

# Budget Consultations 08/09

## Overall Report

November 2007

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# BUDGET CONSULTATION RESULTS 2007

## REPORT OF RESULTS FROM PUBLIC MEETINGS

During the latter part of November 2007, five public events were held to allow the public a chance to talk about the County Council budget for the financial year 2008/2009. The main purpose of each event was to ascertain from the public which services, if any, should be treated as a high priority in budget decisions. Letters were sent out to a sample of members of the People's Voice Panel asking them to attend, but the event was open to all and was publicised on the Council's website and in Libraries and in council offices.

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. A presentation by the Chief Financial Officer was made to inform the public of the detail behind the council's budget and to introduce some of the key factors that members take into account when setting the budget. 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 budget. A Director representing a service department also attended.

## KNOWLEDGE ON THE COUNTY COUNCIL'S BUDGET

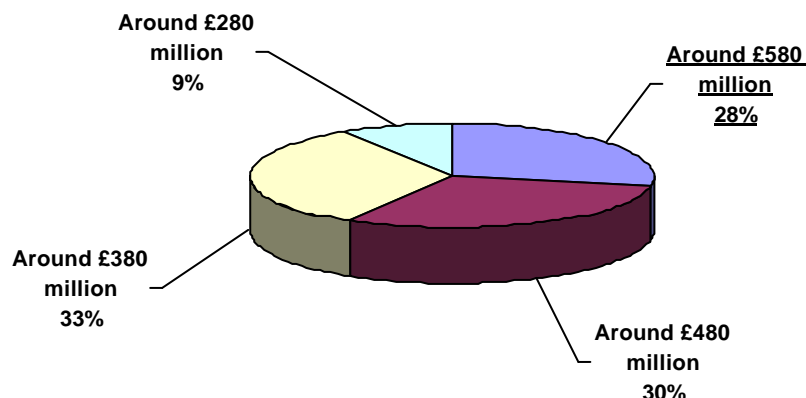
The public's knowledge of the County Council's budget was as follows. The results were taken from the five public meetings and represent a consensus of ideas for each table of participants. In total, there were 16 tables over the five meetings each with between 5 and 7 individuals. Approximately 80 people attended the events and the locations were as follows:

- 1<sup>st</sup> November 2007 – Chippenham Town Hall
- 6<sup>th</sup> November 2007 – Salisbury City Hall
- 8<sup>th</sup> November 2007 – Marlborough Town Hall
- 15<sup>th</sup> November 2007 – Trowbridge St James Hall
- 19<sup>th</sup> November 2007 – Devizes Corn Exchange

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

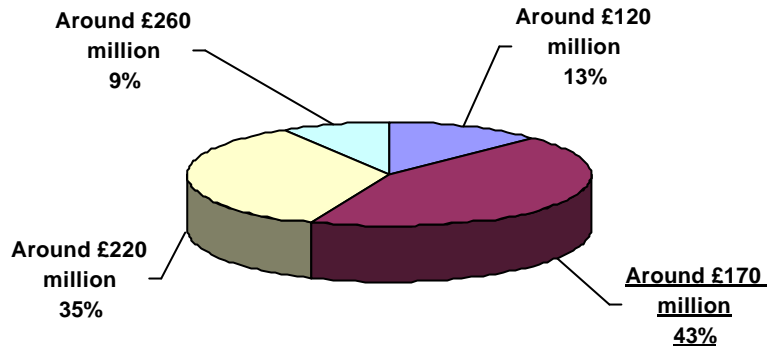
***In the following graphs, the correct answer is shown underlined.***

Q1. How much do you think the County Council gross budget was for 2007/2008?



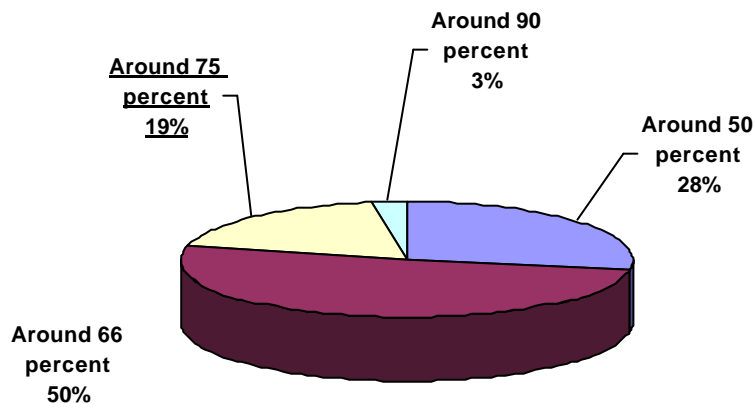
Answer; 28% of people correctly identified that the budget was £580 million, but the vast majority thought it was lower.

Q2. Only part of the County Council's budget comes from the council tax. We spend £583 million each year on services, how much do you think comes from council tax payers?



