

West Lancashire
Meeting the Budget Challenge
2016 Consultation - Residents



in:fusion

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1 Executive Summary

548 responses were received to the 2016 Meeting the Budget Challenge consultation for residents, as well as 35 emails or letters about proposals in the consultation.

The table below provides a summary of the level of agreement for each proposal in the consultation, ordered by those proposals with the highest agreement levels.

There is relatively strong agreement for reducing the time period for Council Tax Discounts, and a fairly high level of understanding of the challenges that the council faces to achieve savings and increase income.

The savings proposals with the strongest level of disagreement amongst residents are the introduction of an annual garden waste charge and the removal of CCTV cameras in areas with lower crime rates.

Proposals	Agree	Disagree	Don't know
Reduce the time period for discretionary Council Tax Discounts on empty properties by half	71%	21%	8%
Agreement with the statement – 'I understand the challenges that the Council faces to find new ways of achieving savings and increasing income from the services it delivers' *	70%	12%	1%
Remove static recycling sites across the borough**	69%	26%	6%
Stop garden waste collections during the winter	51%	45%	4%
Reduce live monitoring of CCTV in off peak/quieter periods**	45%	50%	6%
Charge £25 per year per bin to have an extra green bin emptied	41%	55%	4%
Review mechanical sweeping and street cleansing prestige work	39%	53%	8%
Rationalise public toilet provision to reduce costs by 50%	37%	49%	14%
Remove some of the CCTV cameras in areas with lower crime rates	29%	63%	8%
Introduce an annual charge of £30 to collect garden waste	14%	83%	3%

**A different scale was used for this question, including a 'neither agree nor disagree' option, which is why the percentages do not total 100%*

***Percentages total more than 100% due to rounding*

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 2017/18.

The Council developed a range of proposals in 2016 which were approved for consultation with residents and organisations in the borough before any final decisions are made on the Council's budget for 2017/18.

The aim of the consultation is to understand whether residents and organisations agree or disagree with the proposals and what impact these would have if they were implemented. The findings of the consultation will inform the decision-making process on the Council's budget for 2017/18.

This report focuses on the feedback received from **residents** through the open-access consultation.

2.2 Methodology

An open-access online consultation survey was developed for residents in West Lancashire to give their views on proposals around the Council's budget. The six week consultation went live on Monday 25 July 2016 and closed on Sunday 4 September 2016.

The residents' survey was hosted on the Council website and promoted through a range of press releases and social media updates. 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.

In relation to each of the savings proposals, some facts and figures were provided giving further information including how much money would be saved. Respondents were also invited to give comments about each proposal and any impact it might have.

In total, **548 responses were received from residents**, of which 5 were paper returns. The level of response has increased significantly compared to previous budget consultations. 110 residents responded in 2015, whilst 32 residents had their say during the 2013 budget consultation.

In addition to the survey responses, 35 emails and letters were received from residents about proposals within the consultation. 16 referred to the proposed charge of green waste,

with some suggesting the council should look at ceasing green waste collections over winter instead. 14 objected to proposals around street cleaning. 6 emails or letters related to both public toilets and CCTV, whilst 10 suggested other savings for the council with the main topics relating to councillor and senior officer salaries and expenses.

The purpose of the consultation was to give residents 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 statistically representative piece of research which represents the views of all residents in the borough.

Given the significant increase in the level of response in 2016, some caution should still be applied when reviewing the analysis and findings. As an open-access consultation there is the potential for self-selection bias from residents with strong views on particular issues or services.

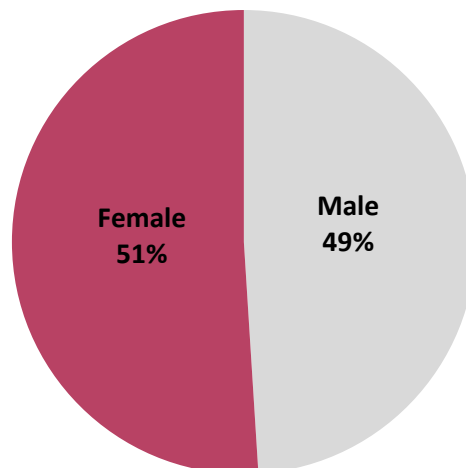
Moreover, whilst demographic information was captured in the survey there will only be cross-tabulation analysis referenced within this report when sample sizes allow and findings are considered noteworthy. For some questions in this report, individual percentage figures may total above 100% due to rounding.

