

Executive Scrutiny Committee	ES / 036 / 11
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2011/12 Budget – Public Consultation Responses

Enquiries to:

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Background

At its' meeting on 15 February 2011 (minute 15), the Executive Scrutiny Committee agreed that it wished to have further details of the public consultation responses gathered by the Council in 2010 in relation to budget setting priorities.

The attached report sets out the overall results of the 2010 consultation, and the previous consultation that took place in 2008.

Mr Duncan Wood, Head of Research and Intelligence will be in attendance to introduce the report and answer questions.

Budget consultation report – phases 1 & 2

Phase 1 & 2 results and summary of evidence

Overall results

Combining the feedback from phases 1 and 2 of the budget consultation, we can identify some key priorities. Those services that residents most want to see protected are:

- Protecting vulnerable people, including the young, elderly and infirm
- Education
- Transport - both infrastructure and public transport
- Health, and
- Safer communities

People want to see more spent on the third sector (charities and voluntary groups), caring for the elderly and transport.

People would support less spending on community engagement, satisfying customers, championing Essex and the Olympic legacy.

Phase 1 results

The priorities identified in the first phase of consultation were:

- Transport
- Supporting vulnerable people
- Schools
- Creating a cleaner, greener Essex, and
- Safer communities.

Phase 2 results

The focus groups in phase 2 identified the following as priorities:

- Help for vulnerable people
- Education, and
- Care for the elderly and infirm.

The focus group respondents also suggested that housing, health and frontline policing were important.

Amongst members of the deliberative workshop in phase 2, the priorities were

- Health (including mental health)
- Social services (for young, vulnerable and disabled people)
- Public transport, and
- Education (including libraries).

Tracker Surveys

The priorities identified in the budget consultation are also high priorities from the Tracker 8 survey conducted at the end of 2009. As Tracker 8 was a scientific sample survey, and as it broadly matches the results of the budget consultation, we can be confident that the budget consultation results represent the views of the Essex population at large.

Sources:

ECC communications team bulletin, 31st August 2010
Stepcheck report (revision B), Stepcheck Ltd. August 2010
Qa research, budget consultation reports, November 10th
Ipsos MORI report on Tracker 8 survey, March 2010

Response levels

There were a number of ways in which people could get involved in the first phase of consultation activity:

- every household in Essex should have received the “Changing Essex” supplement complete with questionnaire;
- Following the questionnaire, Stepcheck were commissioned to perform a validation exercise on the Changing Essex brochure. As part of this process they performed door-step interviews with around 1,000 Essex households.
- the Budget Maker online tool has been widely publicised, including in local and national newspapers;
- text and online responses to the questionnaire have been received; and
- residents could also complete a survey over the phone via Contact Essex.

In total over 2,000 people responded to first phase of consultation.

The second phase of consultation involved 3 focus groups and a deliberative workshop. In total 23 residents took part in the focus groups and 33 residents were involved in the workshop. These residents were selected partly from the Essex citizens’ panel and partly from various community or service user groups.

Phase 2 was designed to rectify any imbalances in participation in Phase 1. As participation was lower in phase 1 in Basildon and Epping Forest districts, care was taken to ensure that two of the focus groups drew upon people from these places. Also, invitations to the deliberative workshop were designed to ensure a diverse range of views could be heard in terms of ethnicity, religion, sexuality and disability in particular.

1) Overall results – priorities and spend

A consolidated list of all phase 1 responses (excluding the budget maker, which did not ask respondents to list priorities) shows that the following **priorities** have been selected as the **most important** by respondents:

1. Transport infrastructure
2. Choice of schools
3. Safest place
4. Less landfill / more recycling
5. Older people

In the 2nd phase of consultation, the **most important** priorities were help for vulnerable people, care for the elderly and infirm (particularly Alzheimer's), education and health.

