

APPENDIX 6B – BUDGET CONSULTATION RESPONSES

1. WHO DID WE CONSULT?

The strategy set out in this report has been informed by a wide-ranging consultation programme with the local community. This has included ongoing engagement about spending and savings priorities throughout 2010 and a targeted programme of consultation on draft budget proposals in January 2011. This appendix focuses on the more recent consultation on specific budget proposals, which has included:

- **A postal survey of the Community Panel** of approximately 900 local residents (547 responses, 60% response rate).
- **‘Your Money, Your Views’** – a consultation document summarising the main budget proposals (112 responses via freepost, email and Twitter/Facebook). ‘Your Money, Your Views’ was published on the Council’s Website and was promoted via Council buildings, GP surgeries, local business networks, Town/Parish Councils and other local organisations. It was also sent out to all members of the Senior Citizens’ Forum.
- **Engagement events** in Woodside, Newport, Dawley, Wellington, Donnington, Madeley and Oakengates – 146 people took part in an exercise that focused on proposed reductions to services.
- **Meetings with a range of external and internal groups and forums**, including:
 - Parishes Forum;
 - Young People’s Forum;
 - Connecting Communities Group;
 - Disabilities Forum;
 - Senior Citizen’s Forum;
 - Rural Forum;
 - Voluntary and Community Sector Forum;
 - Chamber of Commerce (Policy & Representation Board) (presentation only);
 - Joint Information and Consultation Forum (JICF) – Trade Unions (presentation only);
 - Local Strategic Partnership (presentation only);
 - Corporate Employee Focus Group.

The format of these meetings varied but typically included a presentation, question and answer session and in-depth group discussions on specific savings proposals. At most sessions, participants also had the option to state on an individual basis whether or not they supported or opposed the overall budget proposals (73 responses).

The budget strategy was also considered by all **Scrutiny Committees**. Appendix 6a sets out their formal comments on the budget.

The main consultation programme closed on 31 January 2011. However, two further follow-up pieces of work were carried out; consultation with traders in Ironbridge re: proposed car parking charge increases and discussions with regular users of the Twister service re: proposed withdrawal of this service.

2. WHAT DID PEOPLE TELL US?

This year we asked for views on the following themes:

- Overall views on the Budget Strategy and the way we run things (Section 2.1);
- Budget principles (Section 2.2);
- Spending plans (Section 2.3);
- Savings proposals (Section 2.4);
- Council Tax levels (Section 2.5).

2.1 OVERALL VIEWS – THE BUDGET STRATEGY AND THE WAY WE RUN THINGS

The Community Panel were asked three overall questions about the Council's budget strategy and how we run things:

- To what extent do you agree or disagree that the Council's budget proposals will benefit the local community? – 75% agree, 5% disagree;
- To what extent do you agree or disagree that the Council provides good value for money? – 75% agree, 8% disagree;
- How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way the Council runs things? – 83% satisfied, 8% dissatisfied.

At the end of consultation meetings, participants were invited to state whether they supported or opposed the overall budget proposals. Of those who expressed a view, 85% strongly supported or supported the budget overall, whilst 7% were opposed to it (no-one strongly opposed it).

2.2 BUDGET PRINCIPLES

The Community Panel were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the set of guiding principles that underpin the budget strategy (see Section 4.4 of main report). There appears to be strong overall support (95%) amongst the Community Panel for these core principles. The main comments related to:

- Selling land and property - for example 'loss of green space', 'short-term gain for long-term loss', 'only sell for a good price' (71 comments, 61% of total);

- Setting fees and charges at realistic but fair levels - for example ‘unfair to those on low incomes’, ‘charges already unfair’ (10 comments, 9% of total);
- Making efficiencies and savings - for example ‘cuts should be monitored against local need’, ‘savings do not need to be staff’ (6 comments, 5% of total);
- Set aside money to deal with unforeseen circumstances - for example ‘do not set aside any money it is all needed to preserve services’ (6 comments, 5% of total).

