

Budget Consultation Results

(for the Council's 2018/19 Budget)

Executive Summary

2,297 Buckinghamshire residents and 121 representatives of organisations completed this year's Budget Consultation.

Respondents gave their views on the Council's proposal for living within its means, and on spending priorities for 2018/19. They were also invited to comment on what they thought the Council should take into account when budgeting for services for next year. The majority of respondents (6 in 10) were in agreement with the Council's proposal.

Roads (including maintenance and safety), supporting the vulnerable (both adults and children) and education were the highest priorities for respondents. Improving skills and employment opportunities are a higher priority for organisations than for residents.

There was an increase in responses compared with last year's consultation (985 residents and 35 organisations). There were similar levels of agreement with the Council's proposal compared with last year, and in general the service priorities and themes were similar to previous years, with roads and supporting the vulnerable featuring among the highest priorities.

Introduction

Views on the Council's budget and service priorities were sought from residents, businesses and public / community organisations. These results are considered by cabinet and the Council when shaping and approving the final Budget for 2017/18. The consultation ran from 17th October 2017 to the 19th November 2017.

In this year's budget consultation, residents and organisations were presented with the Council's proposal for living within its means. They were asked to make any other comments that the Council should take into account when planning the delivery of its services next year.

The Council's proposals for living within its means included:

- Protecting spending - safeguarding, needs of growing population, roads
- Areas to target reductions – non-statutory services, where alternative services are available, service frequency
- Doing things differently – sharing services with partners, charging organisations or residents for some services

2,297 residents and 121 representatives of organisations completed the survey.

Respondent profile

The profile of those **residents** who responded to the survey was compared to the Buckinghamshire demographic profile to understand whether the survey sample contains an over or under representation of certain demographic groups¹.

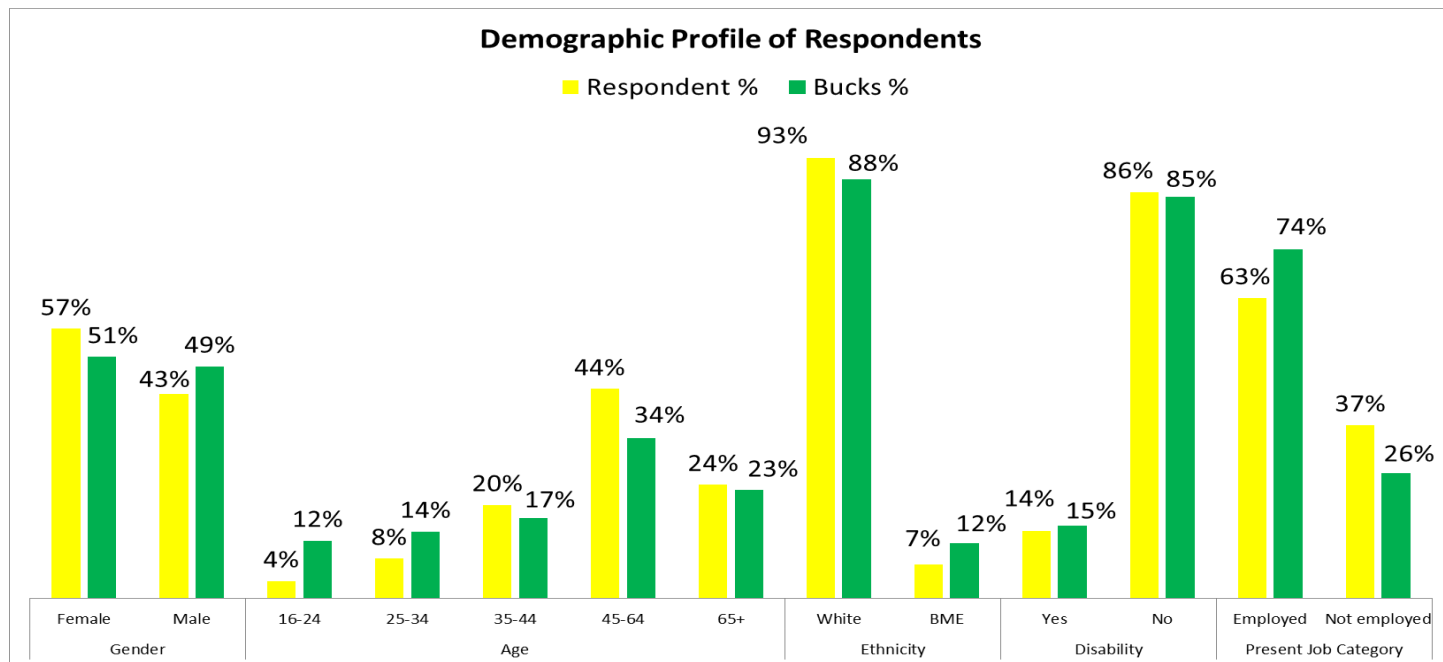


Figure 1: Demographic Profile

The following demographic groups were over represented / underrepresented in the survey (see Figure 1):

