



# **ANNUAL BUDGET CONSULTATION SURVEY RESULTS**

**DECEMBER 2006 / JANUARY 2007**

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January 2007**

# ANNUAL BUDGET CONSULTATION SURVEY

## December 2006 / January 2007

### 1. Introduction

The purpose of the consultation was to obtain the views of residents on subjects surrounding council tax and the allocation of financial resources in 2007/08.

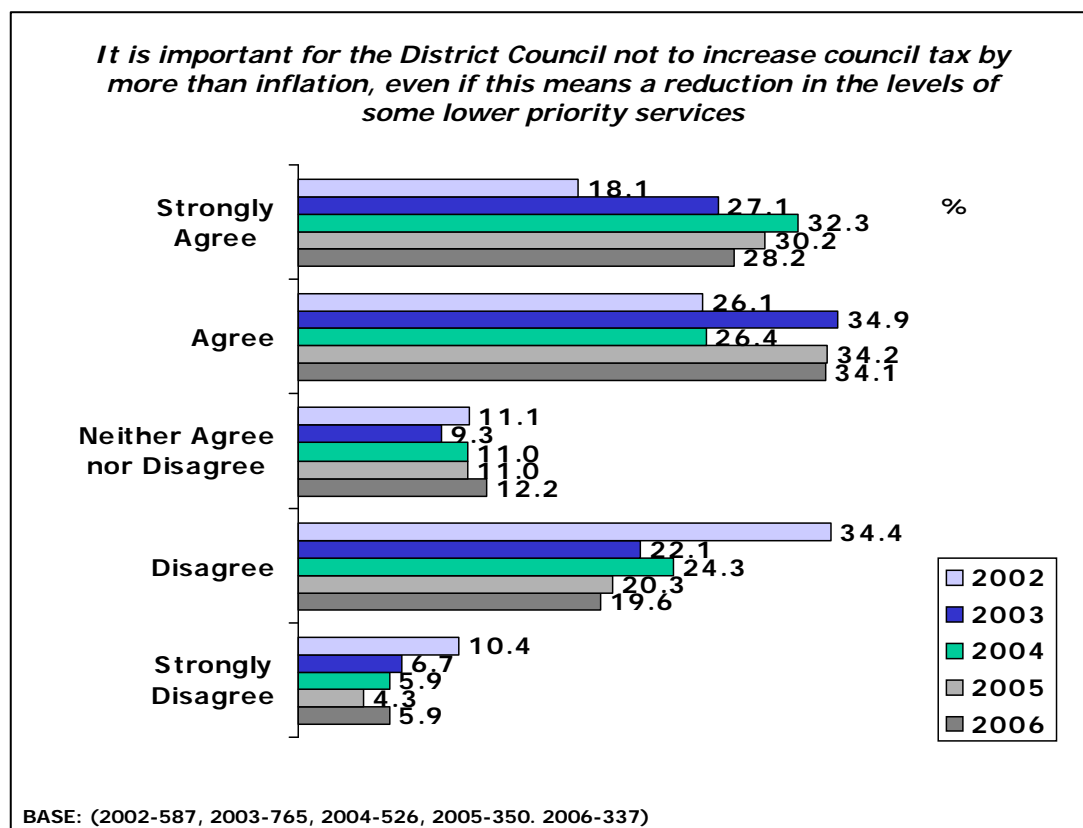
### 2. Methodology

Questionnaires were mailed in December 2006 to 1,500 residents randomly selected off the edited electoral role, with 362 returned in the timeframe allowed. Eight questionnaires were returned not completed for various reasons. This represents a response rate of 24.2%.