2.3 SPENDING PLANS

As part of ‘Your Money, Your Views’, we asked people how strongly they supported or opposed our spending plans overall. Just over three-quarters of respondents (76%) stated that they supported our spending plans, whilst 15% opposed them.

The Community Panel were asked a series of more detailed questions around 3 proposed investment areas:

- Investment in Children’s Social Care Services;
- Long-term investment to support regeneration, housing and economic prosperity;
- Shorter-term investments to improve the quality of life in the Borough.

a) Investment in Children’s Social Care Services

The Community Panel were asked how strongly they supported or opposed the specific revenue investment proposed for Children’s Social Care. There was strong support for this proposal (84% supported, 5% opposed).

b) Long-term Investment – Regeneration, Housing & Economic Prosperity

The Panel were also asked to what extent they supported or opposed a package of longer-term investments to support regeneration, housing and economic prosperity. Whilst 83% of respondents supported this package overall (7% opposed), a number of specific issues and comments were raised about different elements of the proposals, as summarised in Table 1 (all comments made by 3 or more respondents included).

Table 1 – Comments on Long-Term Investments (Community Panel)

Investment	Comments
Improving Borough Town Centres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Borough Town regeneration is a waste of money, has not improved areas (10) - Improving Borough Towns should wait until finances are better (6)

Transforming Telford Town Centre and Town Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Transforming Telford Town Centre should wait until finances are better (18) - Investment should come from private owners in the area (14) - Leave as it is, nothing wrong with it at the moment (10) - Money could be better spent elsewhere (6) - Money for Town Centre should go to local towns instead (3)
Extra care housing	N/A
Supporting more new homes being built	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do not support due to loss of green space (9) - Empty properties need to be filled first before new homes (4) - Already enough houses (3) - Homes in rural areas no good without shops and services (3)
Improving Woodside and Sutton Hill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - These estates have had enough money spent on them (15) - Woodside and Sutton Hill get 'special treatment' (6)
Creating new Sports and Learning Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Should not be a priority in the current climate (3) - Improve the schools we have rather than building new ones (3)
Building a waste bulking station	N/A

In addition to these comments about specific investments, 17 Community Panel respondents stated that they felt that all investment should wait until the economy picks up and 4 stated that investments should have a lower priority than maintaining existing services.

Responses to 'Your Money, Your Views' were generally consistent with these comments and whilst the majority of people supported spending plans overall, some people disagreed with the following specific elements:

- Transforming Telford Town Centre (30)¹;
- Improving Telford Town Park (14)¹;
- Creating Sports & Learning Communities (9);
- Improving Woodside and Sutton Hill (8);
- Regenerating Borough Towns (4).

In addition, 9 people¹ who took part in engagement events stated that they did not support the plans for Telford Town Centre.

1 – Comments on Telford Town Centre and Town Park from 'Your Money, Your Views' and engagement events included (2 or more comments):

- Money should be spent on other things that are more of a priority (6);
- Huge cost when trying to save money (5);
- Telford Town Park not a priority (3);

- Can we afford it? (2);
- Cannot see need for new Civic Offices (2);
- Spend less/savings could be made re: Telford Town Park (2).

c) Shorter-Term, Quality of Life Investments

The Community Panel were also asked how strongly they supported or opposed two shorter-term investments to improve the quality of life in the Borough; maintaining roads and pavements and helping vulnerable people to stay in their own homes.

Table 2 – Shorter-Term, Quality of Life Investments (Community Panel)

Investment	% of Panel who supported or strongly supported	% of Panel who opposed or strongly opposed	Comments (3 or more respondents)
Maintaining roads and pavements	98%	1%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do good quality repairs first time (3) - People are more important than roads and pavements (3)
Helping vulnerable people to stay in their own homes	89%	3%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Keeping people in their own homes can result in them being lonely, so needs support e.g. day centres (5)

Table 2 shows that there is almost universal support for investment in maintenance of roads and pavements with 89% of the Panel also supporting investment in helping vulnerable people to stay in their own homes.

d) Missing Priorities

Looking at overall responses to the Community Panel, Your Money, Your Views' and engagement events there appears to be a high level of agreement with and support for the Council's spending plans and priorities.

