

ITEM 8(a)

SOCIAL CARE AND HOUSING POLICY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

21 NOVEMBER 2007

REPORT ON STAGE 1 OF THE ANNUAL BUDGET CONSULTATION

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1. Purpose

To provide an update on the responses we have received so far to stage 1 of the annual Budget Consultation.

2. Background

The first stage of the consultation started on 1st October 2007 and is due to finish on 12 November 2007.

A copy of the budget questionnaire was distributed to every household in the borough via MK News, as well as stakeholder groups and council offices. In addition, the questionnaire was made available through the council's website and articles were placed in a number of community newsletters as well as local media, such as Live MK, [MK@Work](#), MKWeb, Inform, and the parish newsletter.

There have been 214 responses to the first stage of the Budget Consultation so far. We are still receiving responses and are in the process of inputting and analysing these. Therefore, this report should be seen as indicative of the overall picture.

3. Council Tax levels

Residents were asked to consider three scenarios regarding the potential changes to council tax or service levels, and how these should be balanced. They were asked to rate their agreement with the following three statements:

	% Total Agree
It is important for the council to maintain current levels of service, even if this means increasing Council Tax	52
It is important for the council to improve current levels of service, even if this means increasing Council Tax	43.5
It is important for the council not to increase Council Tax, even if this means a reduction in the levels of some services	27

Sample base (all respondents)

A narrow majority (52%) of respondents agreed with the statement that "it is important for the council to **maintain** current levels of service, even if this means increasing council tax".

Responses to the statement “it is important for the council to **improve** current levels of service, even if this means increasing council tax” were also quite high, with 43.5% agreeing. However, 27% of respondents agreed with the statement that “it is important for the council not to increase council tax, even if this means a **reduction** in the levels of some services”.

Overall, the net agreement scores for the statements regarding the level of council tax suggest a balance of views in favour of at least maintaining current levels of service; the high negative net agreement score for the statement “it is important for the council not to increase council tax, even if this means a **reduction** in the levels of some services” suggests that a reduction in services would not be supported.

However, the narrowness of the majority suggests that only modest increases in council tax would be supported for the purposes of service improvement.

Agreement with specific statements regarding service provision/council tax balance

		Total Agree	Total Dis-agree	Net Agree
It is important for the council to maintain current levels of service, even if this means increasing Council Tax	%	52	45	+ 7
It is important for the Council to improve current levels of service, even if this means increasing Council Tax	%	43.5	51	-7.5
It is important for the council not to increase Council Tax, even if this means a reduction in the levels of some services	%	27	44	- 17

4. Changes in spending for services

Respondents were asked about their spending priorities, and to consider whether they thought that spending should be increased, stay the same, or be reduced for the various services that the council provides.

4.1. Spending should increase

Respondents were asked to consider which services should be priorities for spending.

58% of respondents identified budget spending on Bus services should increase. This serves to highlight the transport issues in the borough.

Other areas where 50% or more respondents wanted to increase budget spending were Care and support for older people (56%), and Maintenance of roads and footpaths (50%).

48% of respondents also identified Crime prevention and community safety as a priority for spending, and 46% of respondents identified Care and support for people with mental health problems, learning and physical disabilities as an area for increased spending.

Services	%
Bus services	58
Care and support for older people	56
Maintenance of roads and footpaths	50
Crime prevention and community safety	48
Care and support for people with mental health problems, learning and physical disabilities	46

Sample base – 214. Multiple response.

4.2. Spending should stay the same

Respondents were asked to consider for which services levels of spending should be maintained.