The following were identified in phase 1 as the **least important** (lowest first):

1. Olympic legacy
2. Tourism
3. Essex championed
4. Reduced carbon footprint
5. Satisfied customers

When asked which priorities they would spend more or less on, phase 1 respondents identified the following as the ones they would **spend more on**¹:

1. Transport infrastructure
2. Larger role for third sector
3. Cleaner, greener Essex

And these are the priorities that phase 1 respondents would **spend less on**¹(least first):

1. Greater community engagement
2. Satisfied customers
3. Residents can choose care services

NB In the budget maker results, respondents selected "other" as the number one priority that they would spend less on, but this has been excluded from this list as the option was not available on other consultation resources.

¹ These are amalgamated results from the budget maker, SMS, postal & Engage Essex online survey responses.

2) Budget Maker analysis

This analysis is based on results up to, and including 10th November 2010.

The Budget Maker application has been viewed 3680 times. We have received 234 responses, which means that around 6.4% of the people that log-on submit a budget. Of those submitted budgets around 85.5% were affordable. Those that were unaffordable generally made no amendments, but added comments in the free-text field. The analysis below is only based on affordable responses.

Just over 80% of responses came from Essex County Council Tax payers.

Table 1 shows the Budget Maker proposals. All rows in the table are ranked by the average percentage cut proposed for each item, starting with the largest cut. Thus 'An Olympic legacy' is at the head of the list as the lowest ranked priority. However, because the budgets vary a lot in size, the final column also shows the rank number of the average budget cut in £m per line.

Table 1 – Budget Maker proposals, average for each item

	Average % change	Rank (% change)	Average £m change	Rank (£m change)
An Olympic legacy	-27.79%	22	-0.22	2
Essex championed	-26.38%	21	-2.37	11
Greater community engagement	-21.75%	20	-6.97	19
Satisfied customers	-21.34%	19	-0.58	5
Globalised local economy	-19.81%	18	-1.53	7
Reduced carbon footprint	-15.87%	17	-1.81	10
A healthier Essex	-15.60%	16	-3.01	=16
Tourism	-14.80%	15	-0.53	4
Other	-12.65%	=14	-22.13	20
Stronger Essex communities	-12.65%	=14	-1.77	9
Supporting charities & volunteers	-11.42%	12	-0.71	6
Transport congestion reduced	-8.48%	11	-1.73	8
A higher-skilled population	-7.34%	10	-2.40	12
Cleaner, greener Essex	-7.26%	9	-0.08	1
Residents can choose care services	-6.56%	8	-30.84	21
Safer communities	-6.10%	7	-3.01	=16
Transport infrastructure improved	-5.99%	6	-5.11	18
Less landfill & increased recycling	-5.35%	5	-2.80	14
Early help for vulnerable people	-4.13%	4	-2.47	13
Schools	-3.74%	3	-35.99	22
Vulnerable young people	-3.41%	2	-4.24	17
Older people in communities	-1.29%	1	-0.52	3

% changes

- The highest average percentage reduction priorities are 1. Olympic legacy, 2. Essex championed & 3. Greater community engagement.
- The lowest average percentage reduction priorities are 1. Older people in communities, 2. Vulnerable young people & 3. Schools.

£m value changes

- The highest average value reduction priorities are 1. Schools, 2. Residents can choose their care services & 3. "Other"²
- The lowest average value reduction priorities are 1. Cleaner, greener Essex, 2. Olympic legacy & 3. Older people in communities.

Main budget-maker themes

1. The main themes emerging from Budget Maker are:
2. The highest priorities appear to be: early help for vulnerable people; older people in communities; and cleaner, greener Essex. These are the items with both the lowest percentage and lowest value reductions. They also have a majority of people wishing to either increase or maintain spending on them.
3. Greater community engagement does not appear to be a priority. Almost 80% of respondents would cut spending on it; and it has the third highest percentage and value reduction of the 22 priorities. This priority includes rural inclusion, youth service, community venues and active citizenship.

