

West Lancashire
Meeting the Budget Challenge
Consultation Report



Report prepared by Adam Pearson
Infusion Research
On behalf of West Lancashire Council
adam.pearson@blackpool.gov.uk
07788 353506
www.infusion.org.uk
January 2016

Contents

1	Executive Summary.....	3
1.1	Level of agreement with budget savings proposals.....	3
2	Background and Methodology	4
2.1	Background	4
2.2	Methodology.....	4
2.3	Who responded to the resident survey?	6
2.4	Who responded to the stakeholder survey?	6
3	Charging for garden waste collection and additional green bins	7
4	Litter bins and dog waste bins	13
5	Chapel Gallery	15
6	Building Control	17
7	Savings on civic activities.....	18
8	Civic Dinner	20
9	Shared Services Contract.....	22
10	Funding for Christmas lights	24
11	Parish Councils.....	26
12	Views on the overall measures	29

1 Executive Summary

110 responses were received to the 2015 Meeting the Budget Challenge consultation, 80 from local residents and 30 from stakeholders, between 27 October 2015 and 10 January 2016.

1.1 Level of agreement with budget savings proposals

Proposals	% who strongly or tend to agree	
	Residents	Stakeholders
Annual charge of £30 to collect garden waste on the current seasonal basis	28%	38%
Annual charge of £25 for each additional green bin collection	42%	47%
Rationalising litter and dog waste bin provision to combined litter and dog waste bins	76%	70%
Operating the Chapel Gallery on a more commercial basis	78%	87%
Restructuring the Building Control team to reduce costs	61%	72%
Ceasing the production of year books and diaries for councillors	92%	89%
Cease attendance by the Mayor at the Royal Garden party in London	90%	71%
Cease sending out Christmas cards	94%	89%
Cease the Council's funding of Town Twinning activities	82%	54%
Cease the provision of a 'past Mayor's Jewel' medal to the Mayor at the end of their year in office	92%	93%
Replacing the Civic Dinner with a Mayor's Charity Ball	95%	93%
Renegotiating the shared services contract with Lancashire County Council and BT Lancashire Services for Revenues, Benefits and IT services	78%	86%
Seeking contributions from local businesses to help fund the Christmas lights in Ormskirk and Skelmersdale	74%	70%
Reducing concurrent grants paid to parish councils by up to 30%	32%	30%
Reducing Council Tax support grant paid to parish councils by up to 30%	41%	33%
Satisfaction with the measures the Council has proposed to take to reduce spending, generate income and improve efficiency (% very or quite satisfied)	37%	61%

2 Background and Methodology

2.1 Background

West Lancashire Borough Council needs to make savings, efficiencies and increase income in order to balance the budget for 2016/17.

The Council developed a range of proposals in 2015 which were approved for consultation with residents and organisations in the borough before any final decisions are made on the Council's budget for 2016/17.

The aim of the consultation is to understand whether residents and organisations agree with the proposals and what impact these would have if they are implemented. The findings of the consultation will inform the decision-making process on the Council's budget.

2.2 Methodology

Two online consultation surveys were developed, one open-access version for residents and a targeted survey for organisations and stakeholders in West Lancashire. The consultation went live on Tuesday 27 October 2015 and closed on Sunday 10 January 2016.

The residents' survey was hosted on the Council website and promoted through a range of press releases and social media updates, including Facebook and Twitter. Residents were also made aware that they could request a paper copy of the survey or send in their views directly either by email or in writing.

The stakeholder survey was also hosted on the Council website. An email was sent to around 644 stakeholders, including public and private sector organisations and voluntary and community groups, inviting them to take part in the consultation.

In total, 80 responses were received from residents and 30 from stakeholders in the borough (of which 4 were paper returns). The level of response has increased significantly compared to the 2013 budget consultation when 32 residents and 14 stakeholders completed a survey.

In addition to the survey responses, 9 emails and letters were received from residents about proposals within the consultation. 8 of these came from residents who objected to any charging for green waste. The other direct response was from a Parish Council in the borough which will be picked up within the stakeholder analysis.

The purpose of the consultation was to give residents and stakeholders the opportunity to give their views on the Council's budget proposals and provide insight into any impact these would have. Therefore it should not be considered a representative piece of research which represents the views of all residents in the borough.

Whilst the number of responses received from both residents and stakeholders has exceeded previous runs of the Council's budget consultation, caution should still be applied when reviewing the analysis and findings. This is because the total response remains relatively low and, because this was an open-access consultation with the potential for self-selection bias, it cannot be considered representative of the West Lancashire population.

Where possible this report will present findings as percentages, with any questions on level of agreement combining those who strongly or tend to agree and those who strongly or tend to disagree.

Moreover, whilst demographic information was captured in the survey there will be no cross-tabulation analysis within this report due to the lower sub-sample sizes.

A number of open-ended questions were included in the resident and stakeholder surveys to give people the opportunity to comment on the proposals. As part of the reporting, these comments have been independently reviewed and grouped into categories to enable some quantitative analysis. Please note that comments made by individuals could cover more than one category, therefore there will be instances where the sum of category totals exceeds the total number of comments made.

The most common categories within each section are listed in tables within this report, whilst less represented categories captured within a summary of other comments raised.

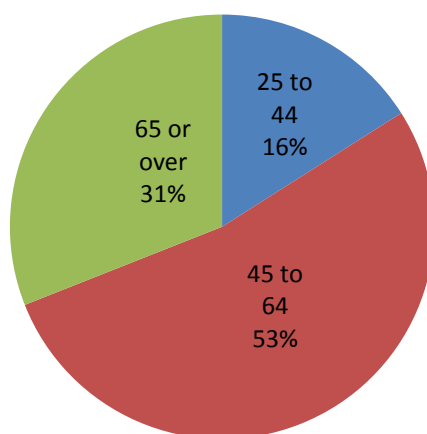
Stakeholder categorisations are not listed within tables due to the lower number of responses and the general breadth of issues raised throughout the survey responses.

2.3 Who responded to the resident survey?

There was a broadly even response from male (52%) and female (48%) residents.

Just over half of resident responses came from people aged 45 to 64. No responses were received from people under the age of 25.

Figure 2.1: What was your age on your last birthday? (base – 77)



12% of respondents indicated that they have a disability.

Of the 72 respondents who disclosed their ethnicity, all indicated that they are White.

