

**Report to:** The Executive

**Date:** 13<sup>th</sup> February 2009

**Report of:** Steve Arnfield

**Report No:**

**Contact Officer:** Karen Johnston

**Tele No:** 01204 331083

**Report Title:** **2009/2010 Budget Consultation (Updated 13<sup>th</sup> February 2009)**

**Confidential /  
Non Confidential:**

This report does **not** contain information which warrants its consideration in the absence of the press or members of the public.

**Purpose:**

To set out results from the budget consultation process

**Recommendations:**

That the Council consider these comments in determining the Council's Budget and Council Tax for 2009/10.

**Decision:**

**Background Doc(s):**

**Signed:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Leader / Executive Member

\_\_\_\_\_  
Monitoring Officer

**Date:**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Summary:**

Since 2004, the council has carried out specific consultation with members of the public about budgets and council tax setting.

This year's process continued that trend, with the methodology designed to reflect this year's budget situation.

This report presents the results from a survey utilised to gather residents' and business rate payers views on the proposals.

Between 14<sup>th</sup> January and 10<sup>th</sup> February 2009, a questionnaire was distributed via Area Forums, the Council's website and at a meeting of business ratepayers. Seventy nine responses were received from Area Forums and 27 responses via the Council's website and 21 from business ratepayers, giving a total achieved sample of 127.

Respondents were given a number of key facts about the budget, and those attending Area Forums and the business ratepayers meeting also received a contextual presentation from the Director of Corporate Resources, in order that they could make an informed decision.

When considering what the percentage increase in council tax should be this year, respondents were spread across the prescribed range of 3% to 5%. A 3% increase was most often suggested (53%).

Sixty four percent of respondents requested that more money be allocated to children's services followed by roads and transport, adult social care and environmental services (56%, 50% and 48% respectively).

## **1. Background Information**

Bolton Council is committed to involving residents and other stakeholders in the process of planning and managing services provided throughout the borough. Since 2004, this has included specific consultation with members of the public about budgets and council tax setting. This year's process continued that trend, with the methodology designed to reflect this year's budget situation. There were two key aspects:

- To set out the context for this year's budget and then present potential options, in order that residents could make an informed decision about council tax and spending for 09/10; and
- Utilise a survey to gather residents' views on these proposals.

The purpose of this report is to set out the results from this survey.

## **2. Methodology and Results**

### 2.1 Methodology

Between 14<sup>th</sup> January and 10<sup>th</sup> February 2009, a questionnaire was distributed via Area Forums, the Council's website and a meeting of business ratepayers. Seventy nine responses were received from Area Forums and 27 responses via the Council's website and 21 responses from a meeting of business ratepayers, giving a total achieved sample of 127.

The survey first set out a number of key facts about this year's budget situation, which respondents were asked to consider before answering specific questions. Respondents from Area Forums and the business ratepayers meeting also received a presentation from the Director of Corporate Resources, providing further detail.

Three related questions were asked in the survey:

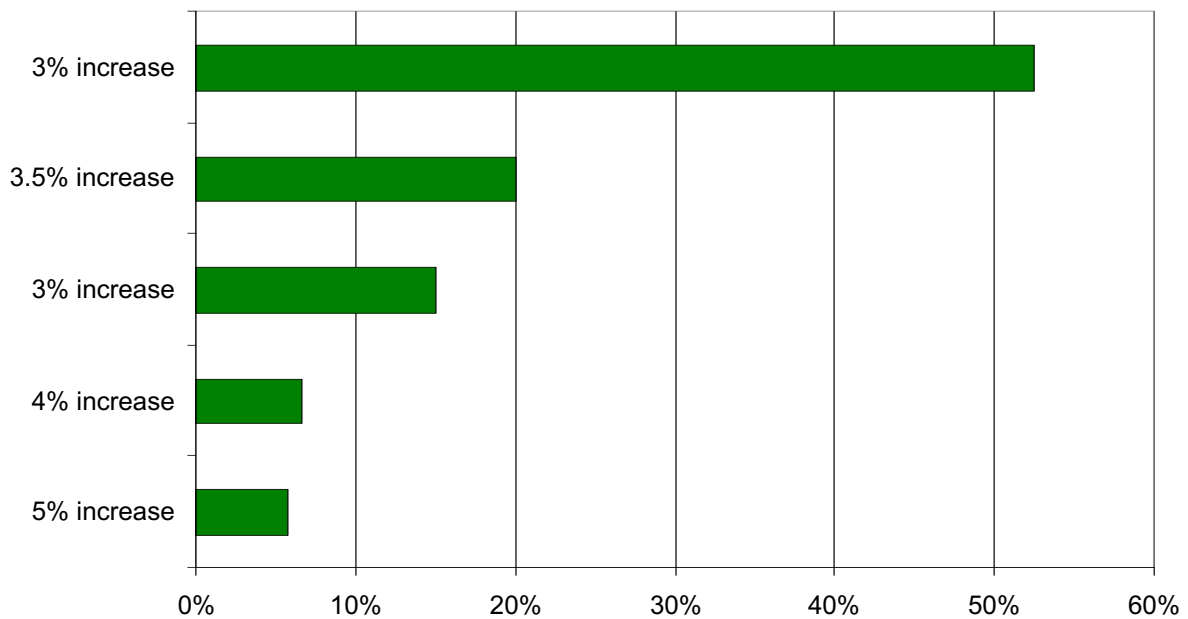
- What should the percentage increase in council tax be this year?
- Which services do you think are most important to protect when looking for savings to balance the council's budget
- Are there any other issues that the council should take into account when considering next year's budget and council tax?

A copy of the survey is attached at Appendix One.

### 2.2 Results

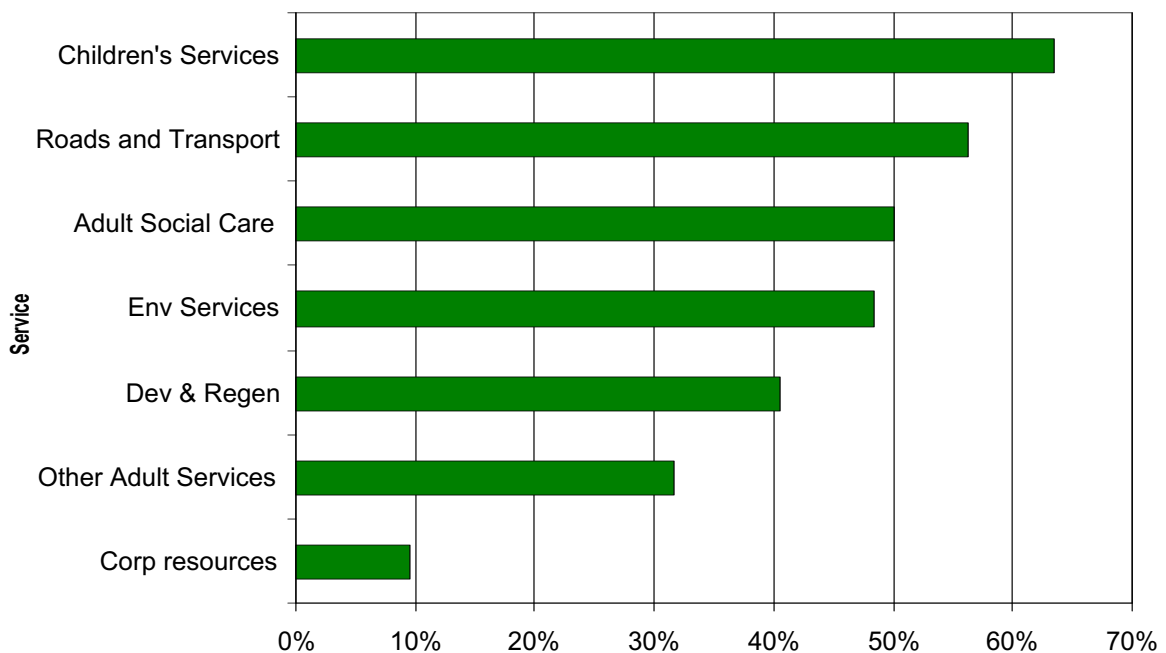
When considering what the percentage increase in council tax should be this year, respondents were spread across the prescribed range of 3% to 5%. A 3% increase was most often suggested (53%).

