

# **Moray Council**

## **Budget Consultation 2011/12**

**Final Report**

**by**

**Craigforth**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **The Consultation Process**

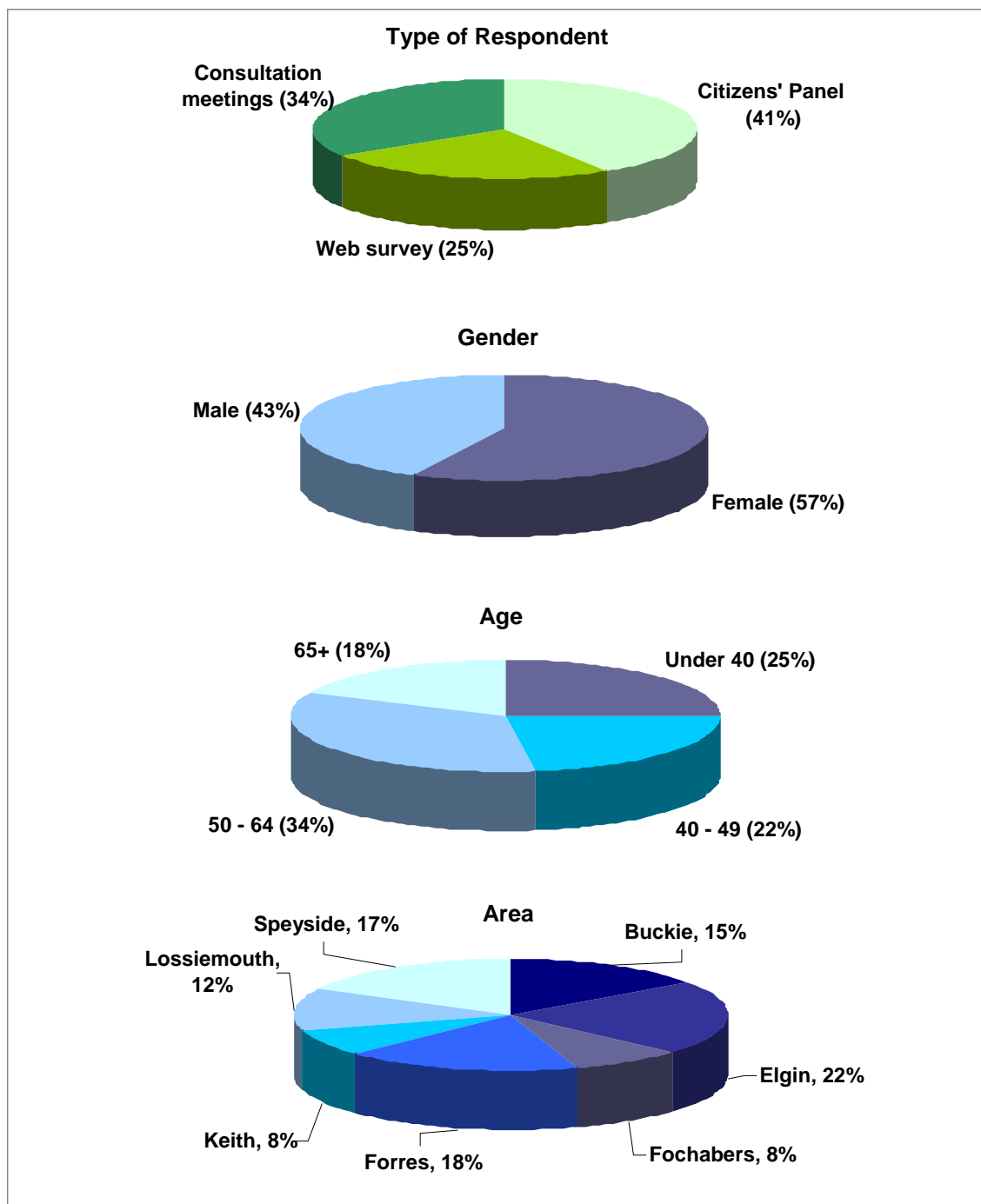
- 1.1. The Budget Consultation was undertaken to gauge public opinion on a range of budget savings options proposed by The Moray Council for the period 2011/12. These options have been developed in the context of a need for all Scottish local authorities to achieve a substantial reduction in spending over the period to 2014/15.
- 1.2. The consultation comprised three main strands; a direct mailing to all current Citizens' Panel members, an online web survey open to all members of the public, and a series of consultation meetings following which attendees were able to complete a consultation questionnaire. The same consultation questionnaire was used across all three strands to ensure that the process produced a robust set of comparable consultation responses.
- 1.3. A consultation document was also provided alongside the questionnaire, setting out the financial context to the consultation and detailing specific savings options. This was important in giving individuals the opportunity to make an informed response to the consultation.

### **Consultation Findings**

- 1.4. The consultation was undertaken during November 2010 with a total of 1361 responses received by consultation close in early December, of which 1264 were "analysable" responses which form the basis of this report.
- 1.5. It is not possible to calculate a meaningful consultation response rate due to the "open" nature of the web survey strand of the consultation.<sup>1</sup> However this is a very strong consultation response, providing a robust basis for the analysis set out in this report. As a guide, on a random sample basis this level of response would equate to a 95% confidence interval of just 2.8%.
- 1.6. Moreover, consultation results have been weighted to minimise any "bias" in the profile of responses (over or under-representation resulting from a higher or lower level of response from some demographic groups). Weighting has been conducted on the basis of location and age, to ensure that findings are as representative as possible of all parts of the community in Moray.
- 1.7. The figure over the page shows the (unweighted) profile of consultation respondents.

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<sup>1</sup> For the Citizens' Panel element of the consultation the overall response rate was 57%. This is similar to the response to the last Panel budget consultation held in 2009, although a somewhat higher response had been anticipated following the recent Panel refreshment. Feedback through the fieldwork period suggests that response may have been "dampened" by the timing of the consultation close to the Christmas holiday period, disruption to mail services caused by extreme weather conditions and the volume of budget information which individuals were asked to consider.

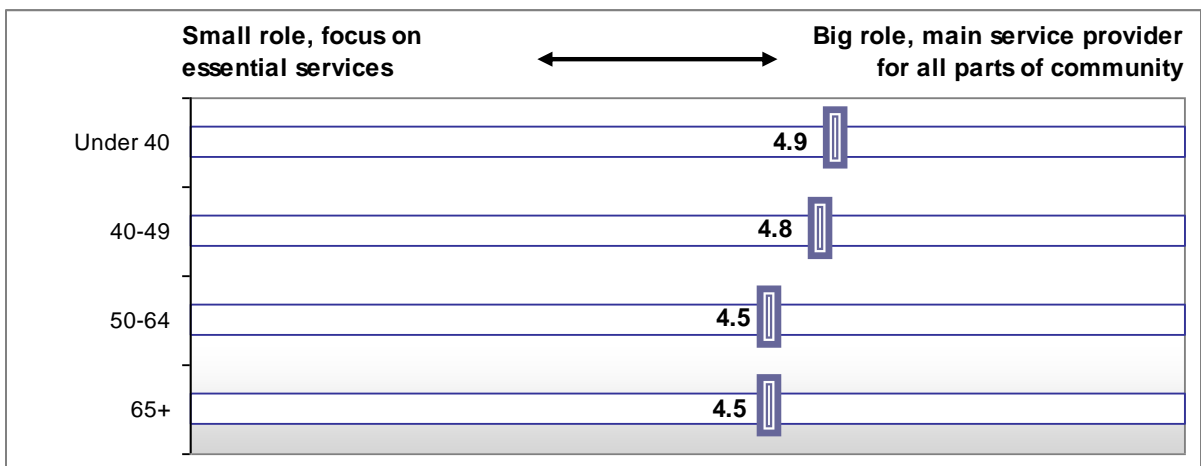
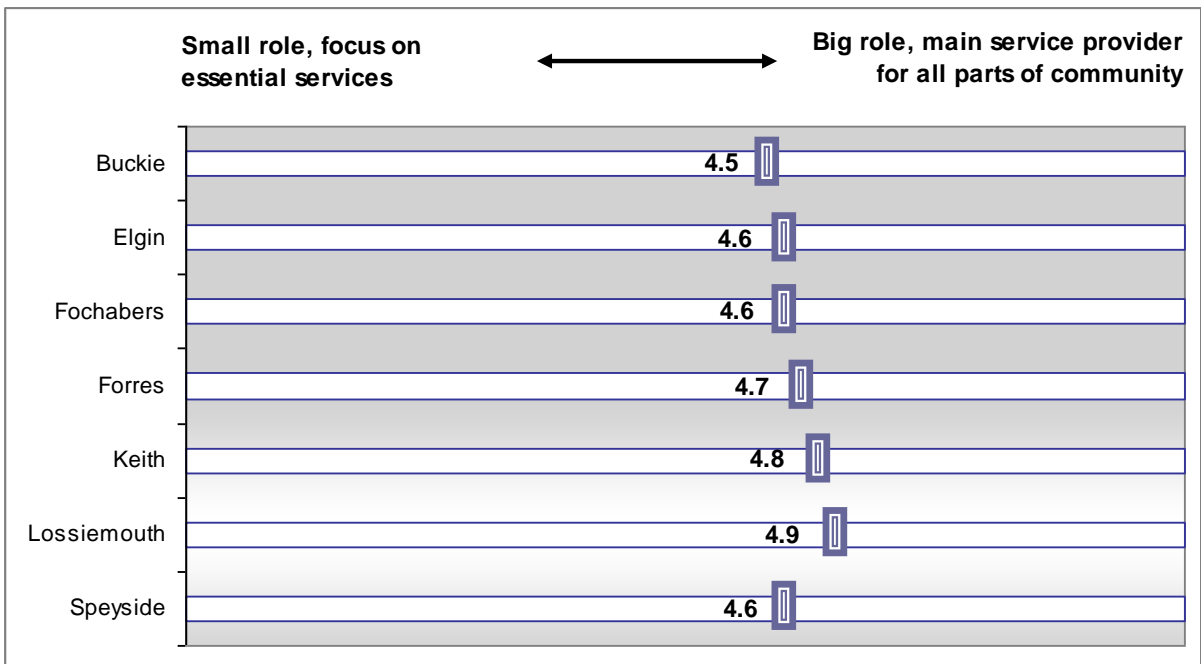
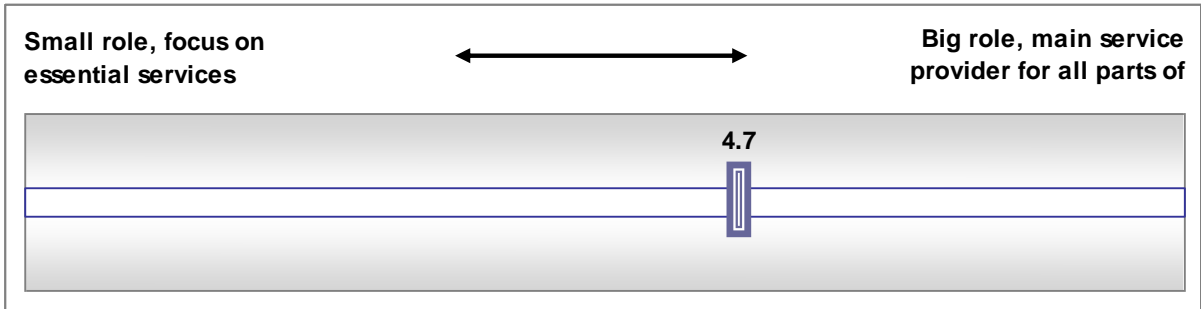
**Figure 1: Profile of Consultation Respondents (unweighted)**

