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Summary

Background and methodology

This report details the findings of two full day deliberative workshops designed and conducted on behalf of Kent County Council (KCC) by the social research agency, Ipsos MORI. The first of the workshops was held in Canterbury on Saturday 29th September 2012 drawing together a cross section of residents from across East Kent. The second was held in Tonbridge among a cross section of residents from West Kent on Saturday 6th October 2012. In total, 68 participants took part in the deliberative events, examining possible service transformation options and increased local control of services.

This year the research formed part of a wider formal consultation on the forthcoming budget. KCC has already put forward options for the 2013-14 budget, which represents a reduction on the previous year’s. With this budget, it is not possible to provide all services at current levels, therefore new ways of providing services and working need to be considered. Testing the appetite for service transformation, increased local control of services, and levels of Council Tax were the main aims of the research.

Unlike quantitative surveys, qualitative research is designed to be illustrative, detailed and exploratory, providing insight into the perceptions, feelings and intended behaviours of people rather than conclusions from a quantifiable valid sample. Therefore, the workshops do not allow statistical conclusions to be drawn about the extent to which views are held across Kent. This said, a qualitative study that is based on strict recruitment criteria (with quotas on different demographic groups) is distinctly superior in terms of its representativeness than an open consultation process, as this is subject to response bias among those with a vested interested or the politically active members of the community.

Main Conclusions

The County Council can draw the following key findings from the research:

- Participants place a high value on core public services and feel that services should be available to those who most need them - particularly services for vulnerable adults and children such as personal and social care.

- Participants would need to be satisfied that KCC has driven out the maximum savings from non-frontline activities and have reviewed provision of discretionary services before changes are considered to core services.

- On balance, residents would not want to see Council Tax increased, even though specific services were identified as needing more funding through universal contribution.

- Some participants expressed a desire to see a more fundamental reform of Council Tax to ensure people got a fair return on what they pay.

- Despite some questions around Council efficiency and the value of some services supported by KCC, participants felt that the Council has a great deal
of expertise delivering services and that it would be difficult to imagine in more than a few cases, any other organisation or local community doing as good a job.

- Nonetheless, participants were open to discussion about delivering services differently, and were very capable of identifying the risks and benefits of different service delivery models.

- When considering how specific services could be delivered in the future, it was not uncommon for participants to suggest combining two or more approaches to harness the perceived benefits of each.

- Participants were extremely pragmatic in deliberations. Discussions around potential changes to different services were guided by a number of considerations. Overall, the likely risk of non-delivery or poor delivery, and how accountability would be ensured were the most important factors.

### Setting the scene

The aim of this year’s workshops represents a departure from previous years’ workshops where we attempted to create a consensus around where to make example budget savings for the forthcoming year – for 2011/12 it was £30m. Clearly, there comes a point where cutting slices off budgets is no longer sustainable, particularly given previous years’ reductions, the need to plug larger shortfalls in funding and providing for unavoidable additional spending demands – equating to an estimated net reduction in spending of £60m on the 2012/13 budget. Decisions have already been made that will deliver approximately £13m of the £60m estimated requirement and KCC therefore was keen to seek public views on how to save the remainder through service transformation and decentralisation.

### The deliberative process

For this reason, we designed a deliberative process that supported participants in their discussions and made them feel comfortable in considering the complex issues put before them. The workshops allowed participants to gradually build their knowledge base (through discussion, presentation and briefing materials) before debating what sorts of models of service provision were most appropriate in general and specifically in relation to some named services. Interactive voting was also used to engage participants in plenary sessions and to map shifts in attitudes throughout the day. The end of each workshop culminated in detailed discussions around how to best deliver a range of County services. They considered four options:

- Increasing Council Tax
- Reducing spend by allowing the County Council to identify reductions in quality/frequency of the service
- Increasing individual user contributions or changing user behaviour
- Having more localised responsibility for service provision and budgeting.

The 21 services under scrutiny spanned across 8 broad areas:

- Adult social care for the vulnerable, and for the elderly
- Social care for children, and vulnerable children
How people prioritised services

Whilst participants were on the whole satisfied with living in Kent, they would like to see Council services improved. Generally, participants were divided on whether they get value for money from the County and many wanted reassurance that efficiencies were being realised. By the end of the day, the balance of opinion became more positive regards value for money but there is still some way to convincing taxpayers and citizens that public funds are being used as well as they could be (23% still disagreed they get value for money at the end of the events).