² 'Other' includes the costs of supporting and managing our front line services, helping to ensure the efficient and effective provision of services to customers and delivery of the key priorities for residents. It also includes interest charges and other financing costs enabling delivery of the authority's capital works programme (e.g. school improvements, road maintenance, improvements to libraries, civic amenity sites and other community facilities).

3) More, same or less spend

Table 2 shows public views from all phase 1 consultation activities about relative spending priorities.

The table is ranked in ascending order of votes for spending cuts, ie, the item with the smallest percentage of respondents proposing cuts for it ('older people in communities') is in the first row, and so on down to the item with the largest percentage proposing cuts ('greater community engagement'). Support for spending cuts is shown in the last two columns of the table.

Other columns show the percentages of people wanting to spend more or the same on items.

Table 2 – Relative spending priorities from all consultation activity

Priority	% wanting more spend	More spend (rank)	% wanting same spend	Same spend (rank)	% wanting less spend	Less spend (rank)
Older people in communities	23.0%	18	51.1%	21	25.9%	1
Cleaner, greener Essex	21.4%	16	50.0%	20	28.6%	2
Early help for vulnerable people	23.8%	19	44.8%	18	31.4%	3
Vulnerable young people	16.7%	8	48.3%	19	35.0%	4
Supporting charities & volunteers	28.2%	21	34.1%	8	37.7%	5
Safer communities	19.6%	=12	42.5%	16	37.9%	6
Higher-skilled population	20.6%	15	41.3%	15	38.1%	7
Less landfill & increased recycling	20.1%	13	40.9%	14	39.0%	8
Transport infrastructure improved	27.6%	20	32.2%	6	40.2%	9
Transport congestion reduced	21.6%	17	34.8%	9	43.6%	10
Reduced carbon footprint	20.5%	14	35.7%	10	43.8%	11
Stronger Essex communities	18.8%	10	35.9%	11	45.4%	12
Schools	15.8%	7	37.6%	13	46.6%	13
Globalised local economy	19.6%	=12	30.2%	2	50.2%	14
Healthier Essex	18.6%	9	30.3%	3	51.1%	15
Tourism	12.3%	6	36.4%	12	51.3%	16
Olympic legacy	3.0%	1	43.2%	17	53.8%	17
Residents can choose care services	9.7%	=5	32.6%	7	57.7%	18
Essex championed	9.7%	=5	32.0%	4	58.3%	19
Satisfied customers	8.5%	2	32.1%	5	59.3%	20
Greater community engagement	9.2%	3	22.0%	1	68.8%	21

From the budget maker results only, a majority of respondents want to see either more or the same level of spending on six priorities (Early help for vulnerable people, Vulnerable young people, Older people, Cleaner, greener Essex, Less landfill & increased recycling, & Safer communities). For the remaining sixteen priorities, most budget maker respondents favoured less spending. When the results are amalgamated with all consultation activities, only the bottom three priorities have a majority of respondents advocating a reduction in spending.

In phase 2 of the consultation respondents were given the opportunity to discuss the Council's budget and the challenges it is facing. Whilst respondents recognised the need for spending reductions they also suggested that consideration should be given to the long term consequences of budgetary cuts.

A key message from the second stage of consultation was that Essex County Council should try and cope with budgetary pressures and minimise cuts to services by reducing waste, streamlining the workforce and running ECC more like a private business.

4) Headline results from the Stepcheck survey

ECC commissioned Stepcheck to conduct a survey into the distribution of the *Changing Essex* brochure. The survey was performed as a brief doorstep interview probing prompted recall of the EssexWorks magazine. This survey involved around 1,000 households.

88% of people surveyed stated that they had received the brochure. 11.1% of those interviewed claimed they had returned the 'Your Essex, your budget' Survey.

Of those that read the 'Changing Essex' supplement, 86% found it informative.