However, those people who took part in these consultations also had the opportunity to raise any other priorities that they thought were missing from the proposed spending plans.

Is there anything missing from our priorities?

Responses (3 or more respondents) included:

- Street cleaning/rubbish removal (14)
- Regeneration in other areas of Telford (10)
- Environmental Health (4)

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|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Leisure Centres (3)- Libraries (3) |
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2.4 SAVINGS PROPOSALS

The main focus of this year's consultation was on savings proposals due to the difficult financial position facing the Council. As part of 'Your Money, Your Views', we asked people how strongly they supported or opposed our savings proposals overall. Almost three-quarters (72%) supported proposals overall, whilst 9% opposed them.

More detailed consultation focused on those savings that could potentially have the most impact on the public (fees and charges and reductions/changes to services) and possible alternative savings options. Sections a)-c) below summarise the overall results of this part of the consultation – specific impacts are discussed in more detail in Appendix 8.

a) Fees and Charges

Table 3 sets out the responses and comments on a range of proposals to increase or to introduce new charges.

For all proposals in the Community Panel survey, a majority of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with them. The two proposals with the highest levels of agreement and lowest levels of disagreement were increasing licence fees (84%/6%) and increasing leisure and culture admissions and charges (78%/12%); these were also well supported at consultation meetings and by people who responded to 'Your Money, Your Views'.

The option of introducing a charge for Flex cards emerged through the consultation process (this was not part of the original budget strategy and was therefore not included in the Community Panel survey). This option was also generally well supported at consultation meetings and by people who responded to 'Your Money, Your Views'.

Looking at views on the two options of increasing leisure and culture charges and introducing a charge for Flex cards ('Your Money, Your Views' and engagement events), of those who commented on these proposals 37 people supported leisure and culture charge increases (12 opposed) and 42 supported the Flex card charge (11 opposed).

For other proposals, between 22-29% of Community Panel respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed. Table 3 highlights some possible reasons for this. In the case of car parking charge increases, it appears that some Community Panel respondents mistakenly believed that the Council runs all the Telford Town Centre car parks (this was clarified for people attending consultation meetings, which may explain why these groups were more supportive of the proposal).

In response to a request from the Community-Focused, Efficient Council Scrutiny Committee, additional consultation was carried out with traders in Ironbridge. This involved hand-delivering letters to businesses in the vicinity of Council-owned car parks – traders were invited to attend a meeting to discuss the proposals on 7 February and also had the option to comment on the proposals via freepost, email or telephone. Only 2 traders attended the meeting (along with the Borough Councillor and a representative from the Gorge Parish Council); however, an additional 18 traders commented on the proposals face to face when the meeting invitations were hand-delivered. A summary of the results of this consultation is shown in Table 3a below.

Table 3a – Consultation with Ironbridge Traders

	Number	Comments
Agree	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cheap anyway (3) - Increase to be expected - Rather see money spent on other council services
Neutral	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enforce double yellow lines - People are too lazy to walk so don't use car parks - Customers do not complain about the amount for parking but about the number of spaces - Not a big increase/parking cheap
Disagree	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Parking should be free (2) - Ironbridge is dead and trade is slipping away - Very concerned - Do not change residents' parking - Get rid of market square car park
Did not state whether they agreed/disagreed but made a comment	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Trade may/will be affected (2) - Will not affect my business (2) - Inevitable - Do not change the permits for locals - Not a big increase/cheap anyway (2) - Not enough car park spaces (2)
Other comments (ward/Parish councillor)	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - May increase on-street parking - 2nd year in a row that prices have increased

The two least well supported proposals overall appear to be introducing a charge for new and replacement bins and increasing charges for low-level preventative services. The proposal to increase cemetery burial charges appears to be a sensitive issue for some Community Panel respondents; in contrast people who discussed this issue at consultation meetings had relatively few concerns.

b) Reductions to Services

Table 4 sets out the responses and comments on a range of proposals to reduce, withdraw or change a number of services.