As a way of generating discussion around Council services and encouraging participants to think about where they would like to see more / less investment in the future, participants took part in a group exercise and plotted services along two axis: important / in need of improvement. This was useful for getting an initial sense of how much value participants placed on different services and the extent to which they considered some as a priority for KCC to focus its attentions on.

This exercise enabled us to segment Council services into five notional categories with regard to their importance to the community and their need for improvement. These five categories were:

- **Priority: Services in need of improvement because of their importance in their own right** - Some services were identified as so important to society and individuals that they are always in need of improvement, such as nursing, residential and domiciliary care for the elderly and vulnerable adults, and care services for vulnerable children. For these services, participants thought that the Council should always be working to improve them or maintain standards of care, given the support and care needs of the users. The voting exercises at the beginning and end of the day confirmed that "care for the elderly and adults with disabilities" was identified as most in need of protection from savings – voted for by half of participants by the end of deliberations.

- **Priority: Services deemed important only because they need improvement** - Roads were identified as important because they are perceived to require a lot of maintenance. Thus the importance of a service can stem from its perceived poor state, rather than say in the case of roads, their strategic or economic importance to the county.

- **Not a priority: Important but current provision satisfactory** - On the other hand, there are other services which were viewed as important in the eyes of participants, but because they are satisfied with current provision they did not believe improvement is necessary. KCC would be expected to maintain the status quo, but not to improve them at the detriment of other service areas. Waste disposal fell into this category.
• **Not a priority: Not that important** - Some services were categorised as not important, suggesting their provision by KCC should be reduced or even ended if viable alternatives exist. The Connexions Service was discussed in this context by numerous participants, reflecting previous years’ discussions around its fitness of purpose.

• **Need to know more:** For some services participants were not sure if they need improving due to a combination of low visibility or lack of understanding of the service and how it might benefit the community. For example, participants were unsure what School Improvement Services achieved and entailed, and why KCC is best placed to deliver the service. With such services, participants sometimes felt unable to make a decision on whether they should be prioritised.

**Reactions to proposed Council Tax freeze**

Overall, participants were more likely to agree than disagree that Council Tax should not go up, even if they could identify specific services which they felt could benefit from more funding. Departing from previous years’ workshops, few participants felt persuaded to pay more Council Tax by the end of the day’s deliberations. This year’s voting data showed that in one workshop, more people wanted a freeze than at the start of the day; in the second workshop, there was a slight shift away from freezing but not to the extent we have seen in previous years. Participants supporting a freeze felt that it was appropriate in the current climate and that more could be done to streamline spending before considering an increase. The data reflects many participants’ reluctance to dig deeper into their own pockets at a time when their income is stretched. ¹

However, although more participants supported a freeze than not, a sizeable minority were happy to consider a small increase in Council Tax if it guaranteed support and improvement in specific service areas. These participants were unwilling to raise Council Tax in service areas they felt were ineffective, less important or where there are perceived inefficiencies; but did opt to increase universal contribution through Council Tax for specific services where they:

- felt the service was a great priority
- felt the alternatives were not viable and too risky
- wanted accountability for delivery (and thus guarantor of standards) to remain with KCC.

Given that willingness to contribute to the cost of services through Council Tax was specific to individual services it will be important to communicate how much Council Tax revenues contribute to the overall budget, what it can be used for, and that efficiencies have been and continue to be realised.

Additionally, some participants were willing to consider a rise to reflect the increases costs the Council has to pay for things like energy and fuel bills, loans and professional fees.

¹ Results from the interactive voting at the end of the day: in East Kent, 53% agreed that “Council Tax should not go up in any circumstances, even if this means some reductions in front line Council services”; 35% disagreed. In West Kent, 56% agreed that “Council Tax should not be increased to make up for a reduction in funding, even if this means KCC has less to spend on services”; 30% disagreed.
Acceptability of alternative models for service delivery

Accepting that the balance of opinion was against raising Council Tax, the main focus of workshop discussions tested participants’ tolerance of and appetite for different ways of managing services. These were:

- **The responsibility for budgeting and managing delivery lies with Kent County Council.** This might mean the Council deciding to decrease the level of the service, the frequency with which it is delivered and/or the number of residents eligible to use a service;

- **The responsibility lies with the community.** This would mean devolving responsibility for budgets locally, allowing local communities to choose how services could be run, raising finances locally and/or organising volunteers to help provide services or deciding local priorities for which services should be reduced;

- **Increased contribution or responsibility lies with the individual user.** This would mean users decide for themselves how to interact with each service and this could translate into behaviour change of some sort, increased contribution at point of use, the management of individual budgets or a transformation of the how the service is run to ensure that costs are not passed on at a universal level.