- 1.8. This report provides a full account of consultation findings, focusing primarily on the overall balance of views across the three consultation strands (Citizens' Panel, public web survey and consultation meetings). However analysis has also considered the extent of variation in views expressed across key groups including type of respondent (Panel, web survey or consultation meeting), age, location and gender. This report highlights significant variations in views across these groups, based on 95% confidence interval statistical significance tests.

## 2. THE COUNCIL'S ROLE IN DELIVERING SERVICES

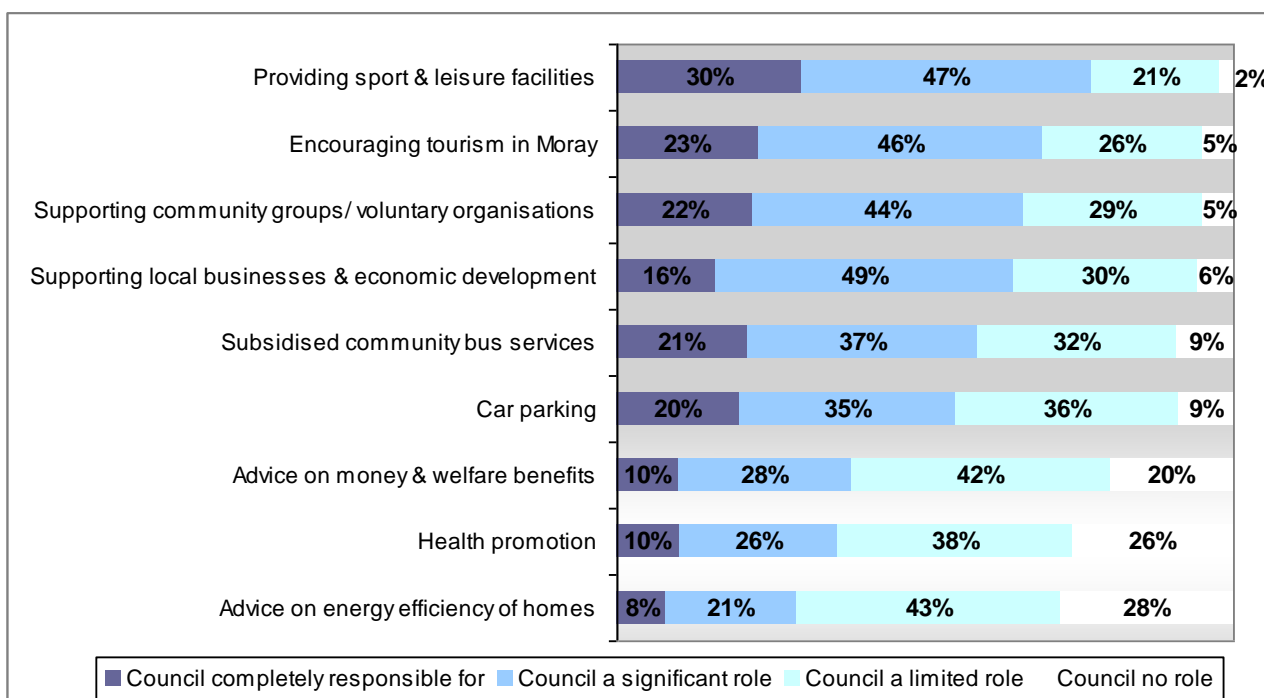
- 2.1. The consultation questionnaire began by asking for views on the kind of role that the Council should play as a service provider for the people of Moray. This included views on how big a role residents feel the Council should have overall, and also how significant a role the Council should play in delivering specific services or activities which are not statutory requirements.
- 2.2. Looking first at views on the role that The Moray Council should play in the lives of local people, consultees were asked to rate this on a seven-point scale from "1: small role focusing only on essential services" to "7: big role, the main service provider for all parts of the local community". Figure 2 over the page sets out results for key consultation groups.
- 2.3. Consultation responses suggest that residents generally think that the ***Council should play a relatively big role in the lives of people in Moray.*** Looking across all groups, the average score of 4.7 indicates that the majority would prefer to see the Council being closer to the "big role" than "small role". Indeed around a third of all respondents rated the kind of role they think the Council should take at 6 or 7.
- 2.4. This overall profile of views was also evident across key consultee groups, with average scores of between 4 and 5 out of 7. Nevertheless there was some notable variation in views. For example younger respondents appear to prefer a more substantial role for the Council, and average score of 4.9 for those aged under 40 contrasting with 4.5 for those aged 65+. In terms of area, Lossiemouth and Keith area consultees appeared to prefer a somewhat larger role for the Council as a service provider than consultees across other areas.

**Figure 2: Size of Role that Council Should Play as a Service Provider**



- 2.5. The consultation questionnaire moved on to ask for residents' views on the kind of role that the Council should play in delivering specific services or activities. The consultation made clear that the listed services and activities were currently provided in Moray, but were not statutory requirements for the Council.
- 2.6. As Figure 3 below indicates, there was some significant variation in the extent to which residents felt The Moray Council should be responsible for specific services and activities.
- 2.7. **Providing sports and leisure facilities** emerged as the area where residents felt the Council should have greatest responsibility. More than three quarters felt that the Council should have at least a significant role in this area (77%), including nearly a third who felt that the Council should take complete responsibility for delivering sports and leisure facilities. Other areas where residents felt the Council should play a substantial role were:
- encouraging tourism (69% felt the Council should have at least a significant role);
  - supporting community groups and voluntary organisations (66%); and
  - supporting local businesses and economic development (66%).
- 2.8. In terms of areas where residents feel the Council could play a more limited role, it is notable that these related more to advice or information related activities rather than provision of services or facilities. In particular, consultation findings suggest the Council could play a more limited role in relation to advice on the energy efficiency of homes (71% suggest a limited or no role), health promotion (64%) and advice on money and welfare benefits (62%).

**Figure 3: Extent to Which Council Should be Responsible for...**





2.9. While the overall balance of views on the role of the Council in delivering specific services was similar across all key consultee groups, some notable variations were evident:

- Web survey respondents were significantly less likely than others to suggest a significant role for the Council in car parking provision. This reflects in part a difference in views across age groups with younger residents tending to see a less significant role for the Council in car parking provision. The potential for greater private sector involvement in provision of car parking is also one of the themes emerging through consultation comments discussed at section 7.
- Consultation meeting attendees were significantly more likely than others – and in particular more likely than Citizens' Panel members – to see a larger role for the Council in supporting community groups and voluntary organisations. This may reflect in part the recruitment of consultation meetings through local community organisations.
- Younger consultation respondents (and in particular under 40s) were more likely than others to see a significant role for the Council in a number of specific service areas. This includes providing sport & leisure facilities, supporting local businesses & economic development, and supporting community groups and voluntary organisations.
- Females were more likely than males to see a significant role for the Council in subsidised community bus services (perhaps surprisingly gender had a greater impact on views here than age), advice on money and welfare benefits, and supporting community groups and voluntary organisations.

### 3. REDESIGNING COUNCIL SERVICES

- 3.1. The questionnaire next asked for views relating more specifically to budget savings options being proposed by the Council (and set out in the consultation document made available to residents). This included views on the overall approach that the Council should take to achieving the required savings, and the extent to which residents would like to see specific service areas protected from or subject to service reductions.