The most popular priorities among those that answered the questions were:

- reducing congestion (36% of respondents)
- improving transport infrastructure (34%)
- keeping the heart in Essex communities (31%)
- less landfill waste and increased recycling (28%)
- a choice of schools (27%)

The least popular were:

- Essex as a recognised tourist destination (0.1%)
- Essex residents can determine the services they need to achieve the best possible quality of life (0%)

The most common responses to how ECC could save money were "cut salaries" (23%), "reduce benefits spending" (20%), "job cuts" (13%) and "reducing expenses" (7%).

5) Comparisons to previous ECC research

Table 3 shows priorities using data from the Tracker 8 Survey (Oct '09-Jan '10). This survey involved a sample that was designed to be representative of the Essex population as a whole. However, there is not an exact match with the budget consultation. The Tracker Survey asks about 'what is most important in making somewhere a good place to live' and 'what most needs improving'. The budget consultation, on the other hand, was structured around the outcomes in the Corporate Plan & Budget Book.

Table 3 – Tracker 8 survey results

	Rank (Tracker 8)
The level of crime	1
Clean streets	2
Road and pavement repairs	3
Activities for teenagers	4
The level of traffic congestion	5
Public transport	6
Health services	7
Affordable decent housing	8
Shopping facilities	9
Job prospects	10
Parks and open spaces	11
Education provision	12
Facilities for young children	13
Sports & leisure facilities	14
Community activities	15
Wage levels & local cost of living	16
Access to nature	17
Cultural facilities (eg libraries, museums)	18
The level of pollution	19
Other	20
Race relations	21

Although the terms used do not match exactly, it is clear that the main priorities from the budget consultation - protecting vulnerable people, education, transport infrastructure and services, health, a cleaner and greener Essex, and safer communities – are also for the most part high priorities in the Tracker Survey. Certainly, none of them is a low priority.

'My Cash, My Call' – budget consultation campaign report November 2008

- 1. Engaging Essex residents**
- 2. Consulting residents**
- 3. Analysing results**
- 4. Reaching the business community**
- 5. Focus groups**
- 6. Conclusion**

Appendix 1 – Comments

Appendix 2 – Breakdown of votes for each category per voting method

Appendix 3 – Postcode splits

Appendix 4 – Advertising examples

Attachment 1 – Focus Group report

Attachment 2 – Business breakfast summary

1. Engaging Essex residents

In order to inform ECC's budget setting for 2009/10, a budget consultation campaign was run from August to September 2008. The campaign was promoted heavily throughout the county, with an emphasis on reaching the traditionally 'hard to reach' 18-25 year old group.

Whilst the messaging explicitly asked residents to 'tell us where you think we should spend your money next year', the implicit message was that ECC listens to Essex residents, wants to involve them in the decision making process, wants to make sure its priorities are aligned with those of the community, and, critically in these 'credit crunch' times, recognises that it is spending 'their cash'.

The campaign achieved high visibility by advertising in local papers, on local radio, at key local stations, in major towns with posters on advertising 'promo bikes' and, to reach the 18-25 audience, in washrooms and on beer mats at popular venues.

Over one and a half million train travellers were exposed to the station advertisements in the time they were displayed. The washroom adverts would have been seen by approximately 900,000 residents, and the radio advertising reached a further half a million listeners. A further 400,000 readers would have purchased local newspapers carrying the adverts. A one-page survey was also included in the *EssexWorks* magazine, delivered to all Essex's 600,000+ households. Please see Appendix 4 for advertising examples.

2. Consulting residents

Residents were asked to choose their top three priorities for budget allocation from a list of twelve options, all derived from the IPSOS MORI residents' survey:

- Education
- Health and leisure
- Supporting vulnerable people
- Highways and transport
- Sustainable economic growth
- Value for money
- Environment
- Recycling
- Making communities safer
- Other
- None of these
- Don't know.