Each of the three models of delivery was considered to have risks and benefits. For example, keeping the status quo (the County Council managing and delivering services) would allow the community to capitalise on Council technical expertise in service delivery, enable better economies of scale and consistency in service, and demonstrate clear accountabilities through political structures. On the other hand, the status quo is not always sensitive to local need.

It is worth noting that despite some questions around Council efficiency and the value of some services delivered by KCC, participants felt that the Council has a great deal of expertise and experience in managing and delivering services and that it would be difficult to imagine in more than a few cases, any other organisation or local community doing as good a job.

Nevertheless, having users pay more for services which are either heavily subsidised (such as Freedom Pass) or which are non essential (such as libraries services) also attracted some support. It particularly appealed to those who felt that people should contribute more towards a system they drawn on heavily, if they can afford to do so.

There was support for more management of services by local communities where there appeared to be a low risk of failure and where there might be existing structures to support this happening successfully. For example, where there is good parent and teacher involvement in local schools, there may be mileage in schools being able to help each other with issues of poor performance and absenteeism.

The three charts below summarise the appeals and risks associated with each model of service delivery.
Should responsibility stay with the County Council?

**APPEAL**
- Safe and reliable delivery - ‘it’s what we have now’
- Ensures consistency across local areas
- Builds on existing capacity and resource
- Strong accountability for services considered ‘high risk’
- ‘Big picture’ helps focus on preventative services
- And can target those communities most in need
- Can provide economies of scale and more clout in negotiating better contracts

**CONCERNS**
- Doesn’t account for differences in local need or demand?
- May lack local insight
- Where current provision is considered poor quality – how will this improve the status quo?
- Could the current service be delivered better – are their efficiencies to be made?
- Do not want to see reduction in quality of service.

More relevant to services where consistency of delivery is valued and where strong accountability is important
- Adult Social Care
- Highways Maintenance

Should responsibility be transferred to communities?

**APPEAL**
- Nice idea: ‘for the people by the people, community spirit’
- Promise of a better quality service: joined-up working, knowledge sharing
- Better local understanding of need and demand
- Recent events show communities can come together (Olympics, Jubilee)
- Engages younger residents (fewer practical concerns)

**CONCERNS**
- Practically, how do we all do this? Who will lead? How do we all have a say?
- We are not the experts?
- How do we ensure good training, recruitment and contract terms?
- Less accountability or safety net for high risk services
- Lack of consistency across areas: postcode lottery
- Less likely to work in areas most in need
- Does it actually save residents money overall?
- Potentially more bureaucratic / complicated

More relevant to services with good existing networks and those where there are obvious benefits to collaborative working
- Schools
- Youth services

This work was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the international quality standard for Market Research,

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To bring these concepts to life, participants were asked to consider case studies which covered eight broad service areas which are shown in Section 5. We found that participants were fully capable of considering each service differently on their own merits and were often guided by very pragmatic considerations. For example, it was felt unrealistic to expect users to necessarily be able to help themselves more if it is their own behaviour which is the focus of the service being delivered. Improving school attendance was discussed in this context.

Participants often struggled to select just one preferred model of service delivery for each service area. When considering how specific services could be delivered in the future, it was not uncommon for participants to suggest combining two or more approaches to harness the perceived benefits of each. For example, in the case of waste disposal and recycling centres, participants suggested a mix of decreasing KCC provision to manage the costs of the service, increased user charging, and perhaps some community participation (e.g. community organised disposal days although there was ambiguity over how exactly community involvement would be achieved).

By contrast, participants could not imagine how public transport schemes (e.g. car pooling, volunteer driven mini-buses, community run SEN transport) could work if managed by the community and they rejected the idea of increased user charges for transport services. Participants therefore tended to favour the status quo and wanted KCC to oversee the running of transport services as they felt it would lead to a more joined up county-wide service.

