

# 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 24 October and 4 December 2018.

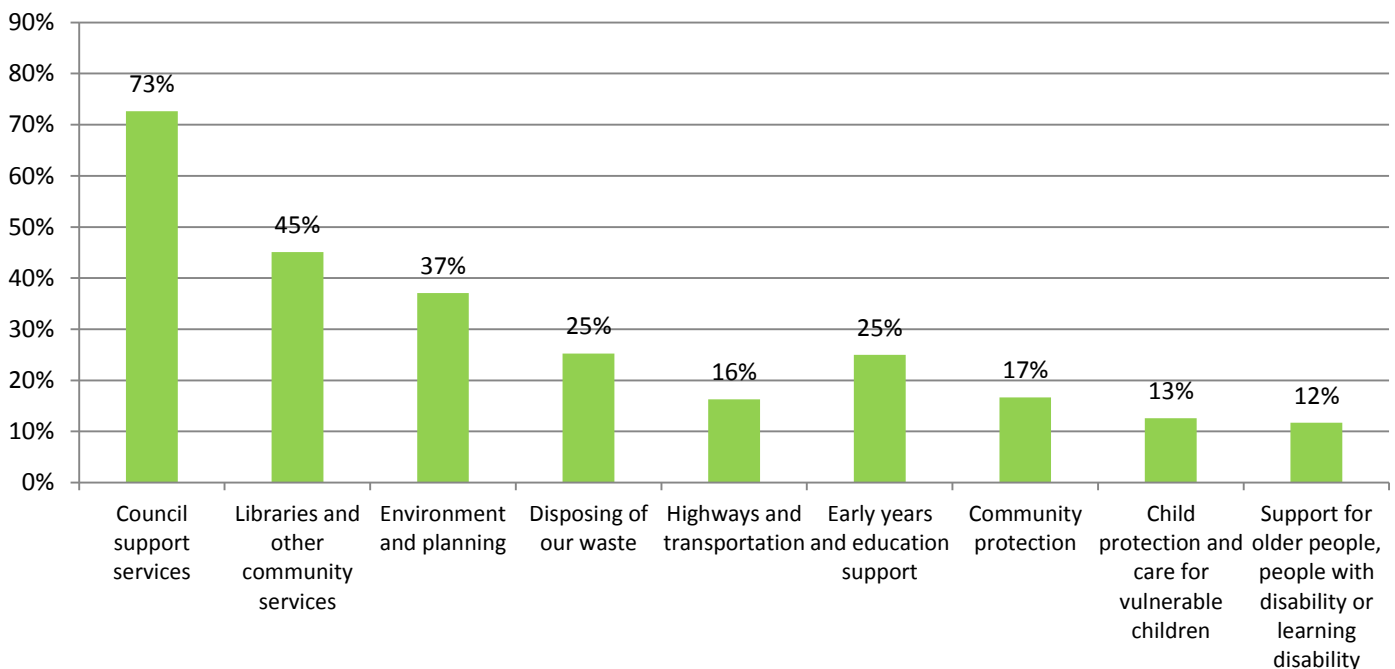
We received 2,021 responses to the survey this year, this is up on the number of responses received last year (1,225) and higher than the average response rate experienced during the 4 previous years the Council has run a version of this survey (1,010). However, please note that this is not a wholly 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 (61.75%), compared to males (38.25%).

