

Harrogate Borough Council Budget 2008/9

Public Consultation

January 2008

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CONSULTATION REGARDING HARROGATE BOROUGH COUNCIL'S BUDGET FOR 2008/2009

1.0 METHODOLOGY

- 1.1** In November 2007 Harrogate Borough Council consulted residents of the District to seek views on the Harrogate Borough Council's budget for 2008/09 and proposals regarding Council tax. A copy of the questionnaire can be found at Appendix A.
- 1.2** The following questionnaires were sent:
- ❑ 1500 questionnaires regarding the Budget were sent to **District Panel** Members, 907 were returned. This represents a 60% response rate.
 - ❑ 210 questionnaires were sent to the **Voluntary Sector**, 29 questionnaires were returned. This represents a 14% response rate.
 - ❑ 150 questionnaires were sent to **Local businesses**, 11 questionnaires were returned. This represents a 7% response rate.
 - ❑ 34 questionnaires were sent to the **Local Strategic Partnership**, 9 questionnaires were returned. This represents a 26% response rate.
 - ❑ 54 questionnaires were sent to **Parish Councillors**, 22 questionnaires were returned. This represents a 41%% response rate.
 - ❑ 53 questionnaires were sent to **Councillors**, 16 were returned. This represents a 30% response rate.
 - ❑ The questionnaire was also placed on the **Harrogate Borough Council website**. 59 responses were received.
- 1.3** In total 1053 responses to the Budget Survey were received. Please note not all respondents answered every question within the questionnaire, the analysis below is based on valid responses to each individual question.

Analysis of responses		
Total questionnaires analysed = 1053		
	Questionnaires returned	Response Rate
District Panel	907	60
Voluntary Sector	29	14
Business Sector	11	7
Local Strategic Partnership	9	26
Parish Councillors	22	41
Councillors	16	30
Internet	59	

2.0 SUMMARY

2.1 Budget 2008/2009

- ❑ 55% of all respondents were aware of the destination of Council Tax billed in 2007/2008
- ❑ Levels of awareness regarding the Council Tax was over 53% for all category groups except the Business sector which was 44%.
- ❑ The most popular method of communicating information regarding the Council Tax billed in the year 2007/2008 was via the Council Tax/Business Rates Leaflet (345 responses)
- ❑ 46% of respondents preferred a Council Tax rise of 4.3% whereby services would remain the same.
- ❑ 77% of respondents agreed that any additional expenditure in 2008/2009 should be spent on recycling & waste collection.
- ❑ The top 3 suggestions for any additional expenditure that was not specified were; Improved/reduced cost public transport, road/pavement repairs and rural development.
- ❑ Respondents that had answered 'yes' to more than one of the additional expenditure areas of recycling & waste collection and Customer Services & IT investment were asked to prioritise their preference for any additional expenditure. Recycling and Waste Collection was given the highest priority and Customer Services and IT investment was given second priority.
- ❑ In order to achieve the lowest Council Tax rise respondents agree the first priority should be not to undertake the additional expenditure.
- ❑ When respondents were asked to specify which services they would reduce (if any) in order to keep Council Tax as low as possible a wide variety of comments were received. The most popular suggestion was a reduction to further IT investment, the second most popular was to reduce the Council Tax paid to Police and the third most popular was a reduction to customer services spending.
- ❑ 82% of respondents agreed that if there was to be an increase in fees for services then this should be applied to the hire/letting of Council premises
- ❑ When Respondents were invited to provide comments or suggestions on the budget questions a wide variety of responses were received and are summarised in Appendix B.

3.1 The following background information was given to respondents.

The Council receives funding from 3 main sources:

- Central Government Grant
- Council Tax
- Fees and Charges

If one of these sources does not increase annually, for example no Grant increase from Central Government, then increased expenditure, including inflation, must be met from the remaining sources i.e Council Tax and Fees & Charges

In September 2007 the Cabinet agreed the following proposals relating to the Council's budget:-

- Increase the overall budget by 2.5% to £23.671m
- Increase fees and charges by 4% (calculated rate of inflation)
- Make efficiency savings of 1% cash
- Plan to receive no grant increase from Central Government

If this is achieved then without any new spending the Council Tax will increase by 4.3%. However, there are considerable pressures for new spending to meet a number of areas of work. These are:-

- **Waste Recycling and Waste Collection** – the Council is required to meet Government targets on recycling and compost or face financial penalties.
- **Customer Services and IT Investment** – there is a requirement to meet Government targets regarding providing local people easy access to Council services electronically.