2.4 Who responded to the stakeholder survey?

In terms of the stakeholder responses:

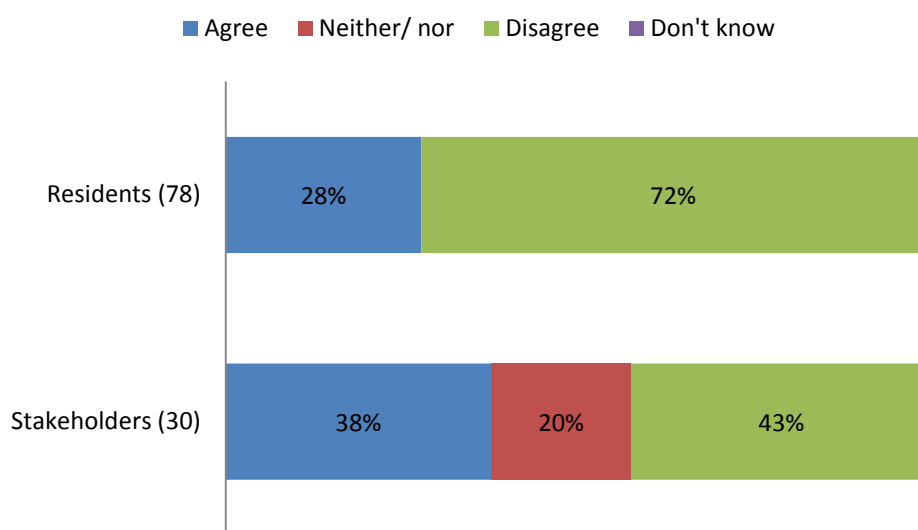
- 9 Parish councils (including one direct response by email)
- 8 community or voluntary organisations
- 7 local businesses
- 4 public services, including health, care, education and housing
- 2 local groups
- 1 stakeholder did not provide information on their organisation

3 Charging for garden waste collection and additional green bins

For householders, the Council is considering introducing an annual charge of £30 to collect garden waste on the current seasonal basis. Many other local authorities have already introduced this approach and it is estimated that this would raise around £500,000.

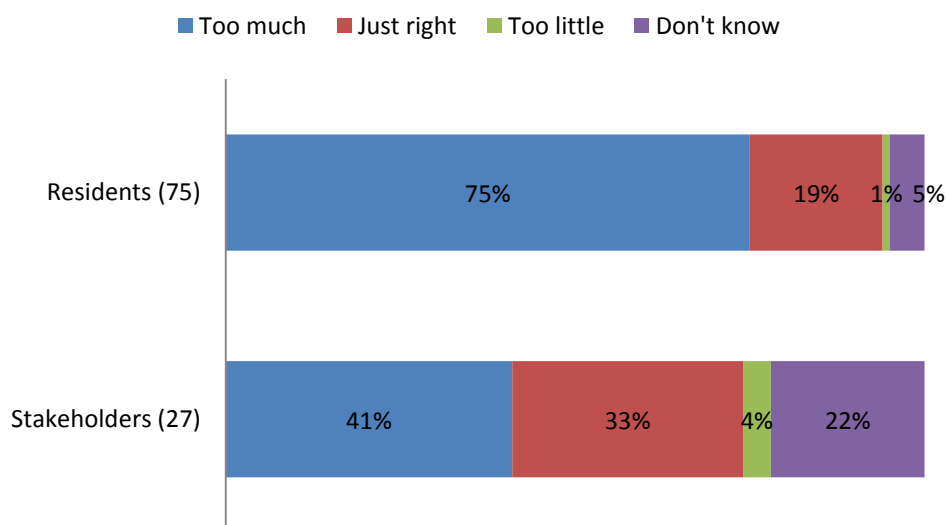
72% of residents disagree with the proposal for an annual garden waste charge compared to 43% of stakeholders.

Figure 3.1: How strongly do you agree or disagree with the annual garden waste charge proposal? (base totals in brackets)



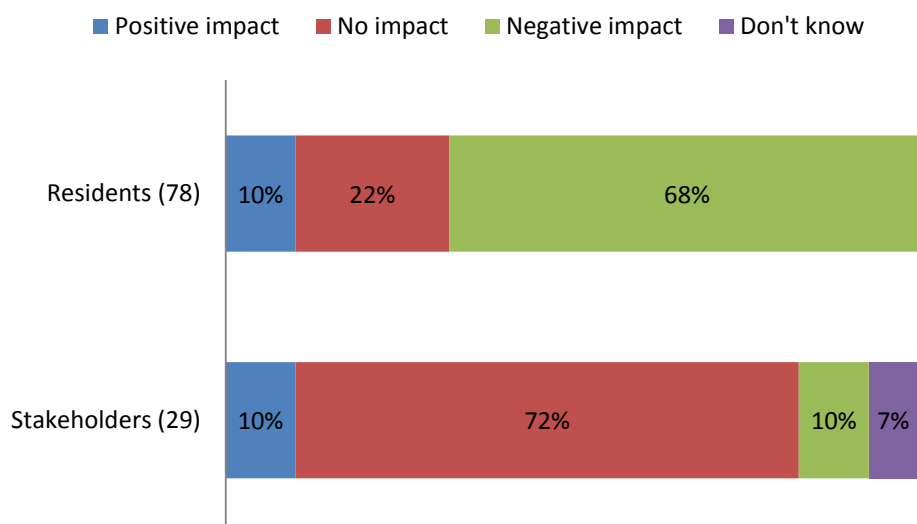
Three in four respondents to the resident survey feel the annual charge is too much.

Figure 3.2: Do you think the proposed green waste charge is...? (base totals in brackets)



68% of residents who responded to the consultation feel the green waste charge would have a negative impact on them. 72% of stakeholder respondents indicated that a green waste charge would have no impact on their organisation.

Figure 3.3: What impact, if any, would it have on you/ your organisation? (base totals in brackets)



59 residents commented on the impact that a proposed charge for green waste would have on them. These have been analysed and the main categories are listed below.

Issues highlighted by residents	Number of comments
Generally negative comments about the cost of the proposal and its impact	46
Expectation that the provision of green waste should be covered within current Council Tax payments	20
Impact on fly tipping in the borough	15
Impact the proposal would have on infrequent users of the green waste service	6
Needs to consider wider factors of green waste usage, including the size of the garden and greenery outside the property footprint (such as trees and leaves)	5
Environmental impact if more people use recycling centres instead	4

Of the other comments made, subjects included the impact on disabled residents, the potential to discourage people to look after their garden and an idea to introduce service charges based on usage.

7 stakeholders commented on the impact of a green waste charge. Comments included the impact on fly tipping and local recycling centre usage in the borough and the ability of residents to cope with the additional cost.

The consultation also asked residents and stakeholders if they could suggest how the Council could minimise any negative impact of the change.

63 comments and suggestions about mitigating impact were received from residents.

