



**CITIZENS PANEL
RESULTS
(BUDGET SPECIAL)**

DECEMBER 2004

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APPENDIX – OPEN-ENDED COMMENTS

Citizens Panel Results – December 2004

1. Introduction

The Council has a Citizens Panel, which contains a representative sample of people living in the District of Stratford-on-Avon. By surveying this Panel, it is possible to obtain views and opinions representative of local residents.

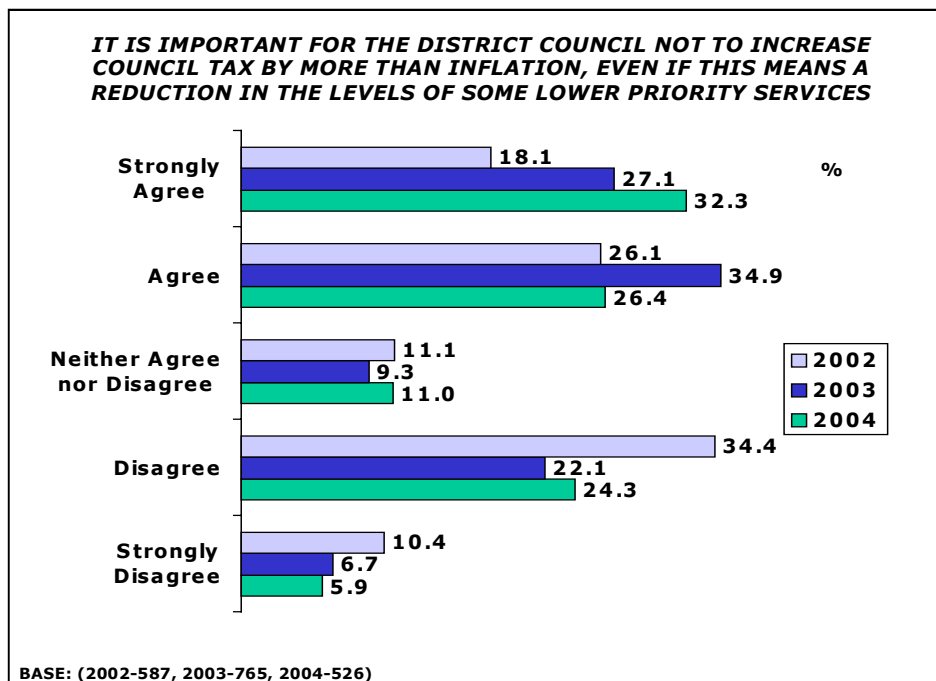
2. Methodology

1,047 questionnaires were mailed in December 2004, with 560 returned in the timeframe allowed. Twelve questionnaires were returned not completed for various reasons. This represents a response rate of 54.1%.

