

**Budget and Council Tax Consultation
Qualitative and Quantitative Research Methodology and Results**

1. This appendix provides detail on the methodology and the results from the quantitative and qualitative market research undertaken to inform the Council's budget for 2012/13.

A Summary of Research Feedback

2. More than 2,250 Central Bedfordshire residents have taken part in the market research exercises.
3. The number of responses to the sample survey was 1,129 and number of responses to the universal survey was 1,118.
4. The surveys included questions relating to:
 - Expectations about the future levels of council tax and council services
 - Preferences for future council tax levels
 - Priority services for protection from savings
 - Priority activities and services for savings
 - Perceptions of alternative ways of delivering services
5. Whilst there are variations in the responses from the universal and sample surveys, there are also some consistent themes.
6. Residents are not optimistic about the Council's budget.
7. A majority of respondents anticipate an increase in Council Tax and a reduction in Government grants and Council services.
8. Most respondents would prefer for Council Tax to remain the same next year, and a clear majority agree that any savings that are required should be found from the costs of running the Council, rather than from frontline services. This view was shared by workshop participants.
9. Suggestions offered by residents for making such savings included reducing the number of senior managers in the council, cutting staffing in general and reducing Councillor expenses.
10. Survey respondents tended to support a number of proposals to change the way the Council delivers services, such as combining services with other public sector organisations and Town and Parish Councils providing some services.

11. Workshop participants stressed the importance of value for money. Many were pragmatic about how services are delivered, but the Council was urged to ensure that it secured the best possible value if it were to change the way it operates.
12. The option for increasing charging for some Council services was not supported by the majority of survey respondents.
13. Changing eligibility criteria for services also raised concerns. Workshop participants perceived that these were already “pretty tough”.
14. Survey respondents were invited to identify which services they would be most and least willing to make savings from.
15. The services that respondents to the universal and sample surveys most wanted to protect from savings were:
 - Maintaining roads and pavements
 - Working with the police to reduce crime and anti social behaviour
 - Refuse collection

There was a preference amongst universal survey respondents, who tended to be older than those taking part in the sample survey, to protect services to support older, disabled and vulnerable people to stay at home and library services.

17. Sample survey respondents were more inclined to protect activities for teenagers, business development and parks/ open spaces.
18. The services where most respondents (to both the universal and sample surveys) were more willing to see savings made were:
 - Cultural facilities
 - Town centre improvements
 - Sport and leisure
 - Planning
19. Respondents to the universal survey, who tended to be older than those taking part in the sample survey, were more willing to accept savings in services that support young people, such as activities for teenagers, young children and family support services than those who responded to the sample survey.
20. Workshop participants reflected some of the strongest preferences of survey respondents.
21. Overall, workshop participants were most likely to protect services relating to reducing crime and anti-social behaviour and road maintenance.

22. The workshop participants undertook an exercise where they were required to take on the role of elected Councillors in determining where resources would be allocated and reduced across all aspects of the Council's business.
23. They emphasised how challenging this was, particularly in relation to Adult Social Care and Children's Services where there was a strongly held view that services for vulnerable people should be protected from reductions.

Methodology

Sample Survey

24. A postal survey was distributed to a random sample of 4,000 households in Central Bedfordshire during September. A reminder was sent to those who had not responded in early October. The sampling method was designed to ensure that the Council has a statistically reliable and representative set of results.

Universal Survey

25. A universal survey was distributed to all households in Central Bedfordshire and made available online. The survey was also promoted directly to the following specific groups:
 1. Town and Parish Councils
 2. Local businesses (including the Chamber and Federation of Small Businesses)
 3. Local Strategic Partners
 4. Carers forum
 5. Youth Parliament and other young people
 6. Housing tenants
 7. Older people reference group
 8. Schools
 9. Voluntary organisations
 10. Faith groups
 11. Disability groups

Community Workshops

26. Four community workshops were conducted to ensure appropriate coverage of the area because of Central Bedfordshire's split between rural and urban areas and network of towns. The community workshops were held in Sandy, Leighton Buzzard, Flitwick and Dunstable. Although each community workshop took place in a town; half the participants were recruited from smaller villages.