Issues highlighted by residents	Number of comments
The Council should not introduce the proposed charge	28
Overall Council Tax payments should be increased to cover the cost of the green waste service	5

A range of other suggestions were received, including:

- Charging for green waste collections based on usage
- Establishing local green waste ‘dumping areas’ to make the most of composting in the community
- Reducing or ceasing green waste collections during the winter months
- Reducing the cost of the proposed green waste charge to make it more affordable for residents
- Introducing exemptions for residents in receipt of a pension or benefits
- Ensuring residents have the opportunity to opt out of any charge
- Charging Council Tax to landlords of student properties to offset any service changes or savings

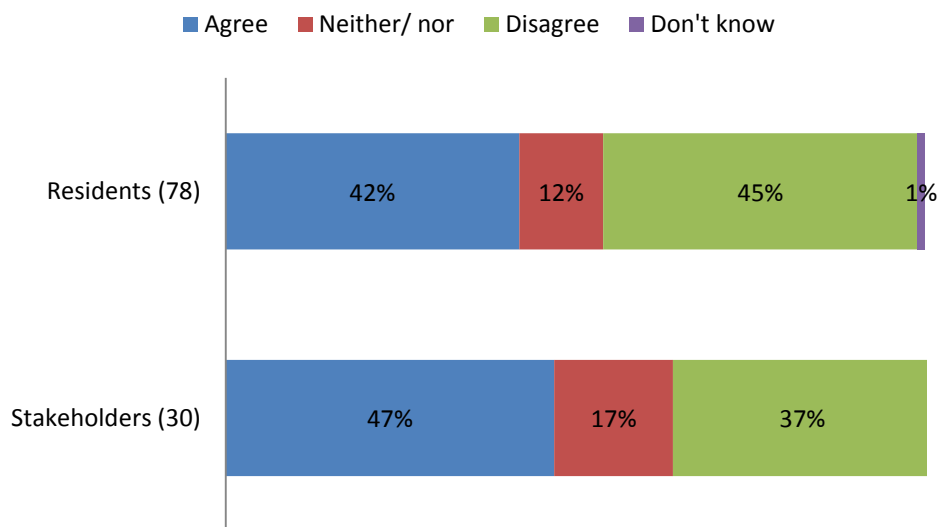
13 suggestions were received from stakeholders, which included:

- Ensuring residents understand that they can opt out of the service
- Communicating more effectively the costs of delivering the service to residents to increase awareness and understanding of the challenges to maintaining valued services in the borough
- Introducing the charge in stages, for example over a three year period
- Reducing the regularity of collections as an alternative to realise the required savings
- Considering the impact of introducing a charge on residents on low incomes or in receipt of benefits
- Introducing charges based on Council Tax bandings of properties

Households could also choose to have more than one green bin emptied, at an annual charge of £25 for each additional bin collection.

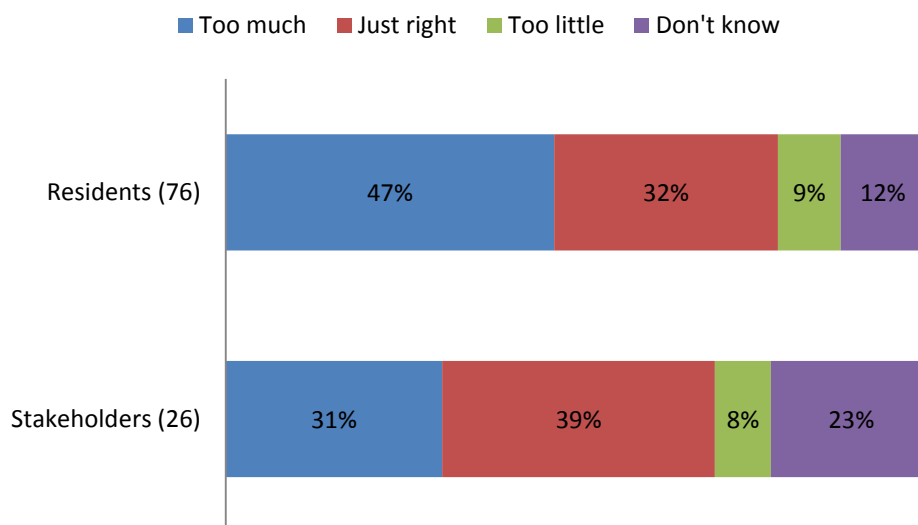
42% of residents agree with this proposal, 45% disagree. More stakeholders agree than disagree with the proposed charge for additional bin collections.

Figure 3.4: How strongly do you agree or disagree with the proposal for an additional green bin collection charge? (base totals in brackets)



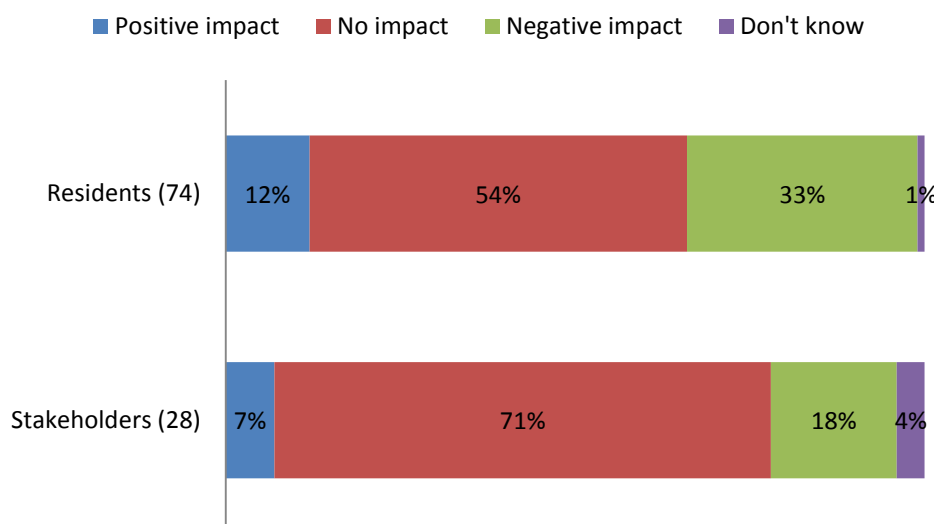
Nearly half of residents who responded to the consultation feel the charge is too much, with around a third believing it is 'just right'.

Figure 3.5: Do you think the proposed additional bin charge is...? (base totals in brackets)



A third of respondents to the resident survey feel increasing a charge for additional green bins would have a negative impact on them. Just over half of residents feel it would have no impact on them, rising to 71% amongst stakeholder respondents.

Figure 3.6: What impact, if any, would it have on you/ your organisation? (base totals in brackets)



32 residents commented on the proposal to charge for additional green bins. These have been analysed and the main categories are listed below.

Issues highlighted by residents	Number of comments
Residents should only be charged for additional green bins as an alternative to the proposal to introduce the basic green waste charge	7
The charge is too high and another expense for residents to deal with	4
The proposal should already be covered by current Council Tax payments	4

A range of other comments were made by residents including the impact the proposal would have on fly tipping and the ability for residents to opt out.

7 stakeholders commented on the proposal, with 3 feeling that the proposal could lead to an increase in fly tipping and 2 suggesting it would negatively impact on residents who are on low incomes. One comment supported the idea that the collection of additional bins should be paid for.

18 residents suggested how the Council could minimise any impact of the proposal. These have been analysed and the main categories are listed below.

Issues highlighted by residents	Number of comments
The Council should simply not implement the proposal for additional green waste collection charges	4
The Council should only charge for additional green waste bin collections	3

Other suggestions included increasing the level of Council Tax generally, charging landlords of student properties and using volunteers to support the delivery of the service.