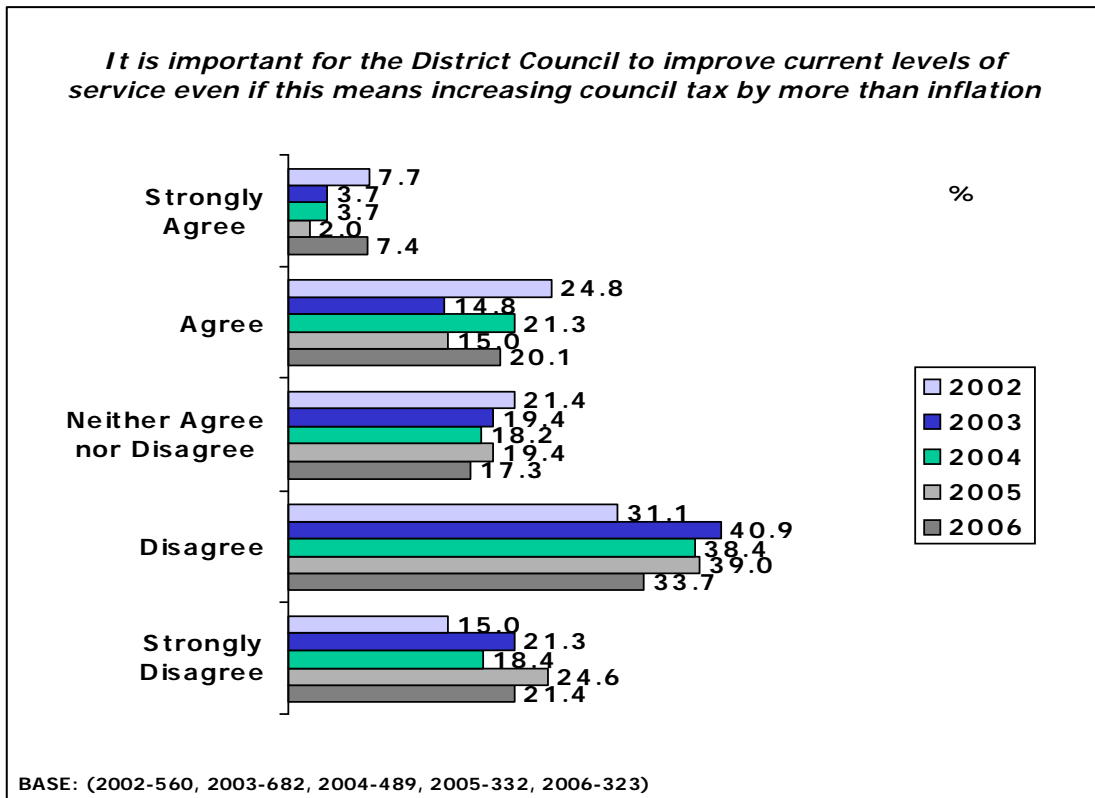
### 3. Results

#### Budget Consultation

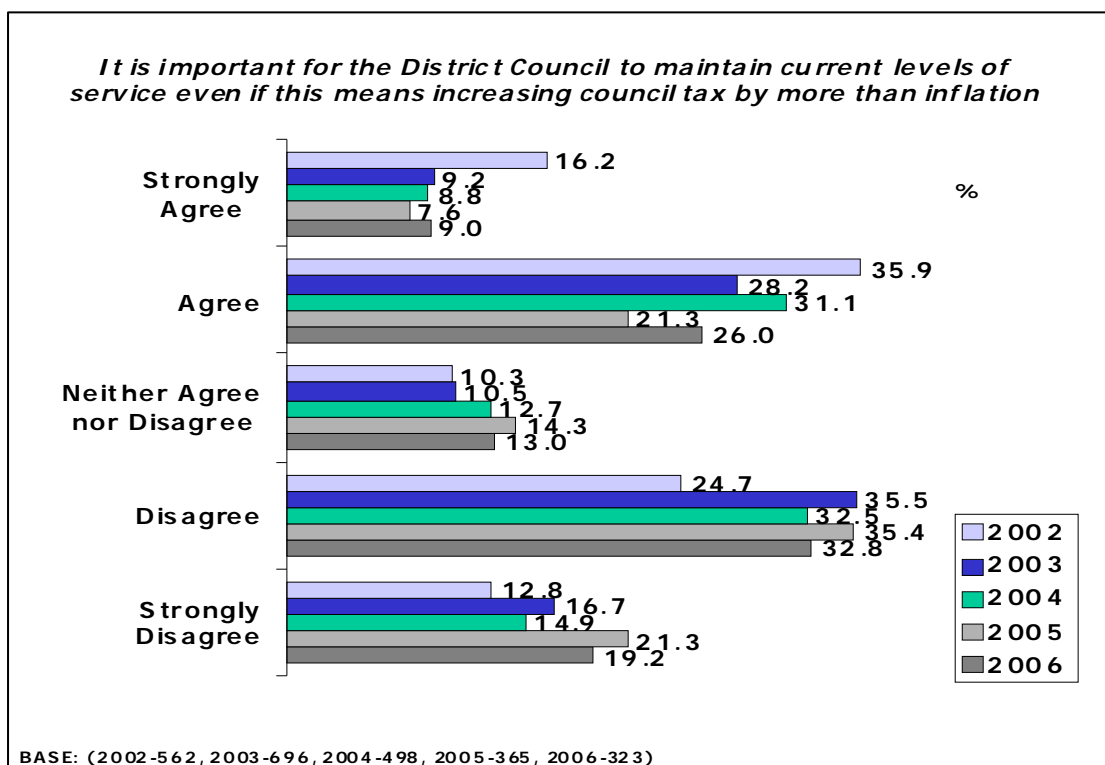
63% of respondents feel "it is important for the District Council not to increase council tax by more than inflation, even if this means a reduction in the levels of some lower priority services".