27. Previous budget research shows that an individual's priorities may change at different life stages. Consequently, workshop participants were segmented in line with their ages (two groups with people aged 18-45 and two groups with people aged 45+). These groups were further segmented by social grade.
28. The Research Unit recruited ten residents per workshop in expectation that between six and eight residents would attend. All workshop participants were recruited face-to-face using a recruitment survey. The Research Unit used quotas on gender, age, disability, tenure, ethnicity, and location to ensure a mixture of people within each workshop.
29. The key aims of the community workshops were to establish how residents would make budget savings faced by Central Bedfordshire Council and to understand why residents made those choices.
30. Participants were given an overview of the Council's current budget and were asked to act as Councillors in agreeing how to save money. An activity was devised which required the groups to determine savings choices in all areas to achieve a required total of savings. This meant they could not avoid the difficult choices by assuming all savings could be achieved by one or two actions, or that any services could be entirely protected.

Who took part?

Sample Survey

31. The total number of responses to the sample survey was 1,129. This represents a response rate of 28% (from 4,000).
32. It is important that findings from the sample survey are representative of the population of Central Bedfordshire. All survey methodologies have their advantages and disadvantages and due to the nature of postal surveys, corrective weights need to be applied to mitigate non-response (for example – as is often the case in postal research – younger residents were less likely to return completed questionnaires). Responses to the sample survey were therefore weighted using Office for National Statistics Census mid-year estimates according to age, gender, and work status.
33. A sample of residents, and not all residents living in the Central Bedfordshire area, participated in the survey. Therefore, all results are subject to sampling tolerances, which means that not all differences are statistically significant. The overall results are accurate to +/- 3 to 4 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

Universal Survey

34. In total, the Council received 1,118 responses to the universal survey. The results from this exercise have not been weighted and it is relevant to note the respondents to the universal survey overrepresented the older population of Central Bedfordshire
35. The majority of the response (95%) was from residents. Other responses included local businesses, Town and Parish Councils and voluntary organisations.
36. There was a good geographical spread of respondents across Central Bedfordshire.
37. The universal survey respondents were broadly reflective of the population in terms of gender and ethnicity. Disabled people were slightly overrepresented.
38. The biggest difference in the profile of the universal survey response compared to the population is in the age profile. As expected with this type of self-selecting survey, people over 55 years old but particularly those over 65 are overrepresented (60% of survey respondents) compared to 27% of the population) and people under 34 years old are underrepresented (11% of respondents compared to 11% of the population).
39. These factors should be taken into consideration when considering the universal survey results and when comparing them to the results of the more representative sample survey.

Community Workshops

40. In total, 31 people participated in the community workshops. The table below shows the breakdown of the different groups and the actual number of participants.

Location	Age	Social grade	Number of Participants
Dunstable	45+	C2DE	8
Flitwick	18-44	C2DE	10
Leighton Buzzard	18-44	ABC1	6
Sandy	45+	ABC1	7

General awareness of the financial climate

41. Respondents to the sample survey were asked about their awareness of the current financial climate and their expectations.
42. Six in ten residents (61%) said that they expected Council Tax to rise in 2012/13. Equally, the majority (55%) of residents said that central government is reducing the money that Central Bedfordshire Council will receive. Residents tend to see these changes as having a greater effect on the range than the quality of services, with over half (53%) predicting a reduction in the range of services and 43% predicting a reduction in quality of services.
43. The expected combination of more Council Tax and more budget savings leads to most residents expecting value for money to fall (42%) with many saying they expect it to stay the same (37%).

General awareness of council budget

44. The community workshops in particular showed that the levels of knowledge and awareness of the council's finances were low. Many were surprised by the presentation on the budget, having expected the money spent by the council to be higher. We also found that few residents were aware of the prominence of social care services provided, and therefore the proportion of the budget spent by Central Bedfordshire Council on these services.