The proposals with the highest levels of agreement amongst the Community Panel were switching off street lights at night (92%), reducing shrub bed maintenance (87%) and reducing the frequency of grass-cutting (85%); these were also all well supported at consultation meetings and by people who responded to 'Your Money, Your Views'.

There was almost universal support for reviewing non-mandatory milk provision (96%) at engagement events and consultation meetings; this proposal was also the most supported by people who responded to 'Your Money, Your Views'.

Whilst 83% of the Community Panel agreed or strongly agreed with the proposal to revise Wrekin Connect and withdraw the Twister service, some people who took part in engagement events expressed concerns about the impact of this proposal on vulnerable people living in rural areas, suggesting that the Council should engage directly with the users of this service. In response to this, we telephoned the 20 people who had used this service in the last 6 months to discuss the proposal in more detail and to understand their individual circumstances (we were unable to make contact with 6 of people, so in total 14 people were contacted). A summary of these discussions is shown in Table 4a below.

Table 4a – Twister Service

Are you a concessionary travel pass holder? <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Yes (13)- No (1)
What have you used Twister for in the past? <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Shopping (13)- Working (1)- Socialising (5)- Medical (1)
Do you use any other buses now as well as Twister? <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Yes (6)- No (8)
Do you use any other form of transport? <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Car (9 – driver (5), passenger (4))- Taxi (3)
Why do you use Twister instead of Wrekin Connect? <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Have no information on the Wrekin Connect (2)- Don't understand Wrekin Connect- Didn't think/know Wrekin Connect came to my area (4)- The Twister is handy and picks me up closer to home (2)- Can't get to bus stop- Runs more often and at more convenient times

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Excellent, helpful drivers (2) - Goes direct to the Town Centre/other areas i.e. not just Wellington - Enjoy the journey and socialising on the bus
<p>If the Twister service was withdrawn, how would this impact on you?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Would have to go back to using a car - Would have to go back to using a taxi (2)/would have to pay for a taxi (2) - Wouldn't be able to get to Telford (2) - Very little as long as buses still available - Would stop me going to work - Would miss it, it's very convenient - Can't get to the bus stop - It's a lifeline
<p>The Twister service currently costs the Council about £19 per passenger per journey do you see this as good value for money for the Council?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Yes – 10 - No – 4

Approximately three-quarters of the Panel and the people who took part in engagement events agreed or supported the proposals to reduce road-sweeping and revert to the national concessionary travel scheme. However, the latter proposal was one of the least well-supported proposals amongst people who responded to 'Your Money, Your Views'.

The two least well supported proposals overall appear to be reducing maintenance of roads and pavements and withdrawal of the free pest control service (both with less than 40% agreement and 50%+ disagreement amongst the Community Panel).

c) Alternative Savings Options

Looking at overall responses to the Community Panel, 'Your Money, Your Views' and engagement events there appears to be a high level of agreement with and support for the majority of the Council's savings proposals.

However, those people who took part in these consultations also had the opportunity to suggest any alternative savings options.

<p>Is there anything else we should stop doing or do less of?</p> <p>Responses (3 or more respondents) included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Other street lighting savings – switch off during the day, switch off every other light, use low energy bulbs/solar lights (26) - Greater use of volunteers/community payback (16) - Switch off some traffic lights at night (11) - Reduce Councillors allowances and expenses (8) - Reduce number of Councillors (3) - Increase or introduce more fees and charges (3) - Reduce traffic management schemes further (3) - Parking enforcement (fines etc.) (3)

2.5 COUNCIL TAX

The Panel questionnaire and 'Your Money, Your Views' asked people to what extent they supported or opposed the proposal to freeze Council Tax. Those who did not support the proposed increase were asked to give their reasons.

