

Cabinet – 16 December 2009

Budget Consultation 2010/11

Portfolio: Councillor C Towe, Finance and Personnel

Service: Council wide - Finance

Wards: All

Key decision: No

Forward plan: No

1. Summary of report

- 1.1 The council's vision sets out our aim for the borough to be a place where people get on well together, support and look after each other, young people fulfil their potential and the borough prospers economically and materially. Seven of the council's ten priorities focus on the needs and aspirations of local people.
- 1.2 Listening to the views and opinions of local people is therefore critical to what we do. Part of our commitment to listen to local people is to consult people on what they think about council services and priorities and how this should be reflected in the annual budget. This report summarises outcomes from the scrutiny, voluntary sector and public consultation towards the council's draft budget proposals for 2010/11. Appendices 1 to 3 provide further details as follows:
 - Appendix 1 – feedback and recommendations from scrutiny panel meetings in November and December 2009 (1a – 1f)
 - Appendix 2 – feedback from public/resident's/service users consultation during 2008 and 2009
 - Appendix 3 – feedback from Walsall Voluntary Action (WVA) Showcase held in November 2009.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the contents of this report and its appendices be noted.
- 2.2 That the recommendations of scrutiny panels be noted.
- 2.3 That the outcomes from the budget consultation, set out in this report, be considered by Cabinet as it develops the council's 2010/11 draft corporate revenue and capital budget.

3. Background information

The council consults annually as part of its budget process. This year consultation has included local residents, the voluntary sector, trades unions via JNCC, and scrutiny. Further consultation is planned with the business community and scrutiny and consultation with trades unions is ongoing throughout the budget process. A further report will be presented to Cabinet in January 2010 covering all consultation findings.

4. Resource considerations

4.1 Financial

Consultation undertaken was funded from existing revenue budgets.

4.2 Legal

The council has a legal duty to set a balanced budget and to consult with NNDR rate payers. A number of meetings, workshops and interviews have been scheduled between September and January covering all stakeholders.

4.3 Staffing

None directly related to this report.

5. Citizen impact

The consultation process is designed to be as inclusive as possible, seeking the views and opinions of residents, stakeholders, the business and voluntary sectors. Understanding the views and opinions of stakeholders is intended to assist Cabinet as it develops and finalises the budget for the financial year ahead. The feedback obtained will also be used by council services alongside other sources of customer intelligence and feedback when developing service plans and in continued implementation of the council's vision.

6. Community safety

The consultation process has raised a number of issues relating to community safety in particular anti-social behaviour, reducing crime levels and concerns over knife crime which can be linked to reports in the national media at the time. Activities for teenagers remain a top priority for local people. Ensuring citizens are safe and secure remains the most important council priority for local people.

7. Environmental impact

The consultation process has raised a number of issues relating to the local environment including keeping streets and public areas clean, educating people about their responsibilities as citizens to keep our borough litter free, tackling graffiti, fining people who litter our borough, tidying up eyesores and ensuring our Street Pride services are effective.

8. Performance and risk management issues

8.1 Risk

No direct implications.

8.2 Performance management:

The outcomes of these budget consultations will be fed through to council services and to LNPs via the council's website and to individual heads of service. Participants will be sent a feedback newsletter summarising actions and outcomes of the budget setting process, demonstrating that we listen and act upon what local people tell us.

9. Equality implications

Feedback gathered for budget consultation during 2008 via 1,148 face to face interviews with residents and key results from the Place Survey 2008/9 (1,518 responses), have been used alongside information gathered at a residents budget consultation workshop held in October 2009. Using information collected via these three methods provides a detailed, broadly representative view of local opinion incorporating the views of older and younger people, those with disabilities and black and minority ethnic groups. Detailed feedback and comments collected at the residents' workshop have reinforced and clarified issues of priority for local people.

10. Consultation

- 10.1 The process is an example of how the council is continuing to consult with residents and stakeholders on key issues as part of a council wide strategy for consultation and engagement. Budget consultation has included residents, business representatives and the voluntary and community sectors. Employee consultation is being held via the trade unions.

- 10.2 A number of qualitative and quantitative consultation methods are being used including meetings, an evening workshop with residents, web and telephone surveys and face to face interviews. Residents can also write in or email us their comments.
- 10.3 Clean streets, activities for teenagers, road and pavement repairs, reducing the level of crime and the level of traffic congestion were all key priorities for all consultees. The most important council priority in the eyes of residents is to ensure citizens are safe and secure (68%). Ensuring citizens enjoy a high quality of life (31%) and are free from discrimination or harassment (28%) were also key priorities.
- 10.4 An emerging theme from the Place Survey data is the relationship between satisfaction with area, anti-social behaviour and fear of crime. Those residents who are satisfied with their area as a place to live are also those who are less likely to identify anti-social behaviour as a problem and be less fearful of going out at night in their neighbourhood.
- 10.5 Consequently, it is no surprise that Walsall residents' consider clean streets and the level of crime to be most important for a good quality of life. These issues are also in the top five most in need of improvement locally.
- 10.6 Overall consultees want a borough to be proud of, one where people respect one another and their surroundings, is safe, clean and easy to get around. Where young people and adults are aspiring and do well in education and training. Whilst continuing to deliver services to those who are vulnerable, attendees want to see a greater allocation of more money to make Walsall a more attractive place to live in, with the regeneration of all areas not just Walsall town centre.
- 10.7 Consultees provided some positive feedback as to how the council is doing in addressing their concerns, for example, feedback from the WVA showcase. When asked how the council is performing against its priorities, net scores (*very satisfied + fairly satisfied*) – (*very dissatisfied + very dissatisfied*) reveal that two of the most important priorities (according to those interviewed, Q5) are also the ones against which the council is performing the strongest; Ensuring citizens are safe and secure and Ensuring citizens are healthy (both net score +23%).

Background papers

Various.

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James Walsh
Chief Finance Officer

7 December 2009



Rory Borealis
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7 December 2009



Councillor C Towe
**Portfolio Holder – Finance and
Personnel**

7 December 2009

Draft Budget 2010/11: Recommendations of the Children's Scrutiny and Performance Panel following Budget Consultation

Summary of report

This report presents the comments and recommendations from the Children's and Young People scrutiny and performance panel following consideration of the draft budget proposals 2010/11 at the panel's meeting on 4 December 2009. This will enable consideration by Cabinet before they make their budget recommendations to Council.

All scrutiny and performance panels have received draft budget proposals in respect of the services falling within their remit, and will receive and consider the revised draft budget proposals during January 2009, providing an opportunity to make further recommendations to Cabinet. Cabinet may wish to consider the feedback contained within this report in formulating their draft budget proposals

Recommendations

That:

1. the draft Children's and Young People Portfolio growth, efficiency, new income and service redesign budget proposals for 2010/11 be noted.
2. it is highlighted to the Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel that an increase in management fees in the catering service may lead to a reduction in use of the service.

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Councillor E. Hughes
Chair, Children's and Young People Scrutiny
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7 December 2009

Draft Budget 2010/11: Recommendations of the Environment Scrutiny and Performance Panel following Budget Consultation

Summary of report

This report presents the comments and recommendations from the Environment Scrutiny and Performance Panel following consideration of the draft budget proposals 2010/11 at the panel's meeting on 30 November 2009. This will enable consideration by Cabinet before they make their budget recommendations to Council.