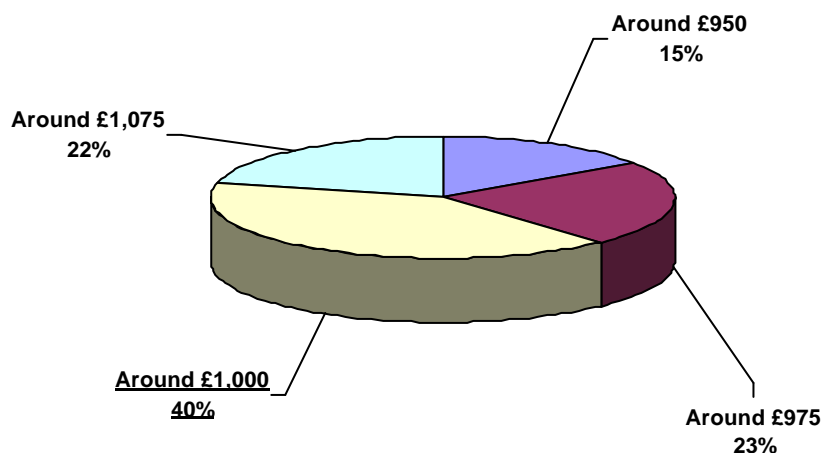
Answer; 43% correctly identified that the percentage of the Councils budget raised by local Council Tax was £170 million. 44% of people thought that it was much higher at £220 million or £260 million.

Q3. The average household in Wiltshire pays £1,298 in 2007/08. How much of this goes to the County Council?



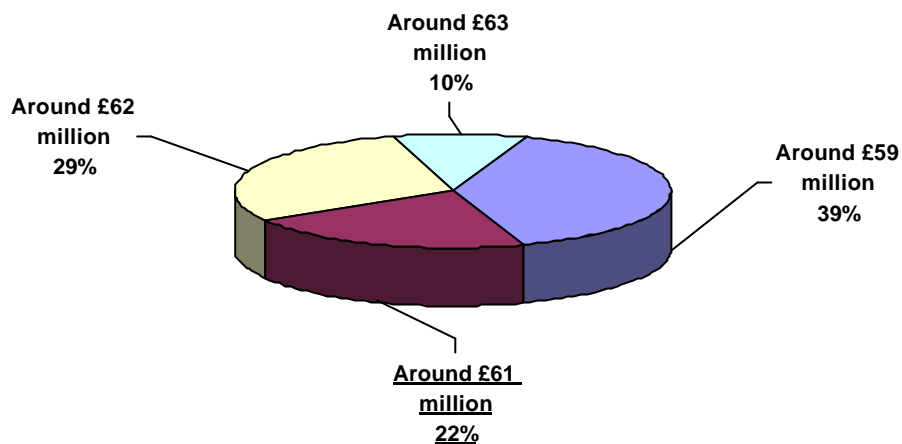
Answer; Only 1 in 5 people, 19%, correctly identified the answer as 75%. The majority of respondents thought it was lower with half of people voting for 66% as the percentage that they thought goes to the County Council.

Q4. The Council tax bill for Wiltshire County Council was £974. What do you think is the average household County Council element of council tax?



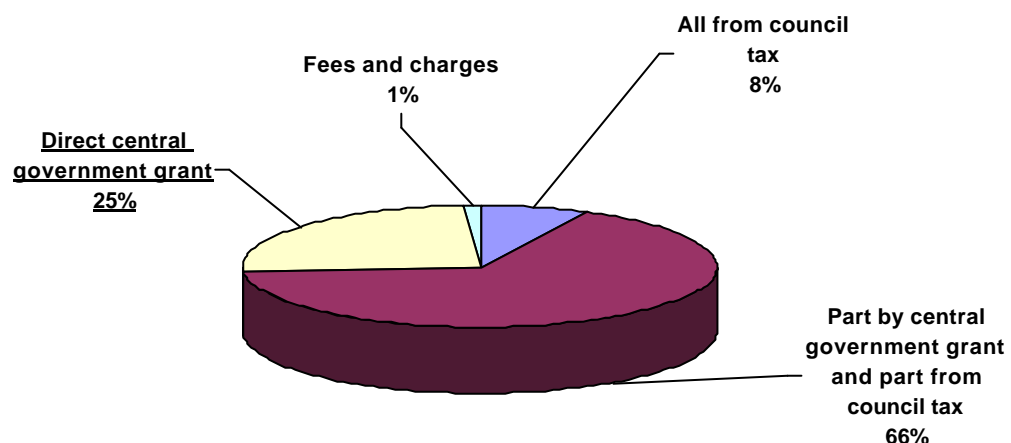
Answer; While the most popular answer was shown to be correct with 40% of people voting that the average council tax bill for all County Councils was about £1,000 per household it was interesting that the majority had no idea where Wiltshire stood in relation to other Counties.

Q5. Last year the County Council got £61 million in non specific central government grant. How much do you think we will get next year?