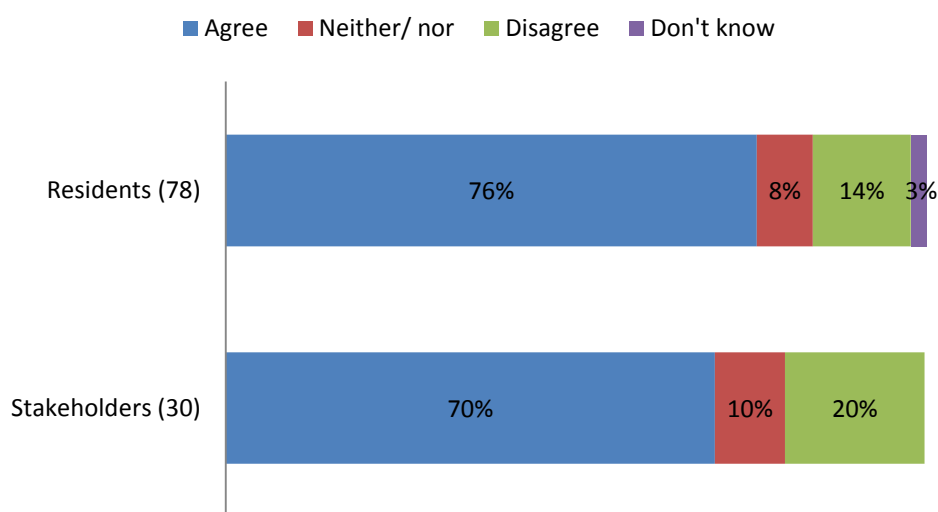
Of the 10 stakeholders who suggested mitigating measures, 3 feel the Council should promote the charge for an additional bin as a positive service offer and communicate the importance of maintaining or improving the quality of service delivered.

4 Litter bins and dog waste bins

The Council is considering rationalising litter and dog waste bin provision by moving away from dedicated litter and dog waste bins being provided across the borough, to combined litter and dog waste bins which would save around £28,000 a year.

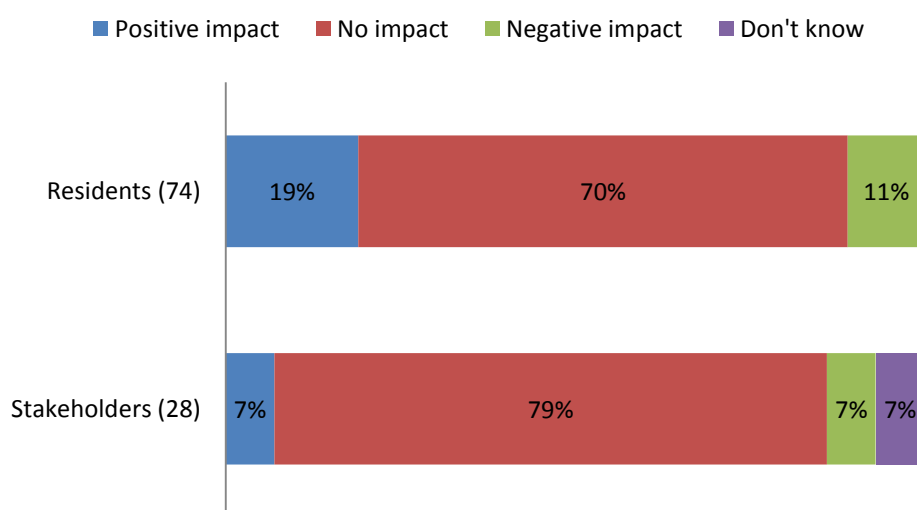
Around three quarters of residents agree with the proposal to combine litter and dog waste bins.

Figure 4.1: How strongly do you agree or disagree with the proposal for combined litter and dog waste bins? (base totals in brackets)



The majority of respondents to the consultation feel that the proposal would have no impact on them.

Figure 4.2: What impact, if any, would it have on you/ your organisation? (base totals in brackets)



21 residents commented on the proposal to combine dog fouling and litter waste bins. These have been analysed and the main categories are listed below.

Issues highlighted by residents	Number of comments
Dog fouling is a problem in the borough	6
Concern around the cleanliness of combining bins and the potential for spreading disease	4
Combined bins would make things easier for residents	3

Other comments included the risk of overflowing waste in bins, some concern around the cost of implementing and also the need for more dog fouling patrols to support the switch.

6 comments were received from stakeholders. 4 of these comments expressed some concern about public health issues and the impact the combination might have on general littering by people who might not want to put litter in bins used for dog fouling. 2 stakeholders queried the availability of dual bins across the borough to meet both litter and dog fouling needs.

15 residents commented on how the Council could mitigate any issues relating to the dual bin proposal. These have been analysed and the main categories are listed below.

Issues highlighted by residents	Number of comments
The Council needs to enforce fines for non-compliance/ dog fouling	4
There should be a sufficient number of bins across the borough	3

Other comments included ensuring the bins are covered to prevent the spread of odours and disease, as well as the need to empty them regularly.

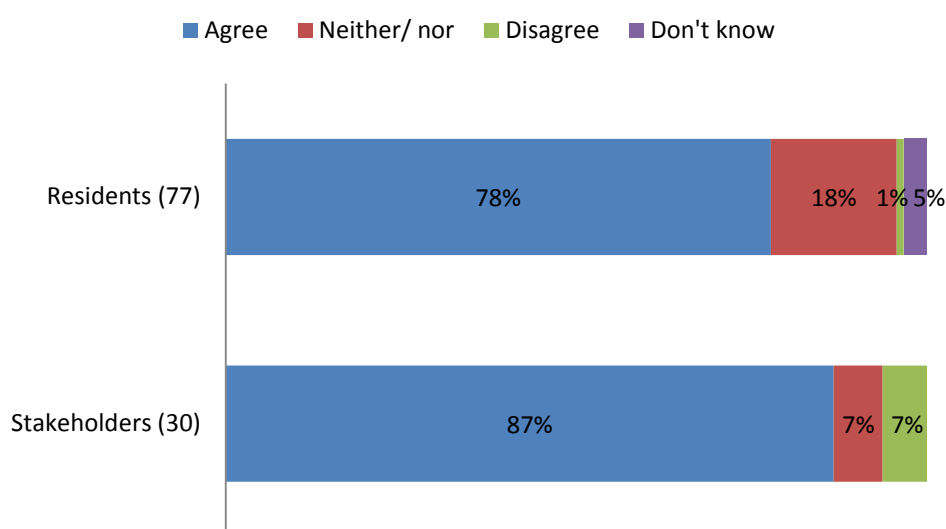
6 stakeholders commented on mitigation around the proposal, including the need to empty on a regular basis to prevent 'overflow', ensuring the bins are accessible and educating people about the dangers of setting bins alight (indicated by one stakeholder as an issue in the borough). 2 stakeholders feel this would be an improvement with evidence that it works in other areas. One stakeholder queried the process for handling the waste and impact on landfill sites.

