of people voting for 66% and 22.2% thinking it was only 50%.

Option	Q3. The average household in Wiltshire pays £1,272 in 2006/07. How much of this goes to the County Council?	Total	Percent	Malmesbury	Devizes	Salisbury
1	50%	6	22.2%	1	3	2
2	66%	11	40.7%	1	5	5
3	75%	9	33.3%	5	3	1
4	90%	1	3.7%	0	0	1
		<b>27</b>				

Q4. What do you think is the average household council tax bill for a county area?

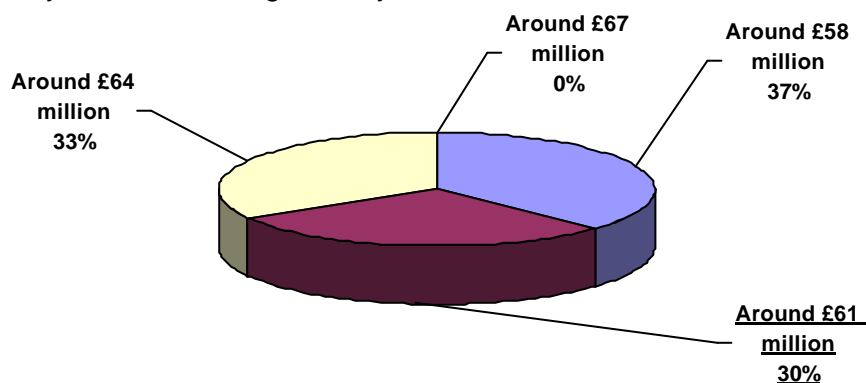


Answer; Over half the number of people, 56%, correctly voted that the average council tax bill was about £1,290.

Option	Q4. What do you think is the average household council tax bill for a county area?	Total	Percent	Malmesbury	Devizes	Salisbury
1	1220	4	16.0%	0	1	3
2	1270	3	12.0%	0	1	2
3	1290	14	56.0%	5	5	4
4	1350	4	16.0%	0	4	0
		<b>25*</b>				

\* Due to an error with two of the voting handsets in Malmesbury on question 4, only 25 votes were considered valid.

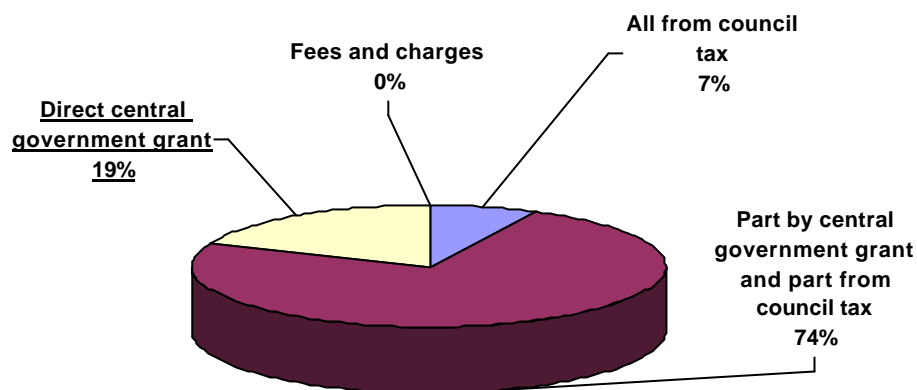
Q5. Last year the County Council got £60 million in central government grant. How much do you think we will get next year?



Answer; Just under a third of respondents, 29.6%, correctly identified the answer as around £61 million. The results were split roughly a third between £58m, £61m and £64m. Nobody thought that it was as high as £67 million.

Option	Q5. Last year the County Council got £60 million in central government grant. How much do you think we will get next year?	Total	Percent	Malmesbury	Devizes	Salisbury
1	£58m	10	37.0%	3	5	2
2	£61m	8	29.6%	3	2	3
3	£64m	9	33.3%	1	4	4
4	£67m	0	0.0%	0	0	0
		<b>27</b>				

