

# Budget Consultation 2015-16

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## SUMMARY REPORT

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February 2015

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## Background

Three Rivers District Council is currently reviewing its budget for 2015/16. Due to reductions in Central Government grant, the Council is looking to make savings of £1.2 million over the next two years from its annual expenditure. This means that the Council has to either reduce its services or the quality of them, and/or increase charges.

In order to inform the budget review process, the Council launched a budget consultation.

## Objectives

The key objectives of the consultation were as follows:

- To ascertain residents' key service priorities
- To understand the level of commitment residents have to offsetting budget cuts with income generation schemes such as increasing council tax and paying for garden waste collection

## Methodology

An on-line survey (driven by Survey Monkey) was launched on 19<sup>th</sup> December 2014 and closed on 9<sup>th</sup> February 2015. It was placed on the front page of Three Rivers District Council's website, within the news item section. The survey was widely publicised via posters in key establishments in the district (eg doctors, dentists, libraries) and press releases were launched. Emails were sent out to the Three Rivers mailing list, and Members also contributed to this email process. Social media statements were also posted. In order to ensure that the residents without internet access could also have a voice, paper surveys were distributed to many organisations who have contact with older people. Younger people, who tend to be under-represented in surveys of this kind, were targeted through links that the Council's leisure and partnerships team have fostered.

Despite wide marketing, the respondent profile is skewed towards the older age groups. With this in mind, results were 'broken down' into 2 age bands, in order to see if there were significant differences in the view points of the younger versus the older age groups. Income bracket bands were also applied, as it was deemed that this analysis would also be insightful.

335 respondents completed the survey.

	Survey profile	Three Rivers Profile
16 – 24 years	2%	12%
25 – 44 years	18%	33%
45 – 64 years	41%	34%
65 – 74 years	24%	10%

75 + years

15%

10%

## *Results*

### **Service protection**

Detailed below is a ranking of services that respondents **wish to protect** in light of the reduction in Central Government funding to councils. **Refuse/recycling, community safety, planning policy (eg protecting green belt) and leisure** are the top services ear marked for protection by respondents.

Highlighted in grey are the groups of respondents who '**over index**' on certain measures. It can be seen that respondents **under 44 years** (who are **underrepresented in the survey**, as mentioned in the methodology above) score significantly **higher than the average** on requesting that **youth facilities and activities** are protected. This younger age bracket (**under 44 years**) also over index regarding protecting **grants to local organisations**.

## SERVICE FUNDING CUT PROPOSALS

The percentage of respondents who DO NOT want each service stated to be cut\*

	ALL	AGE		HOUSEHOLD GROSS INCOME	
		Up to 44 years	45 + years	Up to £36,399	£36,400 +
<b>Respondent numbers</b>	<b>334</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>260</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>103</b>
Rubbish collections and litter clearing	87%	81%	89%	89%	87%
Recycling	74%	74%	75%	79%	77%
Tackling anti-social behaviour	73%	79%	72%	78%	71%
Providing Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs)	70%	73%	69%	68%	69%
Planning policy eg protecting the green belt	69%	63%	70%	64%	70%
Preventing, removing and investigating fly tipping	68%	63%	69%	65%	71%
Enforcing hygiene and safety standards	63%	61%	64%	58%	56%
Parks and play areas	58%	69%	55%	58%	57%
Providing youth facilities and activities	56%	74%	52%	51%	61%
Providing leisure services/sports activities	54%	65%	53%	51%	57%
Providing housing advice and responding to homelessness	52%	52%	51%	52%	51%
Building control	51%	48%	51%	48%	51%
Environmental improvement - eg nature reserves	50%	56%	48%	48%	51%
Planning applications	47%	44%	47%	39%	47%
Improving local shopping areas and town centres	44%	50%	43%	43%	45%
Tree preservations	43%	43%	43%	44%	45%
Efficiency in providing benefits to local people	43%	43%	43%	46%	49%
Removing graffiti	41%	35%	42%	40%	44%
Investigating and removing abandoned vehicles	41%	36%	41%	35%	43%
Monitoring and investigating noise/pollution	39%	37%	39%	30%	36%
Providing holiday play schemes for children	38%	50%	35%	39%	33%
Investigating nuisance animal complaints	32%	33%	32%	29%	26%
Grants to local organisations	28%	49%	24%	31%	29%
Providing cultural services eg arts workshops/Watersmeet	27%	34%	26%	22%	36%
Reducing CO2 emissions eg insulation grants/energy efficiency schemes	27%	32%	25%	25%	28%