5 Chapel Gallery

The Council is considering operating the Chapel Gallery, Ormskirk, and the Arts Service on a more commercial basis to generate additional income of around £10,000 a year.

78% of residents who responded to the consultation agree with this proposal, rising to 87% of stakeholder respondents.

Figure 5.1: How strongly do you agree or disagree with the proposal to operate Chapel Gallery on a more commercial basis? (base totals in brackets)



28 comments were made by residents on the proposal to operate the Chapel Gallery on a more commercial basis. These have been analysed and the main categories are listed below.

Issues highlighted by residents	Number of comments
General support for the idea, particularly the move towards more commerciality at the Council	15
The Gallery would benefit from more promotion	6
There was not sufficient information available to take a view on the proposal	3

Other comments included feedback on the Gallery and its café and some concern around charging for admission.

13 stakeholders commented on the Chapel Gallery proposal with 7 expressing support. Other comments from stakeholders included:

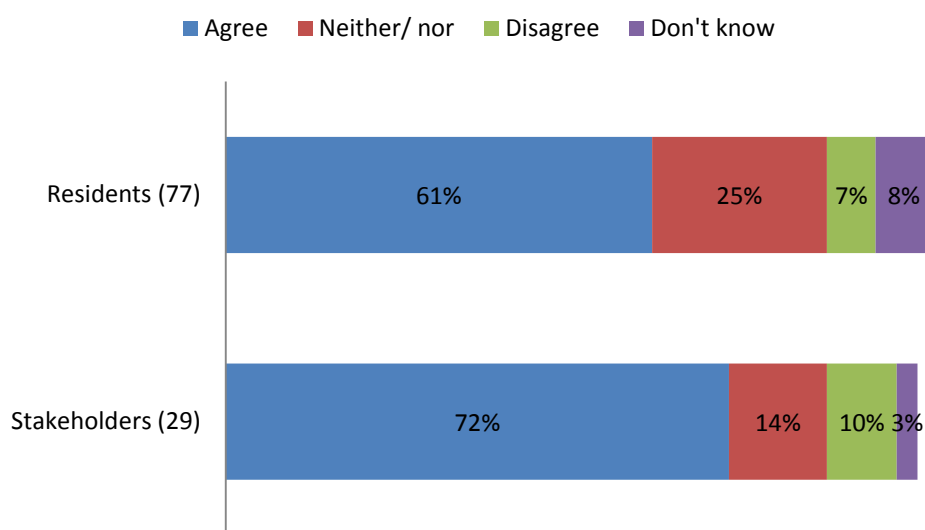
- Providing more volunteering opportunities
- More promotion to maximise its potential, and promotion of the arts generally
- Building on the café as a community led resource for meetings and local seasonal promotions
- Mixed views on admission charges
- Advising caution when it comes to making a profit from the café

6 Building Control

The Council is considering restructuring the Building Control team to reduce costs and this would save around £42,000 a year.

Around three in five residents agree with the proposal, one in four neither agree nor disagree.

Figure 6.1: How strongly do you agree or disagree with the proposal to restructure the Council’s Building Control team? (base totals in brackets)



27 comments were made by residents on the proposal to restructure the Building Control team. These have been analysed and the main categories are listed below.

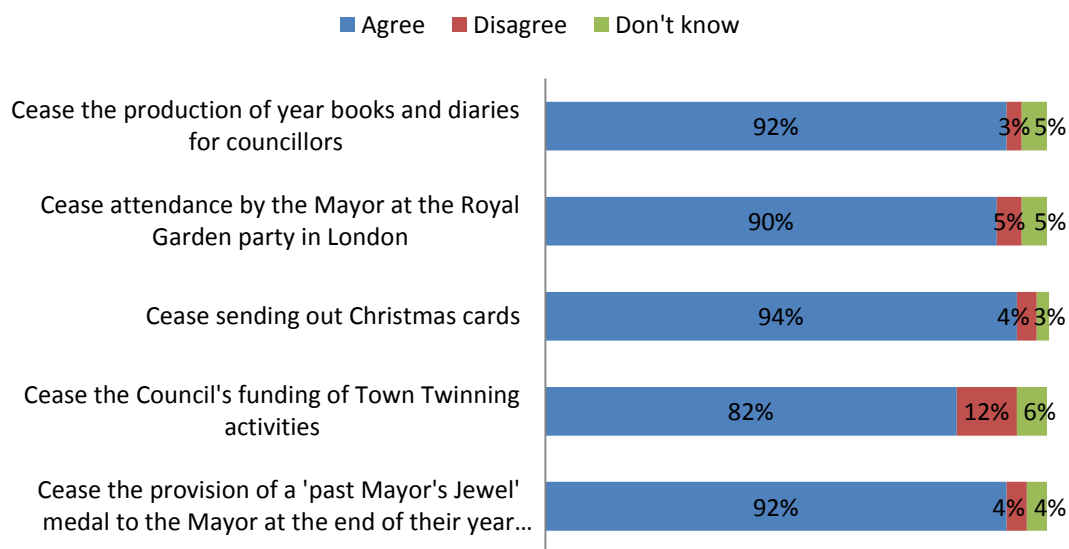
Issues highlighted by residents	Number of comments
They would need more information to understand the impact it would have on them and whether it is a good idea	13
Concern around the impact it would have on job losses at the Council	7
General support for the proposal, assuming it would have no impact on service provision in the borough	5

13 stakeholders commented on the proposal. General support was expressed on the assumption that the Council would still be able to control private landlord and private sector buildings, domestic extensions and that the planning process would not be made more lengthy. Other comments included a need to understand the impact on staff themselves and a suggestion that the building control function could be put out to tender.

