

Citizens' Panel Survey – analysis of results

This paper gives a brief analysis of the responses to the questionnaire issued to the Wolverhampton Citizens' Panel, designed to reflect some of the issues raised by the Lyons Inquiry. Panel members were asked questions about:

- (a) Their local area, and the perception of the Council's role within it;
- (b) Which organisation, agency or body they would complain to if they had an problem to raise about a particular service;
- (c) Which organisation, agency or body *should be* responsible for particular services, regardless of who actually *was* in charge of those services;
- (d) How satisfied they were with the Council, how much they trusted the Council to run services, and what measures could increase that level of satisfaction and trust; and
- (e) Which level of government should have responsibility for setting priorities and budgets for particular services.

SECTION A: The Local Area

Panel members were asked an initial question to ascertain their view of the distinctiveness of their local area – whether it was broadly 'similar' to surrounding areas. This question was intended to elicit a view of whether residents regard their neighbourhood as a 'special case' in delivery terms, or whether they think universal services can provide for their needs.

Question:	All panel members were asked if their local area was different from or similar to neighbouring areas.
Result:	Almost half (49%) said it was similar while a further one in eight (13%) of panel members said that it was very similar. Almost one-quarter (23%) thought their local area was different and 10% said it was very different.
Analysis:	People generally regarded their area as being similar or very similar to neighbouring areas, but a significant minority said that it was different or very different, meaning that there are perceptions of significant differences between areas, which may affect people's view of the relative levels of service those areas receive. It should be recognised, however, that Citizens' Panel membership, and the responses to questionnaires, are not geographically representative, so assumptions cannot necessarily be made on this basis.

Question:	Respondents were then asked if they thought their local area has similar or different needs to neighbouring areas.
Result:	Just over half (51%) said it had similar needs while a further 15% of panel members said that it had very similar needs. One-quarter (25%) thought their local area had different needs and 5% said it had very different needs.
Analysis:	A large proportion again described the needs of their area as similar or very similar to neighbouring areas. A similar (although slightly smaller) minority considered the needs of their area to be different or very different. Again, it should be noted that these responses are not geographically representative.

Question:	Respondents were asked if there were things which Wolverhampton City Council does in their area which the Council should stop doing.
Result:	Only 13% of the respondents concurred that there were things Wolverhampton City Council should stop doing in their local area which they deemed unnecessary. Two-thirds of all respondents (67%) disagreed with this premise and 20% did not know.
Analysis:	There was little approval among Citizens' Panel respondents for fundamental changes in services involving cuts or reductions in the levels of service currently offered. One fifth of respondents answered that they did not know whether services could be discontinued, possibly suggesting an underlying lack of understanding about the services delivered.

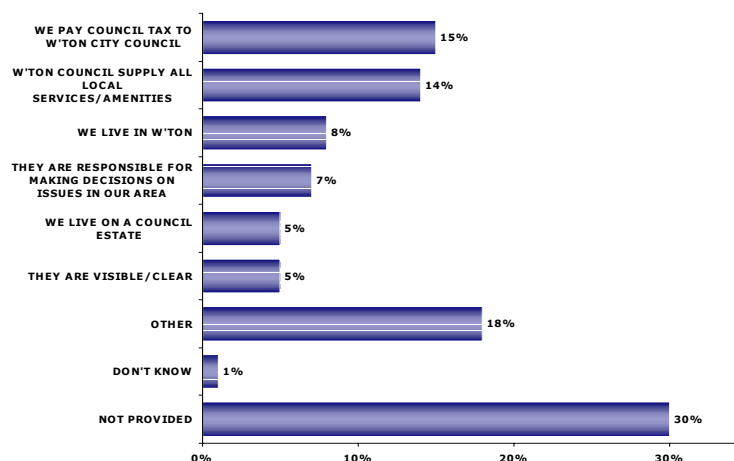
Question:	Respondents were then asked if they thought that there are things that Wolverhampton City Council does not currently do which they think they should start doing, to better meet the needs of their local neighbourhood.
Result:	In response to this, half (50%) said yes and 30% said no, while 18% did not know.
Analysis:	Whilst a majority in the previous question were reluctant to see services cut, the majority of respondents here were clear that there were additional services which could be delivered in addition to those already available.