A number of open-ended questions were included in the survey to give people the opportunity to comment on the proposals. As part of the reporting, these comments have been independently reviewed and summarised into key themes during the analysis process.

2.3 Who responded?

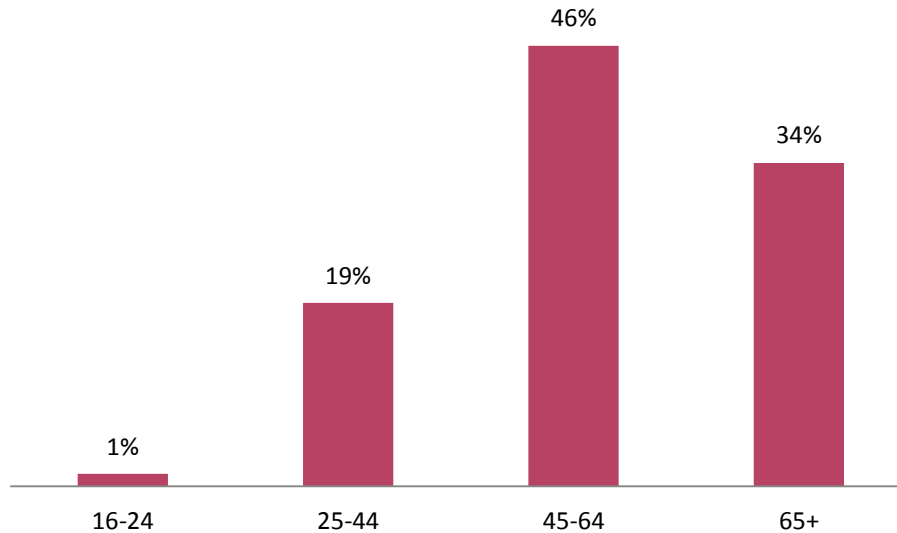
There was an even split of male and female residents who responded to the consultation. This reflects Census population figures for the borough.

Figure 2.1: What is your gender? (base – 536)



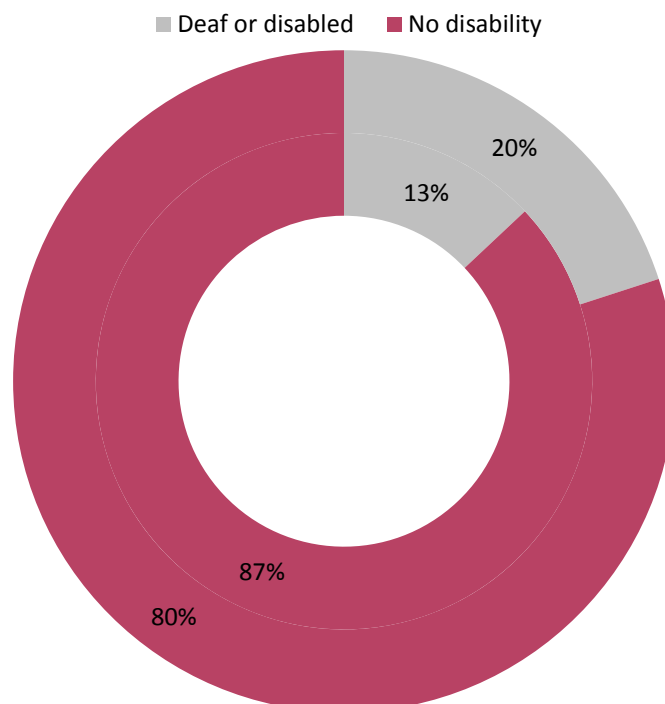
Respondents to the consultation over represent older age groups, with nearly half (46%) aged between 45 and 64 and around a third (34%) aged 65 or over.

Figure 2.2: What was your age on your last birthday? (base – 540)



13% of respondents indicated that they have a disability or are deaf. This is lower than the 20% of residents in the borough who have a limiting long-term illness or disability according to 2011 Census statistics.