27% 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". This is a rise of 10% on the previous year. 55% disagree with the statement.



Over a third of ten respondents (35%) agree 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". This figure has risen by over 6% compared with last year. Disagreement levels are over 50%.



## **Council Tax Rise Preferences**

Provisional figures indicate that the Council needs to bridge a potential gap in the region of £250,000; between what it receives in income and what it spends on your services (this does assume a 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:** £3.45 per year increase in Council Tax (3%) + £250,000 to be met by selected increased charges and reduced services to users

**45.8%**

**Option B:** £5.75 per year increase in Council Tax (5%) + £150,000 to be met by selected increased charges and reduced services to users

**19.8%**

**Option C:** £9.19 per year increase in Council Tax (8%) + £0 to be met by selected increased charges and reduced services to users

**13.4%**

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

**20.9%**

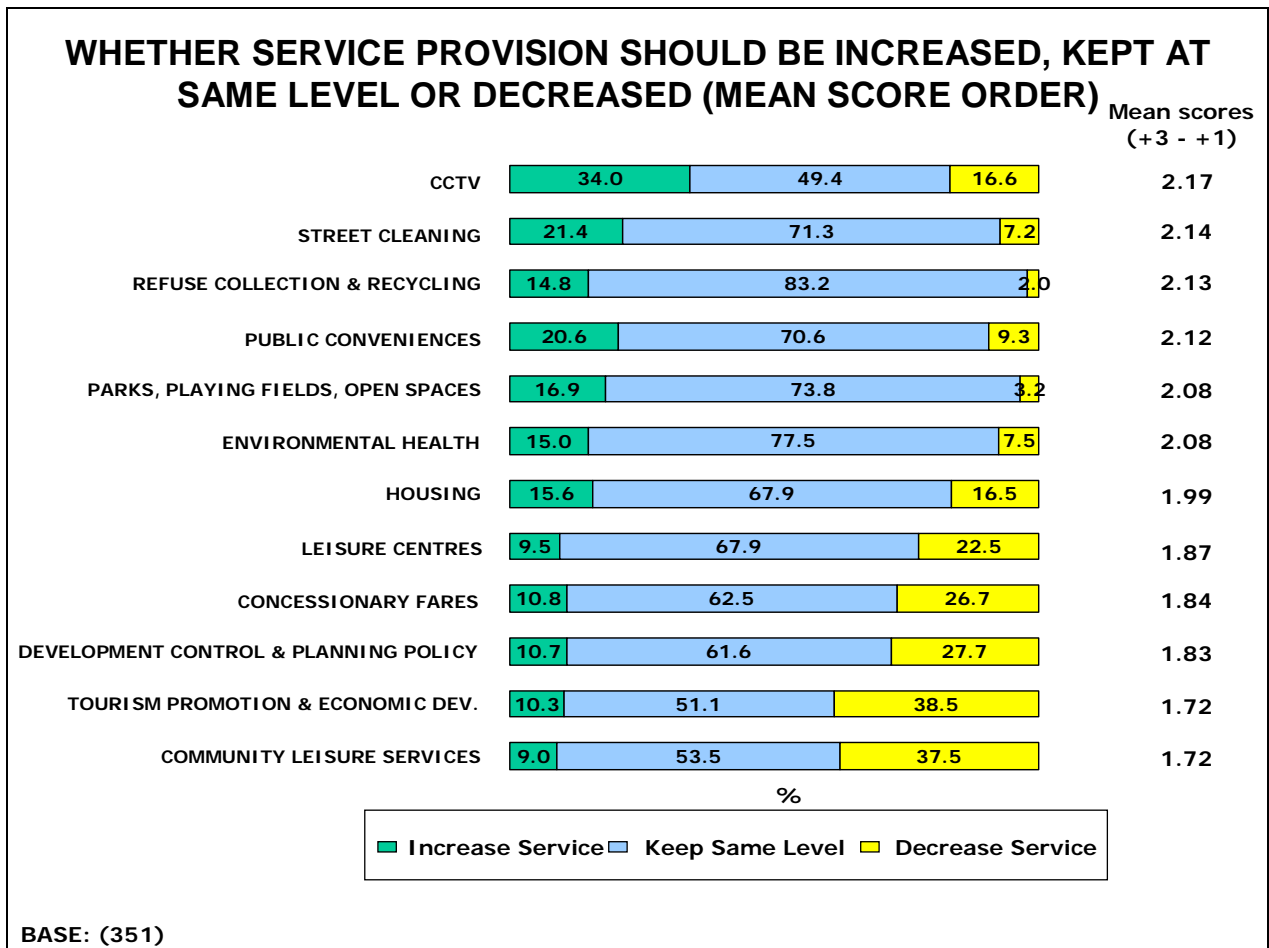
The comments made under Option D are included in the appendix.