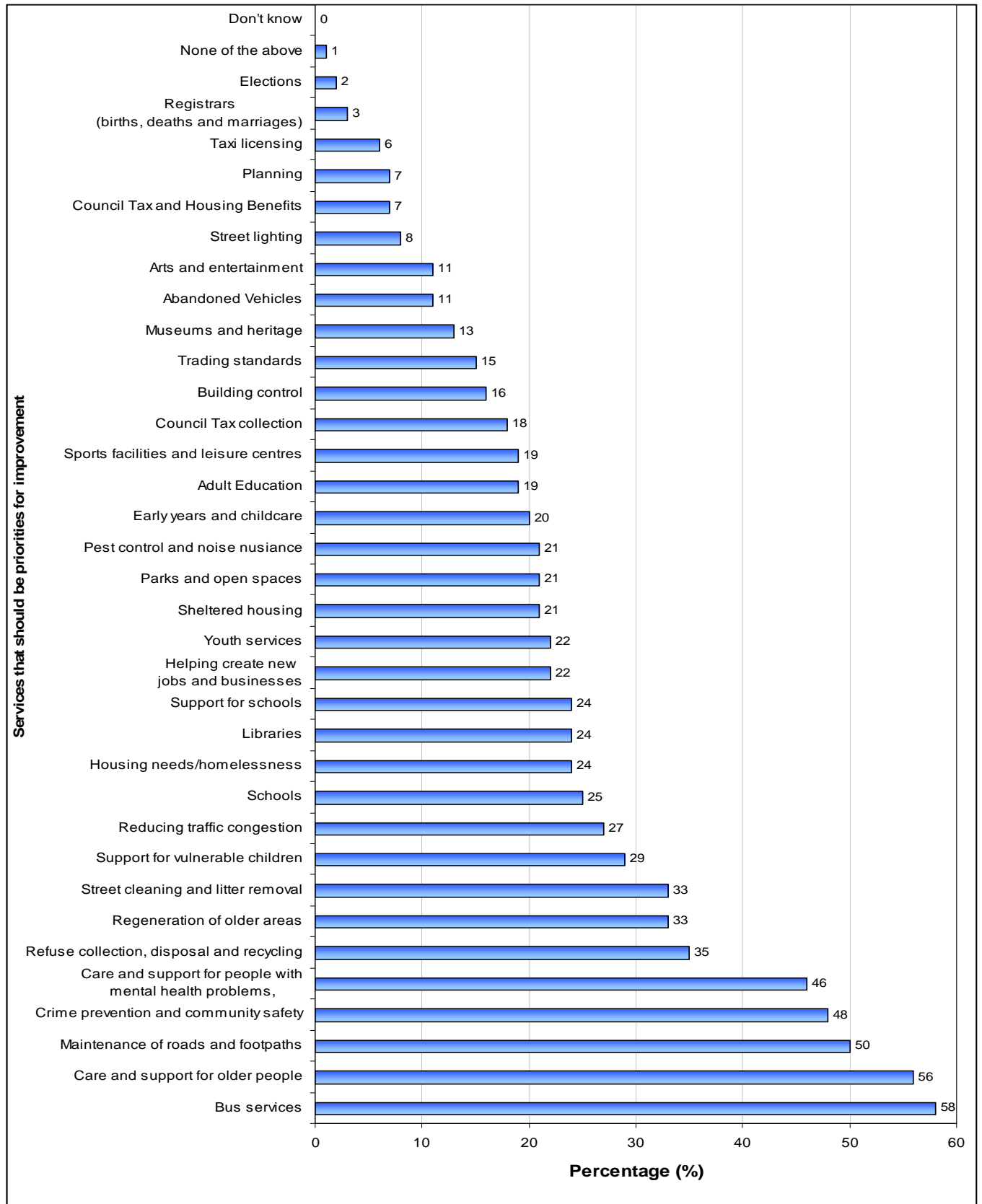
The area that scored the highest for maintaining levels of spending was Abandoned vehicles with 71%. Parks and open spaces also scored highly with 70%.

Other areas where more than 50% wanted to maintain budget spending were Registrars (69%), Pest control and noise nuisance (65%), and Planning (64%).

Services	%
Abandoned vehicles	71
Parks and open spaces	70
Registrars (births, deaths and marriages)	69
Pest control and noise nuisance	65
Planning	64