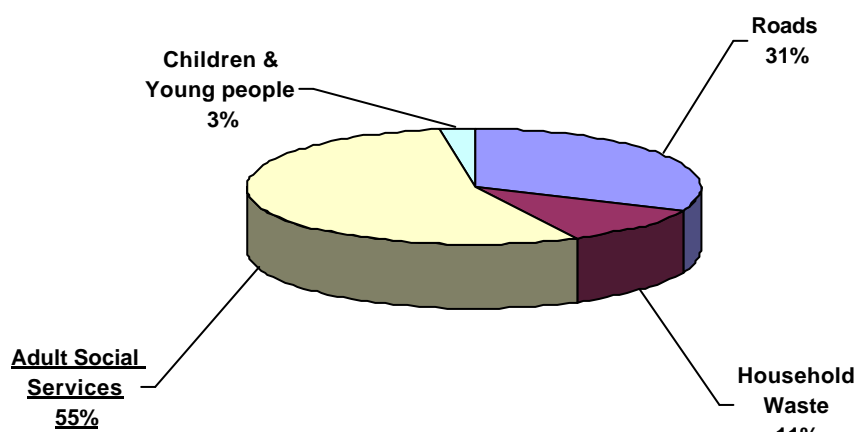
Answer; Just over a fifth of respondents, 22%, correctly identified the answer as around £61 million. The results showed that the most popular choice was for the amount to be less than this year reflecting perhaps a less than optimistic outlook.

Q6. How are schools funded?



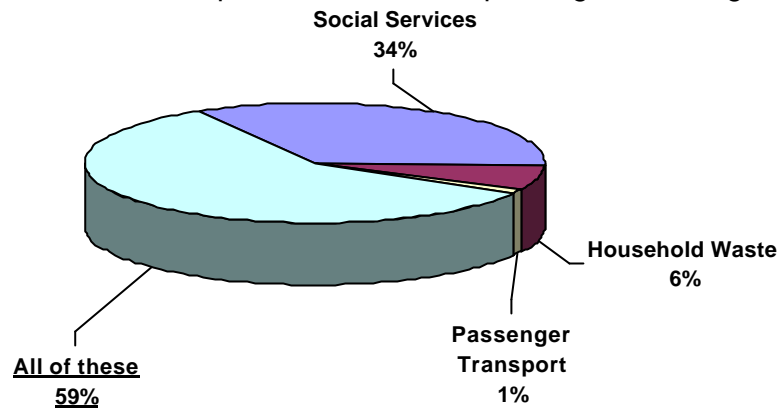
Answer; 25% of people correctly identified that schools are funded by a direct government grant called the Direct Schools Grant.

Q7. What is the highest spending service excluding schools?



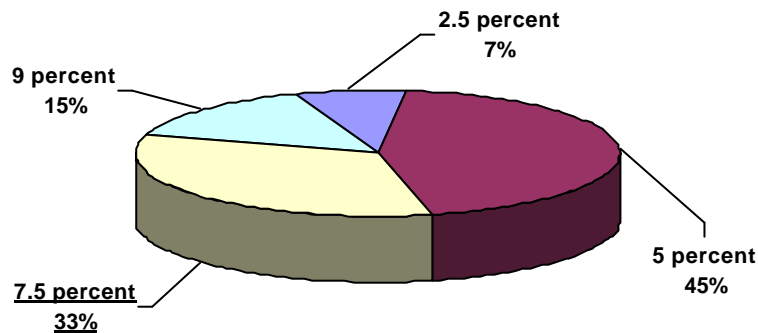
Answer; 55% of respondents correctly identified that Adult Social Services is the highest spending service after schools.

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



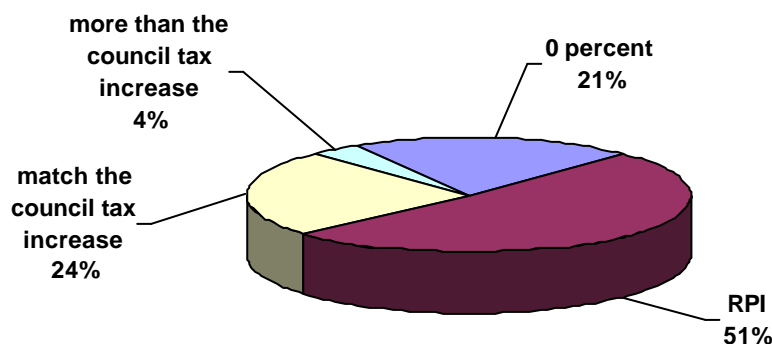
Answer; Over half the number of people, 59%, correctly answered that all of the mentioned service areas are under pressure for extra spending in the budget. Social Services was the second most popular category reflecting perhaps the difficult year for this service area in 2006/7.

Q9. What level of efficiency savings has the Council achieved over the last 3 years?



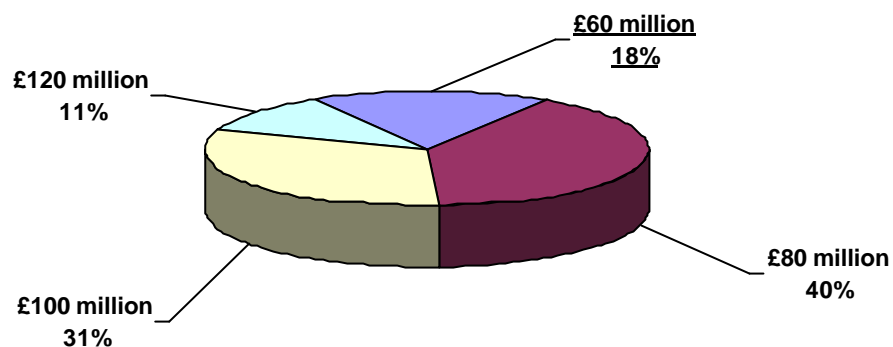
Answer; About a third of respondents, 33.3%, correctly identified the answer of 7.5% efficiency savings over the last three years.