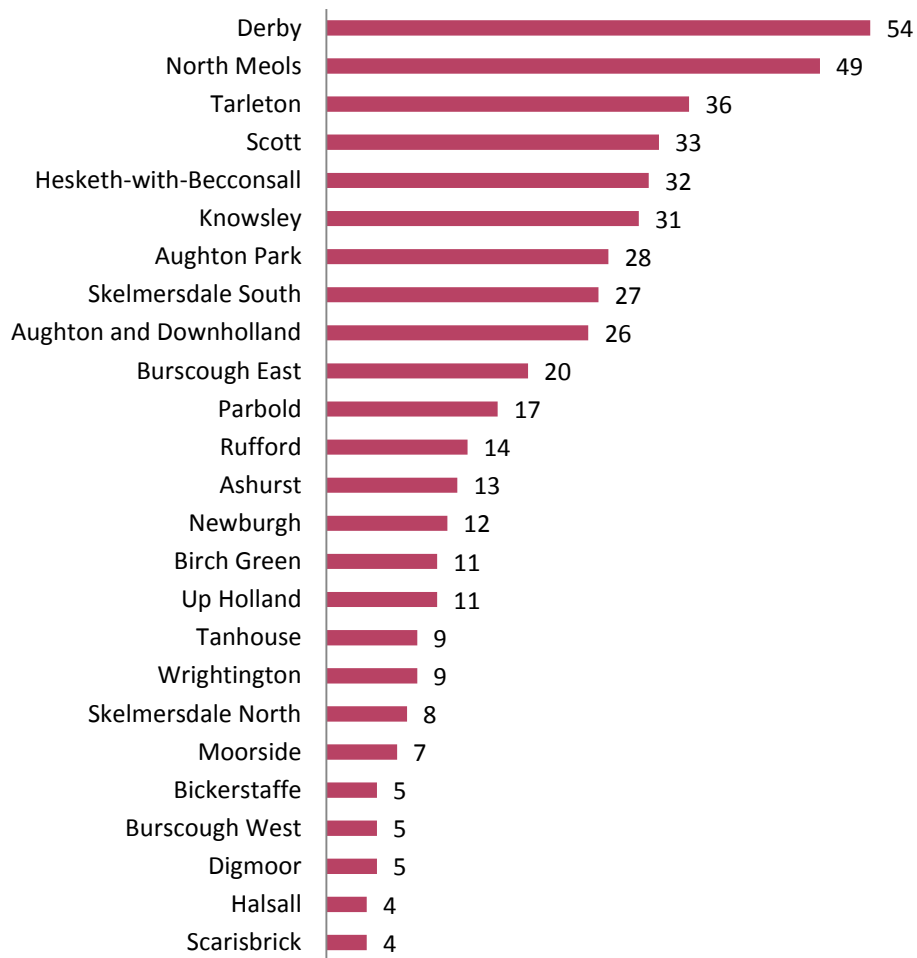
Figure 2.3: Are you a deaf person or do you have a disability? (base – 534, inner circle refers to the survey, outer circle relates to 2011 Census figures)



A mix of responses was received from residents in wards across the borough. The biggest response came from Derby and North Meols residents, whilst 9 wards in the borough had less than 10 responses.

It should be noted that 78 respondents either did not provide a postcode or only provided it partially and so it has not been possible to include these in the ward analysis below.

Figure 3.4: What is your home postcode? (base – 470, split by ward, actual totals)



Of the other demographic questions included in the survey:

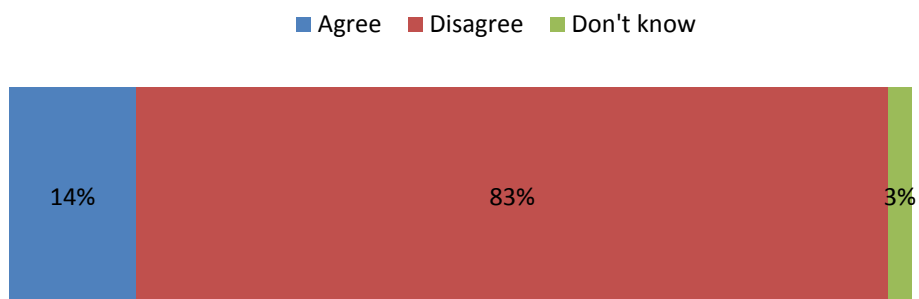
- 65% of respondents identify themselves as of Christian faith, 19% have no faith
- 97% are of White British ethnic background, 2.6% are of either black, mixed or another ethnic background
- 79% of respondents are heterosexual, 18% preferred not to say
- Only one respondent identified as transgender, 9% preferred not to say

3 Main Findings

3.1 Garden Waste Collection

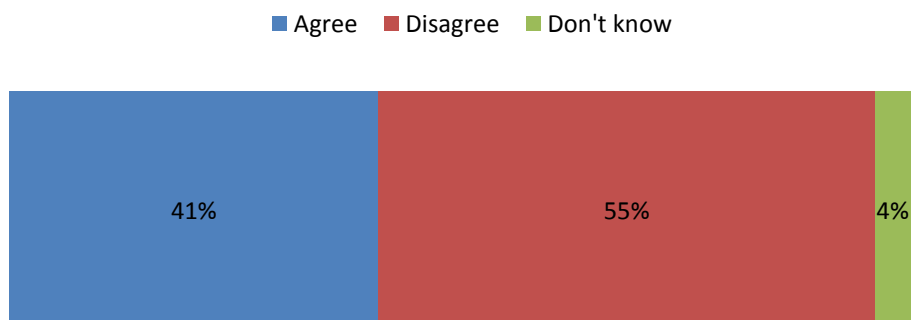
For householders, the Council proposes to introduce an annual charge of £30 to collect garden waste. 83% of respondents disagree with the proposal. Those more likely to disagree with the proposed annual charge appear to be residents who live in the Derby ward (91% disagree) and residents aged 65 or over (86% disagree compared to 81% of 16 to 44 year olds).

Figure 3.1: Do you agree or disagree with the proposal to introduce an annual charge of £30 to collect garden waste? (base – 547)



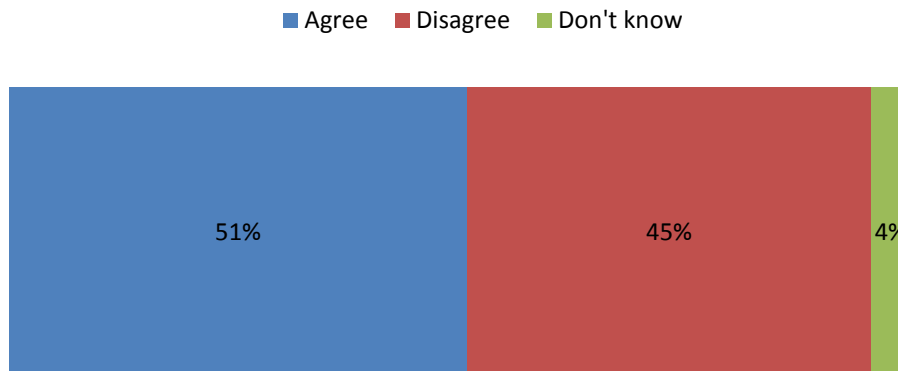
The Council also proposes to charge £25 per year per bin to have an extra green bin emptied. The split of residents who agree and disagree is more mixed for this proposal. 41% agree with the proposal but 55% disagree. Female residents appear more likely to disagree with a charge for extra green bins, with 58% disagreeing compared to 51% of male respondents.

Figure 3.2: Do you agree or disagree with the proposal to charge £25 to have an extra green bin emptied? (base – 544)



In addition, or alternatively, the Council proposes to stop garden waste collections during the winter. More residents agree (51%) with this proposal than disagree (45%). Those residents with a disability were more likely to agree with the proposal than residents who do not have a disability (54% v 50%).