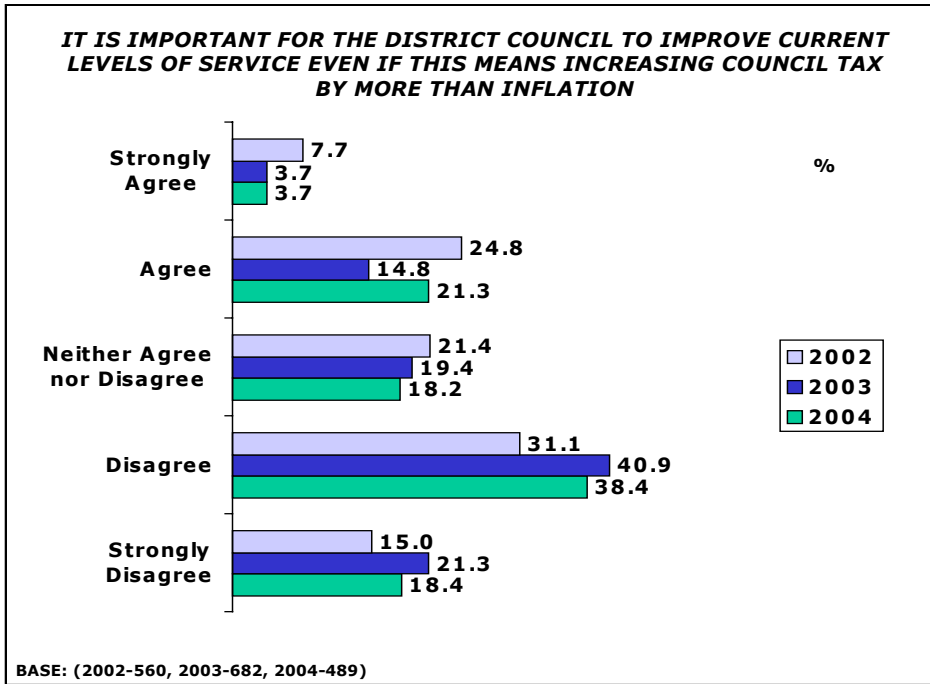
3. Results

Budget Consultation

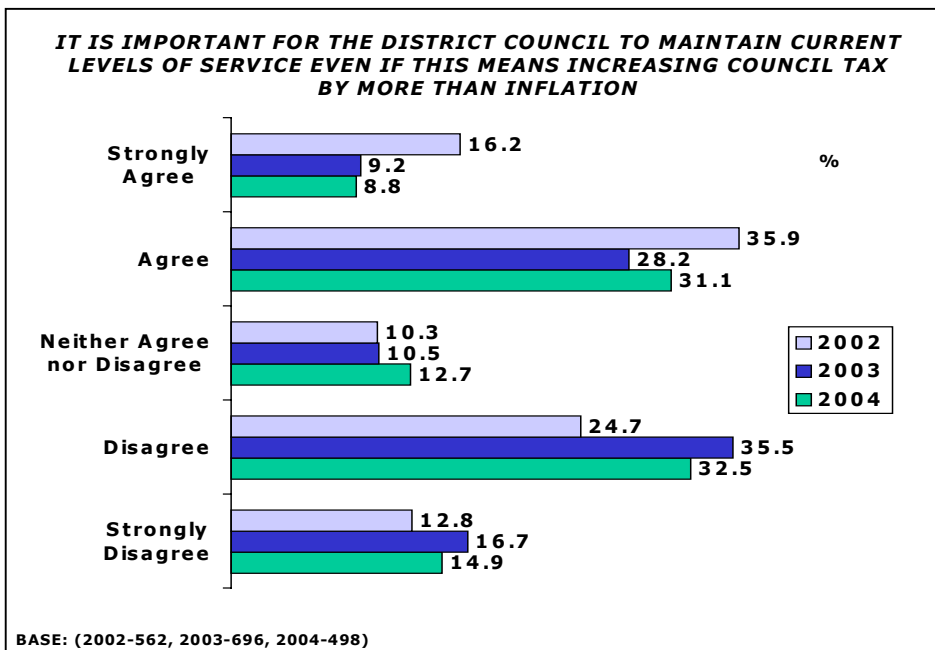
Six out of ten residents have maintained the view as in 2003 that "it is important for the District Council not to increase council tax by more than inflation, even if this means a reduction in the levels of some lower priority services".



A quarter of residents agree that "it is important for the District Council to improve current levels of service even if this means increasing council tax by more than inflation".



Agreement amongst residents that "it is important for the District Council to maintain current levels of service even if this means increasing council tax by more than inflation" has declined from 52% in 2002 to 40% in 2004.



Council Tax Rise Preferences

Provisional figures indicate that the Council needs to bridge a potential gap in the region of £1,250,000, between what it receives in income and what it spends on your services (this does assume an 3% increase in Council Tax). Below are a number of options on how that might be achieved. The figures are for a Band D property and refer to the Stratford District Council element of your Council Tax only (excluding the County Council, the Police, and any Town/Parish Council precept). Results for each option are below.

Option A: £3.20 per year increase in Council Tax (3%) + £1.25 million to be met by selected increased charges and reduced services to users

42.4%

Option B: £5.30 per year increase in Council Tax (5%) + £1.15 million to be met by selected increased charges and reduced services to users

21.1%

Option C: £8.50 per year increase in Council Tax (8%) + £1 million to be met by selected increased charges and reduced services to users

8.2%

Option D: £10.70 per year increase in Council Tax (10%) + £900,000 to be met by selected increased charges and reduced services to users