## Service Provision

Using the mean score as a guide, residents prefer to see an increase in service provision for CCTV; Street Cleaning; Refuse Collection & Recycling; Public Conveniences; Parks, Playing Fields & Open Spaces; and Environmental Health. Reductions in service are preferred for Community Leisure Services; Tourism Promotion & Economic Development; Development Control & Planning Policy; Concessionary Fares; Leisure Centres; and Housing.

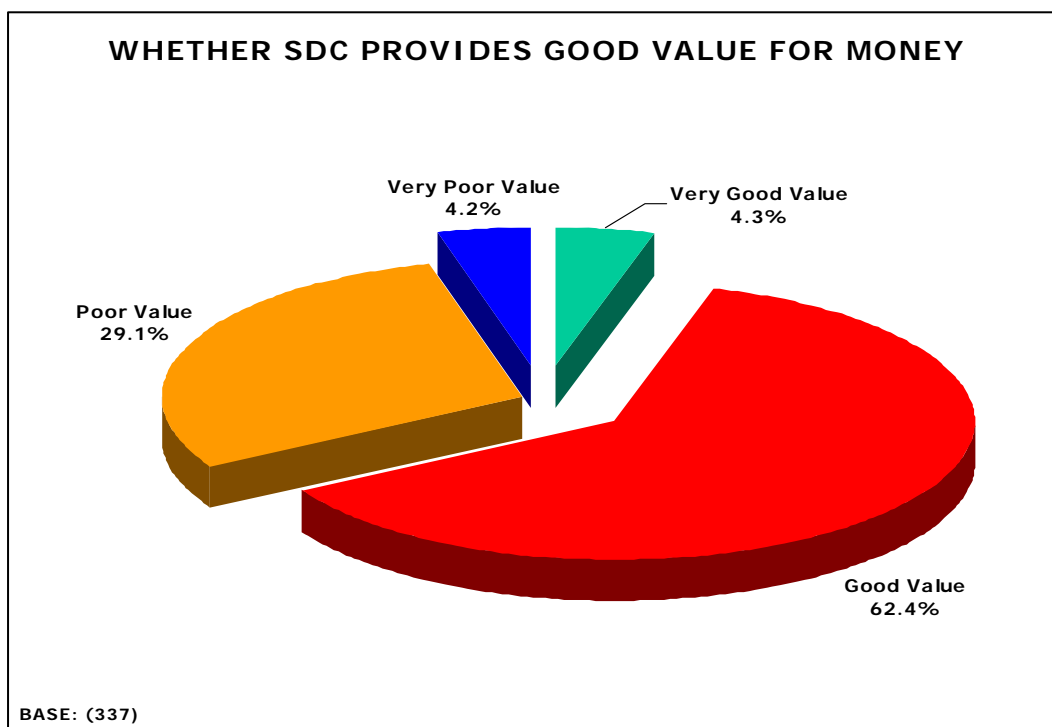
Running the results for statistical significance, the following trends were found:

- Older residents want increased service provision in street cleaning and CCTV, but would like a reduction in service for housing, community leisure services and leisure centres.
- Younger residents want increased service provision in housing, community leisure services, parks etc and leisure centres, but less spent on public conveniences.
- Those aged 30 to 49 want an increase in provision for refuse collection and recycling and a reduction in concessionary fares.
- Those aged 50-64 want more spent on public conveniences.
- Male residents want more provision in street cleaning.



## General

Exactly two-thirds of residents feel Stratford District Council provides good value for money in terms of the council tax it charges.



Asked whether SDC adequately communicates its spending details, 62% of those surveyed agreed the Council does. This figure is 4% higher than 2005.

*SDC provides adequate communication to council taxpayers about its spending*

	2004 %	2005 %	2006 %
Strongly Agree	11.2	6.7	9.8
Tend to Agree	50.5	51.7	52.6
Neither Agree nor Disagree	19.0	20.3	21.3
Tend to Disagree	14.8	13.6	10.6
Strongly Disagree	3.4	4.5	5.2
No Opinion / Don't Know	1.1	3.2	0.6
Base:	(554)	(375)	(348)

Agreement also increases in 2006 when comparing the previous year in respect of the reasonable steps taken by SDC to consult taxpayers about its spending – 45% agree in 2005 against 43% in 2004. Almost three out of ten residents disagree.

*The Council takes reasonable steps to consult taxpayers about its spending*

	2004 %	2005 %	2006 %
Strongly Agree	8.0	4.8	7.8
Tend to Agree	39.6	38.6	36.8
Neither Agree nor Disagree	20.7	23.7	25.8
Tend to Disagree	22.1	21.3	19.1
Strongly Disagree	9.3	9.0	9.6
No Opinion / Don't Know	0.4	2.7	0.9
Base:	(551)	(376)	(345)

## Profile

### Gender

	%
Male	50.7
Female	49.3
Base:	(353)

### Age

	%
30 or younger	6.3
31 to 49	20.7
50 to 64	36.5
65 and over	36.5
Base:	(348)

### How long lived in Stratford District

	%
Less than 1 year	2.5
1-2 years	5.4
3-5 years	7.6
6-10 years	8.2
11-20 years	21.2
21 years or more	55.1
Base:	(354)

### Ethnic Origin

	%
White	98.3
Asian or Asian British	1.1
Chinese/Other Ethnic Background	0.3
Black or Black British	0.3
Base:	(349)

## APPENDIX

### QUESTION 2, OPTION D (OTHER SUGGESTED OPTION FOR COUNCIL TAX LEVELS)

71 comments shown below.