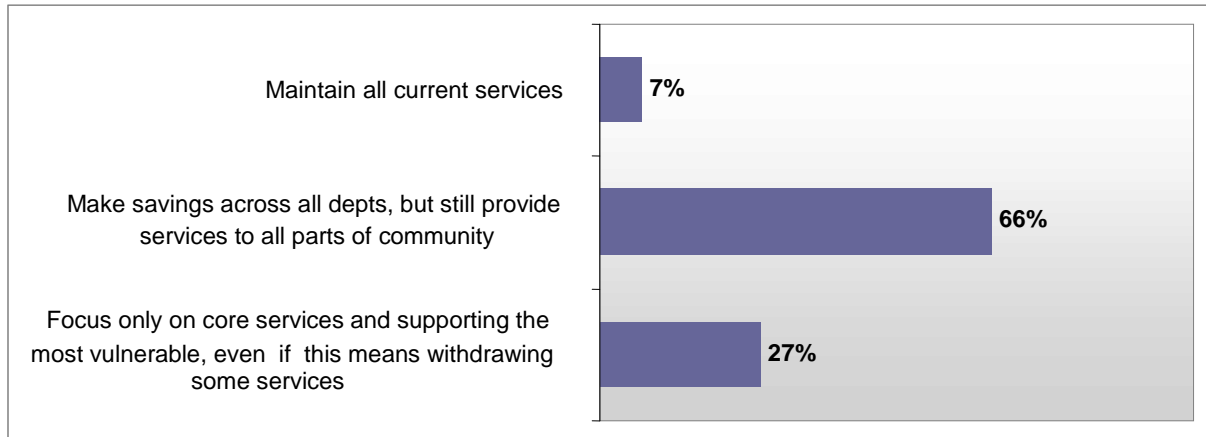
#### Views on Best Overall Approach

- 3.2. In relation to the overall approach that the Council should take to achieving budget savings, residents were asked to indicate which of three options they preferred. These included (i) maintaining all current services<sup>2</sup>, (ii) making savings across all departments but still maintaining services to all parts of the community, and (iii) focusing only on core services and supporting the most vulnerable even if this meant withdrawing some services.
- 3.3. Consultation responses suggest that few residents feel that the Council should seek to maintain all current services in the context of required budget savings - indeed only 7% suggested this. In terms of the best overall approach to achieving savings, ***maintaining some level of service to all parts of the community*** was by some margin the most common suggestion. Around two thirds suggested this (66%), more than twice the number suggesting that the Council focus only on core services and supporting the most vulnerable (27%).
- 3.4. Perhaps unsurprisingly there was a close correlation between views on the best approach to achieving budget savings, and views discussed in the previous section on how big a role the Council should play in residents' lives. In particular, the majority of residents who felt the Council should play a moderate to significant role as a service provider were more likely to support an approach to savings based around maintaining services to all parts of the community. In contrast, the relatively small number who felt the Council should play a small role in residents' lives were much more likely to support the approach of focusing only on core services and the most vulnerable.
- 3.5. There was also some variation in views on the best approach to budget savings across consultee groups, although maintaining some level of service to all parts of the community remained the most popular option across all groups.
- Older residents showed greater support than others for the option for the Council to focus only on core services and supporting the most vulnerable - indeed those aged 65+ were more than twice as likely to select this than those aged under 40. This may reflect a greater concern amongst younger residents about the impact on their lives of the Council focusing only on the most vulnerable groups, although again it should be noted that all age groups prefer the option for the Council to still provide services to all parts of the community;

<sup>2</sup> Consultation materials noted that this option was unlikely to be feasible even with a significant increase in service charging.

- Male respondents were more likely than females to support the option for the Council to focus only on core services and supporting the most vulnerable, although the majority of both males and females preferred the option for services to be provided to all parts of the community.

**Figure 4: How the Role of the Council in Light of Required Savings is Seen**



### Reductions to Specific Service Areas

- 3.6. The questionnaire also asked for views on specific service areas and savings options currently being considered by the Council. The consultation document provided additional detail to individuals on the specific options being considered across each service area, including the anticipated scale of savings.
- 3.7. Residents were first asked to select three service areas which they would choose to protect from service reductions, and three other service areas which they would select for service reductions. Respondents were asked to select from a list of 17 relatively broad service areas. Figure 5 below shows the balance of views in relation to each of these service areas, by “netting” the number of respondents who select a service area for reductions from the number who wish to protect the area from reductions. A positive net score indicates that those wishing to protect an area from reductions outnumber those who wish to select an area for reductions.

### Protecting Services from Reductions

- 3.8. There was significant variation in the kinds of services that residents wish to protect from service reductions, potentially reflecting in part differences in priorities and service use across different parts of the community. Nevertheless a small number of areas emerged where consultation findings suggest residents wish to see minimal service reductions.
- 3.9. In particular, the **majority of residents wish to protect community care and schools & nurseries services from reductions** (net scores of +56% and +49% respectively) and only around 1 in 20 respondents selected either of these areas for service reductions. Moreover, as many as half of those wishing to protect community care and schools & nurseries from service reductions selected these areas as their 1<sup>st</sup> choice - this suggests that these are very significant concerns for a substantial proportion of residents.

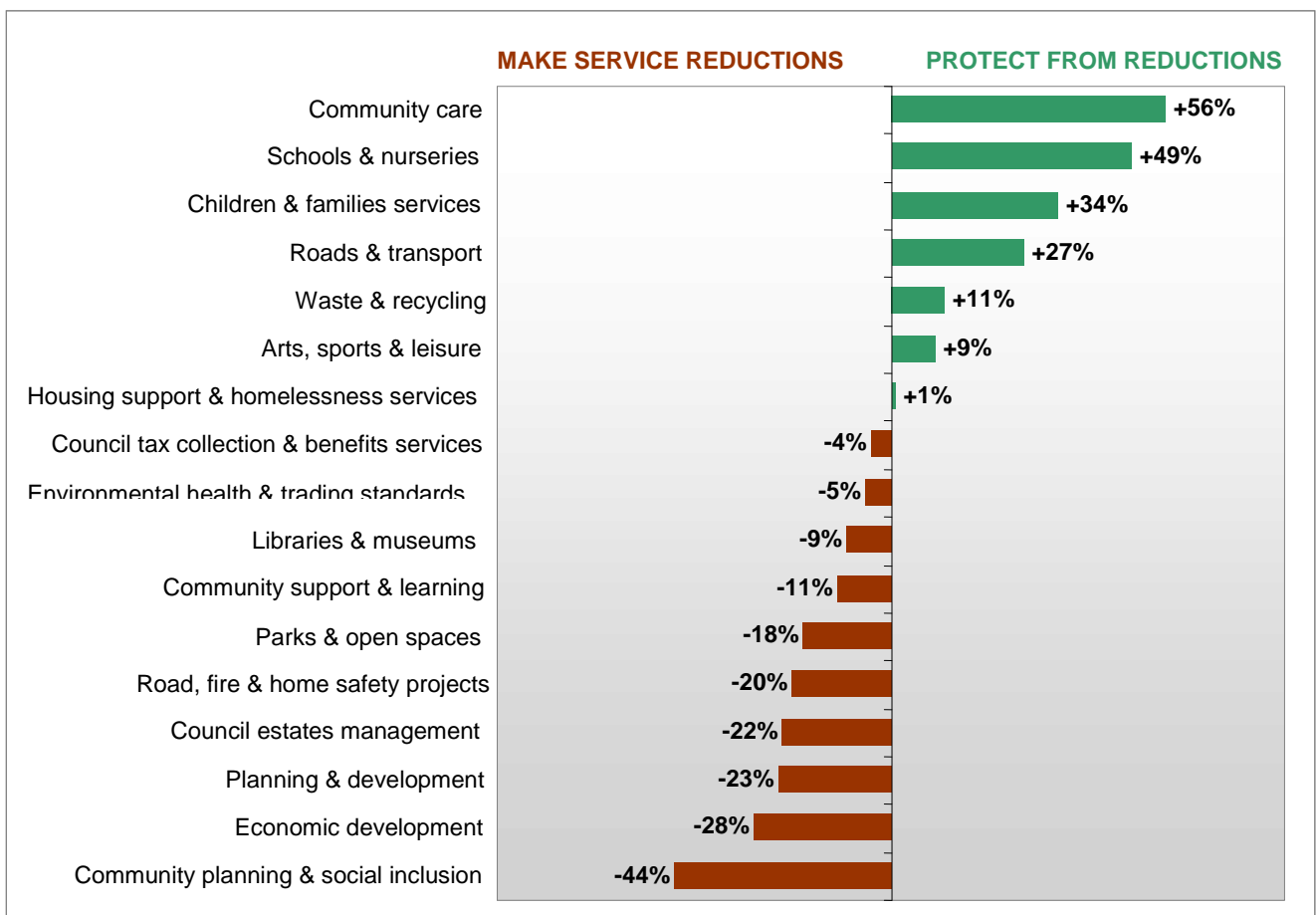
- 3.10. A number of other areas were given a positive net score suggesting an overall wish to protect services from reductions - these are listed below.
- Children and families services (+34%);
  - Roads and transport (+27%);
  - Waste and recycling (+11%); and
  - Arts, sports and leisure (+9%).
- 3.11. However it should be noted that there was some variation in the balance of views in relation to these areas. For example the net score for children & families and roads & transport reflects the balance between 30-40% of residents who wish to protect the services, and very few residents who wish to see service reductions (around 5%). In contrast there was some significant difference of opinion in relation to arts, sports and leisure services - 29% of residents wished to avoid service reductions but as many as 20% wished to make service reductions.

### **Selecting Services for Reductions**

- 3.12. A range of service areas emerged with a negative net score, suggesting that on balance residents were more likely to select an area for service reductions than to choose to protect from service reductions. However some of these ratings were based on the views of a relatively small proportion of respondents. For example Council Tax & Benefits, Environmental Health & Trading Standards, Community Support & Learning and Council Estates Management were mentioned by fewer than a quarter of all respondents. This suggests that these are seen as less important than some other service areas, both in terms of protecting from service reductions and in terms of making service reductions.
- 3.13. Other service areas were more likely to be selected for potential service reductions. **Community Planning & Social Inclusion, Economic Development and Planning & Development** each emerged with more clearly negative net scores (-45%, -28% and -24% respectively). This reflects the balance between a relatively substantial proportion of respondents selecting these areas for reductions (30-50%) and few selecting these as one of the three services to protect from reductions (fewer than 1 in 20).
- 3.14. It is notable that the three service areas most likely to be selected for potential service reductions each represent a broad range of Council activities (eg development control, employability projects, equalities, community safety and research. Moreover, these service areas include a range of activities with a less direct bearing on the majority of residents (such as research, economic development, and elements of the planning system). This is in contrast with the service areas that residents typically wish to protect from service reductions which often involve more direct services to residents (such as community care, schools and waste management).