- Black or Minority ethnic groups – the respondent profile was around half of the Buckinghamshire population profile (7% v's 12%)
- Younger people – the respondent profile was a quarter of the Buckinghamshire profile (4% v's 12%)
- Middle aged groups were over-represented by 30% (44% v's 34%)
- Those who are not in employment were 39% more likely to respond when compared to the Buckinghamshire profile (37% v's 26%)
- Residents from more affluent ACORN groups were more likely to respond to the consultation 55% vs. 45% (Figure 2)

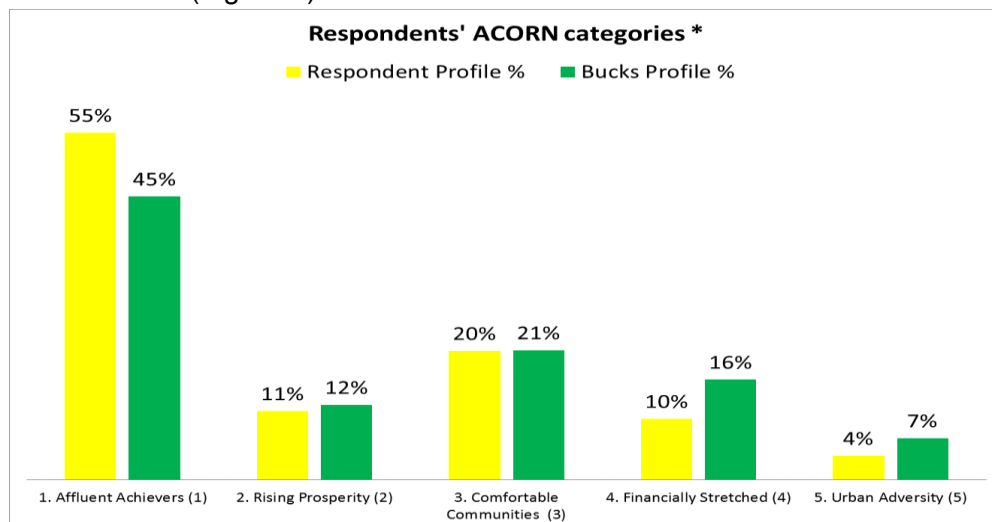


Figure 2: ACORN profile

¹ Results relate to valid respondents for each question (excluding those who did not answer questions about their demographic characteristics).

The profiles of **organisations** who responded to the survey are shown in Figures 3 and 4²:

- ¾ of responses were from employees of public sector organisations
- Only 1 in 10 responses were from private businesses
- 21% of respondents stated that they were representing Buckinghamshire County Council.
- Aylesbury Vale had the majority of responses, with 56% of organisations responding being based here

