

Budget Consultation Report

Strategy, Insight & Engagement
Essex County Council

Introduction

This report presents key findings from the consultation, conducted with residents of Essex, to inform Essex County Council in preparing its 2020-21 budget.

The consultation was undertaken during November and December 2019 and for a period of 4 weeks.

It was conducted via ECC's online consultation platform, was open to the public and was promoted through social media, print media, business networks and through ECC's links with voluntary and charity sector organisations. There were 396 responses to the consultation.

Who took part in the consultation?

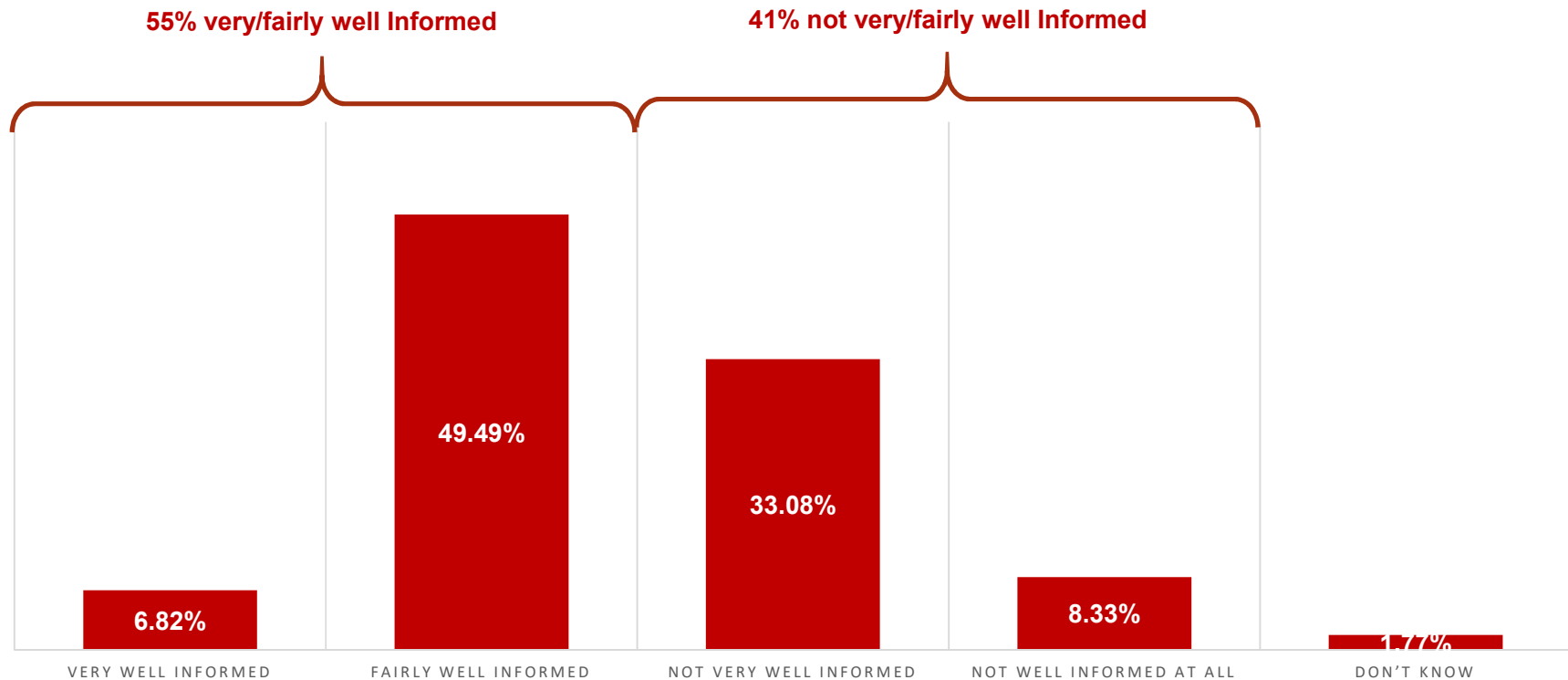
- The vast majority of participants (91%) responded as private residents. The remainder were Councillors at Parish, District or County level, businesses or community groups.
- Participants were more likely to be female (56%) rather than male (37%), although around 10% of respondents preferred to self-describe or not state their gender.
- The consultation saw a good level of participation across the majority of age groups, although the number of participants aged 16-30 was relatively low.
- 89% of respondents stated they were White. 8.59% of respondents preferred not to give details of their ethnic group. All other stated ethnicities were below 0.5% responses.
- Consultation participants were drawn from across all Essex districts. The largest percentage of participants were, from Chelmsford (25%) and Colchester (13%).



What we learned from the consultation

The majority of Essex residents feel well informed about public services

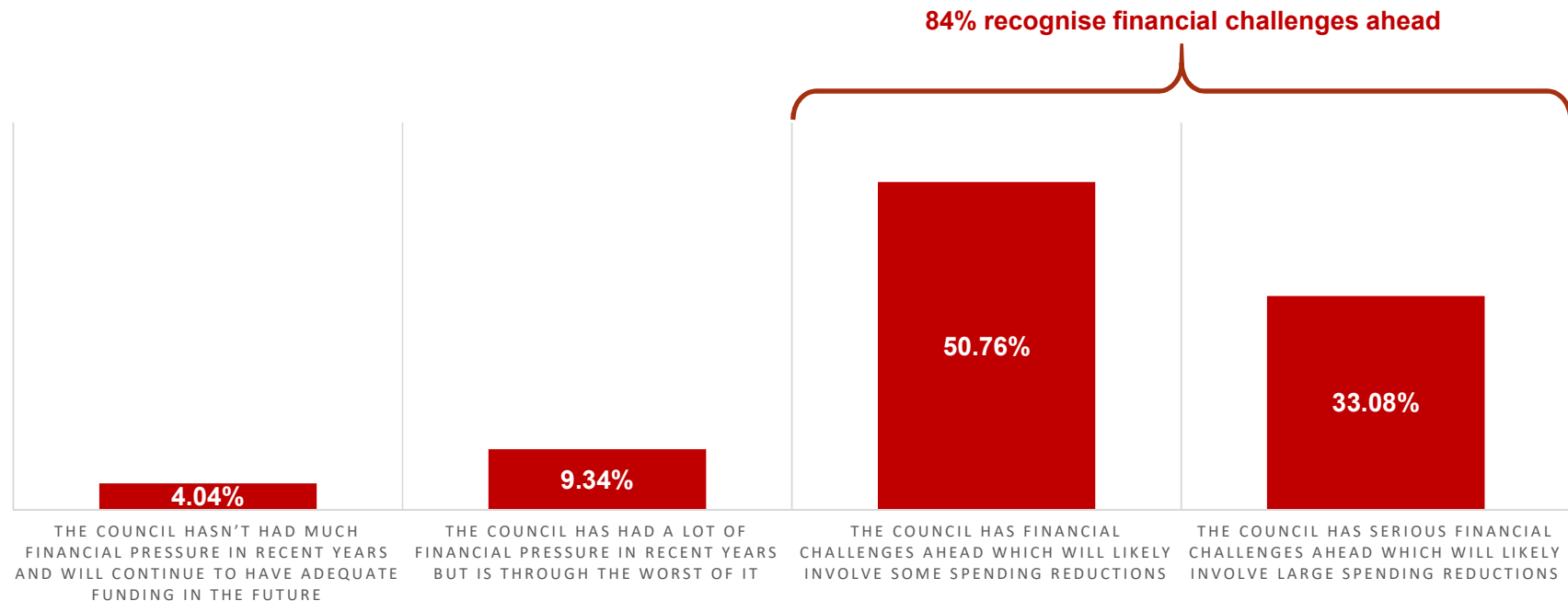
Participants were asked, “Overall, how well informed do you feel about local public services?”



Out of the 396 respondents to this question 6.86% (n=27) felt very well informed, 49.49% (n=196) felt fairly well informed, 33.08% (n=131) not very well informed, 8.33% (n=33) not well informed at all and 1.77% did not know (n=7) and <1% did not answer the question (n=2).

More than eight out of ten participants recognise the financial challenges facing the county council and the impact that these are likely to have on future spending

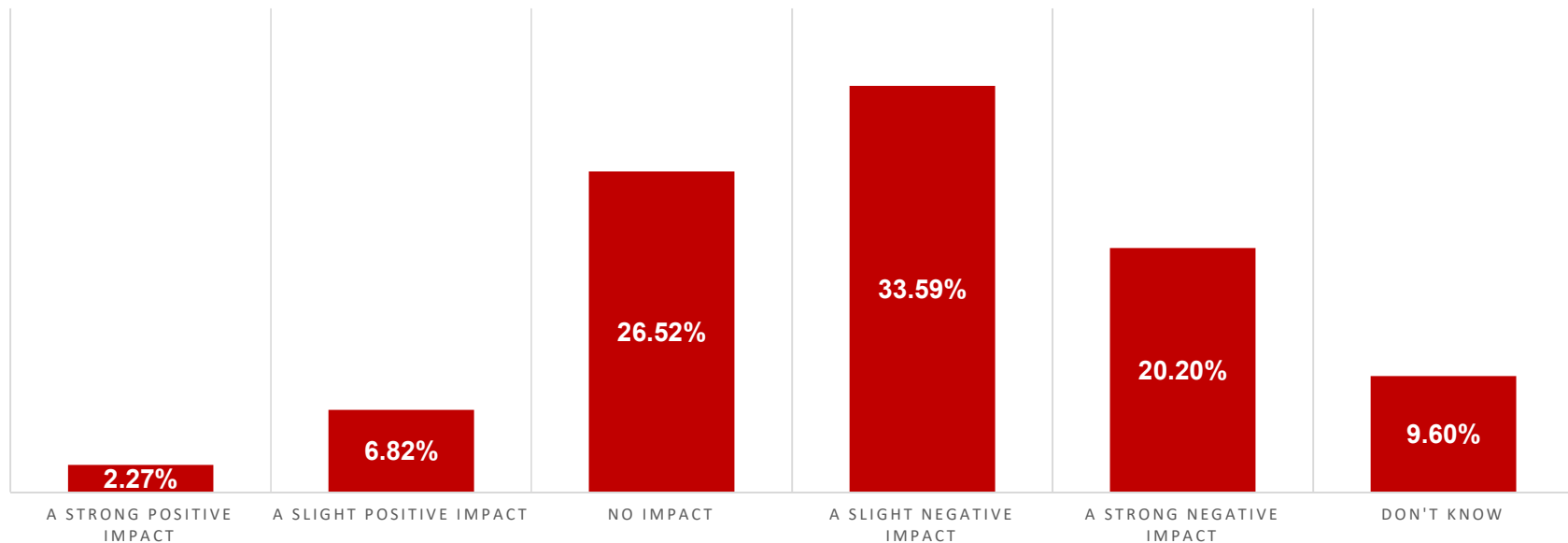
Participants were asked, “Which of the statement best reflects your view?”



Out of the 396 respondents to this question, 4.04% (n=16) felt The Council hasn't had much financial pressure in recent years and will continue to have adequate funding in the future, 9.34% (n=37) felt The Council has had a lot of financial pressure in recent years but is through the worst of it, 50.76% (n=201) felt The Council has financial challenges ahead which will likely involve some spending reductions and 33.08% (n=131) felt The Council has serious financial challenges ahead which will likely involve large spending reductions. 2.78% of respondents did not answer the question (n=11).

The financial pressures on ECC, resulting from national funding reductions, have an impact on households

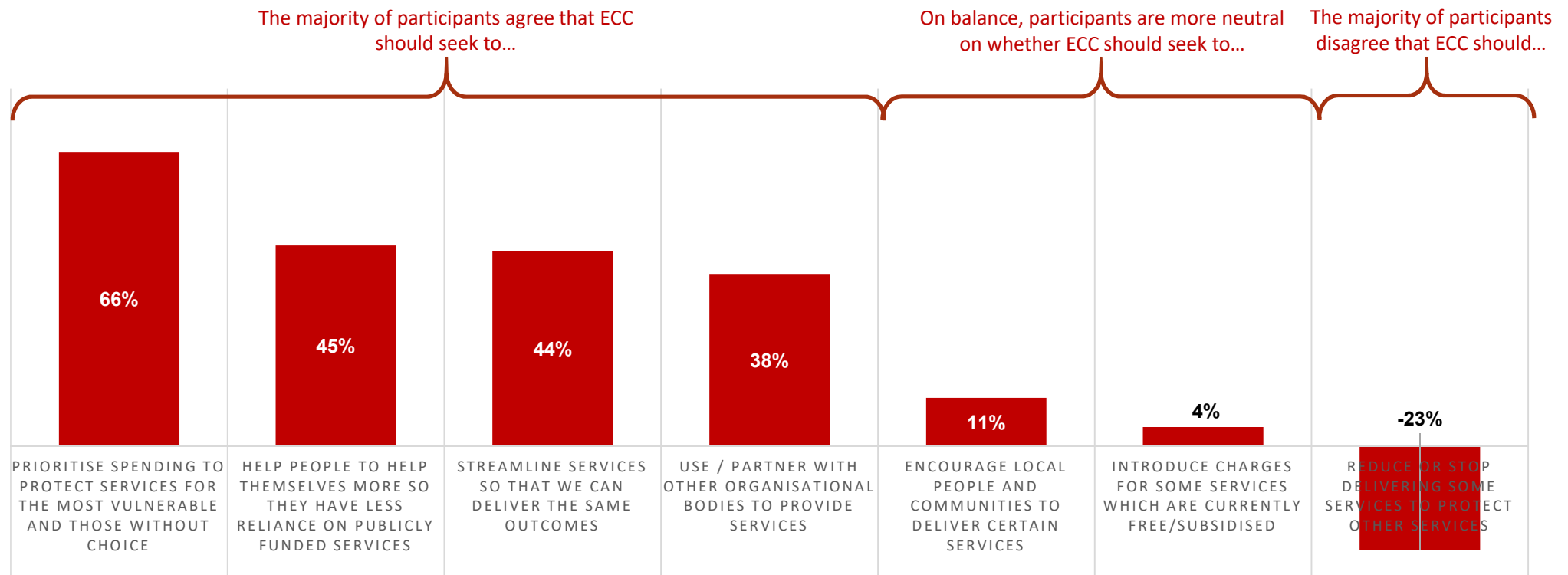
Participants were asked, “What impact have changes to ECC services had on your household or business over the last 4 years



Out of the 396 respondents to this question 2.27% (n=9) felt a strong positive impact from the changes, 6.81% (n=27) felt a slight positive impact, 26.52% (n=105) felt No impact, 33.59% (n=133) felt a slight negative impact, 20.20% felt a strong negative impact (n=80), 9.60% Did not know the impact of changes (n=38) and 1.01% did not answer the question (n=4).

Residents have clear views on the strategies that ECC should pursue in managing financial pressures

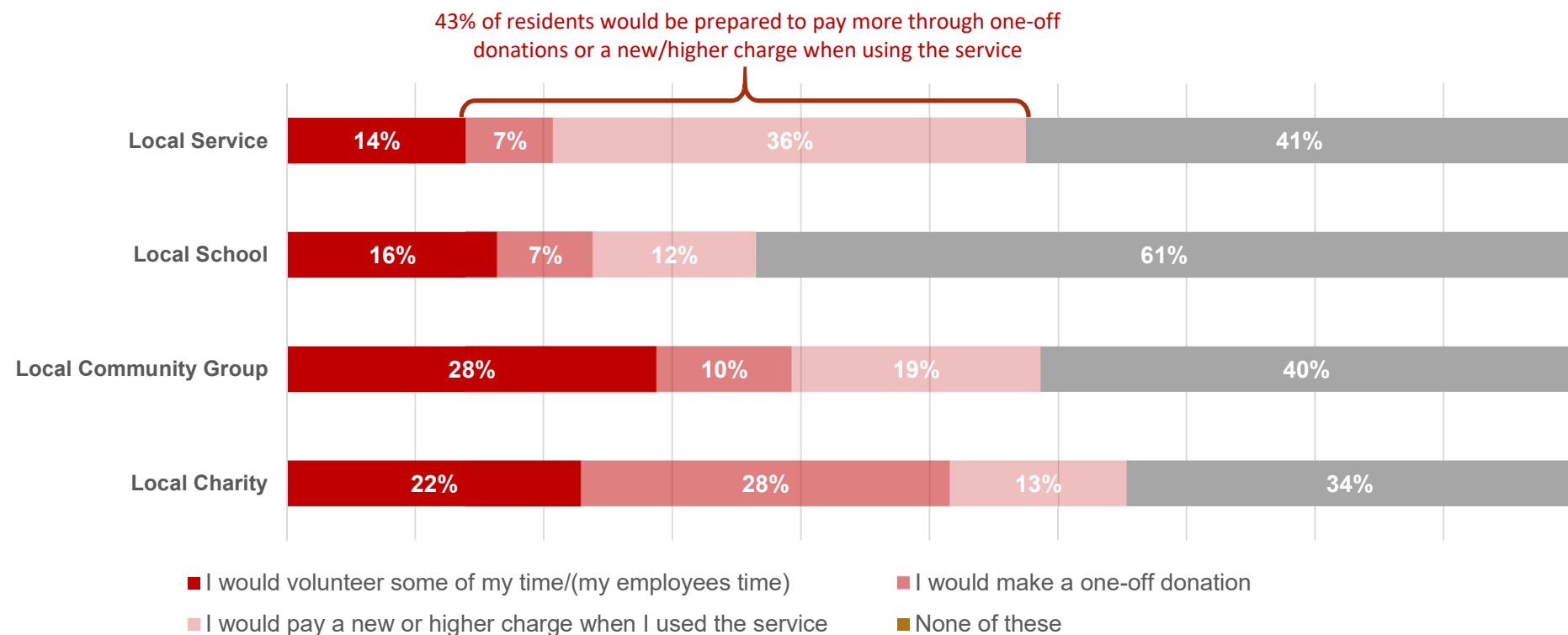
Participants were asked, “How strongly do you agree or disagree that Essex County Council should do each of the following when faced with financial pressures?”



There were 396 responses asking, for each of these strategies set out above, whether participants agreed /disagreed, strongly or slightly. The percentage figures reported above reflect participants' net support for each strategy. This is the percentage of participants who agree strongly/slightly with the strategy, minus the percentage who disagree strongly/slightly.

The majority of residents would be prepared to either pay more, or give their time, to support local services that are experiencing financial pressure.

Participants were asked, “If a service in your local area was at risk from financial pressures, would you do any of the following?”



There were 396 responses asking, for each of the services/organisations set out above, whether participants would be prepared to volunteer some of their time/their employees time to help with a local service under financial pressure, make a one off donation, pay a new or higher charge when they use the service or do none of these.

Residents want to see key services protected despite financial pressure

Participants were asked, “which services should be protected from any funding reductions? The following services were identified by over 50% of all respondents.

Care and support for vulnerable older people
Maintenance of roads, footways and bridges
Care and support for people with mental health needs

80% - 90% of participants supported protection of these services

Child Protection
Waste Management & Recycling
Children’s mental health services
Secondary Schools
Primary Schools
Care and support for people with learning disabilities
Care and support for people with physical and sensory disabilities

70% - 80% of participants supported protection of these services

Libraries
Support for learners with special educational needs
County Parks
Flood protection

60% - 70% of participants supported protection of these services

Investing in Essex’s Transport Infrastructure
Fostering & adoption services
Youth Offending Support
Funding for early years and childcare
Subsidised transport (e.g. rural busses and concessionary fares)

50% - 60% of participants supported protection of these services

Residents are less able to identify services where reductions in spending should be considered to support investment in other areas

Participants were asked, “which services should be considered for funding reductions in order to allow investment and protection in other areas? The following services were identified by over 10% of all respondents.

Smoking cessation

42% of participants identified these as services with which should be considered for funding reductions in order to allow investment and protection in other areas

Obesity programmes

30% - 40% of participants identified these as services with which should be considered for funding reductions in order to allow investment and protection in other areas

Adult Education
Tourism
Home to school transport
Subsidised transport (e.g. rural busses and concessionary fares)
Investing in Essex's Digital Infrastructure

20% - 30% of participants identified these as services considered for funding reductions in order to allow investment and protection in other areas

Street lighting
Sports and leisure provision
Drug and Alcohol Treatment
Attracting inward investment
Health Checks
Trading Standards
Funding for early years and childcare
Economic Regeneration
Libraries

10% - 20% of participants identified these as services considered for funding reductions in order to allow investment and protection in other areas

This document was prepared by Essex County Council's Research and Citizen Insight function.

For more information of a further discussion, please write to research@essex.gov.uk

The Research and Citizen Insight function works to deliver the county council's Corporate Insight Programme. It also provides advice and guidance on research and intelligence across Essex County Council and partner organisations.

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