- 3.15. In relation to residents' views on service reductions across all service areas, it is also important to note that the consultation was asking residents to give overall views on some relatively broad service areas. The degree of variation in ratings given to specific service areas clearly indicates that residents see some areas as more important than others in the context of protection from service reductions. However a number of respondents specifically indicated through the consultation that they had difficulty in providing a single rating for a service area which combined services or activities about which they had quite different views. This suggests that a positive (or negative) overall rating given to a service area may not mean that residents are positive (or negative) about all activities delivered within that service area.
- 3.16. Comments made by respondents also suggest that residents' views on the potential for service reductions may be linked quite closely to the extent to which services and activities have a direct bearing on local residents. In particular comments suggest that residents typically attach a greater value to services delivered direct to individuals, and lesser value to "support" services such as legal and financial services to other Council departments.

**Figure 5: Balance of Views on Service Reductions**



### ***Drivers of Views on Service Reductions***

- 3.17. The profile of views on service reductions set out above was broadly consistent across all consultee groups, in terms of the services most likely to be selected for or protected from service reductions. However, more detailed analysis of consultation responses has identified some variation in views on service reductions, and suggests a range of motivations for wishing to protect or to cut specific services.
- 3.18. Those wishing to focus only on core services were more likely to protect community care services, roads & transport, and waste & recycling. But this group of respondents were more likely to cut arts, sport & leisure and libraries & museums. Those wishing to maintain services to all parts of the community were more likely to protect arts, sport & leisure, and more likely to cut planning & development.
- 3.19. There were also some significant variations across key consultee groups in priorities for services to be protected from reductions, which suggest that the extent of contact with a specific service may be a key factor in views on whether that service should be protected from reductions:
- Schools & nurseries were more likely to be chosen as an area to protect from service reductions by those aged under 50 and females. It is also notable that Buckie respondents were significantly more likely than those in other areas to select schools & nurseries as their top choice to protect from service reductions.
  - Community care services were most likely to be chosen as an area to protect from service reductions by those aged 50+ (notable as the age group most likely to be making use of community care services).

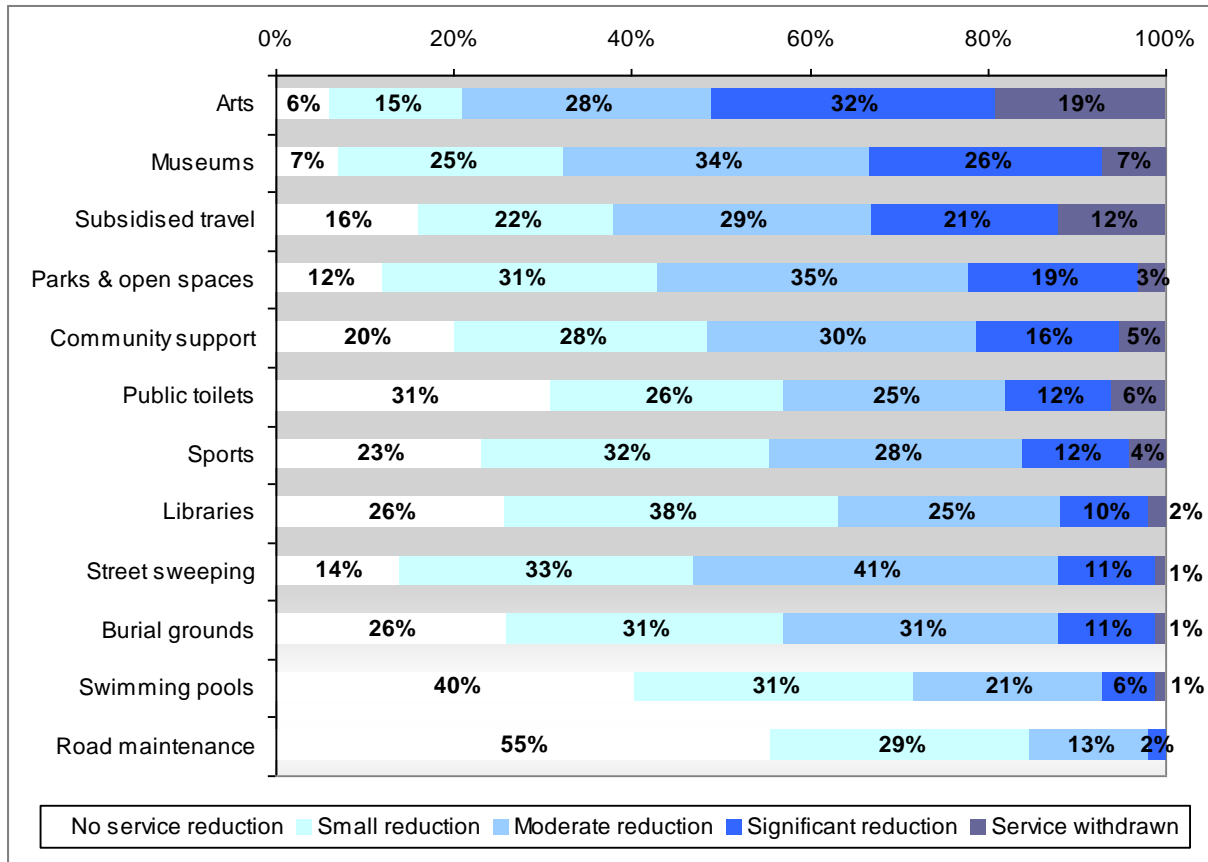
### ***Views on Specific Savings Options***

- 3.20. The Council is currently considering the potential for savings to a range of specific services and facilities. Residents were asked to indicate the extent to which a reduction in these services/ facilities could be possible. As Figure 6 indicates, views were mixed in terms of areas where residents were prepared to see some service reduction although it is notable that for most of the areas listed residents were prepared to consider some degree of service reduction.
- 3.21. ***The arts and museums were by some margin the areas where most residents were willing to consider some degree of service reduction.*** As many as half of respondents felt that a significant reduction or service withdrawal could be possible in relation to the arts specifically (51%), and a third identified museums as an area where significant service reductions or service withdrawal could be possible (33%). Moreover, more than 90% felt that some degree of service reduction would be possible in relation to arts and museums.
- 3.22. Subsidised travel was the only other area where a relatively substantial proportion of residents felt that significant service reductions could be possible. Around a third appeared willing to consider significant reduction or

withdrawal of services (33%) and more than 80% felt that some level of service reduction could be possible.

- 3.23. A number of other areas were seen as having potential for some service reduction, although relatively few were willing to see significant reductions to these areas:
- Parks and open spaces (88% some reduction, 22% significant reduction);
  - Street sweeping (86% some reduction, 12% significant reduction);
  - Community support (80% some reduction, 21% significant reduction);
  - Sports (77% some reduction, 16% significant reduction);
  - Libraries (74% some reduction, 12% significant reduction);
  - Burial grounds (74% some reduction, 12% significant reduction); and
  - Public toilets (69% some reduction, 18% significant reduction).
- 3.24. Two areas emerged where relatively few residents felt that service reductions were possible; roads maintenance and swimming pools. Roads maintenance in particular was the only area which the majority felt could not be subject to any service reduction (55% suggesting this). Moreover, only 15% were prepared to consider anything more than a “small reduction” in roads maintenance service.
- 3.25. Views were somewhat more divided in relation to swimming pools. At 40%, the proportion suggesting that no service reduction was possible was larger than in relation to nearly all other services and facilities. Nevertheless there remained more than a quarter (28%) who were prepared to consider at least a “moderate” reduction in swimming pool provision.
- 3.26. Some significant variations emerged in the extent to which specific groups were willing to consider some reduction in these services. In particular some groups identified specific service areas which they felt should be subject to only small service reduction:
- Sports and swimming pools were highlighted by web survey and consultation meeting respondents, those aged under 50, and females.
  - Libraries were identified by web survey and consultation meeting respondents, Buckie and Speyside area respondents, and females.
  - Subsidised travel was highlighted by Buckie and Speyside area respondents, those aged 65+ and females.
  - Arts provision was highlighted by community meeting attendees, web survey respondents and females.
  - Community support services were highlighted by those aged under 40, community meeting attendees, and web survey respondents.
  - Public toilets were identified by Citizens’ Panel members, consultation meeting attendees and those aged 50+.

**Figure 6: Views on Specific Savings Options**





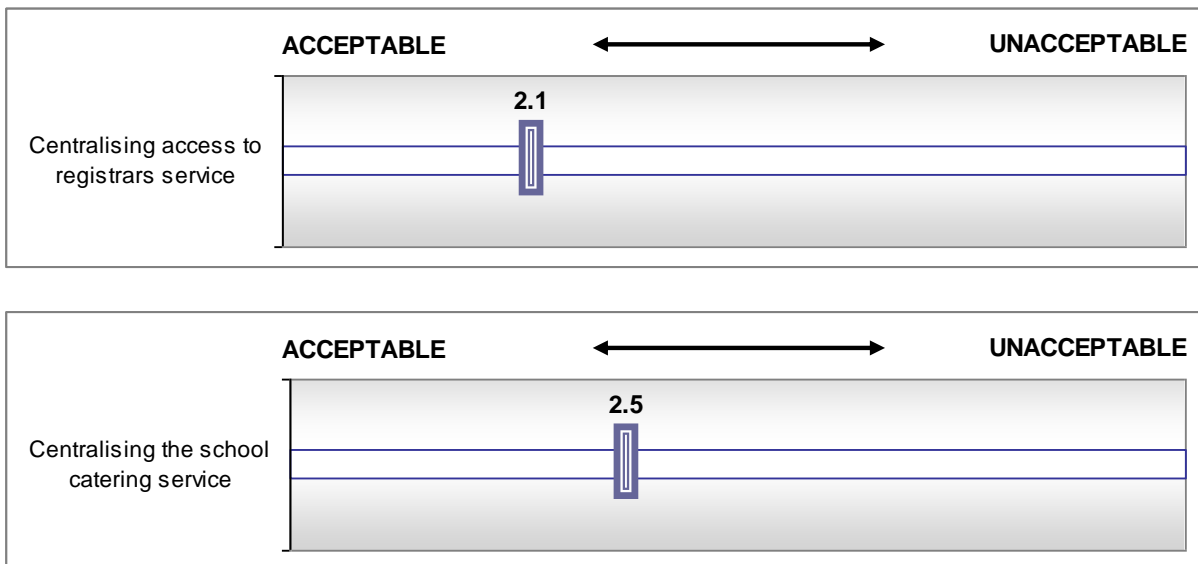
#### 4. CENTRALISING ACCESS TO SERVICES

- 4.1. In addition to specific service areas and facilities discussed in the previous section, the Council are also considering options for budget savings through a reduction in the size of the Council estate and limiting the number of locations via which services can be accessed.