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.....?



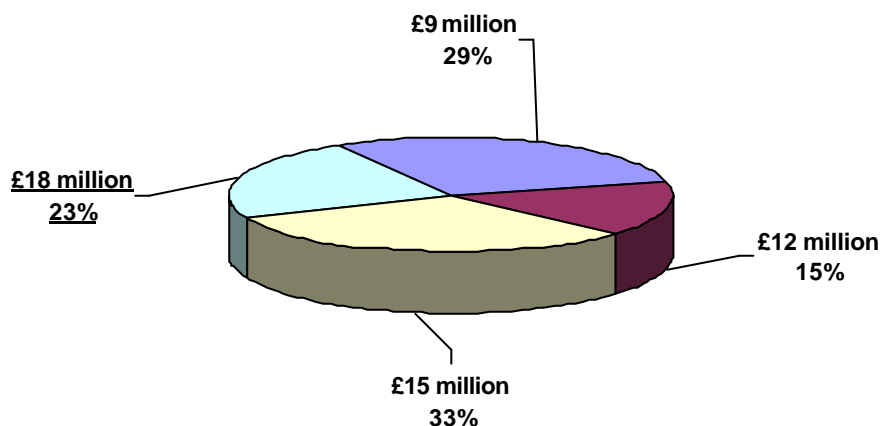
Answer; This was a difficult question asking people to vote for changes to a charging system that would have a direct effect on a number of Wiltshire residents. There was no correct answer to this as it would form one of many difficult decisions that members will have to take when setting the budget. Interestingly, the majority of the people thought that it should be raised to the RPI, (51% voted this way), or to match the council tax increase, (24% voted this way). There were not many who thought that charges should go up beyond the rate of any Council tax increase (taken that headline RPI seems to be lower than this in general terms).

Q11. The County Council gross budget is £580 million. How much do you think the average budget is for each of the Wiltshire districts ?



Answer; Only a small number (18%) correctly identified the size of the districts budget with the majority (82%) thinking that District budgets were much bigger.

Q12. Creating a single unitary council will generate annual savings. How much are these savings estimated to be?

