

Results of the 'Your Priorities' online survey

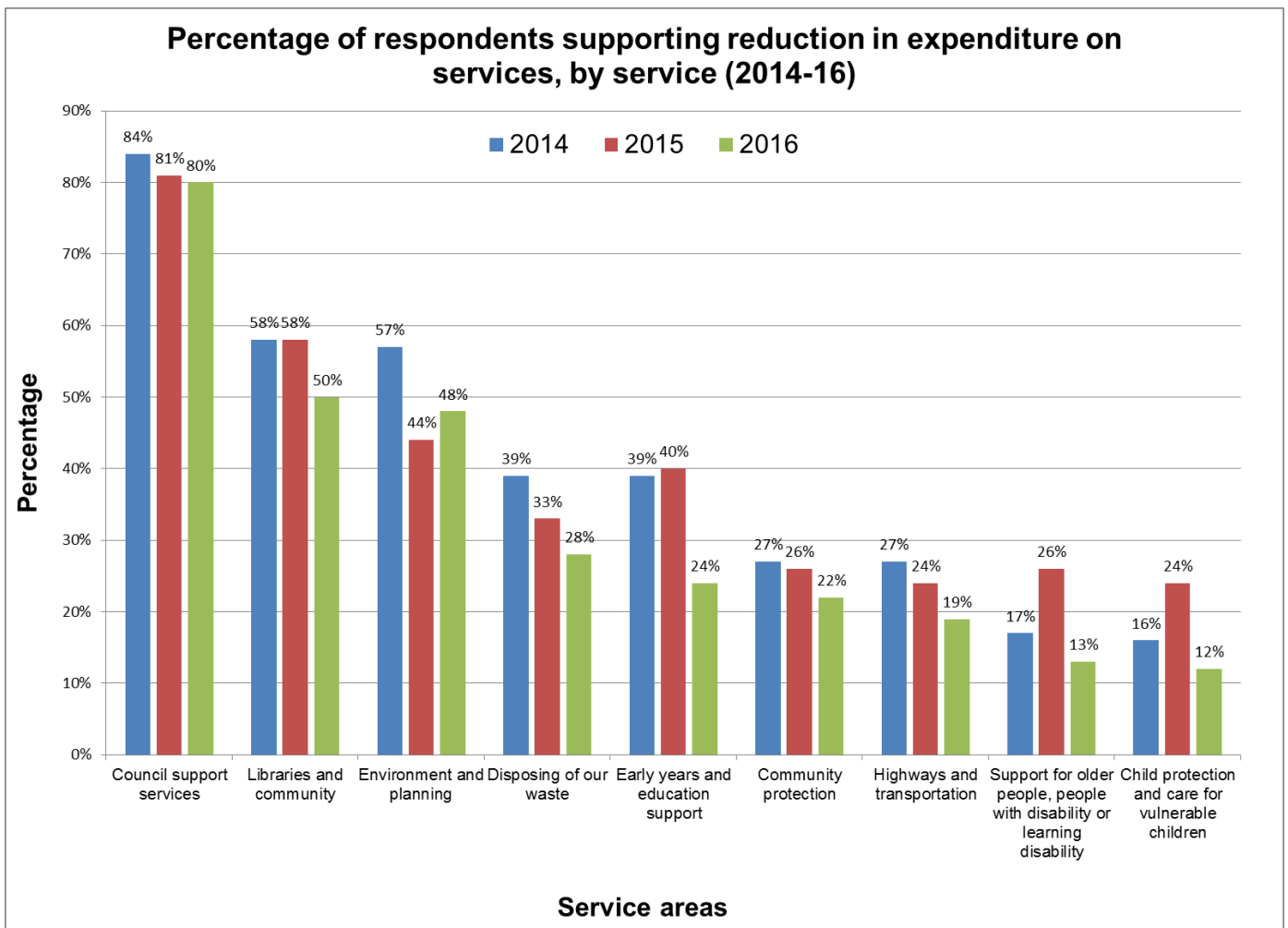
Introduction

Thank you to everyone who filled in our online survey to let us know your priorities for how we spend your Council tax money over the next few years. Hertfordshire County Council shared the online questionnaire, which asked you to identify service areas you considered spending could be reduced by the Council, between 10th October and 11th December 2016.

We received **1937** responses to the survey this year, which is nearly three times higher than last year. However, please note that this is not a wholly representative sample of Hertfordshire's population. Young people aged 18-24 years old are under-represented, as they have been in previous years, and we also received more responses from females (two-thirds) compared to males (one-third).