8.2%

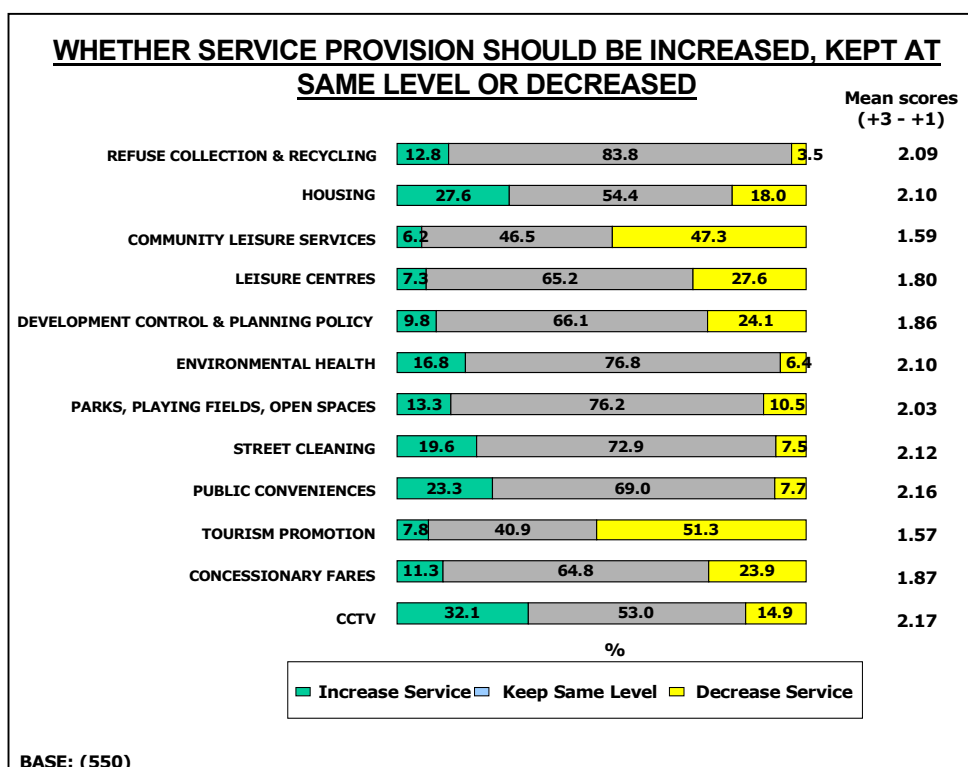
Option E: Other, please specify your own suggested option on the dotted line and tick the box below

20.2%

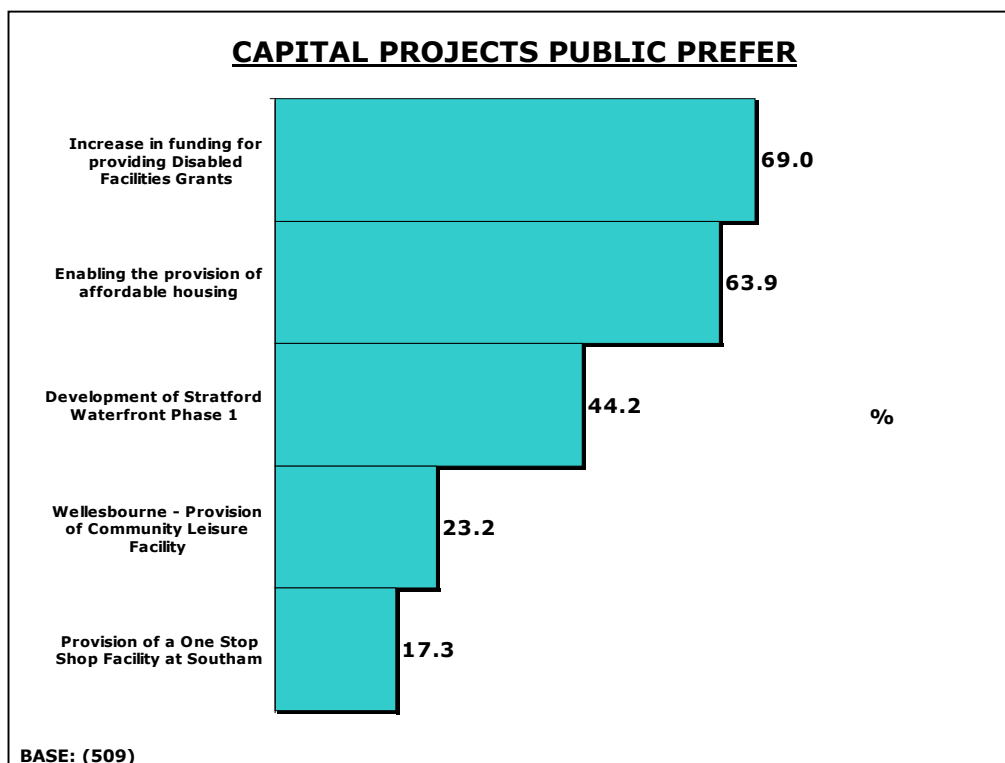
The comments made under Option E are included in the appendix.