All scrutiny and performance panels have received draft budget proposals in respect of the services falling within their remit, and will receive and consider the revised draft budget proposals during January 2009, providing an opportunity to make further recommendations to Cabinet. Cabinet may wish to consider the feedback contained within this report in formulating their draft budget proposals

Recommendations

Transport Portfolio

RESOLVED

That:

- 1) The Environment Scrutiny and Performance Panel support Cabinet's budget proposals for the Transport Portfolio.

And;

- 2) The Panel seek assurance from Cabinet that best value is provided for the citizens of Walsall in implementing this budget.

Environment Portfolio

RESOLVED

That:

- 1) The Environment Scrutiny and Performance Panel support Cabinet's budget proposals for the Environment Portfolio;
- 2) The Portfolio Holder for Environment should take forward the issue of the quality and cleanliness of the Bloxwich public toilets to ensure that they are safe and accessible to all;
- 3) The Environment Scrutiny and Performance Panel recommend that Cabinet should consider extending the opening hours of Bloxwich public toilets to cover Sunday mornings

And;

- 4) The Environment Scrutiny and Performance Panel fully support the interim recommendations of the Street Cleansing Working Group and ask that these are considered by Cabinet in response to their budget proposals. The Panel will report any subsequent budget recommendations following receipt of the group's final report on 4th January 2010:
- a. There should be more litter bins across the borough
 - b. The type of litter bins used should be investigated, and a pilot of different litter bins in problem areas could reveal a need to change the bins used. A trial of using open bins is suggested
 - c. Cleansing operations such as "barrow men" should be utilised in high intensity, problem areas
 - d. Current litter hit squad arrangements of 2 teams of 2 employees should be increased to 3 teams of 2 so that the 3 key areas of the borough can be covered effectively
 - e. Funding for the current 3 Environmental Crime Officers should be extended past 31 March 2010 to ensure the valuable work they do in tackling fly tipping, litter etc can continue
 - f. Night time cleaning of the Black Country Route must be maintained

Author

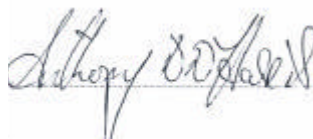
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Councillor A. Harris
Chair, Environment Scrutiny
and Performance Panel

1 December 2009

Draft Budget 2010/11: Recommendations of the Social Care and Inclusion Scrutiny and Performance Panel following Budget Consultation

Summary of report

This report presents the comments and recommendations from the Health, Social Care and Inclusion scrutiny and performance panel following consideration of the draft budget proposals 2010/11 at the panel's meeting on 30 November 2009. This will enable consideration by Cabinet before they make their budget recommendations to Council.

All scrutiny and performance panels have received draft budget proposals in respect of the services falling within their remit, and will receive and consider the revised draft budget proposals during January 2009, providing an opportunity to make further recommendations to Cabinet. Cabinet may wish to consider the feedback contained within this report in formulating their draft budget proposals

Recommendations

That the Social Care and Inclusion Scrutiny and Performance Panel:

1. note the budget presentation received;
2. request that the Council continues to prioritise social care for vulnerable adults within its budgetary process;
3. request hypothetical case studies to show the potential practical impact of proposals on individuals be provided to Panel Members prior to the next meeting on 18 January 2010;
4. request that guidance explaining the impact on learning disability of the pooled budget with NHS Walsall be provided to Panel Members prior to the next meeting on 18 January 2010.

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1 December 2009

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Councillor T Oliver
Chair, Social Care and Inclusion Scrutiny

Draft Budget 2010/11: Recommendations of the Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel following Budget Consultation

Summary of report

This report presents the comments and recommendations from Community Services scrutiny and performance panel following consideration of the draft budget proposals 2010/11 at the panel's meeting on 1 December 2009. This will enable consideration by Cabinet before they make their budget recommendations to Council.

All scrutiny and performance panels have received draft budget proposals in respect of the services falling within their remit, and will receive and consider the revised draft budget proposals during January 2009, providing an opportunity to make further recommendations to Cabinet. Cabinet may wish to consider the feedback contained within this report in formulating their draft budget proposals

Recommendations

That:

1. further information be provided to the Panel on the alternative leisure facilities available, including the possibility of subsidised memberships at other nearby leisure centres, to residents should Willenhall Leisure Centre be closed;
2. the Panel be informed of the alternative swimming and leisure facilities that will be provided for the primary, secondary and special schools that currently utilise Willenhall Leisure Centre, and;
3. the efficiency, new income and service redesign proposals for the Communities and Partnership Portfolio be supported.

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2 December 2009

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Councillor Harrison
Chair, Community Services Scrutiny
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Draft Budget 2010/11: Recommendations of the Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel following Budget Consultation

Summary of report

This report presents the comments and recommendations from the Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel following consideration of the draft budget proposals 2010/11 at the panel's meeting on 2 December 2009. This will enable consideration by Cabinet before they make their budget recommendations to Council.

All scrutiny and performance panels have received draft budget proposals in respect of the services falling within their remit, and will receive and consider the revised draft budget proposals during January 2009, providing an opportunity to make further recommendations to Cabinet. Cabinet may wish to consider the feedback contained within this report in formulating their draft budget proposals

Recommendations

Regeneration Portfolio

RESOLVED

That:

- 3) the Regeneration Portfolio plans and priorities be supported, and;
- 4) the draft Regeneration Portfolio growth, efficiency, new income and service redesign budget proposals for 2010/11 be noted.

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Councillor D. Pitt
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3 December 2009

Draft Budget 2010/11: Recommendations of the Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel following Budget Consultation

Summary of report

This report presents the comments and recommendations from the Corporate Scrutiny and Performance panel following consideration of the draft budget proposals 2010/11 at the panel's meetings on 10 and 11 December 2009. This will enable consideration by Cabinet before they make their budget recommendations to Council.

All scrutiny and performance panels have received draft budget proposals in respect of the services falling within their remit, and will receive and consider the revised draft budget proposals during January 2009, providing an opportunity to make further recommendations to Cabinet. In addition the Corporate Panel received copies of the recommendations from the other panels and used this to inform their views of the council wide position. Cabinet may wish to consider the feedback contained within this report in formulating their draft budget proposals

Recommendations

That:

1. The resolution from Willenhall LNP be noted and forwarded to the Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel;
2. The Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel identify compensatory savings proposal that would make it possible for Cabinet to consider keeping Willenhall Leisure Centre open in the short term;
3. Subject to alternative savings being identified and agreed by Cabinet, the Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel carry out a full options appraisal to ascertain the long term viability of the centre and report this back to Cabinet;
4. The recommendations of the Environment Scrutiny and Performance Panel be supported, subject to final clarification that costs can be met within the draft budget proposals
5. The recommendations of the Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel be noted;
6. The recommendations of the Social Care and Inclusions Scrutiny and Performance Panel be noted;
7. The recommendations of the Children and Young People Scrutiny and Performance Panel be noted; and
8. Cabinet's draft budget proposals for 2010/11 be noted.

Author:

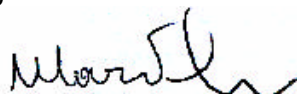
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Chair, Corporate Scrutiny and
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Budget Consultation Financial Year 2010/11

Summary of findings

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Budget Consultation Financial Year 2010/11

The consultation process

Each year Walsall Council undertakes public consultation in preparation for the budget setting process. On the evening of Monday 5 October 2009 the council held a special residents consultation event. At the event attendees heard about the council's budget setting process as well as current and future spending and savings targets. Through informal discussion in small groups¹, local residents then had the opportunity to have their say on what they thought should be the council's spending priorities for the coming financial year.