We identified eight guiding principles or tests participants wanted to consider before deciding what sort changes could be possible and tolerable for each of the services under scrutiny. Importantly, people wanted to choose the model(s) that posed the least risk to vulnerable people and which ensured the best deal in terms of value for money, quality and accountability. The first five items are more considerations relating to who should deliver services and be involved in delivering them, and the last three are more considerations when weighing up who should be accountable or responsible for services. These eight factors are summarised below:
Guiding considerations for changes to service delivery

**Purpose:** Does the service provide for the whole community, individuals or specific persons in need?

**Coverage:** Is the service best served through a strategic county wide oversight, or would it benefit from local understanding.

**Quality of existing provision:** How good is the current quality (frequency/capacity/delivery/cost etc…)

**User:** Looking at the profile of the user, is it appropriate to ask them to take on more responsibility?

**Viable alternatives:** How feasible are the alternative scenarios? Are the structures and demand already in place or been proven elsewhere?

**Accountability:** Who should oversee and be responsible for guaranteeing standards & quality?

**Risk:** What is the risk to the individual/community if the service is not being delivered/accessed to an acceptable standard?

**Trust in competency:** can the organisation/body (eg, KCC, District Council, School, individual) be trusted to make the right decisions on behalf of the user/beneficiary?

The following paragraphs summarise how participants responded to alternative models of service delivery by each of the 8 service areas.

**Adult Social Care** – there was some acceptance that services could not continue to be provided in the same way as the past due to the challenges presented by an ageing population and reduced funding. Views about how these challenges should be tackled varied, often depending on participants’ age, with some younger residents recognising that individuals could perhaps be asked to contribute more to their care costs while others in the middle and older age groups tended to feel that local communities could probably do more to encourage volunteers who could help those
with less acute needs. Across all age groups there was generally agreement for supporting people to stay as long as possible in their own homes and lead independent lives. Most participants, however, lacked sufficient understanding of how adult social care was funded currently to express strong feelings about whether a more personalised service (allowing people to live for longer in their own homes) should be funded through increased Council Tax.

**Children's Social Care** – many participants felt that KCC should continue to be responsible for children’s social care. For the most part, participants had too limited experience or understanding of children’s social care services to be able to envisage how alternative models for service delivery would work and identify where savings could be made. There was generally support for increasing investment in services which helped prevent children from entering care in the first place. People were less clear, however, on the practicalities of how this could be done, which in turn meant it was hard for many participants to justify increased Council Tax.

**Children's Services** – many participants expressed concern that support for the most vulnerable children should be protected and valued the strategic oversight and expertise that involvement from the County Council would ensure. However, familiarity with and awareness of individual children’s services was often limited and it was therefore difficult for most people to support increased Council Tax in this area. Some older participants said they would be open to see some reductions in Council spending by increasing parental responsibility and community involvement, but few could clearly envisage how this would play out in reality. Overall, most participants were concerned to protect the quality and accessibility of children’s services and many were therefore hesitant in their response to alternative models of delivery.

**Community Services** – perhaps more so than in other areas, there was some appetite for diminishing KCC responsibility for both delivering and funding these services. Participants could see that there were obvious cost savings and some were shocked at the existing level of current Council subsidy in this area. As well as the obvious appeal in cost reductions, a more devolved delivery model was often considered a better one, increasing local engagement and encouraging more involvement and investment from individual users. There was very little appetite for increasing Council Tax to protect these types of service; given many did not see these services as such a priority, there was even some openness to reductions in some of these services (e.g. community wardens).