Results

In response to the question **"In which service areas do you feel that spending should be reduced?"** you answered broadly the same way as you have done in previous years. The full results for this year (compared with 2014 and 2015) were:



The most supported areas for spending reductions were:

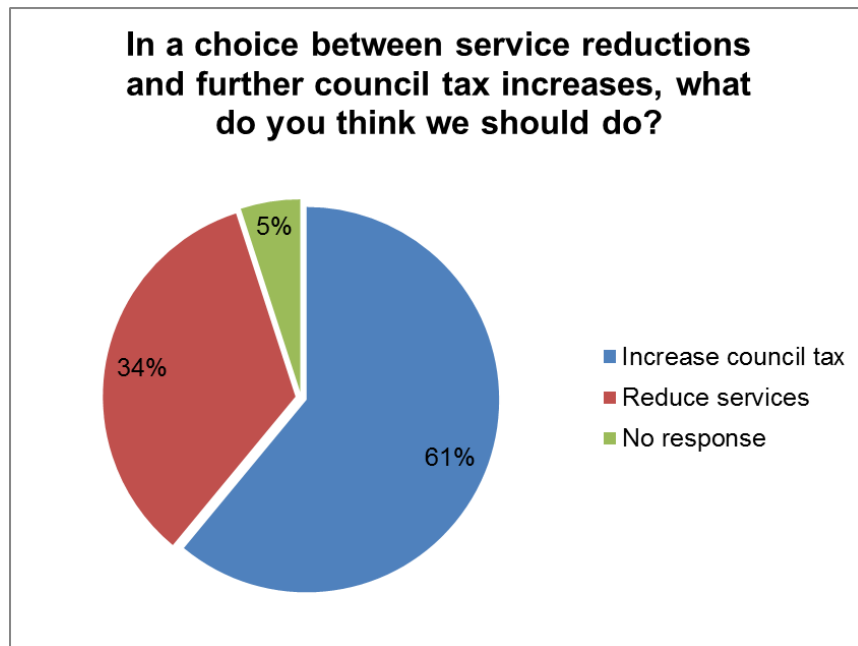
- Council support services (80%)
- Libraries and community services (50%)
- Environment and planning (48%)

The least supported areas were:

- Child protection and care for vulnerable children (12%)
- Support for older people, people with disability or learning disability (13%)
- Highways and transportation (19%)

Although the services where you indicated you were willing to accept reductions were in a similar priority order to last year, the proportion of you willing to support service reductions is lower this year than last.

In response to the question, **“In a choice between service reductions and further council tax increases, what do you think we should do?”**, 61% of you preferred council tax to be raised than see reductions in services. This has fallen over the past two years, from 65% in 2015 and 69% in 2014.



Comments and Feedback

Just over a quarter of you (552 in total) took the opportunity to leave additional comments at the end of the survey. These covered a wide range of topics, from recommendations for either reducing or maintaining funding of services, suggestions for alternative ways of working, or comments on the quality of existing services. They provide an interesting snapshot into the views of some residents, but note they are not representative of the overall views of everyone who responded to the survey.

The most common suggestion for reducing spending was to make efficiency savings. Proposals included using more technology (such as skype or self-service web portals), improving staff efficiency, and making better use of Council property. For example, some of you argued for greater asset and property sharing, others for making energy efficiencies within property, as well as across services.

The next most common theme in your suggestions was around reductions in salaries and numbers of staff, particularly at the senior and management level. Some of you called for a reduction in the staff pension scheme or in expenses associated with councillors and council meetings, with a handful suggesting a reduction in the number of councillors or a reorganisation of local government.

Other suggestions for alternative ways of working included: more joined up working and building better partnerships; making better use of volunteers and encouraging communities to become more self-reliant; investing in prevention; exploring opportunities for income generation or commercialisation; and bringing outsourced services back in-house (emerging from concerns over existing contracts).

Many of your comments were targeted at existing service provision in specific areas, such as road quality, reductions in bus services, inadequate provision of street lights, and reduced opening hours of recycling centres. Comments about libraries were split evenly between those calling for the service to be maintained and those suggesting a reduction in the number of libraries.

There were a significant number of you in favour of continuing to support services for vulnerable people. Many of you argued that the choices were incredibly difficult to make and/or that it is impossible to endorse any further reductions. Some asked for the Council to make a stand against further cuts from central government, others asked why there was a need for cuts and called for an increase in budgets.

There were again a large number of comments and suggestions which related to services which are either beyond the Council's control or which relate to services delivered by other organisations, such as housing, waste collection and planning and housing developments. Those of you who made comments about the survey itself were in general critiquing the lack of information available for you to make an informed decision. Some also argued that the survey was leading and said you'd prefer a greater cost breakdown and/or to be able to choose options within services.

What now?

Thanks again for your participation in this survey, it is vitally important that we hear your views on how your council tax money is spent.

The County Council has been developing proposals to achieve a balanced budget within our limited resources. You are welcome to attend [County Council](#) on 21st February, where the final budget will be approved.

Look out for more consultations about potential changes in specific service areas by keeping an eye on our [consultation portal](#) or subscribing to the 'Have Your Say' topic on our [email update service](#).