\*Figures represent the percentage of respondents scoring 1 or 2 on a scale which ranges from 1: 'do not cut' through to 5: 'make significant cuts'

\*\*Shaded sections highlight significantly different scores compared to the total sample (at a 95% confidence level)

## Proposed cuts

Detailed below are the **services that attracted less than 50%** of respondents rating them as 'do not cut' (scores of 1 or 2 on the scale, where 1 is 'do not cut' and 5 is make significant cuts').

The figures below show **the percentage of respondents that stated that they DID** want to see the **service cut** (scores of 4 or 5 on the scale, where 1 is 'do not cut' and 5 is make significant cuts').

**Cultural services and CO2 emissions** attracted a majority (51% and 50% respectively) stating they **do** want cuts to the Council's budget in these areas. All other services attract less than 50% of the respondents, with the rest of the respondents scoring '3', the middle point between 'do not cut' and 'cut'.

## SERVICE FUNDING CUT PROPOSALS

The percentage of respondents who **DO** want each service stated to be cut\*

	ALL
<b>Respondent numbers</b>	<b>334</b>
Providing cultural services eg arts workshops/Watersmeet	51%
Reducing CO2 emissions eg insulation grants/energy efficiency schemes	50%
Grants to local organisations	47%
Providing holiday play schemes for children	43%
Tree preservations	33%
Investigating nuisance animal complaints	33%
Efficiency in providing benefits to local people	29%
Removing graffiti	27%
Monitoring and investigating noise/pollution	27%
Improving local shopping areas and town centres	26%
Investigating and removing abandoned vehicles	24%
Planning applications	21%

\*Figures represent the percentage of respondents scoring 4 or 5 on a scale which ranges from 1: 'do not cut' through to 5: 'make significant cuts'

## Income generators

Respondents were asked whether, in order to minimise service reductions, they would be prepared to pay/pay more for various services and for council tax. Although **no proposal attracted a majority of respondents in favour of it, garage rents** attracted the highest levels of acceptance of increase payments (39% in favour), followed by town centre parking (30%).

### INCOME GENERATORS PROPOSALS

The percentage of respondents who are happy to be pay more for each service\*

	ALL	AGE		HOUSEHOLD GROSS INCOME	
		Up to 44 years	45 + years	Up to £36,399	£36,400 +
<b>Respondent numbers</b>	<b>331</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>257</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>103</b>
Garage rents	39%	39%	40%	39%	45%
Town centre parking	30%	28%	31%	31%	37%
Parking in parks/open spaces	29%	27%	31%	32%	37%
Council tax	28%	25%	28%	24%	38%
Garden waste collection	26%	27%	26%	24%	36%

\*Figures represent the percentage of respondents scoring 1 or 2 on a scale which ranges from 1: 'happy to pay more' through to 5: 'would not pay more'

## Supportive comments

Respondents were invited to comment on the ratings they had provided. Some key themes emerged, as detailed below, which shed light and expand upon the ratings detailed above:

### Services requiring protection

#### *Leisure*

"Youth services have been decimated up and down the country. I would hate to see this repeated in Three Rivers as it is short sighted and leads to many costly provisions and resources further down the line if young people are not offered the support they need at such a crucial stage of their life "

The services provided for young people are great in this area, especially Baldwins Lane"

"Holiday play schemes should not be reduced. These schemes provide essential care for working families are well run and also provide enjoyment and variety for children "

## Service cuts

### *Leisure*

"There are many affordable private leisure facilities and the Council does not need to provide more Cultural activities should be self supporting or supported by the charitable/voluntary sector"

"You could save £100,000 by scrapping the playground idea. Do not build a playground on Chorleywood Common "

"The common is one giant playground"

"The Sir James Altham pool has the most important qualities spot on and needs no improvement – excellent water quality and good staff. Instead of rebuilding the pool, why not refurbish it for now? The ladies changing facilities are quite dire.

