

Final Report on Stage 2 of the Annual Budget Consultation February 2007

1. Introduction

Stage two of the budget consultation has now ended and all feedback received by 5 February 2007 has been compiled. This stage of the consultation focused on the Liberal Democrat Cabinet budget proposals for 2007/08, including the level of council tax, areas for savings and charges and areas for investment. The consultation also put forward specific proposals from the Labour Party and Conservative Party.

The consultation ran between 22nd December 2006 – 2 February 2007 and a total of **572 responses** have been received (compared to 340 during last year's consultation). 5,000 copies of the Budget Consultation leaflet have been distributed to stakeholder groups, community organisations, as well as council offices across the borough. In addition, the leaflet was made available through the council's website and articles have been placed in the local media such as MK News.

2. Consultation Responses

The responses from the feedback form have been tabulated below:

a. Council Tax levels

Residents were asked about whether they thought the proposed Council Tax increase of 3.6% was too high, acceptable or too low. The responses are as follows:

	% Total
Too high	35
Acceptable	53
Too low	6

Sample base (572 respondents)

As shown above, a clear majority of respondents (**53%**) believe that the Council Tax increase proposed is acceptable, whilst **6%** think it is too low. This contrasts with **35%** of respondents who thought that the proposed increase was too high.

When asked about when they would like the increase to take place, respondents said:

	% Total
A lower Council Tax rise this year with a higher rise next year	3
A more evenly spread rise over the two years	69

Sample base (**572** respondents)

b. Liberal Democrat Cabinet Budget proposals

i. Savings

Residents were asked to consider whether they would support the following proposed savings:

		Total Support	Total Do not support	Net support
Reduction of the equivalent of one member of the Community & Economic Development Team from 17 to 16	%	59	36	+23
Grants for voluntary and community organisations – limit existing grants to current year's level	%	58	38	+20
Reduction of one member of the Children & Youth team from 39 to 38	%	46	50	-4
Reduce Focus Sports Budgets	%	57	36	+21
Reduction in the Hanson Environmental Study Centre staff budget	%	58	27	+31

Sample base – **572** Multiple response

As can be seen from the table above, the majority of respondents, in general, support the proposed savings. The largest positive response by 1% is around the proposal 'reduction of the equivalent of one member of the Community & Economic Development Team from 17 to 16' with 59% of respondents supporting this.

The only proposal which has negative net support is 'reduction of one member of the Children & Youth team'. Responses to this proposal, however, show that the difference between those who do not support it and those who do is small.

In general, there is a clear/strong majority for supporting the proposed savings.

ii. Increase in charges/fees

Residents were asked to consider whether they would support the following proposed increase in charges or fees:

		Total Support	Total Do not support	Net support
Provision of a business advice line chargeable at a premium rate	%	54	42	+12
Increase charges in Community Centres and Sports Grounds by 5%	%	48	39	+9

Sample base – **572** Multiple response

Although there appears to be overall support the proposed increases in charges/fees there is a slight majority in favour of the first proposal.

iii. Investments in priorities

Residents were asked to consider whether they would support the following proposed investments in priority service areas:

		Total Support	Total Do not support	Net support
Two additional community safety wardens	%	63	34	+29
Recruitment of a Community Safety officer	%	52	43.5	+8.5
Contribution to maintain and develop the Lighthouse project	%	68.5	28	+40.5
To provide further resources to ensure that Houses in Multiple Occupation comply with the requirements of new legislation.	%	58	37	+21
Contribution to Fletcher House running costs to ensure the project remains open	%	54.5	40	+14.5
Establish a fund for the provision of a library on the Eastern Flank	%	50.5	45.5	+5
Improving street cleaning	%	66	31	+35
Improving community relations	%	30	54	-24

Sample base – 572 Multiple response

There is strong support for additional community safety wardens (+63%), the Lighthouse project (+68.5%) and improving street cleaning (+66%).

Net support both for the provision of a Library on the eastern flank and for the recruitment of a Community Safety Officer is marginal.

There is still little support for improving community relations (net support -24).

c. Opposition Party Proposals

This year we consulted not just on the Liberal Democrat Cabinet's proposals, but also on the proposals from the Labour and Conservative opposition parties, where they differ from the Cabinet. This is to reflect the new political balance of the Council.

i. Labour Party Proposals

Residents were asked to consider whether they would support the following proposed investments in service areas:

		Total Support	Total Do not support	Net support
Additional funds for 11 Parish Councils which have a high proportion of houses in lower Council Tax bands	%	40	55	-15
A fund of £2,000 per councillor to repair pavements. This is a one year pilot	%	44	50.5	-6.5
Extend the concessionary fares scheme for old age pensioners and disabled people to cover peak times	%	47	49	-2
Allocate 90% of funds to fix roads in older towns and 10% of funds to fix roads in estates around Milton Keynes	%	43	50	-7
Extra books for libraries	%	54	27	+27

Sample base – **572** multiple response

The proposal with the highest amount of negative responses is the ‘additional funds for 11 Parish Councils’ with **55%** of respondents not supporting this proposal. This is followed by the proposal for ‘a fund of £2,000 per councillor to repair pavements’ with **50.5%** of respondents not supporting this proposal.

The only one of the above proposals to receive support is the proposal to have ‘extra books in libraries’ with **54%** of respondents supporting the proposal.

ii. Conservative Party Proposals

Residents were asked to consider whether they would support the following proposed investments in service areas:

		Total Support	Total Do not support	Net support
Improvements to the Music Centre	%	36	59	-23
A programme to change the timing of street lighting on dual carriageways	%	51	35.5	+15.5

Sample base – **572** Multiple response

There was a negative response to the proposal to make ‘improvements to the Music Centre’ with net support **-21%**. The proposal to change the timing of street lighting has received support with **+15.5%** net support.

d. Respondents Details

i. Age of Respondents

	%
16-24	10
25-44	25
45-59	34
60-74	22
75 years and over	6

Sample base – **572**. Multiple response

ii. Gender

52% of the responses received were from males with **35.5%** from females, **12.5%** did not respond.

3. Summary

a. Council Tax Levels

53% of respondents believe that the proposed Council Tax level was acceptable, whilst **35%** of respondents thought it was too high. Meanwhile, **6%** of respondents thought that proposed increase was too low.

The majority of respondents supported having the rise spread more evenly across two years.

b. Liberal Democrat Proposals

In general, respondents have shown a strong support for the proposed savings, with the exception of one proposal which has a small majority against it. Respondents have also indicated their support for the increase in charges/fees. Overall the responses to the investments in priority services have been supportive. However, one of the proposals did not receive majority support.

c. Labour Party Proposals

In general, there was a negative response to the Labour Party proposals with the highest negative response being towards the proposal to provide ‘additional funds for 11 Parish Councils’, and the highest amount of support being received to the proposal to fund ‘extra books for libraries’.

d. Conservative Party Proposals

The proposal to make ‘improvements to the Music Centre’ generated a high level of negative response, with **59%** of respondents not supporting the proposal. Meanwhile the proposal to change the timing of street lighting was supported with net support of **+15.5%**.