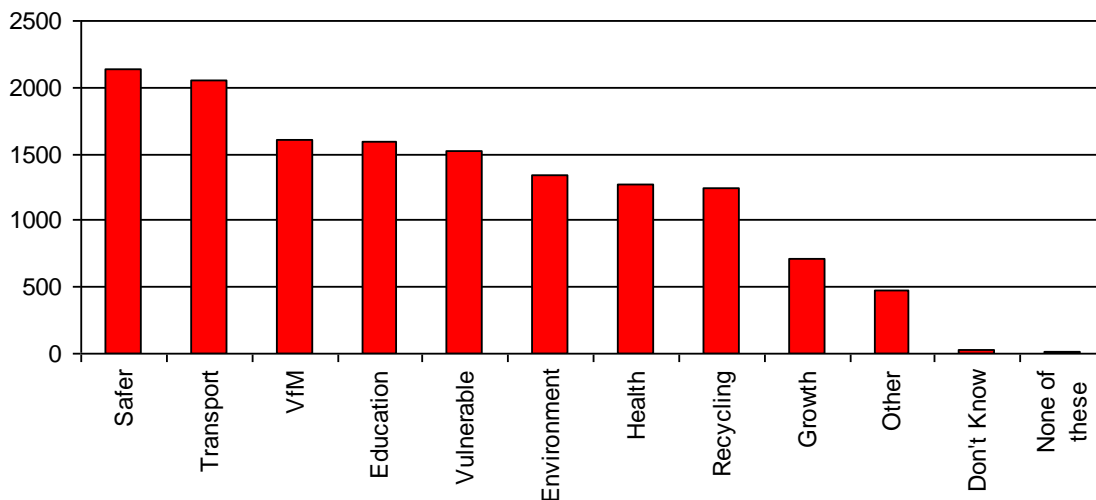
Respondents could also provide comments - see Appendix 1 for analysis.

The three key voting methods were text, web and post. Postal votes were mainly from *EssexWorks* Magazine but also from promotional postcards, sent out every time a caller to Contact Essex requested literature of any kind. In addition to this, a two-day survey of station visitors was used to obtain further votes. The incentives offered were £50 vouchers in a weekly draw for text, web and postcards and a £200 final draw for *EssexWorks* Magazine.

Overall, 4,020 people responded, casting between them a total of 11,507 votes for the priorities. (N.B. some voters only selected one or two priorities)

3. Analysing results

Votes per category



'Making communities safer' is the top overall priority, with 2,134 votes. This is closely followed by 'Highways and transport', with 2,060 votes. Six priorities can be termed as 'middle-range'. These are: 'Value for money' (1,606 votes), 'Supporting vulnerable people' (1,593 votes), 'Education' (1,519 votes), 'Environment' (1,336 votes), 'Health and leisure' (1,265 votes) and 'Recycling' (1,243 votes). The least popular priority was 'Sustainable economic growth', which received 718 votes. 468 people voted for the

budget to be spent on 'other' priorities, while less than 1% of people selected 'none of these' or 'don't know'.

An interesting feature of the survey was the consistency of the top three priorities. Weekly reports indicated that despite differences in voting numbers from week to week, there was little change in the ranking of the top three.

Top priorities did, however, vary by voting method:

	Text	Internet	Postal	Station survey
1	Making communities safer	Making communities Safer	Making communities safer	Education
2	Education	Highways and transport	Highways and transport	Highways and transport
3	Environment	Value for money	Value for Money	Making communities safer

Please see Appendix 2 for a breakdown of votes per voting method.

4. Reaching the business community

Essex businesses were invited to a business breakfast. Reflecting marginal demand, only one event was held. This was well received and identified county infrastructure as the participants' main priority. See Appendix 5.

5. Focus groups

Four focus groups were held, three involving residents from Tendring, Basildon and Harlow, and one with younger people. The focus group report (provided as an attachment) concludes that 'Making communities safer' continues to be perceived as a priority by residents. It also identified a genuine desire for increased or continued investment in highways and transport. Younger participants were likely to highlight education as a priority. The report warns that focus group participants tended to misunderstand the 'Sustainable economic growth' option and suggests caution when assessing its low priority ranking. See Attachment 1.

6. Conclusion

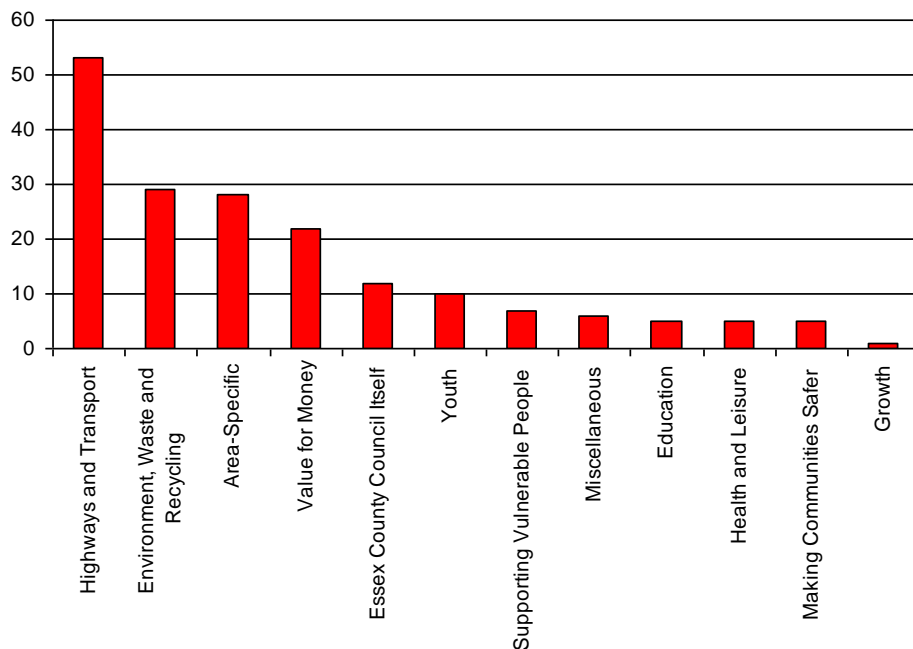
The 'My Cash, My Call' campaign had two main clear aims: firstly to demonstrate that ECC was consulting on Essex residents' priorities, and secondly to ascertain what these were. Whilst a higher response rate would have been desirable, it should be recognised that engaging residents on topics such as budget allocation will never be an easy task. Communication of the results will coincide with the announcement of ECC's 2009/10 budget.

Appendix 1 – Comments

In addition to the nine prompted priority areas, three additional categories emerged. These were youth, area-specific and issues with ECC itself. There were also six miscellaneous or unclear comments.

In total, 183 comments were received, some of which are counted more than once as they address issues in different priority categories.

Breakdown of the comments into their corresponding priority areas.



The four most commonly discussed priorities related to highways and transport, environment and recycling, area-specific issues and value for money. The least common priority was sustainable economic growth. Key issues included:

Travel

- Better maintenance of roads and footpaths.
- More investment in the provision of cycle routes.
- Reduction of transport costs, including suggestions for free school transport and allowing bus passes to be used on trains.
- Improved provision of evening and weekend transport.

Environment, Waste and Recycling

- Aesthetic improvements to the environment, particularly the removal of rubbish and litter. Suggestion that ECC should 'get tough' on fly-tipping.
- Better provision for the recycling of plastic, kitchen, and garden waste.
- Maintenance and availability of public toilets.
- Provision of housing.

Area-specific

- Campaign for a footpath from Marks Tey playground to St. Andrew's School.
- Improve the no. 47 Chelmsford bus route on weekends and public holidays.
- Promoting shopping in Shenfield with better parking to encourage trade.

Value for money

- Reduction of Council spending. Attention was paid to the cost of *EssexWorks* magazine, trips to China, and payment of ECC final-salary pensions.
- Reduction in Council Tax and rates.
- Reduction in promotions. The 'My Cash' campaign was criticised.

Efficiency

- Reducing levels of staffing required by ECC.

ECC

- Concentration on specific services including the Youth Service, hospitals, music services and social services.

Youth

- Provision of facilities and activities for younger people.

Supporting vulnerable people

There was general enthusiasm for support and protection of vulnerable people.

Education

Responses highlighted five specific areas that should be considered, including transition plans, non-accredited skills, special educational needs, free college education and apprenticeships. No area received more than one comment.

Health and leisure

- Provision of funding for the arts, sports clubs, festivals and music venues.

Making communities safer

- Provision of more policing, and focusing on reducing vandalism.
- Promoting cohesion through community schemes.

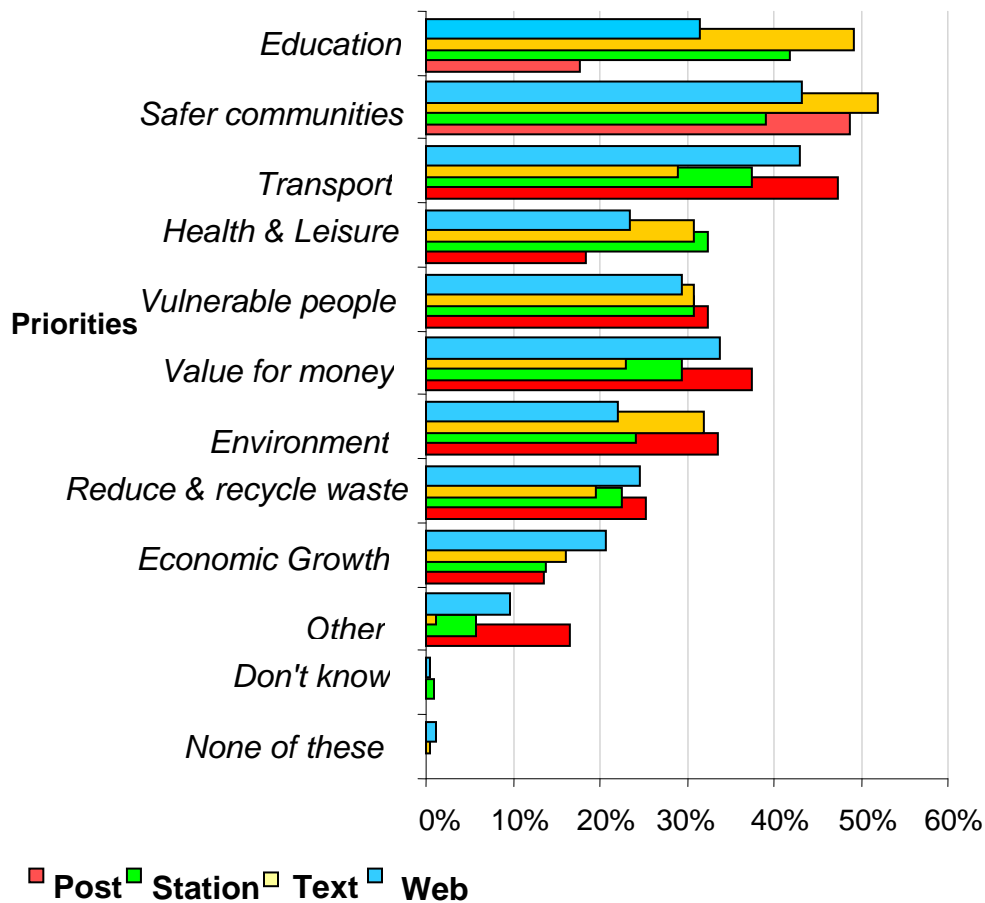
Supporting economic growth

- Concentrate on local jobs.

Appendix 2 - Total Number of Votes per Category

	Text Message	Internet	Station	Postal	Total Votes
Educational	86	172	392	1484	2134
Health and leisure	51	126	274	1609	2060
Supporting vulnerable people	52	158	268	1128	1606
Highways and transport	53	236	359	945	1593
Sustainable economic growth	30	116	122	1251	1519
Value for money	40	188	267	841	1336
Environment	54	121	199	891	1265
Recycling	33	135	194	881	1243
Making communities safer	92	238	346	42	718
Other	3	36	46	383	468
None of these	1	6	4	19	30
Don't know	0	2	13	4	19

Priorities by voting method



Appendix 3 – Postcode split

Mosaic profiling provides an insight into the lifestyles, culture, habits and behaviour of citizens using postcode data, allowing public bodies to gain a consistent picture of the demographic make-up and characteristics of consumer groups. In the case of 'My Cash, My Call', Mosaic profiling has been employed to assess the representation of social groups in the data collected; the variation in priorities in relation to mosaic groups; and the receptiveness of respondents to advertising media.

The voters' postcodes were analysed within the following Mosaic groups:

- A Career professionals living in sought after locations
- B Younger families living in newer homes
- C Older families living in suburbia
- D Close-knit, inner city and manufacturing town communities
- E Educated, young, single people living in areas of transient populations
- F People in social housing with uncertain employment in deprived areas
- G Low income families living in estate based social housing
- H Upwardly mobile families living in homes bought from social landlords
- I Older people living in social housing with high care needs
- J Independent older people with relatively active lifestyles
- K People living in rural areas far from urbanisation

Selection of information

The final data set is comprised of entries via text, web, post and station methods that included last names, post codes, the priorities and a location. Entries that did not contain this information are excluded.

In this analysis, 4,019 cases are included. It should be noted that some respondents only selected one priority option instead of three.

To create Mosaic profiles the data is geocoded – only 69% of the postcodes could be matched to their Mosaic profiles, the remaining cases were either unmatched or unknown. (Note that the station votes included respondents from outside the Essex area.)

Base file comparison

In a comparison with a base file of adult residents aged 18+, the following information emerged about the range of respondents in the survey.

- The three groups that most exceeded the base rate comparison in terms of response to the survey were Group A (career professionals living in sought after locations), Group C (older families living in suburbia) and Group K (people living in rural areas far from urbanisation).
- The most underrepresented group in the sample was Group G (low income families living in estate based social housing). Groups F (people living in social housing with

uncertain employment in deprived areas) and H (upwardly mobile families living in homes bought from social landlords) were also underrepresented.

Mosaic group trends

The comparison of Mosaic group responses should be treated with caution as the number of respondents in groups G, F and I are small – 28, 35 and 88 respectively. However, the following observations can be made:

- Respondents from low income families living in estate-based social housing are more likely to select safer communities and transport while they are least likely to select education and environment.
- Of those respondents in group J (independent older people with relatively active lifestyles), the highest proportion voted for transport.
- Educated, young, single people living in areas of transient populations are least likely to vote for transport but most likely to vote for reduce and recycle waste.
- Health and leisure received high proportions of the votes from groups G (low income families living in estate-based social housing) and F (people living in social housing with uncertain employment in deprived areas).

According to Mosaic profiling, the most represented group is deemed to be most receptive to broadsheet newspapers, heavyweight magazines, telephone advice lines and the internet. The least represented groups (H, F & G) are considered to be most receptive to communication by TV, telemarketing, posters, red top newspapers and drop-in centres.

Key priorities

The three priorities considered most important by respondents are making communities safer (45%), highways and transport (42%) and delivering value for money (33%).

Priority comparison with voting method

The analysis shows that respondents who voted by text or at the station are more likely to include education and making communities safer, while those who voted by web or post are more likely to choose transport and making communities safer.