The Council must decide if it wishes to invest further in these areas and is seeking views on the priorities for investment. As a guide, a 1% increase in Council Tax produces an additional £125,000 to spend. However, if the Council increases its Council Tax above 5% it will face financial penalties from the Government.

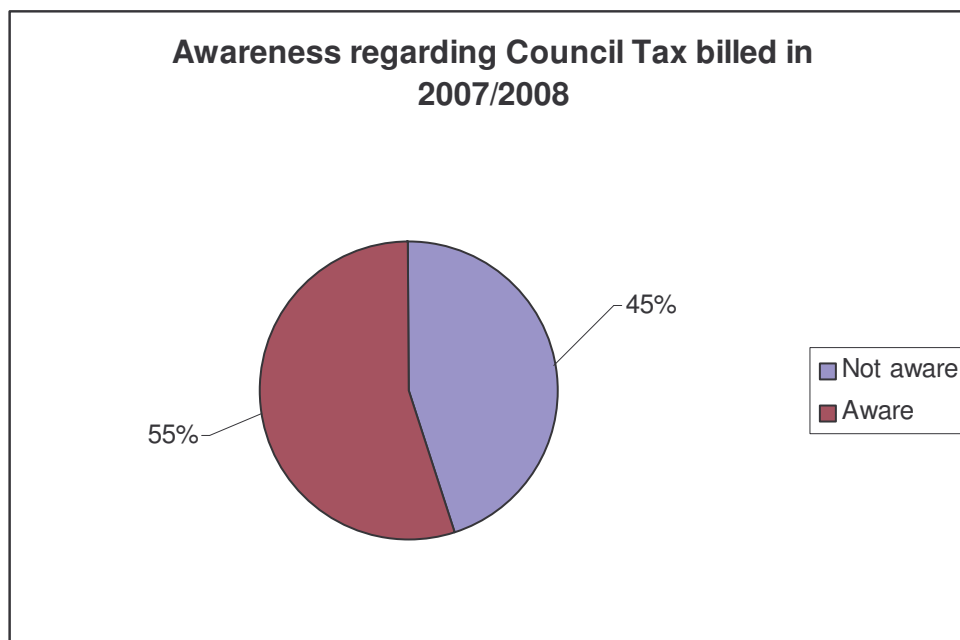
3.2. Respondents were asked about their awareness regarding the destination for Council Tax billed in 2007/08. They were told that:

- 14.6% was for Harrogate Borough Council
- 68% was for North Yorkshire County Council.
- 13.4% was for North Yorkshire Police Authority.
- 4% was for North Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service.

The following table sets out their responses.

- Overall, the level of awareness of Council tax billed in 2007/2008 was 55%.
- Levels of awareness regarding the Council Tax was over 53% for all category groups except the Business sector which was 44%.

Awareness regarding Council Tax billed in 2007/8														
	District Panel		Voluntary Sector		Business Sector		LSP		Parish Councillors		Councillors		Internet	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Aware	463	53	18	64	4	44	7	78	13	62	16	100	39	66
Not Aware	418	47	10	36	5	56	2	22	8	38			20	34