7 Savings on civic activities

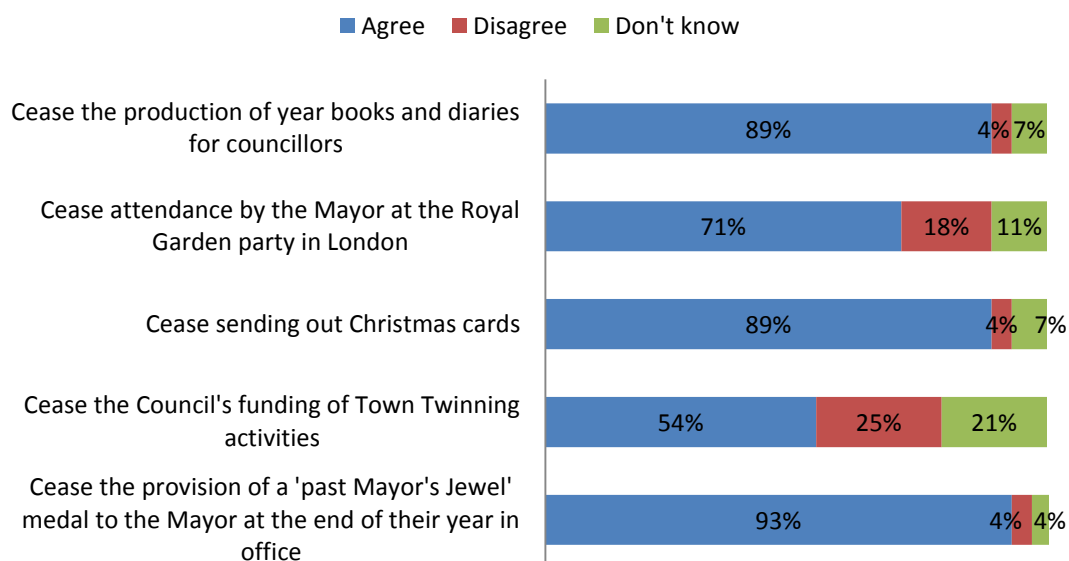
The Council is considering reducing spending on various civic activities to realise savings of around £4,900 a year. The majority of residents who responded to the consultation agreed with the proposals around reductions in civic activity spend. The highest level of agreement (94%) was for the cessation of sending out Christmas cards.

Figure 7.1: Level of agreement from residents with civic activity proposals (base – 78)



The majority of stakeholders agree with ceasing councillor year books and diaries, sending out Christmas cards and the provision of a 'past Mayor's jewel' medal. They were less likely to agree with ceasing funding for Town Twinning activities, although more than half still agreed with this proposal.

Figure 7.1: Level of agreement from stakeholders with civic activity proposals (base – 28)



34 residents commented on the civic activity proposals with unanimous support for making savings in this area. A couple of comments were made about balancing these reductions with the need to maintain the Council's profile at events. Moreover, some residents suggested that e-cards should be sent out at Christmas.

17 stakeholders commented on the civic activity proposals. Like residents, there is general support for implementing the proposals but some specific comments were made:

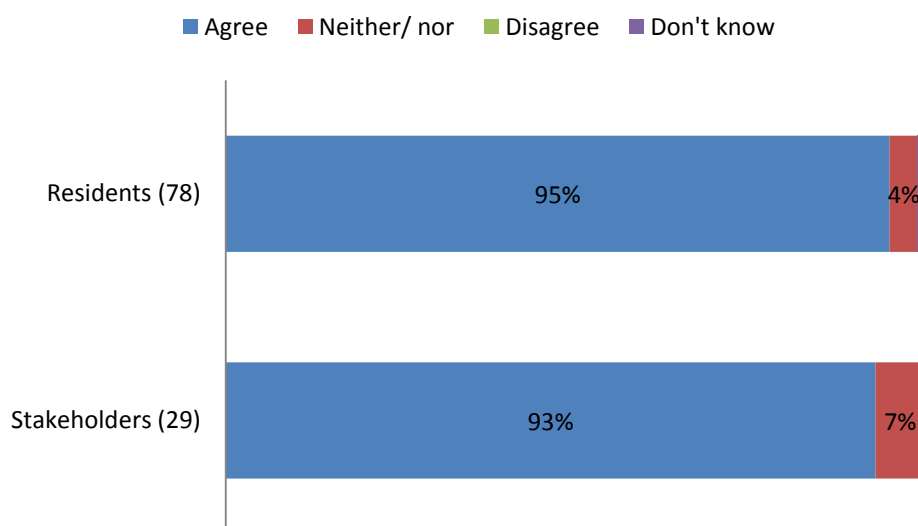
- Christmas cards could be a good way to provide useful contact details and information for people
- A gift for the Mayor is a good idea, but a cheaper alternative should be sourced
- The Mayor can help to raise awareness of West Lancashire
- Depending on the nature of Twinning visits these could be seen as a positive for the borough on both a cultural and economic level

8 Civic Dinner

The Council is considering replacing the Civic Dinner with a Mayor’s Charity Ball which will be paid for by attendees and resource support will be limited to officer time only. This would save around £5,000 a year.

95% of residents and 93% of stakeholders agree with the proposal to replace the Civic Dinner with a Mayor’s Charity Ball.

Figure 8.1: How strongly do you agree or disagree with the proposal to replace the Civic Dinner with a Mayor’s Charity Ball? (base totals in brackets)



25 comments were received from residents about the proposal to replace the Civic Dinner with a Mayor’s Charity Ball. These have been analysed and the main categories are listed below.

Issues highlighted by residents	Number of comments
Cease the provision of a Mayor’s dinner altogether with council resources focused on services which benefit the majority	9
The proposal for a Mayor’s Charity Ball is a good idea	8
There was not sufficient information available to take a view on the proposal	3

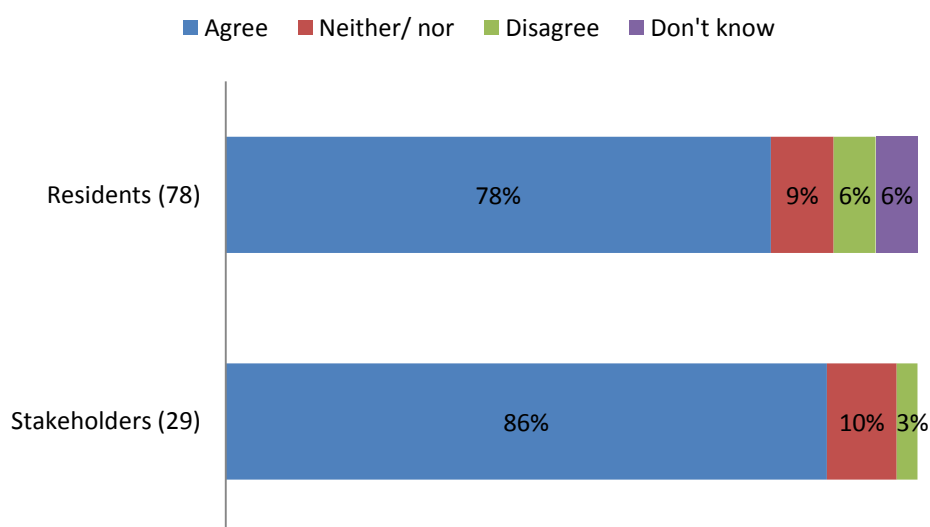
Other comments included a suggestion that any associated charities are local whilst another resident queried whether local businesses could sponsor the event.

11 stakeholders commented on the Civic Dinner proposal, with 10 expressing support, particularly the move towards charitable work. One stakeholder feels the Mayor should organise the event themselves without using officer time.

9 Shared Services Contract

The Council is considering renegotiating the shared services contract with Lancashire County Council and BT Lancashire Services for Revenues, Benefits and IT services. The first year's saving target would be £42,000 with the expectation that savings would be significantly higher in subsequent years.

Figure 9.1: How strongly do you agree or disagree with the proposal to renegotiate the shared services contract with Lancashire County Council and BT Lancashire Services? (base totals in brackets)



23 residents commented on the proposal to renegotiate the shared services contract with BT Lancashire Services. These have been analysed and the main categories are listed below.

