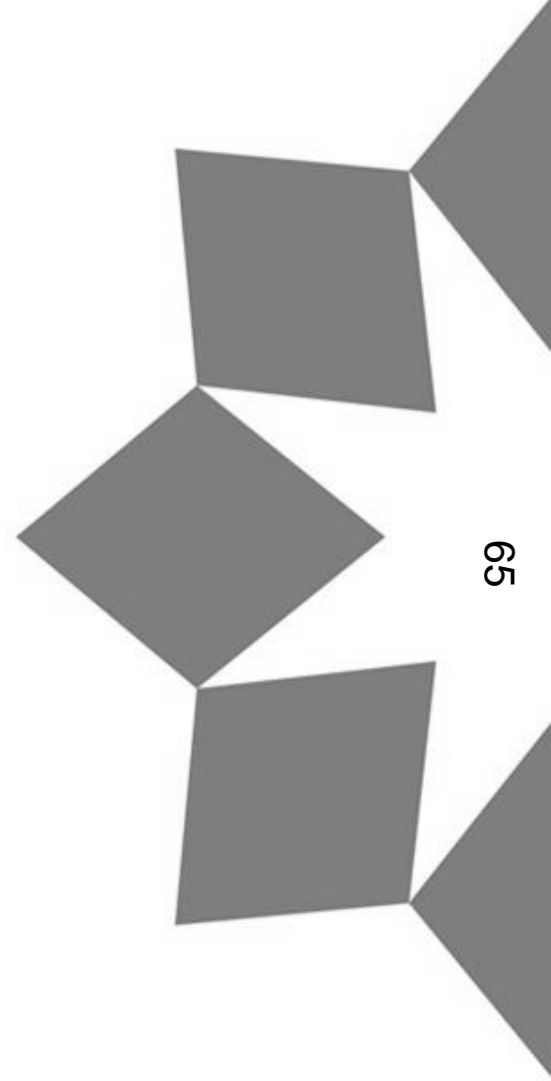


Leicestershire County Council Budget Consultation Feedback

Report
October 2022



Background

In June 2022, a report to Leicestershire County Council's (LCC) Cabinet noted that the Council's budget is set to be profoundly impacted by inflation and other pressures over the next few years. Since the report was written, further emerging pressures suggest that these gaps will widen even further.

Throughout summer and autumn 2022, work will be undertaken by the Council to identify options for new savings proposals. The details of the changes that the Council will be required to meet to balance the budget will unfold over the years ahead. In the meantime, the Council is keen to engage local participants over the next 6 months on the financial challenges ahead and the service changes needed to meet these.

To complement this, the Council commissioned M·E·L Research to deliver an online qualitative community with a sample of participants. The online community sought to bring a cross section of participants together, setting them questions and tasks to complete to gather insight that met key objectives set by the Council.



Executive summary

Awareness

At present, participants appear to lack awareness over the ‘frightening’ financial situation facing LCC. Increased and clearer communication may be needed to ensure residents across the county are informed about this. In particular, communication should focus on LCC’s position as the lowest funded council in the UK, as this message resonated most strongly among participants in this research.

Service prioritisation

Services for vulnerable groups, such as children, the elderly and those with disabilities, were ‘protected’ from cuts in a variety of tasks throughout the research. Given the inevitable cuts facing these services, it may be necessary to inform residents that future funding will be significantly reduced, and therefore cuts to these ‘protected’ services will be needed. This could be achieved through more targeted/specific messaging.

Services relating to Leicestershire’s landscape (such as grass cutting) were perceived as less important by many participants. Some of these services are likely to have suffered cuts previously or already receive a relatively lower proportion of funding. It may be worth including this context within future communications to residents so they are fully cognisant that further reductions of these services will be difficult.

Community action

Landscape-based services were most likely to be identified as those that could be picked up by the community instead of LCC, although time was highlighted as a barrier to participation by some. Consider raising awareness of existing community action groups and increasing opportunities for residents to get involved.

Council Tax

Many participants said they would be willing to see a 5% increase in their Council Tax, as this amount feels ‘doable’ given the cost-of-living crisis. Interestingly, many said the Council could consider increasing Council Tax and reduce services to balance the budget.

Objectives



Do participants understand council services and the two-tier nature of Leicestershire?
Are participants aware of the different sources that generate financial pressures?



How much do the public understand the financial pressures/situation the Council is in?
How can we build an understanding of the situation amongst participants?



What trade-offs are people willing to make or see?



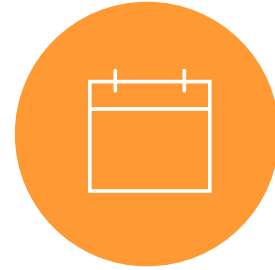
How do participants think individuals, communities and Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations can do more?
How can the Council facilitate this?

Methodology - Overview



In total, 26 participants took part in the online community.

Participants were recruited through a screener to ensure the sample contained a good geographical spread across the County, a mix ages, household incomes and prior attitudes towards the Council.



The online community took place between 3rd – 7th October 2022.

From Monday 3rd – Thursday 6th October, participants were asked to complete a series of activities relating to their awareness or perception of Leicestershire County Council, its current service provision, and its projected funding shortfall.

During these activities participants were not able to see contributions from other participants (to avoid bias in responses).



On Friday 7th October, discussion boards went live, opening up topics, themes and questions that had emerged during other tasks throughout the week.

At this point, participants could see, like and respond to posts and comments made by others participating in the study; to encourage and facilitate interaction between participants.

Methodology - Platform

The platform was designed to be user-friendly and engaging, using a variety of tasks to elicit responses from participants.

The main dashboard features a teal navigation bar with tabs for Home, Activities, Discussion Board, and Summary. A welcome message for 'Holly' is displayed at the top left. Below this is a video player with a play button and the text 'Welcome to the community!'. To the right, three moderator profiles are shown: Elliot Simmonds, Holly Turrell, and Sam Jones. A central text block contains a welcome message and instructions about the study and incentives. At the bottom, a 'Discussions' section lists four topics with their respective engagement metrics (likes and replies).

Discussion Topic	Likes	Replies
What has stood out to you most from the information you have received over the last four days?	4	34
What stands out as the causes of the financial pressure that LCC is facing?	1	33
How would you describe the Council's budget situation after what you've seen over the last four days?	1	26
Do you think the Council should be reducing services or raising more from taxes?	1	32

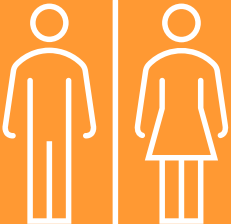
This block contains three overlapping screenshots of the platform's interface. The top screenshot shows the 'Day 1' activity page with a progress bar at 96% and 28 of 27 responses received. It features six service area cards: Consent form, Introduce yourself, Establishing consent awareness of, True breakdown of service provision in, Leicestershire County Council service provision, and LCC's financial situation. The middle screenshot shows the 'Council leader for the day' section with a text prompt: 'Please explain your reasoning here for the points allocation below.' and a task: 'If you had to reduce these services to make the total cost 80 'points', please state how many points you think should be spent on each of the following services.' The bottom screenshot shows a discussion board for the topic 'What stands out as the causes of the financial pressure that LCC is facing?' with two comments and an 'Add Reply' button.

The community


Blaby District Council **4**
Charnwood Borough Council **4**
Harborough District Council **4**
Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council **4**
Melton Borough Council **4**
North West Leicestershire District Council **4**
Oadby & Wigston Borough Council **2**



Male **11** Female **15**




16–29 **7**
30–44 **7**
45–54 **7**
55+ **5**



White **22**
Minority ethnic background **4**



Living alone, no children **5**
Household with no children **6**
Household with child or children under 5 **2**
Household with child or children between 5 and 16 **6**
Household with child or children aged over 16 **7**



Working full-time **16**
Working part-time **4**
On an apprenticeship or a training scheme **1**
Unemployed and available for work **1**
In full-time education **2**
Wholly retired from work **2**



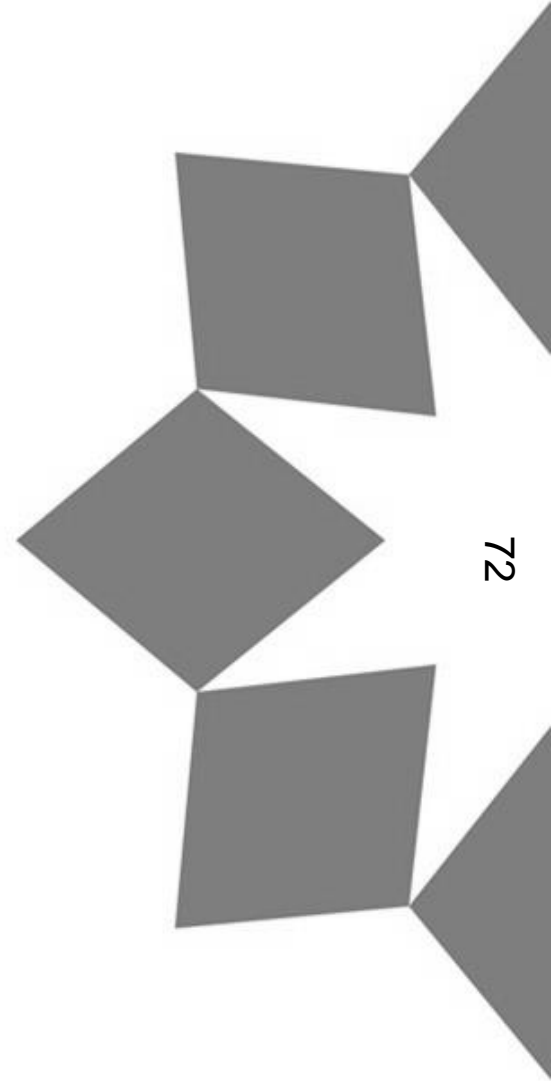
Below £20,000 **2**
£20,001 - £40,000 **10**
£40,001 - £60,000 **10**
£60,001 - £80,000 **2**
£80,001 - £100,000 **2**