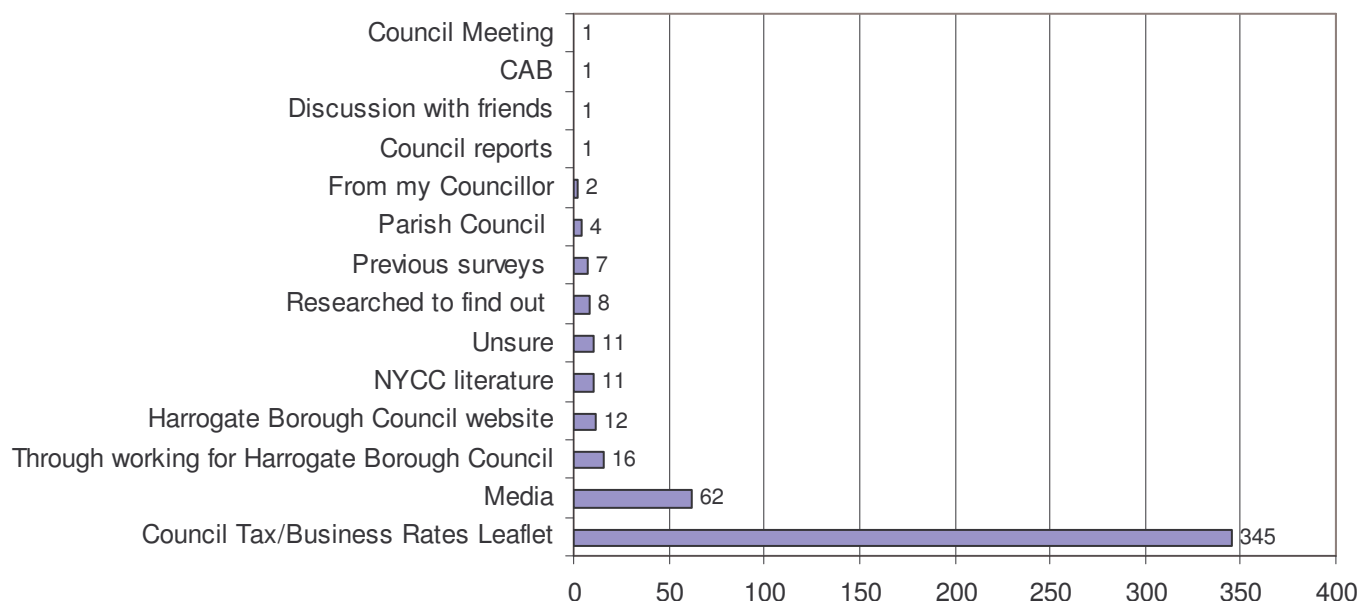


3.3 Respondents were asked how they became aware of the Council Tax billed in 2007/8.

- The most popular method of communicating information regarding the Council Tax billed in the year 2007/2008 was via the Council Tax/Business Rates Leaflet (345 responses)

How respondents become aware of the details regarding the Council tax billed in 2007/08	
Council Tax/Business Rates Leaflet	345
Media	62
Through working for Harrogate Borough Council	16
Harrogate Borough Council website	12
NYCC literature	11
Unsure	11
Researched to find out	8
Previous surveys	7
Parish Council	4
From my Councillor	2
Council reports	1
Discussion with friends	1
CAB	1
Council Meeting	1

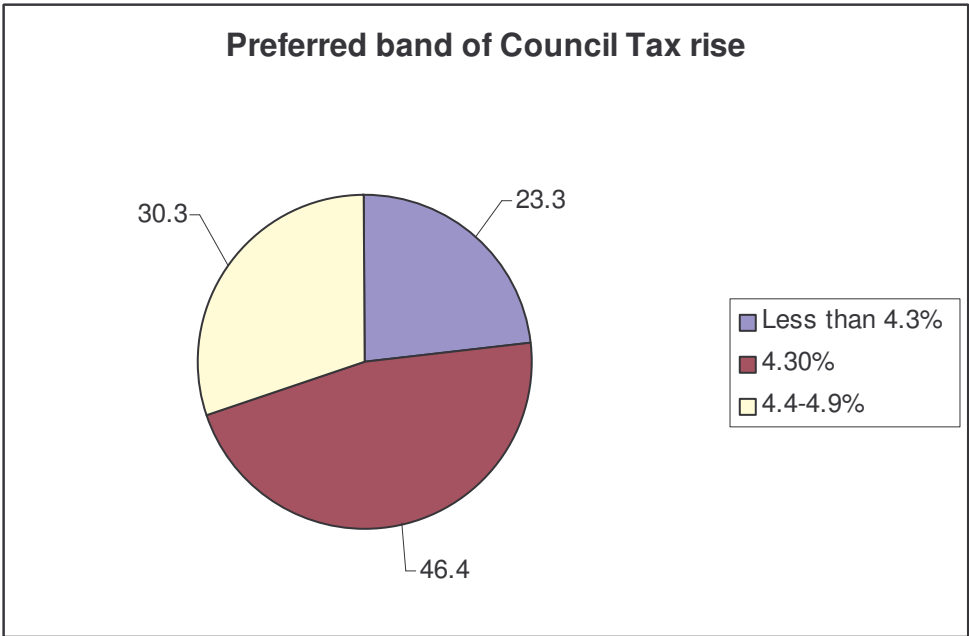
How respondents became aware of the details regarding the Council tax billed in 2007/2008