In preparation for the 2009/10 budget a comprehensive programme of consultation was undertaken gathering the views of over 1,100 people from across all areas of the borough. This included over 1,000 face to face interviews² with residents living in all areas of the borough. More information is available on; www.walsall.gov.uk/budget_consultation

Between September and December 2008 the national Place Survey³ was undertaken. A Walsall Partnership Survey, this statutory consultation aims to support the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) where it will be used to help assess, from residents perspective, what their priorities are and the extent to which Walsall Partnership is delivering against those priorities as well as wider outcomes for the community more information is available on; http://www.walsallpartnership.org.uk/wp_place_survey

Being gathered just 12 months ago, findings from budget consultation 2009/10 collected in the autumn of 2008 and results from the New Place Survey remain valid sources of information which can be used, along with other information, to inform the budget setting process for the financial year 2010/11. Findings from the October 2009 residents workshop event as well as information from the New Place survey and budget consultation 2009/10 are combined and summarised here.



Residents at the October 2009 workshop discuss what's good, bad and lacking in the borough.

¹ 47 people were recruited via existing contact lists held by the council. Prior to the event 12 people contacted us to say they could no longer attend. On the actual night 18 residents attended.

² 1,148 residents were interviewed. ICM Government & Social research unit were commissioned to undertake interviews with local residents. Interviews were carried out face-to-face, in home, across the borough between 5th and 30th September 2008. A representative sample was interviewed, with quotas set by age, gender, work status and ethnicity, ensuring the sample was broadly representative of the local population. The sample was also stratified by Local Neighbourhood Partnership (LNP) to ensure a sufficient number of interviews in each, enabling reliable comparisons by LNP area. A minimum of 111 residents were interviewed in each LNP.

³ A total of 1,518 responses were achieved and data has been weighted to ensure results are reflective of the wider population in the area, and to account for non-response bias.

Top priorities for improvement (budget consultation 2008)

Residents taking part in budget consultation face to face interviews in September 2008 said that clean streets (38%) and activities for teenagers (37%) were the top priorities for improvement in the Borough, followed by road and pavement repairs (28%) and reducing the level of crime (27%).

In the same face to face interviews, the most important council priority in the eyes of residents is to ensure citizens are safe and secure (68%). Ensuring citizens enjoy a high quality of life (31%) and are free from discrimination or harassment (28%) were also key priorities.

Place Survey Priorities (2008)

Chart 1 over the page gives a good indication of what issues local residents say are important to local quality of life and which most need improving.

Again clean Streets and level of crime are both important to local quality of life and remain in need of improvement. The majority of services in bottom right quadrant (i.e. affordable decent housing and Health Services) are seen as important but of less concern (in terms of needing improvement).

Activities for teenagers and road and pavement repairs are of lower importance (given all the other issues) but are seen as high on list for improvement.

Issues in the extreme bottom left hand quadrant are less important generally and less in need of improvement; but should still be noted.

The Place Survey top 5 priorities for improvement are;

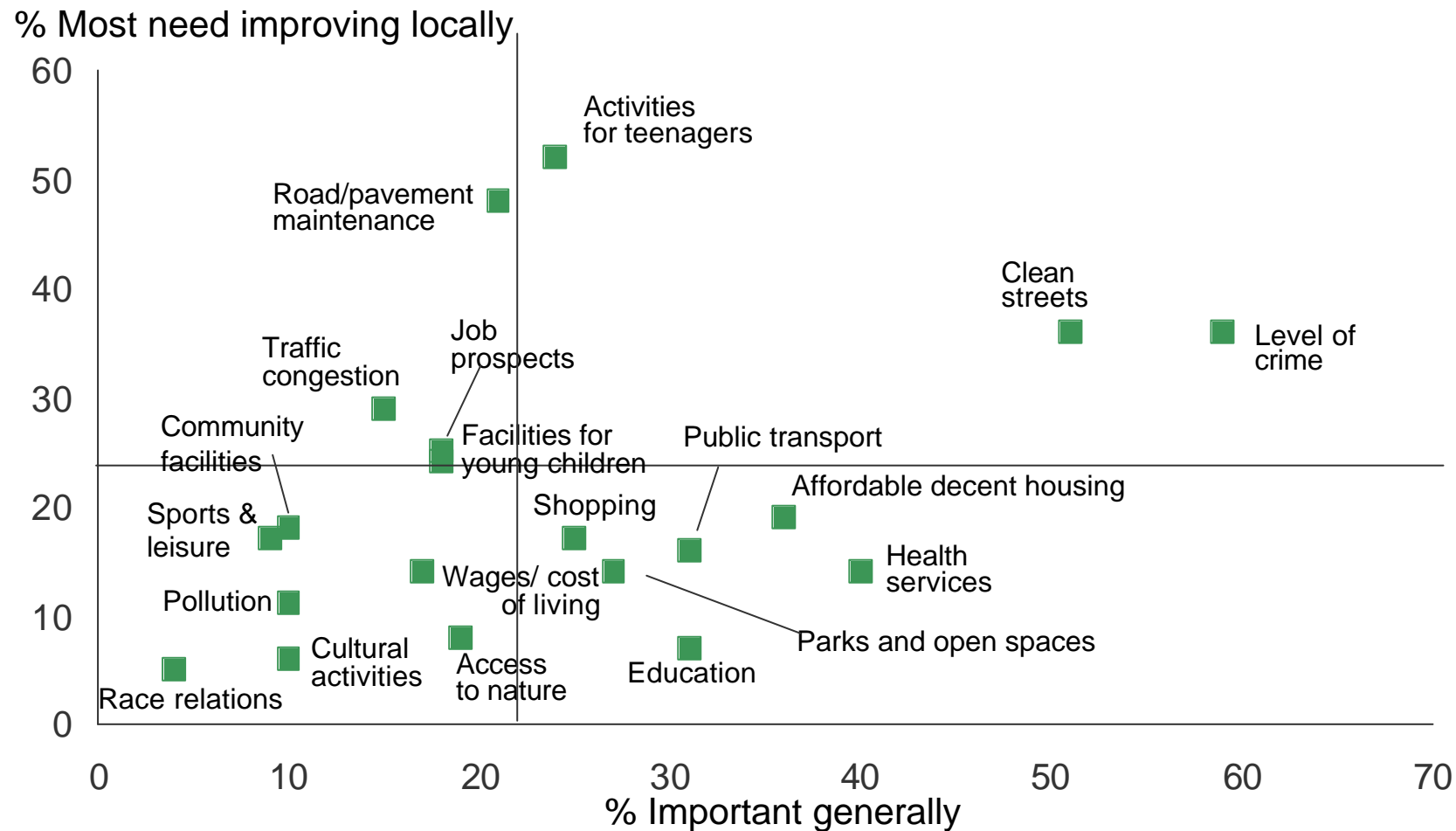
1. Activities for teenagers
2. Road and pavement repairs
3. Level of crime
4. Clean streets
5. Level of traffic congestion

The Place Survey top 5 issues most important for quality of life are;

1. Level of crime
2. Clean streets
3. Health Services
4. Affordable decent homes
5. Public transport

Chart 1. Place Survey. What's most in need of improvement and what's most important to making somewhere a good place to live.

Developing priorities for improving quality of life



An emerging theme from the Place Survey data is the relationship between satisfaction with area, anti-social behaviour and fear of crime. Those residents who are satisfied with their area as a place to live are also those who are less likely to identify anti-social behaviour as a problem and be less fearful of going out at night in their neighbourhood.