##### Limiting Local Access to Specific Services

- 4.2. Looking first at limiting local access to services, residents were asked to rate options for centralising the registrars service and school catering service on a five point scale from “1: acceptable” to “5: unacceptable”. Consultation materials made clear that centralising the registrars service would mean that the only permanent service access point would be based in Elgin, and for the school catering service would mean that some school meals were delivered through serveries.
- 4.3. Responses suggest that overall, **residents generally find these options somewhat acceptable although views are divided**. Centralising the registrars service appears to be more acceptable, 2.1 out of 5 suggesting that on balance more residents found this acceptable than unacceptable. Indeed nearly half of all respondents rated this option as “1: acceptable”. Views were somewhat more divided in relation to centralising the school catering service with a rating of 2.5 out of 5. Nevertheless there remained a third of respondents who rated this option as “1: acceptable”.

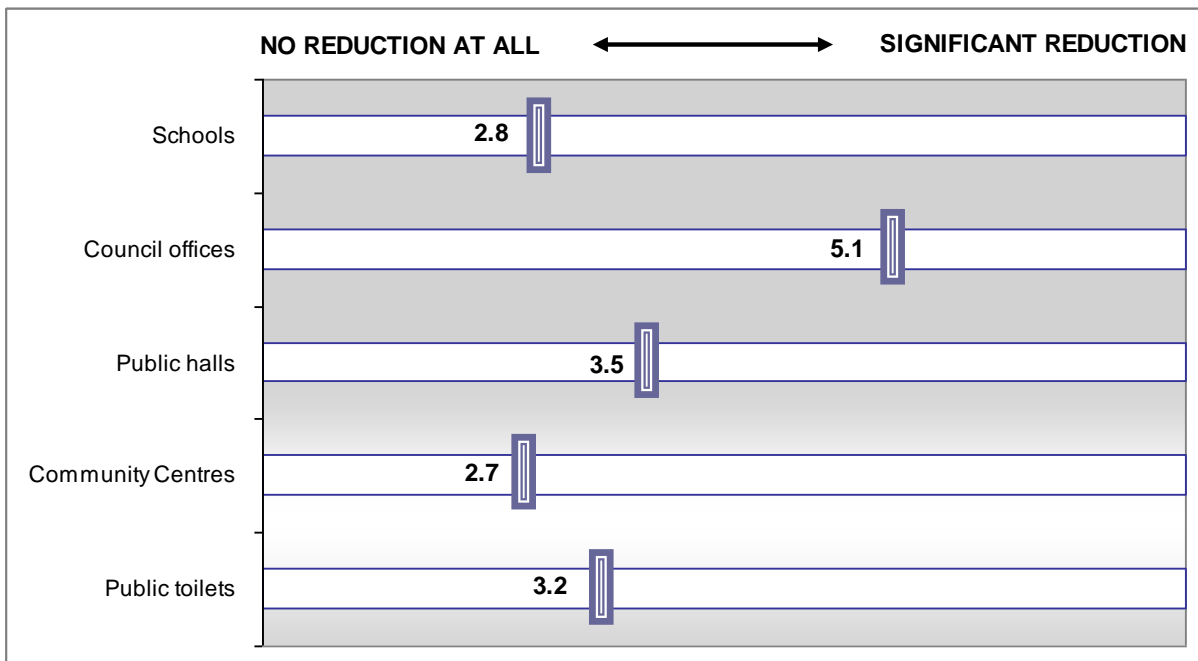
**Figure 7: Views on Centralising Registrars Service and School Catering**



### Reducing the Size of the Council Estate

- 4.4. The consultation also asked for residents' views on options to achieve savings by reducing the size of the Council estate, whether this was through sale of premises or by transferring management of some premises to community organisations. Residents were asked to rate the potential for reduction to specific elements of the Council estate on a seven point scale from "1: no reduction at all" to "7: significant reduction".
- 4.5. As Figure 8 below indicates, there was some significant variation in views on the potential to reduce specific parts of the Council estate. In particular, **Council offices were the only part of the estate for which residents appear prepared to see a relatively substantial reduction** - a rating of 5.1 out of 7. Indeed around half of all respondents rated Council offices as 6 or 7 (48%) suggesting they feel that a significant reduction would be acceptable.
- 4.6. Consultation findings suggest that most residents would find any significant reduction in other elements of the Council estate unacceptable. For example, public halls and public toilets were given an average rating of 3.5 and 3.2 respectively indicating that a small reduction may be acceptable but that few residents would find a substantial reduction acceptable.
- 4.7. Rating of schools and community centres was lowest (2.8 and 2.7 respectively) suggesting that residents would see a reduction to these elements of the Council estate as least acceptable.

**Figure 8: Views on Reducing Elements of the Council Estate**



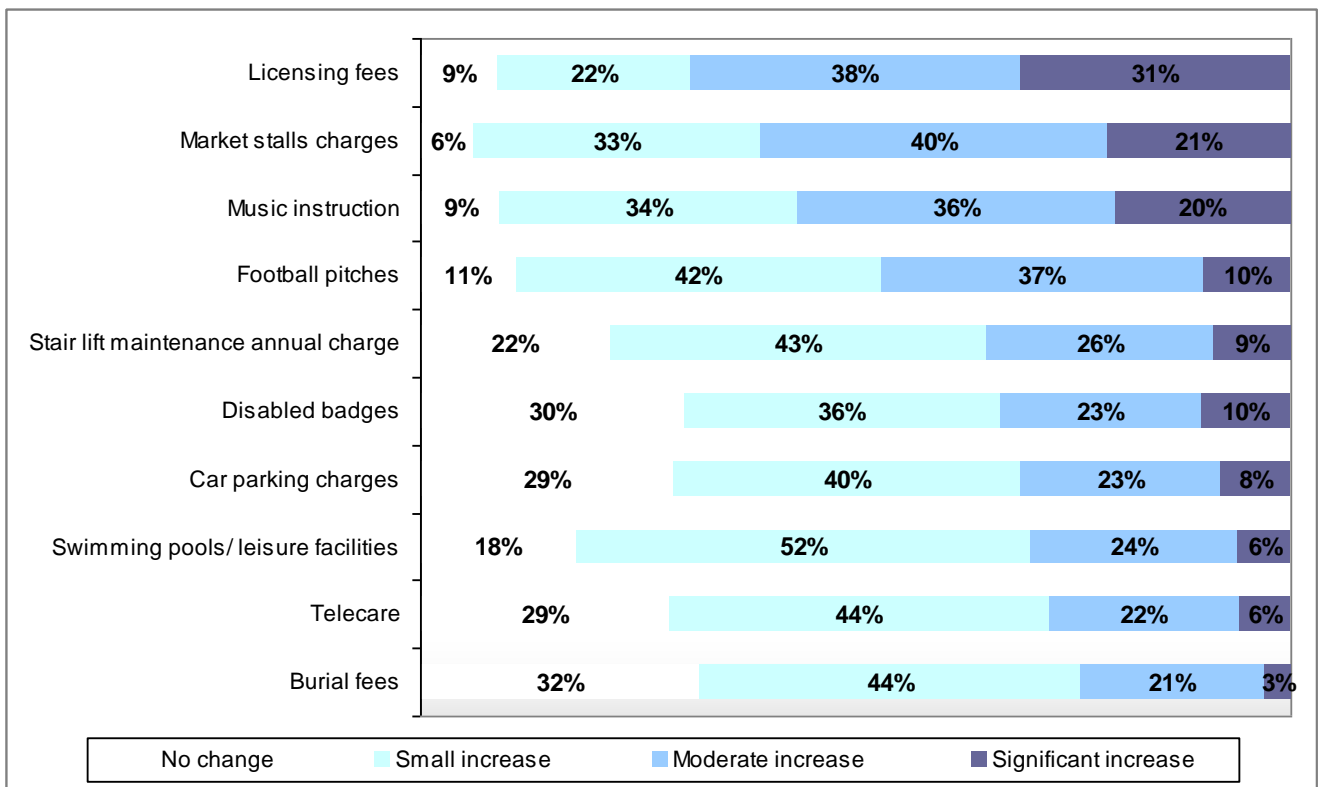
4.8. Notwithstanding the overall profile of views summarised above, there was considerable variation across consultee groups in terms of the extent to which individuals were willing to consider a reduction in specific aspects of the Council estate:

- The following groups were least willing to see a reduction in the schools estate – Buckie, Keith and Speyside area respondents, those aged under 40 or 65+ and females.
- The following groups were least willing to see a reduction in Council offices – those aged 65+ and Buckie and Keith area respondents.
- The following groups were least willing to see a reduction in public halls – Buckie area respondents.
- The following groups were least willing to see a reduction in community centres – those Lossiemouth and Buckie area respondents, under 40s and females.
- The following groups were least willing to see a reduction in public toilets – Fochabers area respondents and those aged 65+.