**Highways** – many participants concluded that responsibility for the highway network should stay with the Council since there were obvious challenges in adopting a more devolved and local delivery model. With the majority of roads crossing local boundaries, the strategic oversight of the Council was considered to be particularly valuable. While most participants could foresee the impracticalities and inefficiencies in devolving responsibility, some warmed (in theory) to the idea of more local decision-making involved in the delivery process for example on issues relating to traffic calming/management and urgent road maintenance works. There was generally little appetite for individual user charging and most participants argued that running a car was already costly for them, especially in more rural areas where there was little alternative mode of transport; their responses were therefore less favourable towards the idea of passing costs down to users. Very few participants saw that there was a need to increase Council Tax to improve highway spending and many felt that the Council could drive down costs by establishing more efficient maintenance contracts.
Schools – some participants expressed initial interest in passing more responsibility for school improvement down to local schools and encouraging schools to be better at sharing their resources between themselves, in the hope that this would reduce their reliance on Council funding and could ultimately lead to better quality of service and more consistency between schools in one area. However, in reality participants struggled to envisage how this increased cooperation between schools would work; whether schools would contribute equally; whether those in need of support would be open to receiving it from neighbouring schools etc. Many were also quite concerned about increasing responsibility lying at the parental level, since existing parent-led groups such as PTAs could sometimes result in a busybody mentality where not all parents had equal say. There were also concerns about the expertise and ability of parents to make important decisions regarding the running of the school and the quality of service delivered to students. Another consideration in this service area was the fact that most participants felt parents would continue to try to get their children into a better school which might be further away, rather than send their children to a nearby under-performing school and try to improve it by becoming more involved.

Transport – many participants were willing to explore alternative ways of providing public transport. For example, some felt that parents could take more responsibility for getting children to school, although this view was usually confined to younger focus groups and was less popular among those participants with children of their own. Some believed cost savings could be made in the area of SEN transport, passing the costs on to users / parents and providing financial support to only the most vulnerable. There was little appetite for increased user charging, in particular for subsidised bus routes where the level of existing Council subsidy was so high that participants struggled to see how alternative delivery models could support them to the same extent. Many felt that the freedom pass however was a “very good deal” and were more open to increased user charging in this area.

Waste – Appetite for increasing Council Tax for this service area was extremely low with most participants expressing the view that the Council could probably generate more savings through existing and new contracts and/or get more income from service users themselves, as well as potentially charging more for use of recycling services. There was generally little desire for devolving more responsibility to local communities as participants realised that there were unavoidable challenges in administering this. Most participants therefore concluded that waste services should continue to be organised by the Council but that there was potentially scope for reducing Council costs by working more efficiently with contractors and / or engaging service users in a different way, and making small user changes.

More detail on each of these service areas is supplied in the main report.
Background and Methodology
Background and Methodology

Background and objectives

Kent County Council (KCC) commissioned Ipsos MORI to host deliberative events to engage residents across the county in the budgetary process. Ipsos MORI has conducted such qualitative research on behalf of KCC since 2005, usually at the beginning of a budget consultation in order that findings from the workshop are fed into wider and more formal consultation on the coming year’s budget. This year, KCC has already published a consultation on its proposed budget for 2013-14, and the budget workshops have been commissioned to form part of the formal consultation process.

Findings from previous budget workshops

Previous workshops have given good insight into what local residents consider to be priorities for funding by the County Council. These focus around services for the vulnerable such as social care, universal services such as education and health, and infrastructure services such as public transport and road maintenance.

The 2010 workshop identified a series of determining factors used by participants to help them identify areas for making savings. These were: whether they had a good or poor experience of the service; whether they felt the service was currently over or under-provided; whether the alternative proposed was viable and fair; and whether standards could be retained whilst savings are made.

Residents in previous workshops also discussed factors that would determine whether a service should be provided by KCC, a private or voluntary organisation. These included considerations of affordability for both the Council and for residents, whether the Council has a moral responsibility to provide a service (e.g. social care for the elderly), whether the market could provide a viable alternative to Council provision and whether the Council can guarantee the quality of services provided by other bodies.

In previous workshops residents also understood and discussed the various ways in which savings can be made. These included: stopping the provision of some services, charging more, rationing services to a smaller group of residents, reducing the quality of a service or service level (providing a minimum, not a gold standard), and changing the way a service is provided to make it more efficient and better value for money – which might mean external contracting.

The concept behind the 2012 workshop

In 2012, Kent County Council wished to expand upon all these previous findings to explore, in more depth, residents’ feelings about service transformation - with a particular emphasis on the idea of more local control of services (and the funding of services) either by the community or by individual service users. Given that the national government is no longer providing financial assistance to help Council offer a freeze in Council Tax, it was also important to revisit residents’ attitudes towards raising Council Tax in the current economic climate.

Key objectives for the 2012 workshops were therefore:
To understand residents’ views on spending priorities for their local area and Kent as a whole
To explore the extent to which residents are willing to reduce spending vs. see an increase Council Tax.
To explore the extent in which residents are willing for services to be less centralised and more community based; and
To explore the extent to which residents are willing to look after themselves without support and funding from local government.