Issues highlighted by residents	Number of comments
General support for the proposal to realise savings for the Council	6
Concern or dissatisfaction with the BT Lancashire Services arrangement and the quality of service offered	6
Not enough information to comment on the proposal	5
Concern for any potential job losses as a result of renegotiating the contract	4

14 stakeholders expressed a mix of views on the proposal to renegotiate the BT Lancashire Services contract. Comments included:

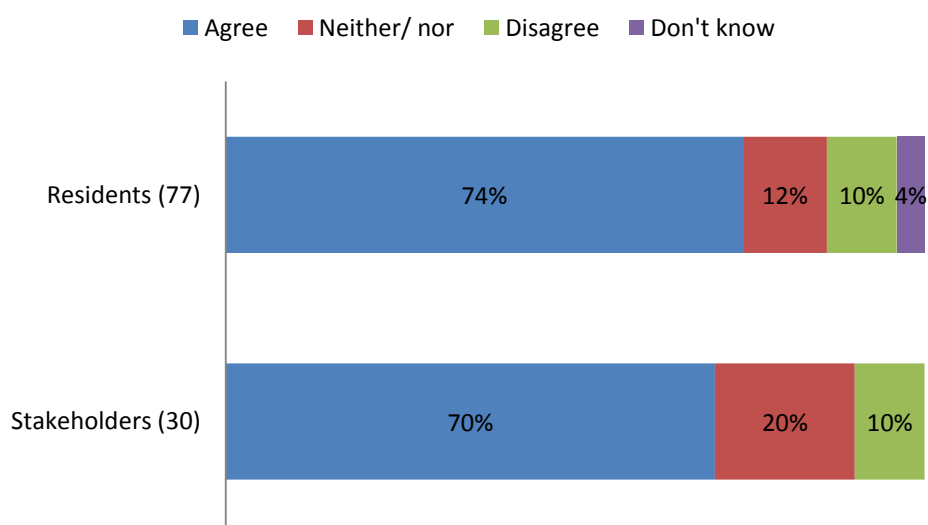
- Any increased efficiencies or resource sharing would be positive
- A couple of stakeholders felt that this could have been done sooner
- It should be an on-going process where savings targets are regularly reviewed
- Some concern around the potential loss of staff hours
- A suggestion that the Council could undertake a wider review of commissioned services to maximise value and that the current BT contract could be renegotiated with a new provider

10 Funding for Christmas lights

The Council is considering seeking contributions from local businesses to help fund the Christmas lights in Ormskirk and Skelmersdale which could save up to £31,000 a year.

Seven out of ten stakeholders agree that the Council should seek contributions from local businesses.

Figure 10.1: How strongly do you agree or disagree with the proposal to seek contributions from local businesses to help fund Christmas lights? (base totals in brackets)



38 comments were made by residents on the proposal to seek contributions from local businesses to help fund the Christmas lights in Ormskirk and Skelmersdale. These have been analysed and the main categories are listed below.

Issues highlighted by residents	Number of comments
General support for the idea to seek contributions from local businesses	9
Unsure of the potential impact on local businesses	6
Comments about the prioritisation of the locations of Christmas lights across the borough	5

Other comments from residents included a view that the Council should contribute to the cost, the contributions from businesses should be optional, the lights could be scrapped altogether and certain businesses should take more responsibility for contributing (such as national chains and Edge Hill University).

14 stakeholders commented on the proposal with a mix of views expressed, including:

- Christmas lights are important to local towns and local businesses
- Christmas lights are 'a waste of money' and do not bring in extra income for businesses
- The proposal would only be relevant to retail businesses who operate in town centres
- It could be difficult to strike the balance between being mandatory and 'opt in' and may not be fair if some contribute but others don't

11 Parish Councils

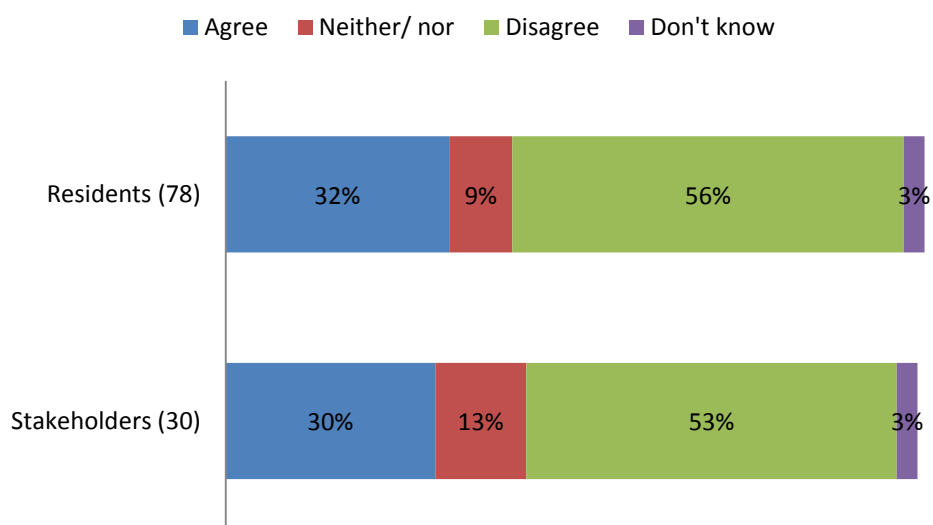
The Council is considering reducing some grants to parish councils in order to save a total of £33,000 a year. This could potentially result in a reduction in the services provided by parish councils.

Proposal one is to reduce concurrent grants paid to parish councils by up to 30%. Concurrent grants, currently worth £64,000 a year, are used by parish councils to provide specific services within their area. This would save up to £19,000 a year.

32% of residents who responded to the consultation agree with the proposal to reduce concurrent grants paid to parish councils, whilst 56% disagree.

All parish council respondents strongly disagree with the proposal.