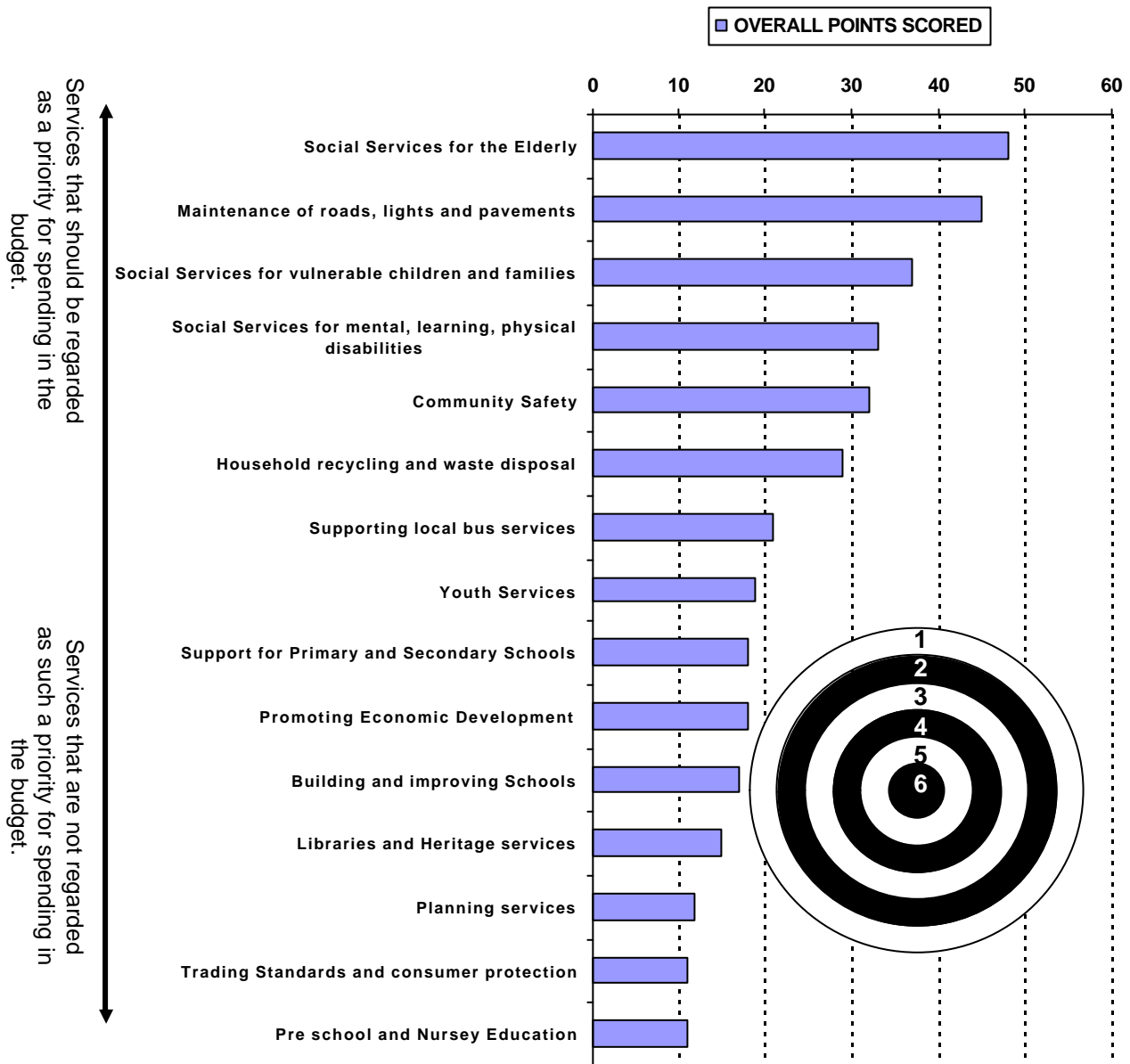


Answer; Nearly a quarter of people correctly stated that savings would reach 18 million. The majority (77%) thought that estimated savings would be much lower and were not sure of the larger financial benefits that would accrue from the new authority.

While the quiz showed up that the public are not so well versed in the facts and figures the main outcome of the quiz was to give respondents a good background to the councils budget and to allow those who did not know the correct answer to some questions new knowledge on which to base their decisions later in the evening.

## SERVICE PRIORITIES

A "Target Game" was played by each table where individuals were each able to choose 5 service areas from a list of 15 services to reflect those services they felt were the most important and therefore should be a priority for spending in any future budget. 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 highest 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 SHOULD BE REGARDED AS A PRIORITY IN THE BUDGET

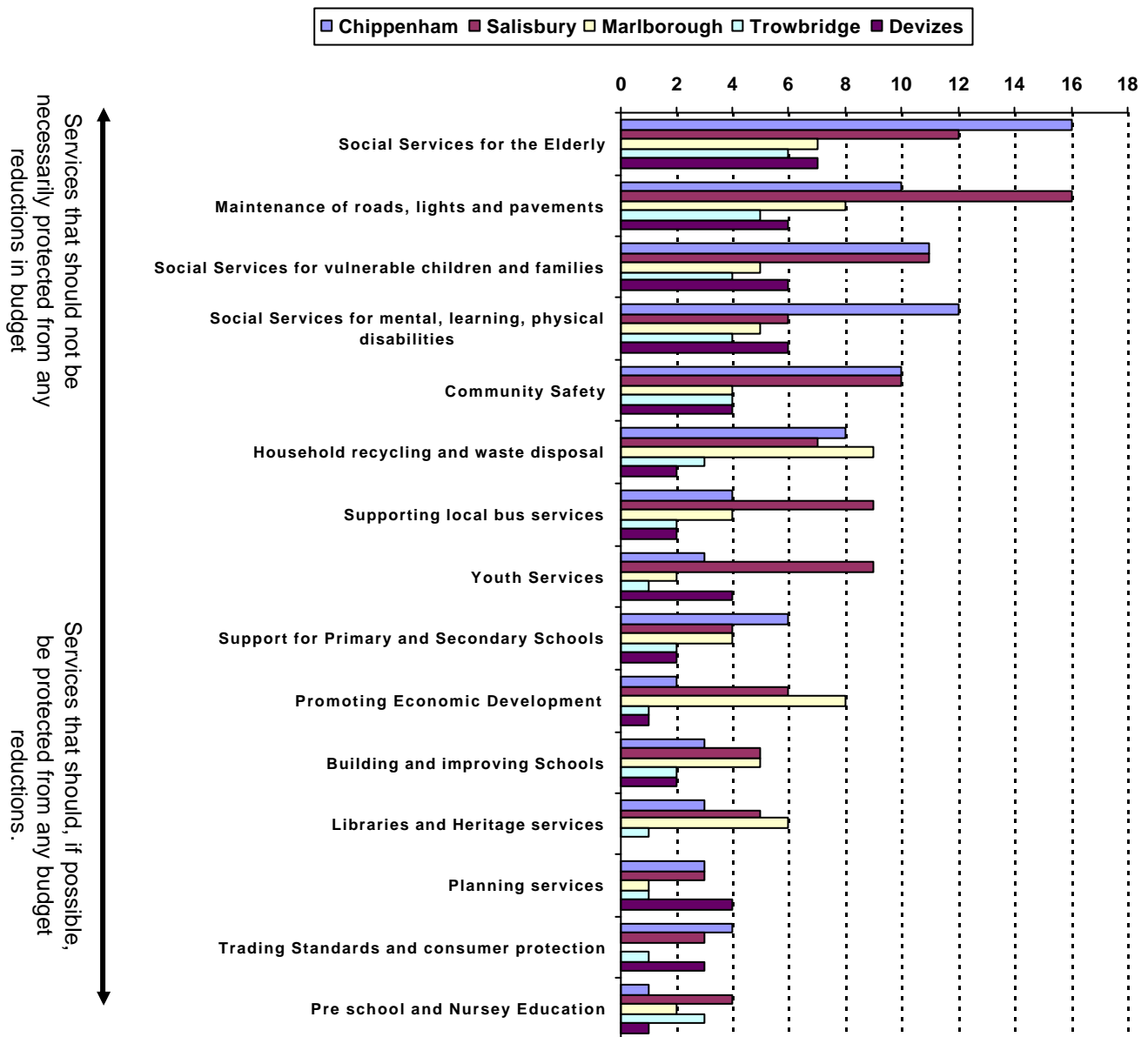
The overall result shows that there is a clear pattern with Social Services for the Elderly and the Maintenance of roads, lighting and pavements the top two choices. Other high scores were recorded for the other two Social Service areas as well as Community Safety and Household recycling/waste disposal. The results are a clear steer for the Council and show which services should be seen as a priority.