Amongst the Panel, 91% of respondents stated that they strongly support or support the proposed freeze. For 'Your Money, Your Views', the figure supporting the proposal is slightly lower (84%).

Of the people who opposed the proposal (5% - Panel, 8% - 'Your Money, Your Views', the main reason appears to be that people would prefer a small increase to secure some services and reduce the need to make service cuts. Only 2 people said that Council Tax should be reduced.

Table 3 – Fees and Charges (All Consultation)

Proposal	Community Panel (CP)	Consultation Meetings	‘Your Money, Your Views’ (YM, YV)	Comments and Issues Raised (more than 3 respondents/groups)
Increase licensing fees	84% agree (6% disagree)	15/18 groups agree (2/18 disagree)	In ‘top 5’ most supported savings proposals (ranked 4 th)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Council should not be subsidising businesses (meetings – 4 groups, CP - 4) - Taxi-drivers may go to Shropshire so Council may lose revenue (meetings - 5 groups) - Fee increase will be passed on to customers (CP – 4) - Unfair as you have to have a licence (CP – 3)
Increase leisure and culture charges (either an annual price increase across leisure and culture or annual Flex card ¹ charge)	78% agree (12% disagree)	13/18 groups agree with both options (0/18 disagree)	In ‘top 5’ most supported savings proposals (ranked 2 nd)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support Flex card charge of about £5 (meetings – 6 groups, EE – 4, YMYV - 3) - Price increases could discourage people from using leisure centres (meetings – 5 groups, CP – 21, EE- 3) - Consider family Flex card or other concessions (meetings – 4 groups) - Should be covered by users (CP – 5) - Annual price review should be routine (CP – 4)
Introduce standard charge for bulk collections	69% agree (22% disagree)	11/18 groups agree (2/18 disagree)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Could lead to fly-tipping (meetings – 8 groups, CP – 82) - Consider concessions (CP – 8) - Should get 1 free collection a year (CP – 8)
Increase car parking	60% agree	16/18 groups agree	In ‘top 5’ most	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Car parking fees for shopping too high

charges	(29% disagree)	(2/18 disagree)	supported savings proposals (ranked 5 th =)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> and will move shoppers away (CP – 45) - Will discourage visitors (CP – 14) - Car parking should be free (CP – 8) - Should be linked to inflation (CP – 5) - The Range car park – will impact on disabled drivers (CP – 4) - Should not be free at market towns (CP – 3)
Increase charges for help with shopping and cleaning	57% agree (25% disagree)	8/18 groups agree (4/18 disagree)	In 'top 5' least well supported proposals (ranked 5 th least supported)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No increase or Increase lower (meetings – 6 groups, CP - 35) - Should be free (CP – 8) - Increase should be higher (meetings – 3 groups) - Need to make sure that people get maximum benefits/financial support (meetings – 3 groups) - Will impact on vulnerable people (CP – 21) - Look at ability to pay (CP – 3)
Increase cemetery burial charges	52% agree (26% disagree)	15/18 groups agree (3/18 disagree)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Could be seen as a 'death tax' (CP – 51)
Introduce a charge for new/replacement bins ²	N/A	6/18 groups agree (5/18 groups disagree)	In 'top 5' least well supported proposals (ranked 2 nd least supported)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - You shouldn't have to pay if your bin is stolen (meetings – 5 groups) - You shouldn't have to pay if your bin is damaged by the contractor (meetings – 3 groups) - Impact on recycling/fly-tipping (YMYV – 16)

- 1 – Flex card option emerged through consultation (not included in original budget strategy), therefore not part of Community Panel survey
- 2 – Not included in Community Panel survey, as full details of proposal not available until after survey distributed.