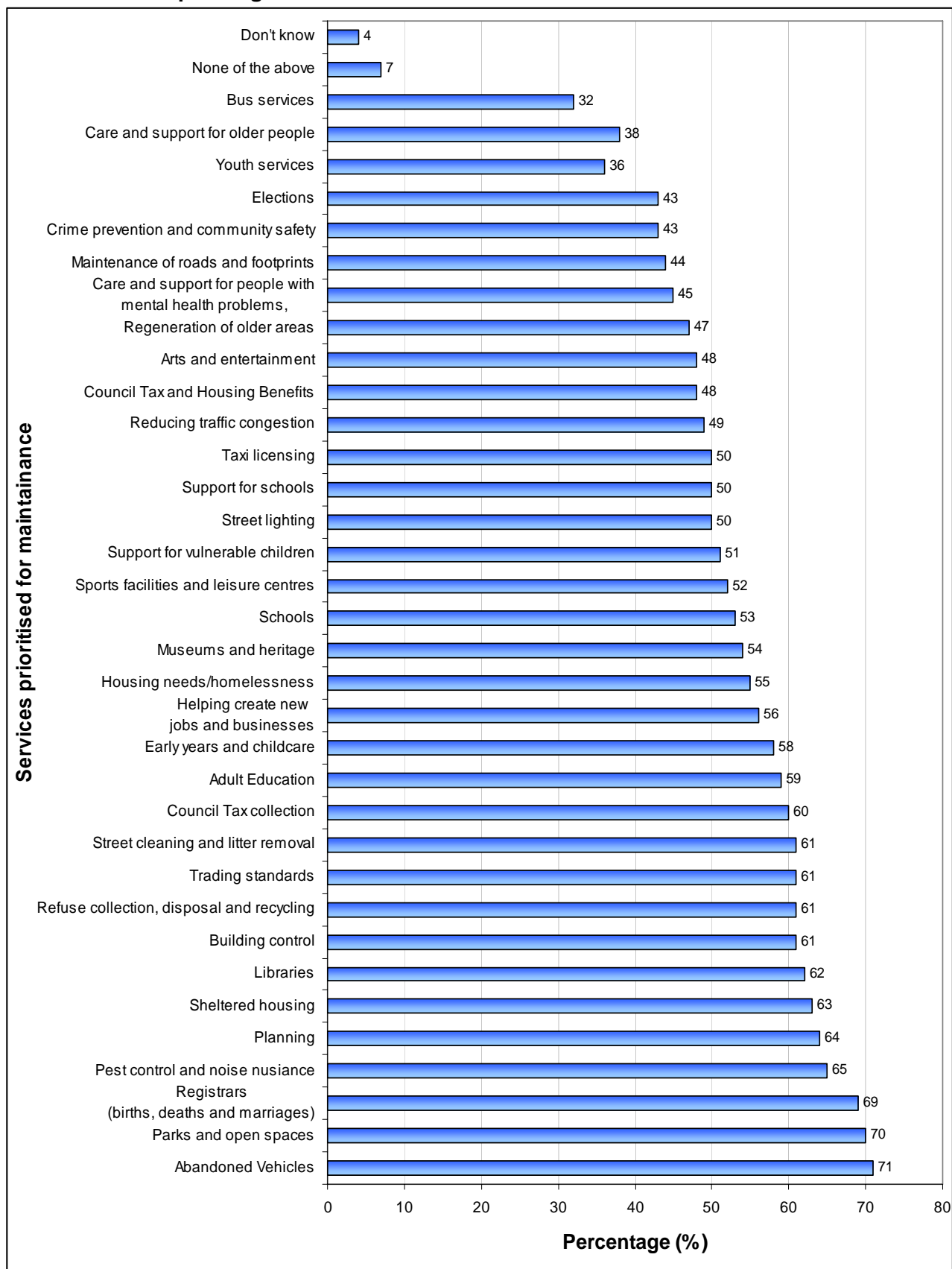
Sample base – 214. Multiple response.

Services where spending should increase



Sample base – 214. Multiple response.

Services where spending should remain the same



4.3. Spending should be reduced

Respondents were asked to consider for which services budget spending should be reduced.

Areas where a reduction in spending was expressed were Elections (53%) and Council tax and housing benefits (43%).