## DISTRICT WIDE VARIATIONS

There were some District wide variations which are shown below but the overall pattern and certainly the top 5 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.

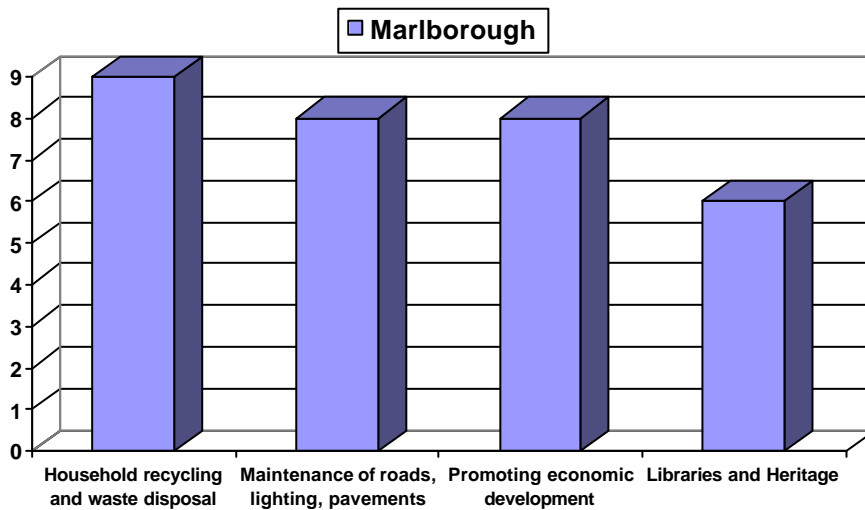
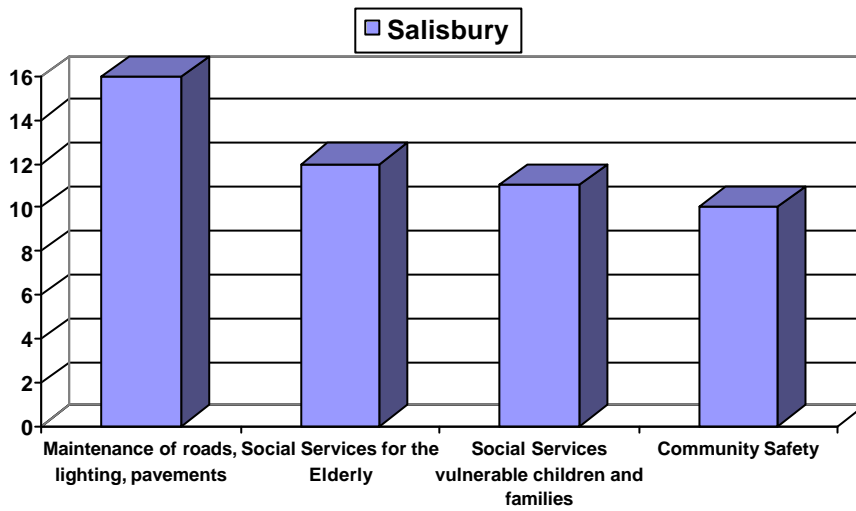
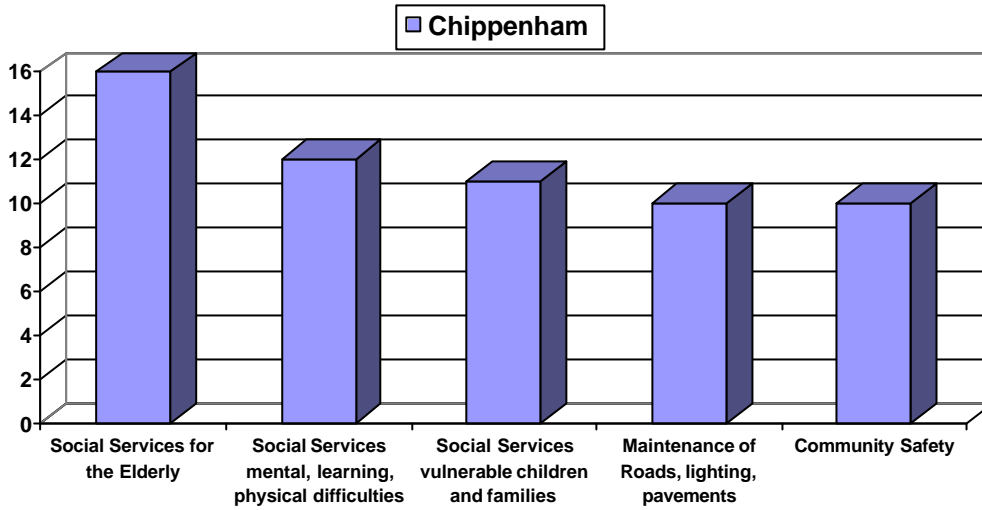
## VENUE ANALYSIS PRIORITY SCORES