Figure 3.3: Do you agree or disagree with the proposal to stop garden waste collections during the winter? (base – 545)



Over 300 comments were received from residents on the garden waste collection proposals. The main issues and suggestions raised were:

- Negative comments about the proposed costs, in particular:
 - The principle that residents already pay Council Tax and should not be charged further for a service they feel should already be covered by the Council Tax charge
 - The impact any additional costs could have on the most vulnerable residents, including pensioners and people on low incomes or in receipt of benefits
 - A worry from some that once any charge is introduced that it would continue to be reviewed and likely rise over time
- The likely knock-on effect the proposals would have on fly tipping in the borough, including a general increase in green waste on streets and pavements which could then present safety issues during wet, winter weather.
- Some people find it difficult to get rid of garden waste at recycling centres, particularly those who are disabled or elderly. Points were also made that sometimes the types of garden waste collected are not suitable for transporting in cars.

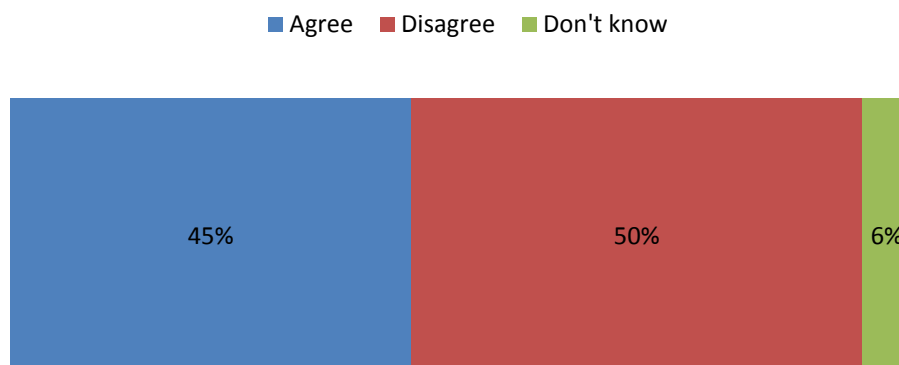
- There were various comments made about what ‘winter’ constitutes and how garden waste collections should account for that time of the year. In particular, residents are worried about the leaves that accumulate over October and November and feel that any winter break should not begin until December. Some residents agree with the principle of stopping collections during winter, whilst others feel it should be a year-round service to account for the pruning and maintenance that gardens need over the year.
- A number of suggestions were made about composting, including whether the council can generate income by composting and re-selling to residents, or the role the council can play in offering advice and encouraging residents to compost to reduce the likelihood and impact of fly tipping of garden waste.
- Some residents made alternative suggestions for garden waste collections. These included reviewing the frequency of collections through the year as opposed to introducing a winter break and just charging for collections over the winter period.

3.2 CCTV

The Council is proposing to reduce live monitoring of CCTV in the borough during off peak/quieter periods. 45% of respondents agree with the proposal whilst 50% disagree.

Some wards had higher proportions of residents disagreeing with the proposal. 43 of 49 respondents (88%) from the North Meols ward and 24 of 32 residents (75%) from the Hesketh-with-Becconsall ward disagree with the proposal.

Figure 3.4: Do you agree or disagree with the proposal to reduce live monitoring of CCTV in off peak/ quieter periods? (base – 546)



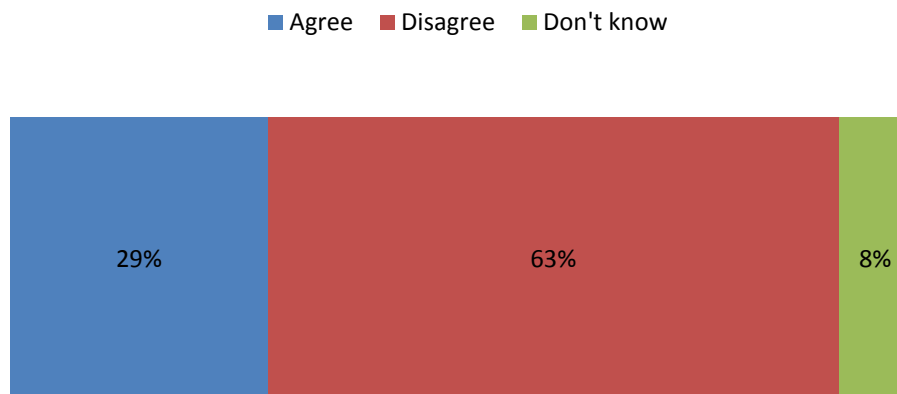
Please note that % total more than 100% due to rounding

Another proposal is to remove some of the CCTV cameras in areas with lower crime rates. 63% of respondents to the consultation disagree with this proposal, whilst 29% agree.