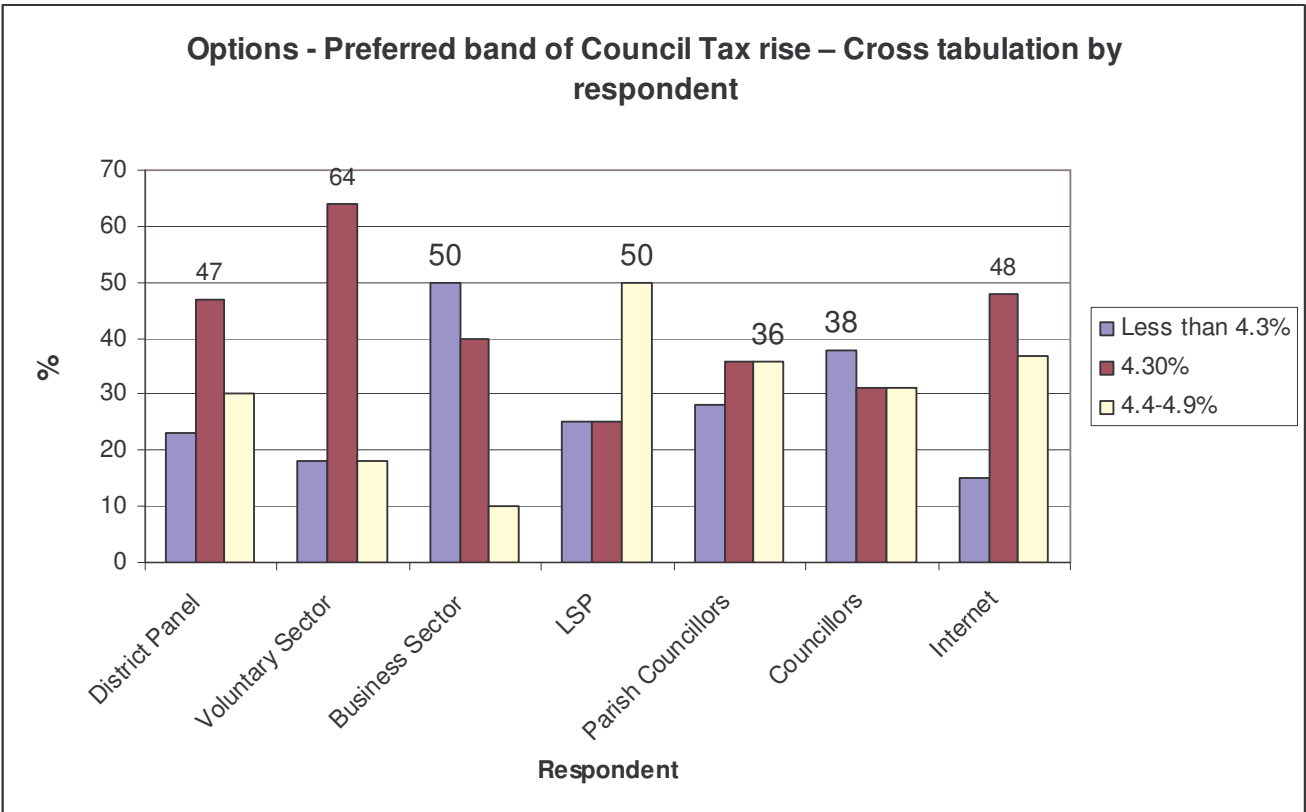
3.4 Respondents were asked their preferred Council Tax rise. Bearing in mind that:

- Less than 4.3% would lead to either cuts in existing services and/or a further increase in fees and charges.
 - At a rise of 4.3% services would remain the same.
 - A rise of 4.4 - 4.9% would enable some of the additional expenditure detailed above in paragraph 3.1.
- Overall 46% of respondents preferred a Council Tax rise of 4.3% whereby services would remain the same.
 - Four out of the seven category groups of respondent stated a preference of a rise of 4.3%, Business sector and Councillors stated a preference for a rise of less than 4.3% and the LSP stated a preference for a rise of 4.4-4.9%