## 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 most supported areas for spending reductions were:

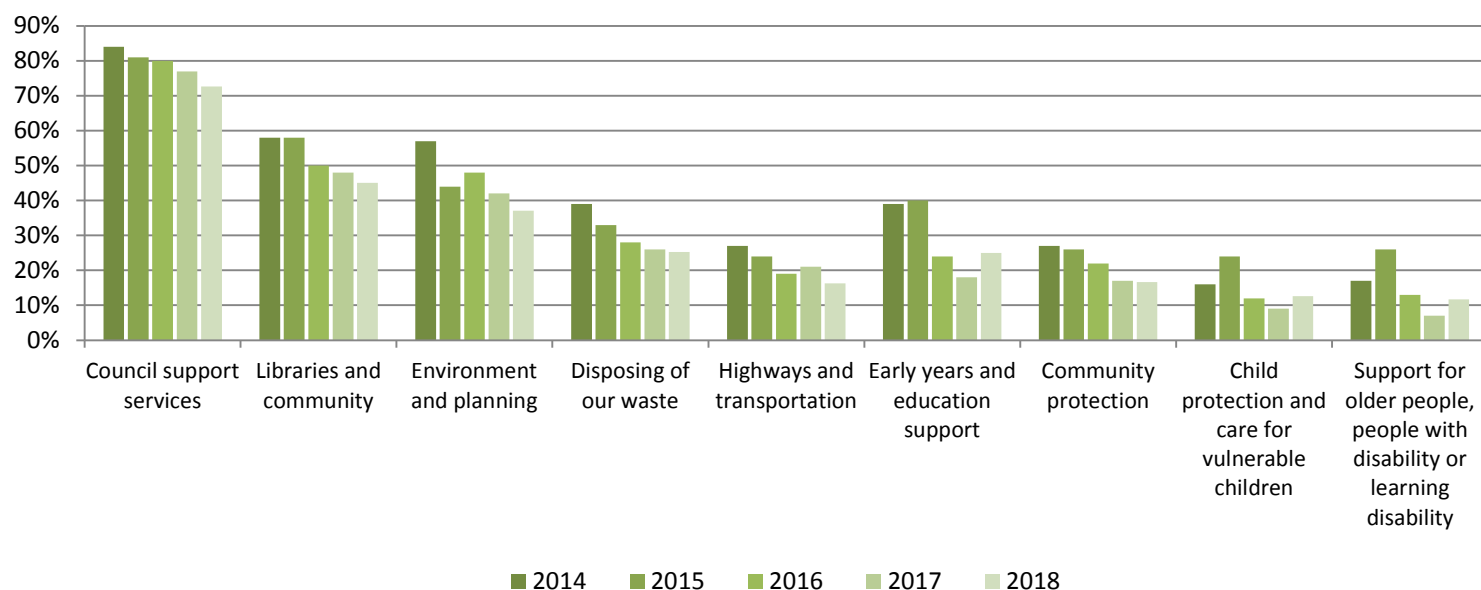
- **Council Support Services**
- **Libraries and community services**
- **Environment and planning.**

Representation of your answer to question 'In which service areas do you feel that spending should be reduced?' 2018



The full results for this year (compared with results from the 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017 survey) were as follows:

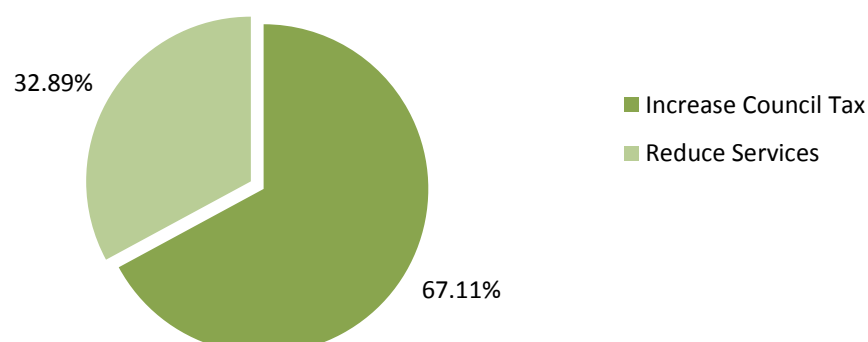
**Representation of your answer to question 'In which service areas do you feel that spending should be reduced?' 2014-2018**



Although the services where you were willing to accept reductions were in a similar priority order to last year, the proportion of people willing to support service reductions is lower this year than last. By comparing the results from the previous years, we can see that this has been a general trend since the survey began in 2014.