I speak positively of the Council **10**
I have no views one way or another **15**
I speak negatively about the Council **1**



Current awareness of service provision and financial situation

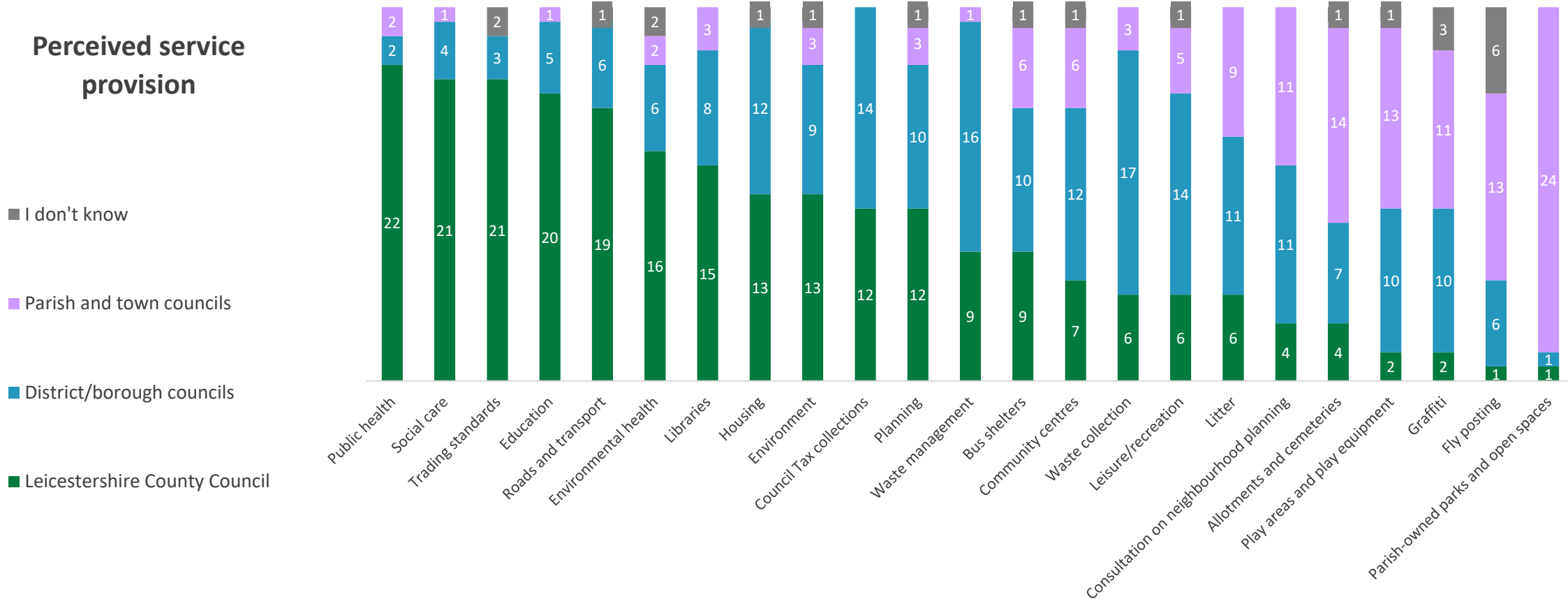


Current awareness of service provision is a mixed picture, particularly regarding district/borough councils and what they are responsible for; participants often misattribute these services to LCC or parish/town councils

Actual service provision



Perceived service provision



Participants appear to lack clarity about services and which level of local government provides them. Consider improving awareness of service provision by communicating strands of funding clearly in areas with higher levels of confusion over provision (such as bus shelters and community centres). This also ensures information is brought to residents, including those who may be digitally excluded.

When presented with the true breakdown of service provision in Leicestershire...

- The majority were aware of LCC being responsible for education, public health and roads and transport
- Participants were surprised at the number of services provided by parish councils
 - In particular, the power of parish and town councils to provide fixed penalty fines was surprising; some felt a 'more powerful LCC' or the police would need this power
- Some participants felt libraries, planning and waste management was, or should be, more locally managed; either by district/borough councils or parish councils
- There was also some confusion between the separation of environmental services and environmental health services

✔ In line with what I thought
 ☁ Different to what I thought
 😮 Surprising
 🙋 I didn't know that this service was provided

A simple guide to council services ➤

Leicestershire County Council

Leicestershire County Council is responsible for services across the whole of the county, including:

Education
Managing transport for schools

Planning
Dealing with planning applications and waste management

Environment
Boosting biodiversity and tackling climate change

Libraries
Books, access, and community events and more

Social care
Protecting and supporting thousands of children, adults and families

Waste management
Waste disposal as well as helping residents recycle

Public health
Helping people live active and healthy

Trading standards
Protecting consumers and businesses

Roads and transport
Looking after 2,575 miles of highway

Leicestershire is split into seven smaller district council areas

- Blaby District Council
- Charnwood Borough Council
- Harborough District Council
- Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council
- Melton Borough Council
- North West Leicestershire District Council
- Oadby and Wigston Borough Council

They are responsible for services like:

- Waste collection
- Council Tax collection
- Planning
- Leisure and recreation
- Environmental health

Parish and town councils

These operate at a level below district and borough councils – they're elected and can advise on a number of local issues, including:

- Allocation of council funds
- Community centres
- Play areas and playgrounds
- Parish owned parks and open spaces
- Consultation on planning

They also have the power to issue fixed penalty fines for things like:

- Anti-social behaviour
- Graffiti
- Dog mess

Awareness of specific LCC services tends to come from experience; directly, through work, or from friends and family

“Was already aware of child social services, waste management, learning disabilities and waste management. I have family who work for children’s services. My brother-in-law has a learning disability and I use local waste sites [which] have LCC logos etc.”

Male, 45, North West Leicestershire

“I was aware of all apart from Family Support and Mineral Planning whatever that means. I presume I have this knowledge because of my age, life experiences and the interest and/or usage I have with the variety of services during the past 60 years.”

Male, 74, Blaby

How did you become aware of these services?

“Aware of Highways, Planning and social care and to a degree libraries. Knew about them from my job [Highways Engineer] and using libraries.”

Female, 50, Charnwood

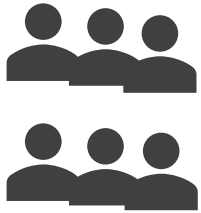
“Aware of all the branches/functions above either through work, day to day life, or family/friends' involvements with some of those services.”

Male, 32, Melton

How aware are participants of the financial pressures Councils are facing?

Awareness of LCC's financial situation is relatively poor

Many participants are aware of cuts facing local councils (presumed to be caused by government cuts and cost of living crisis). Fewer, however, are aware of specific issues facing LCC.



Many participants aware that **councils** across UK face financial difficulties:

- From **national** news sources e.g., TV, newspapers
- From **local** news sources e.g., local newspapers
- From **friends** living in other parts of the UK
- From **context** of cost-of-living crisis:
 - Given impact on finances for other organisations (including businesses) the financial impact on local councils seems inevitable for many

“The news tells us that we are facing problems in services [and] I hear friends worried about elderly care of parents.”
Female, 50, Charnwood

“I am aware of the pressures my local council are under – I receive the annual breakdown.”
Female, 45, Melton



Fewer participants aware of **issues facing LCC specifically** – those who are aware find out through:

- Seeing **local/community centers** being **shut down**
- **Annual breakdown** of spending (from Leicestershire Matters)
- **Local radio** (e.g. BBC Midlands Today)

“I’m not aware of any specific pressures to LCC, I just thought it was the government in general that was facing money issues.”
Male, 45, North West Leicestershire



Many participants are aware of cuts facing local councils; campaigns to raise awareness of the severe shortfall facing LCC will not be starting from square one.



More could be done to educate participants about the financial issues facing LCC specifically – consider including this within publications sent to Leicestershire households (for example, Leicestershire Matters) or prominently within communities.

After assessing initial awareness, participants were given the following information on LCC's financial situation:

Over the last 10 years, Leicestershire County Council has had to make difficult decisions which has enabled them to make savings of £220m. However, times are increasingly tough and without local government funding reform, there is less room for manoeuvre.

Leicestershire remains the lowest-funded county in the country. If it was funded at the same level as Surrey, it would be £104 million per year better off, or £350 million, compared to Camden. The current system doesn't share national resources fairly and although Leicestershire County Council has planned for reduced funding, demand for services is increasing and the pressure on their budget is tightening. For many years the Council has been pressing the government for Fairer Funding.