Some wards in the borough had higher proportions of residents disagreeing with the proposal:

- 23 of 26 Aughton and Downholland residents disagree
- 31 of 32 Hesketh-with-Becconsall residents disagree
- 45 of 49 North Meols residents disagree
- 29 of 36 Tarleton residents disagree

Figure 3.5: Do you agree or disagree with the proposal to remove some CCTV cameras in areas with lower crime rates? (base – 542)



263 comments were received from residents on the CCTV proposals. The main points made were:

- A worry that removing any CCTV cameras would encourage crime and anti-social behaviour in those areas, particularly if the removal of cameras has been publicised.
- Some people highlighted the lack of police presence in the rural areas, feeling that they are being penalised and without CCTV they would become more vulnerable.
- Some residents made comments in favour of removing CCTV, with reasons including a perception that they are a waste of money, people feeling uncomfortable about the 'big brother' approach and some preferring for resources to focus on police presence to deter crime.

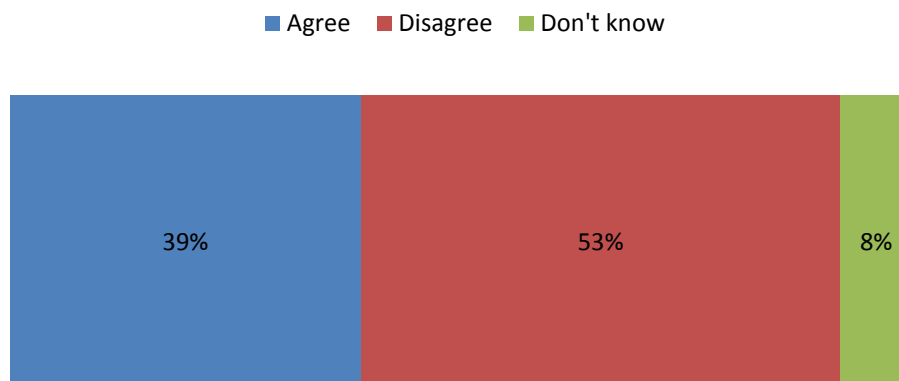
- A number of respondents suggested that any decision be made on a trial basis so that the impact on crime levels can be reviewed and cameras potentially be reinstated if necessary.

3.3 Street Scene Services

The Council proposes to review mechanical sweeping and street cleansing prestige work, including routes and frequencies. More respondents disagree (53%) than agree (39%).

57% of residents aged 65 or over disagree compared to 44% of 16 to 44 year olds. Moreover, male residents appear more likely to disagree (56%) with the proposal than females (50%).

Figure 3.6: Do you agree or disagree with the proposal to review mechanical sweeping and street prestige work? (base – 545)



250 comments were made by respondents about the street cleaning proposal and any impact it might have. The main themes from the comments were:

- A general worry about the impact it would have on the cleanliness and tidiness of the borough's streets and pavements, with some feeling that certain areas would suffer more than others.
- Various comments were made about how this could have a negative impact on a number of factors, including the ability to attract visitors, local pride and most notably the potential for future flooding if drains do not remain clear.