Options - Preferred band of Council Tax rise.		
	No	%
Less than 4.3% (this will lead to cuts in existing services and/or a further increase in fees & charges)	233	23.3
4.3% (services will remain as they are)	465	46.4
4.4-4.9% (this will enable the Council to address some of the new spending areas detailed above)	304	30.3



Options - Preferred band of Council Tax rise – Cross tabulation by respondent						
	Less than 4.3%		4.3%		4.4-4.9%	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
District Panel	200	23	400	47	259	30
Voluntary Sector	5	18	18	64	5	18
Business Sector	5	50	4	40	1	10
LSP	2	25	2	25	4	50
Parish Councillors	6	28	8	36	8	36
Councillors	6	38	5	31	5	31
Internet	9	15	28	48	22	37

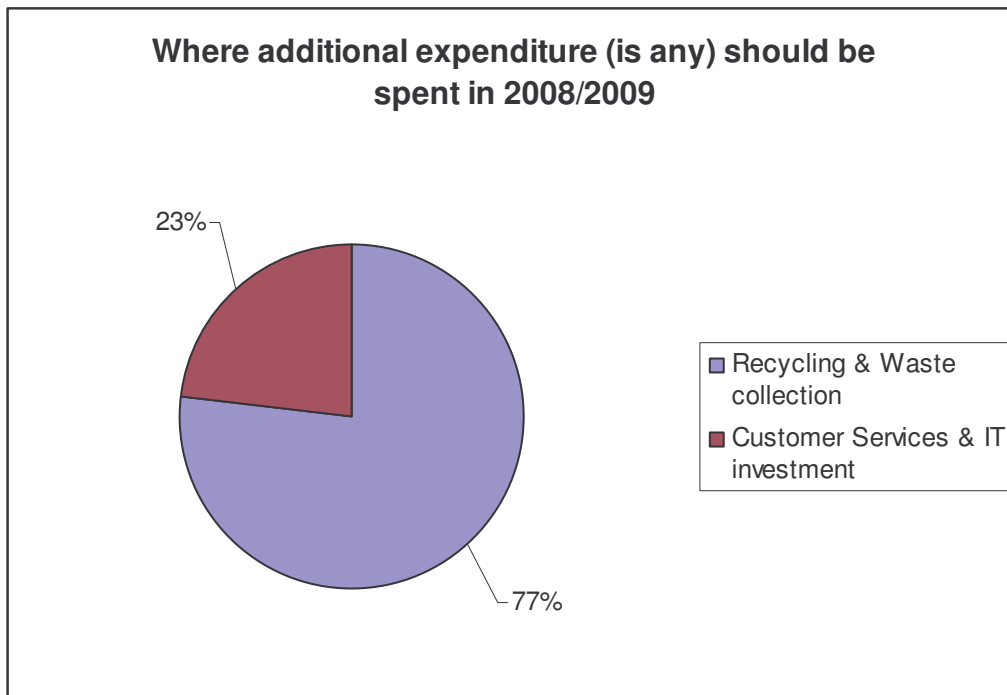


3.5(i) Respondents were asked how additional expenditure (if any) should be spent in 2008/2009.

- 77% of respondents agreed that any additional expenditure in 2008/2009 should be spent on recycling & Waste collection.

Where additional expenditure should be spent in 2008/2009		
	No	%
Recycling & Waste collection	782	77
Customer Services & IT investment	228	23

Note Customer Services & IT investment may have been read as separate categories, the heading refers to integrated Customer Services & IT programme.



3.5(ii) Respondents were also asked if they thought additional expenditure should be spent in an area not specified. The following responses were received:

- The top 3 suggestions for additional expenditure that is not specified were; Improved / reduced cost public transport, road/pavement repairs and rural development.

Area for additional expenditure not specified	
Improved/reduced cost public transport	18
Road/pavement repairs	11
Rural development	8
Community Safety	7
Supporting voluntary services	6
Enforced litter/alcohol/anti social behaviour	5
Improved Efficiency	5
Traffic management	4
Council wages increased	3
Reduced staff/cut backs	3
Communications and media relations/customer focus	3
Affordable Housing	3
Reduced parking restrictions/fines	2
Health and housing	2
Support for local businesses/reduce business rates	2
Cycle Routes	2
Visual Amenity	2
Climate change	2
Renewable Energy	2
Facilities for young people	1
Leisure	1
Planning applications	1
Arts funding	1
Cultural services	1
All Resources	1
NHS	1
Home Help	1
Education/Skills	1
Civic Pride	1
Public Toilets	1
Gritting Roads	1
Knaresborough's needs	1
Better services for people with disabilities	1
Community Planning	1

3.6 Respondents were asked if they had answered 'yes' to more than one of the additional expenditure areas of Recycling & Waste collection and Customer Services & It investment were asked to prioritise their preference for any additional expenditure.