Looking ahead, the impact of inflation and other pressures on the Council's budget will be profound. A report from June 2022 outlined that the budget gap in 2023/24 was expected to grow from a manageable £8m (at the time the current financial strategy was approved in February) to c£20m based on current inflation projections. And that over the 4-year life of the strategy the gap could increase from £40m to over £70m unless mitigating actions are taken. Since the report, further emerging pressures suggest that these gaps will grow even further. The current position is dire and the Council will need millions in further savings as inflation has left its finances in a frightening situation.

Resident concerns about the shortfall were focused on vulnerable groups within the community, including children, the elderly, and those with disabilities

Unprompted responses highlight a conscientious community who are concerned for welfare of vulnerable groups, not just how cuts will affect them individually.

“It worries me for how it will affect my children. It also worries me for the more vulnerable in Leicestershire; the elderly, young and people with physical/learning disabilities. These services are already stretched, so this news is very worrying.”

Female, 49, Harborough

“My nana relies on her prescriptions being delivered by the chemist and I worry she may be impacted as they may stop offering the delivery service.”

Male, 27, Blaby

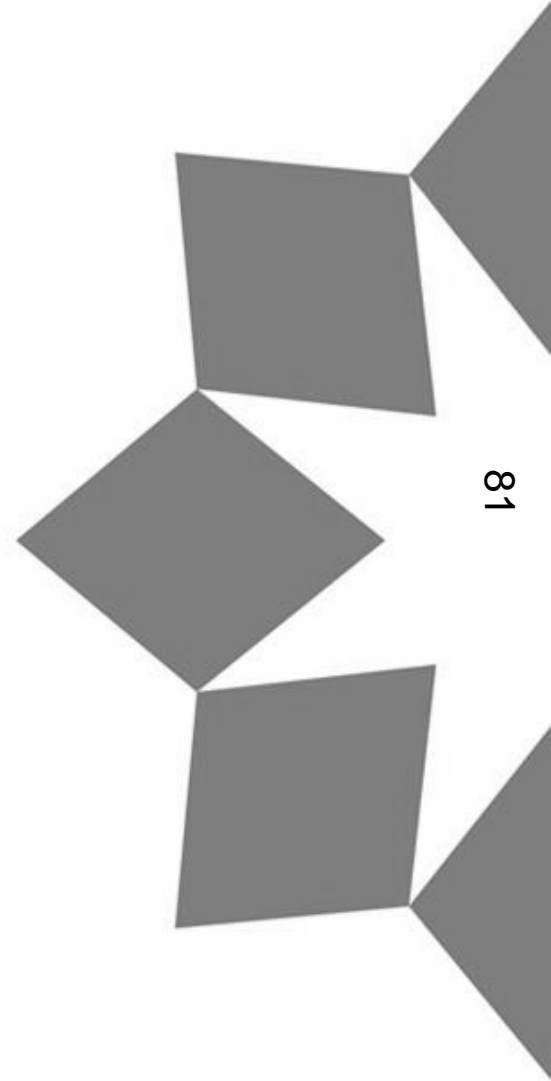
“It makes me worried for our younger generation especially children of today and where they shall be in 20 years time to come.”

Female, 28, Hinckley & Bosworth

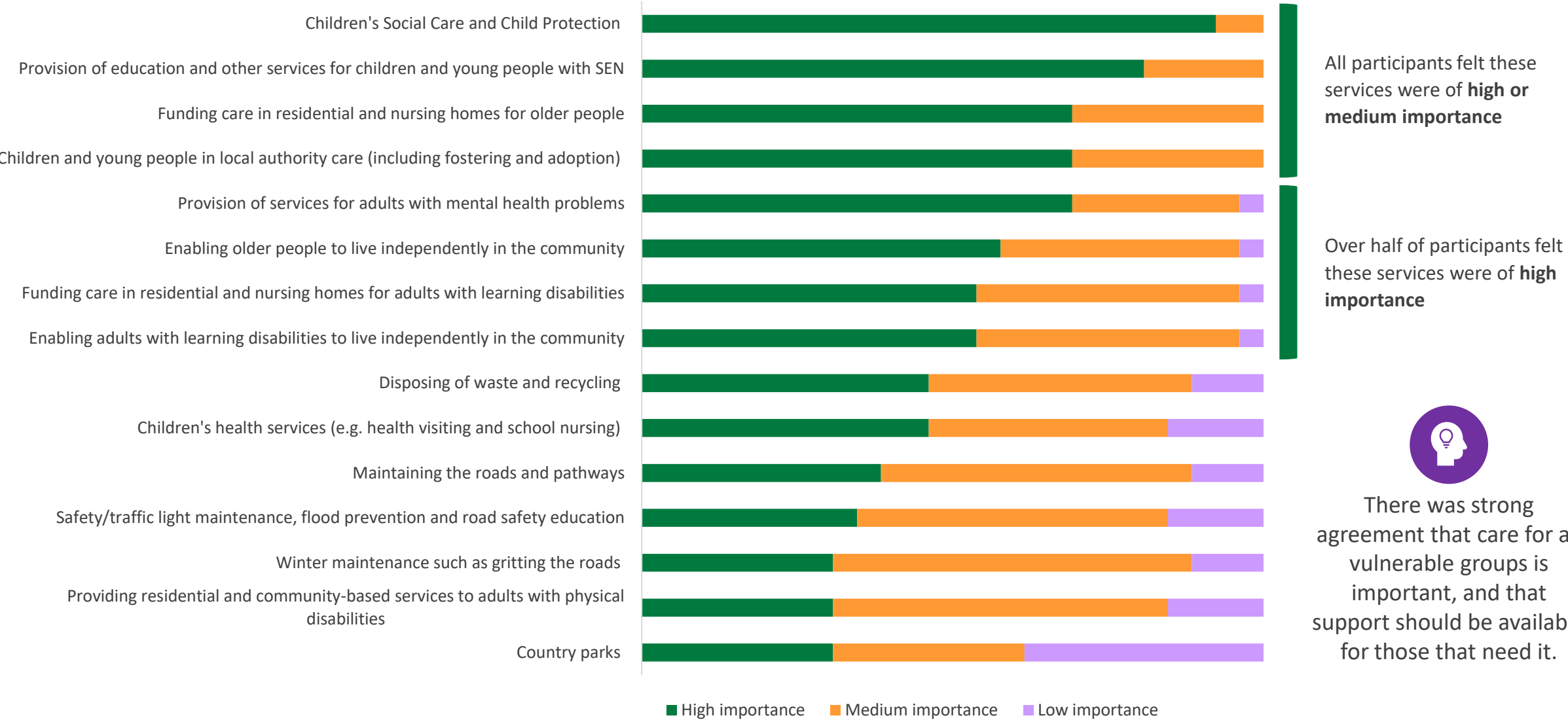
“It’s obviously a worry for everyone, but particularly people who rely on the services.”

Male, 27, Blaby

Service prioritisation and trade-offs



Children's services and services for older and more vulnerable participants were the most highly valued, with most also highlighting the importance of waste management and well maintained roads and pathways across the county



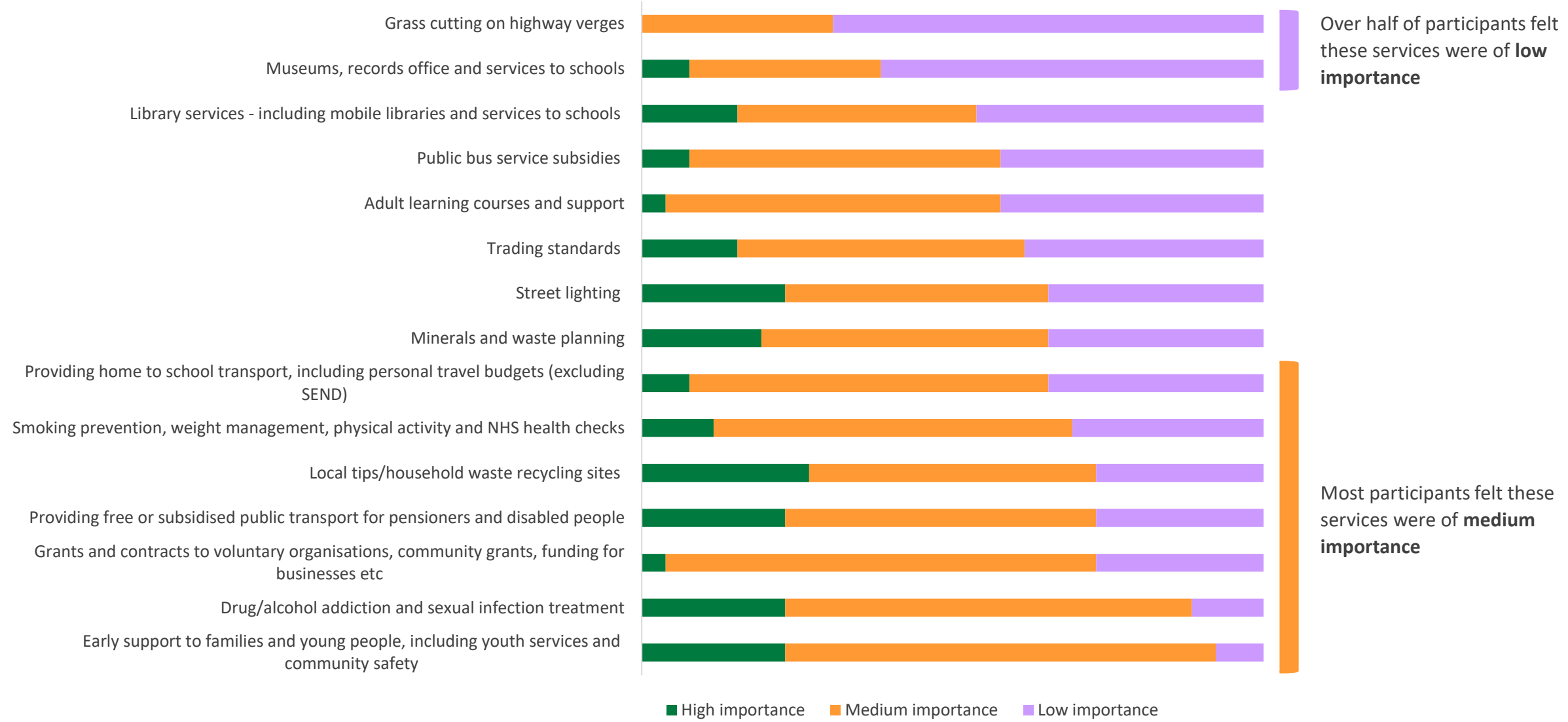
All participants felt these services were of **high or medium importance**

Over half of participants felt these services were of **high importance**



There was strong agreement that care for all vulnerable groups is important, and that support should be available for those that need it.