Service Provision

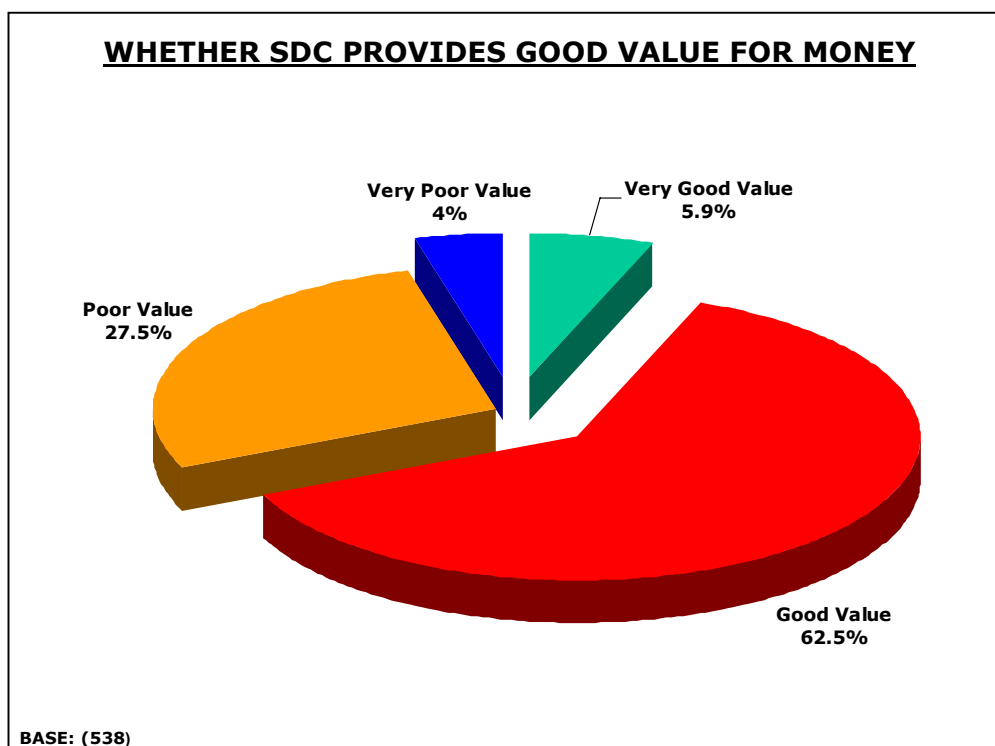
Using the mean score as a guide, residents prefer to see an increase in service provision for CCTV, Housing, Public Conveniences, Street Cleaning, Refuse Collection & Recycling, and Parks, Playing Fields & Open Spaces. Reductions in service are preferred for Tourism Promotion and Community Leisure Services.