Kent County Council wished to gather detailed views across a range of service areas, as well as to understand differences and similarities in resident views according to demographic factors such as age, local area, and gender.

Methodology

Recruitment and logistics

Two deliberative workshops were held, one for residents of East Kent at Canterbury Christchurch University on Saturday 29th September 2012, and another for residents of West Kent at the River Centre in Tonbridge on Saturday 6th October 2012. Both workshops took place between 10.00 am and 4.30 pm.

Recruitment for the workshops was conducted face-to-face, with quotas set by age, gender, district Council area, work status, ethnicity and social grade to ensure that participants were broadly representative of Kent as a whole. A cash incentive and travel expenses were offered to participants to encourage attendance; in total, 81 participants were recruited across the two days, 40 for East Kent and 41 for West Kent. Of these, 33 attended on the day in East Kent and 35 in the West. A breakdown of the 68 participants by gender, and age is provided in the appendices.

Outline of the day

Following an initial discussion on service priorities, spending cuts and Council Tax, a presentation was given by Ipsos MORI to highlight public opinion data around the economy and public services. This was followed by a presentation by KCC clarifying the Council’s current position in terms of the budget and funding, to contextualise the day’s debates.

Residents were then given time to debate three different service delivery models: reducing spend or increasing Council Tax, increasing individual contributions for service provision or having more localised responsibility for service provision and budgeting through the community (including schools, local businesses and the third sector). The rest of the workshop then encouraged residents to focus in on a range of service case studies and take a view on which model would work best for each of these services. There were 21 case studies in total across eight broad service areas:

- Adult social care for the vulnerable, and for the elderly
- Social care for children, and vulnerable children

2 A disproportionate number of those who were recruited for the East Kent workshop but did not attend were from Thanet, the furthest district from the workshop venue. For this reason, we recruited an extra participant from Dartford for the West Kent workshop which is the most distant district from Tonbridge.
- Children’s services
- Community services
- Highways
- Schools
- Transport; and
- Waste disposal.

A full breakdown of the workshops can be found at the beginning of Section 5 on Service Areas.

The table below provides an outline of the workshop itinerary.

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<td>10.00-10.30</td>
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<td>- Welcome by Ipsos MORI</td>
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<td>- Outline of day</td>
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<td>- First round of interactive voting</td>
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<td>- Assignment to breakout groups</td>
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<td>10.30-11.40</td>
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<td>Views of local area/priorities</td>
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<td>- Group introduction</td>
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<td>- What is Kent/your area like as a place to live?</td>
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<td>- What is important in making somewhere a nice</td>
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<td>place to live?</td>
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<td>- Identify priorities through assignment of key</td>
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<td>services across an important vs need improving</td>
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<td>scale/grid.</td>
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<td>- Initial reactions to reduce spending/services</td>
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<td></td>
<td>vs increase Council Tax</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.40-11.50</td>
<td>BREAK</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.50-12.40</td>
<td>Plenary</td>
<td>KCC presentation and questions</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>- 5-10 setting the scene by Ipsos MORI on the</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>national context</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>- 20 min presentation by KCC</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Q&amp;A.</td>
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<td>- Plenary review: where we’ve got to so far, plan</td>
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<td>for the afternoon</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.40-1.20</td>
<td>LUNCH</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.20-2.30</td>
<td>Group</td>
<td>Models for making savings</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Explore each of the three models for savings,</td>
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<td>probing for differences across each of the 9-10</td>
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<td>broad service areas.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>i) Increasing universal contribution;</td>
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<td>ii) Devolve local budget responsibility;</td>
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<td>iii) Increase individual responsibility</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>iv) Increase community involvement</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.30-2.40</td>
<td>BREAK</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.40-4.00</td>
<td>Group</td>
<td>Mapping savings by area of spending:</td>
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<td>- Review earlier discussions and map each</td>
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<td>broad area against approaches to spending.</td>
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<td>i) Subsidised bus routes (probe on other</td>
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The deliberative model

Tasking local residents with solving difficult financial and service transformation problems with limited prior knowledge and within the confines of a day-long workshop is a challenge. However, we designed the research events so that participants would be supported in their discussions and would be comfortable in considering the complex issues put before them:

- The deliberative element allowed participants to gradually build their knowledge base (through discussion, presentation and briefing materials) of Council spending and Council services before debating which models of service provision were most appropriate in general and specifically in relation to some named services.