- Recycling and Waste Collection was given the highest priority and Customer Services and IT investment was given second priority

3.7 In order to achieve the lowest Council Tax rise, respondents were asked to prioritise the following:

- Reduce existing services.
- Not undertake the additional expenditure

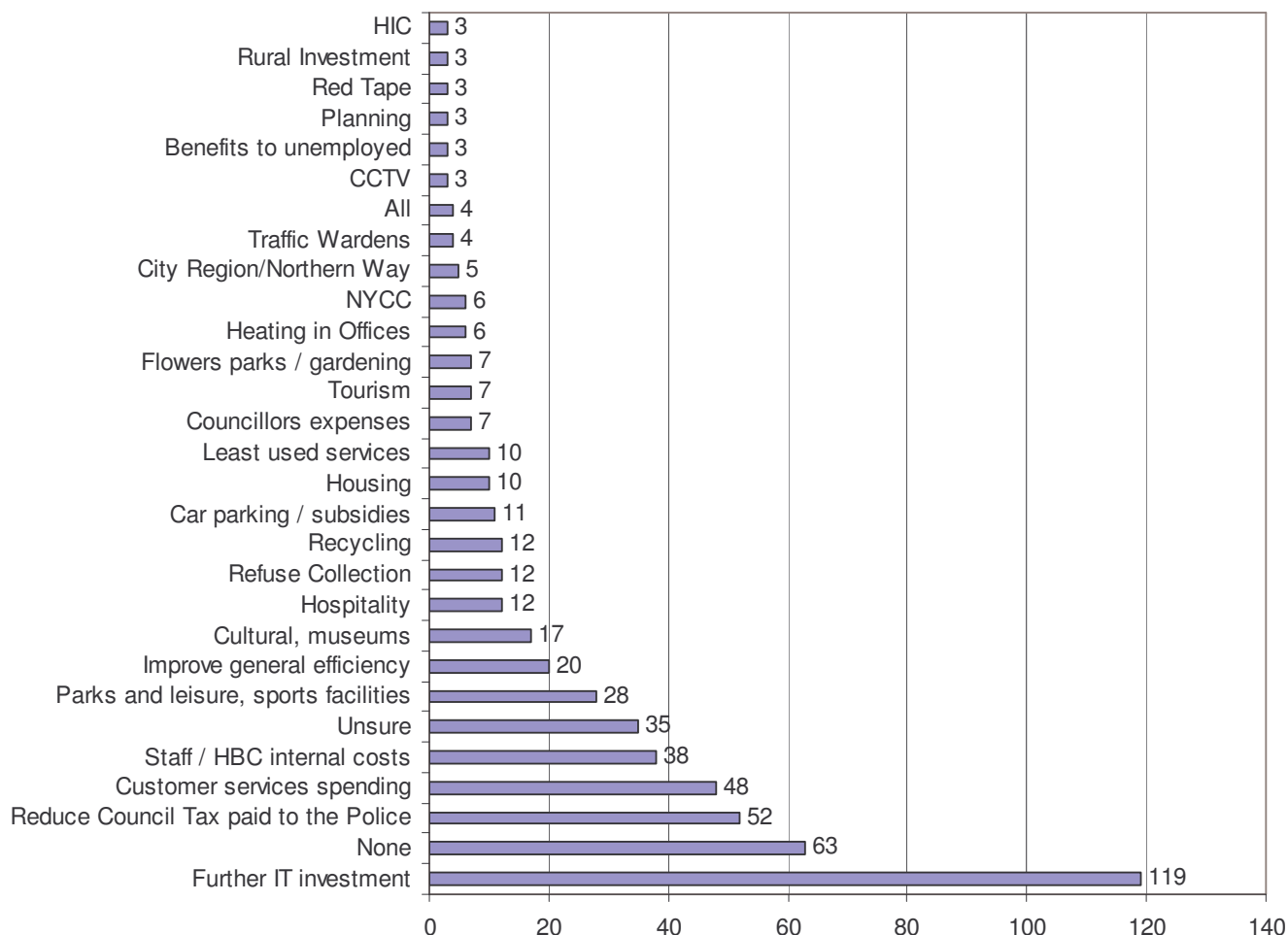
- Increase fees and charges for services by more than 3.9%
 - Introduce new charges for services
- Not undertaking the additional expenditure was given the highest priority.