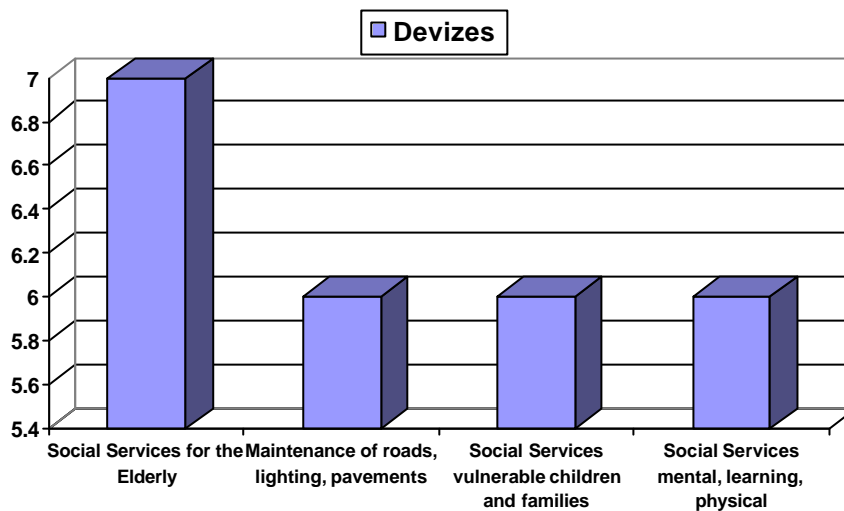
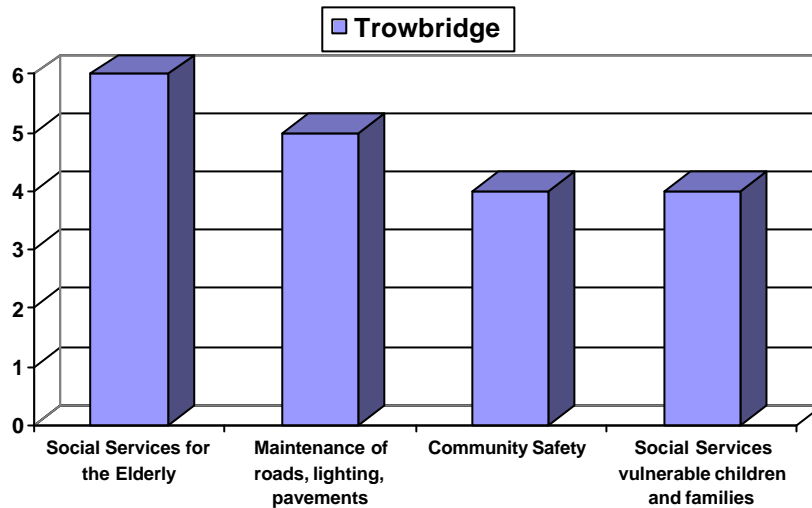
The results of this survey should be seen as a way of supporting decision makers in the context of understanding the needs, opinions and priorities of people living in Wiltshire on County Council services, as well as which areas people are prepared to have budget restrictions placed.



The top priorities per venue are shown perhaps more easily below;







## CONCLUSIONS

This exercise shows that the public have a wide range of issues to raise and welcome the opportunity to meet face to face with senior officers and members to discuss budget priorities. While the numbers involved are small, it is interesting to see how consistent the views of the public are across Wiltshire. However, the Council should not rely merely on the results of these meetings but use them as additional information when taking into account a whole range of views on the budget. For example, a number of budget type questions have been included in the November 2007 version of the People's Voice which will explore budget priorities not from just eighty people but from around two and a half thousand. The Council also recognises that there are many groups of people that are not adequately represented during these public meetings for a whole range of reasons. One group absent has been young people and these have been canvassed using a mirror event held in at County Hall on November 23<sup>rd</sup>, the results of which will be feed back to members as additional information.

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

## APPENDIX 1 – Individual comments and issues raised at the meetings.

A number of individual issues were raised by people and it was agreed that these should form a list in order to further inform members.

### **Chippenham**

A person from Minety commented that flood and drainage related issues didn't appear separately on the service cards. It was explained that these fell under the general heading of Roads Maintenance. Jane Scott said we would note that and put it in the report. The main thrust was that more resources should be put towards this type of work which was a problem in that area of the County.

A lady said that she felt the writing on the posters was too small and the advertisements for the event should be bolder to attract more participants.

### **Salisbury**

There were some written comments on budget game that some would like all services to be a high priority

### **Marlborough**

There were some written comments on budget game that the Impact of rural / urban needs will affect results and that Marlborough will be more rural and have different priorities than urban places.

### **Trowbridge**

Wilts and Dorset route from Salisbury to Bath – Jane Scott would follow up the query on the inadequacies of this important bus route.