Figure 11.1: How strongly do you agree or disagree with the proposal to reduce concurrent grants paid to parish councils? (base totals in brackets)

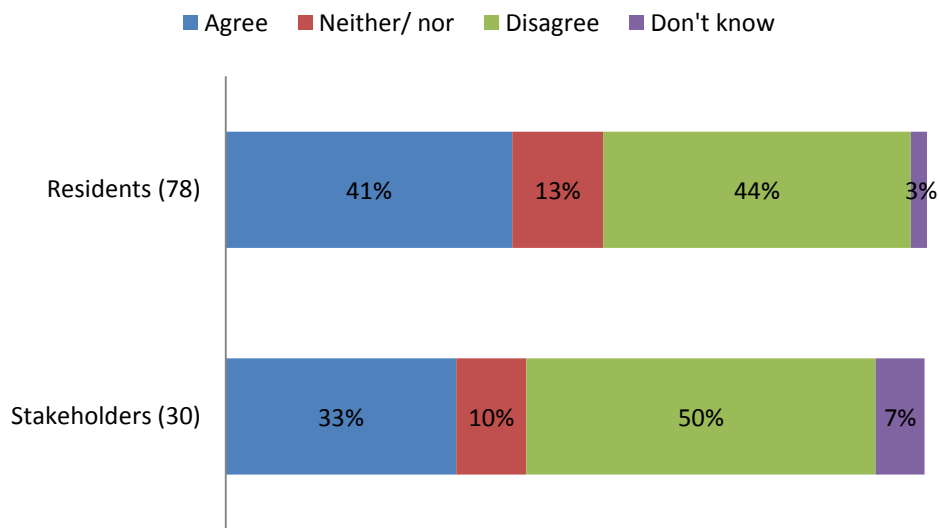


Proposal two is to reduce Council Tax support grant paid to parish councils by up to 30%. This grant is paid to compensate parish councils for reductions in income resulting from changes to the council tax benefit scheme, currently worth £48,000 a year, and is used by parish councils to help provide some local services. This would save up to £14,000 a year.

41% of residents who responded to the consultation agree with the proposal to reduce concurrent grants paid to parish councils, whilst 44% disagree.

All parish council respondents strongly disagree with the proposal.

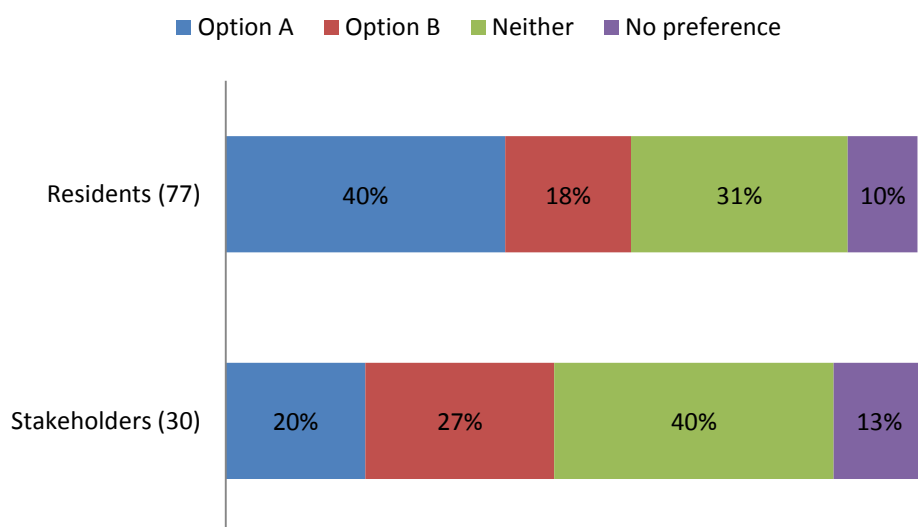
Figure 11.2: How strongly do you agree or disagree with the proposal to reduce Council Tax support grant paid to parish councils? (base totals in brackets)



In making these reductions, there would be two options to choose from. Option A would be to reduce funding by 10% per year over each of the next 3 years. Option B would be to introduce the full 30% saving in 2016/17.

Residents appear more likely to opt for option A whereas stakeholders are more mixed. Two in five stakeholders indicated that they would prefer neither option.

Figure 11.3: Which option would you prefer? (base totals in brackets)



29 comments were received from residents on the proposals relating to Parish Councils. These have been analysed and the main categories are listed below.

Issues highlighted by residents	Number of comments
Concern about the impact that grant reductions could have on services in the local area	6
Funding for Parish Councils should be left alone	6
Grant reductions should be implemented but the Parish Councils should be given some time to manage the reductions	4

Other comments from residents included implementing the reductions straightaway, positive feedback about Parish Councils, a lack of information to provide an informed response and some queries about how the proposal would affect non-parish areas of the borough.

14 stakeholders commented on the Parish Council proposals. 9 stakeholders expressed disagreement with the proposal to reduce grant funding, with the main reasons being the impact it would have on local services across the borough and the timing of the budget setting process makes it difficult for Parish Councils to agree their own budgets.

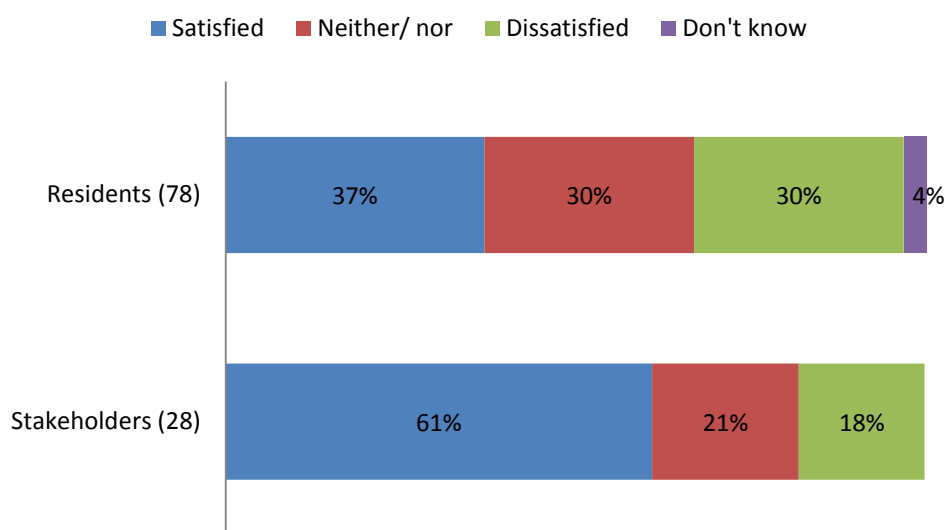
Other stakeholders did not feel as strongly that the proposal should not be implemented. Instead suggestions included incentivising Parish Councils to ensure funds are used effectively and introducing more control over how Parish Councils spend their grants.

12 Views on the overall measures

Overall, stakeholders appear to be more satisfied than residents with the measures the Council is proposing to take to reduce spending, generate income and improve efficiency.

Three in five (61%) stakeholders are satisfied with the measures compared to 37% of residents.

Figure 12.1: Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the measures the Council is proposing to take to reduce spending, generate income and improve efficiency?



31 residents made final comments at the end of the consultation survey. A wide range of comments were captured, including:

- The need to continue looking for further savings, including staff and councillor expenses
- Several comments on student landlords and how they should not be exempt from Council Tax charges
- Some negativity about the cuts that the Council is making
- But also some sympathy and understanding for the challenges the Council faces to reduce its budget

11 stakeholders provided a final comment during the consultation, including:

- Needs to be more focus on efficiencies and commercialisation rather than reducing spend and increasing costs

- Some general support for a number of the proposals and appreciation that the Council is trying to spread the reductions across different sectors and services, although there is some disappointment relating to specific proposals, namely reductions to Parish Council grants
- General empathy for the situation the Council is in and the difficult decisions which need to be made