### *Reducing CO2 emissions*

"Reducing CO2 emissions, whilst this is important there is lots of alternative funding available from energy suppliers"

### *Divert services to volunteers*

"I've often thought a Pensioners Work Force could do wonderful work eg cleaning road signs, litter collection and acting as drivers for PCSOs"

"Use community service orders for some graffiti removal"

### *Divert services to parish councils*

"A number of services could and should be delegated down to Parish Council level. "

### *Democratic services*

" Adopt all out 4 yearly elections"

### *Communication*

"Scrap council newsletters delivered to all homes"



## Income generators

### *Tax*

"Properly progressive property taxes would enable a relatively wealthy area, like ours, to maintain and improve its services"

Multiple occupancy properties to contribute more"

"I am at a loss as to why losing Government Funding is such an issue. There are far more residents when compared to 24 months ago, therefore more income available for services"

### *Leisure*

"Charge slightly more for council run play schemes as these are very cheap compared to other equivalent forms of childcare"

### *Dog mess fines*

"If someone were actually fined £1000 it would prevent others from leaving their dog's mess around for people to walk in"

"Why should we pay for [free dog bags]? If it is supposed to stop dog mess being left on the pavement it is not working. You should charge for them the same as you do for nappy bags"

### *Parking*

"If you charge more for town parking people will not go. Shops will close and TRDC will have less revenue"

## *Recommendations*

- **Prioritise** the following services for funding protection:
  - **Refuse/recycling**
  - **Community safety**
  - **Planning policy (eg protecting green belt)**
  - **Leisure.**
  
- **Review the funding provision for cultural services and C02 emission reduction** – take heed of the fact that these services are **still considered important** by residents, but that they believe the Council should be **relieved of some of its responsibility** for this (either by **other funding streams** or by **self funding schemes**).
  
- Further **proactive cost saving proposals** were suggested by respondents including:
  - **Renovation rather than rebuild for Sir James Altham pool**
  - **Scrapping Chorleywood playground proposal**
  - **Delegating** some services to **parishes**
  - **Enlisting more volunteers** (eg at Watersmeet, street cleaning etc)
  - **Scrapping the newsletter to households**
  - **Adopting 4 year all out elections**
  
- No income generation scheme proved popular with residents and none attracted a majority, although alternative proposals were proactively put forward by some respondents
  - A review of property tax (including wealth and multiple occupancy)
  - Charging more for leisure services
  - Dog mess fines properly overseen