## 5. CHARGING FOR SERVICES

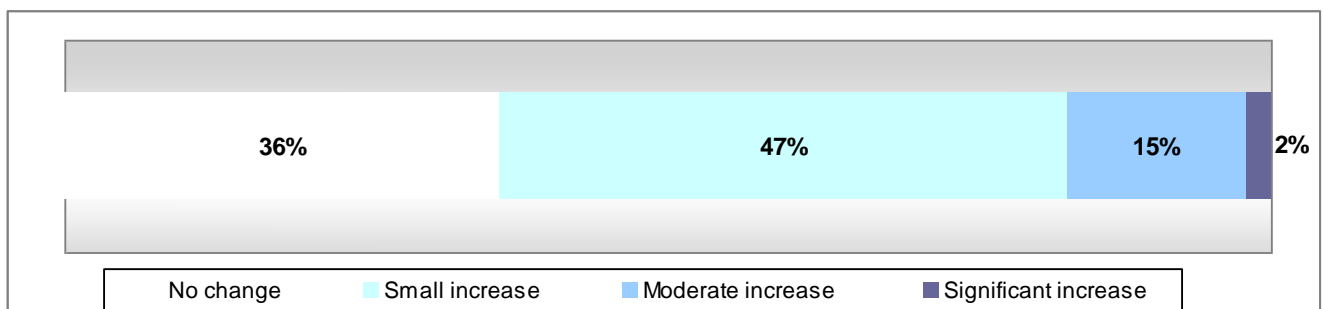
- 5.1. The Council are currently considering options to increase or introduce charging to support delivery of services, as a potential means of reducing the need to cut or withdraw services. Residents were asked for their views on the extent to which an increase in charging for specific services would be acceptable as a means of supporting service delivery. Figure 9 sets out consultation findings.
- 5.2. A number of specific service areas were identified as having potential for moderate or significant increase in charging. Findings suggest that the majority of **residents would find a substantial increase in the following charges acceptable**:
- Licensing fees (69% suggesting a moderate or significant increase);
  - Market stall charges (61%);
  - Music instruction (56%); and
  - Football pitches (47%).
- 5.3. Residents also seem to be prepared to see some increase in charging in relation to other specific services, with most prepared to see at least a small increase in charging. However relatively few were prepared to see significant increases, and there remained around 30% who felt that there should be no increase in charging.

**Figure 9: Views on Increasing/ Introducing Charging for Specific Services**



- 5.4. Again there were a number of significant variations in the extent to which individuals were willing to consider an increase in charging for specific services. Indeed it was notable that males, those aged 40+ and Lossiemouth area respondents were more willing than others to consider a substantial increase in charging across a number of service areas:
- Males were significantly more likely than females to consider an increase in charging for music instruction, car parking, disabled badges, stair lift maintenance and telecare services.
  - Those aged 40 and over were significantly more likely than younger respondents to consider an increase in charging for swimming and leisure facilities, and car parking.
  - Lossiemouth area respondents were significantly more likely than others to consider an increase in charging for music instruction, disabled badges, stair lift maintenance and telecare services.
  - Fochabers area respondents were more likely than most others to consider a substantial increase in charging for disabled badges.
  - Forres and Elgin area respondents were more likely than others to consider a substantial increase in licensing charges.
- 5.5. Council Tax is currently a significant income source for all Scottish local authorities. Although not a charge for a specific service, the consultation sought residents' views on the acceptability of an increase in Council Tax charges in Moray.
- 5.6. As Figure 10 shows, a substantial minority felt that there should be no change to Council Tax charges – more than a third indicated that any Council Tax increase would be unacceptable (36%). However consultation findings suggest that **nearly two thirds of residents would consider some increase to Council Tax charges** (64%) and this finding was consistent across all key consultee groups.
- 5.7. Comments received through the consultation suggest that the potential for Council Tax increases to reduce the need for service cuts is an important consideration for residents here, and also that a few residents would find any moderate or significant Council Tax increase acceptable.

**Figure 10: Views on Increasing Council Tax Charges**



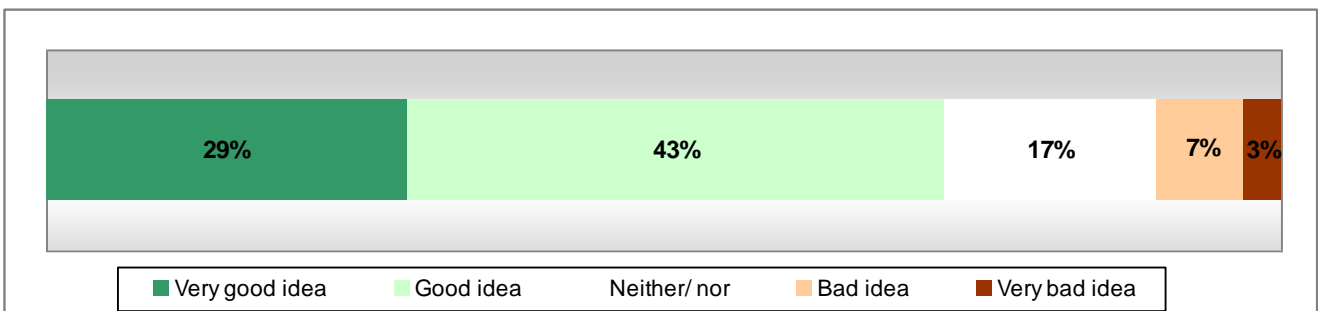
## 6. THE ROLE OF COMMUNITIES

- 6.1. The final element of the consultation asked residents to consider the potential for local communities to play a greater role in delivering services, and as a result freeing limited Council resources to focus on “core” service areas. Residents were asked for their views on the potential practicality of communities playing a larger role in specific activities currently undertaken by the Council, and also to indicate the kinds of activities that they would personally considered taking on.

### The Principle of Greater Community Involvement

- 6.2. Consultation findings suggest that **residents generally see greater community involvement in providing services or facilities as a good idea**. Well over two thirds of respondents felt that this was a good idea (71%), and only a tenth felt that greater community involvement was a bad idea.
- 6.3. It is interesting to note that these findings were consistent across key consultation groups with no significant variation in views on the principle of greater community involvement based on age, gender or area. However there was some correlation between views on the principle of greater community involvement and views on the size of role that the Council should play in residents’ lives (see figure 2). In particular, those who feel the Council should play a smaller role in residents’ lives were more likely to see greater community involvement as a good idea than those who preferred the Council to play a larger role.

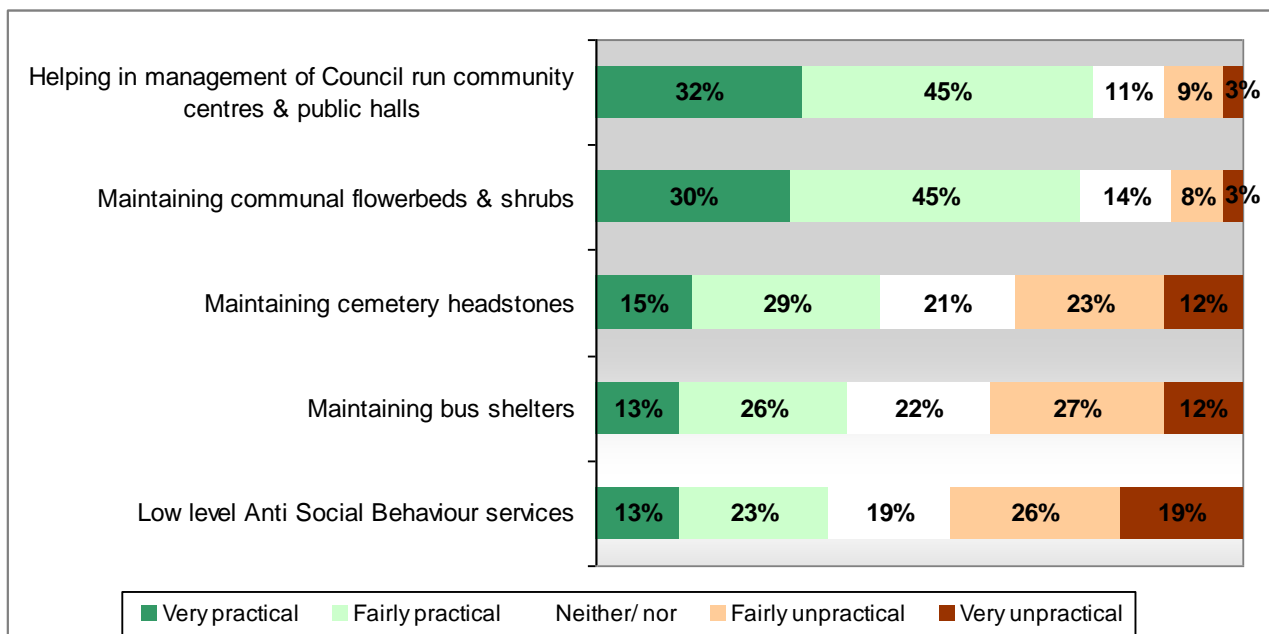
**Figure 11: Whether More Community Involvement in Maintaining Facilities or Providing Services is a Good Idea**



- 6.4. Notwithstanding the support noted above, **residents clearly felt that greater community involvement was more practical for some services and activities than others** (Figure 12).
- 6.5. Management of community centres or public halls and maintenance of communal flowerbeds or shrubs were the only activities where greater community involvement was seen as practical (by 77% and 75% respectively). Indeed a number of consultation respondents indicated that some extent of community involvement was already helping to support public halls locally and there was clearly some support for this option.

- 6.6. Residents appeared less positive about the potential for greater community involvement in other activities:
- Maintaining cemetery headstones (44% rating as practical, 35% as impractical);
  - Maintaining bus shelters (39% practical, 39% impractical); and
  - Low level antisocial behaviour services (36% practical, 45% impractical with a number mentioning concerns relating to residents' safety).
- 6.7. There was very little variation across consultee groups in views on the practicality of greater community involvement in specific roles and services. Indeed the only significant variation was in relation to low level antisocial behaviour services, with Buckie and Lossiemouth area respondents most likely to see this as a practical option.