Question:	Of those who answered that the Council should provide additional services, 157 respondents suggested the areas in which the Council should be doing things to better the local neighbourhood.
Result:	One in eight (12%) cited better roads/footpaths/pavement maintenance, 9% street cleaning and 8% that they should provide more youth services/facilities.
Analysis:	It is unsurprising that the priorities of residents fall largely into the clean / green bracket, as these consistently the issues which come towards the top of residents priorities in other surveys. Youth facilities have also come out previously as a high-priority issue.

Question:	Respondents were asked whether they associated their area with Wolverhampton City Council, and what the principal reason for the association was.
Result:	Just over three-fifths (62%) of all panel members did associate their local area/neighbourhood with Wolverhampton City Council. Of these, 15% gave their reasons for this as paying tax to the Council, while 14% said it was because the Council supplies all local services/amenities
Analysis:	Of those who responded that they did associate their local area with the Council, the two top answers have to do with visibility – Council Tax as the most highly-visible form of direct taxation, and local services and amenities because they carry Council branding. However, only five percent considered that the Council was clear or visible in its interventions in their neighbourhood, and only 7% cited the Council’s responsibility for decision-making. This suggests a low level of understanding of what the Council does beyond taxation and direct services.

Figure 1

PLEASE SAY WHY YOU SAY THIS (PANEL MEMBERS WHO ASSOCIATE THEIR LOCAL AREA/NEIGHBOURHOOD WITH WOLVERHAMPTON CITY COUNCIL)

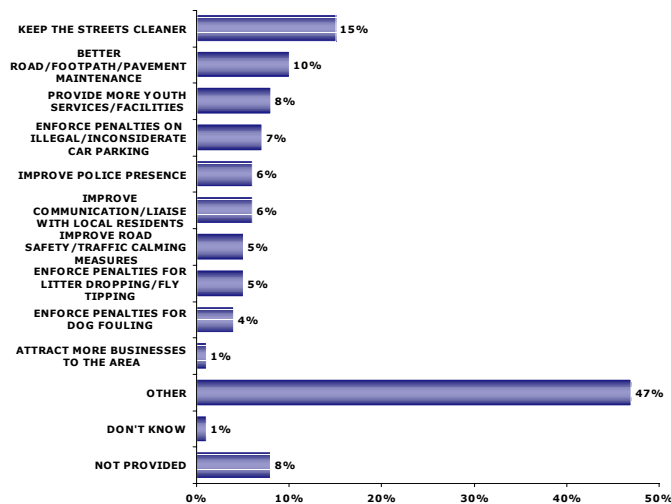


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Question:	Panel members who answered that they would like WCC to take on more responsibility for improving the local area, were asked how this should be done.
Result:	Just over three-fifths (61%) of all panel members said that they would like Wolverhampton City Council to take on more responsibility for improving their local area. Of these, 15% cited keeping the streets clean, while 10% cited better road/footpath/pavement maintenance (see Figure 2 below).
Analysis:	This illustrates the prominence of “clean/green” issues in the minds of residents once again. It is interesting that residents regard increasing the police presence as a Council policy issue, and shows the importance of partnership working on crime and disorder issues in order to maintain public confidence in their neighbourhoods. The large percentage of “other” responses shows that there are a large number of other issues bubbling under which do not fall directly into any of the main subheadings used in the survey – however, this may well be a product of the unweighted nature of the data.