Participants perceived grass cutting and libraries, culture and leisure services to be of lower importance. Findings from across the week suggest that these are services that could be delivered in different ways, and were services that some participants felt could be more locally-managed



Participants were surprised at some services receiving more funding – in particular, the cost of the ‘Healthy Living’ service was questioned by several respondents

		Spend (£m)	% Spend
Special Educational Needs and Disabilities:	Provision of education and other services (including transport) for children and young people with special educational needs	113	22%
Older People:	Funding care in residential and nursing homes for older people	78	15%
	Enabling older people to live independently in the community		
Children's Social Care:	Children and young people in local authority care (including fostering and adoption)	80	15%
	Children's Social Care and Child Protection		
Learning Disabilities:	Enabling adults with learning disabilities to live independently in the community (with services such as supported living, employment and day services)	59	11%
	Funding care in residential and nursing homes for adults with learning disabilities		
Waste management:	Disposing of waste and recycling	35	7%
	Local tips/household waste recycling sites		
Healthy Living:	Smoking prevention, weight management, physical activity and NHS health checks	26	5%
	Children's health services (e.g. health visiting and school nursing)		
	Drug/alcohol addiction and sexual infection treatment		
Highways:	Maintaining the roads and pathways	14	3%
	Street lighting		
	Grass cutting on highway verges		
	Safety/traffic light maintenance, flood prevention and road safety education		
	Winter maintenance such as gritting the roads		
Physical Disabilities:	Providing residential and community-based services to adults with physical disabilities	15	3%
Family support	Early support to families and young people, including youth services and community safety	12	2%
Public and school transport:	Providing free or subsidised public transport for pensioners and disabled people	13	3%
	Providing home to school transport, including personal travel budgets (excluding SEND)		
	Public bus service subsidies		
Mental Health:	Provision of services for adults with mental health problems	19	4%
Libraries, Culture and Leisure:	Library services - including mobile libraries and services to schools	6	1%
	Museums, records office and services to schools		
	Country parks		
Adult Learning:	Adult learning courses and support	5	1%
Economic Growth and Grant Aid:	Grants and contracts to voluntary organisations, community grants, funding for businesses and social housing, and wider support for economic growth	3	1%
Regulatory and Planning:	Trading standards	3	1%
	Minerals and waste planning		
	SERVICES TOTAL	481	93%
	SUPPORT SERVICES	37	7%
	TOTAL	518	100%

“I think the area which receives over funding is healthy living [...] things like alcohol and drugs are self incurred. This is a choice which effects all financially.”
Male, 41, Charnwood

“Whilst I understand that helping to fight obesity, assisting people to stop smoking etc. potentially has an impact on things like the NHS system I can't help but think that a Healthy living budget being £26m sounds like an awful lot of money.”
Male, 55, Charnwood

“I am shocked how little is spent on mental health given how prevalent this is becoming in contrast to more being spent on healthy living.”
Male, 45, North West Leicestershire

In addition, unprompted concerns over funding for mental health services, especially when compared to others, were shared by many

Numerous comments from participants of all ages, genders and locations may reflect a growing concern for resident mental health across the county.

“It surprised me that mental health was so far down the list. Especially as the impact of poor mental health surely correlates to a lot of other areas of budgeted spend.”

Male, 32, Melton

“I think more should be spent on mental health services.”

Female, 17, Melton

“I am shocked on the percentage of funding for mental health [...] I think this should be funded more.”

Male, 27, Blaby

“I am surprised that the level of importance for mental health is so low. Particularly following Covid and the statistics following this in relation to how mental health has been affected.”

Female, 45, Melton

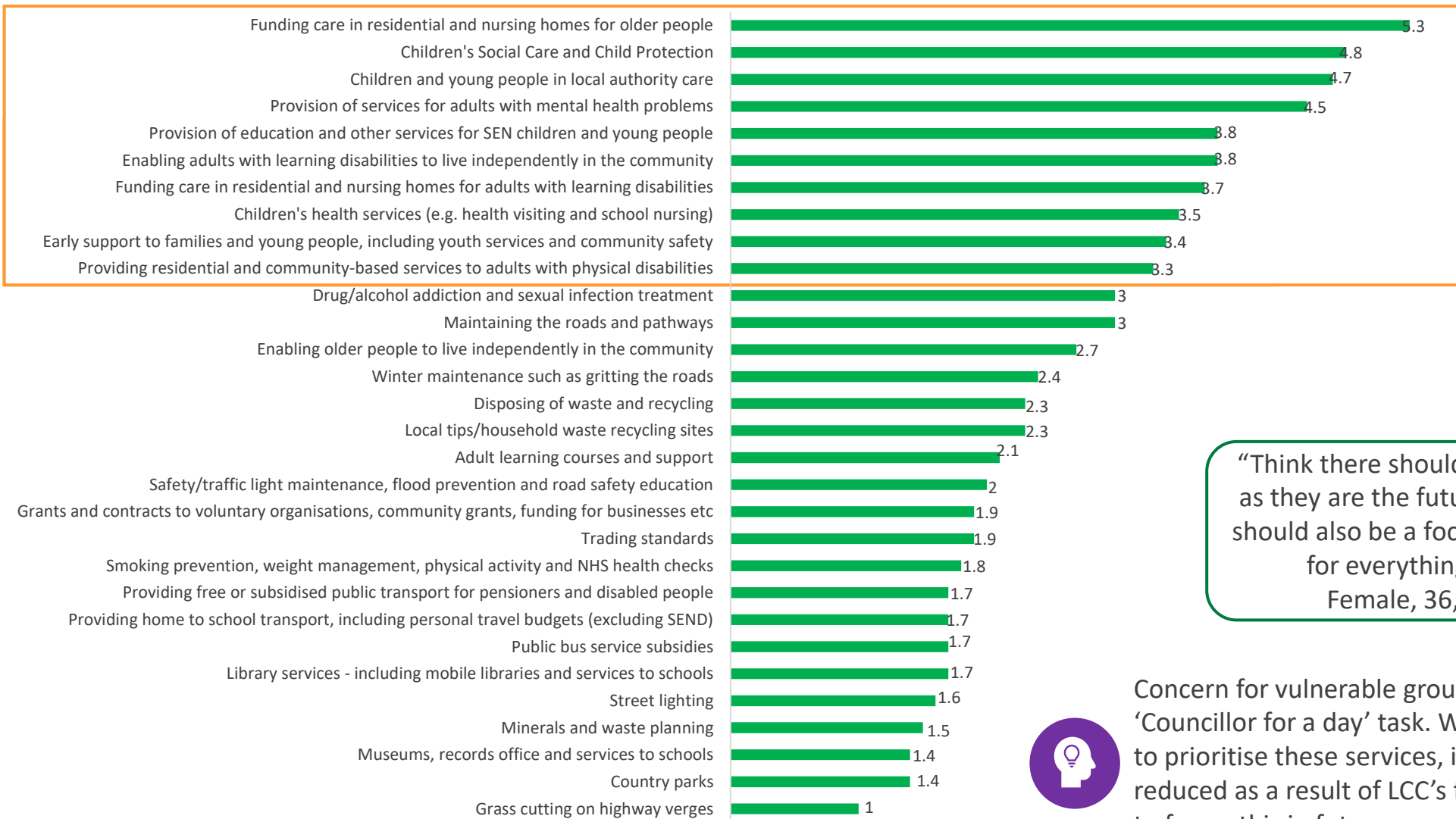
“That significant 10’s of millions are spent on some vulnerable members our community but at least a 5th less is spent on mental health provision?? This feels unfair, particularly given the mental health crisis we find ourselves in and hikes in suicide rates!”

Female, 37, Hinckley & Bonsworth

How do participants suggest services are prioritised?