Consequently, it is no surprise that Walsall residents' consider clean streets and the level of crime to be most important for a good quality of life (rated as important by 59% and 51% of residents respectively). These issues are also in the top five most in need of improvement locally (both listed by 36% of residents); they are joined by activities for teenagers (52%) and road and pavements repairs (48%) as key areas in need of improvement.

Local decision making

Residents responding to the Place Survey generally feel unable to influence decisions in their local area, (77%) disagree that they are able to influence decisions overall. Just more than one in five residents believe that they are able to influence decisions affecting their local area.

One in four residents (26%) wishes to become more involved in decision-making. Those who are dissatisfied with the work of the council are particularly more likely to say this (34% compared to six per cent of the dissatisfied that do not wish to become more involved).

Furthermore, considering the role of local people in decision-making a majority feel that they currently are not adequately informed about local public services. Seven in ten residents feel uninformed overall (69%). We often find that the extent to which residents are informed about local services influences their level of satisfaction, and this is the case in Walsall.

- Nine in ten residents dissatisfied with Walsall Council are uninformed (90% compared to 45% satisfied).
- Six in seven residents who do not agree that Walsall Council provides good value for money are uninformed (86% compared to 47% who agree).
- Eight in ten residents dissatisfied with their local area as a place to live are uninformed (82% compared to 64% who are satisfied).

Residents Workshop October 2009

Residents were first asked their thoughts about living in the borough, what's good, what's bad and what is lacking. Generally whilst participants find it easy to think of bad points, it is less easy for them to put forward examples of what is good in the borough. Many had a fairly limited experience of the wide range of council services, whilst others had experience of a range of services. A reference sheet detailing what services the council provides was given to all attendees for information.

All comments shown in italics were all made by resident's workshop on 5 October 2009.

A borough to be proud of

Attendees highlight a number of good aspects however there is general agreement that as a borough we do not promote or celebrate our positives enough. Many attendees feel that the borough should be celebrated for its history and past prosperity in a number of industries which, although no longer exist, are important for the history of the area.

'Build on the town's reputation and history; the Arboretum, our markets, and what we are historically famous for.'

'Look at what we are proud of and build on it.'

'The New Art Gallery is good, something for Walsall to be proud of.'

One group talked about how the council is doing lots of good work, e.g. with vulnerable people but you don't see this. Residents and visitors to the borough judge an area and the local authority on visible aspects such as the state of the roads, cleanliness and the feeling of economic prosperity.

'Poor state of the roads, these are the things you see, but you don't see a lot of the good work going on which is hidden.'

'There are plenty of pot holes.'

Crime, community safety and anti-social behaviour

Many comments related to community safety, in particular anti-social behaviour and the need for respect.

'Anti-social behaviour needs tackling.'

'Youth's hanging around, especially towards the evening.'

'The town centre [Walsall] is unwelcoming and unsafe.'

'I like walking by the canals but I don't feel safe.'

'No respect from all ages, not just youth.'

Two attendees gave first hand accounts of being attacked; hence they were extremely worried about crime and community safety in the borough, whilst others expressed general concerns about crime and anti-social behaviour.

'Not enough crime prevention activities. Crime is the biggest and worst problem in the borough.'

'It is not safe to go out in the neighbourhood!'

'Parks had been closed down in Bentley because of drug addicts!'

'Community safety – Walsall Arboretum, I've only seen community safety officers twice in last 12 months, need people to feel safe to use park.'

One person thought and others in the group agreed, that there is a lack of suitable role models and a lack of positive parental backing for young people.

'There are different attitudes of different people. Aspirations vary and there is a lack of parental backing.'

Many people blamed anti-social behaviour on the lack of activities and entertainment for young people. Attendees believe that having more activities and things to do would help stop young people from hanging around the town centre in big groups drinking alcohol, skate boarding in pedestrianised areas and *'generally making a nuisance of themselves'*.

'There is nothing for young people to do.'

'The only entertainment is bars and clubs.'

'More facilities for youngsters in town, like a skateboarding park. Ask them what they want.'

'We need more places opening for younger people, for example youth centres.'

Leisure, cleaner and greener

As well as welcoming free swims for the over 60's and under 16's, attendees appreciate the borough's parks and green spaces.

'Free swim for over 60s and under 16s is great.'

'Park areas are well kept and looked after.'

'My local park [George Rose] is great. It's well maintained. There is a new grant to invest in the park.'

'The park area in Bloxwich is good. It's tidy, well used and feels safe.'

'I like the Arboretum, but it doesn't always feel safe.'

Much praise was given for the new recycling collection scheme which was introduced in the borough in April 2009. Attendees speak of the ease of recycling and the large range of materials they can now recycle at home.

'The recycling service is exceptional. It's amazing just how much you can recycle. You now realise how much we were sending to landfill.'

'The recycling service is much improved.'



October 2009 residents' workshop.

Road and pavement maintenance is of particular importance including repairing potholes and maintaining footpaths as well as trimming hedges and verges throughout the borough (not just the central Walsall area). The cleanliness of all of Walsall's footpaths was also mentioned with attendees identifying litter picking as important.

A number of attendees mentioned the need to improve the environment and the street scene, particularly litter and tidying up run down areas in the borough. This is a consistent message from residents, which echo's findings in the Place Survey and budget consultation for the previous financial years.

'Lots of rubbish on streets.'

'Clean streets – start charging for litter dropping.'

'Litter is bad but getting better.'

All attendees in one group complained of not enough road sweeping and litter picking in Walsall town centre and around the borough. Cigarette ends and chewing gum were highlighted in particular. Other areas of concern in the town centre were the deteriorating and state of the gravel around the trees in Darwall Street, Leicester Street and Lichfield Street.

Some participants commented that they had seen an improvement in the cleanliness of the borough, with improvements being made to make it cleaner and greener. However, it was felt that people visiting the area for the first time would be less than impressed and that whilst some areas are clean others are not.

'I have noticed improvements since I moved here. It's cleaner and greener, but my friends visiting from Devon recently were appalled.'
'The council is not collecting rubbish or cleaning streets in the Bentley area, there are fly tipping problems. Bentley is very dirty.'

Whilst it is felt important that areas are cleaned up and improved, it should not be at the detriment of other key services e.g. care for the vulnerable, adults and children.

'Focus on care services – both elderly and young people.'
'Focus on looked after children, vulnerable adults.'
'Need to protect Elderly Services.'



Group discussion at the residents' workshop 2009.

Education and regeneration

Investing in education is a top priority for many, particularly basic skills. Attendees value the wide range of courses available both at higher and entry level education and the convenience and choice of full and part time courses.

'Better education in schools. Children are leaving school without the qualifications or skills to obtain good jobs.'
'Bring back apprenticeships, these worked very well.'
'Need to attract & motivate young people to train in a skill to equip them for jobs of the future.'
'The amount of courses available at schools are good and growing.'
'Bitesize courses are great.'

Some attendees identify the boroughs libraries as a vital resource, having a wide range of books and free access to the internet. One person highlighted the excellent customer service libraries provide.

'I use the libraries and they are excellent. Although they close on Monday's I would rather that than close a library or see redundancies. I can go on another day so Monday closure is not too much of a problem.'
'Libraries are a vital resource for all.'
'The customer service provided by libraries is second to none.'

Many attendees want to see the council working hard to encourage inward investment and regeneration in the area. Derelict buildings, run down areas and empty shops are highlighted as a concern. Attendees want a thriving economy but feel there are no jobs and no industry.

'Encourage more businesses into area to create more jobs.'

'Too many empty and boarded up shops. Need to encourage different shops to the area.'

'Must encourage investment in the borough.'

Improving and renovating old buildings is thought as one way to help make the area more attractive. Park Street in Walsall was described by one attendee as *'dirty and dull'* and that the street is overwhelmed by people collecting for charities and looking for people to make accident claims.

Housing

Affordable housing and the right mix of housing is needed. One attendee spoke of a large housing development in Blakenall where many of the properties remain empty. They expressed concern that the wrong type of properties were built.

'Lots of properties stand empty in Blakenall. The council is losing income from council tax from these properties. Can't this be recouped from the developer?'

In contrast another member of the group identified a large housing development [Accord Housing] in Darlaston which has been very successful with all the properties being occupied.

Some residents complained of a lack of equal funding and investment in district centres around the borough. There was the feeling that resources are focused in the central areas of Walsall. Attendees want to see investment across the whole borough.

Community and voluntary sector

It was thought that emerging opportunities exist as a result of the current economic climate. With growing unemployment, one group thought that investing in and supporting volunteering opportunities in the borough would be a positive step forward, giving those out of work something to do whilst developing their skills and helping to improve the borough.

'Invest in volunteering. People out of work can volunteer in the community.'

'The council could promote opportunities for community groups and volunteering.'

One attendee highlighted the link between unemployment and potential increase in health issues like depression and obesity. It was suggested that the council introduces initiatives to give discounts for some council services, like leisure centres, which they thought might also increase council income.

It was suggested by one attendee that whilst the voluntary sector provides a number of key services, investment in the voluntary sector is perhaps concentrated in too few services and that duplication exists. It was suggested that similar service providers collaborate in order to make cost savings.

'The voluntary sector is not diverse enough. What services are there for the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay Bi-Sexual and Transgender) population?'

'Join up similar services.'

One attendee who lives in Blakenall felt that the New Deal initiative had had a huge impact in the area. The introduction of local committees was thought to be a great success with local people actively involved and taking an interest in their local area.

'Local committees would work in other areas. Young people have a centre and run services themselves.'

Transport

On the topic of transport some attendees thought that the new Walsall ring road had improved the town, however others were more critical or unsure of the benefits it brings.

'The ring road has smartened the town up.'
'The ring road has improved the road network.'
'It's [Walsall ring road] a nightmare.'

Some attendees were not sure if the ring road works as well as promised. Some felt that in areas the road markings are confusing / misleading and the filter roads are often blocked especially near the Queen Mary's Grammar School.

'There are too many crossings at the Arboretum junction.'
'The Arboretum junction needs gantry signage and clearer road markings.'

Talking about public transport, a number of attendees mentioned difficulties using the Walsall bus station and the need to improve public transport in general.

'Public transport is too expensive. Look at what can be done to improve it.'
'Poor access for disabled at bus station, money has been wasted.'
'Butler's Passage was a waste of money.'

Extending the Metro service into Willenhall and Walsall would be welcomed. Attendees think that its introduction would improve links with other areas and encouraging more people to visit the borough and businesses to invest.

'Extending the Metro would be a major plus.'

Car parking was a bone of contention for some people, particularly parking enforcement and the lack of parking in Walsall town centre.

'Traffic wardens seem to target schools and not key areas like Caldmore. Where does this income go?'
'Parking fines for people who park on double yellow lines are not fined on some streets yet on others repeatedly.'
'Parking is terrible in Walsall – too many double yellow lines – people now shop elsewhere because there is no where to park in Walsall.'
'There are not enough places to park in the town centre. It needs sorting out.'

Challenging Times

Attendees appreciate the impact of the credit crunch and the knock on effect that will be felt locally. There are worries that cuts may lead to reduced services which then impact on the most vulnerable.

'In times like these it's the most vulnerable who suffer.'
'Everything possible should be done to avoid cuts.'

'Care for older people is very important particularly residential care and welfare of vulnerable people who must have their feelings voiced and be listened to.'
'Vulnerable people must be cared for as priority.'

The effective management of Walsall Council employees was highlighted by one group, particularly managing sickness absence, dealing with grievances and discipline quickly so to ensure council employees are able to work and perform their roles.

'Look after staff. It's important to resolve employee issues quickly and effectively.'

One person suggested looking at redeployment. Transferring staff from departments that are currently over resourced i.e. planning, and temporarily transferring staff to other departments which have vacancies to save on recruitment costs.

Other cost savings suggested included trying not to print too much, producing necessary publications less frequently e.g. quarterly instead of monthly. Joining up services across departments and with partners was also thought to be a worthwhile approach to reducing costs.

'Be prudent, spend prudently and see how recession develops.'
'Good luck stretching that £1! I totally appreciate the volume of tasks compared to budget available.'

Along with the library service the First Stop Shop was identified as providing excellent customer service with the public being served more quickly being directed to the right advisor without unnecessary delays.

'The facilities in the First Stop Shop are excellent.'

Priorities in brief

Overall attendees want a borough to be proud of, one where people respect one another and their surroundings, is safe, clean and easy to get around. Where young people and adults are aspiring and do well in education and training. Whilst continuing to deliver services to those who are vulnerable, attendees want to see a greater allocation of more money to make Walsall a more attractive place to live in, with the regeneration of all areas not just Walsall town centre.

Money allocation

The money allocation task is a basic way of identifying priorities whilst also demonstrating the difficulty of dividing a limited budget across competing priorities.

When asked to allocate a notional £100 budget to current council priorities, attendees allocated the largest budget to 'ensuring citizens' are aspiring and achieving in education and qualifications' followed jointly by 'ensuring citizens are enjoying a high quality of life (clean, green and mobile) and ensuring citizens are safe and secure.



Attendees allocate their £100 budget to council priorities.

Council priorities were ranked in the following priority order, with arrows indicating the direction of any movement between 2008 and 2009.

Rank order		Council priority	
2008*	2009**		
4	1	↑	Ensuring citizens' are aspiring & achieving in education & qualifications
1	2.5	↓	Ensuring citizens are enjoying a high quality of life (clean, green & mobile)
2	2.5	↘	Ensuring citizens are safe and secure
7	4	↑	Ensuring citizens are free from discrimination or harassment
3	5	↓	Ensuring citizens are healthy
5	6	↓	To deliver quality services and meet customer expectations
8	7.5	↗	Ensuring citizens contribute to their communities (e.g. volunteering)
9	7.5	↑	Ensuring citizens are financially and materially secure
10	9.5	↗	To make effective use of our resources
6	9.5	↓	Improving the organisation and improving the customer experience (the transformation agenda)

* Based on the responses of 28 people from budget consultation in 2008 ** Based on the response of 18 people

A number of attendees at the October 2009 workshop commented on how even this simple task was difficult.

'This is an excellent way of gauging opinion.'

'I now understand how difficult it must be for the council.'

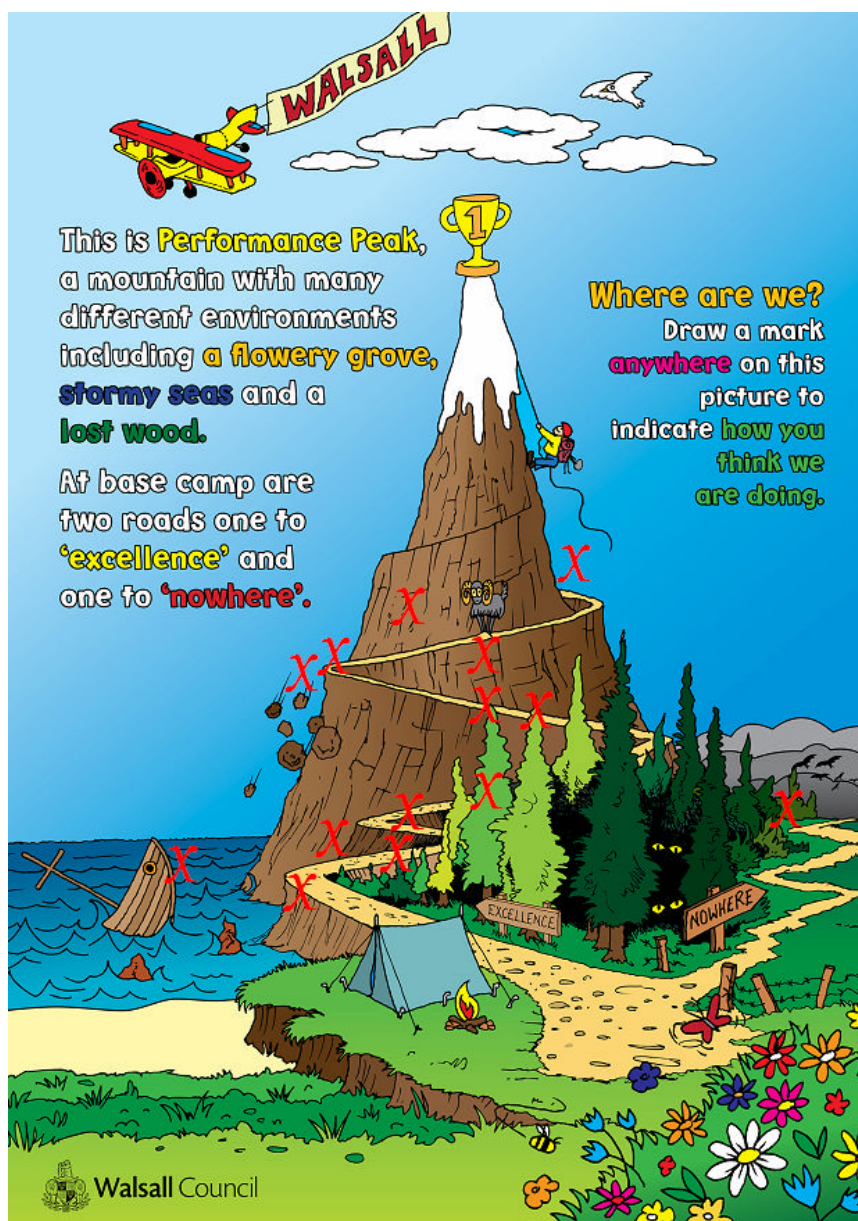
'This is really hard [pondering on where to allocate their money].'

Performance Peak

At the start of the October 2009 residents' consultation event, attendees were given a picture of 'Performance Peak, a mountain with many different environments including a flowery grove, stormy seas and a lost wood. At base camp there are two roads, one to 'excellence' and one to 'nowhere'. Using marker pens provided, attendees were asked to look at a drawing and make a mark on the picture for where they think Walsall Council is in relation to how we are performing. Their first mark, made at the start of the evening was labelled '1' their second mark

labelled '2', was made at the close of the evening. Participants gave their reasons for why they had marked where they did.

Mark 1 (at the start of the consultation event)



At the start of the event, attendees were free to make their first mark anywhere on the picture but were asked to explain why. X indicates where participants made their mark.

Comments were varied, however many gave a positive outlook for the council but indicating there is plenty of room for improvement.

'They are improving but have some way to go.'

'Walsall Council has made a positive start to improve performance, but there is a long way to go and listening to and involving residents has been slow to start.'

'Distant, still a very, very steep climb.'

'Still think Walsall Council have got a long way to go before reaching the top.'

Others indicated that although we are on the road to excellence there is much more we could do to improve.

'I think Walsall has room for development and it all is done well the town will offer more.'

'I think the Council are working hard to keep Walsall on the map.'

'Some services are better than others although not familiar with many of them.'

Some people were less positive, citing the credit crunch as a contributing factor to lower council performance and thus making their mark lower down the mountain or even in the stormy seas.

'Fairly depressed at this level on the rock.'

'Average performance due to credit crunch.'

'Stormy waters: which will be continued while the country is in recession. The Council can do things to make the environment good and to help young people so that they have a focus and do not spend their days hanging on street corners or in town.'

Mark 2 (at the end of the consultation event)



At the end of the event, attendees were free to make their second mark anywhere on the picture and were asked to explain why. X indicates where participants made their mark.

The differing pattern of marks on Performance Peak and supporting comments indicate that following the event the perception of how the council is performing had for some improved.

'After discussions and talking about the changes and ideas about the budget a more positive feeling is achievable.'

'We should promote our good points more.'

'A better understanding of Walsall borough and what it has within the limits of its environment, making the most of what we have got.'

'I think Walsall is in a position whereby it can be a centrepiece of innovation.'

Workshop feedback from attendees

Fifteen people completed an evaluation feedback questionnaire at the end of the event and the results indicate that attendees thought the event was very successful.

Everyone who filled in a questionnaire said they understood the purpose of the event, that staff were helpful, that the table tasks and discussions were enjoyable and informative and that they got the chance to contribute to the tasks and have their say.

80% of respondents said that staff were excellent with 20% saying good. No one rated any of the aspects of the event poor or very poor. On rating the event overall, 67% rated the event as excellent and 33% good, again no one said poor or very poor.

Comments included;

'This event could be longer so that each task can be discussed more.'

'A good mix of information and activity.'

'A very good idea, learnt a lot about council finance.'

'Could have had a better involvement from public. Ask those who attended to bring someone who would be interested.'

'Improve the demographics - i.e. more younger people and black and ethnic minorities.'

'Parking is bad, should be able to park nearer.'

'Try a daytime workshop.'

'Enjoyable.'

'Quite informative and enjoyed every bit of it.'

'Sessions such as this are a good and valued practise by Walsall Council.'

Walsall Voluntary Action Showcase Monday 2 November, Banks' Stadium

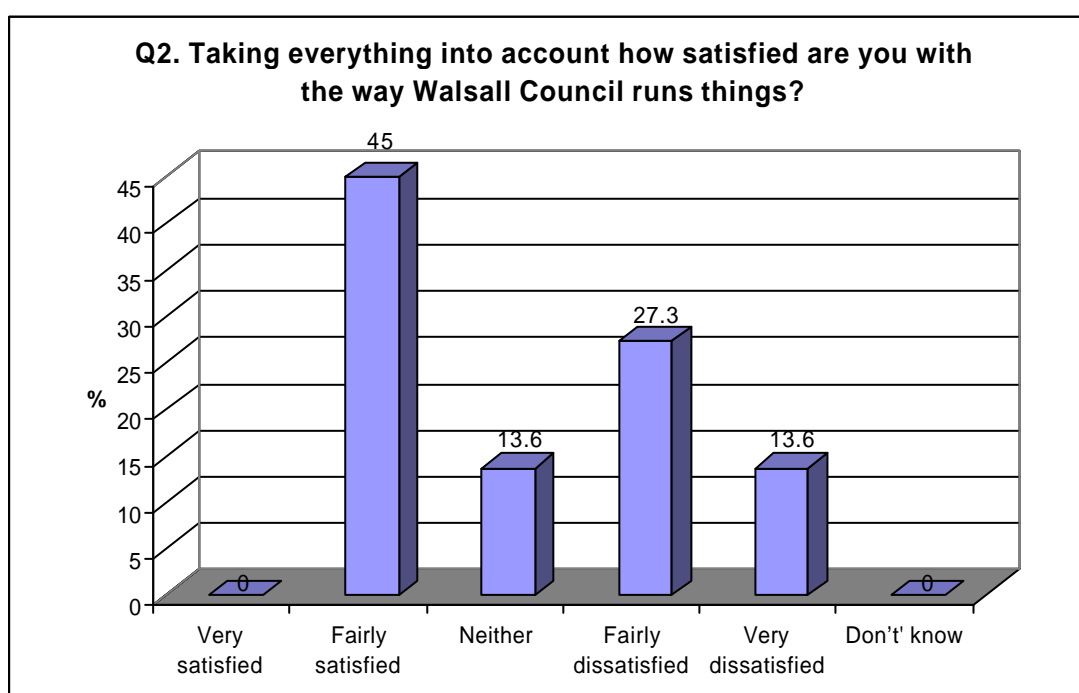
Officers from Walsall Council attended this annual showcase event with the sole purpose of speaking to representatives from the community and voluntary sector about the council's spending priorities for the coming financial year. Twenty-two people were interviewed on the day, with at least one person from each of the following organisations being interviewed;

- Victim support
- Walsall Housing Regeneration Agency (WHRA)
- Walsall Endeavours Community Interest Company
- Afro Caribbean Association
- Bridging the Gap
- Walsall Street Teams
- Samaritans
- Frank F Harrison Community Association
- Brownhills Local Committee
- Walsall Friends of the Earth
- Youth Essential Theatre School of Performing Arts
- Walsall Society for the Blind
- Breathing Space
- Comex (Walsall) Ltd

82% of respondents lived in the borough of Walsall.

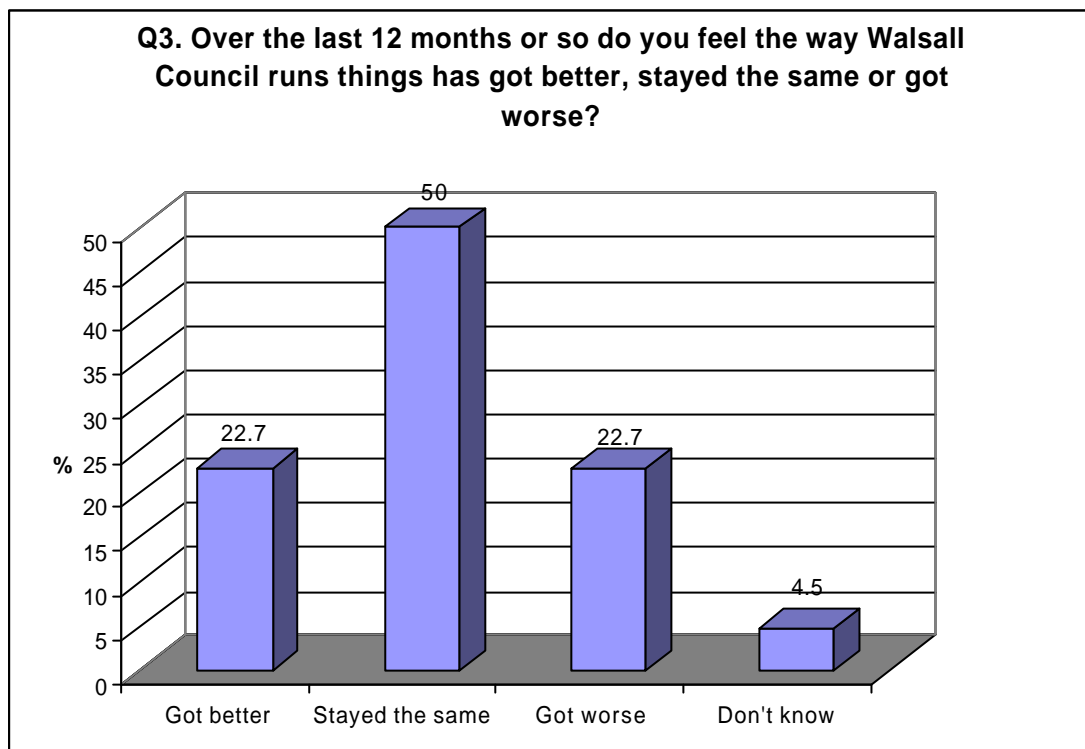
Q. Satisfaction with the way the council runs things

Whilst 45% of those interviewed were fairly satisfied with the way Walsall Council runs things, just over one fifth (41%) were dissatisfied to some extent, of which 14% were very dissatisfied.



Q. Have things got better, stayed the same or got worse

Half of those interviewed feel that there has been no change in the way the council runs things in the last 12 months. The same proportion of respondents (23%) thought that things had got better and got worse over the last 12 months.



Respondents generally find it difficult to identify any significant change in the last 12 months.

Aspects most in need of improvement

When asked what four or five things are most in need of improving in the borough, unprompted, the most frequently mentioned issues were clean streets, activities for teenagers, facilities for young children and the level of crime. Also most in need of improvement were job prospects and road and pavement repairs.

Q. Thinking about the borough of Walsall, which 4 or 5 things, if any do you think most need improving?

	%
Clean streets	45.5
Activities for teenagers	27.3
Facilities for young children	27.3
The level of crime	27.3
Job prospects	18.2
Road and pavement repairs	18.2
Community activities	13.6
Health services	9.1
Parks and open spaces	9.1
Shopping facilities	9.1
Wage levels and local cost of living	9.1
Cultural facilities (e.g. libraries, museums)	4.5
Education provision	4.5
The level of pollution	4.5
The level of traffic congestion	4.5
Public transport	4.5
Race relations	4.5
Access to nature	0
Affordable decent housing	0
Sports and leisure facilities	0
None of these	0
Don't know	0
Other	59.1

Unsurprisingly comments tended to relate very closely to the ideals of the organisation or client group the respondent represented. Key areas of focus included children and young people, crime and anti-social behaviour

"Expand youth provision in the borough."

"Facilities for young people need improving with a particular focus on training into work."

"More needs doing to address provision for 8-11 year olds."

"Opportunities for children and young people need increasing."

"Provision of facilities and support for young parents is lacking, especially as Walsall has a teenage pregnancy problem."

"Increase job prospects for young people."

A number of comments related to the general appearance and cleanliness of the borough with respondents identifying specific problems with the appearance of some housing association properties in the Brownhills area as well as maintenance of highways and pavements.

"The poor state of some housing association properties gives a very bad impression."

"Grounds maintenance of roundabouts needs some attention, particularly in Brownhills."

"Smaller district centres are overlooked – regeneration is needed across the whole borough."

Respondents clearly feel that clean streets is a top priority for the borough. In addition, comments indicate that a number of respondents feel that fly tipping is also a problem that needs tackling.

"Street cleaning, maintenance of pavements. Bins, there are none in street."

"Fly tipping - need to check areas fully to get it all cleared up. Sometimes the council checks an area for fly tipping but not thoroughly enough and miss bits which don't get cleared up."

"Tips should be more available - e.g. with trailer transit vans."

"As a resident tips aren't accessible so fly tipping has worsened."

Crime and anti-social behaviour are a concern for respondents, 27% said that the level of crime in the borough needs tackling. Some respondents made suggestions for what is needed in the borough.

"A greater police presence is needed particularly for anti-social behaviour. A general focus on children and young people is needed. In terms of ASB, dispersal orders don't work!"

"Police (more needed) particularly out of town."

"There is a lack of support for the rehabilitation of offenders. Offenders leave prison with nowhere to go and nowhere to get support and advice. There needs to be more support in this area."

Car parking was mentioned on a number of occasions, with respondents' main concerns focussing on the lack of car parking spaces, enforcement and charges.

"Lack of parking and parking charges put people off coming into town. Why isn't car parking free on a Sunday?"

"Parking enforcement - need more parking officers in Brownhills. Better distribution of parking enforcement officers across the borough. Currently they are all focussed in Walsall town centre."

"Parking in Willenhall there are not enough spaces and no enforcement. Enforcement can work if it's done sensibly. Signs for loading zones, not always clear what you can and can't do."

Traffic congestion was highlighted as a problem by one respondent who also thought that the council's approach to the whole environment and climate change agenda needs addressing. The individual did not feel confident that the council takes climate change and sustainability seriously enough.

"Transport – congestion on our roads. The ring road has helped but there needs to be sustainable transport package for the borough. The council needs to take climate change more seriously. There needs to be a focus on sustainable food sources and sustainable farming – local products for local people. The council should lead by example."

Other comments included;

"Quality and varied entertainment is lacking."

"The council needs to work more closely with and actively promote the voluntary sector."

"Community engagement needs improving."

"The council needs a major restructure. Mismanagement of council"

Most important council priorities and how we are performing

'Ensuring citizens are safe and secure' was thought to be the most important council priority. This was followed by 'ensuring citizens are healthy' and 'making effective use of resources'.

Q. Which 2 or 3 council priorities do you think are most important?

	%
Ensuring citizens are safe and secure	63.6
Ensuring citizens are healthy	36.4
To make effective use of resources	36.4
Ensuring citizens are enjoying a high quality of life (e.g. clean and green, good transport links)	22.7
Ensuring citizens are aspiring and achieving in education and qualifications	18.2
Ensuring citizens contribute to their communities (e.g. volunteering)	18.2
Ensuring citizens are financially and materially secure	18.2
Ensuring citizens are free from discrimination or harassment	18.2
To deliver quality services and meet customer expectations	18.2
Improving the organisation and improving the customer experience	0
None	0
Don't know/No opinion	0

When asked how the council is performing against its priorities, net scores (*very satisfied + fairly satisfied*) – (*very dissatisfied + very dissatisfied*) reveal that two of the most important priorities (according to those interviewed, Q5) are also the ones against which the council is performing the strongest; Ensuring citizens are safe and secure and Ensuring citizens are healthy (both net score +23%).

Q. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way that Walsall Council is performing against these priorities?

	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Net score
* Ensuring citizens are safe and secure	4.5	40.9	27.3	13.6	9.1	+22.7
* Ensuring citizens are healthy	4.5	45.5	22.7	27.3	0	+22.7
Ensuring citizens are financially and materially secure	4.5	40.9	18.2	31.8	0	+13.6
Ensuring citizens are enjoying a high quality of life (e.g. clean and green, good transport links)	13.6	27.3	27.3	31.8	0	+9.1
Improving the organisation and improving the customer experience	4.5	18.2	40.9	9.1	4.5	+9.1
* To make effective use of resources	4.5	27.3	27.3	27.3	4.5	0
Ensuring citizens are aspiring and achieving in education and qualifications	0	18.2	36.4	36.4	0	-18.2
Ensuring citizens contribute to their communities (e.g. volunteering)	9.1	13.6	31.8	31.8	9.1	-18.2
To deliver quality services and meet customer expectations	9.1	9.1	36.4	36.4	0	-18.2
Ensuring citizens are free from discrimination or harassment	4.5	18.2	18.2	45.5	9.1	-31.9

* Top three most important council priorities

With a net score of -32% a key area for improvement is 'ensuring citizens are free from discrimination or harassment.'

Respondents were invited to make any other comments

Listening and consulting communities

"Do more consultation to get people's opinions."

"Don't spend lots of money on consultations and consultants, use own staff."

"I have concerns about the lack of consultation between voluntary sector and the council."

Community cohesion

"There is racial tension in Darlaston."

"I feel that sometimes community cohesion can promote community in-cohesion i.e. funding for specific groups like Black and Asian Minority Ethnic Groups which pulls race boundaries further apart."

"Racial tension exists but it is better than it was. There are pockets of aggressive young men, many have complex issues. Problems exist around the grooming of young females."

"Need to do more to support the vulnerable."

Activities for teenagers

"There is a lack of things to do for teenagers/under 16."

"There should be more places for physical activities."

"Walsall Youth Service, there have been improvements in provision and service. Healthy lifestyles, a lot more should be done. Youth provision needs more of this. Try and focus on being healthy. Healthy communities are important."

"Help given to widowed mother in-law in benefits was poor. Do not know where to go for help. Good feedback form from school on how to help education process."

"More needs to be done to find people opportunities (young people) there aren't things out there for people to do."

Resources and funding

"Resources - a lot more could be done. Directing it into specific needs such as extended services for ex offenders. The benefits service is doing well especially with elderly. The system is really working."

"Would welcome more funding for outreach partner projects on prevention."

"Not enough funding to meet people's training expectations. Wasted resources - should be targeted specifically."

"Council could do more, use resources. Brownhills - discipline is abysmal."

"Better support for the 3rd sector, tap into the resources that exist."

"The council and its partners should procure locally where possible."

"Walsall College over budget/not completed. Town centre poor management of funds. Money needs using more effectively across all areas. Funds have been wasted and not allocated where they are really needed e.g. community buildings are in a really poor state."

"We are always told there is money, but then we are told we don't qualify. Clarity and support is needed to assist the process. The council listens but doesn't act."

"Wiser spending where it is really needed. Understand needs of the community."

The environment and regeneration

"It would be good to have a greater green agenda, there is more we can be doing particularly around transport and fuel efficiency. Need to reinvigorate interest in green agenda. The council seems unwilling/nervous to work with Friends of the Earth, there is lots to be gained from working in partnership."

"The recycling service in particular has got better."

"Transport is not reliable, many unclean areas. Litter is a major problem."

"Town centres are not as clean and fresh as they should be."

"Regenerate Walsall Town Centre, the facilities and shops. Derelict, boarded up shops are an eyesore and not good for the town."

"Walsall is in worst state I've ever seen. Don't want to live/work/shop there. Highly paid people don't live in Walsall. Used to be a friendly town. Now it's more guarded."

The council

"When contacting the council you get a different service every time. Sometimes very friendly and an answer straight away, other times they are not so helpful."

"You ring up and get passed around, the person you speak to doesn't have the information to answer your question. LNPs don't always act on what you tell them, they don't come back to you."

"The website is not user friendly. The language used is not customer focussed."

"Things have got better, the council has only recently woken up to mistakes that have been made in the past. Issue of funding taken from supporting people. Meetings for community partnerships aren't well advertised. Disaster getting rid of Neighbourhood Offices. One stop shop – the wrong queue issue. Council tax benefit - only open until 5.00pm which is not good."