Figure 2

PLEASE SAY WHY HOW YOU THINK THEY COULD DO THIS (PANEL MEMBERS WHO WOULD LIKE WOLVERHAMPTON CITY COUNCIL TO TAKE ON MORE RESPONSIBILITY FOR IMPROVING THEIR LOCAL AREA)



UNWEIGHTED SAMPLE BASE = 192

SECTION B – COMPLAINING

Respondents were asked to identify, from a list of services, the agency, organisation or body to whom they would complain if there were a problem. The most prevalent answers are listed below:

Childcare and nursery	-	Local Education Authority (15%)
Racist incidents	-	Police (32%)
Bins/waste collection	-	Environmental (20%)
Street cleaning	-	Local Council (20%)
Car on fire	-	Fire Service (46%)
Community safety	-	Police (33%)
Health Services (e.g. GP)	-	Primary Health Care Trust (16%)
Council Housing repairs	-	Housing Department (18%)
Immigration	-	Home Office (8%)
Domestic violence	-	Police (48%)
Libraries	-	Local Council (16%)
Licensing	-	Local Council (15%)
Buses	-	Travel West Midlands (27%)
Graffiti	-	Local Council (16%)
Noisy neighbours	-	Environmental (20%)
Planning	-	Local Council (20%)/Planning Dep't (20%)
Vandalism	-	Police (42%)
Pot holes in the roads	-	Highways Dep't (25%)
Schools	-	Local Education Authority (36%)
Meals on wheels	-	Social Services (24%)
Badminton courts	-	Sports & Leisure Services (23%)
Trading standards	-	Trading Standards (16%)
Art galleries	-	Sports & Leisure Services (16%)
Youth clubs	-	Sports & Leisure Services (10%)
Fly tipping	-	Environmental (18%)
Student loans	-	Local Education Authority (13%)
Pensions	-	Dep't of Works and Pensions (12%)
Road safety	-	Police (14%)
Parks	-	Local Council (16%)
Parking tickets	-	Police (14%)
Council Tax/Housing benefits	-	Local Council (17%)
Kerb crawling	-	Police (47%)
Anti-social behaviour	-	Police (50%)
Markets	-	Local Council (18%)
Pollution	-	Environmental (24%)
Voting	-	Electoral Registration Office (15%)
Grand theatre	-	Grand Theatre (24%)
Child support	-	Child Support Agency (14%)
Drains	-	Local Council (15%)
Trees	-	Local Council (19%)
Street lighting	-	Local Council (19%)
Prostitution	-	Police (42%)
Child employment	-	Police (9%)

Analysis:	The most interesting features of the list produced by the respondents is that, whilst the most prevalent answer given is generally (but not always) the “right” one, the low percentages of respondents giving the most prevalent answer indicate either a considerable variance of answers, or that respondents did not know the answer. In general, the services provided by the national emergency services have the highest level of understanding of the services they provide. However, where the Council is named as the service provider, sometimes individual departments are listed, and sometimes the “Local Council” in general terms. It illustrates that either better communication, or better branding of services, may be required to ensure that people are aware of who they should contact in case of a service delivery issue.
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SECTION C – Responsibility

Similarly, the Panel was asked to identify the agency, body or organisation responsible for the various services listed. The most prevalent answers were as follows:

Childcare and nursery	-	Local Education Authority (16%)
Racist incidents	-	Police (36%)
Bins/waste collection	-	Local Council (21%)
Street cleaning	-	Local Council (23%)
Car on fire	-	Fire Service (36%)
Community safety	-	Police (32%)
Health Services (e.g. GP)	-	Primary Health Care Trust (15%)
Council Housing repairs	-	Local Council (22%)
Immigration	-	Police (10%)
Domestic violence	-	Police (45%)
Libraries	-	Local Council (18%)
Licensing	-	Local Council (14%)
Buses	-	Travel West Midlands (19%)
Graffiti	-	Local Council (17%)
Noisy neighbours	-	Police (20%)
Planning	-	Local Council (19%)
Vandalism	-	Police (39%)
Pot holes in the roads	-	Highways Dep't (20%)/Local Council (20%)
Schools	-	Local Education Authority (28%)
Meals on wheels	-	Social Services (22%)
Badminton courts	-	Sports & Leisure Services (18%)
Trading standards	-	Local Council (15%)
Art galleries	-	Local Council (15%)
Youth clubs	-	Local Council (14%)
Fly tipping	-	Environmental (15%)
Student loans	-	Local Education Authority (14%)
Pensions	-	Dep't of Works and Pensions (10%)
Road safety	-	Police (17%)
Parks	-	Local Council (21%)
Parking tickets	-	Police (19%)
Council Tax/Housing benefits	-	Local Council (20%)
Kerb crawling	-	Police (44%)
Anti-social behaviour	-	Police (45%)
Markets	-	Local Council (21%)
Pollution	-	Environmental (19%)
Voting	-	Local Council (13%)
Grand theatre	-	Grand Theatre (18%)
Child support	-	Social Services (10%)
Drains	-	Local Council (18%)
Trees	-	Local Council (22%)
Street lighting	-	Local Council (24%)
Prostitution	-	Police (42%)
Child employment	-	Police (11%)