**Figure 12: Practicality of More Community Involvement in Specific Roles**

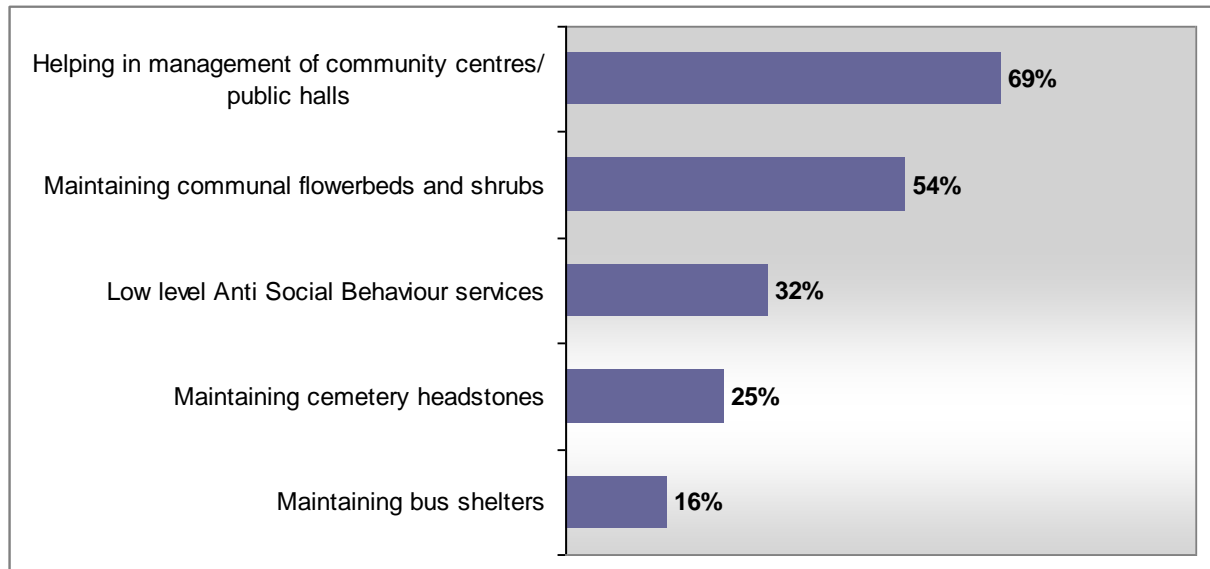


**Whether Personally Interested in Getting Involved**

- 6.8. Reflecting the views set out above, there was also some strong personal interest in getting involved in supporting local services and facilities. This was particularly the case in relation to the management of community centres and public halls (as is noted above, some respondents were aware of this locally) and maintaining communal flowerbeds and shrubs. Indeed consultation findings suggest that more than half of respondents might be interested in these roles (69% and 64% respectively).
- 6.9. Interest in other activities was more limited. Nevertheless around a third of respondents expressed some interest in getting involved in low level antisocial behaviour services (32%), and a quarter were interested in maintaining cemetery headstones (25%). Relatively few were interested in maintaining bus shelters (16%).

- 6.10. There were some significant variations in the extent of interest in getting involved in these roles across consultee groups. For example, interest in management of community centres and public halls was greatest amongst Lossiemouth and Buckie area respondents and those aged under 40. This reflects the profile of views on the extent to which individuals are willing to see a reduction in community centres and public halls – unsurprisingly, those least willing to see a reduction in these are also most willing to get involved in their upkeep.

**Figure 13: Interest in Getting Involved in Specific Roles**



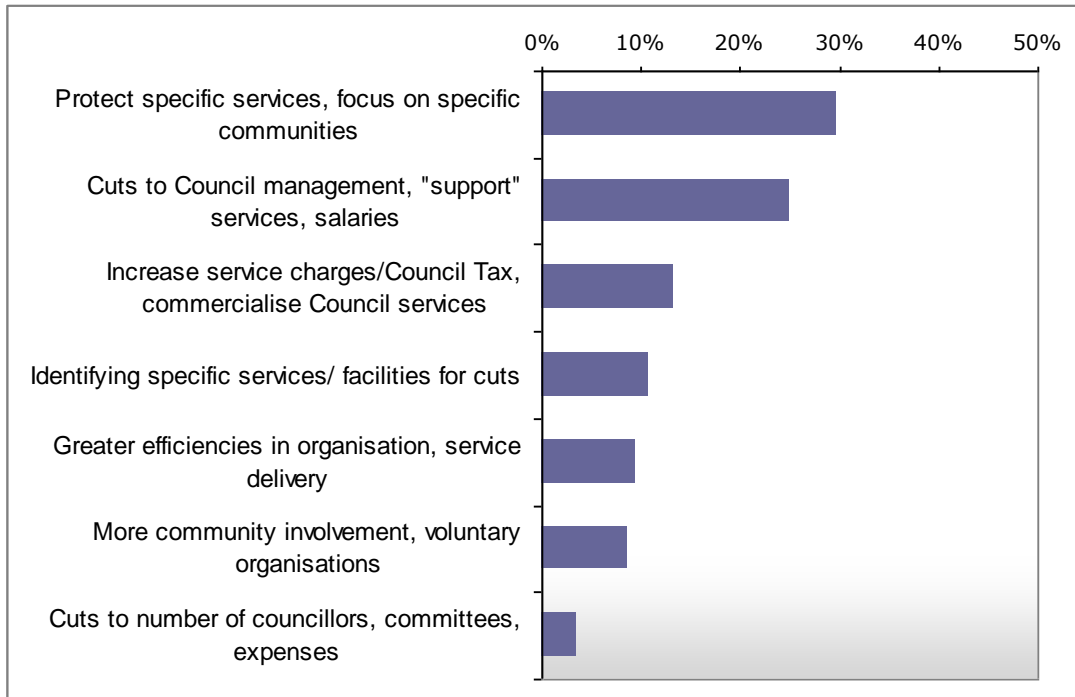


## 7. ADDITIONAL CONSULTATION COMMENTS

- 7.1. The final section of the consultation gave individuals an opportunity to add any further comments in support or in addition to their responses described in sections 2 to 6. Well over 500 individuals chose to give further comments here, representing nearly half of all consultation respondents. Unsurprising given the volume of comments received, these were highly varied in terms of length and complexity and ranged from a single line to relatively lengthy comments making multiple points or referring to a number of different service areas.
- 7.2. A substantial number of individuals used comments to reinforce views expressed elsewhere in the survey form (eg identifying service areas that should or should not be protected from service reductions). However, individuals also used the opportunity to expand on or provide a rationale for views discussed in earlier sections of this report, or to identify issues which they felt should be considered and which had not been included in the consultation.
- 7.3. Below we provide a summary of the key themes emerging from consultation respondents' comments.
- 7.4. Figure 14 shows the main points made through additional comments received to the consultation.
- 7.5. As this indicates, two themes emerged as being notably more common concerns for consultation respondents - the need to protect specific services and/or maintain services to specific communities, and a desire to minimise the need for reductions in "frontline" services through cuts to Council management staff, "support" services (eg Legal, Financial Services) and reduction in Council staff salaries. In relation to the former point, many individuals used comments here to reinforce their support for specific services which they had expressed elsewhere in the consultation. In contrast those mentioning cuts to management and "support" services suggested that this was an important area for which the consultation did not give them an opportunity to comment.
- 7.6. A range of other common themes were identified by respondents' comments, including:
- A relatively substantial number of respondents expressing support for the potential for a moderate increase in charges for specific services, or Council Tax levels to reduce the need for service reductions;
  - Comments on specific service areas which respondents' felt should be a focus for reductions as a means of achieving the required budget savings;
  - A greater focus on efficiencies across the Council (including options to merge services with other local authorities) as a means of achieving savings;

- Differing views on the feasibility of greater community involvement, and specifically the extent to which this may be able to achieve substantial savings; and
- Support for a reduction in the number of elected members within Moray, and/or a focus on reducing costs associated with committees and elected members' expenses.

**Figure 14: Additional Consultation Comments - Key Themes**



7.7. We discuss each of these points in turn over the following pages.

**Protecting Specific Services and Parts of The Community**

7.8. As discussed in section 3 of this report a number of service areas were highlighted by respondents as areas that should be protected from service reductions, when asked to consider the extent of potential reductions across all Council services. Perhaps reinforcing the strength of feeling in relation to potential service reductions, the most common issue emerging through additional consultation comments was the need to protect specific Council services or parts of the community from the impact of budget savings. Indeed nearly a third of those providing comments made reference to specific services which they felt should be protected from reductions.

7.9. Many respondents highlighted the value of specific Council services for local communities, and the significant negative impact of service reductions. This often included - individuals recounted personal experience or commenting on the extent to which the local community uses a specific service.

- 7.10. In terms of the types of service which residents would like to see protected from service reductions it is notable that these are a mix of services which were ranked highly at section 3 (eg education), but also a number of other services which were not ranked in section 3 as the top services to be protected from reductions (eg arts, sports and leisure). This suggests that there may be a particular strength of feeling in relation to possible reduction or closure of arts, sports and leisure facilities - although it should be noted that this is amongst a minority of respondents.
- 7.11. In relation to Council facilities in particular, a substantial number of respondents expressed concern that some service reductions could be very difficult to reverse when the financial climate improves. For example it was suggested that total closure of a facility such as a library or sports facility would in effect mean the permanent loss of the facility - there was a clear view from many commenting on these kind of facilities that options should be considered to ensure that facilities can stay open, even if this means a reduced service being provided.
- 7.12. The main points made in support of protecting specific services from reductions are noted below.
- Education services... This was ranked as one of the top services to protect (see section 3 of this report), and a substantial number of respondents also noted here that education was very much a “core” service which should be protected. This also reflected a relatively common view that children are as a key vulnerable group who should be protected from service reductions - indeed a number of respondents felt that reduction in education services would be “short sighted” and potentially affect the future prosperity of Moray. Specific reference was made to a potential increase in class sizes within Moray, and there was very significant concern from some that this would have a detrimental effect on education standards for core maths and English subjects across Moray. Some also commented that these kind of cuts runs contrary to education objectives within the Curriculum for Excellence, and the Scottish Government recommendation that funding to support class sizes should be ringfenced.
  - Sports and leisure facilities... There was very strong support for the retention of sports and leisure facilities, and in particular swimming pools from a substantial number of respondents. Indeed swimming pools and other leisure facilities were the most common services referred to in respondents’ comments (including reference to specific facilities such as Speyside, Lossiemouth and Forres). Some suggested that these facilities can be an “easy target” for service cuts, but stressed that they offered considerable value in terms of health and wellbeing of the whole community (including for example reducing incidence of antisocial behaviour). There was also a perceived safety issue for children in rural and coastal areas where the ability to swim is vital, and a suggestion that it will be unfeasible for many people to access centralised services for a 30 minute swimming lesson, for example due to fuel costs. A significant number of respondents also suggested that sports and leisure facilities were where a moderate

increase in charging could be considered, and that this would be preferable to closures or significant reduction in service.