Views on Council Tax

45. The response to the question about preferences for Council Tax next year was similar from both surveys. The majority (73% and 75%) preferred to see council tax stay the same next year.
46. The community workshops showed that residents feel the level of Council Tax is too high as a proportion of wages and in comparison to neighbouring areas, especially as residents expected their Council Tax would be lower than in adjoining urban areas.
47. It is important to note that both surveys and the community workshops were undertaken before the central government announcement that Council Tax would be frozen in 2012/13.

Services that should be protected from savings

Sample Survey

48. From the sample survey the most popular services to protect from savings were:

	Response
Maintaining roads and pathways	44%
Working with the Police to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour	37%
Refuse collection	35%
Country parks, open space and rights of way	25%
Attracting and supporting business to create jobs	23%
Activities for teenagers	23%

Universal Survey

49. From the universal survey the most popular services to protect from savings were:

	Response
Maintaining roads and pathways	40%
Working with the Police to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour	33%
Services to support older, disabled or vulnerable people to stay in their own homes	32%
Refuse collection	28%
Libraries	23%
Day centres and activities for disabled and vulnerable adults	21%

50. Road and path maintenance, reducing crime and anti-social behaviour and refuse collection are top priorities from both surveys.
51. The differences in the top six services, i.e. the universal survey respondents prioritising services to support older, disabled or vulnerable people to stay in their own homes, libraries and day centres and activities for disabled and vulnerable adults, is likely to be a reflection of the older age profile of the respondents.
52. The community workshop discussions suggest that the public are less willing to see savings in social care and health services. There was a strong theme from the discussions that the vulnerable should be protected. There was also recognition of the difficult choices and that some cuts in these areas might have to be made.

Services that should be least protected from savings

53. The majority of survey respondents (89% in the universal survey and 81% in the sample survey) said they would rather see savings made in the cost of running the Council than in frontline services.
54. Some residents commented in the universal survey that they felt the Council was over-staffed, had too many senior managers, and that salaries and Councillor expenses should be reduced.

Sample Survey

55. From the sample survey the services the public are most willing to see saving made in were:

	Response
Cultural facilities (theatres and arts)	47%
Planning (including managing the increase in new housing)	31%
Improving town centres	26%
Social Housing	23%
Libraries	21%
Sports and leisure facilities	21%

Universal Survey

56. From the universal survey the services the public are most willing to see saving made in were:

	Response
Cultural facilities (theatres and arts)	44%
Improving town centres	30%
Sports and leisure facilities	28%
Planning (including managing the increase in new housing)	27%
Working with schools to improve educational progress and attainment	25%
Social Housing	24%

57. Cultural services (theatres and arts), improving town centres, sports and leisure facilities, planning and social housing all appear in the top six services to make savings in from both surveys.

58. The key difference from the universal survey is that the respondents also chose working with schools to improve educational progress and attainment as their fifth most popular service to see savings in. In general the universal survey respondents were more willing to see savings made in Children's Services such as support for parents and families with young children, activities for teenagers and facilities and activities for young children.
59. The universal survey respondents were less willing to see savings made in Libraries, in line with their preference to protect libraries from savings.

Delivering services differently

60. The responses to the various options for providing services differently were similar from both surveys.
61. The most supported options (with over half of the respondents from either survey supporting them) were:
- combining some council services with other public sector organisations to share costs and
 - Town and Parish Councils providing some council services.
62. Over a third of respondents (from either survey) supported the following options;
- asking individuals to do more for themselves
 - a charity or social enterprise providing some Council services
 - local communities providing some Council services through volunteers
 - encouraging local people using some Council services to contact us by the internet instead of the phone or in person and
 - private sector organisations providing some Council services.
63. There was some limited scepticism about contracting out services, driven by a perception that this increases their costs. There was a general condition placed on all of the models - the public would only be willing to support these different models if it maintained or improved the quality of the service and provided value for money.
64. Respondents (in both surveys) were least supportive of
- introducing and/or increasing charging for some services
 - changing the criteria for accessing council services.
65. People were concerned about the possibility of changes in the eligibility criteria for services, especially for social care, which were already seen as being challenging.