Analysis:	Whilst the most prevalent answers given are much the same as those in Section B, there are a number of notable differences. The Police are expected to play a role in far more of these issues than is actually the case – road safety is the responsibility of a number of partners, and parking tickets are part of the civil traffic management process undertaken by Councils. However, the low % response rates of the most prevalent answers indicate that there is some disagreement amongst respondents about who should be responsible for what.
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SECTION D – SATISFACTION AND TRUST

Question:	Panel members were asked to rate their satisfaction with the way in which Wolverhampton City Council runs things.
Result:	Two-fifths were satisfied (38% satisfied; 2% very satisfied), while one in five were dissatisfied (16% dissatisfied; 5% very dissatisfied). 37% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.
Analysis:	Whilst this shows a good level of satisfaction, with 40% of respondents satisfied at the way the Council runs services and serves the city, the 21% who are either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied and the 37% who are either unsure or indifferent should inspire us to guard against complacency.

Question:	Respondents were asked to name three things that would increase their satisfaction with the way in which Wolverhampton City Council runs things
Result:	9% gave street cleaning as their first choice followed by reduction of the Council Tax bill (7%) and sensible use of taxpayers' money (6%)
Analysis:	The top responses show that our role in collecting and spending taxpayers' money are key issues in determining satisfaction with the way we operate, eclipsing all other areas of service delivery except, once again, the "cleaner, greener" issue of street cleaning and the appearance of neighbourhoods. This shows the extent to which discussions around taxation can 'crowd out' messages about our performance in delivering services.

Question:	Panel members were then asked to rate the extent to which they trust Wolverhampton City Council to do what is best for Wolverhampton as a whole.
Result:	One-third said they trust the Council (31% trust; 3% fully trust), while one in four said they did not (16% sometimes distrust; 9% have no trust in them at all). 41% neither trust nor distrust the Council.
Analysis:	Again, although one-third of respondents trust the Council, only 3% within that one-third said they fully trust the Council to do what is best for the City. The number who either distrust or have no trust in the Council stands at one-quarter, which is a real cause for concern. Perhaps most concerning is that 41% have no opinion either way – despite our envisaged position as community leader and "place-shaper", the largest percentage of respondents have no opinion on whether we can be trusted to play that very role.

Question:	Respondents were asked to name three things that would increase their trust in Wolverhampton City Council
Result:	6% gave total transparency in decision making/future plans as their first choice followed by improve communication/liase with local residents (5%) and reduce Council Tax (4%)
Analysis:	Amongst a comparatively low response rate for this question, the top answers relate to openness and clarity of communication as key issues to address, along with another example of how the Council Tax debate can obscure discussions on improvement in other areas.

SECTION E – RESPONSIBILITY

Panel members were then presented with a list of services and asked if thought they should be decided by the Council or have minimum standards set for them by central Government. The following table shows results for each service.

Table 1

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING SERVICES DO YOU THINK CENTRAL GOVERNMENT SHOULD BE ABLE TO SET MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR WOLVERHAMPTON TO MEET AND WHICH DO YOU THINK SHOULD BE DECIDED BY THE COUNCIL (ALL PANEL MEMBERS)				
	% COUNCIL	% CENTRAL GOV'T	% DON'T KNOW	% NOT PROVIDED
CHILDCARE AND NURSERY	39	43	8	10
ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES	48	41	2	10
FIRE	38	50	3	9
COMMUNITY SAFETY	64	23	2	10
HEALTH SERVICES	27	62	2	9
HOUSING	67	21	3	9
IMMIGRATION	15	72	3	10
LIBRARIES	74	12	3	11
LICENSING	54	31	4	11
PLANNING	68	19	3	9
POLICE	32	58	2	9
SCHOOLS/EDUCATION	38	50	3	9
SOCIAL SERVICES	44	45	2	8
SPORT AND CULTURE	61	25	3	11
TRADING STANDARDS	33	55	3	9
YOUTH SERVICES	69	18	4	9
UNWEIGHTED SAMPLE BASE = 317				