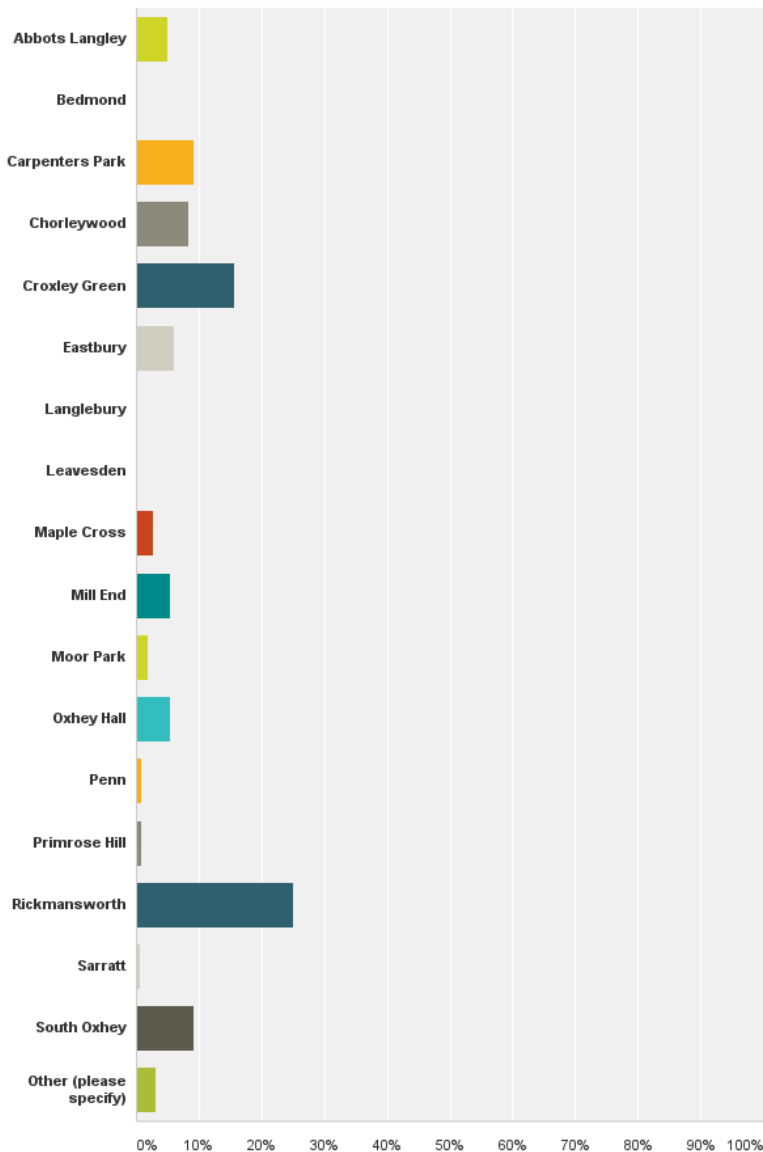
## Profile of respondents

Respondents are split almost exactly down the middle on gender – 49.8% are male and 50.2% are female. The majority of respondents were white British (89%), with a further 3% white Irish, 3 % were mixed race, 2 % were Chinese and less than 1% were black. A fifth of respondents (19%) stated that their day-to-day activities were limited because of health problems or disability.

Detailed below are charts displaying further profile information gathered.

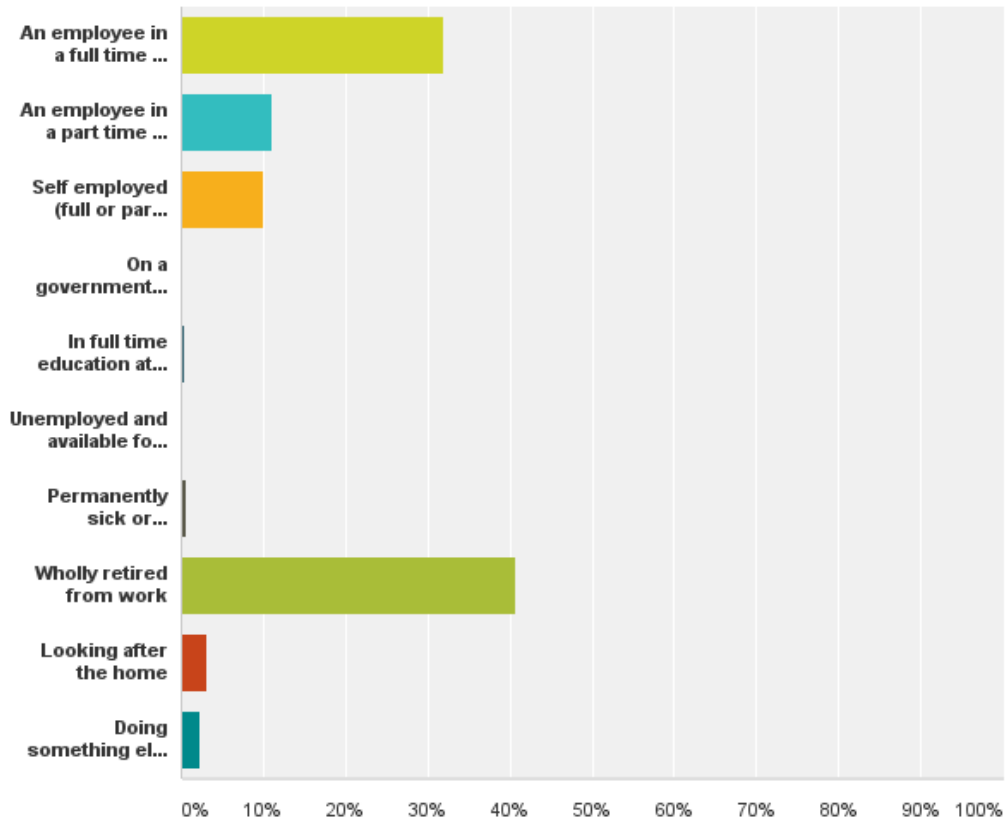
### Q6 Where do you live?

Answered: 326 Skipped: 9



### Q8 Are you currently employed, self employed, retired or otherwise not in paid work?

Answered: 319 Skipped: 16



### Q10 What is your total yearly household gross income (ie before tax deductions)?

Answered: 318 Skipped: 17