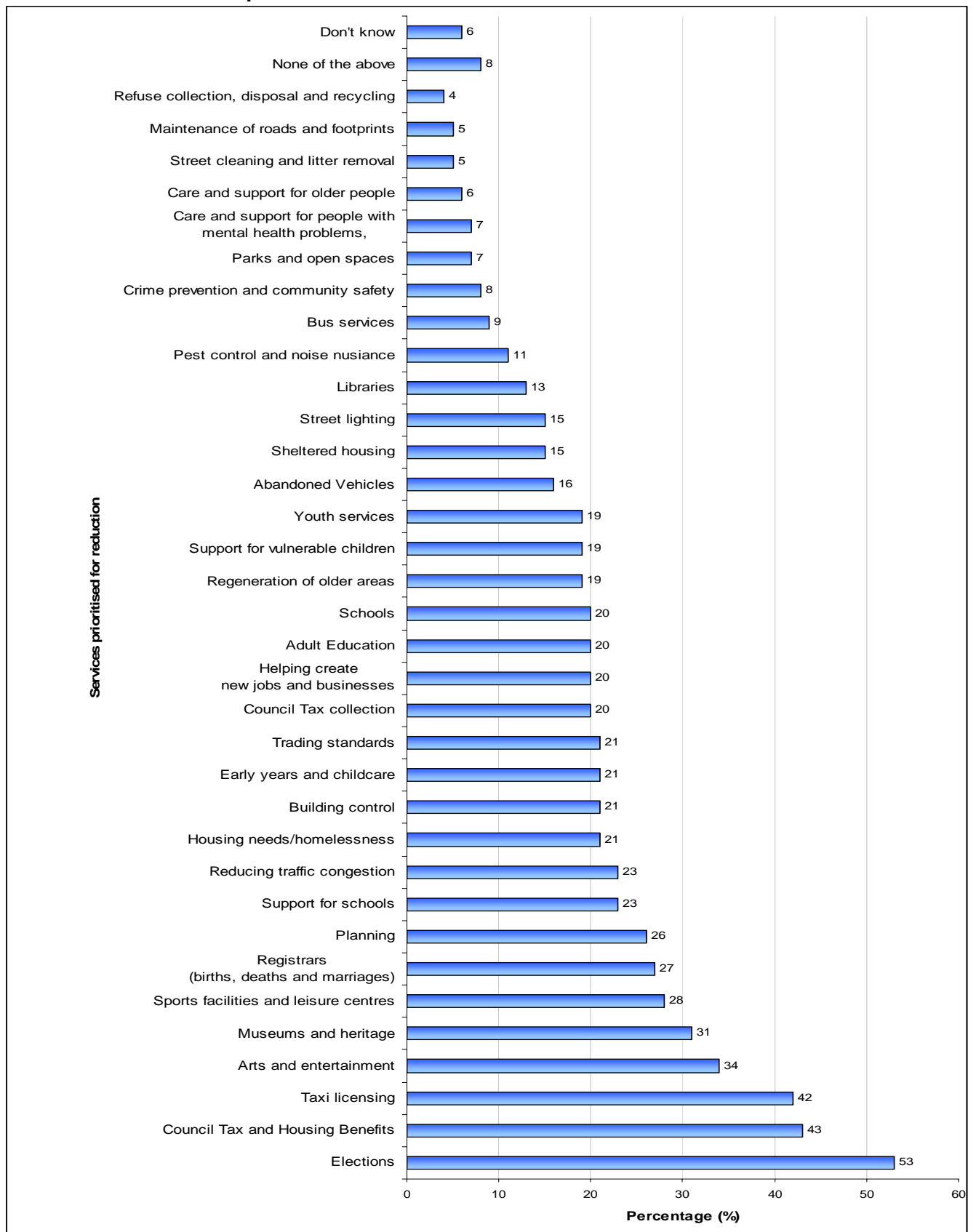
Meanwhile, 42% and 28% of respondents thought that spending for Taxi licensing and Arts and entertainment, respectively, should also be reduced. 21% of respondents thought that the funding for Museums and heritage should be reduced.

The top three services identified this year for a reduction in spending, namely Elections, Council tax and housing benefits and Taxi licensing, were also the top three areas identified for reductions last year as well.

Services	%
Elections	53
Council Tax and Housing Benefits	43
Taxi licensing	42
Arts and entertainment	28
Museums and heritage	21

Sample base – 214. Multiple response.

Services that should be prioritised for reduction



Sample base – 214. Multiple response.

5. Summary

5.1. Council tax levels

52% of respondents thought that it is important for the council to maintain current levels of service, even if this means increasing council tax, whilst 44% of respondents would not support a reduction in the levels of service.

However the narrowness of the majority suggests that large increases in council tax would not be supported.

5.2. Spending priorities

The areas that scored the highest for increased levels of budget spending with 50% or more, were:

- Bus services (58%);
- Care and support for older people (56%); and
- Maintenance roads and footpaths (50%).

The areas that scored the highest for maintaining levels of funding were:

- Abandoned vehicles (71%);
- Parks and open spaces (70%); and
- Registrars (births, deaths and marriages) (69%).

Areas where a reduction in spending was expressed were:

- Elections (53%);
- Council tax and housing benefits (43%); and
- Taxi licensing (42%).