### **Devizes**

Issues mentioned:

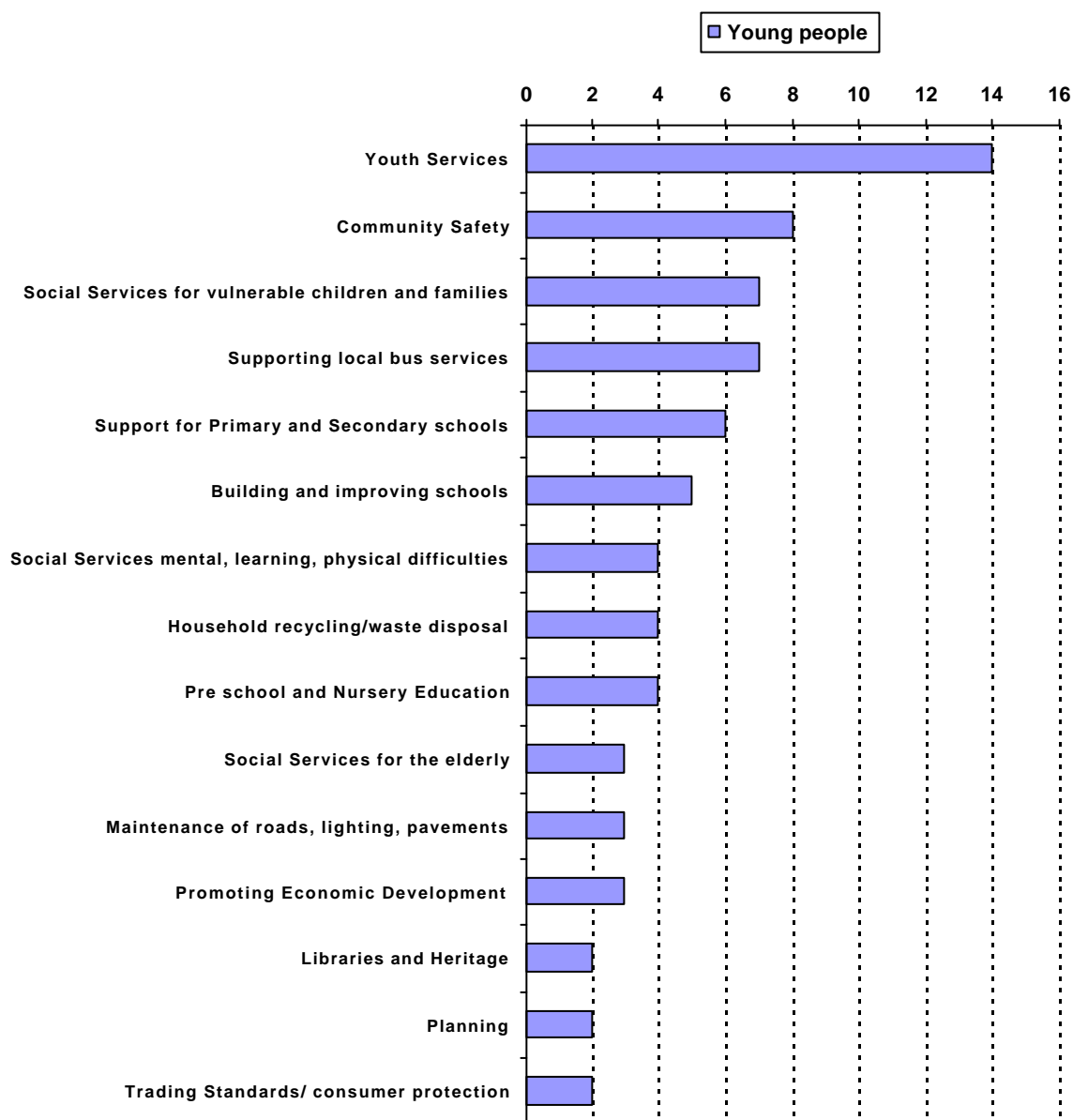
- Social care helpdesk –a person said they were having to wait up to 2 days for a call back. Why can't you phone your social worker direct like you used to be able to?
- A person who was a carer raised the issue of worsening levels of care and that unpaid carers are having to do more.
- Roads – poor quality of materials used in repairs because they are expensive but which was proving false economy as road repairs were not lasting very long and potholes in particular were reappearing straight after they were repaired due in part to heavy farm vehicles.
- Floods – drains not cleared / ditches full up with waste from hedges. It was raised as an issue as to who had the responsibility to keep drainage ditches clear.

## APPENDIX 2 – Results from a youth event using the same quiz and target game

On November 23<sup>rd</sup>, a number of young people were attending County Hall who were invited to take part in a similar version of the public Budget Consultation events. The young people took part in the quiz and the target game and although numbers were small provided a useful reminder that issues for young people not only differ from adults but that there is nevertheless a surprising amount of common ground to share.

While it would not be prudent to go through all the quiz questions and compare how the adults and the young people fared question by question it is interesting to note that young people were no worse or indeed no better than adults in getting the correct answer to the quiz questions. In fact in some areas such as funding for education the young people were better informed it seemed and even in those questions that required a difficult choice such as the question around Social Services charging the young peoples answers mirrored that of the adult participants.

When it came to the target game and the issue, of which services should be regarded as high priority one might assume that an entirely unique pattern might arise when compared to the adults who participated in the game and as the results below show this was in fact the case.



## OVERALL SCORES YOUNG PEOPLE AND ADULTS