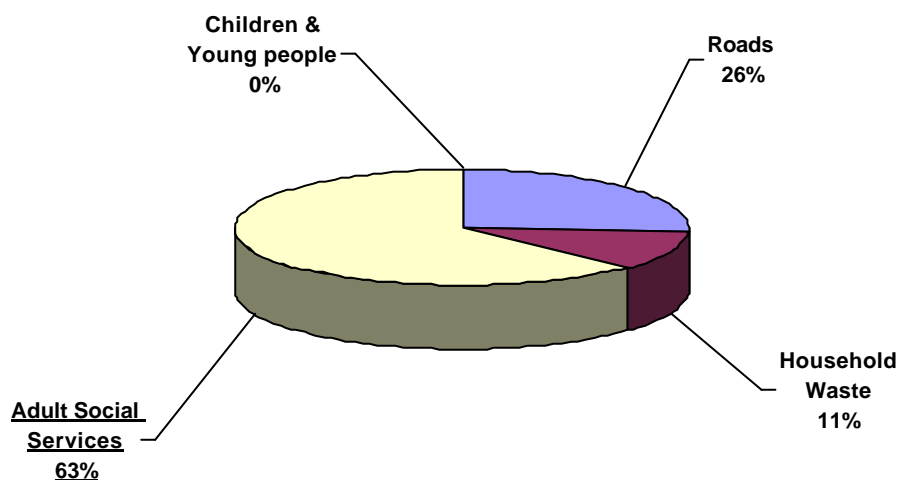
Q6. How are schools funded?



Answer; 18.5% of people correctly identified that schools are funded by a direct government grant called the Direct Schools Grant.

Option	Q6. How are schools funded?	Total	Percent	Malmesbury	Devizes	Salisbury
1	All from council tax	2	7.4%	1	1	0
2	Part by central government grant and part from council tax	20	74.1%	6	7	7
3	Direct central government grant	5	18.5%	0	3	2
4	Fees and charges	0	0.0%	0	0	0
		27				

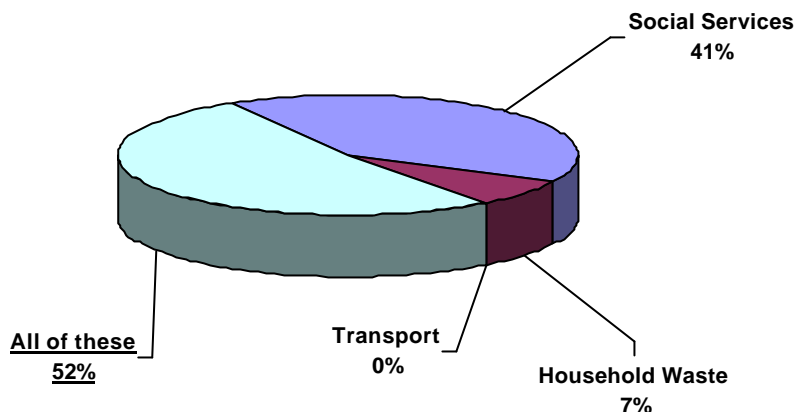
Q7. What is the highest spending service excluding schools?



Answer; 63% of respondents correctly identified that Adult Social Services is the highest spending service after schools.

Option	Q7. What is the highest spending service excluding schools?	Total	Percent	Malmesbury	Devizes	Salisbury
1	Roads	7	25.9%	1	3	3
2	Household Waste	3	11.1%	2	1	0
3	Adult Social Services	17	63.0%	4	7	6
4	Children & Young people	0	0.0%	0	0	0
		27				

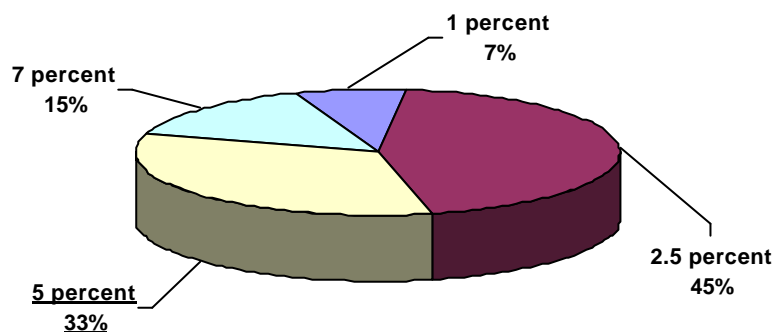
Q8. Where do you think we have pressures for extra spending in our budget?