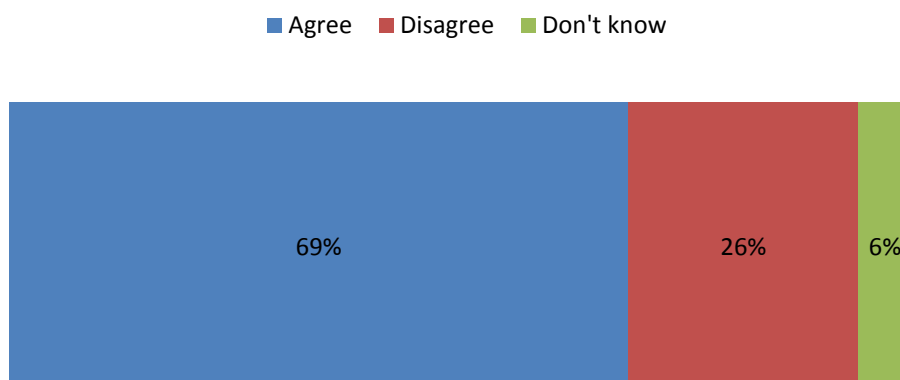
- There was some negativity from residents about current street cleaning in the borough, with comments suggesting that they do not see streets cleaned currently and ‘it couldn’t get any worse’.
- Some suggestions were made to run alongside any reductions or efficiencies in the service, including clamping down on littering through fines, educating residents on being responsible with their litter and doing more with local businesses so they do their bit to keep the borough tidy.

3.4 Static Recycling Sites

The council proposes to remove static recycling sites across the borough. 69% of residents agree with the proposal, 26% disagree.

64% of respondents with a disability agree with the proposal compared to 70% of residents with no disability.

Figure 3.7: Do you agree or disagree with the proposal to remove static recycling sites across the borough? (base – 546)



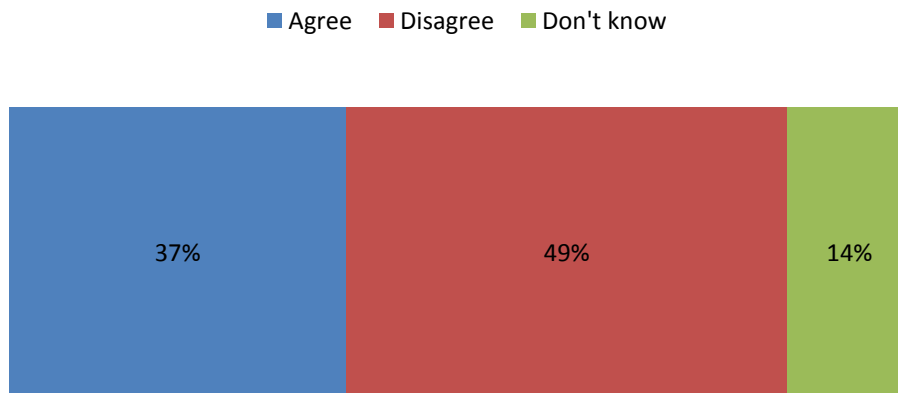
Please note that % total more than 100% due to rounding

3.5 Public Toilets

The council proposes to rationalise public toilet provision to reduce costs by 50%. More respondents disagree (49%) than agree (37%) with this proposal.

33% of respondents aged 16 to 44 disagreed with the proposal compared to 54% of 45 to 64 year olds and 53% of residents aged 65 or over.

Figure 3.8: Do you agree or disagree with the proposal to rationalise public toilet provision to reduce costs by 50%? (base – 546)



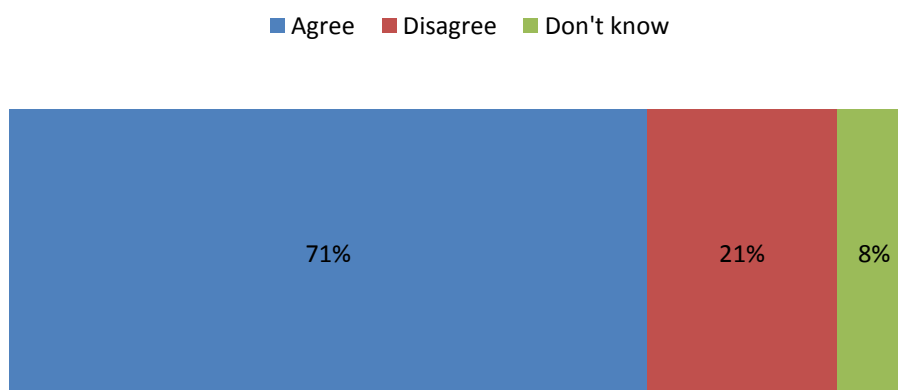
Over 200 comments were made about the public toilet proposal and any impact it might have. The main comments were:

- Some explanation of the impact it would have on groups more reliant on access to toilets, namely families with children, older people and those with a disability.
- The majority of comments referring to charges appear open to the idea of paying a small fee to use good quality, maintained public toilets.
- Moreover, the idea of 'fewer but better' public toilets in the borough was generally received well, particularly given the comments about the current state of toilets in the borough, although there were some people who worry what this would mean for the availability across the borough.
- There were a range of comments about how the council could work with local businesses, particularly pubs and cafes, so that residents and visitors could use their toilet facilities even if it was for a small fee.

3.6 Council Tax Discounts on Empty Properties

The Council proposes to reduce the time period for discretionary Council Tax Discounts on empty properties by half. This proposal gained the most support from residents with 71% of respondents agreeing, whilst 21% disagree. In particular, 78% of residents over the age of 65 agree with the proposal compared to 64% of 16 to 44 year olds.

Figure 3.9: Do you agree or disagree with the proposal to reduce the time period for discretionary Council Tax Discounts on empty properties by half? (base – 544)



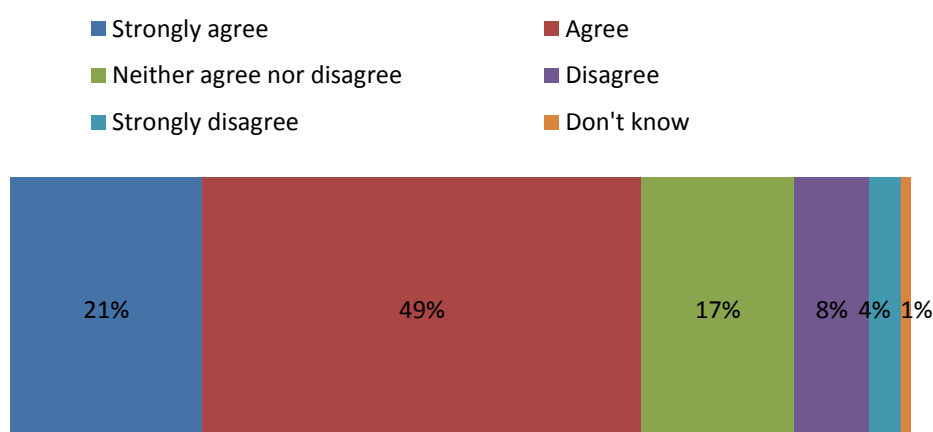
140 comments were made on the proposal around Council Tax Discounts and the impact it might have. A review of the comments reveals:

- A mixed view on the idea of giving home owners a discount on empty homes, with some supportive of the approach whilst others feel it is unfair. Those in support of the idea feel that it will help to tackle the prevalence of empty homes in the borough, however others feel that there should not be a Council Tax charge when a property is empty and council services are not being used.
- Some people made comments about the time period proposed, suggesting that three months does not allow enough time to renovate and/ or sell a property, particularly if it has become empty due to a death of occupant.
- A number of suggestions were made about exemptions for particular circumstances, such as properties becoming empty due to a death in the household.
- There was a strong view from many of the comments about landlords and students and how they should pay Council Tax.

3.7 Overall Measures

70% of respondents to the public consultation strongly agree or agree that they understand the challenges that the Council faces to find new ways of achieving savings and increasing income from the services it delivers.

Figure 3.10: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement – ‘I understand the challenges that the Council faces to find new ways of achieving savings and increasing income from the services it delivers?’ (base – 541)



Finally, residents were given the opportunity to make any further comments or suggestions about how the council could make savings or increase income. Nearly 250 comments were made with the main ideas and suggestions being:

- Landlords and students should pay Council Tax
- Review staffing levels and salaries across the organisation, particularly at a senior level
- Review councillor remuneration and expenses
- Look at opportunities to share services with other authorities and public services
- Look at other ways to increase resource and capacity, such as volunteering or work-based schemes for unemployed residents
- General references to streamlining the organisation and being more efficient

Moreover, there were a number of comments which recognised the challenges that the council faces to balance the budget and the role of central government in setting the focus on austerity measures.