In order to achieve the lowest Council Tax Rise, in what order would you do the following?	
Not undertake the additional expenditure	1 st
Increase fees & charges for services by more than the planned 4%	2 nd
Introduce new charges for services	3 rd
Reduce existing services	4 th

3.8 When respondents were asked to specify which services they would reduce (if any) in order to keep Council Tax as low as possible a wide variety of comments were received. The most popular suggestion was to reduce further IT investment, the second most popular was to reduce the Council Tax paid to Police and the third most popular was to reduce customer services spending.

Services respondents would reduce (if any) in order to keep Council tax as Low as possible	
Further IT investment	119
None	63
Reduce Council Tax paid to the Police	52
Customer services spending	48
Staff / HBC internal costs	38
Unsure	35
Parks and leisure, sports facilities	28
Improve general efficiency	20
Cultural, museums	17
Hospitality	12
Refuse Collection	12
Recycling	12
Car parking / subsidies	11
Housing	10
Least used services	10
Councillors expenses	7
Tourism	7
Flowers parks / gardening	7
Heating in Offices	6
NYCC	6
City Region/Northern Way	5
Traffic Wardens	4
All	4
CCTV	3
Benefits to unemployed	3
Planning	3
Red Tape	3
Rural Investment	3
HIC	3
Central Services	2
Street Cleansing	2
Speed Management	2
Traffic Alterations	2
Gritting	1

Services respondents would reduce (if any) in order to keep Council tax as Low as possible

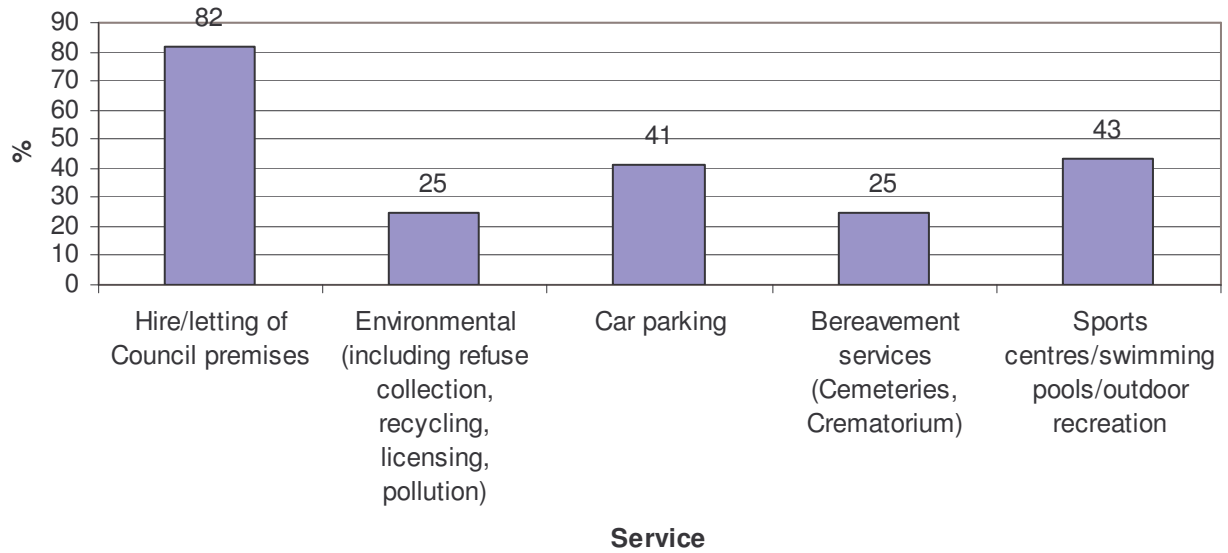


3.9 Respondents were given a list of services and asked for which services they would increase the fees (if any). Respondents were also informed that some fees are statutory or set by regulatory bodies and so were not included. Respondents were invited to tick all areas for added expenditure that they agreed with.