Answer; Over half the number of people, 51.9%, correctly answered that all of the mentioned service areas are under pressure for extra spending in the budget.

Option	Q8. Where do you think we have pressures for extra spending in our budget?	Total	Percent	Malmesbury	Devizes	Salisbury
1	Social Services	11	40.7%	1	6	4
2	Household Waste	2	7.4%	0	0	2
3	Passenger Transport	0	0.0%	0	0	0
4	All of these	14	51.9%	6	5	3
		<b>27</b>				

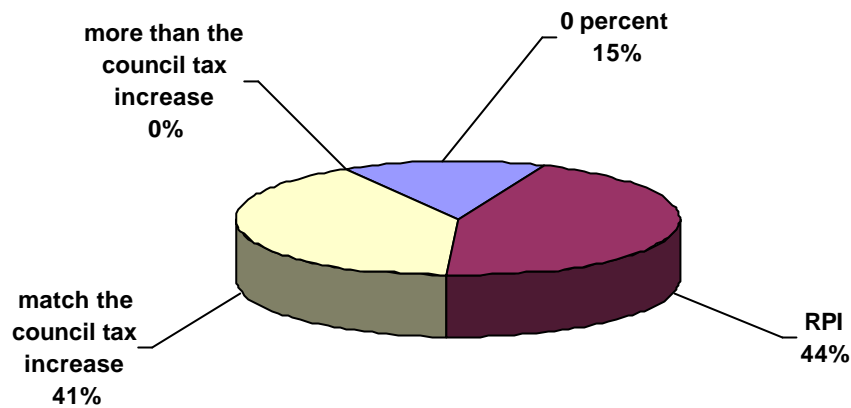
Q9. What level of efficiency savings has the Council achieved over the last 2 years?



Answer; About a third of respondents, 33.3%, correctly identified the answer of 5% efficiency savings of which 2.5% of that is "cashable" savings.

Option	Q9. What level of efficiency savings has the Council achieved over the last 2 years?	Total	Percent	Malmesbury	Devizes	Salisbury
1	1%	2	7.4%	0	0	2
2	2.5%	12	44.4%	3	5	4
3	5%	9	33.3%	3	3	3
4	7%	4	14.8%	1	3	0
		<b>27</b>				

Q10. In the current year the council earned £31 million in fees and charges, 80% of which comes from Adult Social Care contributions. Should the charges be increased by:



Answer; Somewhat of a trick question the answer is up to the person what they believe. Interestingly, however, was that the majority of the people thought that it should be raised to the RPI, 44.4%, or to match the council tax increase, 40.7%.