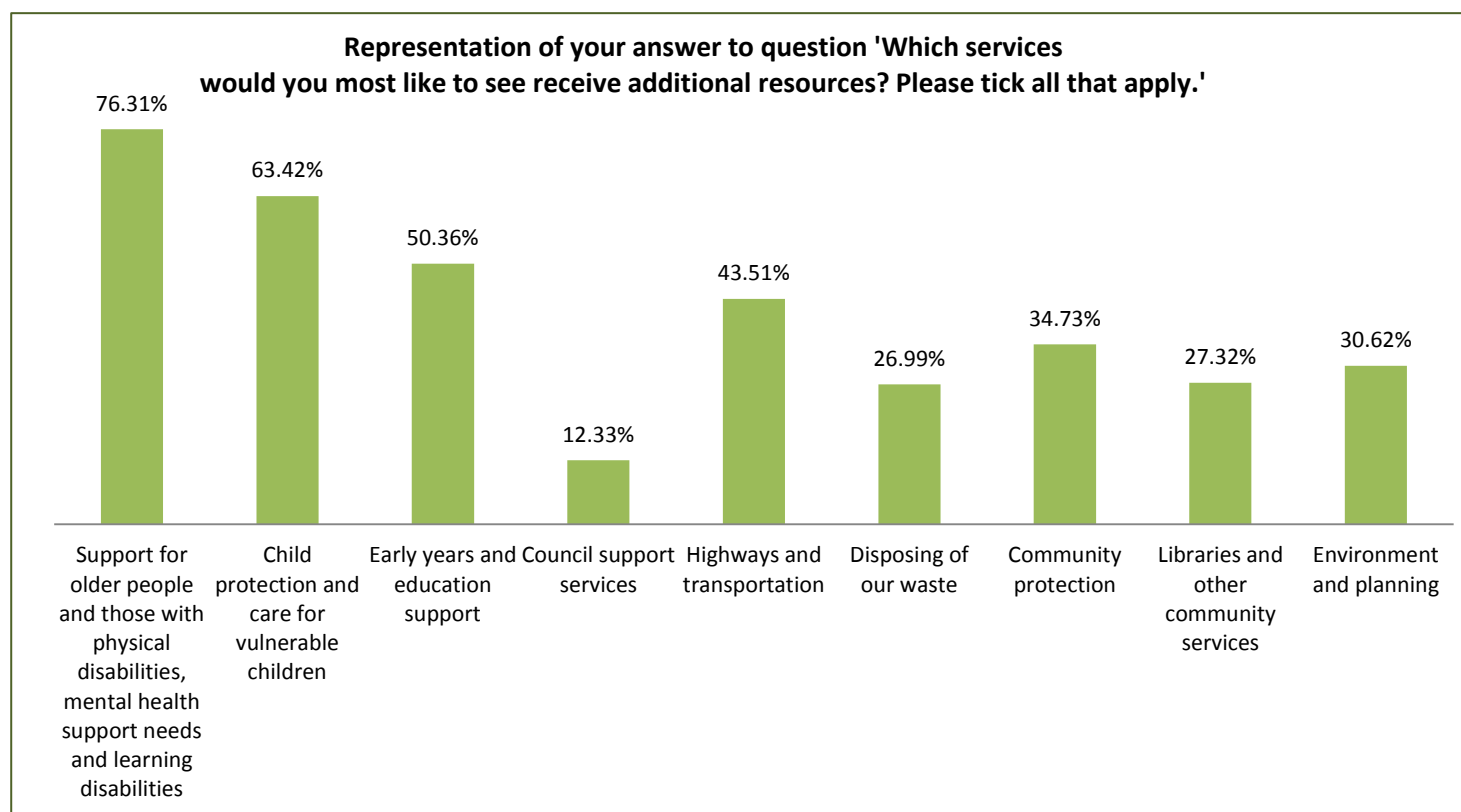
In response to the question, **“In a choice between service reductions, and further council tax increases, what do you think we should do?”**, results were:

**Representation of your answers to the question ‘In a choice between service reductions, and further council tax increases, what do you think we should do?’**



67.11% of those who answered this question preferred council tax to be raised rather than see reductions in services, which is almost 10% higher than the previous years. The amount of people choosing to increase council tax has reduced over the last couple of years, whilst the amount of people choosing to reduce services has stayed broadly the same at 33%.