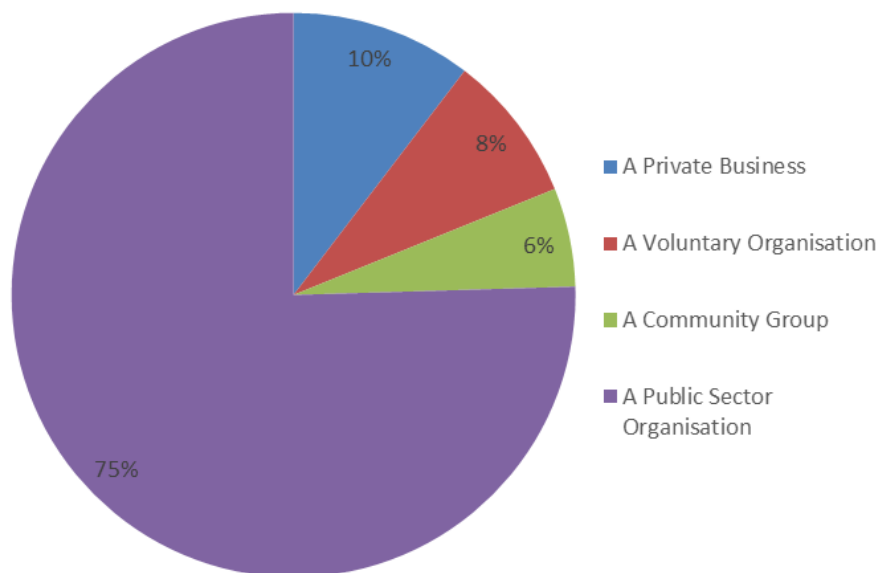


Figure 3: Organisation Category

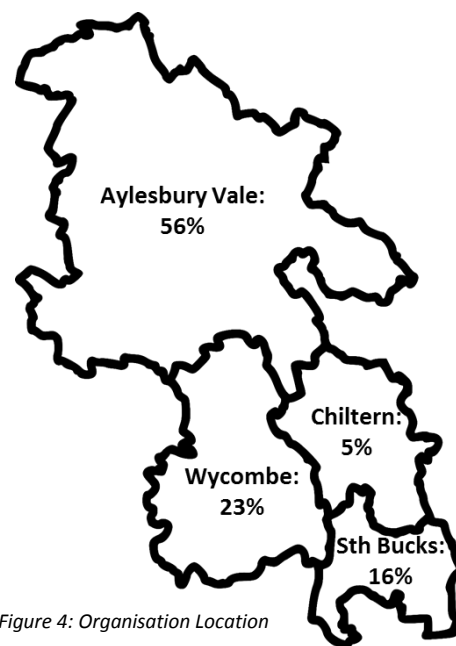


Figure 4: Organisation Location

The following organisations responded to the consultation (where an organisation's name was provided):

² Results relate to valid respondents for each question (excluding those who did not answer questions about their organisation)
Bases: Organisations – Organisation Category (106), District of Location (95)

- Allied Healthcare
- Aston Clinton Parish Council
- Aylesbury Vale District Council
- Booker Hill School
- Buckinghamshire Adult Learning
- Buckinghamshire County Council
- Buckinghamshire Adult Learning
- Burnham Grammar School
- Carpendale EV Consulting Ltd
- Chalfont St Giles Youth Club
- Chesham Sick Poor Fund
- Child First Nursery And Pre-School
- Denham Parish Council
- Family Assessment & Support Team
- Great Linford Primary School
- Hambleden Parish Council
- Handsup Communications
- Isis Operations
- McParland Chemists
- Oxford Health
- Ramblers
- RBL
- Richings Park Residents Association
- Royal Latin School
- The Highcrest Academy
- The Stoke Poges School
- Transport For Buckinghamshire
- Wednesday Club Waddesdon

Results

The Council’s plan for living within its means

The majority of residents (61%) **agree with the Councils proposals for living within its means**; 16% disagreed. Similar levels of organisations (62%) agree with the proposals; only 8% disagreed (Figure 5).

One fifth of residents (21%) and one quarter of organisations (26%) neither agreed nor disagreed with the proposal and 3% from both groups stated that they did not have an opinion.

**“How strongly do you agree, or disagree with the Council’s plan for living within its means?”
(Protecting spending; Areas to target reductions; Doing things differently)³**

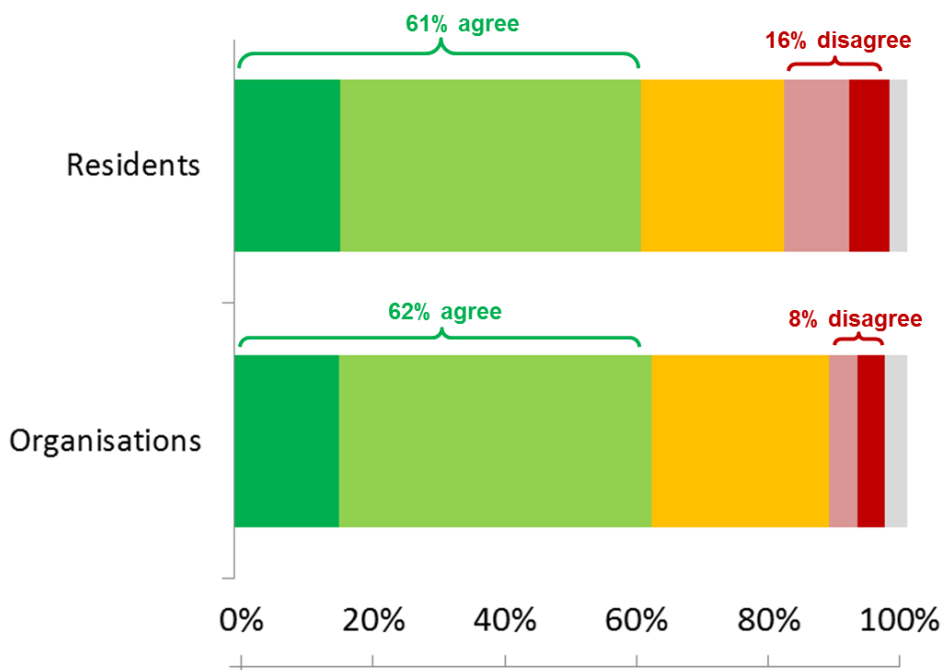


Figure 5: Proportion of the residents (2,297) and representatives of organisations (121) responding to the question: “How strongly do you agree, or disagree with the Council’s plan for living within its means?”