'Councillor for a day'

Concern for vulnerable groups was re-confirmed through the ‘councillor for a day’ task. When asked to reduce service provision by 20%, participants prioritised spending on services for children, the elderly, and those with disabilities. 9 of the top 10 ‘protected’ services were for vulnerable groups



“ I feel the vulnerable should receive the most funding as they cannot care for themselves.”
Male, 41, Charnwood

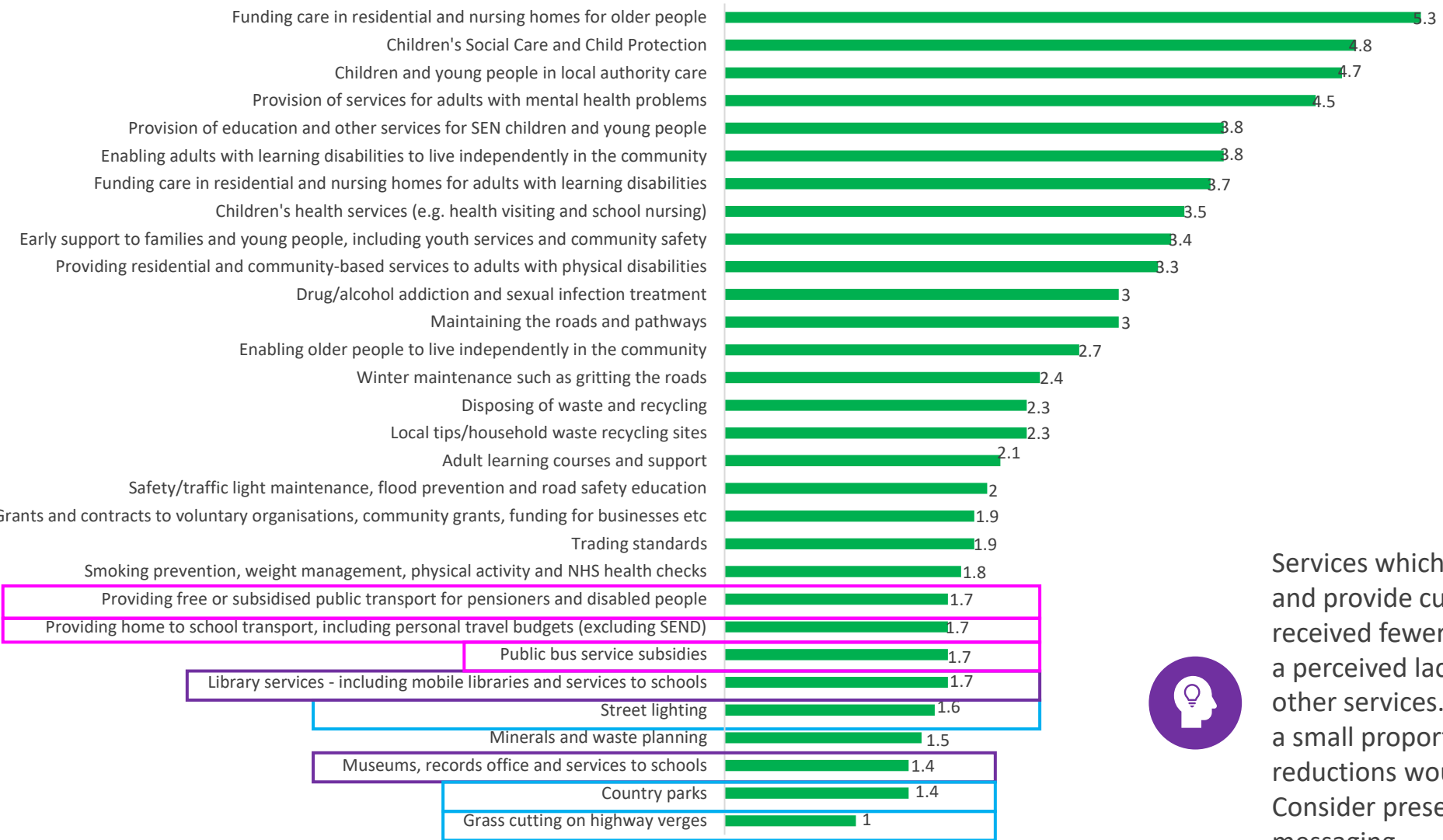
“I feel most of the points should go into social care.”
Female, 37, Hinckley & Bonsworth

“Think there should be a focus on younger people as they are the future generation - that said there should also be a focus on the older generation too, for everything they have done for us.”
Female, 36, Hinckley & Bonsworth



Concern for vulnerable groups was restated through the ‘Councillor for a day’ task. While it is clear that residents wish to prioritise these services, inevitably these will need to be reduced as a result of LCC’s financial situation. Consider how to frame this in future communications to residents.

Services which maintain Leicestershire’s landscape, provide cultural opportunities (including for schools) or support with transport (including subsidies) received the fewest points on average. 8 of the 10 fewest point-scoring services are in this category.



Support with transport (including subsidies)

Provide cultural opportunities (including for schools)

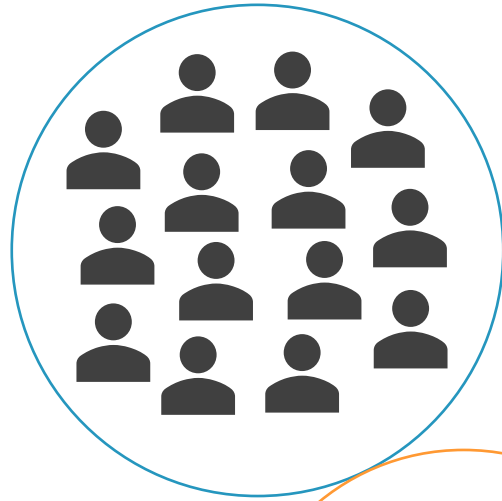
Maintain Leicestershire’s landscape

Services which maintain Leicestershire’s landscape and provide cultural opportunities / transport received fewer points from participants, highlighting a perceived lack of importance in comparison to other services. Even if cut, these services represent a small proportion of LCC’s overall budget, thus reductions would still be needed to other services. Consider presenting this to residents in targeted messaging.



Council Tax

Sentiment about **current** Council Tax was split between those who feel the amount their household is expected to pay is 'about right' and 'too high'



About right

"I believe that for the services we receive it is a reasonable sum of money to pay. We have excellent bin collections, a decent library, a superb health centre, a frequent bus service, a community centre and a well-maintained village environment."

Male, 74, Blaby



Too high

"I believe in proportion to earnings the council tax rates are sky high and [...] the amount of value of council services in relation to the tax people pay is poor."

Male, 24, Oadby & Wigston



Unaware

**When asked, participants were presented with the current average Council Tax bill for each band in the County, as well as a link to find their band.*

How would participants respond to an
increase in Council Tax?

A Council Tax increase is acceptable to most; but not higher than 5%

Even half of those stating their current Council Tax is 'too high' would be willing to accept an increase.



"I think we pay enough . The services are not what people expect as some areas are fortnightly with refuge. Care homes at a squeeze, crime up because of homeless."

Female, 59, Blaby

"Taking into consideration the other cost of living increases we have [a 5% increase] seems reasonable."

Female, 32, Harborough

"We are in Tax Band C so [with a 10% increase] we would pay an extra £129 a year. That's about an increase of £12 or so a month. It's rubbish to have another cost go up but I strongly believe in social support and moral duty to help our community."

Female, 50, Charnwood

**When asked, participants were presented with an illustration of what each %-increase would look like for each band.*

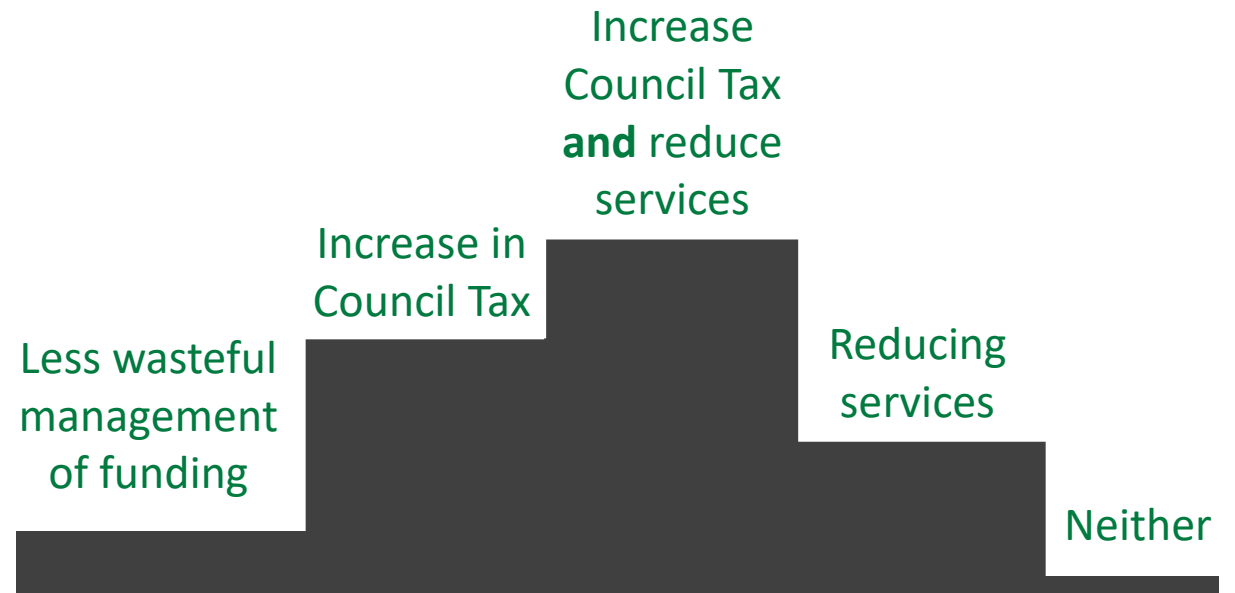
However, when asked whether LCC should increase Council Tax or reduce services, roughly half think both are necessary

A finding from the discussion board was that a balance may suit participants the best; many accept that to keep services they must pay more tax and that some services could be cut or outsourced to members of the community.