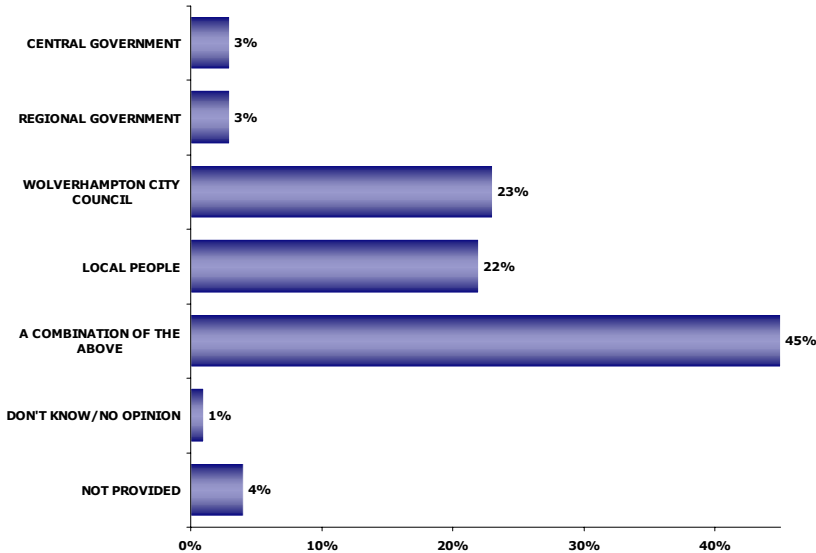
Analysis:	The eight service areas, where a higher proportion of people thought responsibility should rest with local government rather than central government, were: libraries; youth services; housing; planning; community safety; sport and culture; licensing; and environmental services. The remaining services were considered by respondents to be the prerogative of central government (although social services was marginal, with only 1% separating those who preferred central or local government to set standards). It is interesting to note that the proportions of people thinking that the Council should have a key role in making service delivery decisions seldom drops below one-third of respondents, in an interesting juxtaposition with the considerable minority expressing lack of trust in the Council in
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	previous questions, perhaps articulating a sense that there are certain key questions which should be decided locally. It is also interesting that trading standards was one issue of local significance which should be governed by national standards – the rest of the issues considered to be the preserve of the centre in terms of target-setting were clearly national issues, such as immigration, fire services, health and policing (although nearly one third said that policing should be a locally-determined issue)
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Question:	Respondents were asked who they thought should be responsible for deciding what the priorities are for their local area/neighbourhood.
Result:	The following figure shows that almost half of all panel members thought it should be a combination of Wolverhampton City Council and local people.
Analysis:	The figure shows that there is strong support from the respondents for locally-set priorities for local areas. There is very limited support for prescription from regional or national authorities for neighbourhood provision.

Figure 3

FROM THE FOLLOWING, WHO DO YOU THINK SHOULD BE RESPONSIBLE FOR DECIDING WHAT THE PRIORITIES ARE FOR YOUR LOCAL AREA/NEIGHBOURHOOD (ALL PANEL MEMBERS)