Differences in opinion for different groups of residents were then analysed to understand whether they were statistically significant (at a 95% confidence level⁴):

³ See Appendix for further details

⁴ 95% confidence level – The chances are that 95 times in 100, the “true” value will fall within the specified range.

Agreement with the Council's proposals are higher amongst:

- Older people aged 65+ (70% agree)
- White ethnic groups – Who are more likely to agree with the proposal (64%) compared to BME groups (54%)
- Respondents without a disability (63%) compared with disabled groups (56%)

Service Priorities

All respondents were asked to select up to five services where they thought the Council should “Keep spending the same” and where it should “spend less”.

Roads, supporting and protecting vulnerable adults and children, and education were the highest priorities for **residents**.

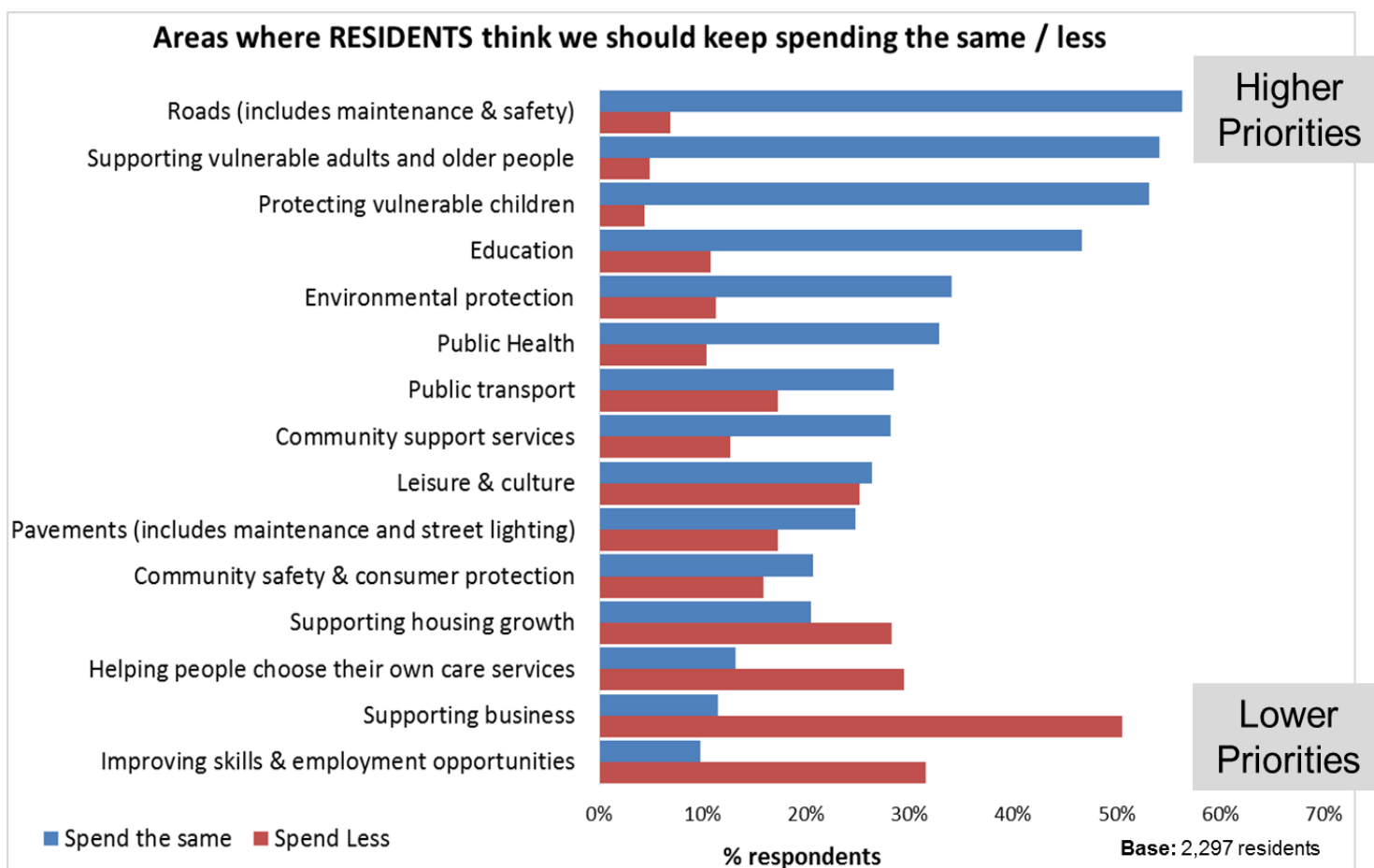


Figure 6: Proportion of the 2,297 residents responding to the “Spend the same” and “Spend less” questions on spending priorities

Demographic differences

For residents (Figure 6), the service priorities with the largest differences in opinion were analysed to understand demographic differences. Statistically significant differences were noted as follows:

- Leisure and Culture: Spending reductions were more likely to be suggested by those without children (27%) than those with children (22%).
- Community Safety and Consumer Protection: A third more males, and a third more respondents without children thought less should be spent in this area

Comparisons with previous years

There was an increase in responses compared with last year, with 2,297 residents completing the survey (compared with 985 last year).

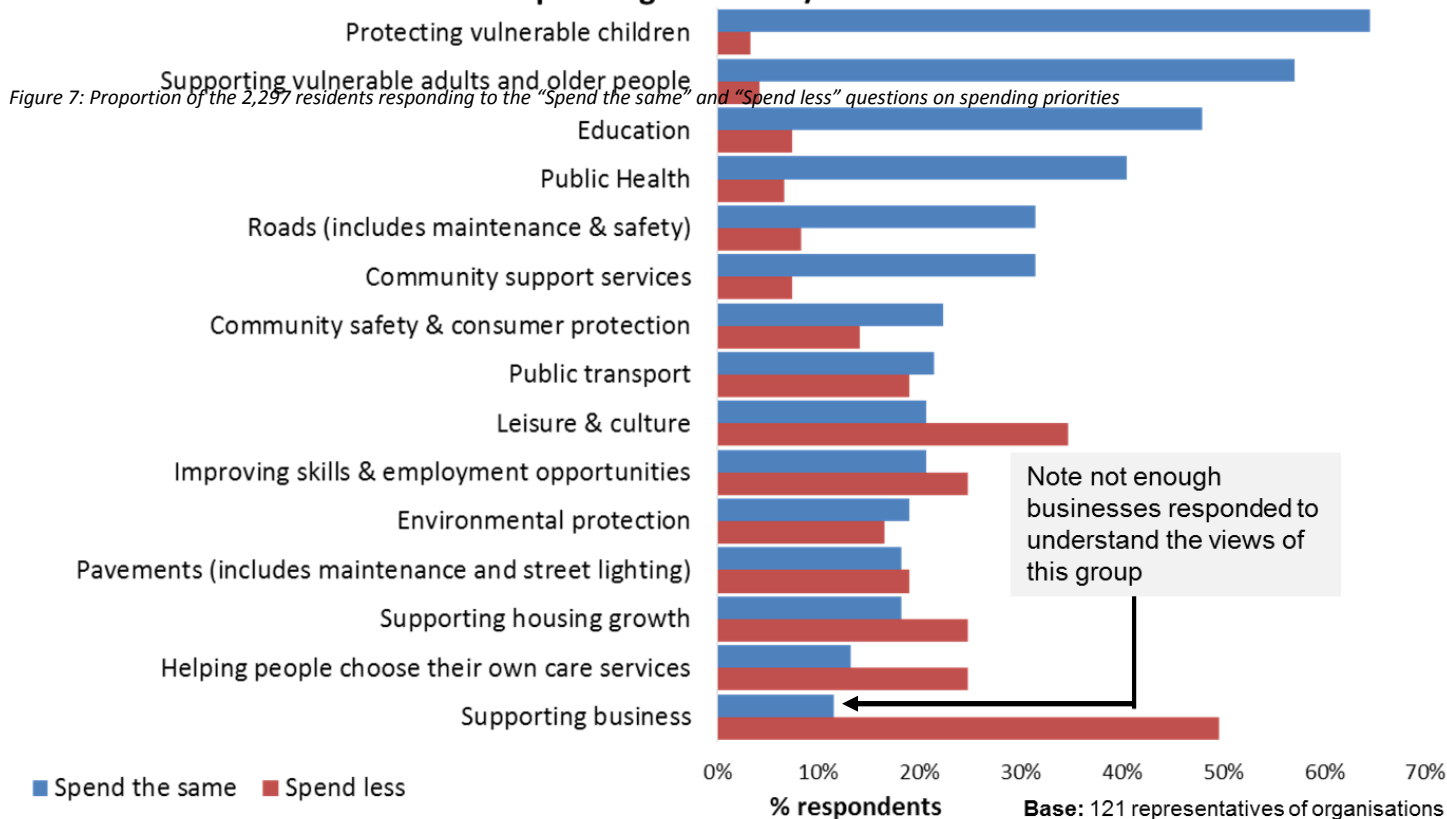
There were similar levels of agreement with the Council’s proposal compared with last year (6 in 10 agreed). Roads and supporting the vulnerable are still the highest priorities for residents, as with previous years.

Education is ranked higher in terms of those that said spending should remain the same (compared with two years ago). Note that the 2015 consultation had a category for ‘Children with Disabilities’ that was not included in this year’s consultation and may affect the positioning of Education

Community Safety, Supporting Businesses and Improving skills and employment opportunities are all ranked lower than in the 2015 survey when considering where spending should remain the same.

For **organisations**, protecting vulnerable children, supporting vulnerable adults and education were the top priorities in terms of keeping spending the same (Figure 7). Improving skills and employment opportunities are a higher priorities for organisations than for residents. Supporting businesses was a low priority, however, there are not sufficient responses in this category to understand the views if this group.

Areas where REPRESENTATIVES FROM ORGANISATIONS think we should keep spending the same / less



There were no statistically significant differences for organisations, this is due to the relatively low number of respondents from this group.

Comparisons with previous years

There was an increase in responses compared with last year, with 121 representatives of organisations (compared with 35 last year).

There were similar levels of agreement with the Council's proposal compared with last year (6 in 10 agreed). Supporting the vulnerable (adults and children) is still the highest priorities for organisations, as with previous years.

Education and Health are both ranked higher in terms of those that said spending should remain the same (compared with two years ago).

Community Safety and Supporting Businesses have moved down, however due to the relatively low number of responses these results are not statistically significant.

Respondents' comments for planning delivery of services

Out of the 2,297 residents and 121 organisations who responded, 1,139 made specific comments to take into account when planning the delivery of services next year⁵. Each comment was categorised to understand common themes that residents raised (Figure 8). Please note a respondent may have mentioned more than one theme – for example a respondent who commented on roads, finances and schooling would appear in all three categories.

The most frequently mentioned topics for residents were roads, comments about the council and finances. For representatives of organisations, the most common mentions were comments about the council, schooling and children's services.

⁵ 171 comments were made on other subject areas that did not fit into one of the broad categories above. 1,139 respondents made a comment, 61 of whom were representatives of organisations.

“Please let us know if you have any other comments or suggestions that you would like us to take into account when budgeting for your services next year?”

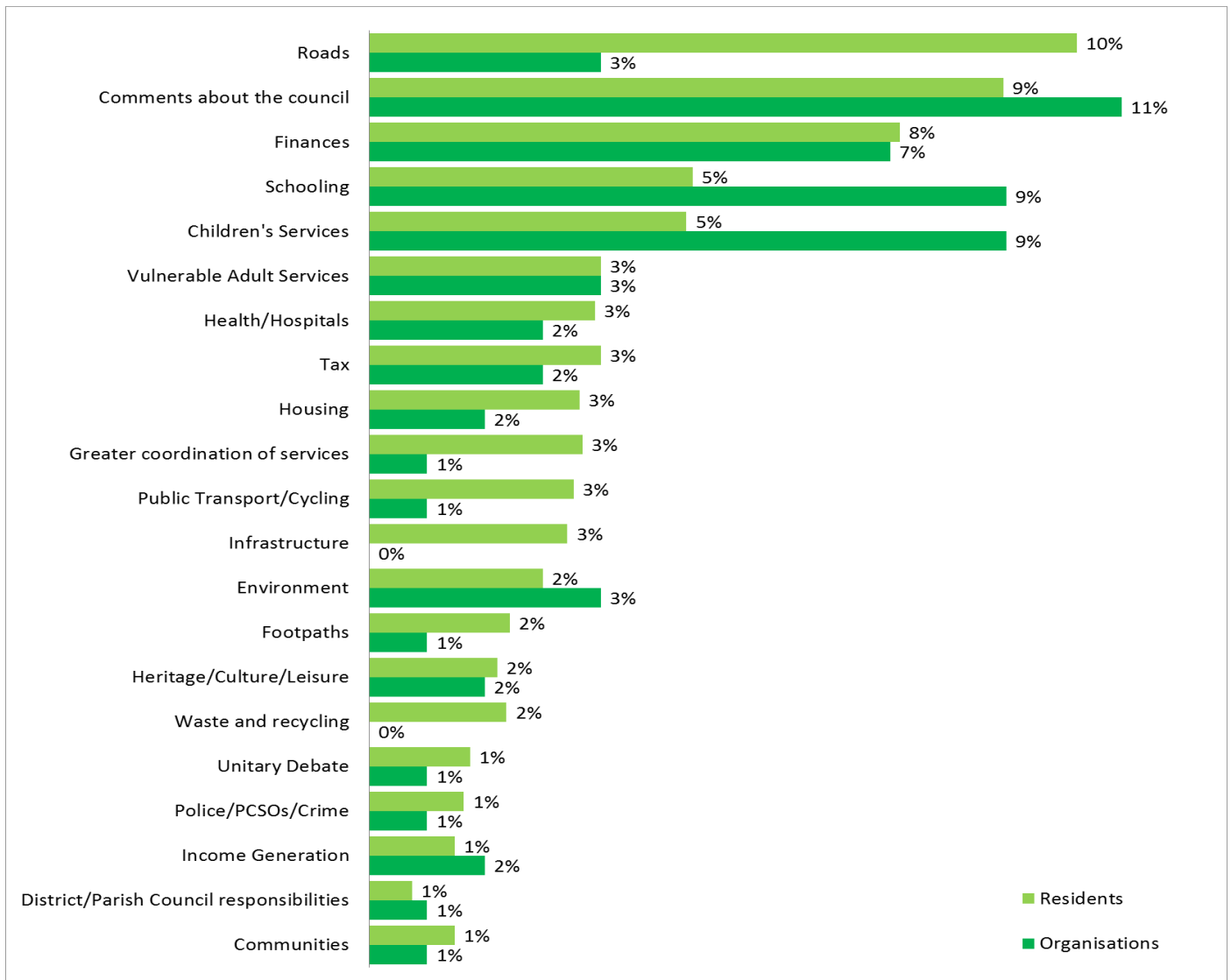


Figure 8: Proportion of the 2,297 residents and 121 representatives of organisations making a comment within each detailed category

Respondents raised a range of different issues in the comments section of the survey. Some of the key themes that were raised are highlighted below, with verbatim comments in green italics to provide an example of the type of comments raised.

Roads - Concerns around condition of roads and quality of repairs plus increasing traffic and congestion.

"Ring-fence money for road repair; the roads are embarrassingly bad in Buckinghamshire. Without safe roads other services won't be able to operate effectively"

Comments about the Council - Comments around staffing levels, spend on salary and pension and use of contractors/interims.

"Do not employ costly interim people, look at the staff pool we have"

Finances - The Council should challenge budget cuts from central government and employ longer term financial planning.

"Combine together with other Local Authorities to tell the government that it is not possible to deliver 1st World public services with the current spending restraints"

Schooling - Concerns regarding school budgets and funding, particularly around SEN.

"The size of the continued cuts to school budgets".

Children's Services - Focus on early interventions to deal with issues before they escalate.

"Invest in our future through education and Children's services"

Vulnerable Adults Services - Highlight for an appropriate amount to be spent on care to offer quality services.

"Need to protect the most vulnerable in society"

Health/Hospitals - More money for health services plus consider prevention and awareness of healthy living.

"Get people to take responsibility for their own health"

Tax - Those who could afford to pay more would often be happy to do so.

"I would prefer to pay more Council tax in return for improved services"

Housing - Split of opinion over whether more or less new housing would benefit Buckinghamshire.

"Please drop any ideas for additional housing. We are over populated here"

Infrastructure - Raise money from private housing development to support the infrastructure of the growing community.

"Developers should contribute to improve infrastructure"

Greater Coordination of Services – Streamline Council processes, improve communication with district / town parish councils

"How can communities near each other share resources and band together to help each other?"

Public Transport/Cycling - HS2 unpopular with Buckinghamshire residents, reluctance to spend more on cycle ways unless they are better utilised.

"Mitigation of HS2 disruption"

Income Generation - Sell or lease assets, raise taxes and get businesses to sponsor services in return for advertising.

"Why don't you have smaller, cheaper to run county offices? That building could be sold for a lot of money for apartments"

Appendix

I. The Council's plan for how it can budget to live within its means

To ensure we are able to provide the services that we are required to by law, as well as those that are most important to people, we are proposing to focus our spending on some priority areas. To help fund these we will need to reduce spending in other areas, work differently and generate income.

There are some areas where we believe we need to maintain spending in order to provide statutory and essential services.



- Invest in services to safeguard and care for vulnerable children and adults e.g. through Adults and Children's Social Care services
- Provide infrastructure to support population and housing growth in Buckinghamshire e.g. ensuring there are enough places for children in schools, providing road and rail network improvements
- Improve 'Early Help' support for children and families who are experiencing difficulties, to prevent small problems becoming bigger
- Improve support for children with disabilities (including education, health and care plans),
- Improve the condition of existing roads through a highway maintenance scheme that focuses on the long-term maintenance of roads
- Invest in new digital technologies e.g. to improve customer service, to help people apply for services online and to enquire as to progress with receiving their services

There are some areas where we believe we need to reduce our spending in order to protect investment in priority services



- Reduce the level some services that we aren't required to provide
- Reduce the frequency of some services that we aren't required to provide so other services can be maintained e.g. grass cutting on highways
- Provide street lighting on footpaths during times they are most used, whilst reducing lighting during lower use periods

- Reduce some household waste recycling centre services so that other services can continue to be provided
- Access to community support services, including preventative support provided by voluntary organisations, NHS and Social Care

There are some different ways of working that we want to continue and develop so we can reduce costs and also generate income to fund services



- Delivering library services in modern and more cost effective ways e.g. through digital media and online lending services
- Selling products and services so we can generate income e.g. selling more materials from household recycling centres and selling services to other public sector organisations that we have specialist skills in e.g. human resources
- Working in partnership with other public sector organisations to better meet people's needs and reduce duplicate costs e.g. to provide some healthcare services with the NHS
- Making commercial investments that generate profit to fund other services e.g. purchasing and then leasing business premises
- Charging for some non-statutory services that we are not required to provide
- Extending the provision of personal budgets so people with care needs can choose to buy the services they feel best meet their needs e.g. transport and day care services
- Recruiting more foster carers to look after vulnerable children in a home setting, taking them out of care homes
- Offering support services to schools for improving educational attainment differently, now that they manage their own budgets

II. Full description of Service Priorities referred to in Figures 6 and 7

- **Protecting vulnerable children** - Includes fostering, adoption, helping families who experience difficulties, children with disabilities and special educational needs
- **Supporting vulnerable adults and older people** - Includes home care services, day care centres and residential/nursing care for older people
- **Education** - Includes supporting schools to improve educational results
- **Roads** - Includes road maintenance and road safety
- **Pavements** - Includes street lighting and pavement maintenance
- **Leisure & culture** - Includes libraries, museums and country parks
- **Supporting business** - Includes high speed broadband, businesses growth and job creation
- **Community safety & consumer protection** - Includes working to reduce crime and the exploitation of vulnerable people, including scams
- **Public Health** - Includes health visitors, school nurses and drug & alcohol treatment
- **Community support services** - Includes preventative support provided by voluntary organisations, NHS and Social Care
- **Public transport** - Includes buses, trains, cycleways and community transport

- **Environmental protection** - Includes prosecution of fly-tipping and providing household recycling centres
- **Supporting housing growth** - Providing infrastructure such as roads and schools
- **Improving skills & employment opportunities** - Includes adult learning courses
- **Helping people choose their own care services** - By providing personal budgets so people can choose to buy care services they feel best meet their needs

III. Guide to statistical reliability

The 2,297 respondents account for 0.5% of the Buckinghamshire population (16+ year olds 2016 ONS Mid-Year Population Estimates).

The residents who took part in the surveys are only a sample of the total "population" of Buckinghamshire residents, so we cannot be certain that the figures obtained are exactly those that would have been reached if everyone had responded (the "true" values). We can, however, predict the variation between the sample results and the "true" values from knowledge of the size of the samples on which the results to each question is based, and the number of times a particular answer is given.

The confidence with which we can make this prediction is usually chosen to be 95% - that is, the chances are 95 in 100 that the "true" value will fall within a specified range. The following illustrates the predicted ranges for different sample sizes and percentage results at the "95% confidence interval":

Size of sample on which survey result is based	Approximate sampling tolerances applicable to percentages at or near these levels		
	10% or 90%	30% or 70%	50%
	±	±	±
100 responses	6	9	10
200 responses	4	6	7
500 responses	3	4	4
1,000 responses	2	3	3

Figure 9: Sampling Tolerances

For example, with a sample size of 1,000 where 70% give a particular answer, the chances are, that 95 out of 100 times in conducting surveys that the "true" value (i.e. the one which would have been obtained if the whole population had been interviewed) will fall within the range of ± 3 percentage points from the survey result (i.e. between 67% and 73%).

NB: Strictly speaking the tolerances shown here apply only to random samples; in practice good quality quota sampling has been found to be as accurate.