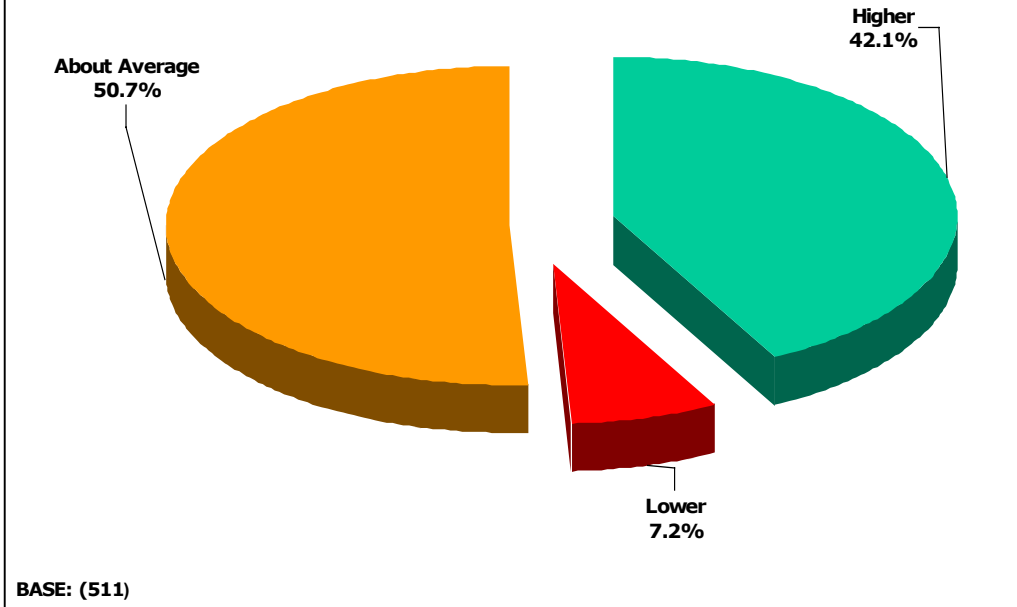
The two capital projects preferred by the Citizens' Panel are to increase funding for Disabled Facilities Grants and enable the provision of affordable housing.



Two-thirds of residents feel we provide good value for money in terms of the council tax it charges. When asked an awareness question about whether they thought the SDC element of the overall council tax was higher, lower or about average, exactly half felt it was about average and 42% thought it was higher. This suggests residents should be provided with more information to educate them that SDC's level of council tax is in the bottom quartile for district councils.



WHETHER RESPONDENTS THINK SDC ELEMENT OF COUNCIL TAX IS HIGHER, LOWER, OR ABOUT AVERAGE COMPARED TO OTHER DISTRICTS



Asked whether SDC adequately communicates its spending details, 62% agreed the Council does. However, agreement falls when asked if reasonable steps are taken by SDC to consult taxpayers about its spending – 48% agree and 33% disagree.

SDC provides adequate communication to council taxpayers about its spending

| | % |
|----------------------------|-------|
| Strongly Agree | 11.2 |
| Tend to Agree | 50.5 |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree | 19.0 |
| Tend to Disagree | 14.8 |
| Strongly Disagree | 3.4 |
| No Opinion / Don't Know | 1.1 |
| Base: | (554) |

The Council takes reasonable steps to consult taxpayers about its spending

| | % |
|----------------------------|-------|
| Strongly Agree | 8.0 |
| Tend to Agree | 39.6 |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree | 20.7 |
| Tend to Disagree | 22.1 |
| Strongly Disagree | 9.3 |
| No Opinion / Don't Know | 0.4 |
| Base: | (551) |

Community Safety

Residents were asked to identify the three most important community safety priorities to be delivered first following an audit of crime during 2004.

| | % |
|---|-------|
| <i>Reduce the number of alcohol-related violent crime incidents, particularly at weekends at night</i> | 61.2 |
| <i>Reduce instances of anti-social behaviour, e.g. criminal damage, noisy neighbours, intimidation</i> | 58.5 |
| <i>Reduce the amount of crime committed by persistent and prolific offenders</i> | 48.3 |
| <i>Reduce the level of drugs misuse by people</i> | 48.1 |
| <i>Reduce the amount of domestic burglary</i> | 37.0 |
| <i>Reduce the level of fear of crime amongst Stratford District residents, which is disproportionately high compared with the national figure</i> | 24.8 |
| <i>Reduce the amount of vehicle crime that takes place, e.g. theft of vehicles, theft from vehicles</i> | 19.7 |
| Base: | (549) |

APPENDIX

COMMENTS MADE AT QUESTION 2,
OPTION E
(OTHER SUGGESTED OPTION FOR
COUNCIL TAX LEVELS)

118 Comments made

"Limit increase to inflation - reduce costs by cutting on wasteful administration & low priority services."

"Sorry - I don't like the ""Reduced Services to Users"

"Operate the council as a business- answerable to the customer and give value for money not year on year increases- Business faces cost downs year on year not increases. The customer would simply go elsewhere. Do not play to the ""you cannot go anywhere else"" theme"
"I do not wish to see a reduction in services"

"No increase, reduce staff and services to reduce costs"

"After the huge increase last year 2003 I think the council should manage their affairs in a better way"

"0% increase (assuming 3% increase) improve efficiency and productivity"

"Reduce admin, costs & waste of funds- reduce staff"

"An increased small % is OK. If money is always short at the end of financial year how much money is wasted or perhaps could be directed better so this gap is not so large because living in small villages and hamlets in the area only have collection of refuse and possible street lighting??"

