

**2000/2001 BUDGET CONSULTATION RESULTS**

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**1. Purpose**

1.1 To present the results of the consultation exercise for the 2000/2001 budget.

**2. Summary**

2.1 A survey and series of discussion meetings was held in order to consult the local community on proposals for the 2000/2001 budget. The survey revealed:

- (a) a small majority in support of a Council Tax increase of 5 per cent or more (51%);
- (b) the following service priorities:
  - (i) education;
  - (ii) public transport;
  - (iii) caring for the elderly; and
  - (iv) street cleaning.

**3. Recommendations**

3.1 To note the results of the consultation exercise.

4. **Background**

- 4.1 During September 1999, a consultation exercise was undertaken to ensure the local community would have the opportunity to make its views known about priorities for the 2000/2001 budget.
- 4.2 The consultation exercise was less extensive than that for the 1999/2000 budget which had, of course, culminated in the budget referendum in February 1999.
- 4.3 The consultation comprised two main strands:
- (a) a survey questionnaire published in the September edition of Messenger, delivered to every household in the borough; and
  - (b) three public discussion groups held during September in different parts of the Borough - Bletchley, Wolverton, Central Milton Keynes.

5. **Issues and Choices**

- 5.1 The number of people who replied to the Messenger questionnaire was 270.
- 5.2 The questionnaire asked people to say whether they agreed or disagreed that “*Council Tax rises should be limited to about 5 per cent (the likely national average)*”. Table 1 shows the response to this question.

**Table 1:** “ Council Tax Rises should be Limited to About 5 Per Cent”

Category	Number of responses
Agree	113
Disagree	148
Not answered	9
Total	270

- 5.3 This question was followed by another that asked, “*If you think the increase in Council Tax should be lower or higher, what level do you think is justified?*”. The answers to this question show that not all of those who disagreed with the initial statement were in favour of a lower rise. A significant number stated a preference for an increase in excess of 5 per cent . Table 2 shows the pattern of support for varying levels of Council Tax when responses to the second part of the question are incorporated.

**Table 2:** Support for Different Levels of Tax Rise

Level of rise	Number people	Per cent
5%	85	32.6
Over 5%	48	18.4
Less than 5%	101	38.7
Rate of inflation	24	9.2
Not marked	3	1.2
Total	261	100
<b>5 per cent or more</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>51%</b>
<b>Less than 5 per cent</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>48%</b>

5.4 As inflation is currently below 5 per cent, the 24 people supporting a rise in line with inflation should be added to the less than 5 per cent figure. This gives the following summary figures:

- (a) Less than 5 per cent 48%
- (b) Per Cent or more 51%

5.5 Whilst opinion is finely balanced, there is therefore a small majority in favour of a Council Tax rise of 5 per cent or more.

5.6 Survey respondents were also asked; *'Which services do you think are the most important and should receive the highest priority?'*. A summary of responses to this question is set out in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Which services do you think are the most important and should receive the highest priority?

Service	Number of mentions
Education/schools	85
Improvement of public transport	57
Caring for the elderly	48
Street cleaning	43
Health	32
Crime prevention/law and order	29

Service	Number of mentions
Landscaping/maintenance of hedges and verges	28
Rubbish clearing/litter/graffiti	27
Maintenance of paths and roads	24
Emergency services (Police/Fire/Ambulance)	21

5.7 The questionnaire also asked respondents to identify what they felt to be the lowest priority services. The responses are summarised in Table 4.

**Table 4:** Which services do you think are the least important and should receive the lowest priority?

Service	Number of mentions
Money spent on services for travellers	26
Leisure centres	19
Education/schools	11
Traffic calming	10

5.8 In addition to the survey, a short series of public discussion meetings were held:

7.30-9.00 pm	Wednesday 22 September 1999	Bletchley
7.30-9.00 pm	Thursday 23 September 1999	Wolverton
11-12.30 am	Saturday 25 September 1999	Central Milton Keynes (Library)

5.9 The meetings were advertised in the September edition of Messenger and in the local press. A total 24 people were engaged in discussions at these events. The meetings were not traditional public meetings. The chairs at each were arranged in a circle and, following a short introduction by the Leader of the Council, those present discussed the budget and related issues. This format was designed to allow a good quality informal discussion that would provide qualitative information about the public's views. A summary of key comments made by members of the public is **Annexed** to the report.

5.10 The discussions revealed a variety of views, many of which related directly to the neighbourhood in which the consultations took place. This was especially the case at the Bletchley meeting, where residents had particular concerns about regeneration and

community safety. Older people on pensions had concerns about Council Tax increases that their pension income could not keep pace with.

5.11 It was evident that many local people wish to develop a better understanding of the broader context of the budget if they are to make judgements on priorities.

5.12 The services mentioned as priorities at the library meeting in particular reflected the views expressed through the survey. Education was frequently mentioned as a priority along with landscape and highway maintenance.

## 6. **Implications**

### 6.1 Environmental

Public transport was one of the most frequently mentioned priority services in the consultation.

### 6.2 Equalities

“Money spent on services to travellers” was most frequently identified as a low priority.

### 6.3 Financial

The consultation related to the 2000/2001 budget.

### 6.4 Legal

None.

### 6.5 Staff and Accommodation

None.

## 7. **Conclusions**

7.1 The budget consultation exercise, although limited, has nevertheless been of value in identifying community views on Council Tax increases and service priorities.

Background Papers: None