**Q1. For every 1% reduction in your council tax bill, additional savings of £950,000 would have to be made by the council. Taking this into account what should the percentage increase be? (Base = 127)**



Around 6 out of 10 respondents would like to see more money allocated to children's services. There was a similar level of support for roads and transport, adult social care and environmental services (56%, 50% and 48% respectively).

**Q2. Which services do you think are most important to protect when looking for savings to balance the council's budget? (Base = 127)**



Finally, respondents were asked whether there were any other issues that the Council should take into account when considering next year's budget and council tax. Forty five respondents took the opportunity to comment here, with some raising multiple issues.

<b>Q3. Are there any other issues that the council should take into account when considering next year's budget and council tax?</b>	
<b>Comments about specific services</b>	<b>No of responses</b>
Recession and money worries	9
Careful use of resources and more efficiency	7
Cut unnecessary management jobs	7
Improve roads and cycle ways	5
More recycling facilities	4
Regeneration of town centre	3
Better adult education	3
Prioritise social services	3
Lower council tax rise; services will suffer	3
Reduce number of councillors	2
Clean up public spaces	2
More parks and green spaces	2
Reasonable charges for hiring public venues	2
Mayor to use public transport	1
Split cuts across all service area	1
Bring back fortnightly bin collection	1
Use local businesses for council services	1
More for young people	1
Support local businesses	1

Comments could be grouped into three areas:

- Recession / current economic climate
- specific service improvements; and
- efficiency of the council

### **3. Recommendation**

- 3.1 That the Council consider these comments in determining the Council's Budget and Council Tax for 2008/09.



## Council Tax and Spending 2009/10

### Please consider the following key facts before completing the survey

Next month the council will decide its budget for 2009/10 and what the level of council tax will be.

The council's budget comes from the grant and business rates it receives from the government, with 25% from council tax.

We receive a grant which we must use for funding our schools. For 2009/10 this is £177.6m, an increase of 4.4% on this year.

To fund all our other services the government gives us revenue support grant and a share of national business rate income. In 2009/10 we will receive £123.8m, an increase of 3.5%. Council tax is the only element of funding the council controls. Your final council tax bill will also include amounts for police and fire services, so the total actual increase could be more than this.

We anticipate our costs to rise by £15m next year. Inflation will increase our costs by £7.5m, particularly in the energy market where we had to secure contracts earlier this year when energy prices were at very high levels.

The council is looking to identify efficiency savings to help meet these costs. As the council is aiming for an increase of no more than 4.5% this requires savings of around £7m to balance the budget.

For every 1% reduction in your council tax bill below this, additional savings of £950,000 have to be found.

**Q 1** Taking the above into account, what should the percentage increase in the council tax be this year? (please tick one box only)

- ☐ 3%      ☐ 3.5%      ☐ 4%      ☐ 4.5%      ☐ 5%

**Q 2** Which services do you think are most important to protect when looking for savings to balance the council's budget? (please tick all that apply) Please see overleaf for details of services

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Adult Social Care            | <input type="checkbox"/> Environmental Services |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Children's Services          | <input type="checkbox"/> Other Adult Services   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Corporate Resources          | <input type="checkbox"/> Roads and Transport    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Development and Regeneration |   |

**Q 3** Are there any other issues that the council should take into account when considering next year's budget and council tax? (please write in box below)