- Stop building new housing and maintain levels of services for existing residents
- I strongly believe we are already paying too much
- Reduce paper work and red tape
- Replace council tax with a local income tax
- £0 p.a. increase in council tax and £0 to be met by selected increased charges and reduced services
- Hold tax at current levels and look at ways of saving money
- Reduce costs of planning and economic development
- Savings could be made in many departments to save £250,000 or more - At all councils
- Council tax has to be found and think option A is right
- Reduce overheads within district council (e.g. staff, final salary pension)
- Negotiate harder with your service providers to ensure a reduction in cost and therefore no need to increase charges or reduce services. This could be done by negotiating rebates and settlement discounts
- Reduce waste and inefficiency
- Inflation increase and savings
- Percentage increase to be the same as state pension increase. Additional funding from reducing civil service pension increases to the same level as state pension increases
- Reduce spending on non services to users
- No increase in council tax. Reduced services to users. Much less money wasted on you telling us how clever you are
- Review your efficiency. Look at labour costs and who adds value. Only 1.25% improvement is required. You need a year on year cost saving plan. Perhaps you have one, in which case what have you achieved?
- £2.00 per year increase (% in line with the national pensions increases) and £200,00 met by 1.5% improvement of productivity/value added)
- Be more efficient - as any other industry would have to be or reduce staff levels
- Council should not rely on placing business contracts outside. Do your own contract like a business should be organised. Suggest you take a further count of your. None producers sitting behind desks. As a business owner we have to be more efficient
- No charge increase - Reduce costs by cutting staff, renegotiating longer working hours, lower pensions, lower/shorter holidays, lower sick pay.
- Differentiate between desirable and necessary then look at increased efficiency. This worked when I was a manager in industry and should equally work now. The client was never regarded as a sacred cow to be milked at will, neither should the taxpayer
- Reduce some of the current bureaucratic waste
- Increased efficiency leading to reduced cost of providing current level of services
- Whatever increases - do not reduce services
- Look to increasing staff homeworking, sell property occupied and reduce carbon emissions
- Use unemployed reviewing benefit to provide services
- There are significant savings to be had by increased efficiency and attention to detail (Elizabeth House). £1 Million not collected tax!!
- Get your act together, improve efficiency and deliver the services at no cost increase
- No increase in tax, are monies already received in a more efficient way
- 3% increases, no other charges
- Something should be done to keep the lower housing bands to a minimum
- No increase on council tax, no increase on other charges
- Owing to my age I would have to go for option A, but would still like my street to be clean
- £7.50 increase per household and no reduction in services
- £250k is not a lot when considering that whole budget and should be found better

- managing what is already collected
- Increase limited to no more than previous years inflation figure and reduction in in-house council spending and costs, may require reduction in staff levels.
- Creative approaches and increasing efficiency
- more efficient
- £3.45 increase, ensuring services to users, by better supplier management
- The increases should only be levels of inflation
- Wastage within the council, Overuse of electricity, telephones, paper, staff sickness
- No increase in council tax and no overall increased charges
- Increased provision in rural areas
- Reduce councillors expenses, the mayors posh car, decorating offices and Stratford bridge that Stratford public don't want
- If you spent the money more wisely you wouldn't have to increase by much and certainly wouldn't have to reduce services to users. i.e. revamping council offices
- Reduce SDC running costs/overheads + 3 or 4% council tax increase if necessary
- should be help for pensioners who have minimal private income
- Cut jobs at the council so that revenue can be gained in this way
- Somewhere between B+C without increasing charges on essential services. Not worried about charges on non essential services
- We pay £2000 per year and get nothing
- My wife and I are O.A.P. We cannot keep paying the increases
- I do not think council tax should be increased at all. It is far too expensive to every householder already. I think the money should be found elsewhere to keep the standard of the service. If this is so, I live in a mobile home and pay £66 a month t
- Improve efficiency and prioritise. It cost them C
- Achieve 10% year on year efficiency in budget and services as required by other organisations such as NHS or private to achieve this
- SDC represents only 9% of rates. So questions all others
- Use available resources more effectively
- An increase per household per year plus a sum met by selected increased charges with no reduction in services to users
- Reduce council admin/running costs
- Increase council tax by no more than 3% and £250,000 to be met by introducing maximum efficiency practice within the council offices
- Keep council tax as it is, sack highly paid council employees if not value for money and reduce overheads. Perhaps even scrap SDC altogether and give powers to town council
- Reduce costs
- £3.45 per year increase in council tax and £250,000 to be met by implementing, like other businesses in internal cost cutting initiatives which enable services to be maintained or even increased for your customers
- No increases but cut out wasteful expenditure on such things as parking meters and new talking machine in civic hall car park, which is not very helpful for non English speaking visitors
- Reassessments on all properties i.e. this village alone loft conversion extensions businesses being run
- They increase in accordance of the rate of inflation
- £0, reduce lower priority services
- Maintain current services within 3% increase by reducing council costs
- Serious consideration should be given to increasing efficiency, reduce costs
- No increase in council tax and make Stratford town pay for using the nonsense of DC funds. Villages get virtually no service at all
- Spend less on council admin, spend less on council office refurbishments