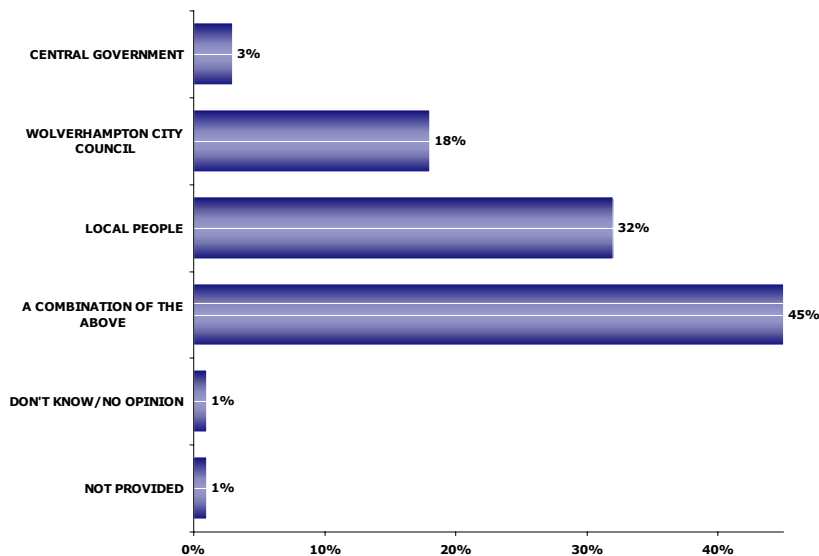


UNWEIGHTED SAMPLE BASE = 317

Question:	Respondents were then asked if they thought central Government, Wolverhampton City Council or local people should decide where any money should be spent if more were to become available to spend on public services.
Result:	Figure 4 shows that, again, almost half of all panel members thought it should be a combination of Wolverhampton City Council and local people.
Analysis:	It is interesting to note that although 15% of people were happy to let Wolverhampton City Council set spending priorities, far higher proportions of respondents were in favour, either of local people alone making decisions on spending, or of local people and the Council taking part in a joint process to decide on spending priorities. It is clear from this that a majority of respondents favour local people having some increased role in deciding how budgets should be allocated and spent.

Figure 4

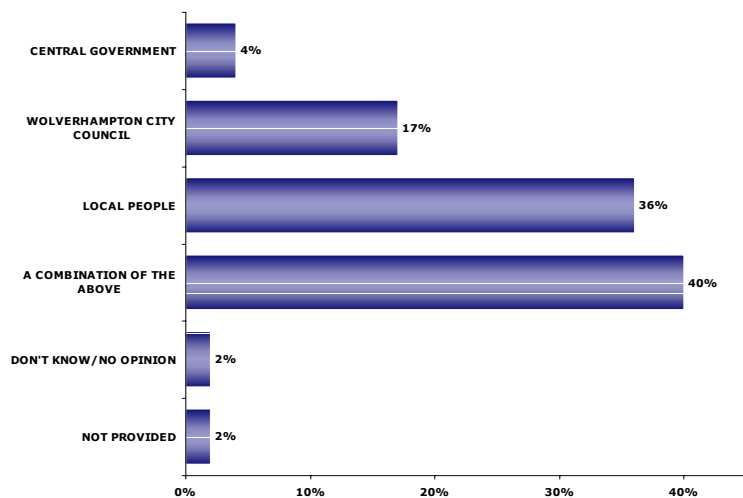
IF MORE MONEY WERE AVAILABLE TO SPEND ON PUBLIC SERVICES IN WOLV'TON, DO YOU THINK CENTRAL GOV'T, THE COUNCIL OR LOCAL PEOPLE SHOULD DECIDE WHERE THAT MONEY SHOULD BE SPENT (ALL PANEL MEMBERS)



UNWEIGHTED SAMPLE BASE = 317

Question:	Respondents were then asked if they thought central Government, Wolverhampton City Council or local people should decide where any services should be cut if public services in Wolverhampton were going to be cut to save money.
Result:	Figure 5 shows that, two-fifths of all panel members thought it should be a combination of Wolverhampton City Council and local people.
Analysis:	Again this broadly mirrors the result of the previous question, with a clear majority of residents favouring some level of public involvement in making decisions about spending cuts.