- The most popular response was to increase fees on hire/letting of Council premises (82%)

Services where respondents would you increase the fees (if any)		
	No	%
Hire/letting of Council premises	771	82
Environmental (including refuse collection, recycling, licensing, pollution)	236	25
Car parking	387	41
Bereavement services (Cemeteries, Crematorium)	229	25
Sports centres/swimming pools/outdoor recreation	402	43

Services where respondents would you increase the fees (if any)



3.10 Finally respondents were given a free space area to write any comments or suggestions they had regarding the budget questionnaire. A full list of comments received can be found at Appendix B.

Appendix A

Questionnaire

Harrogate Borough Council's Budget 2008/2009

These questions are seeking your views on Harrogate Borough Council's Budget for 2008/9 and proposed Council Tax rise. We understand that you may wish to make further comment and a space for this purpose is provided at Question 34.

The Council receives funding from 3 main sources:

- ◆ **Central Government Grant** ◆ **Council Tax** ◆ **Fees and Charges**

If one of these sources does not increase annually, for example no Grant increase from Central Government, then increased expenditure, including inflation, must be met from the remaining sources i.e Council Tax and Fees and Charges

In September 2007 the Cabinet agreed the following proposals relating to the Council's budget:-

- ▶ Increase the overall budget by 2.5% to £23.671m
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If the above are achieved without any new spending the Council Tax will increase by 4.3%. However, there are considerable pressures on the Council, for new spending to meet a number of areas of work.

These are:-

Waste Recycling and Waste Collection - the Council is required to meet Government targets on recycling and compost or face financial penalties.

Customer Services and IT Investment - there is a requirement to meet Government targets regarding providing local people easy access to Council services electronically.

The Council must decide if it wishes to invest further in these areas and is seeking views on the priorities for investment. As a guide, a 1% increase in Council Tax produces an additional £125,000 to spend. However, if the Council increases its Council Tax above 5% it will face financial penalties from the Government.

- Q11 Were you aware that of the Council Tax billed in 2007/8:**
- ▶ 14.6% is for Harrogate Borough Council to spend.
 - ▶ 68% is for North Yorkshire County Council to spend.
 - ▶ 13.4% is for North Yorkshire Police Authority to spend.
 - ▶ 4% is for North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service to spend.

Please tick one box

Aware

Not aware

Q12 If Aware, how did you know?

please specify

Q13 What is your preferred Council Tax rise?

Please tick one box

Less than 4.3% (this will lead to cuts in existing services and/or a further increase in fees and charges)

4.3% (services will remain as they are)

4.4 - 4.9% (this will enable the Council to address some of the new spending areas detailed above)

Q14 Do you agree that additional expenditure should be spent in 2008/9 in any of the following areas?

Please tick one box for each statement.

	Yes	No
Recycling and Waste Collection.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Customer Services and IT investment.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Other

If you think additional expenditure should be spent in an area not specified above please specify

Q15 If you answered Yes to more than one of the additional expenditure areas in question 14, please prioritise.

Please tick one box for each statement

	First Priority	Second priority
Recycling and Waste Collection.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Customer Services and IT investment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q16 In order to achieve the lowest Council Tax rise, in what order would you do the following?

Please tick one box for each statement

	First	Second	Third	Fourth
Reduce existing Services.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not undertake the additional expenditure .	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Increase existing fees and charges for services by more than the planned 4%.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Introduce new charges for services.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q17 Which services would you reduce?

(please specify)

Q18 For which of the following services would you increase the fees? (Please note some fees are statutory or set by regulatory bodies cannot be changed. These are not included here)

Please tick all that apply

Hire/letting of Council premises

Bereavement services (Cemeteries, Crematorium)

Environmental (including refuse collection, recycling, licensing, pollution)

Sports Centres / Swimming Pools / Outdoor Recreation

Car parking

Q19 Please use this space to write any comments or suggestions you have regarding the questions above

Q20 Colour of questionnaire

Green

Blue

Lilac

Grey

Salmon

Internet

Yellow

Appendix B

Any other comments?

Please contact Community Engagement Officer 01423 556068 for details