- Community centres... Again there was some very strong opposition to any loss of community centres, with some overlap with comments on sports & leisure facilities and arts & cultural services in terms of the issues raised. Community centres were seen as especially valuable as a basis for “community spirit” and social cohesion, particularly in more rural and remote areas where it was suggested facilities are well used by all parts of the community. It was again suggested that other options are available to enable facilities to remain open, for example through increasing income generated by charging for classes, reducing discounts for specific groups etc.
- Arts and cultural services, inc libraries and music tuition... This area was again seen as an “easy target” for service reductions, but a number of respondents were keen to highlight the value of services to themselves and other parts of the community in terms of minimising social isolation - “the life blood of the community”. Some also suggested that these kind of facilities had a wider value in terms of retention of population by ensuring a good quality of life in Moray. Again it was noted that modest increase in charging for facilities or services would be preferable to closure or withdrawal of services.

7.13. In addition to comments on specific service areas, a substantial number of respondents suggested that decisions on potential service reductions should be taken to protect the most vulnerable parts of the Moray community. Here respondents referred to parts of the community who may use a broad range of Council services or facilities, for whom the withdrawal or reduction of services could have a very significant impact on “physical and emotional wellbeing”.

- People with disabilities were clearly seen as a key “vulnerable” group, for whom service reduction could have a very significant negative impact. It was noted that individuals often make a substantial personal contribution to the cost of the services they receive, and that a significant increase in service charges or reduction in level of service would have a major impact on their quality of life - “me and my son...wouldn’t manage daily without our care”.
- Older people, and particularly those with particular health-related needs were also seen as a group who were vulnerable to a reduction in services. This particular group were mentioned in relation to a whole range of services from community care and support services (seen as vital to the quality of life for some people) to transport, and community facilities such as libraries and community centres (seen as playing a significant role for those in rural and isolated communities in particular).

- As noted above in relation to education services children were also seen as one of the most vulnerable groups within the community. This was particularly the case in relation to education services, in relation to which some expressed very strong concern that service reductions would have a significant and lasting effect on children. However children and young people were also highlighted as a group who may be particularly impacted by reduction in other services such as sports and leisure and community centres.
- Those living in more rural, isolated areas were seen as particularly vulnerable to service reductions in community facilities, transport links and services such as dial-a-bus. These were seen as invaluable for residents in these areas to avoid problems of isolation and deprivation. It was suggested that closure of local facilities could have a very significant negative impact on prosperity and social cohesion in these areas, and that a reduction in services such as roads maintenance could have disproportionate impact on rural areas which are particularly reliant on car transport. There was also concern that it is unfeasible for many in these areas to continue to access services or facilities if they are centralised.

### **Cuts to Council Management and “Support” Services**

- 7.14. This was the second most common theme emerging through consultation comments, with around a quarter of those providing additional comment including some reference to potential reduction in costs associated with management structures, “support” services which do not provide a direct service to the community, and Council salaries. It is interesting that this appeared to be a particular concern for respondents to the public web survey, but was a much less common area of concern for Citizens’ Panel members.
- 7.15. Comments made here seemed to reflect a relatively common view that “the Council is top-heavy” in terms of the number of individuals in senior positions. It was also suggested that there is an imbalance in the profile of Council staff between those providing a support or administrative function, and those providing services direct to the community.
- 7.16. In this regard there was a clear feeling that a reduction in costs associated with Council management and “support” services should be prioritised ahead of cuts to frontline services. Specific reference was made to Financial and Legal Services here, as examples of areas where service reductions would have a less significant impact on the community.
- 7.17. Some comments received through the consultation suggest that part of the motivation for so many respondents to comment on this issue, was the exclusion of options for cuts to services such as Financial and Legal from the consultation form. A number of respondents clearly felt that this implied that reductions in these services and other management or administrative costs were not being included in the budget review.

### **Increases in Service Charging and Council Tax**

- 7.18. As is noted above in relation to views on the protection of specific facilities (eg community centres, swimming pools), a substantial number of respondents suggested that an increase in charging would be preferable to a significant reduction or withdrawal of services. While some concern was expressed that even a moderate increase in charging could exclude some parts of the community from accessing services, there was a fairly widespread view that there was some room for an increase in charging to avoid the need for closure of facilities.
- 7.19. This point was raised in relation to a range of different services, most notably in relation to charges for use of community centre facilities and sports or leisure facilities. A number of individuals suggested that an overhaul of charging structures for these facilities could ensure that the most vulnerable were still able to access services, whilst increasing overall revenues.
- 7.20. Reference was also made to other services where it was suggested that an increase in charging could produce additional revenue to support the most valuable services and facilities. There was a common view that car parking charges should be increased, and particularly in larger towns, with the additional revenue used to support community facilities and other services. It was also suggested that a small increase in bus fares for older people may also be feasible.
- 7.21. Some suggested “commercialisation” of parts of Council services to generate additional revenue which could help to support core services. Specific suggestions included “community run coffee bars”, charging for museum entry, sale of food and drink in some facilities and parks where this might generate income.
- 7.22. Finally on charging, the consultation asked residents for their views on an increase to Council Tax. As is indicated at section 5 of this report the majority of respondents indicated that some increase in Council Tax charges would be acceptable, although most felt that this should be a “small” increase.
- 7.23. These views were also reflected in consultation comments. In particular there was relatively common support for a reduction in the Council Tax discount for holiday homes or second homes.
- 7.24. Views were somewhat more divided in relation to increases in Council Tax charges for all residents. A number of respondents suggested that a small increase in Council Tax could generate significant additional income for the Council, and thus reduce the need for service withdrawal or reduction. Again, while not a preferred option, a small increase in charges was seen by many as preferable to closure of services and facilities.
- 7.25. However others felt that greater Council efficiencies (including cuts to management and admin costs) should come before any increase in Council Tax levels.

### Identifying Specific Services for Cuts

7.26. It is interesting to note that respondents were far more likely to use the space for additional consultation comments to highlight areas which should be protected from service reductions, than to make reference to services which could be subject to cuts. Nevertheless, respondents highlighted a number of specific areas which they felt should be a focus for budget savings:

- Schools with very small pupils rolls were mentioned by a significant number of respondents. In particular, reference was made to a number of schools with “a handful” of pupils on the roll and which respondents did not seem to feel offered good value for money - this included reference to a number of schools by name which had clearly been the subject of discussion locally. Respondents suggested that closure of these schools would be fair as a means of minimising the need for reductions to education services to all children in Moray.
- A reduction in street lighting was suggested by a number of respondents, both in terms of fewer street lights and reducing the hours during which lighting was used.
- It was suggested that the frequency of garden waste collection could be reduced during the winter months specifically.
- A reduction in costs associated with flowerbeds and maintenance of grass areas was suggested, often in parallel with comments about the scope for greater community involvement in these activities.
- A reduction in some public transport was suggested where there was very little take up of services.
- Reference was made to the potential to reduce costs associated with flood alleviation works.

### Greater Council Efficiencies

7.27. A number of respondents suggested that the first step for the Council should be to consider ways that costs can be reduced while continuing to provide the current level of service. In many instances this was linked to a view that there should be a reduction in Council management and “admin” staff, as discussed earlier in this section. However a number of specific suggestions were made where respondents felt efficiencies could be achieved:

- Merging of services was perhaps the most common suggestion. This included reference by a number of respondents to potential merging of parts of Moray Council with neighbouring authorities - in this regard specific mention was made of procurement services, financial services and Chief Executive services. In addition a small number of individuals suggested that all Council functions could be merged with neighbouring authorities or across the Grampian region.

- Some suggested greater use of private sector companies in delivering specific services, including reducing the Council's role in delivering bus services, and passing open space maintenance to private companies. It was also suggested that benchmarking of some Council services against the private sector could be a means of identifying areas for improvement in Council services.
- A number of respondents made reference to services which they felt could be delivered more efficiently without a significant impact on standard of service. Specific mention was made here to roads and transport services, with a perception that there was room for reduction in staffing levels.

### **More Community Involvement**

- 7.28. Consultation comments expressed a mix of views in relation to the potential for greater community involvement to support the delivery of some services.
- 7.29. A number of respondents welcomed this approach, and felt that it was an important way for the community to support the delivery of important services. However, others highlighted areas where community involvement was already significant (such as public halls and flowerbeds) and suggested that there was limited scope to increase input from the community. Related to this point, some scepticism was expressed about the potential for community involvement in some areas. In particular there was a perception that those in larger towns had little interest in this kind of role.
- 7.30. Nevertheless, reflecting the views set out in section 6 of this report the balance of views suggested that greater community involvement did offer the potential to support some services and enable Council resources to be focused in other areas. Specific reference was made here to the potential for communities to take on responsibility for ensuring that streets and open spaces are clean and tidy, and for maintenance of community facilities such as halls and libraries.
- 7.31. However it was also noted that, dependent on the kind of role that communities may be asked to play, there may be a need for support from the Council to achieve this. This included reference to a potential need for initial training, or ongoing support and advice to enable communities to effectively play these kinds of roles.

### **Reduction in Elected Members, Committees and Expenses**

- 7.32. Finally a number of respondents specifically suggested that there was scope to achieve savings through a reduction in the number of elected members within Moray, and/or a reduction in costs associated with elected members and committees. In most cases this was associated with suggestions of a reduction in Council management and "admin" costs, and potentially reflected a wider view that all other areas should be considered before any cuts to "frontline services".



- 7.33. Comments made in relation to a reduction in costs associated with elected members covered a number of specific points. This included reducing the number of elected members across Moray, with reference made to towns where it was suggested a single elected member would be sufficient. Other suggestions included reducing payments to elected members (consistent with a suggested reduction in Council staff salaries), enforcing stricter limits on elected members' expenses, and reducing the number of Council committees.

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