Table 4 – Reductions or Changes to Services (All Consultation)

Proposal	Community Panel (CP)	Consultation Meetings	‘Your Money, Your Views’ (YM,YV)	Engagement Events (EE)	Comments and Issues Raised (more than 3 respondents/groups)
Switch off street lights at night	92% agree (6% disagree)	15/18 groups agree (1 disagrees)		92% support (65/71 comments)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Could affect personal safety and increase crime (meetings – 5 groups) - Council should make sure no lights are on during the day (meetings – 4 groups, EE - 7) - Switch off every other/3rd light (meetings – 3 groups, EE – 3)
Reduce shrub-bed maintenance	87% agree (6% disagree)	15/18 groups agree (0 disagree) – proposals discussed together	In ‘top 5’ most supported savings proposals (ranked 3 rd)	84% support (52/62 comments)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use volunteers and community payback (meetings – 10 groups, EE - 6) - Keep grass cut at junctions/roundabouts for safety reasons (meetings – 3 groups) - Replace shrub beds/verges with lower maintenance alternatives (meetings – 3 groups) - Could affect appearance of town – good at the moment (EE – 3)
Reduce frequency of grass cutting	85% agree (9% disagree)				
Revise Wrekin Connect/withdraw Twister	83% agree (5% disagree)	12/18 groups agree (3 disagree)		57% support (24/42 comments)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Need to look at alternative options and talk to service users (meetings – 4 groups) - Concern about vulnerable people in rural areas (EE – 8)
Reduce frequency of road sweeping	76% agree (15% disagree)	16/18 groups agree (0 disagree)	In ‘top 5’ most supported savings	74% support (36/49 comments)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Concern over flooding in rural areas if gullies not cleared (meetings – 3 groups) - Don’t see sweepers now so it won’t

			proposals (ranked 5 th =)		make much difference (EE – 3)
Revert to mandatory concessionary travel scheme	75% agree (16% disagree)	11/18 groups agree (1 disagrees)	In 'top 5' least well supported proposals (ranked 4 th least supported)	74% support (50/68 comments)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - People will not be able to travel free to hospital/day care appointments (meetings – 4 groups, EE - 5) - Impact on rural areas (meetings – 1 group, EE – 3) - Look at alternative of an annual fee for extra half an hour (EE – 4)
Reduce spend on street lighting maintenance	51% agree (34% disagree)	See roads – proposals discussed together	Included with roads	Included with roads	
Remove pest control service	36% agree (50% disagree)	10/18 groups agree (3 disagree)	In 'top 5' least well supported proposals (ranked 3 rd least supported)	40% support (20/51 comments)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prefer the Council to provide an in-house service with a charge (meetings – 8 groups, EE - 6) - An essential service that should be retained (meetings – 4 groups, CP – 6, EE – 5, YMYV - 10) - Look at concessions for those who can't afford to pay (meetings – 3 groups, EE - 5) - Potential public health issue (EE – 3)
Reduce spend on road and pavement repairs	32% agree (56% disagree) – these proposals	8/18 groups agree (3 disagree)	In 'top 5' least well supported proposals (ranked 1 st least supported)	19% support (11/59 comments)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A false economy, storing up problems for future (meetings – 6 groups) - Do quality, long-term repairs in the first place (meetings – 5 groups, CP - 5) - Will increase damage to cars and

	were joined together in Panel				<p>insurance claims (meetings – 5 groups, EE - 3)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Will impact on pedestrians, especially those with mobility problems/visual impairment (meetings – 4 groups, YMYV - 3) - Roads are already in a poor condition, need to be maintained (meetings – 3 groups, CP – 29, EE – 22, YMYV - 26)
Reduce spend on traffic management		14/18 groups agree (1 disagrees)			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support de-cluttering of signs (meetings – 4 groups) - Some concerns over reduced rights of way budget (meetings – 4 groups)
Review of non-mandatory milk provision ¹	N/A	14/16 groups agree (0 disagree)	In 'top 5' most supported savings proposals (ranked 1 st)	96% support (64/67 comments)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Some parents will not opt-in, could affect nutrition (EE – 4)

1 - Not included in Community Panel survey, as full details of proposal not available until after survey distributed. Consultation on this started slightly later – hence only 16 groups consulted.