“I think it needs to be a bit of both. Taxes need to rise marginally [and] there are some services that need more funding, or the funding remaining the same.”
Female, 32, Harborough

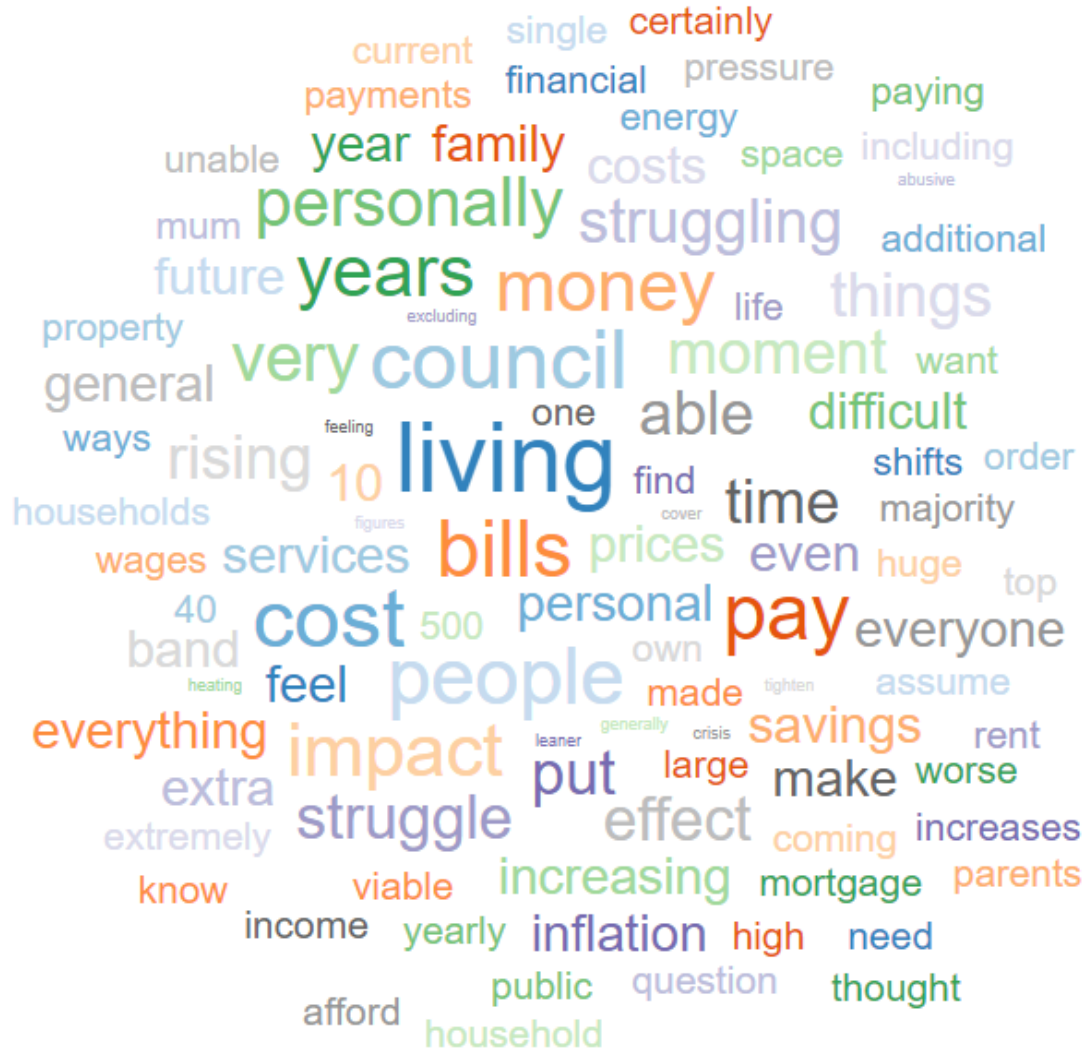
“I don’t think services should be reduced; I’d be happy to pay more council tax in order for services to continue running.”
Female, 24, Blaby

“Some services at the moment are nice to have such as free transport whereas others are needed such as social care.”
Female, 50, Charnwood



When asked this yes or no question, around half of respondents said LCC should increase Council Tax **and** reduce services. This compromise of ideas may represent a potential step forward for the Council’s finances.

An increase of 9.9% (the increase needed to enable LCC to balance it's budget) was seen as an “extremely impactful” increase, especially given other rising costs of living



“Absolutely crazy. Again, don't agree. I'm sure there are other ways money could be made without impacting on residents. Time is getting tough for everyone. As much as LCC are struggling financially with cost of living increasing so are everyone. Increasing things like this to the general public will have abusive knock-on effect, especially those that don't get pay increases.”

Female, 36, Hinckley & Bosworth

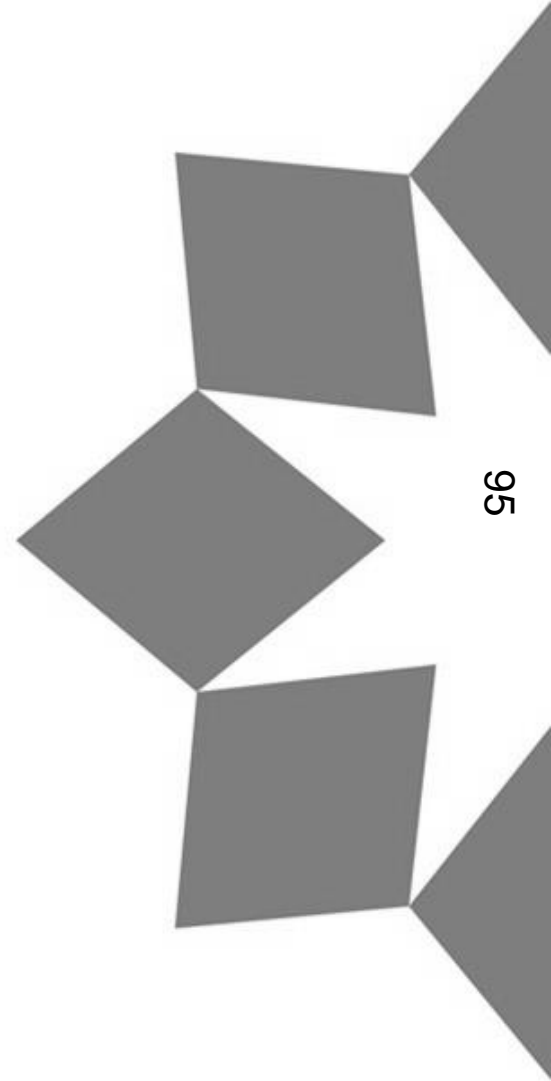
“My mortgage as just risen, as well as gas and electric monthly payments so another increase like this really would impact on my financial situation and make the cost of living even harder at the moment.”

Male, 45, North West Leicestershire

“I think this would far too high an increase. We are already in a cost-of-living crisis, and this would really push families even further into financial trouble.”

Female, 32, Harborough

Partnerships and the role of others in the community



Participants agreed that helping others within the community would help everyone lead better and more fulfilling lives. They also felt that there is a responsibility for people to support the Council given the challenges it is facing



I agree with this



I don't agree with this



I find this surprising



I hadn't thought about this before

Individuals and communities lead better, more fulfilling lives the more they help themselves and each other and remain independent for as long as possible. There is a large community, voluntary, charity and faith sector in Leicestershire doing much good work, but more people could be more involved in these groups, as well as less formally, just as 'good neighbours'.

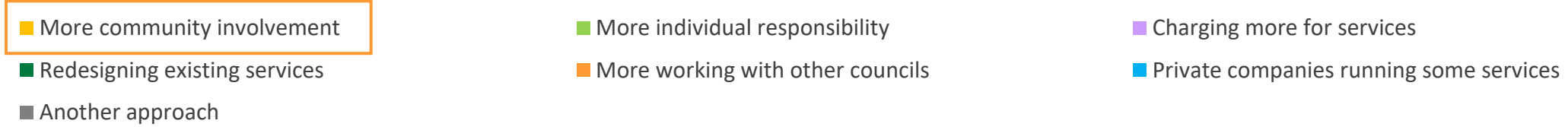
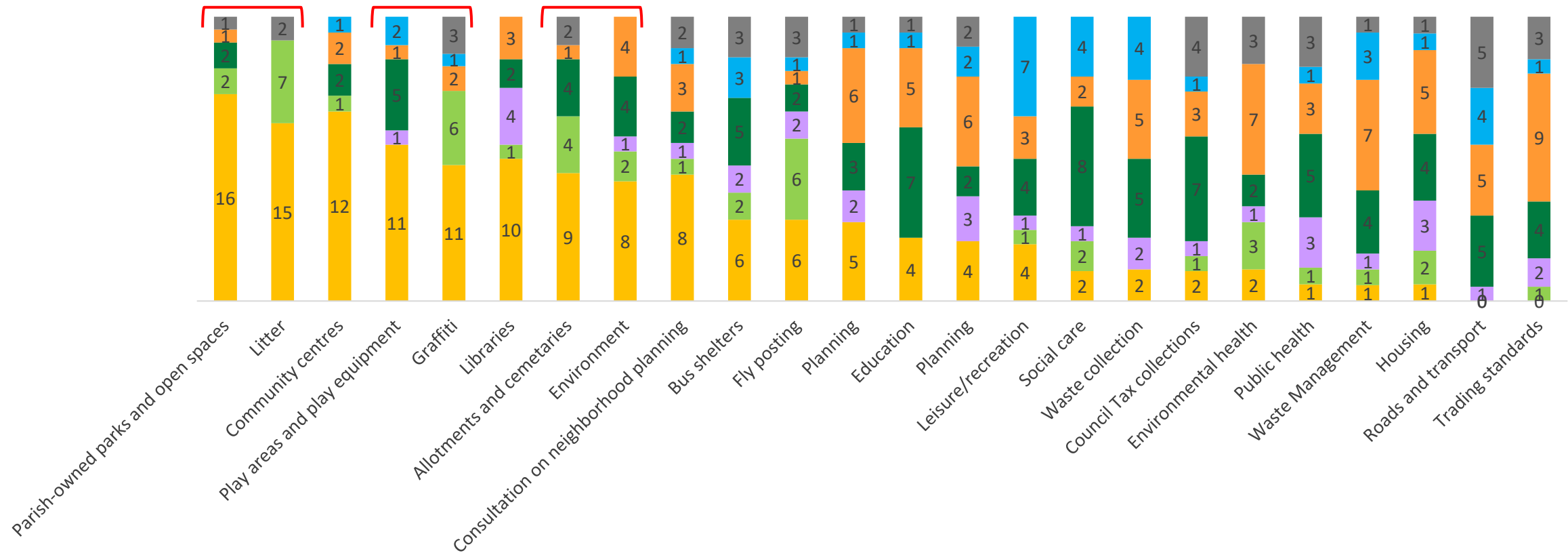
"I think working as a community can be more efficient and effective, it also means the community is happier and more involved as they can help with the services they use the most and make it how they would like."

Female, 17, Melton

- The majority of participants agreed that helping each other benefits both individuals and society more broadly
- Some participants hadn't thought about Leicestershire's voluntary sector prior to this research, but believe actions to support independence within the community would be of benefit
- Some participants were surprised to learn about the large community sector present in Leicestershire
- The idea of increasing community support through informal means (such as encouraging behaviour between 'good neighbours') was agreed upon by many participants

What services could be delivered differently?

Participants mostly identified landscape-based services – such as maintenance of parks and open spaces – as potentially deliverable by more community involvement, and not LCC



This was highlighted further when asking about ‘individual action’; participants suggest that care for elderly participants, through visits or medication pick-ups, could be provided by the community to help reduce the burden on the Council’s budget – a potential legacy of the Covid-19 pandemic

“I think organising litter picks it’s an easy start. I think there may be some interest in helping to maintain parks and cemeteries in their local areas. I think you may get some people interested in volunteering in a care setting for example.”

Male, 55, Charnwood

“Helping neighbours with needs like shopping collection of prescriptions spending time with them and just making sure they are not forgotten.”

Male, 65, Charnwood

“Respect their local environment, use parks and open spaces to be more active, support local charities and community centres, volunteer, visit and be more social with isolated people. Do a shop for them and chat for 30 mins or whatever time you have, pick up after your own mess.”

Female, 50, Charnwood

“Keeping an eye on the elderly / vulnerable , offering free transport to those with limited mobility and on low incomes, litter picking and parks and countryside maintenance issues.”

Male, 74, Blaby



Consider strengthening awareness of existing community action groups, for example the litter ‘wombles’, to make the most of willing volunteers within Leicestershire

A couple of participants highlighted specific examples of community action within their local area


“I would say that in my local area people have come together to try and help improve or maintain services for example the **bus route from Melton to Nottingham** was under cancellation and **everyone came together to prevent this** despite it not working it showed community support. Another thing I've noticed in my local area is that there is a **group of volunteers** that take part in things to make our town looks nicer for example I saw them **painting the fences and railings around Melton** although this isn't a massive project to improve the town majorly it showed that the community spirit is there to do so.”

Female, 17, Melton


“The village I live on has always has a strong sense of community. This was reinforced during the pandemic with the **local post office and pubs/cafe offering deliveries**/other services to the more **vulnerable in our community** as well as other participants. **Our local FB village page** often has **requests of assistance** for things such as **a lift to the hospital**, which another individual will say they can do. The local parish council is also very receptive to comments on things such as if something needs to be repaired in the local play park. They get things done very quickly. This adds to the feeling of a strong community.”


Female, 49, Harborough


In the context of reducing Council costs, participants also gave the following examples and suggestions of community or individual action...


 Male, 41, Charnwood ▾ 👍


Hold people accountable for ASB. littering, graffiti and fly tipping all come at a cost to the tax payer. issue large fines or make individuals give up their time to render their actions (litter pick).

 Male, 55, Charnwood
have to say I totally agree with your comments there


 Moderator
Thanks for this - does anyone have any additional thoughts on this topic?


 Male, 24, Oadby & Wigston
I agree its a great solution, if its someone's damage or waste is being dumped why should it come to a cost to the tax payer, the individual/firm should be fined and ordered to rectify that damage.




 Male, 27, Blaby


By all doing our bit to help, picking up litter, offering to help the vulnerable




 Male, 74, Blaby

Little picking twice weekly in our village




 Female, 43, Harborough 👍

Perhaps low level maintenance of grass verges, upkeep of parks and community areas but I'm not sure in the big scheme of things how much this would save? I'd be interested to know.

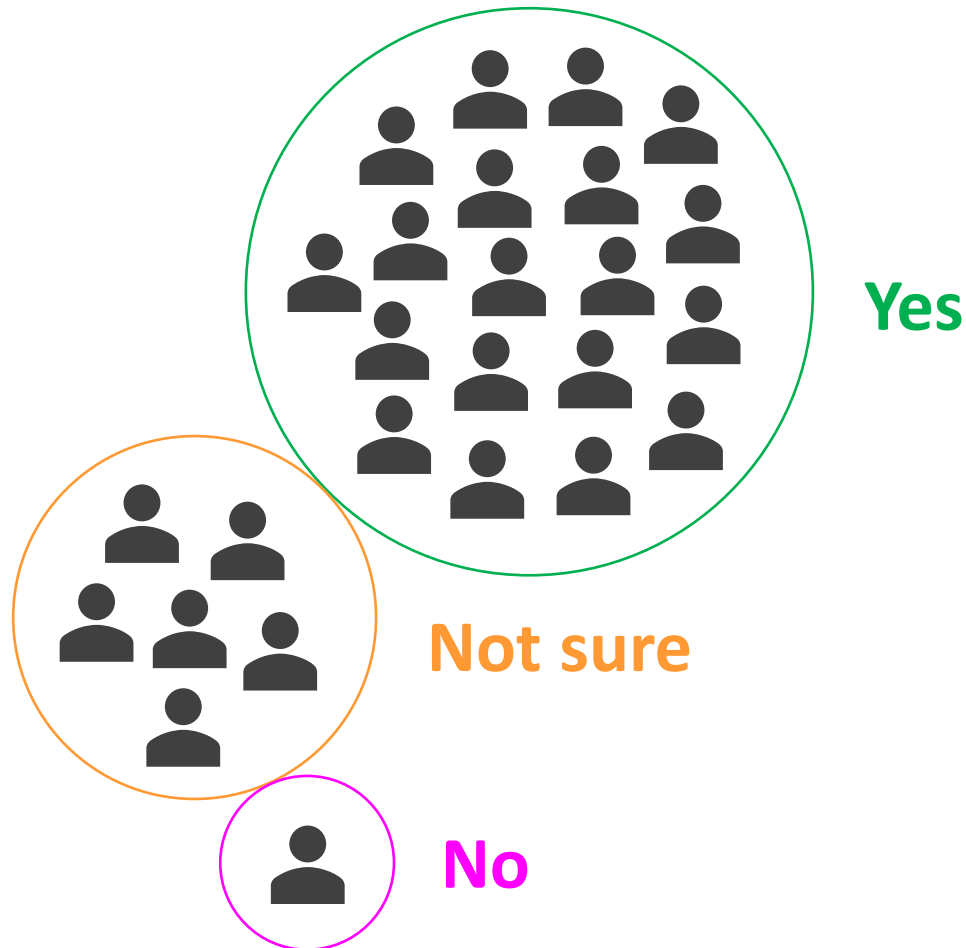
 Male, 55, Charnwood
I think your right

When it comes to community involvement and volunteering it would nearly always be at a low level and in the sort of areas that you have mentioned. Unfortunately, even having Members of the public volunteering for certain tasks requires somebody in charge to oversee the process and organise events. This in itself can cost time and money and end up being a distraction.



This coincides with resident attitudes towards community action; roughly three quarters believe communities should support others to help with the Council's financial challenges

"Do you think communities/individuals should support others to help with the Council's challenges?"



"I think working as a community can be more efficient and effective, it also means the community is happier and more involved as they can help with the services they use the most and make it how they would like."
Female, 17, Melton

"I think people should support others through hard times but in a way I don't think it should be an individuals responsibility to support others through problems they face if they are caused by councils etc. I think the support should be provided by councils or other sectors."
Female, 17, Melton

"They should help others anyway not to just prop up a failing service."
Male, 41, Charnwood

However, participants also highlighted key barriers such as childcare, full-time work and a lack of free time

Many said that such barriers will only worsen with rising costs of living.



“The free time people have is spent supporting their own families. To support others [...] would take a massive culture shift.”
Male, 41, Charnwood



“As much as I think people would like to help many people are working long hours and can’t afford to give up their time.”
Female, 32, Harborough



“Both myself and my partner work and are usually out of the house 8-6 everyday. With the cost of living, if anything people are going to work more in the next few years, and older members of the community will be working later in life and have less time to volunteer.”
Female, 32, Harborough



“a lot of people are more cautious now around the vulnerable with the risk of covid.”
Female, 24, Blaby



Participants want to help their communities, but many highlight that existing barriers – including work patterns and childcare duties - prevent them from providing support. To maximise on the goodwill of participants, especially given the cost-of-living crisis, LCC could ensure that opportunities to help the community are available around busy lives, for example through flexible, evening and/or short shifts.

Key messages and communicating the shortfall to residents

The main takeaways for participants were the number of services provided by LCC and that it is the lowest funded council in the UK

The looming financial pressures facing LCC resonated with fewer participants; therefore, considering more targeted messaging about this in future publications, to raise and retain awareness within the community, would be beneficial.

“What has stood out to you most from the information you have received over the last four days?”



How many services are provided by LCC



That LCC is the lowest funded council



Empathy for the Council's situation / an understanding of the difficulties faced



The Council's budget and where it is spent



That the Council is looking to engage participants through research like this



That LCC is unfairly funded compared to other councils



The financial pressure faced by LCC in the coming years

Participants believe that raising awareness of the ‘frightening finances’ will help others within the community better understand the Council’s situation

Physical post, as well as bulletins in local TV and radio, were seen as effective ways of achieving this.

“Taking what you have seen over the last four days, what’s the best way to help others understand the Council’s situation?”

- A third of participants believe others within their communities simply aren’t aware of LCC’s dire finances, thus they think raising awareness would help others understand the Council’s situation. Participants suggested the following would be good avenues for messaging:



- Posting information through letterboxes
- Local radio
- Local TV stations
- Social media
- Workplaces

“Information is a key part of the process. I feel that everyone pays their council tax because it’s just “another tax”. Unless you take the time to find out how the budget is broken down and spent you have no clue as to how badly the cuts are going to bite or what services may be effected/lost.”

Male, 55, Charnwood

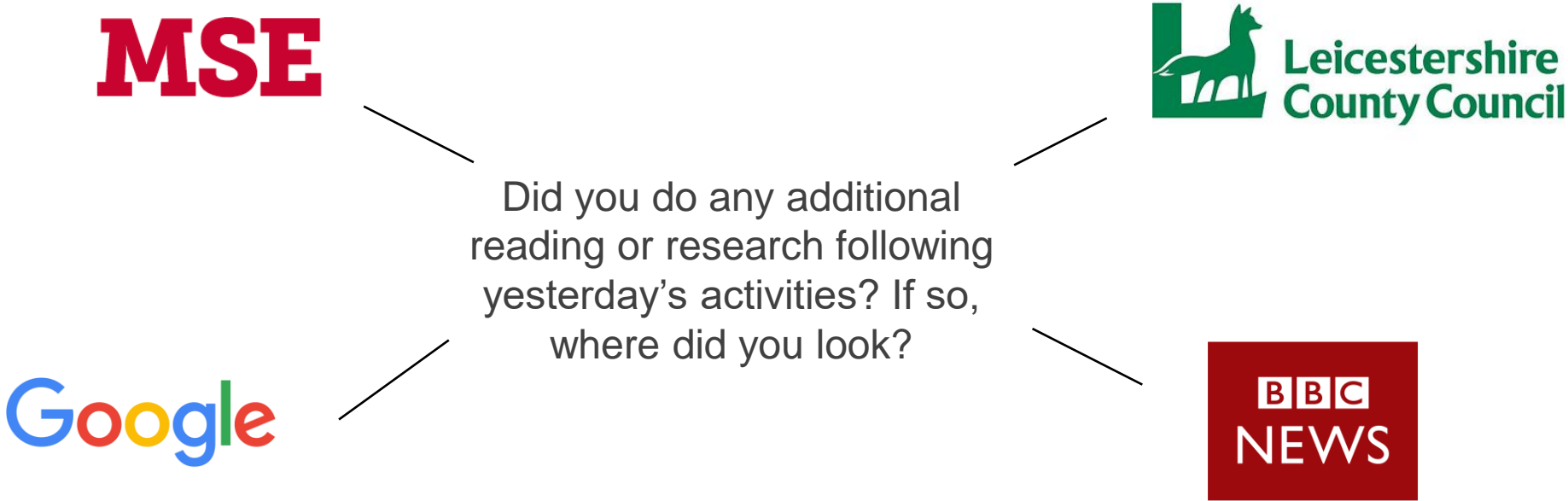
- Some participants also noted that simplifying information about finances might help those within the community understand the situation better.



Current communication aiming to raise awareness of LCC’s financial situation does not appear to ‘cut through’ to residents, with many unaware of the severity of incoming cuts. Consider how to communicate this in future messaging with residents.

When looking for information about the financial shortfall facing LCC, participants looked at MoneySavingExpert, Google and the BBC. While the Leicestershire County Council website was used, it was not the first port of call for many participants

This presents opportunity for LCC to 'own' the information moving forwards.



There is an opportunity for LCC to 'own' information about the Council's financial situation and incoming shortfall. Consider stronger campaigns to raise awareness of the shortfall on the LCC website and become the first port of call for participants looking for information.

Key messages (1)

Awareness

- At present, residents appear to lack clarity about services and which level of local government provides them. Consider improving awareness of this through targeted messages within the areas of confusion, for example a breakdown of funding on posters within bus shelters and/or community centers (as currently, many residents are unaware of which LCC strand funds these).
- Many participants were already somewhat knowledgeable about cuts facing local councils across the UK through local/national news, friends living in other counties, or from the context of the cost-of-living crisis. This means any awareness campaign about LCC's financial situation can build upon this pre-existent knowledge and will not need to start from square one. More could be done, however, to educate participants about the financial issues facing LCC specifically, as many participants taking part in this study were previously unaware of the Council's 'dire' situation.
- Participants were shocked, surprised, angry and scared to learn about the severity of the cuts facing LCC in the coming years. This suggests current messaging about this is not 'cutting through' to residents.

Service prioritisation

- When tasked with reducing services by 20%, those which maintain Leicestershire's landscape and provide cultural opportunities / transport were most depleted by participants, highlighting a perceived lack of importance in comparison to other services. Some of these services are likely to have suffered cuts previously or already receive a relatively lower proportion of funding – it may be worth including this context within future communications to residents so they are fully cognisant that further reductions of these services will be difficult.
- It is evident throughout varying tasks that participants of varying ages, genders and localities believe the care of vulnerable groups (namely children, the elderly, and those with disabilities) is important, and that support should be available for those that need it. Whilst previous efforts to address Leicestershire's funding shortfalls have been successful in protecting services that appear to be important to residents, it may be necessary to inform them that future funding will be significantly lower, and therefore cuts to these 'protected' services will be needed. Rather than simply increased messaging, more targeted messaging may be needed to communicate this message to residents.

Key messages (2)

Individual action

- Landscape-based services, as well as ‘neighbourly’ help (such as supporting more elderly or vulnerable residents) was seen as something the local community could pick up instead of LCC. Consider strengthening awareness of existing community action groups, for example the litter ‘wombles’, to make the most of willing volunteers within Leicestershire.
- To maximise on the goodwill of participants, especially given the cost-of-living crisis, LCC should ensure that opportunities to help the community are available around busy lives, for example through flexible, evening and/or short shifts. This may make it easier for those who want to help but have identified barriers, such as work shifts and childcare responsibilities, to their provision of support within the community.
 - We often see similar barriers reported in other community-based research we undertake. Having more information on the local charities and organisations needing volunteers or more information on the different type of volunteer roles are often key enablers to help residents decide to give up time to help others.

Council Tax

- Around half of participants say their current Council Tax payment is ‘about right’. However, the majority felt a 5% rise would be acceptable.
- When asked whether the Council should reduce services or increase tax as a way of balancing the budget in response to the upcoming shortfall, around half of respondents said LCC should do both. This compromise of ideas could represent a potential step forward for the Council’s financial strategy.

Communicating the shortfall

- For many participants, the main takeaway from this research is that LCC is the lowest funded council in the UK. Consider making this the main focus of future communications as it seems to resonate the most with those living in Leicestershire.
- Only a small minority of participants say the long-term nature of the oncoming shortfall – i.e., that it will affect LCC every year for the next few years – stood out the most strongly to them as a result of this research. Consider making this more of a ‘headline’ piece to ensure residents understand that these impacts are not a ‘one-off’ but will impact LCC in the coming years.
- When looking for information about the shortfall, participants are currently accessing a variety of sources including MoneySavingExpert and the BBC. There is an opportunity for LCC to ‘own’ information about the Council’s financial situation and incoming shortfall. Consider directing residents to your website to become the first ‘port of call’ for those looking for more information on this topic.

This project has been delivered to ISO 9001:2015, 20252:2019 and 27001:2013 standards:

