

BUDGET CONSULTATION PRESTON CITY COUNCIL (2008)

Background

The current economic climate – rising energy costs and lower interest rates – together with recently introduced concessionary travel measures have hit local authority finances. Preston City Council found that these issues meant their planned budget over the next few years could not be sustained. They were faced with a choice of remedial actions:

- to generate more income by charging for services or increasing Council Tax
- to reduce services and hence save money
- to externalise services.

The Council decided to hold a workshop with residents to assess each option. Ipsos MORI was commissioned to recruit residents, moderate the workshop and report on findings.

Objectives

The objectives of the workshop were to:

- determine which were the preferred options
- understand the perceived advantages and disadvantages of the various options
- provide insight into how “acceptable” the options were to residents

Approach

A workshop with 20 residents was convened.

Prior to attending the group, participants were asked to fill in a brief two page questionnaire at the beginning and end of the discussion group; firstly, to educate the participants about the services which the Council provides, and secondly to establish whether participants’ views on how the Council should tackle their budgetary issues would change once they were better informed.

Senior Council representatives attended the workshop to set the scene and educate the participants about the budget dilemmas facing the Council, and to answer specific questions about the Council's structure, the services it provides under a two-tier system and to clarify any budget setting queries.

Findings

Initial findings were discussed with Council officers at the end of the workshop and a formal report on the discussions was also provided.

The findings from the workshop were used to:

- determine whether there was a preferred option or whether the solution was a combination of all three
- to understand better the perceived advantages and disadvantages of each option
- to provide the Council with insight into ways in which each option can be made more “acceptable” to the general public ie by placing conditions on the actions by the Council or through specific communications

How to get in contact

If you would like help or advice:

Nicola Moss

T: 0161 240 2401

email: nicola.moss@ipsos.com