IF PUBLIC SERVICES IN WOLV'TON WERE GOING TO BE CUT TO SAVE MONEY, DO YOU THINK CENTRAL GOVERNMENT, WOLVERHAMPTON COUNCIL OR LOCAL PEOPLE SHOULD DECIDE WHICH SERVICES SHOULD BE CUT (ALL PANEL MEMBERS)



UNWEIGHTED SAMPLE BASE = 317

Question:	Panel members were then asked if they thought there was anything that Wolverhampton City Council currently does across the city that it should stop doing.
Result:	While one in twelve (8%) cited wasting taxpayers money, more than half (53%) did not provide an answer to this question.
Analysis:	Once again, it could be argued that perceptions about our use of taxpayers money, influenced by the visibility of the Council Tax, have clouded perceptions about services. The high proportion of respondents who did not provide an answer may well illustrate, as, arguably, have other questions in this survey, that either awareness of the services we provide is low, or that respondents genuinely did not regard public service cuts to be desirable under any circumstances.

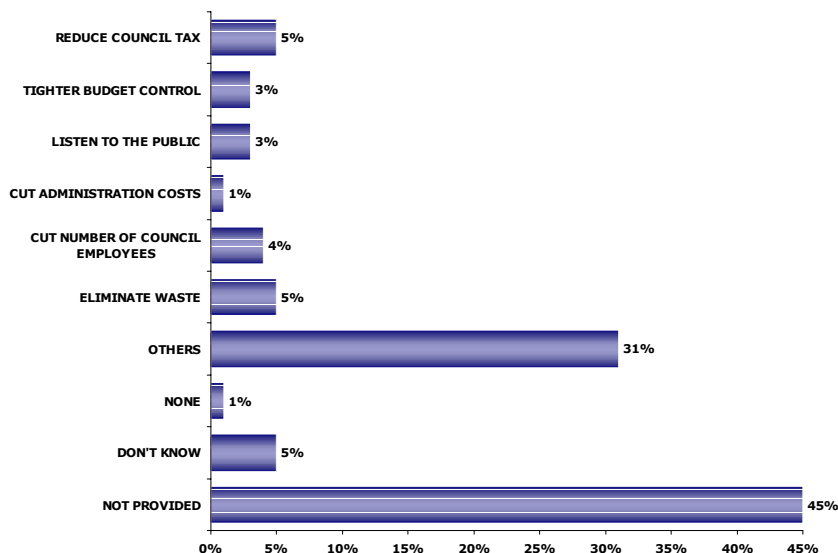
Question:	Respondents were asked whether there were any additional services that they would like Wolverhampton City Council to provide across the city.
Result:	Three-fifths (60%) of panel members did not provide an answer to the question, although one in twenty (5%) mentioned more youth facilities/community centres.
Analysis:	Unless people have clear ideas about services which are currently lacking, it is difficult to name additional services which could be provided. The fact that the proportionately highest response was youth facilities and community centres could be a response to the perceived adequacy of existing provision.

Question:	Respondents were asked if they thought that on the whole Wolverhampton City Council provides value for money.
Result:	Approaching two-fifths (37%) said yes they did think so, while a similar proportion (38%) said no. One in five (21%) did not know.
Analysis:	The figures for perception of value for money are finely balanced on either side of the argument. Other research has shown that those who have experienced a good service from the Council will tend to regard their investment through Council Tax as good value for money, whilst those with less frequent experience or a poor experience of such services will have a lower opinion of the Council's value for money. It is difficult without further research to interpret what the figures produced by this survey mean in terms of the financial reform of local government.

Question:	Respondents were asked how the City Council could increase value for money.
Result:	Figure 6 shows how panel members think Wolverhampton City Council could increase value for money for the citizens of Wolverhampton.
Analysis:	The most popular individual responses proportionately concerned reduction of Council Tax, elimination of waste and cutting the Council workforce – however, there were a high number of individual responses which were not easily classifiable, and an even greater proportion of respondents did not provide an answer to the question. It is concerning that there appears to be an image of profligacy within the Council, even though this is held only by a significant minority of respondents – another case, perhaps, of the Council Tax debate overshadowing all others. Other than that, it seems that there is genuine uncertainty about how the Council could provide better value for money, and so perhaps there is a need for Councils to communicate better in this regard.

Figure 6

HOW DO YOU THINK WOLVERHAMPTON CITY COUNCIL COULD INCREASE VALUE FOR MONEY FOR THE CITIZENS OF WOLVERHAMPTON (ALL PANEL MEMBERS)



UNWEIGHTED SAMPLE BASE = 317