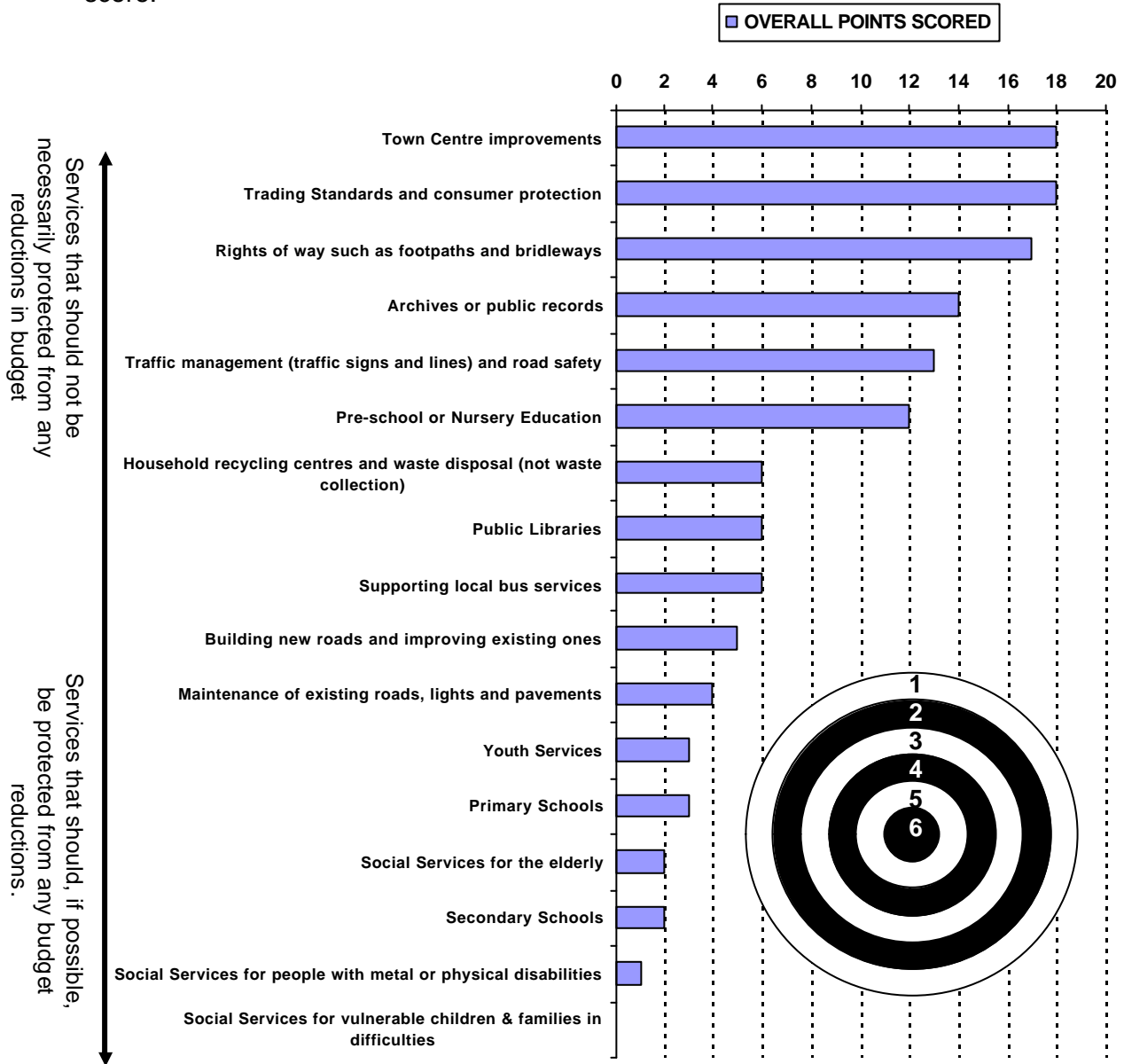
Q10. In the current year the council earned £31 million in fees and charges, 80% of which comes from Adult Social Care contributions. Should the charges be increased by:		Total	Percent	Malmesbury	Devizes	Salisbury
Option 1	0%	4	14.8%	0	2	2
Option 2	RPI	12	44.4%	3	4	5
Option 3	match the council tax increase	11	40.7%	4	5	2
Option 4	more than the council tax increase	0	0.0%	0	0	0
		<b>27</b>				

Overall the majority of the people who took part during the electronic voting session gave the correct answers to the quiz and after the final question people had a short discussion on the results.



## SERVICE PRIORITIES

A "Target Game" was played by each table where individuals were each able to choose 5 service areas from a list of 17 services to reflect those services they felt were the least important and therefore should not necessarily be protected from any budgetary cuts. By placing the service of their choice on to the target or by moving a service closer to the centre (within a set of rules administered by a facilitator at each table) a clear pattern of the lowest service priorities emerged. By scoring each service dependent where it ended up on the target (6 points for a "bulls eye" 1 point for the outer ring and no points if the service was not chosen by anyone) a total score could be given to each service area which was then added up to show an overall score.