An additional question was added to the survey this year **'Which services would you most like to see receive additional resources? Please tick all that apply.'** The below chart shows a summary of the answers given:



The services that the most respondents wanted to receive extra funding were **'Support for older people and those with physical disabilities, mental health support needs and learning disabilities'** and **'Child protection and care for vulnerable children.'** The categories that were selected least to receive additional funding were **'Disposing of our waste'** and **'Council support services.'**

## **Comments and Feedback:**

32% of you (650) left additional comments covering a wide range of topics. This is significantly higher than the number of comments received last year (361). Many comments covered several different subjects. These comments present an interesting snapshot into some residents' views, but it is important to emphasise that they are not representative of the overall views of respondents to the survey as a whole, or residents in the County as a whole. Respondents to the survey make up less than 0.2% of the Hertfordshire population.

The most common theme within the comments concerned the Council's staff recruitment and expense. The majority of these called for reductions in senior managers' salaries. Further responses suggested improvements for the efficiencies relating to staff, including having a more thorough review of roles and responsibilities to see if any savings can be made/processes changed. Comments suggested that the Council not only needs to pay attention to how many members of staff it employs, but also how they could use their time more efficiently.

The second most commonly mentioned theme in this year's survey related to areas which are outside the council's control. This has been a common area of focus in previous surveys and comments covered a range of services which are delivered by other bodies/organisations. In particular, District Councils are responsible for a number of the services which were commented on in this survey. This included improving waste collection and concerns around town growth, housing and planning constraints.

There were also a number of comments specifically relating to the survey. Comments included questions over why there was no option to 'maintain budgets' in the survey, believing there was not enough information presented to make a decision and people finding the survey very difficult to complete as they didn't believe there was any service areas that cuts could be made. Suggestions from respondents included that it would be useful to know how our spending compares to other councils and that savings could be made proportionately from each service area, rather being asked to select whole services to receive reductions.

A large proportion of comments made suggestions on how the County Council could reduce spending by making efficiency savings. Suggestions were made around the lessening need for fixed office space in the age of modern technology, improving online services for residents so officer time can be better utilised, reducing paper usage and reducing the amount of external communications sent in leaflet/magazine form to residents.

Like previous years, there were a number of comments relating to improving the repair of faults on highways and footpaths. Suggestions included making more permanent fixes by relaying whole roads instead of filling in individual potholes, and putting more time and resources in to fixing issues, so they do not arise again.

There were also a number of comments that called for more use of shared services and better collaborative working between Hertfordshire and neighbouring counties and councils. Comments referred to administrative services such as IT and HR, and the Fire and Rescue service.

Similarly to last year, concerns were raised over the County Council's relationships with partners and external contractors. A number of comments raised concerns about the contract costs of highways contractors. Comments widely reflected the idea that their work was inefficient and the work they do often needed doing again after a short amount of time.

Like previous years, a number of comments called for a reduction in expenses associated with councillors and council meetings. It was suggested that the number of councillors needs to be reduced and councillor expenses and allowances should also be controlled and reduced.

From the results above it is clear that many participants chose 'Increase Council tax' rather than 'Reduce services'. There were number of comments which support this option, suggesting that vulnerable people would suffer if services were not maintained at their current level. Following this, a small number of respondents called for council tax to be increased only for the wealthiest Hertfordshire residents, and for the council to subsidise council tax for those least wealthy residents.

Numerous comments were made this year relating to central government. The majority of these comments revolve around the need for the council to put more pressure on the government to provide local authorities with more money, and stand up to the cuts being made.

### **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 19th 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.