"Is there a reduction for over 70's"

"The council should become more efficient thus marking savings as costs. Plus ludicrously high salaries must be curbed!"

"If I overspend, no-one bails me out so why should SDC? Live within your income. Your management should not allow a gap to arise"

"Minimal increase and savings to be made through reduction in bureaucracy & waste e.g. Excessive cost of feasibility study for new council offices last year"

"Inflation increase and better management of costs. Negotiations for improved services at lower cost"

"No increase at all in council tax"

"Spend less on recreation-tourism. Majority of people cannot afford to use these facilities. The only people who benefit are residents of SOA and tourists"

"Increase council tax by inflation make savings by running all councils more efficient"

"Reduce refurbishment's to council offices + councillors parks- Increase taxes on businesses that lower standards in Stratford i.e. Nightclubs and late night drinking establishments"

"Increase in council tax = inflation +reduction in services + increase in charges. A reduction in costs can be made by only mailing me once not twice. This form was sent twice = 2xpost cost +envelope +time = ?pounds"

"A more strict control on salaries +work done by salaried etc, lot of excess staff in council offices"

"Inflation only increase (2.6%?) + gap met by reduced services only"

"Council tax increase and maintain services at current levels"

"Less waste, better controls- 3% vise"

"Efficiency savings & capping pension entitlements in the private sector"

"No reduced services to users"

"Think more creatively- get more business minded- change personnel as required"

"Inflation increase in council tax. Reduce spending on recreation & tourism"

"No increase. Sell the council offices + move into cheaper accommodation"

"3% increase and improve efficiency of the council by 3% each year as business do"

"No increase, reduce services, staff, grants etc"

"None of the above will solve the shortfall- needs a rethink"

"Look at staffing levels at Elizabeth house and councillor expenses"

"Suggest better housekeeping- as in small business"

"Cut council waste- do not increase council tax and maintain services"

"Manage your business by controlling expenses and maximising productivity as in the private sector"

"Dramatically decrease grants etc for non essentials (That is the latters people should make their own efforts"

"10.70 per year + efficiency cuts, while maintaining services"

"Increase council tax until you can maintain current services (+not reduce)"

"Analysis of central Gov. reduction by circa 3/4million needs clarification. i.e. Is this permanent/ what justification? Can the interest on reserves be improved?"

"Examine how this overspend came about and invite those responsible to do something about it. Why should I pay for their inefficiency?"

"Large increase in all fees for planning application in relation to size of project"

"An increase of no more than 7% in council tax + balance rest by cost reductions in SDC"

"Reduce the cost of running the council and waste of resources on such schemes as the council offices. More efficient use of resources"

"Overheads to be reduced i.e. Expenses salaries, perks + early retirement"

"Please do not cut services especially in outlying areas"

"Why when other authorities have a lower tax, is ours SO expensive- Lower it!"

"Increase charges and changes so that there are no reduced services to users"

"No increase on at least a maximum of 1%"

"Increase efficiency- especially possible around housing & council tax benefit administration. Reduce/eliminate infighting amongst council officials"

"And this is going in the wrong direction i.e. increased tax and reduced service. How can anyone agree with this?"

"Increase council tax to meet the shortfall"

"Reduce expenditure to match funding"

"Reduce allowances to councillors"

"Stop wasting money- work smarter"

"Reduce the number of high paid managers and merge departments"

"Start controlling cost to below inflation levels (or lower)"

"A reduction of council tax is required by 10%"

"No reduced service to users. Better budgeting"

"Maintain services at reduced cost by improving productivity"

"Year on year there is an increase in council tax charges. For 2005/2006 charges should be frozen at last years rates"

"Council tax should be increased by inflation & internal waste should be cut to cover the gap"

"Labour government, set standard keep within inflation"

"Exist within the budget as everyone else has to"

"Reduce council staff"

"Continuously check your costs. Make up shortfall via increased council tax"

"First and foremost OAP's cannot afford these high tariffs"

"No reduction in services"

"Zero increase"

"3% + 1.25million met by increases efficiency + cost cutting"

"Increase council tax equally do not discriminate"

"Some council bosses could cut their wages. Less wasting money on silly things that nobody get we benefit from"

"No more than (2%) increase"

"Maintain council tax at 2--4-5 levels"

"Services must not be reduced as they are not very good at present"

"% increase to maintain current levels of service"

"Eliminate the waste in resources and be more efficient"

"Staffing levels to be heavily reduced- except in policing and car park attendants"

"Pay figure needed not to reduce but increase services!"