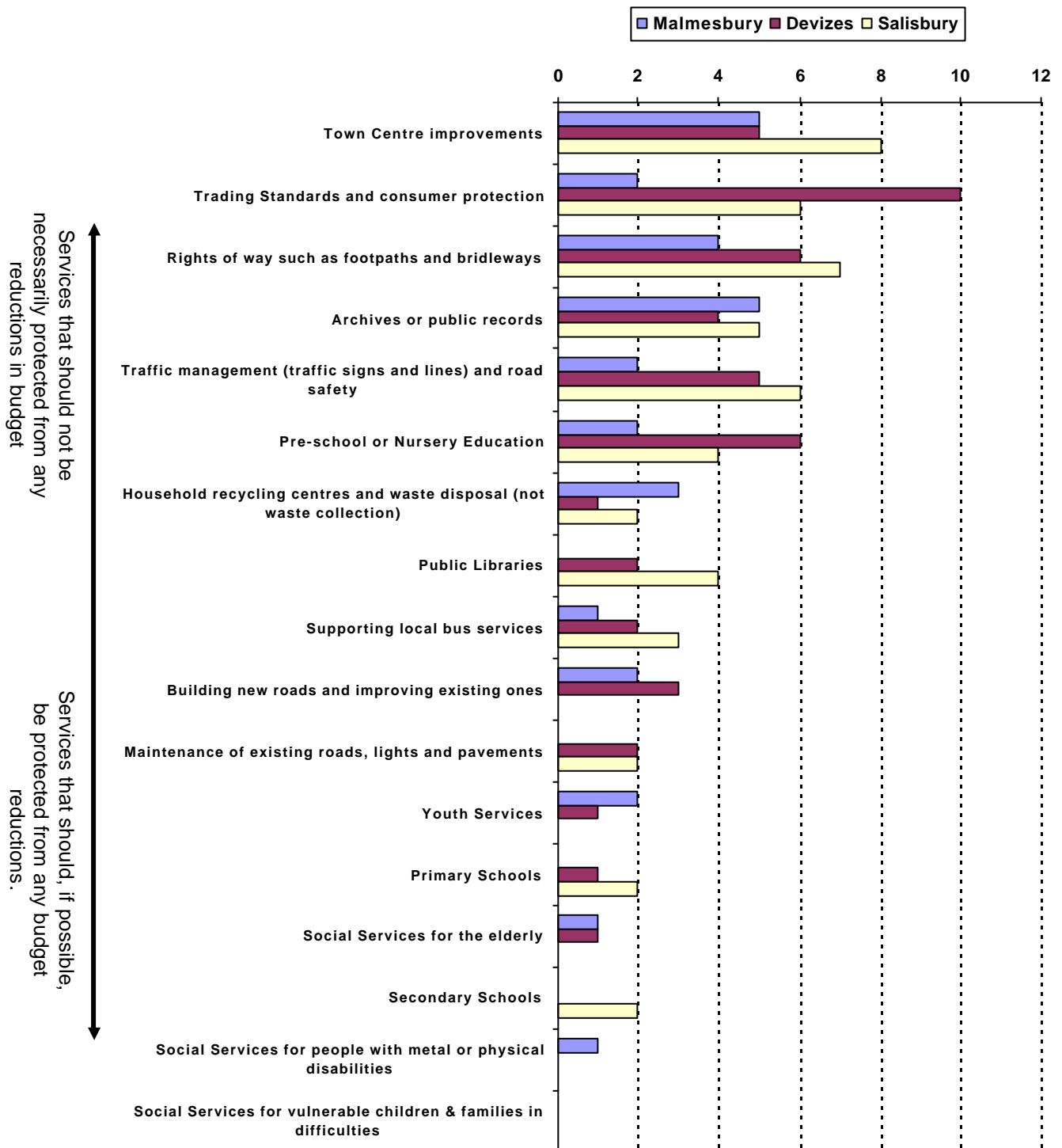


### THOSE AREAS THAT COULD BE REDUCED

The overall result shows that there is a clear pattern with Town Centre improvements, and Trading Standards least favoured, and Social Services for vulnerable children & families being the most favoured, and therefore ones that should be protected from any budgetary reductions if possible. The results are a clear steer for the Council and show when services should not be subject to any reductions and also where reductions are more acceptable.

There were some District wide variations which are shown below but the overall pattern and certainly the top 5 lowest priority services remained pretty consistent. Caution must be applied to the broken down analysis as the sizes of each of the meetings did vary and therefore more points would have been available to use at certain venues – but as an indicative pattern, the results are interesting.

### VENUE ANALYSIS PRIORITY SCORES



The results of this survey should be seen as a way of supporting decision makers in the context of understanding the needs, opinions and priorities of people living in Wiltshire on County Council services, as well as which areas people are prepared to have budget restrictions placed.

For more information on the People's Voice Panel or for information on how to join visit our website at [www.intelligencenetwork.org](http://www.intelligencenetwork.org) or [www.wiltshire.gov.uk](http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk).