



Aberdeenshire Council

2010 Residents Survey

Final Report

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SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

OVERALL SATISFACTION

The Council's overall net satisfaction figure has continued to improve significantly over the past two years from +35% to +43%.

There are particularly positive trends in terms of public perceptions of the value for money delivered by the Council with a majority of those that express an opinion now being positive about these issues.

An increasing proportion of Aberdeenshire citizens believe the Council to perform better than other Local Authorities with a majority of those that express an opinion saying that they would be prepared to commend Aberdeenshire Council to other people.

CUSTOMER SERVICE AND COMMUNICATIONS

The Council retains similarly positive ratings to previous surveys with regard to a range of customer service attributes.

There is emerging evidence that both online and telephone delivery are the most commonly preferred methods of transacting a range of types of business with the Council; however, a significant number of people do suggest that a personal visit is their preferred approach to undertaking certain types of business that have an added level of complexity.

Awareness of the Guide to Council Services is high but is much lower for the network of digital screens that the Council has established across Aberdeenshire.

Almost half of people have used the Council's website and it achieves favourable ratings although clearly there is scope for further improvement.

The same is true with regard to Council communications overall in that views are more likely to be positive than negative but a number of people still only rate the Council as "average" at this.

THE COUNCIL'S STRATEGIC PRIORITIES – COMMUNITY WELLBEING

The Council's performance is rated modestly in relation to most Community Wellbeing activities and is rated poorly with regard to anti-social behaviour, housing and misuse of alcohol.

Ratings for issues in relation to towns and villages have not changed significantly since 2008 although slight improvements are apparent in relation to keeping towns and villages clean and tidy and the Council having a clear plan for how communities will develop.

Some positive trends have emerged in relation to community issues, particularly with regard to overall vibrancy, availability of sports and leisure facilities and affordable housing.

Respondents are broadly positive about their overall quality of life.

Universal services relating to Community Wellbeing are generally rated positively; they show a slight improvement in relation to street lighting but also a slight decline in relation to street cleaning.

Specific services that relate to Community Wellbeing are also rated highly, particularly in relation to country parks and burial grounds.

In terms of Council decision making and consultation, ratings have shown a slight improvement regarding the Council genuinely listening to the views of local communities and local individuals having an influence on Council decisions.

THE COUNCIL'S STRATEGIC PRIORITIES – JOBS AND THE ECONOMY

Most dimensions of the Council's performance in relation to the strategic priority for Jobs and the Economy are given modest ratings, with some mixed views in relation to the availability of skills and encouraging new / existing business. Ratings under this heading are poorest for the Council's performance in encouraging the Scottish Government and others to invest in necessary strategic transport links.

Universal services relating to winter gritting/clearing and road maintenance show decline since 2008; this is likely to be due to strain on resources caused by the last winter being particularly severe.

Specific services relating to Jobs and the Economy are rated positively by just over half of respondents, suggesting some scope for improvement.

THE COUNCIL'S STRATEGIC PRIORITIES – LIFELONG LEARNING

The Council's performance in relation to Lifelong Learning is rated positively in relation to accessing computer technology and involving parents in schools. However, performance for other aspects of Lifelong Learning is rated less positively, particularly in relation to meeting the leisure needs of older people.

Satisfaction levels for specific services relating to Lifelong Learning are generally very high, with the exception of education and training for people with disabilities where satisfaction levels are notably lower. Given the generally positive ratings for most services it is reasonable to conclude that those areas where the Council's performance is rated less positively reflect the priority accorded to these issues rather than being a comment on the quality of delivery of those services that are available currently.

THE COUNCIL'S STRATEGIC PRIORITIES – SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT

The majority of respondents rate recycling services positively. However, other aspects of Sustainable Environment are rated less positively, particularly in relation to sustainable travel methods and effective land use planning where 'poor' or 'very poor' ratings are highest.

Universal services relating to sustainable environment are generally rated positively with refuse collection showing significant improvement since 2008.

SATISFACTION WITH COUNCIL SERVICES

In terms of universal services, ratings for street lighting and refuse collection have shown improvement since 2008, whilst other services have shown a slight decline. Services not covered in previous surveys such as recycling and maintenance of open spaces are given high ratings, although dog fouling/wardens is a service where ratings are poor in comparison to these other service areas.

Generally, specific services are given high ratings by respondents. However, slightly lower ratings are accorded to training and employment initiatives, planning and building control and support to local businesses. In some cases, these lower ratings may reflect the outcomes that people achieve (which will not always be in the direct control of the Council) rather than any issues relating to the actual quality of delivery of that service.

FUTURE PRIORITIES

The Residents' Survey provides an initial overview of public perceptions on budget priorities. However, it should ideally be complemented by a more in-depth and considered review of these issues, reflecting the need for a detailed prioritisation of service areas that people would wish to see protected.

Respondents place priority on the protection of "core" universal services as well as services related to the protection of vulnerable people and schools. Specific services they nominate as being most important to protect include roads maintenance, refuse collection and winter gritting/snow clearing, as well as child protection.

The services most likely to be perceived as least important to protect are usually services used only by specific groups of individuals with particular examples including museums and arts, trading standards and support to local businesses.

Users of particular services are much more likely than the population as a whole to see these services as priorities for protection and this is particularly so for services such as before and after school care, schools, education and training for people with disabilities, council housing services and youth clubs and services.

A majority of respondents that express an opinion believe it is reasonable for the Council to introduce new charges or increase existing charges if it helps to protect other services but a significant minority of people disagree with this. There is a common view that charges should reflect ability to pay and that wider social benefits of services should be taken into account before applying increased charges.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the above, conclusions have been set out under five headings:

- Communications
- Customer Services
- Strategic Priorities
- Satisfaction with the Council
- Future Priorities.

A range of tactical and strategic recommendations then follow on from these conclusions.

1.0 BACKGROUND, OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

BACKGROUND

- 1.1 This 2010 Residents survey is the sixth full-scale survey of residents' views which Aberdeenshire Council has undertaken since 2000 (such surveys have now been undertaken in 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008 and 2010). Specific in-depth items of research have also been conducted in the intervening years (2001, 2003, 2005, 2007 and 2009). The survey repeats a number of questions from the previous surveys, to allow for tracking of changes in perceptions over time. In some cases, it is possible to track changes back to the 2000 survey. However, in most cases we have presented trend information back to 2004 for ease of reference.
- 1.2 Until 2008, the survey questionnaire had evolved over time, with only fairly modest changes being made. However, for 2010 much more substantial changes were made both to capture information on perceived achievement of the Council's strategic priorities and to capture new information on budget priorities and charging issues. The resultant questionnaire was more comprehensive in nature but also more challenging to complete.
- 1.3 The original broad aims and objectives of the 2010 Residents' Survey were:
- To identify issues of importance to Aberdeenshire residents.
 - To determine perceptions of the Council's performance against these priorities.
 - To track changes in residents' perception over time.
 - To provide an overall "headline" measure of public satisfaction.
 - To consider residents' priorities for the future, with particular reference to future budget priorities.
 - To assist the process of setting goals, and planning actions, for future improvement.

These broad aims were pursued in the first instance through the large scale postal survey as described below. An additional element of the survey for 2010 was a survey of young people, which included both an online response option (which school pupils were encouraged to complete) and self-completion surveys completed by young people engaging with the Council's youth services. In many cases the results of these two surveys have been merged to provide an overall view although there were also a number of questions asked in only one or other of the surveys.

- 1.4 It should be noted that separate area reports are to be produced and disseminated for each of the administrative areas. A separate "equalities report" is also to be prepared, addressing any differences in response across key equalities groups; in addition, a specific report on the findings of the young person's survey will be made available.

- 1.5 The purpose of the survey is to inform a variety of planning and decision making processes within the Council; the results are therefore of more than academic interest. Throughout the research process, the involvement of the Residents and Employee Survey Team (REST) has been crucial in ensuring the relevance of the survey to these decision making processes.

The focus is one of continuous improvement. The survey is designed to identify areas of priority for residents and to gauge their views on the Council's current performance in these areas and how such performance could be improved.

It is important to recognise that the results are based on **perceptions** rather than empirical evidence of actual service performance. It is recognised that these perceptions are formed both from actual experience of the service and also from wider communications, including word of mouth. Satisfaction with particular aspects of Council service is also influenced by changing **expectations** of service delivery (both in the public and private sectors) in addition to the effectiveness and efficiency of actual service delivery.

It is recommended that the results are considered by the full Council and also by the Strategic Management Team. Individual Services should consider the implications for their own Service, as should established groups that are working on "cross-cutting" issues. Clearly, it is also important that the results be widely and effectively disseminated throughout the organisation. Mechanisms for widespread dissemination of the survey results should be put in place, involving for example, articles in SQ (Shire Quarterly), a Core Brief item and appropriate local press coverage.

- 1.6 The survey questionnaires were devised in partnership with REST. They build on questions asked in previous surveys whilst also asking a deeper and more searching set of questions than previously regarding the achievement of the Council's strategic objectives, budget priorities and options for charging for services. The questionnaire is set out in Appendix 1.

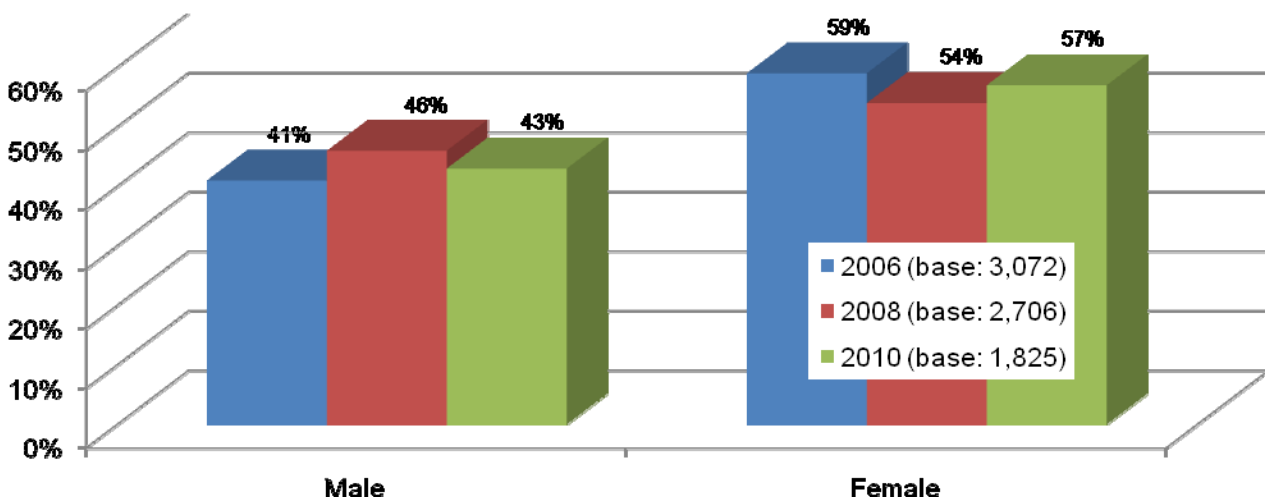
SURVEY RESPONSE

- 1.7 The "main" survey was conducted on a postal basis, with a total of 12,000 invitations being issued, at random, to households in Aberdeenshire, selected to be representative of the population in the Council's six administrative areas. This approach was similar to that undertaken in previous years. The fieldwork period covered late-May and June 2010.
- 1.8 A total of 1,799 responses were received for this survey including 1,780 postal and 19 online responses. This represents a response rate of approximately 15%. This is within the anticipated range of response rates for surveys of this nature which IBP would normally cite at between 10% and 20%. It is, however, lower than response rates achieved for the Council's previous residents' surveys, which ranged between 19% and 26% between 2002 and 2008. The main variable to have changed is the questionnaire content. A number of blank questionnaires were returned leaving 1,734 usable questionnaires.

- 1.9 There were a total of 161 responses to the young person’s survey including 107 hard copy and 54 online responses. Taken together with the main survey, the total sample size is therefore 1,895.
- 1.10 For illustrative purposes, a randomly selected sample of 1,895 people provides a level of accuracy of +/- 2.24% for the Aberdeenshire population as a whole, which compares to a confidence interval of +/- 1.86% for the 2008 survey. The response numbers are therefore large enough for us to have an acceptable level of confidence in the findings. Even at an administrative area level, a sample size of 300 still provides data accurate to +/- 5.62%, which compares reasonably well to the figure of +/- 4.57% for a sample size of 450 (which is more typical of previous surveys).
- 1.11 It is, however, important to consider the profile of the achieved sample in considering the comparability of the 2010 data to the previous surveys.

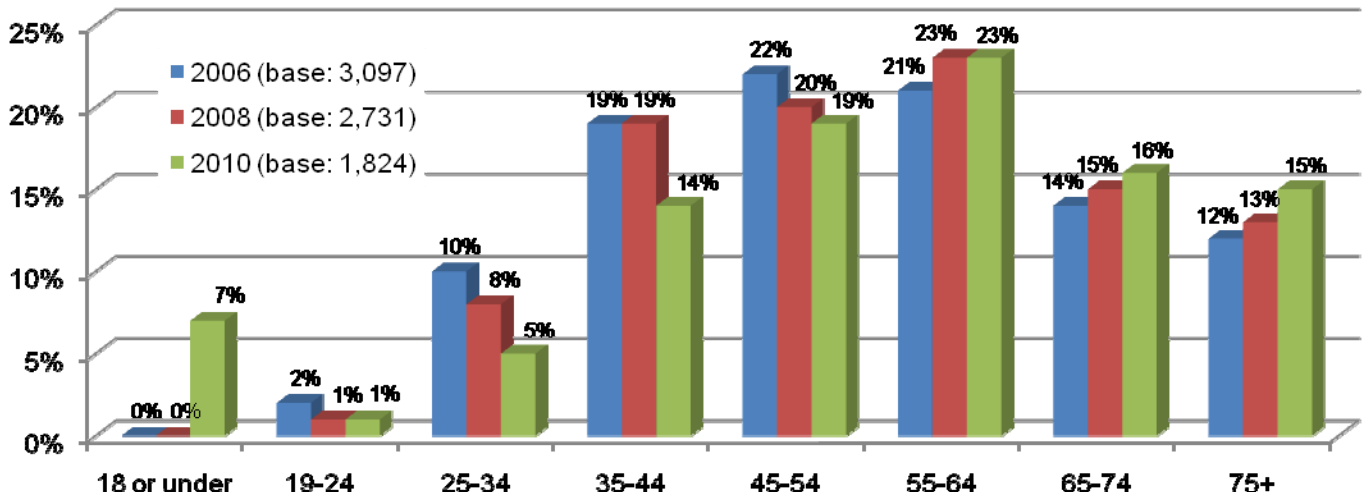
Figure 1.1 below illustrates that respondents were more likely to be female than male. This has been the pattern of previous surveys. It is worth noting at this point that, throughout the report, numbers may not add to 100% due to the effects of rounding.

Figure 1.1: Profile of Respondents (Gender)



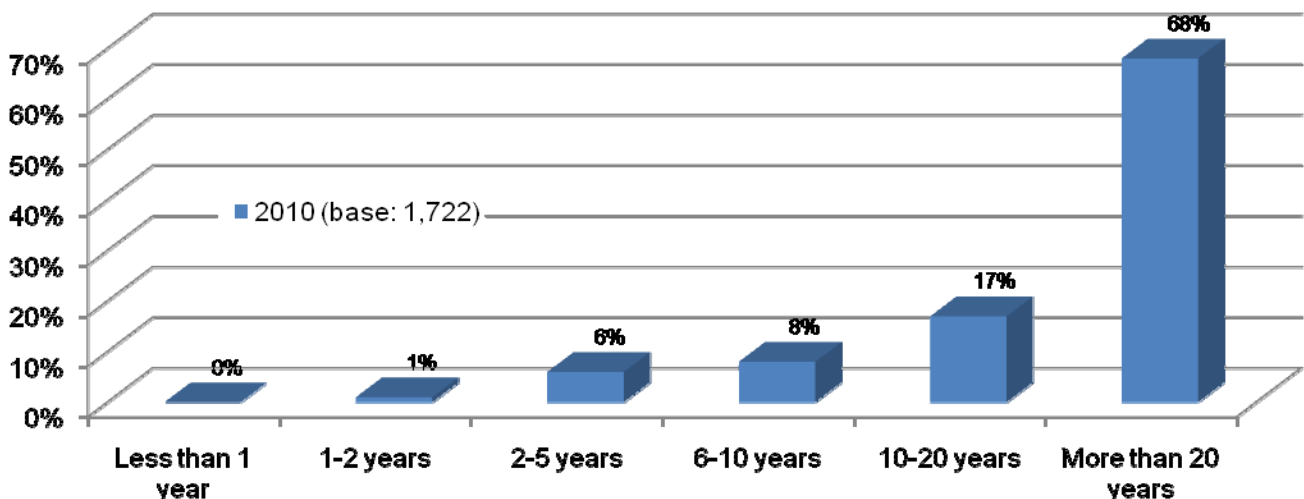
- 1.12 Due to the addition of the young person’s survey, the age profile of the survey has changed somewhat, with the addition of a significant number of responses from young people. There are fewer responses proportionately from the 25-44 age groups and more responses from older people. However, weighting of the data by age shows no material change in the key survey results.

Figure 1.2: Profile of Respondents (Age)



1.13 Most survey respondents have lived in Aberdeenshire for some period of time as shown in Figure 1.3 below (it should be noted that most descriptive questions were not asked of young people so some aspects of the sample profile are based on the results of the main survey only).

Figure 1.3: Profile of Respondents (Time Lived in Aberdeenshire)



1.14 The profile of responses by employment status is set out in Table 1.1 below:

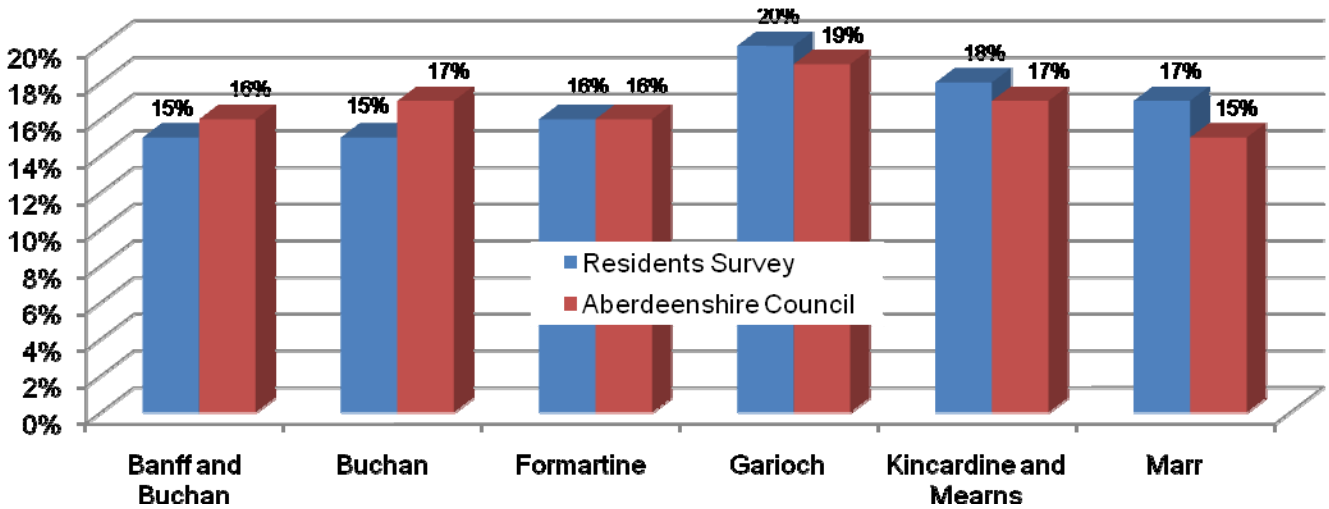
Table 1.1: Employment Status

Employment Status	2008	2010
Employee	48%	39%
Self-employed	7%	9%
Government employment and training programme	0%	1%
Unpaid family worker	-	1%
Other employment	1%	1%
Unemployed	1%	1%
Student	1%	0%
Looking after family home	5%	3%
Temporarily sick or injured	-	1%
Long-term sick or disabled	4%	4%
Waiting results of job application	-	0%
No jobs available	-	-
Not yet started looking	-	0%
Do not need or want employment	-	1%
Retired from paid work	33%	35%
Other	1%	2%
Not answered	0%	3%
Base:	2,737	1,734

This shows a slight reduction in the proportion of the sample who were employed although again this distinction does not make any material change to the overall results.

1.15 As in previous surveys, the six administrative area profiles match closely the profile of the area of the Council as a whole. The overall results have been weighted by area in line with previous practice although this again makes no appreciable difference to the overall results.

Figure 1.4: Profile of Respondents (Area)



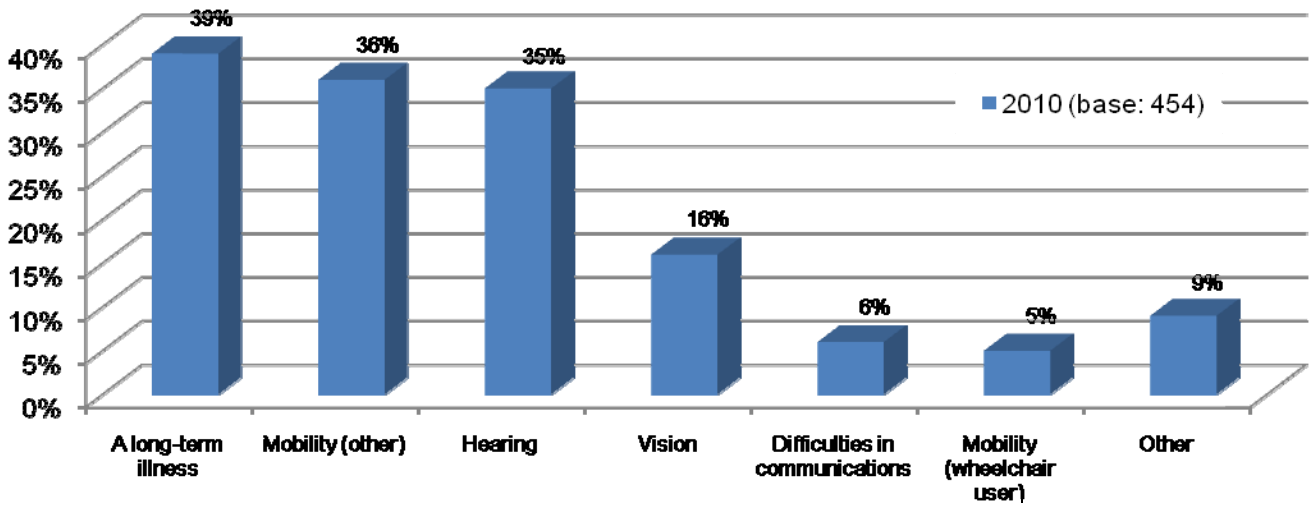
Base: 1,700¹

1.16 75% of the sample from the main survey described themselves as being of Scottish ethnicity whilst 12% said English. A further 8% described themselves as British. 3% of people did not answer this question with the remaining 2% of responses being from people of various ethnicities.

¹ A small number of respondents eradicated the code number on the questionnaire that allows us to identify their location.

1.17 26% of the sample consider themselves to have a disability, with the profile of such disabilities being as shown below:

Figure 1.5: Profile of Respondents (Disability)



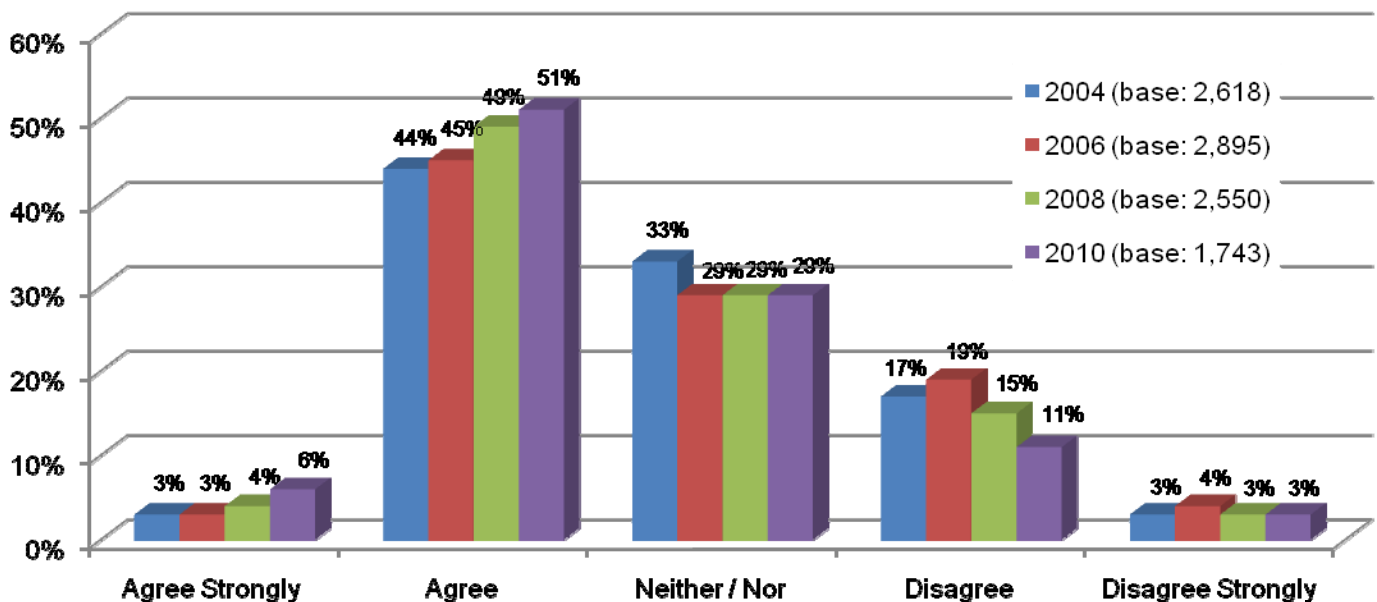
2.0 OVERALL SATISFACTION

2.1 This section sets out patterns of overall satisfaction with Aberdeenshire Council, as identified by the quantitative survey.

A “headline” picture of overall satisfaction comes from levels of agreement with the statement “*I am satisfied with Aberdeenshire Council as a provider of local services*”. Agreement with this statement was explored in both strands of the survey.

The pattern in responses to this question is positive and improving as illustrated in Figure 2.1 below.²

Figure 2.1: Overall Satisfaction



The proportion of those that express an opinion who agree that they are satisfied with the Council as a provider of local services has increased from 53% to 57% and, conversely, the proportion of those who expressly disagree that they are satisfied has declined from 18% to 14%.

2.2 Figure 2.2 over the page profiles the trend in relation to net satisfaction with the Council as a service provider, based on the above statement.

² Within many of the graphs in this report, “net agreement” figures will be given. That is to say, the figure quoted is the % agreeing with a statement (or expressing satisfaction) less those disagreeing (or expressing dissatisfaction). This allows for agreement and disagreement levels to be taken into account in a single figure, thus allowing for large amounts of data to be summarised easily.

Figure 2.2: Overall Net Satisfaction

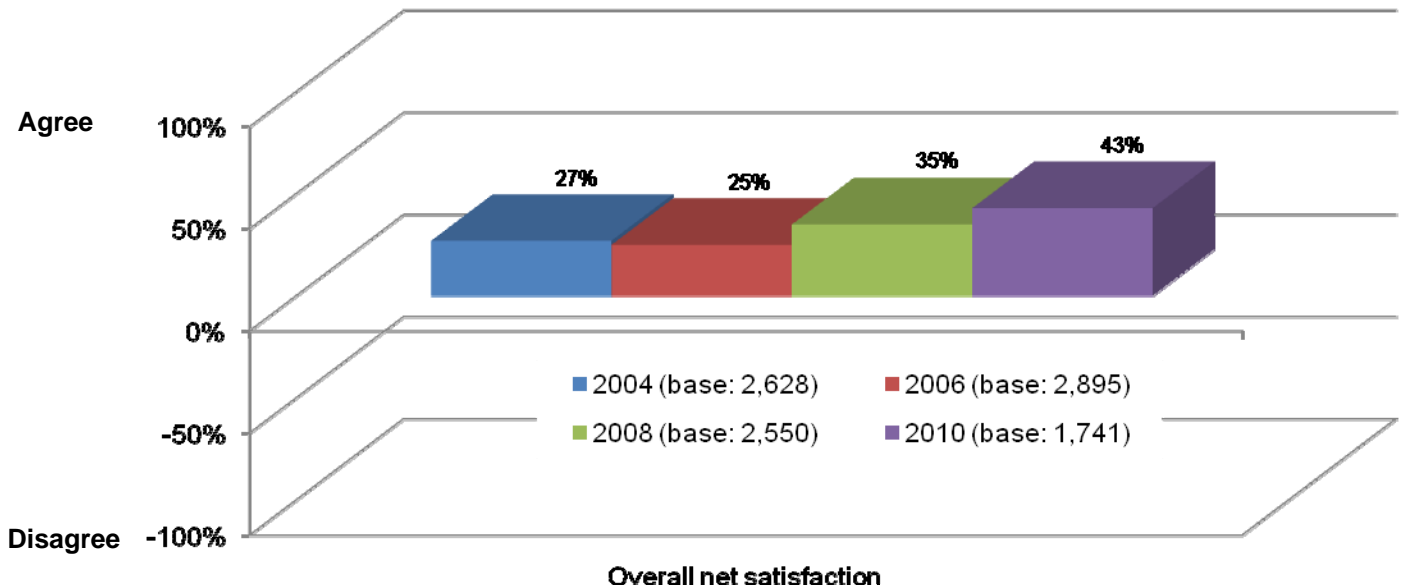
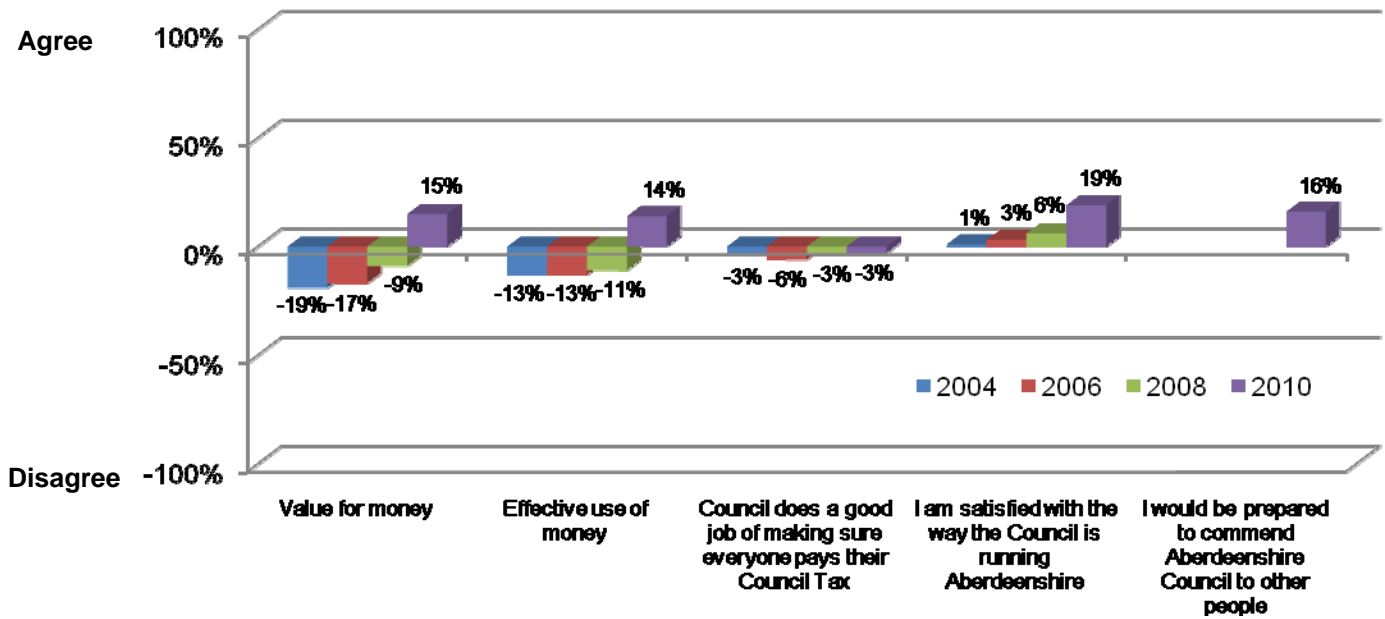


Figure 2.2 demonstrates a net agreement of +43% in 2010 compared to +27% in 2004 and + 25% for 2006. Until 2004, the findings for this question in the Residents Survey mirrored a long term decline in satisfaction with services provided by Scottish Local Authorities. This pattern was reversed in 2004 although the 2006 figures showed a very modest decline in net satisfaction. The continuation of a significant upwards trend is clearly a very positive finding.

2.3 The overall views of the Aberdeenshire population were explored by reference to a number of attitudinal statements. As can be seen in Figure 2.3, a significant overall upwards trend is evident over the past two years, particularly in relation to how the Council is perceived to be making efficient use of the resources available to it.

Figure 2.3: Overall Views on Key Issues

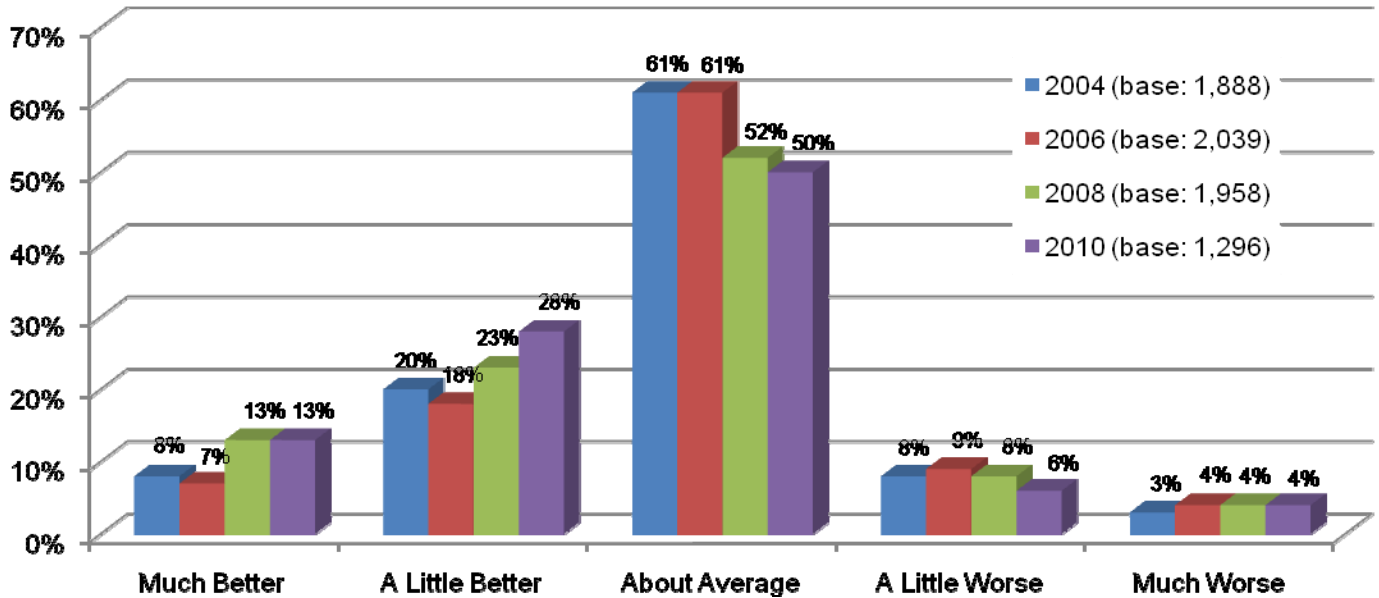


2.4 The improvement in overall satisfaction with the Council is also reflected in responses to the question as to how Aberdeenshire residents perceive the Council in relation to other Councils.

The 2004 results for this showed a net positive view of the Council³ of +17% and this declined to +12% in 2006. However, since then this figure has improved significantly to +31%.

³ That is to say, the proportion that considers the Council to be better than other Councils less the proportion that considers it to be worse.

Figure 2.4: Overall Views (Compared to Other Councils)



SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

The Council's overall net satisfaction figure has continued to improve significantly over the past two years from +35% to +43%.

There are particularly positive trends in terms of public perceptions of the value for money delivered by the Council with a majority of those that express an opinion now being positive about these issues.

An increasing proportion of Aberdeenshire citizens believe the Council to perform better than other Local Authorities with a majority of those that express an opinion saying that they would be prepared to commend Aberdeenshire Council to other people.

3.0 CUSTOMER SERVICE AND COMMUNICATIONS

3.1 12% of respondents to the main survey do not remember ever having been in contact with the Council and these are excluded from the figures below, which profile reasons for the most recent contact with the Council.

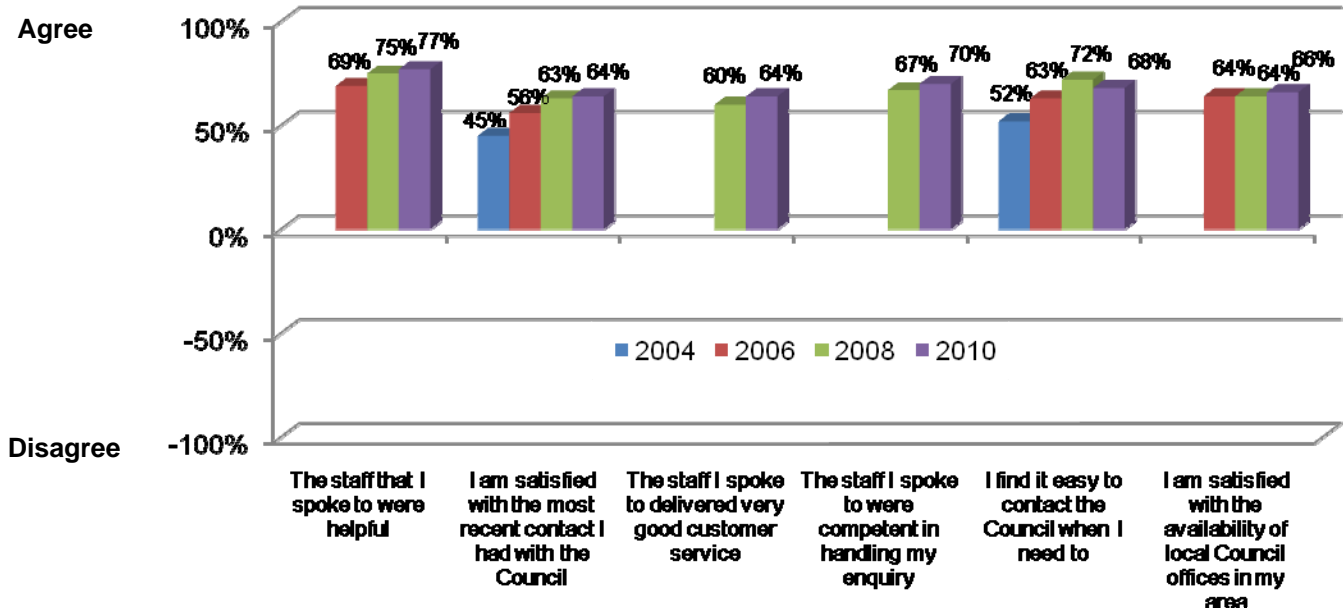
Table 3.1: Reason for Most Recent Contact

Reason for Contact	2008	2010
To make a payment	16%	18%
To request a Council service	18%	15%
To make an application for something	5%	13%
To report a problem	10%	13%
To get information or advice about a Council service	17%	11%
In response to a communication from the Council	7%	6%
To make a complaint about a Council service	7%	4%
To get more general information or advice	9%	4%
To make a complaint about something else	3%	3%
On a business-related matter	4%	2%
For another reason	12%	11%
Base:	2,538	1,434

Amongst respondents to the young person's survey, the most common contacts with Aberdeenshire Council (other than school) were: going to a youth club or similar (71%); using a Council Community Centre (60%); using Council libraries, museums or arts venues (58%); using a Country Park (55%) and using Council sports facilities (49%).

3.2 Figure 3.1 on the following page profiles net agreement with a number of statements concerning how such contacts have been managed and suggest that the Council has maintained its generally positive ratings with respect to these issues (although the very slight reduction in perceived ease of contact with the Council should be noted). There are varying base numbers of responses to these questions, which are detailed in the appendices.

Figure 3.1: Agreement with Attitudinal Statements

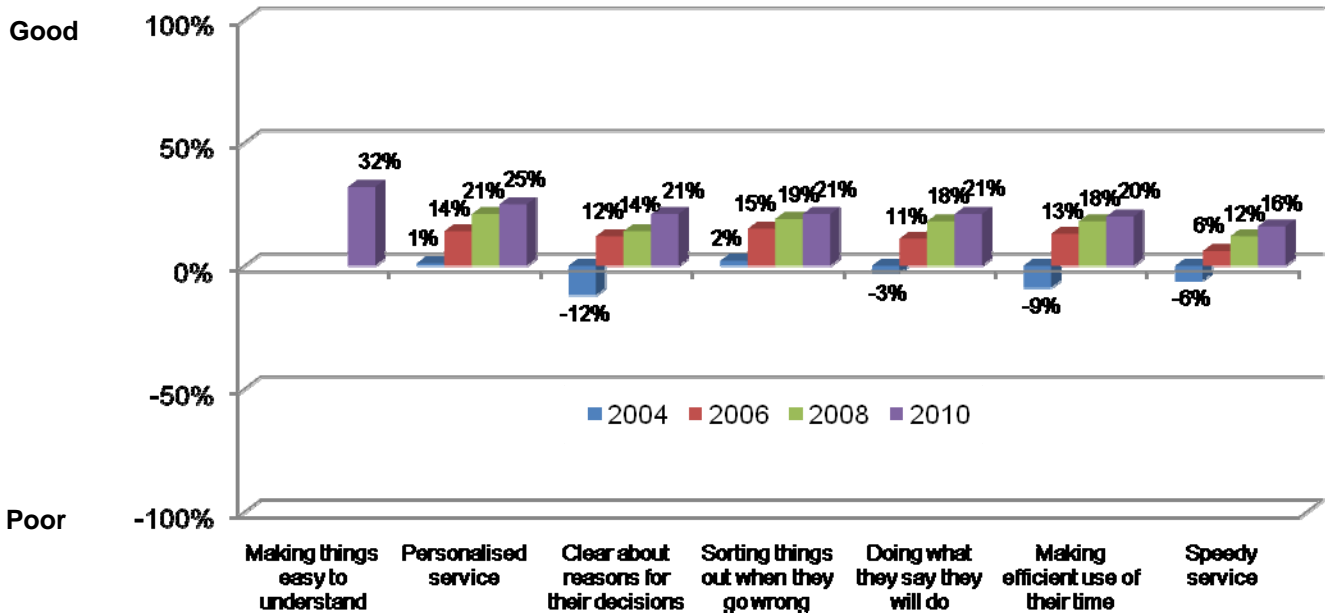


3.3 The continued positive situation is reflected in ratings for a range of service attributes, which are set out in Figures 3.2(a) and (b) below (again, full base numbers are set out in the appendices).

Figure 3.2(a): Customer Service and Contact Management



Figure 3.2(b): Customer Service and Contact Management



3.4 The 2010 survey profiled preferred methods of contacting the Council for a range of services, as illustrated below:

Table 3.2: Preferred Methods of Contact

Service	Post	Personal visit to Central Office of Service Point	Telephone	Electronic methods (such as email or internet)	Other
Apply for a Council house and track your position on the waiting list	9%	31%	25%	33%	2%
Apply for Council Tax Benefit and / or Housing Benefit	15%	35%	24%	24%	2%
Arrange and / or pay for a bulky uplift	1%	10%	64%	24%	1%
Book and pay for a leisure activity	5%	18%	39%	36%	1%
Book and / or pay for an evening class	4%	19%	35%	41%	1%
Book and / or pay for school-based activities	7%	20%	26%	43%	4%
Inform the Council of a change of address	19%	12%	32%	37%	1%
Pay a parking fine	30%	19%	11%	38%	2%
Pay your Council Tax	8%	20%	5%	41%	25%
Report a housing repair	2%	15%	57%	23%	2%
Report an incident of anti-social behaviour	2%	14%	65%	17%	1%
Report and track a road or street light fault	1%	7%	61%	30%	1%
Submit a social work assessment form	20%	26%	24%	29%	2%
Submit and / or pay for a planning application	25%	30%	9%	34%	1%

It is interesting to note the range of preferences cited for these contact channels and, in particular, the preference for electronic methods that exists (the most preferred option in 8 of these 14 scenarios).

There are also a number of examples where telephone contact is clearly the preferred option (for example, in relation to reporting of housing repairs and instances of anti-social behaviour as well as transactions such as the arrangement of bulky uplifts and reporting of certain faults). It seems likely that such examples require a degree of two way contact and reassurance that residents best feel comes from some element of human contact.

Personal face-to-face contact is most likely to be preferred when there is a particular degree of complexity and/or requirement for advice, such as when people are making applications (in these examples, for a Council House or for Benefits).

- 3.5 The 2010 survey asked how residents currently contacted the Council and went on to ask their preferred method of contact as set out below:

Table 3.3: Reason for Most Recent Contact

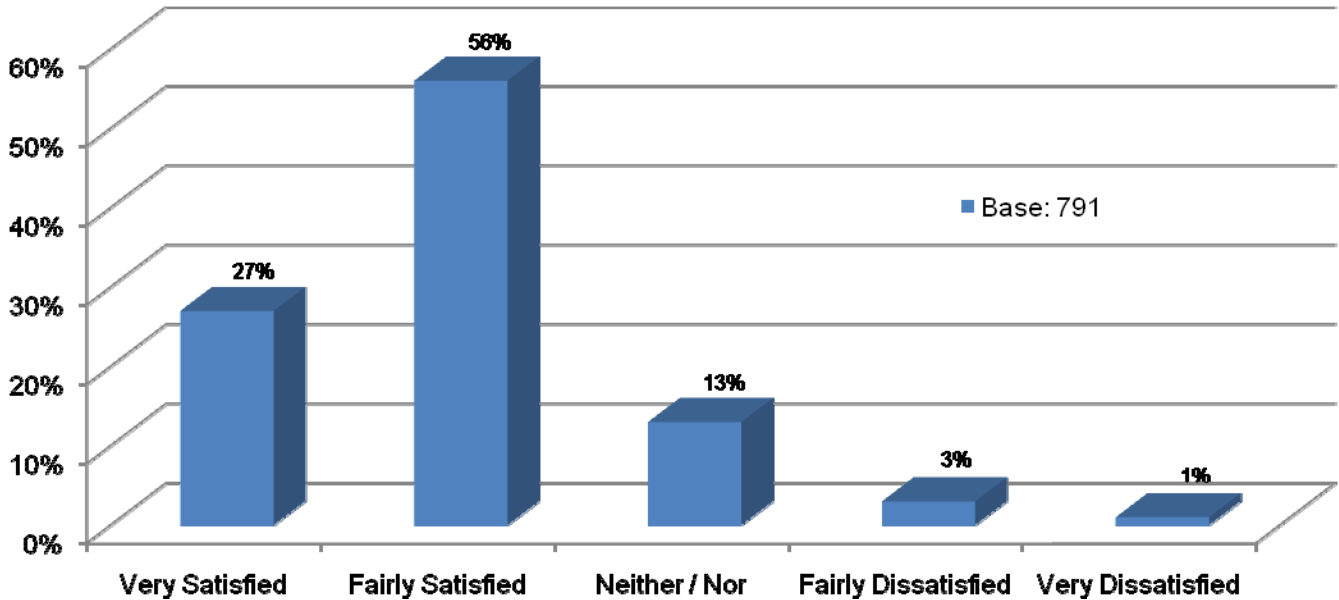
Method of Contact	Current	Preferred
Through the Council's website	38%	37%
Through Young Scot website (only asked in Young Persons' Survey)	N/A	4%
Through the Council Tax mailing	45%	35%
Leaflets, posters or newspapers provided directly by the Council	52%	47%
From direct mailings	29%	38%
From pages of information contained in the local newspaper	49%	38%
Local Councillors	7%	12%
Community Councils, community groups or tenants' groups	9%	11%
Word of mouth	33%	12%
Text messaging	1%	5%
Through social networking sites	<1%	6%
Other	1%	2%
Base:	1,678⁴	1,820

The current and preferred methods broadly matched one another although people would like to see more information through direct mailing and less through word of mouth.

- 3.6 48% of respondents said they had previously used Council offices (the figure in 2008 was 47%). A reasonably high level of satisfaction with offices was apparent as shown in Figure 3.3 on the following page.

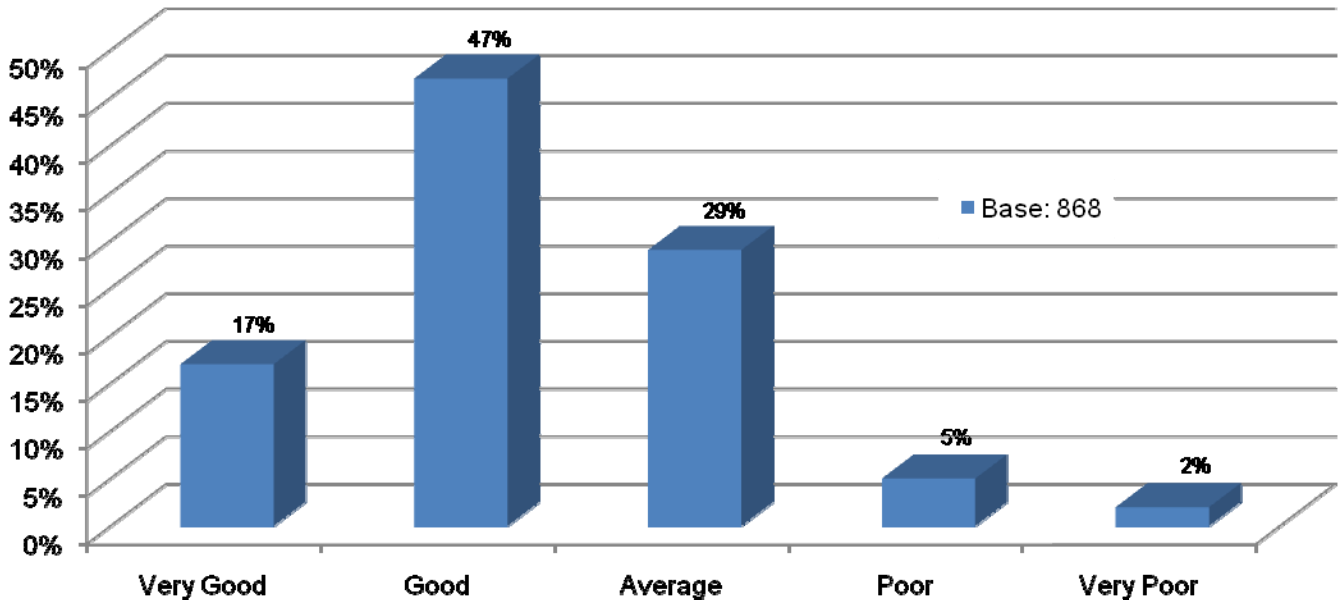
⁴ Young people were not asked this question for reasons of space.

Figure 3.3: Satisfaction with Council Offices



- 3.7 65% of those who answered the question said that they had seen the Council's Guide to Council Services, which was issued in 2010 with Council Tax demands. Of these, 81% say that they have a copy available to them and 90% of those who express an opinion believe it to be a useful publication. These are clearly very positive results.
- 3.8 However, only 18% (319 respondents) were aware of the network of digital screens that have been located in a range of libraries, community centres and supermarkets. Of these respondents, 77% said that they had seen the screens and 67% of those who had done so considered them to be useful.
- 3.9 47% of respondents had used the Council's website and expressed an opinion about it. These views are summarised on the following page.

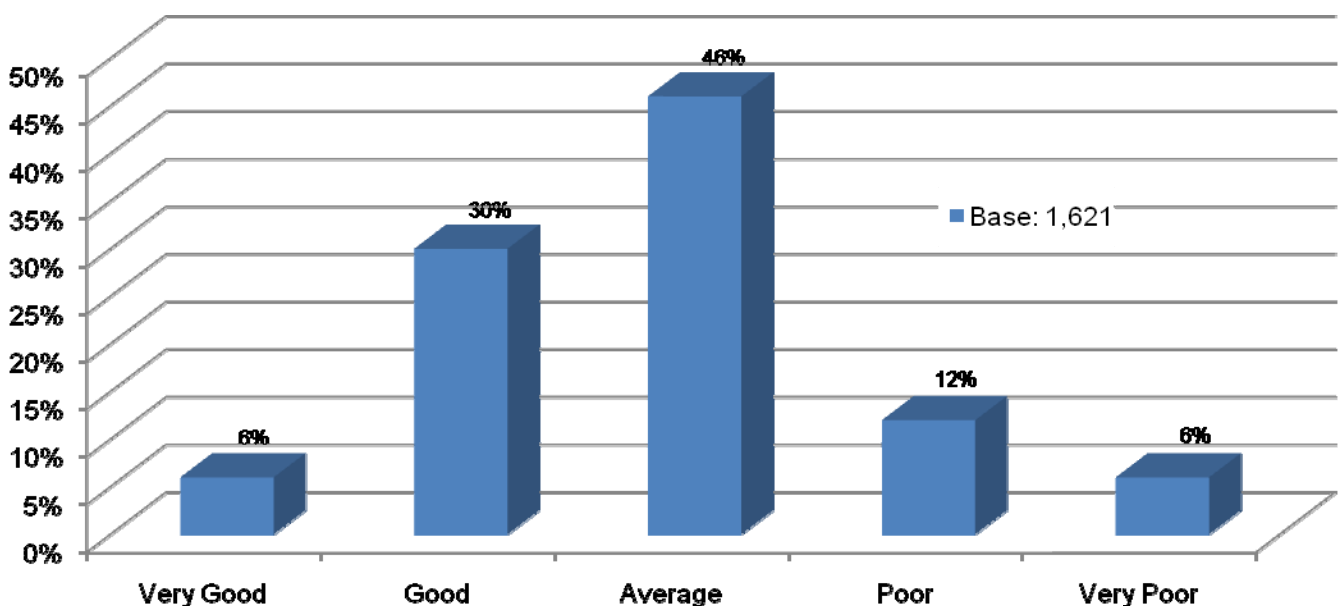
Figure 3.4: Experience of Using Council Website



Whilst ratings are clearly positive there does remain scope for further improvement.

- 3.10 Overall, more people express a positive view than a negative view when asked to rate the Council’s overall communications. However, the proportion of people expressing a neutral (and even negative) view suggests scope for continued improvement.

Figure 3.5: Council’s Overall Communications



SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

The Council retains similarly positive ratings to previous surveys with regard to a range of customer service attributes.

There is emerging evidence that both online and telephone delivery are the most commonly preferred methods of transacting a range of types of business with the Council; however, a significant number of people do suggest that a personal visit is their preferred approach to undertaking certain types of business that have an added level of complexity.

Awareness of the Guide to Council Services is high but is much lower for the network of digital screens that the Council has established across Aberdeenshire.

Almost half of people have used the Council's website and it achieves favourable ratings although clearly there is scope for further improvement.

The same is true with regard to Council communications overall in that views are more likely to be positive than negative but a number of people still only rate the Council as "average" at this.

4.0 THE COUNCIL'S STRATEGIC PRIORITIES – COMMUNITY WELLBEING

4.1 The 2010 survey asked residents how well they perceived the Council to be achieving its strategic priorities. These are set out in a number of themes:

- Community Wellbeing
- Jobs and the Economy
- Lifelong Learning
- Sustainable Environment.

Chapters 4 to 7 detail the results of responses in relation to each of these strategic priorities. It is important in considering all of these findings to recognise that they are based on residents' perceptions and not on specific empirical evidence of service performance or outputs. In many cases, it is also the case that, although the issue concerned is a declared strategic priority for the Council, it is one that is pursued in partnership with others. The findings do, however, provide a robust baseline in relation to how the Council is perceived to be performing in relation to the delivery of these various strategic priorities.

4.2 The Council's strategic priority in relation to Community Wellbeing was described thus in the questionnaire:

“The Council is committed to working with its partners to ensure that people in Aberdeenshire feel safe, live in good quality affordable housing, located in thriving communities and have access to resources and services which encourage and support healthy and productive lifestyles. The Council is committed to ensuring that individuals, families and communities are actively involved in Council decisions and to ensuring that vulnerable people receive care and support to enhance the quality of their lives.”

4.3 Respondents were asked to rate the Council's performance in relation to a range of issues. In the first instance we have tabulated responses to these questions in Table 4.1, setting out the results in detail, including “don't know” responses (the small number of people who did not answer the question are excluded and base numbers therefore vary for each question and are set out in full in the appendices):

Table 4.1: Detailed Rating of Community Wellbeing Performance

	Very Good	Good	Neither / Nor	Poor	Very Poor	Don't Know
Improving road safety	3%	24%	21%	20%	7%	26%
Tackling anti-social behaviour	1%	12%	17%	20%	7%	43%
Tackling issues caused by the misuse of alcohol or other drugs	1%	10%	16%	19%	7%	46%
Ensuring child protection measures are in place to protect vulnerable children	2%	17%	13%	5%	2%	60%
Ensuring the needs of vulnerable adults are met	2%	19%	13%	8%	3%	56%
Ensuring a wide enough range of housing choices	0%	8%	12%	14%	5%	60%
Ensuring that the Council's housing stock is of an appropriate standard	1%	11%	11%	8%	4%	66%
Ensuring that the needs of homeless people are met	2%	9%	12%	7%	4%	66%
Regenerating priority areas	1%	8%	16%	10%	4%	62%
Integrating migrant workers and ethnic minority groups into Aberdeenshire's communities	3%	11%	12%	4%	2%	68%
Providing recreational opportunities in well maintained public spaces	3%	28%	19%	16%	6%	29%

It is worth noting, in the first instance, that there is a very high level of “don’t know” response for many of these questions. The questionnaire included the following specific statement:

“In some cases, you may feel that you do not have enough information to comments. If so, please tick “don’t know””.

The generally high level of “don’t know” responses reflects the specific nature of these priorities (and the client groups and service users concerned) with many people not feeling able to express an opinion; in some cases, it is therefore perfectly reasonable for individuals to give such a response. In other cases, however, the Council may wish to consider the need for enhanced communication by services as to how they are addressing the Council’s strategic priorities.

- 4.4 These issues are analysed further in Figures 4.1(a) and (b), which summarises the findings **amongst those who gave a response** (base numbers therefore vary and are set out in full in the appendices; numbers do not add to 100 due to “neither / nor” responses):

Figure 4.1(a): Rating of Community Wellbeing Activities

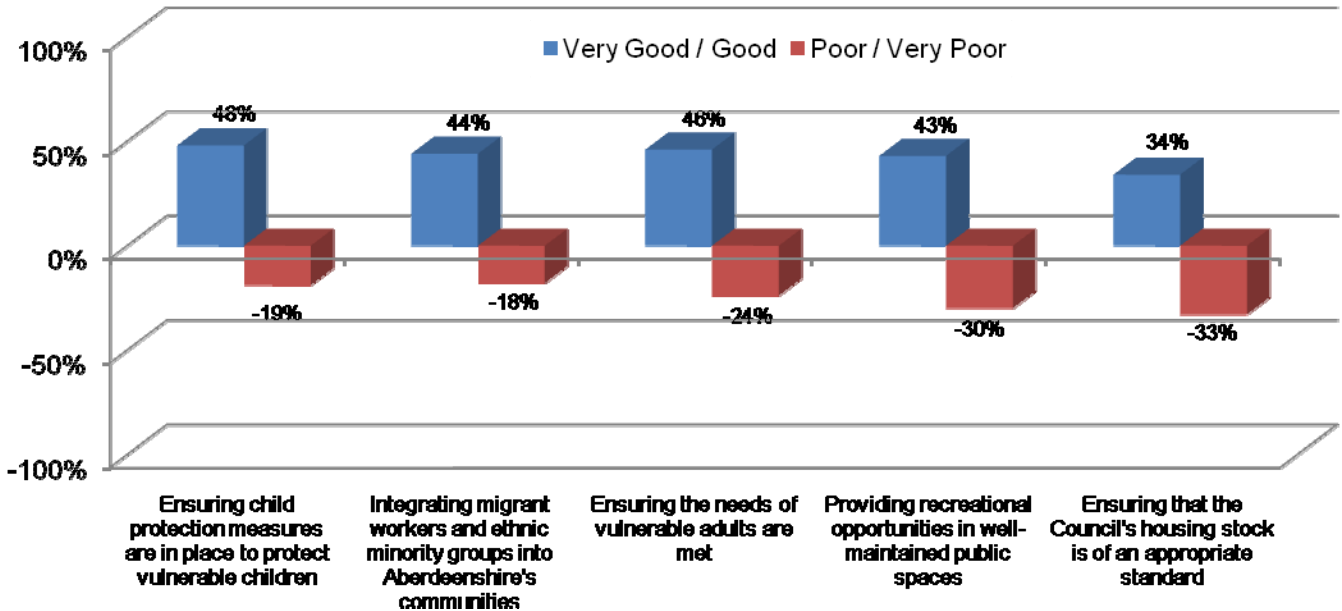
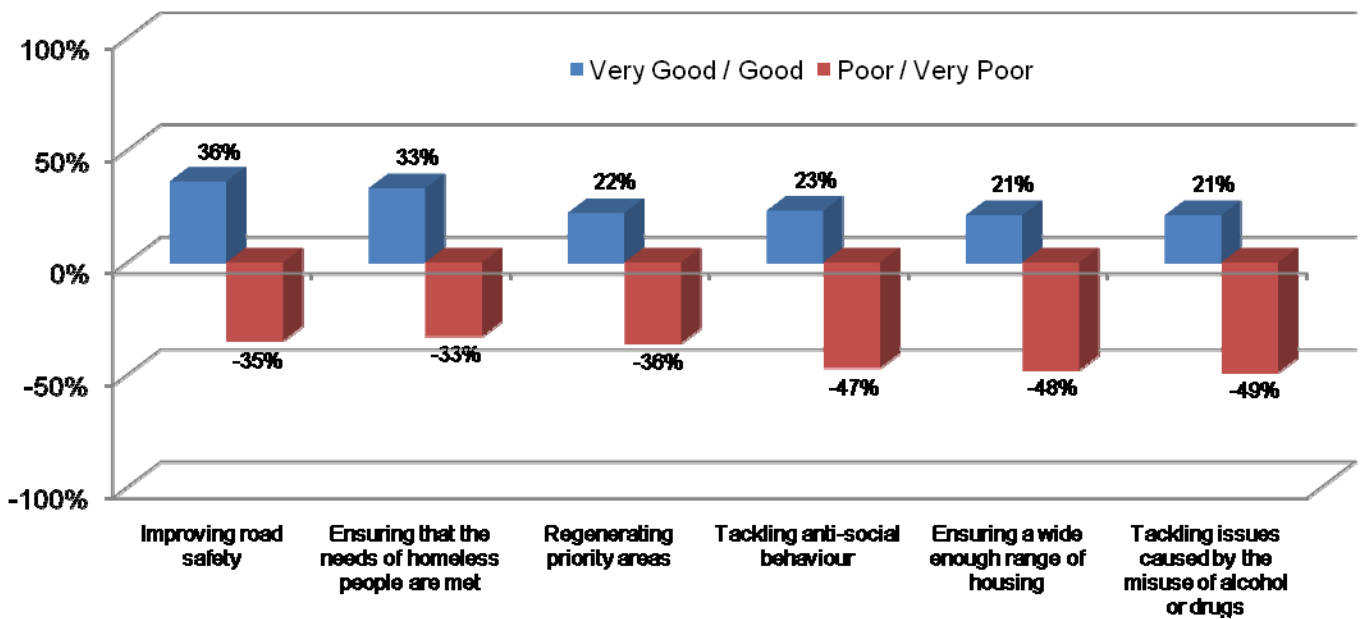


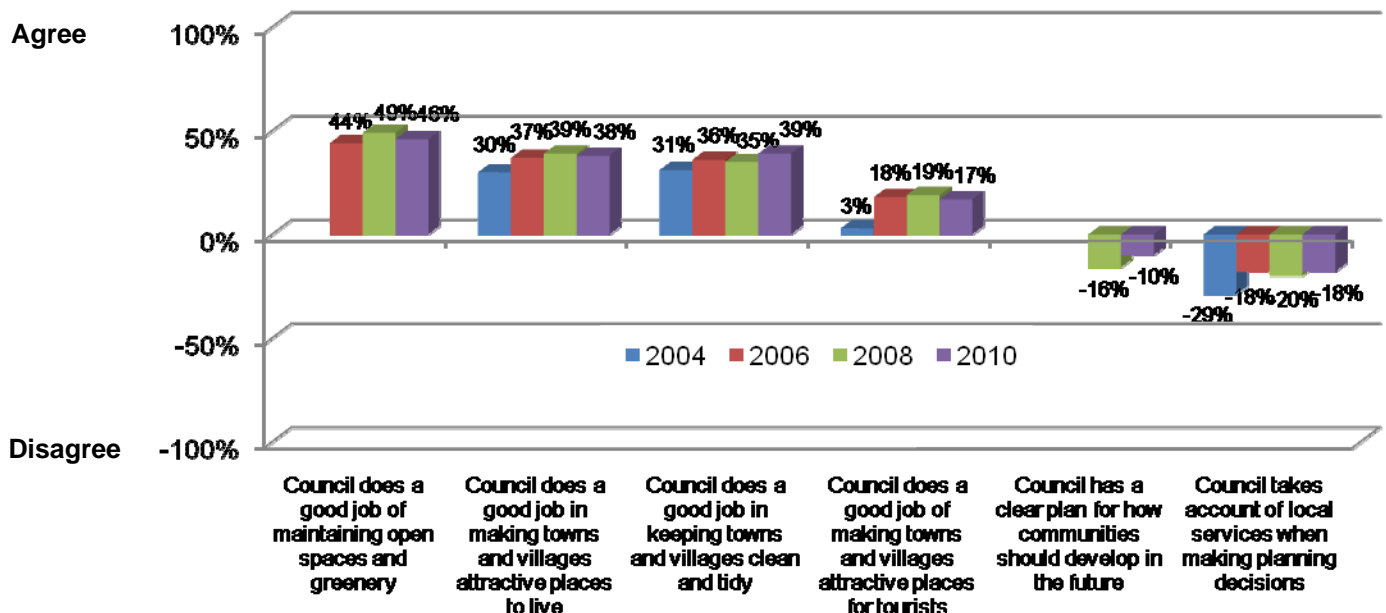
Figure 4.1(b): Rating of Community Wellbeing Activities



Despite the positive trends in overall satisfaction with the Council that were discussed in Section 2 of this report, these “new” questions highlight the distance that the Council has yet to travel with regard to a number of areas. Anti-social behaviour, housing and misuse of alcohol and drugs are particularly notable as areas where a significant number of people rate the Council’s performance thus far as being poor, highlighting the need for continued efforts in these areas.

4.5 The strength of agreement / disagreement with a number of issues concerning Aberdeenshire’s towns and villages is set out below. There is little difference in views apparent between 2008 and 2010 (bases for these questions vary).

Figure 4.2: Towns and Villages

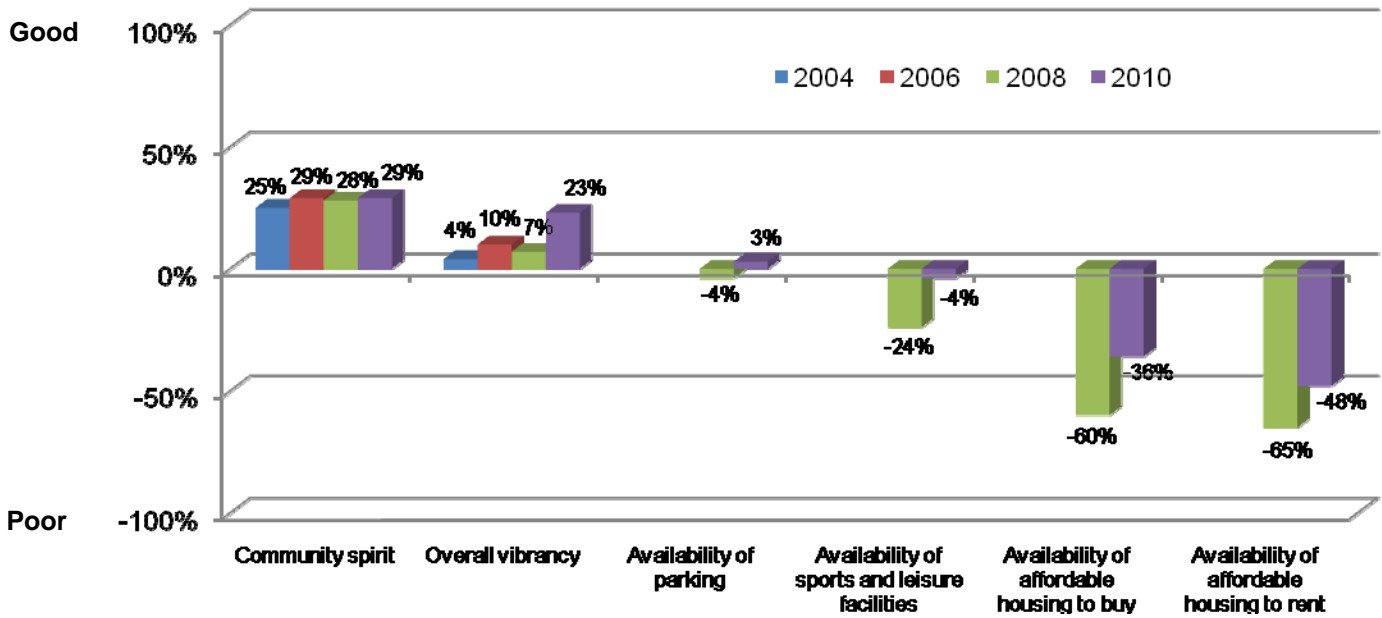


Ratings have improved slightly in relation to the Council doing a good job of keeping towns and villages clean and tidy and having a clear plan for how communities should develop in the future.

4.6 Respondents were also asked to provide ratings for a number of features of the town or village in which they live, the results of which are set out on the following page (the figure given is a net figure whereby very good / good ratings are calculated and poor / very poor ratings are subtracted from this). Again, bases vary and are set out in full in the appendices.

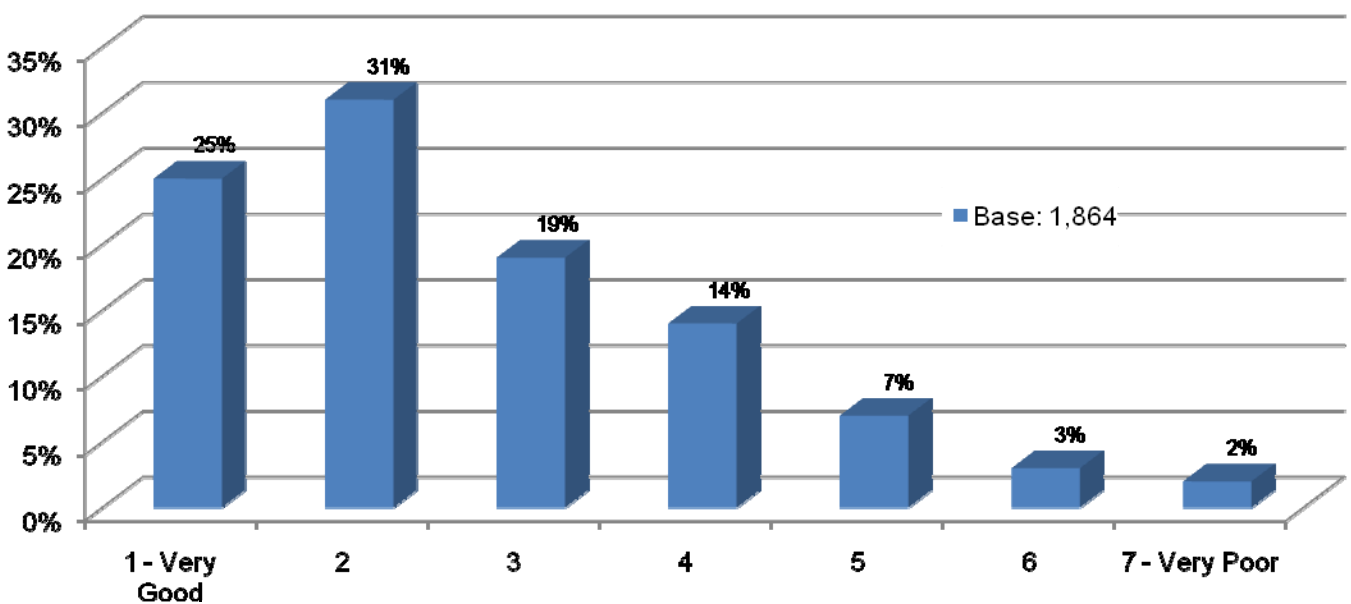
Some of the findings here show a positive trend, particularly with regard to issues of vibrancy and the availability of sports and leisure facilities. Ratings for affordable housing remain very poor but are improving (although this may reflect a fall in house prices over the last few years).

Figure 4.3: Community Issues



4.7 To provide an overall baseline of perceptions of quality of life, respondents were asked to rate their overall quality of life on a scale from 1 (very good) to 7 (very poor). Results for this were broadly positive, with the overall mean score being 2.63.

Figure 4.4: Rating of Quality of Life



4.8 A number of questions regarding certain “universal” Council services that were posed in the questionnaire relate to the issue of community wellbeing. These results are detailed below (figures given are overall satisfaction figures, not net satisfaction):⁵

**Figure 4.5: Rating of Universal Services
Community Wellbeing**

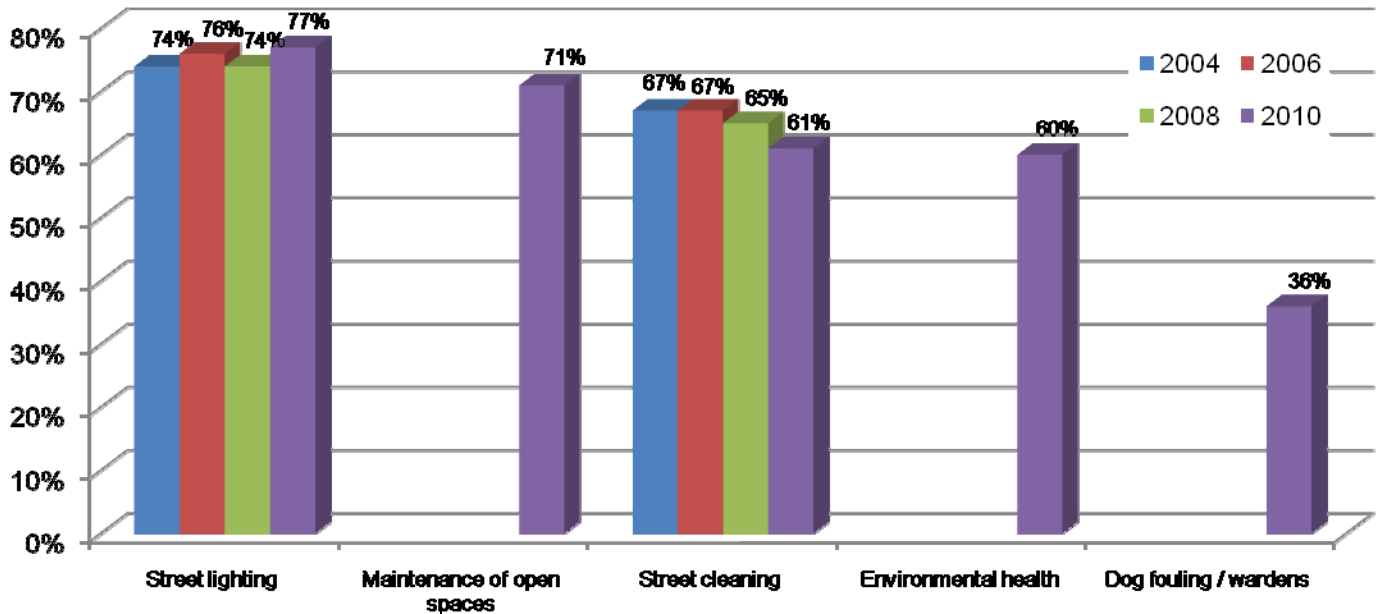


Figure 4.5 above shows a slight improvement in ratings for street lighting along with generally positive ratings for maintenance of open spaces and environmental health. There has been a slight decline in satisfaction with street cleaning, albeit from a reasonably high level; this is worthy of further investigation to establish any geographical or other factors that may have contributed to this. Satisfaction with the dog fouling / wardens service (investigated for the first time in the 2010 survey) is notably lower than for the other services considered here.

4.9 Certain of the questions asked of people were users of specific services also relate to the strategic priority of community wellbeing. Satisfaction levels amongst **users** of these services is tabulated on the following page.

⁵ Overall satisfaction is defined as the proportion of respondents who stated that they were either very or fairly satisfied with a service. Respondents who gave a “don’t know” response or did not provide an answer have been excluded from the analysis.

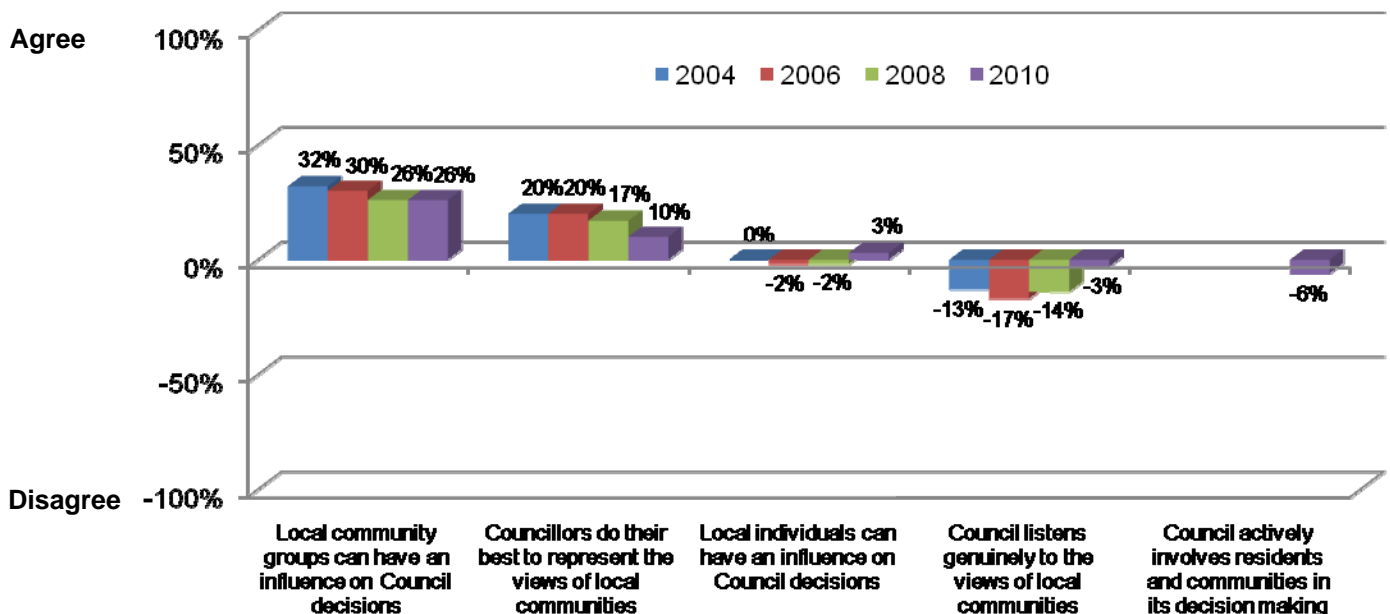
Table 4.2: Rating of Specific Services – Community Wellbeing

Service	Very Satisfied	Fairly Satisfied	Neither / Nor	Fairly Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Not answered	% of respondents who use service
Burial grounds	30%	47%	9%	6%	2%	5%	28%
Council housing services	23%	43%	14%	6%	5%	8%	11%
Council-run leisure / sports facilities	14%	56%	15%	9%	4%	2%	39%
Country parks	29%	55%	10%	3%	1%	2%	63%
Social work services	37%	35%	10%	7%	2%	8%	14%
Trading standards	19%	40%	19%	8%	6%	8%	8%

Satisfaction amongst users of these services is relatively high (varying between 59% for Trading Standards and 77% for burial grounds and 84% for country parks).

4.10 Figure 4.6 below shows ratings for a number of issues relating to Council decision-making and consultation, which is itself an important dimension of community wellbeing (bases vary and are detailed in the appendices):

Figure 4.6: Council Decision Making and Consultation



There has been some modest improvement in ratings regarding the Council genuinely listening to the views of local communities and local individuals having an influence on Council decisions. However, the extent to which people believe that Councillors do their best to represent their community has declined slightly since 2008.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

The Council's performance is rated modestly in relation to most Community Wellbeing activities and is rated poorly with regard to anti-social behaviour, housing and misuse of alcohol.

Ratings for issues in relation to towns and villages have not changed significantly since 2008 although slight improvements are apparent in relation to keeping towns and villages clean and tidy and the Council having a clear plan for how communities will develop.

Some positive trends have emerged in relation to community issues, particularly with regard to overall vibrancy, availability of sports and leisure facilities and affordable housing.

Respondents are broadly positive about their overall quality of life.

Universal services relating to Community Wellbeing are generally rated positively; they show a slight improvement in relation to street lighting but also a slight decline in relation to street cleaning.

Specific services that relate to Community Wellbeing are also rated highly, particularly in relation to country parks and burial grounds.

In terms of Council decision making and consultation, ratings have shown a slight improvement regarding the Council genuinely listening to the views of local communities and local individuals having an influence on Council decisions.

5.0 THE COUNCIL’S STRATEGIC PRIORITIES – JOBS AND THE ECONOMY

5.1 The following description of the Council’s strategic priority for Jobs and the Economy was set out in the questionnaire:

“Aberdeenshire has a broad economic base from traditional industries such as agriculture, fishing and forestry to those that have grown over the last 30 years such as the energy and service sectors. The Council is committed to working with partners to help the Aberdeenshire economy become more resilient and adaptive to change. With the lowest unemployment rate in mainland Scotland, Aberdeenshire is an attractive area to live in and aims to have the necessary infrastructure for new and existing businesses, both large and small, to thrive.”

5.2 Table 5.1 sets out the results obtained in relation to residents’ rating of the Council’s performance with regard to Jobs and the Economy including “don’t know” responses (the small number of people who did not answer the question are excluded and base numbers therefore vary for each question and are set out in full in the appendices): :

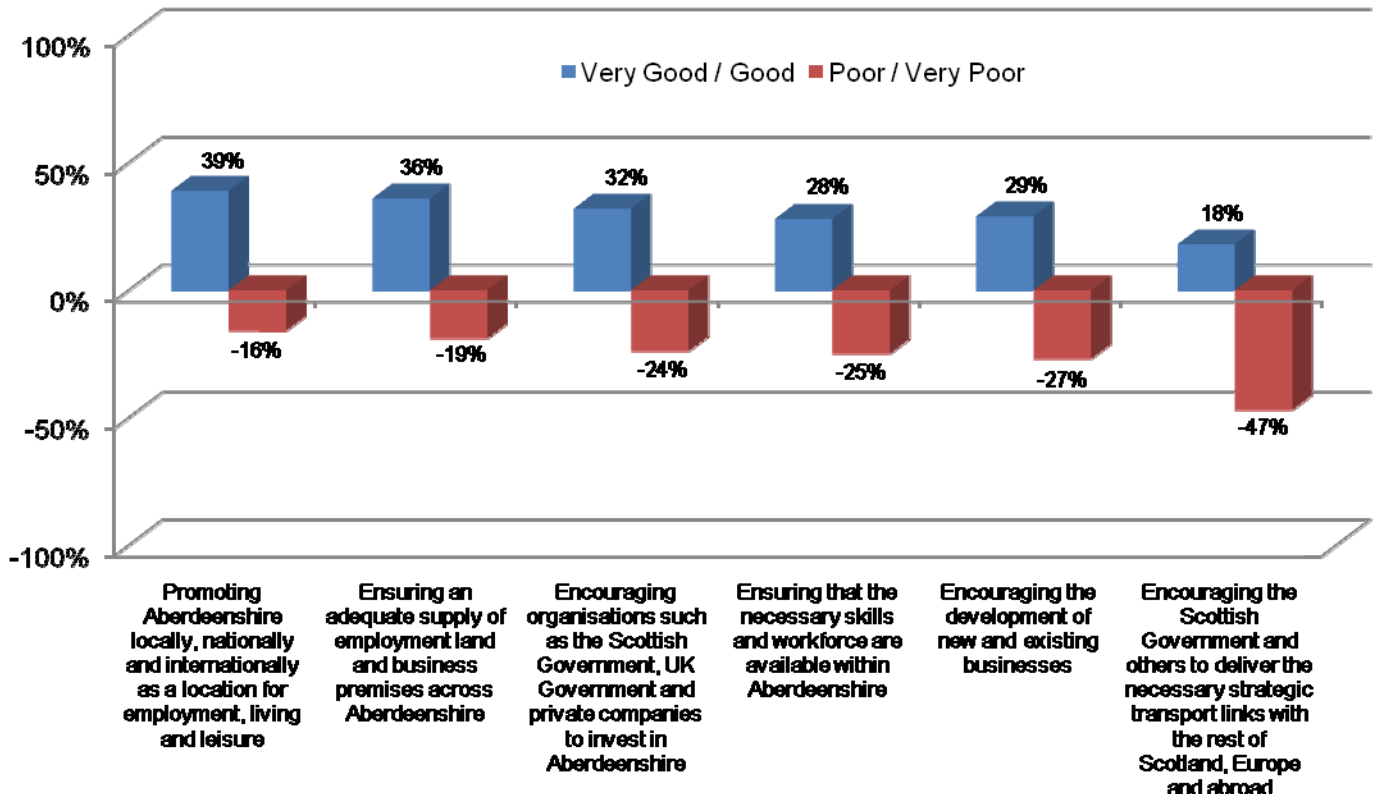
Table 5.1: Detailed Rating of Jobs and the Economy Performance

	Very Good	Good	Neither / Nor	Poor	Very Poor	Don’t Know
Promoting Aberdeenshire locally, nationally and internationally as a location for employment, living and leisure	3%	22%	28%	8%	2%	37%
Encouraging organisations such as the Scottish Government, UK Government and private companies to invest in Aberdeenshire	2%	16%	25%	11%	3%	43%
Ensuring an adequate supply of employment land and business premises across Aberdeenshire	2%	18%	25%	8%	3%	44%
Ensuring that the necessary skills and workforce are available within Aberdeenshire	1%	14%	26%	10%	4%	45%
Encouraging the development of new and existing businesses	2%	16%	27%	12%	4%	39%
Encouraging the Scottish Government and others to deliver the necessary strategic transport links with the rest of Scotland, Europe and abroad	2%	10%	23%	18%	12%	37%

Again, the significant level of “don’t know response should be noted, with almost half of all respondents not expressing a specific view on the Council’s performance with respect to these aspects of the Jobs and the Economy strategic priority.

5.3 Amongst those respondents who did give an answer with regard to the aspects of Jobs and the Economy previously noted, the results were as follows (Bases vary and numbers do not add to 100 due to “neither / nor” responses):

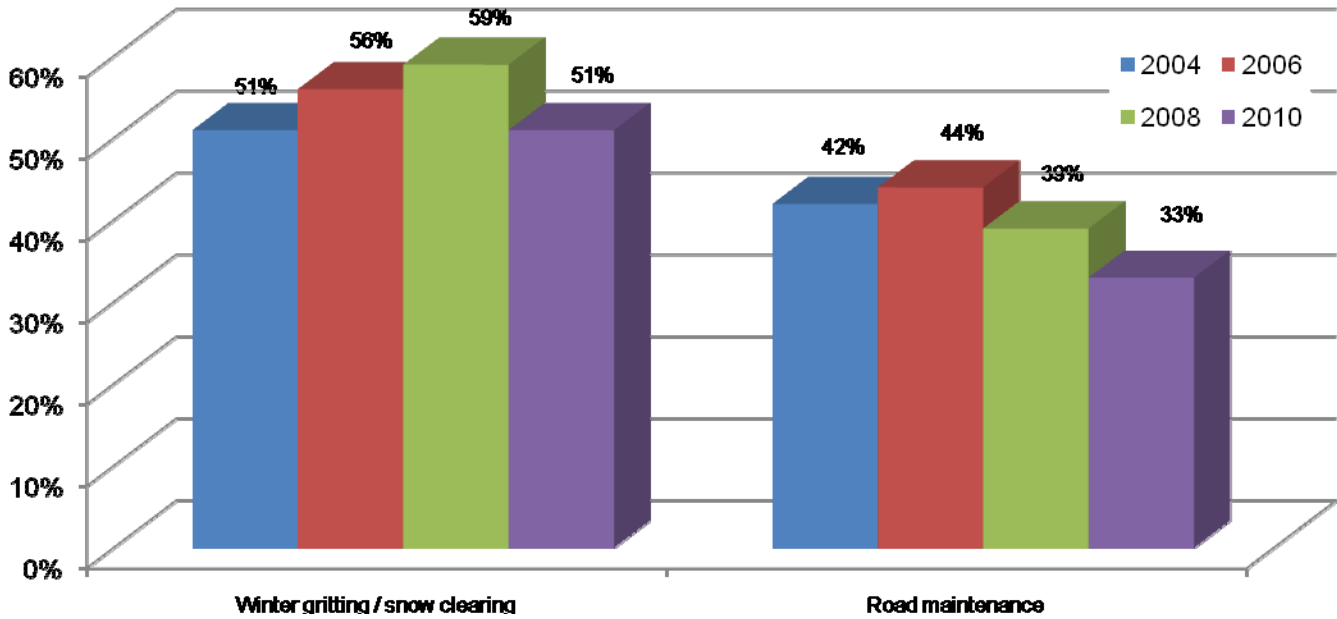
Figure 5.1: Rating of Jobs and the Economy Performance



5.4 Again, mixed views are apparent with regard to some issues (for example, the availability of skills and encouraging new / existing business). However, the area where the Council’s performance is most likely to be considered to be poor amongst those that express an opinion relates to encouraging the delivery of necessary strategic transport links.

5.5 The following questions regarding universal Council services are considered to relate specifically to Jobs and the Economy, with the figures quoted below being the overall satisfaction of residents who expressed an opinion.

Figure 5.2: Rating of Universal Services – Jobs and the Economy



In both cases, satisfaction has declined since 2008. In the case of winter gritting / snow clearing, this reverses a general upwards trend since 2004 and it would seem reasonable to suggest that the particularly inclement weather over the winter of 2010/ 11 has been a factor in this. These circumstances may well have contributed to the decline in satisfaction with road maintenance given the impact that this severe weather has had on the condition of roads across the country.

5.6 A small number of specific services used by respondents also related to this theme as tabulated below:

Table 5.2: Rating of Specific Services – Jobs and the Economy

Service	Very Satisfied	Fairly Satisfied	Neither / Nor	Fairly Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Not answered	% of respondents who use service
Planning and building control	13%	42%	16%	18%	7%	4%	28%
Support to local businesses	9%	42%	22%	13%	4%	10%	10%
Training and employment initiatives	16%	33%	18%	15%	6%	13%	7%

The majority of users of these specific services are satisfied, although the figures would suggest that there remains perceived scope for improvement in some areas.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

Most dimensions of the Council's performance in relation to the strategic priority for Jobs and the Economy are given modest ratings, with some mixed views in relation to the availability of skills and encouraging new / existing business. Ratings under this heading are poorest for the Council's performance in encouraging the Scottish Government and others to invest in necessary strategic transport links.

Universal services relating to winter gritting/clearing and road maintenance show decline since 2008; this is likely to be due to strain on resources caused by the last winter being particularly severe.

Specific services relating to Jobs and the Economy are rated positively by just over half of respondents, suggesting some scope for improvement.

6.0 THE COUNCIL'S STRATEGIC PRIORITIES – LIFELONG LEARNING

6.1 The following description of the Lifelong Learning priority was included:

“With over 400 facilities including schools, recreation centres, community centres, libraries, museums and other cultural venues the Council plays a vital part in making Aberdeenshire a great place for learning and leisure.”

6.2 Detailed ratings in relation to the Council's performance with regard to the issues explored under “Lifelong Learning” are shown below, including “don't know” responses (the small number of people who did not answer the question are excluded and base numbers therefore vary for each question and are set out in full in the appendices):

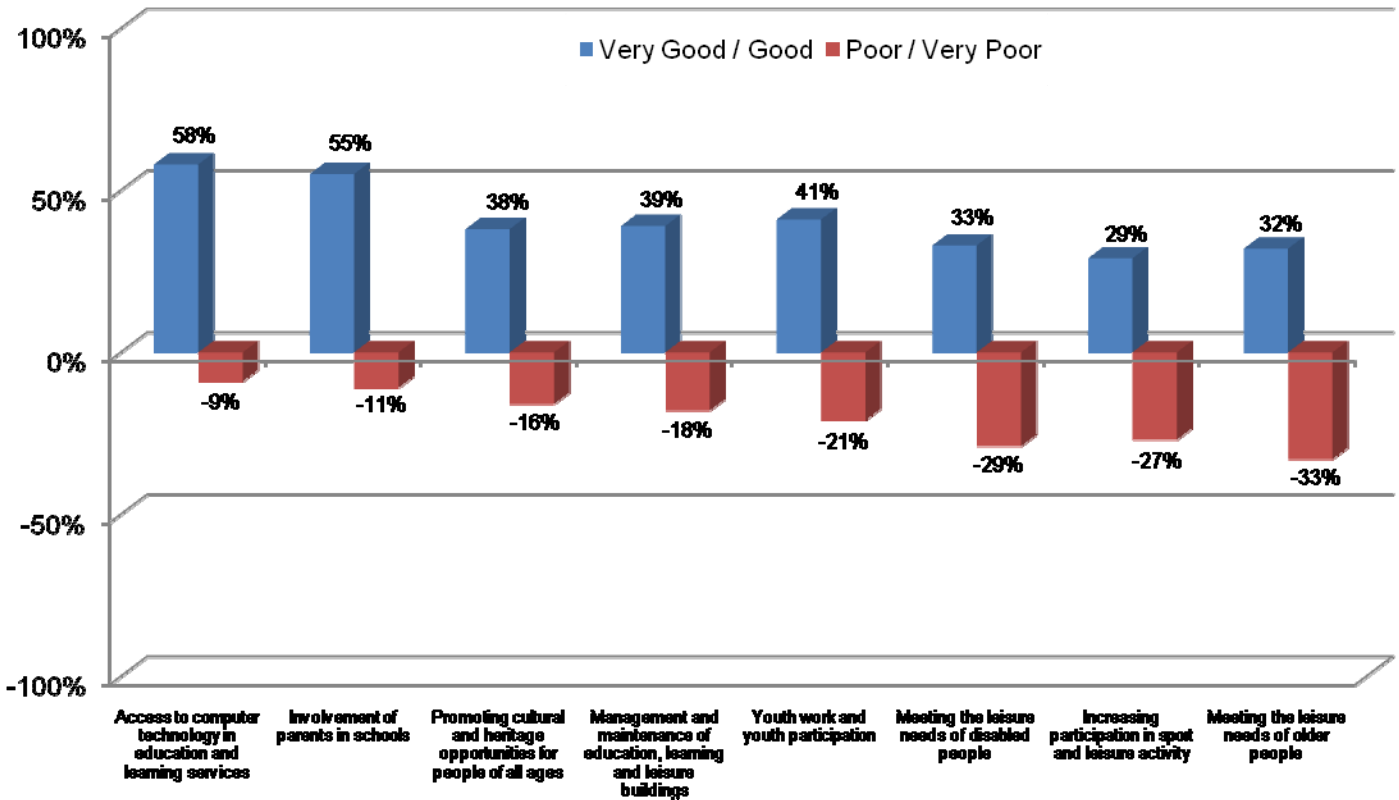
Table 6.1: Detailed Rating of Lifelong Learning Performance

	Very Good	Good	Neither / Nor	Poor	Very Poor	Don't Know
Management and maintenance of education, learning and leisure buildings	4%	24%	29%	10%	4%	32%
Access to computer technology in education and learning services	6%	30%	21%	4%	1%	37%
Youth work and youth participation	4%	16%	18%	7%	3%	52%
Involvement of parents in schools	5%	22%	17%	4%	2%	50%
Promoting cultural and heritage opportunities for people of all ages	2%	19%	25%	7%	2%	45%
Meeting the leisure needs of disabled people	2%	12%	16%	8%	5%	58%
Meeting the leisure needs of older people	2%	15%	19%	12%	5%	46%
Increasing participation in sport and leisure activity	2%	15%	25%	12%	4%	42%

Again, the significant level of “don't know” response should be noted, particularly in relation to some issues (such as youth work, parental involvement and meeting the leisure needs of disabled people) where a significant number of people would not reasonably be expected to have direct experience of the issue.

6.3 Perceptions of the Council’s performance in delivering these strategic priorities are summarised below, based on those respondents that expressed a view (base numbers vary and are detailed in the appendices):

Figure 6.1: Rating of Lifelong Learning Performance



Perceptions of the Council’s performance in relation to Lifelong Learning are positive in relation to accessing computer technology and involving parents in schools. However, performance for other aspects of Lifelong Learning is rated less positively, particularly in relation to meeting the leisure needs of older people and disabled people and with regard to increasing participation in sport and leisure activity.

- 6.4 Certain specific services that people use relate to the Lifelong Learning theme. Results in relation to these are tabulated below.

Table 6.2: Rating of Specific Services – Lifelong Learning

Service	Very Satisfied	Fairly Satisfied	Neither / Nor	Fairly Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Not answered	% of respondents who use service
Adult education	34%	48%	6%	5%	4%	3%	10%
Before and after school care	39%	36%	4%	5%	11%	4%	4%
Education and training for people with disabilities	27%	35%	12%	15%	2%	10%	6%
Library services	45%	41%	6%	3%	1%	4%	51%
Museums and arts	28%	53%	9%	5%	1%	4%	37%
Your child / children's school(s)	31%	47%	9%	7%	1%	5%	25%
Youth clubs and services	30%	44%	9%	6%	4%	7%	13%

Of those using the above services, satisfaction levels are generally very high. However, users of education and training for people with disabilities are less satisfied compared to other service users (although it should be noted that the numbers of service users is relatively low for this).

- 6.5 The findings set out earlier in this section show that a significant proportion of people rate the Council's performance as poor in relation to meeting strategic priorities in relation to issues such as the leisure needs of specific groups and sport and leisure activities. However, when people actually use such services then they are generally positive about the service that they service. It would seem reasonable to conclude that the dissatisfaction with achievement of strategic priorities is not about poor service delivery but, rather, is related to respondents' views on the range of services available.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

The Council's performance in relation to Lifelong Learning is rated positively in relation to accessing computer technology and involving parents in schools. However, performance for other aspects of Lifelong Learning is rated less positively, particularly in relation to meeting the leisure needs of older people.

Satisfaction levels for specific services relating to Lifelong Learning are generally very high, with the exception of education and training for people with disabilities where satisfaction levels are notably lower. Given the generally positive ratings for most services it is reasonable to conclude that those areas where the Council's performance is rated less positively reflect the priority accorded to these issues rather than being a comment on the quality of delivery of those services that are available currently.

7.0 THE COUNCIL'S STRATEGIC PRIORITIES – SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT

7.1 The following description of the Sustainable Environment priority was included:

“The Council is committed to ensuring that what the economy and society does now in terms of meeting the needs of the current generation does not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. We are committed to providing a range of initiatives promoting renewable energy, energy conservation, waste management, strategic development, cultural heritage and education. The Council is further committed to reducing its carbon emissions with the aim of being a carbon neutral organisation in the short to medium term.”

7.2 The detailed results in relation to perception of the Council's performance with regard to these aspects of the Sustainable Environment priority are detailed below, including “don't know” responses (the small number of people who did not answer the question are excluded and base numbers therefore vary for each question and are set out in full in the appendices):

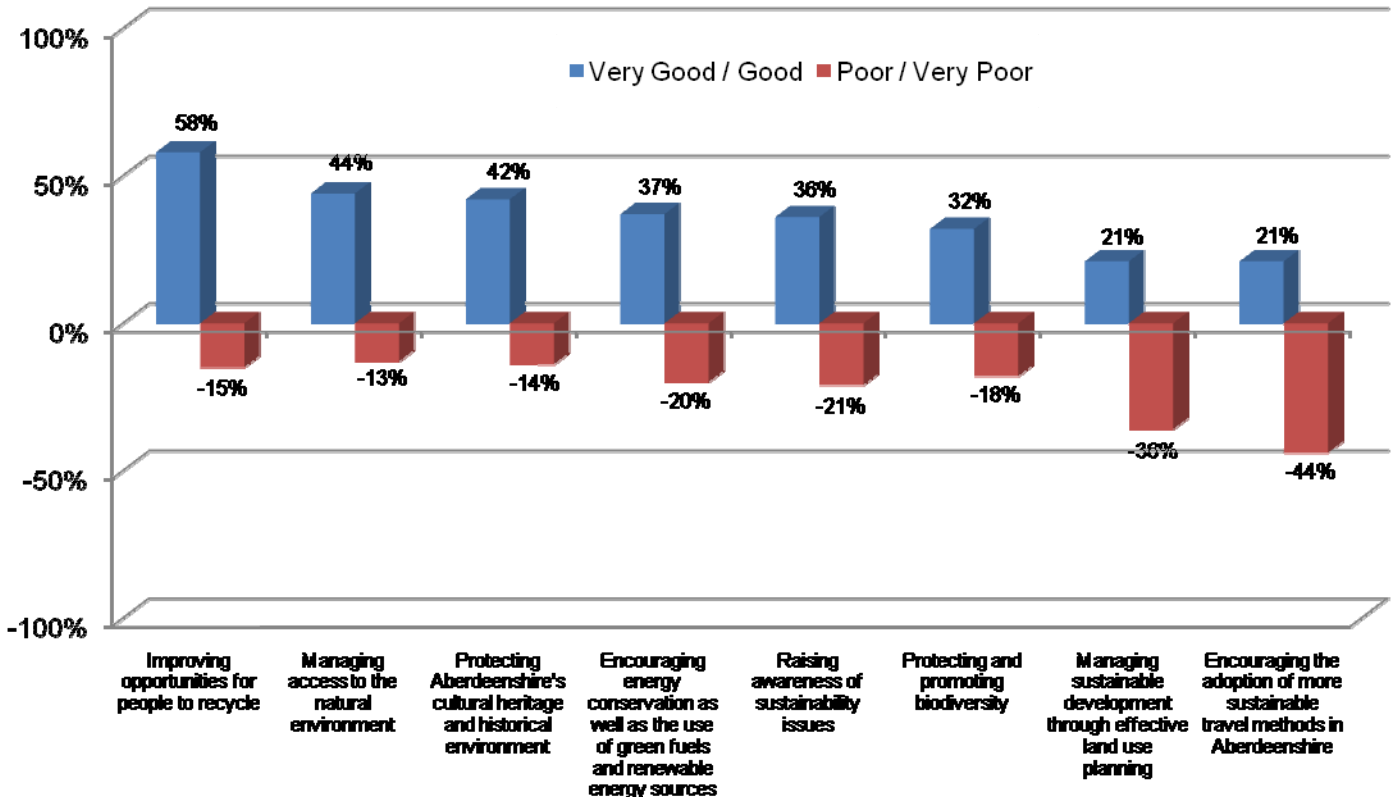
Table 7.1: Detailed Rating of Sustainable Environment Performance

	Very Good	Good	Neither / Nor	Poor	Very Poor	Don't Know
Encouraging energy conservation as well as the use of green fuels and renewable energy sources	3%	21%	28%	10%	2%	36%
Raising awareness of sustainability issues	3%	20%	27%	11%	2%	37%
Managing sustainable development through effective land use planning	1%	8%	20%	13%	4%	54%
Encouraging the adoption of more sustainable travel methods in Aberdeenshire	2%	12%	23%	19%	9%	35%
Protecting Aberdeenshire's cultural heritage and historical environment	3%	25%	29%	7%	3%	33%
Managing access to the natural environment	2%	25%	27%	6%	2%	37%
Protecting and promoting biodiversity	1%	12%	22%	6%	2%	57%
Improving opportunities for people to recycle	12%	39%	24%	8%	5%	12%

Although some “don't know” responses are lower than for other sections of the survey they remain significant, particularly in relation to issues of land use planning and biodiversity. Again, in some instances it may be perfectly reasonable for people to give a “don't know” response whilst in other cases there may be a need for stronger communication as to what the Council is doing in this field.

7.3 Ratings of the Council's performance in relation to the Sustainable Environment priority are set out below, amongst those that expressed a direct opinion (base numbers vary and are detailed in the appendices):

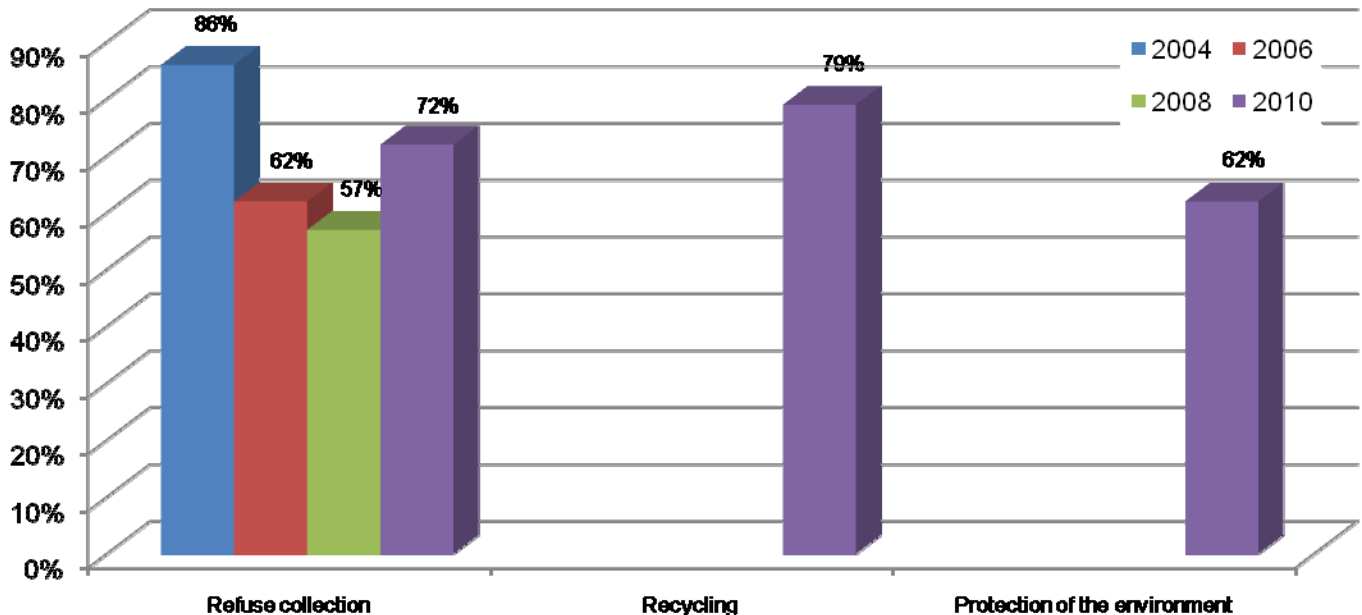
Figure 7.1: Rating of Sustainable Environment Performance



The Council is rated positively by the majority of respondents in relation to recycling opportunities, although other aspects of Sustainable Environment are rated less positively. Areas where a large minority rate the Council poorly relate to encouraging sustainable travel methods and effective land use planning. The reasons for this (and what is understood by respondents in relation to these issues) would benefit from further investigation.

7.4 Certain of the universal services for which ratings were identified related to the Sustainable Environment priority. These ratings are summarised in the figure below.

Figure 7.2: Rating of Universal Services – Sustainable Environment



The above graph shows significant improvement in ratings for refuse collection since 2008, with ratings moving towards those that were recorded before the Council moved to fortnightly collection cycles for residual waste (previous Residents’ Surveys have concluded that this was the primary reason for the sharp decline in satisfaction with refuse collection between 2004 and 2006).

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

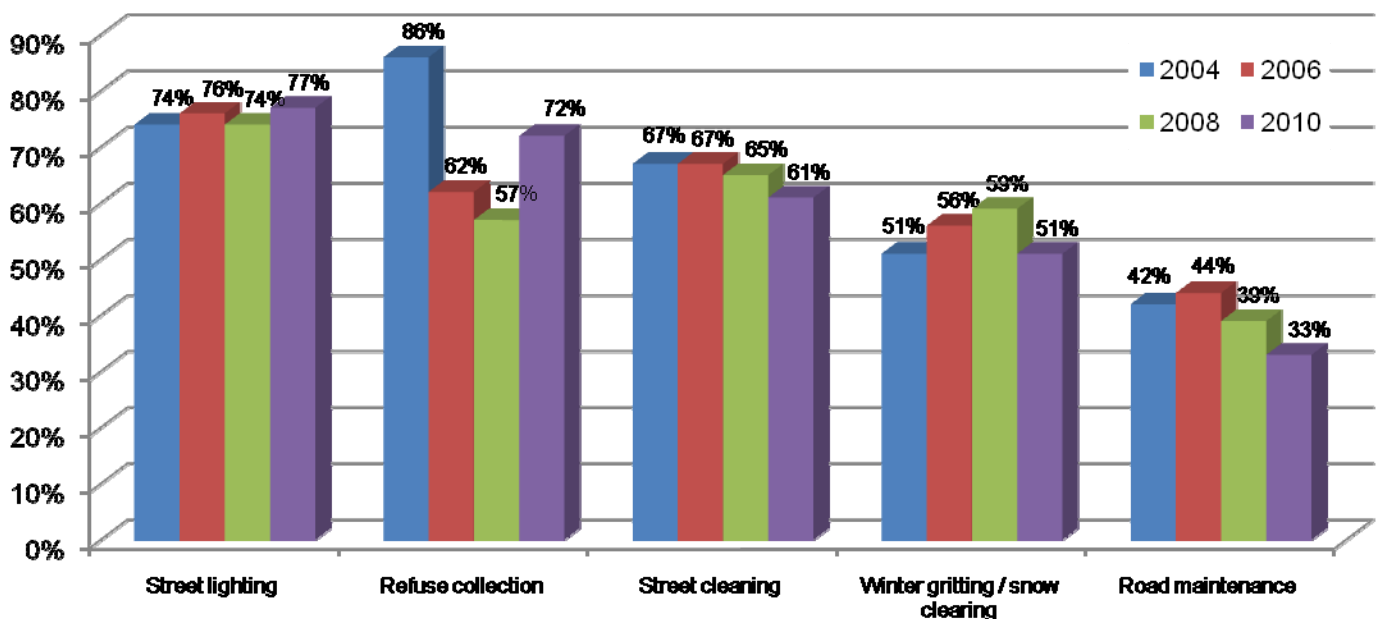
The majority of respondents rate recycling services positively. However, other aspects of Sustainable Environment are rated less positively, particularly in relation to sustainable travel methods and effective land use planning where ‘poor’ or ‘very poor’ ratings are highest.

Universal services relating to sustainable environment are generally rated positively with refuse collection showing significant improvement since 2008.

8.0 SATISFACTION WITH COUNCIL SERVICES

- 8.1 The various satisfaction ratings have already been set out in chapters 4-7. However, as these have previously been incorporated in a single chapter of the Residents' Report we have included these results here, for completeness.
- 8.2 Ratings for a range of universal service for which trend data is available are set out below (bases vary and are detailed in the appendices):

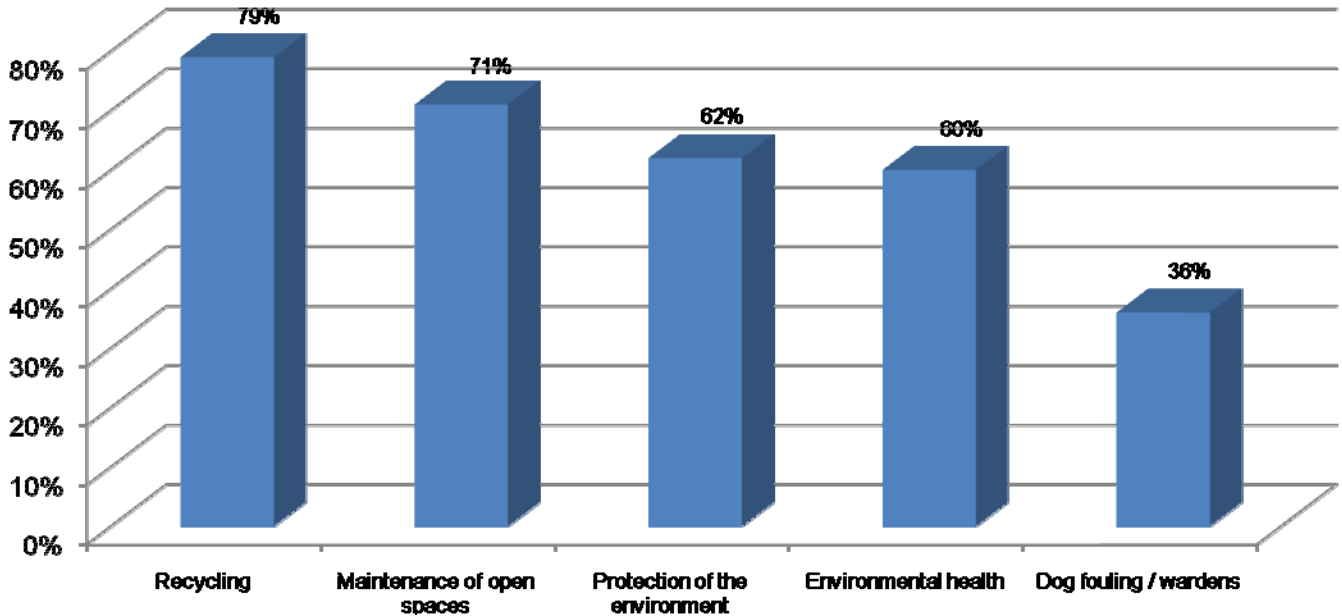
Figure 8.1(a): Rating of Universal Services



The service where the positive trend over the past two years has been most significant has been refuse collection although a modest improvement in overall satisfaction with street lighting has also been recorded. There have, however, been some modest reductions in satisfaction with street cleaning, winter gritting / snow clearing and road maintenance.

- 8.3 In 2010, a number of new questions were asked under this heading and ratings for these are summarised on the following page:

Figure 8.1(b): Rating of Universal Services



Generally, universal services are rated positively, particularly in terms of recycling and maintenance of open spaces. However, dog fouling / wardens is a notable issue that is rated poorly by comparison to these other services. This reflects other evidence of the priority accorded to dog fouling. For example, the 21st survey of the Viewpoint Citizens' Panel⁶ showed that dog fouling was one of the most commonly witnessed of a number of examples of anti-social behaviour (79% of people said they had witnessed or experienced it over the past two years) and was the single biggest element of anti-social behaviour about which people said they worried "all of the time" (18% said that this was the case).

⁶ The Viewpoint Citizens' Panel is administered by the Aberdeenshire Community Planning Partnership and undertakes regular surveys with a standing panel of approximately 1,200 Aberdeenshire residents on a range of Community Planning themes on behalf of the Partnership.

- 8.4 Ratings for a number of specific services that people either have a need for or choose to use are tabulated below, with results being ordered in declining order of satisfaction rather than being grouped thematically (the small number of people who said that they were service users but did not provide a rating for the service concerned are included in the overall base of responses for these questions):

Table 8.1: Service Usage and Satisfaction

Service	% of respondents who use service	Base	Satisfaction
Library services	51%	967	86%
Country parks	63%	1,195	84%
Adult education	10%	166	82%
Museums and arts	37%	696	81%
Local Council offices	48%	825	80%
Burial grounds	28%	472	78%
Your child / children's school(s)	25%	481	78%
Before and after school care	4%	67	75%
Youth clubs and services	13%	245	74%
Social work services	14%	262	73%
Council-run leisure / sports facilities	39%	730	70%
Council housing services	11%	191	67%
Education and training for people with disabilities	6%	110	62%
Trading standards	8%	144	59%
Planning and building control	28%	486	55%
Support to local businesses	10%	180	52%
Training and employment initiatives	8%	132	48%

Most specific services are given high ratings by respondents and this applies particularly to a wide range of leisure activities such as libraries, country parks and museum and art facilities. Generally high satisfaction levels are also achieved by a range of educational services, youth work activities, burial grounds and social work services. A slightly lower (but still respectable) level of satisfaction is accorded to Council housing services and to trading standards. Those areas where ratings are poorest amongst those who say they are service users include planning and building control, support to local businesses and training and employment initiatives. All of these fall within the Jobs and the Economy theme and it may be that these slightly poorer ratings are a reflection of economic circumstances.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

In terms of universal services, ratings for street lighting and refuse collection have shown improvement since 2008, whilst other services have shown a slight decline. Services not covered in previous surveys such as recycling and maintenance of open spaces are given high ratings, although dog fouling/wardens is a service where ratings are poor in comparison to these other service areas.

Generally, specific services are given high ratings by respondents. However, slightly lower ratings are accorded to training and employment initiatives, planning and building control and support to local businesses. In some cases, these lower ratings may reflect the outcomes that people achieve (which will not always be in the direct control of the Council) rather than any issues relating to the actual quality of delivery of that service.

9.0 FUTURE PRIORITIES

BUDGET PRIORITIES

- 9.1 A new section of the questionnaire concerned issues around the Council's future budget priorities. The following preamble was included in the questionnaire:

“Due to the well publicised expected reduction in government grant funding, all local authorities will need to make significant budget savings over the next few years. Your answers to questions in this section will be one of the things that the Council takes into account in setting its budgets in the future.”

- 9.2 Respondents were then asked to nominate up to 10 service options they considered MOST important to protect and up to 10 that they considered LEAST important. The results of this are set out over the page, organised in order of the “net figure” accorded to each service; this figure is constructed by subtracting the proportion who say that something is least important to protect from the proportion who say it is most important to protect. It should be noted that the information in Figure 9.1 is based only on the results of the “main” survey.⁷

⁷ For reasons of space, young people were only asked the question as to what was MOST important to protect and the information in Table 9.1 is therefore based only on the results of the main survey.

Table 9.1: Priorities for Budget Protection

Service	Proportion Nominating as Most Important to Protect	Proportion Nominating as Least Important to Protect	Net Figure (proportion nominating as most important less proportion nominating as least important)
Refuse collection	72%	3%	+69%
Road maintenance	71%	2%	+69%
Winter gritting / snow clearing	69%	5%	+64%
Child protection	61%	4%	+57%
Recycling	56%	10%	+46%
Your child / children's school(s)	45%	10%	+35%
Street cleaning	38%	12%	+26%
Education and training for people with disabilities	38%	11%	+27%
Maintenance of burial grounds	38%	16%	+22%
Council-run leisure / sports facilities	36%	19%	+17%
Library services	37%	22%	+15%
Street lighting	33%	17%	+16%
Council housing services	31%	17%	+14%
Social work services	27%	14%	+13%
Protection of the environment	29%	19%	+10%
Maintenance of open spaces	31%	22%	+9%
Environmental health	28%	21%	+7%
Country parks	26%	24%	+2%
Planning and building control	24%	22%	+2%
Youth clubs and services	22%	23%	-1%
Training and employment initiatives	19%	27%	-8%
Dog fouling / wardens	25%	35%	-10%
Before and after school care	21%	32%	-11%
Adult education	18%	31%	-13%
Local Council offices	18%	33%	-15%
Support to local businesses	18%	35%	-17%
Trading standards	8%	41%	-33%
Museums and arts	11%	46%	-35%

- 9.3 The ostensible message here is one of priority being accorded to highly visible, universal services such as roads, refuse collection, recycling and winter gritting / snow clearing. It seems likely that these are seen as “**core**” services for a Local Authority to provide and that this explains the priority accorded to them in this list. Of course, this cannot tell us whether respondents would see any opportunities for efficiency savings within these broad service areas. Street cleaning, street lighting and maintenance of burial grounds would be other services that which would fit into this category although in this specific case slightly less priority is accorded to its protection.
- 9.4 Coming somewhere below these priorities are a set of services that are accorded a reasonable level of priority and which few people consider to be “least important” to protect. A number of these services could be grouped together under a general theme of “**protecting vulnerable people**” with examples being child protection and education and training for people with disabilities.
- 9.5 The third main theme to emerge relates to **schools**, which is seen as one of the top priorities for protection by a significant minority (as illustrated later in this chapter, there are some significant variations according to whether people consider themselves to be users of a particular service.
- 9.6 Other services that are more likely to be considered “most important” rather than “least important” to protect include leisure facilities, country parks, libraries, housing, social work, various services related to environmental protection and Planning and Building Control. However, these services are prioritised to a lesser extent than those noted above. It is worth noting that, in Housing and Social Work services, this category includes two of the largest front line services within the Council.
- 9.7 There are a number of areas where respondents were more likely to suggest that it was “least important” rather than “most important” to protect the service. Some examples included:
- Youth clubs and services
 - Dog fouling and wardens
 - Before and after school care
 - Training and employment initiatives
 - Adult education
 - Local Council offices
 - Support to local businesses
 - Trading Standards
 - Museums and arts.

There are a number of points to note in this regard. Firstly, many of these are services used by specific groups of people rather than the community as a whole and it is possible that this is reflected in the lower priority accorded to them (we return to this issue later in this section). Certain areas accorded lower priority (such as youth work and dog fouling / wardens) could be considered as something of a surprise given that they are already seen as priorities in relation to the achievement of strategic priorities and / or are rated less positively than some other services. It would seem, however, that when this is put in the form of a direct question about budget priorities, other service areas take precedence.

The lower relative importance attributed to the provision of local Council offices is also worth noting in this regard.

9.8 Further investigation of the views of different groups of people is helpful in this respect. In the first instance, we have analysed the “league table” in terms of priority rankings from each of the main and young person’s surveys in the table below (based on the proportion ranking a service as “most important”):⁸

Table 9.2: Comparison of Priorities for Budget Protection (1)

Service	Ranking in Relation to Proportion Nominating as Most Important to Protect (Main Survey)	Ranking in Relation to Proportion Nominating as Most Important to Protect (Young Person’s Survey)
Refuse collection	1	17
Road maintenance	1	5
Winter gritting / snow clearing	3	5
Child protection	4	1
Recycling	5	10
Your child / children’s school(s)	6	2
Street cleaning	7	14
Maintenance of burial grounds	7	Not asked
Library services	9	10
Education and training for people with disabilities	10	4
Council-run leisure / sports facilities	10	7
Street lighting	12	14
Council housing services	13	Not asked
Maintenance of open spaces	13	12
Protection of the environment	15	8
Environmental health	16	Not asked
Social work services	17	16
Country parks	18	8
Dog fouling / wardens	19	Not asked
Planning and building control	20	Not asked
Youth clubs and services	21	3
Before and after school care	22	Not asked
Training and employment initiatives	22	13
Adult education	22	Not asked
Local Council offices	22	Not asked
Support to local businesses	22	Not asked
Museums and arts	27	17
Trading standards	28	Not asked
School breakfast clubs	Not asked	19

⁸ The list provided to young people was edited to ensure its relevance to that client group.

The top priorities amongst respondents to the young person's survey were child protection (78% ranking this in their top 10 options to protect), schools(68%), youth clubs and services (59%), education and training for people with disabilities (58%), winter gritting / snow clearing and road maintenance (both 53%) and Council-run leisure and sports facilities (52%). Whilst some of these issues were similar in the main survey, young people do appear to place significantly greater priority for protection on certain services that particularly impact upon them (most notably, child protection, schools and youth work / services).

- 9.9 An additional way of addressing this issue is to compare the priority accorded by people to certain services, based on whether they saw themselves as users of that particular service. The ranking provided to the detailed services is illustrated over the page, based on the rankings from the main survey and comparing all respondents to those who considered themselves to be users of the particular service. Where the service is "universal" in nature, all respondents are considered to be users of that particular service.

Table 9.3: Comparison of Priorities for Budget Protection (2)

Service	Proportion Nominating as Most Important to Protect (all respondents)	Proportion Nominating as Most Important to Protect (service users only)	Difference Between % of Service Users Nominating as Most Important to Protect as Compared to All Respondents
Refuse collection	72%	72%	-
Road maintenance	71%	71%	-
Winter gritting / snow clearing	69%	69%	-
Child protection	61%	61%	-
Recycling	56%	56%	-
Your child / children's school(s)	45%	81%	+36%
Street cleaning	38%	38%	-
Maintenance of burial grounds	38%	38%	-
Library services	37%	54%	+17%
Education and training for people with disabilities	36%	71%	+35%
Council-run leisure / sports facilities	36%	57%	+21%
Street lighting	33%	33%	-
Council housing services	31%	68%	+37%
Maintenance of open spaces	31%	31%	-
Protection of the environment	29%	29%	-
Environmental health	28%	28%	-
Social work services	27%	52%	+25%
Country parks	26%	35%	+9%
Dog fouling / wardens	25%	25%	-
Planning and building control	24%	40%	+16%
Before and after school care	21%	72%	+51%
Youth clubs and services	18%	55%	+37%
Training and employment initiatives	19%	37%	+18%
Adult education	18%	40%	+22%
Local Council offices	18%	27%	+9%
Support to local businesses	18%	32%	+14%
Museums and arts	11%	25%	+14%
Trading standards	8%	18%	+10%

- 9.10 Clearly, a slightly different order of priority emerges when only the views of service users are concerned. For example, amongst service users specifically, the issue chosen most often amongst respondents' top ten priorities is schools (chosen by 81% of service users compared to, for example, the 71% of the sample as a whole that chose road maintenance in their top ten priorities).
- 9.11 This tendency for a higher proportion of service users to nominate certain services that they use amongst their top priorities (compared to respondents as a whole) is particularly evident in some areas, highlighting the priority that service users place on these particular services. Examples include:
- Before and after school care
 - Schools
 - Education and training for people with disabilities
 - Council housing services
 - Youth clubs and services.

The high level of priority noted by users of these services clearly needs to be taken into account by the Council.

- 9.12 Whilst it is important that the Council take account of these findings in its budget setting, a note of caution is appropriate. The nature of the Residents' Survey is such that it is necessarily broad and this means that in-depth information cannot be provided to respondents to help inform their views on the above issues. Ideally, a more deliberative process that takes account of the implications of various savings options would be put in place, which would lead to a more informed response.
- 9.13 Respondents were asked an open ended question about other areas where the Council could make savings. Some examples of responses are listed below:

"Reduce the number of country schools. Reduce number of councillors."

"No expensive lunches / dinners. No expenses claims. No bizarre street furniture or sculptures. No fancy paving stones."

"Supply adequate supervision of staff thus ensuring work time is put to good use."

"Plan work schedules to cut down on the constant re-opening of the same areas for remedial works."

Many of the comments made were relatively superficial in nature and usually related to areas of perceived waste or inefficiency. Whilst these comments are worthy of note, they provide only a limited insight into any additional, practical savings options. A full listing of verbatim comments from the main survey can be found in Appendix 3.

9.14 Respondents were also asked a further open ended question about other areas where the Council should prioritise the protection of services. Some examples of responses are listed below:

“Road maintenance.”

“Support of old people/senior citizens.”

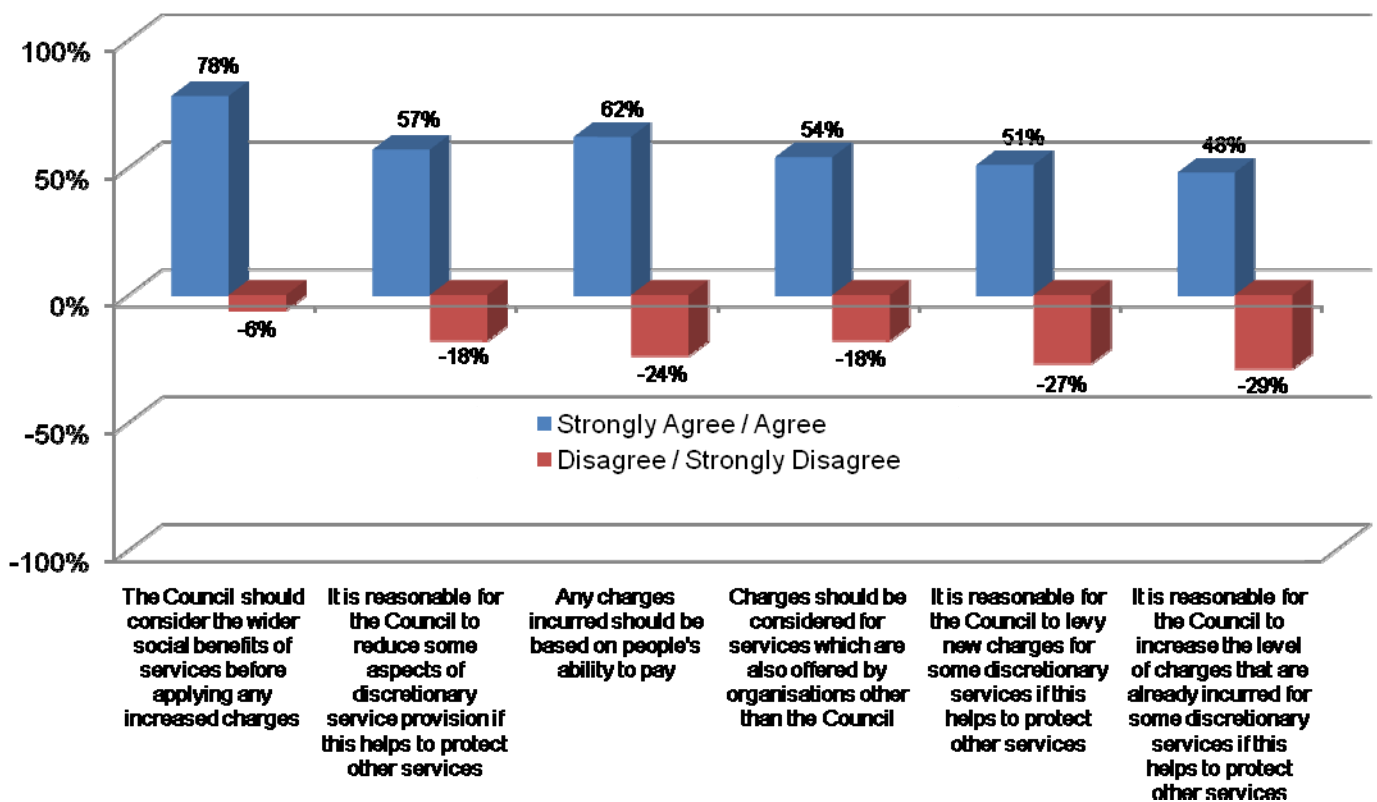
“Landscape services, public services.”

Again, such comments were very diverse and, in the context of the Residents’ Survey, respondents could not go into any detail as to the rationale for such priorities. A full listing of verbatim comments can be found in Appendix 3.

CHARGING OPTIONS

9.15 Respondents to the main survey were then asked to agree or disagree with a range of statements regarding the Council’s approach to charging, with the results of this being set out below:

Figure 9.1: Agreement with Charging Statements



There is majority agreement with all of these statements and, in particular, with the view that the Council should consider the wider social benefits of services before applying any changes and that charges should be based on ability to pay. There is broad acceptance that it is reasonable to reduce some aspects of discretionary provision and that charges should be considered where the Council is not the only provider of a service. However, views are more divided in relation to whether new or increased charges are reasonable at all with a significant minority of people being resistant to this (although there is majority agreement).

- 9.16 Respondents were then asked if there are any services that they would be willing to pay for in order to reduce the need for service reductions elsewhere. A selection of responses is listed below:

“Libraries, country parks.”

“Adult education, leisure and sports.”

“We are paying council tax. No other charges should be relevant. If there is a need to increase Council Tax, make the need transparent.”

Again, suggestions were very diverse and the survey does not particularly lend itself to a detailed analysis of the underlying rationale for these suggestions. A full listing of verbatim comments can be found in Appendix 3.

- 9.17 Finally, respondents were asked if there are any services that they currently pay for and would be willing to pay more for in order to reduce the possible need for service reductions elsewhere. Some examples of responses are listed below:

“Swimming pool.”

“Entry charges to Leisure facilities.”

“I would willingly pay for my Council Tax if I got some of the benefits e.g. maintenance of my home, street lighting and paving.”

Comments related to a mix of specific services where people indicated some degree of willingness to pay more along with general issues relating to Council Tax levels. A full listing of verbatim comments can be found in Appendix 3.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

The Residents' Survey provides an initial overview of public perceptions on budget priorities. However, it should ideally be complemented by a more in-depth and considered review of these issues, reflecting the need for a detailed prioritisation of service areas that people would wish to see protected.

Respondents place priority on the protection of “core” universal services as well as services related to the protection of vulnerable people and schools. Specific services they nominate as being most important to protect include roads maintenance, refuse collection and winter gritting/snow clearing, as well as child protection.

The services most likely to be perceived as least important to protect are usually services used only by specific groups of individuals with particular examples including museums and arts, trading standards and support to local businesses.

Users of particular services are much more likely than the population as a whole to see these services as priorities for protection and this is particularly so for services such as before and after school care, schools, education and training for people with disabilities, council housing services and youth clubs and services.

A majority of respondents that express an opinion believe it is reasonable for the Council to introduce new charges or increase existing charges if it helps to protect other services but a significant minority of people disagree with this. There is a common view that charges should reflect ability to pay and that wider social benefits of services should be taken into account before applying increased charges.

10.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This final section of the report sets out a number of conclusions and recommendations that can be drawn from the results of the 2010 Residents' Survey. We have already set out conclusions at the end of each thematic section (and in the Executive Summary) and in a number of cases the requirement for the Council will simply be to satisfy itself that its current improvement activities and plans (as well as work it does in partnership with others) are addressing the issues identified. In some instances, however, we believe that the findings give rise to a need for specific additional actions and we have highlighted these as recommendations within the shade shaded text boxes in this chapter. These are a mix of operational and strategic recommendations and also incorporate recommendations for further research. In forming these recommendations, IBP has been mindful of the budgetary pressures facing Aberdeenshire Council, in common with other public bodies in Scotland, and have focused particularly on recommendations that are financially achievable and which maximise the outcomes and benefits for citizens and service users at an affordable cost.

COMMUNICATIONS

- 10.1 Levels of awareness and usage of the Guide to Council Services suggest that it has been a success in communicating effectively with residents about the range of Council services.

Recommendation: The Council should be minded to continue the Guide to Council Services for future years, subject to a thorough analysis of costs and benefits.

- 10.2 Evidence on the effectiveness of the Council's network of digital screens is less persuasive and it would be appropriate to consider further the purpose and effectiveness of this communications tool.

Recommendation: The Council should review the cost-effectiveness of its network of digital screens, before deciding whether to maintain this communications tool.

CUSTOMER SERVICE

- 10.3 The Council retains generally positive ratings for a wide range of customer service attributes and it should obviously seek to maintain such ratings in the context of any organisational changes that arise from the budgetary pressures that it is facing.
- 10.4 The priority accorded to telephone and online delivery as service channels, particularly for information and for more routine transactions should be noted. However, although the Council's website achieves favourable ratings there remains scope for improvement and for the marketing and delivery of a wider range of services through this medium. A related issue that is worthy of note is the relatively low priority that is accorded to the provision of Council offices, in the context of future budget priorities. There is an opportunity here to aggressively develop a strategy of emphasising low cost delivery channels such as telephone and online whilst reducing reliance on high cost face-to-face channels and rationalising the provision of Council offices.

Recommendation: The Council should review how it is developing its mix of service delivery channels for the future to ensure it is maximising the opportunity to develop such channels in the context of residents' priorities and likely budget constraints.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

- 10.5 The survey findings suggest strongly that issues of community wellbeing such as anti-social behaviour, housing and substance misuse are important priorities for residents and highlight the importance of continuing work in these areas. It may well be that there is a lack of awareness amongst communities of the work that is already carried out (the high “don’t know” response to questions about this issue would indicate that this is the case) but further research is required to confirm this.
- 10.6 There has been a notable decline in satisfaction with roads maintenance and winter gritting although this can reasonably be attributed to the particularly challenging weather conditions that were faced in the most recent winter. There has also been a modest decline in satisfaction with street cleaning. Clearly, a watching brief needs to be maintained regarding satisfaction with such services, particularly given the potential re-orientation of some aspects of service provision in the coming years.
- 10.7 A particular desire is apparent in the survey findings for improved strategic transport links and efforts to encourage investment in these should be continued. The survey findings are not able to confirm residents' awareness of what is already being done to encourage investment in such links and nor is it able to confirm the specific priorities that residents would have for such links, which is an issue to be addressed through more targeted research.
- 10.8 There are positive ratings apparent for much of what the Council does in relation to aspects of Lifelong Learning. However, a number of issues (including meeting the leisure needs of older people and education and training for people with disabilities) achieve poorer ratings and these findings would benefit from further investigation to establish the reasons for this.
- 10.9 There has been a notable return in satisfaction levels in relation to refuse collection and recycling. These satisfaction levels declined following the introduction of fortnightly collections of residual waste but have now returned to similar levels to what was being achieved before this change. Previous research has shown the influence that this issue can have on overall satisfaction levels with the Council and it is therefore of particular importance to track on an ongoing basis.
- 10.10 It is notable that dog fouling / wardens is the “universal” service that receives the poorest ratings from all such services covered in the survey; as noted herein, such poor ratings are apparent from other research within Aberdeenshire. However, this finding should be qualified by noting that this service is actually accorded comparatively little priority for protection in the context of questions about future budget priorities. It would seem reasonable to ensure that efforts are continued to address what is clearly a concern for a significant number of people whilst recognising that this is not an area of particular priority for resource allocation.

SATISFACTION WITH THE COUNCIL

10.11 The Council should have some cause for satisfaction with the improvement in its net satisfaction figure from +35% to +42%. A number of factors may well have contributed to this trend including improvements in aspects of service delivery, effective communications, the existence of a freeze on Council tax levels and, indeed, the relative absence of negative publicity that has been accorded to some other Councils. Again, confirmation of the reasons for the trend would require a different research approach but it will certainly be important to track this headline satisfaction figure over the coming years.

FUTURE PRIORITIES

10.12 The survey findings suggest that priorities for budget protection should be informed by a number of principles:

- Ensuring that there is continuing delivery of those universal services that residents clearly see as being “core” to Council service provision.
- Placing a strong emphasis on the protection of vulnerable people.
- According priority to schools expenditure.

However, underpinning these specific service priorities is a strong view (revealed particularly in the survey’s open-ended comments) that wasteful and inefficient expenditure needs to be reduced. The Council needs to not only do so but to communicate effectively the nature of its efforts to reduce any such waste if it is to maximise ongoing public support for the changes that it is likely to have to make.

10.13 In considering budget prioritisation issues it will be important to recognise that there will be quite different perspectives from different groups of the community (e.g. younger people and older people) and that views will vary significantly in relation to whether people are users of a particular service; this is particularly true for services that have particular importance to those that use them (including, for example, a number of aspects of educational provision, council housing and youth clubs and similar services).

Recommendation: The Council should put in place clear criteria to inform the budget prioritisation process (subject to the further research and consultation described below) and should place particular emphasis on protection of “core” services (including a range of universal services as well as schools provision) and on the protection of vulnerable people.

Recommendation: Effective communication with Aberdeenshire residents as to the budgetary challenges that the Council is facing and how it is addressing these is clearly an important dimension of an overall consultation approach on the future budget; IBP is aware that plans have already been put in place for this. Such communications activity should emphasise the steps that the Council has taken and plans to take to maximise its internal efficiencies as well as setting out clearly the scale of the budget reduction challenge and the range of options open to the Council.

10.14 The survey suggests that a majority of people recognise that new and increased charges will most probable need to be introduced and most will accept this if it helps to protect other services. There is, however, a strong view that any decision to introduce or increase such charges should take account of the wider social implications of such a decision and that charges should be applied in a way that reflects fairly the ability to pay.

Recommendation: The Council should ensure that it has a clear charging policy in place that allows decisions on charges to be applied to be made in a consistent way. This charging policy should reflect the wider social impacts of the application of charges and include appropriate provision to ensure that charges are based on ability to pay.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

- 10.15 As might be expected from a broad ranging study such as this, a number of additional questions arise from the research findings and a number of these have been set out in these conclusions. Commonly, the questions that arise relate to the basis on which respondents have come to a particular conclusion and often there is a need for a more in-depth understanding of the reasons why certain views have been expressed and of what respondents would consider to be appropriate responses to any such issues that are identified. The Council plays a lead role in the Aberdeenshire Community Planning Partnership, which has in place a forward programme of research on key Community Planning issues that reflect broadly the Council's strategic priorities. The Citizens' Panel provides a potentially cost-effective method of ensuring that issues identified for further investigation in this report can be addressed in greater detail (at the time of writing for example (October 2010) a specific Panel survey is being undertaken that will provide further insight into transport issues).
- 10.16 It may also be that certain of the issues identified require a more qualitative approach than would be accorded through a Citizens' Panel survey (for example, there may be a need for a more detailed understanding of the overall drivers of customer satisfaction and how these might be likely to change in the context of the financial environment that the Council faces and the changes it will be putting in place over the next few years).
- 10.17 In particular, we believe that there is a need for more intensive consideration of the budget reduction options that the Council faces and that these should be the subject of consultation where they have a significant impact on the public and service users; this process should enable a wide range of stakeholders to inform the Council's future priorities. Ideally, such an engagement process would include the identification of a range of options and their implications and a constructive dialogue with stakeholders, backed up by the provision of relevant information, to help inform the views that they are asked to put forward.