"Raise money using business partnerships with the large organisations within the town"

"Full increase and improvement to services inc. rubbish disposal & policing"

"Maintain the current level of council tax, reduce council overheads and improve service to all users"

"Reduce the number of paid councillors and make administration more efficient"

"People on low income and pension cannot afford go back to poll tax and all over 18 years pay more"

"DC to spend less on schemes which seem to damage the towns business etc Parking metered!!"

"No increase. I only have my bins emptied once a week, and I even have to carry them to the road side. We will soon have to put them in the lorry our self? I have nothing else."

"Increase council tax by percentage to eliminate the potential gap"

"No increase. Cut out all nice to do things concentrate on mandatory services only"

"3.20 and revise the budget to cut waste"

"The huge number of new houses, combined with the 3% increase + increased efficiency should cover any shortfall"

"Cost cutting exercise on under used services / buildings"

"3.20 per year increase + more efficient use of manpower + resources to maintain services cutting down on wastage"

"Use income more efficiently and stop wasting money. Less spending on retirement pensions for police etc"

"We can not get extra money when we can't make ends meet, so we have to spend wisely"

"Increase revenue from new car park meters. Reduce admin and overhead cost. Negotiate better deals from outsourced partners e.g. Biffa"

"Reduce services and dont increase council tax by more than inflation."

"Only increase by inflation?????????????"

"Why do all the above mention@Reduced services? Increase tax to cover existing services."

"Any increase should be ??? to RPI. I am sure that this can be achieved by improving productivity without reducing services ???."

"Reduce management levels- cut wastage- disability permits distributed freely but are ?? always disabled?? They then receive free parking."

"No increase, use money more wisely. People will not tolerate any more increase if legal bills. With regard to S.D.C. employees keep having to be paid."

"As an accountant if I couldn't reduce water costs by £1,250,000 ?? from your budget I wouldn't be much good!"

"Use increases government funding promised by Gordon Brown recently to keep increase as low as possible"

"Services should not be reduced. Maybe less should be paid out to the new parking wardens. Do we need quite so many?"

"3.20 + review of recreation + tourism + planning + ???.(35.8% of budget) (22% of budget) development"

"Reduce expenditure on tourism to the value it was at in 2003/2004.6,687-5312=1,375 1375-1,250=1251-profit. Jobs a good un!"

"No target for council tax increase. Set a target to reduce Council establishment and operational costs in order to contain council spending."

"Further efficiency gains; elimination of all now. Essential services. Be radical and target a reduction in tax-that will highlight areas which can take cuts + enable the less well off to cope with their tax bills."

"No increase, savings to be made from recreation + tourism which should be transferred to private sector"

"Reduce precept-shortfall to be made good by scaling back public sector pension benefits."

"Try to maintain council tax without increase. Have independent audit of admin + all costs bearing in mind money wasted in recent years on Elizabeth House proposals. Surely car ??? changes now imposed will increase revenue but sadly it is ?? people out of town."

"3% up in council tax + maintenance of all services by user charges (means tested if necessary)."

"With the increase in housing in the area surely there should be an increase in council tax revenue"

"Efficiency should be improved, no services should be reduced if costs are rising above inflation. Any increase should be for additional services not improvement/funding of inefficient management of other/existing ones"

"To remain as current until tax payers? A clear list of reduced changes which? All options in going to happen?"

"Restrict council tax increase to rate of inflation and put pressure on the government to increase its contribution. This will need publicity to enlist public support. The government should be pushed to the limit, at least where they have to threaten legal action. Also if services are reduced it will stir up that section of the public that do not pay council tax and may prompt some action (as when poll tax was introduced)"

"3.20 p.a. increase (3%) + 1.25m to be met by productivity increases."

"Do not reduce service to users- look to private sector to sponsor etc any or all services, competitively? Obtaining bulk discount, use are company to co-ordinate all ??? for consistency, pre-fund ?? This year + increase charges are next 5 years in a 5 year plan."

"If the money was managed differently I? Like one could take???"