- In addition to discussions in larger plenary sessions, participants were divided throughout the day into smaller working groups (by age and region). This allowed for the gathering of detailed views from all participants on service provision models, and fostered good group dynamics.

- Finance and policy officers from KCC were present at the workshop to act as expert witnesses, providing additional information and clarification to participant queries as they considered specific proposals for service transformation or for savings.
- Interactive voting was used to engage participants in plenary sessions and to map shifts in attitudes throughout the day.

**Participant feedback**

Participants in the workshop were generally very happy with how the day was run and enjoyed the different elements of the workshop. The following chart represents the average scores out of 5 that participants gave to particular aspects of the day.

### Participant feedback for deliberative workshop 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Out of 5, how satisfied are you with the following aspects of the day?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KCC Presentation</td>
<td>4.4, 4.25, 4.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities to give views</td>
<td>4.73, 4.59, 4.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of IM moderators</td>
<td>4.6, 4.41, 4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event organisation</td>
<td>4.55, 4.25, 4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venue Facilities</td>
<td>4.5, 4.22, 4.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>4.55, 4.47, 4.51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reasons given for such positive scores can be gleaned from some of the participants' comments on the feedback forms which include: feeling their views and opinions had been taken into consideration; and having gained insight into Council Tax and how the County spends its money (and the constraints they face). One resident commented that they “left feeling much more confident in the Council than previously - sensible people making difficult decisions”.

Others expressed their hope that decision makers would take their views seriously and deliver concrete actions. Residents also appreciated the fact that there were Council representatives available to provide clarity on the issues and constraints.

**Interpreting qualitative data**

Unlike quantitative surveys, qualitative research is designed to be illustrative, detailed and exploratory, providing insight into the perceptions, feelings and intended behaviours of people rather than conclusions from a quantifiable valid sample. Therefore, the workshops do not allow statistical conclusions to be drawn about the extent to which views are held across Kent. This said, a qualitative study that is based...
on strict recruitment criteria (with quotas on different demographic groups) is distinctly superior in terms of its representativeness than an open consultation process as this is subject to response bias among those with a vested interested or the politically active members of the community.

Throughout this report, use is made of verbatim comments and case studies from participants. Where this is the case, it is important to remember that the views expressed do not always represent the views of the group as a whole, but are illustrative of the issues raised during the workshop.

The perceptions of participants make up a considerable proportion of the evidence in this report, and it is important to remember that although such perceptions may not always be factually accurate, they represent the truth to those who relate them.

The report also contains the results of interactive voting used during the workshop. Given the number of residents involved, the findings of the interactive voting are intended to provide a context for analysis by showing general shifts in opinion during the workshop; they should not been seen as a set of statistically robust figures representative of Kent County residents as a whole.

**Publication of the results**

As the Council has engaged Ipsos MORI to undertake an objective programme of research, it is important to protect the Council’s interests by ensuring that it is accurately reflected in any press release or publication of the findings. As part of our standard terms and conditions, the publication of the findings of this report is therefore subject to the advance approval of Ipsos MORI. Such approval will only be refused on the grounds of inaccuracy or misrepresentation.

**Acknowledgements**

Ipsos MORI would like to thank the Kent residents who participated in the workshops. In addition, we would also like to thank all KCC colleagues who helped develop the concept and materials for the project; in particular Dave Shipton, Paul McCallum, Anthony Kamps, David Whittle, Liz Sanderson, Michael Thomas-Sam, Steve Charman and Phillippa Garden, who acted as expert witnesses during the workshop.
Section 1: Context

The national context and public perceptions

In 2012, public spending continues to be reduced as the Government prioritises paying off the national debt. Central government funding to Councils is set to decrease by around a quarter between 2010/11 and 2014/15. In most areas this has meant substantial cuts to service provision as well as public sector jobs.

Recent Ipsos MORI polling shows the British public are worried about this situation, with the economy and unemployment ranking much higher than traditional areas of concern such as the NHS or crime.

Tracking public opinion on how money should be spent on public services has been a key tool in helping policy makers decide their budgets, and has become ever more important in the current economic climate.

For example, since the election of 2010, public opinion has tended to recognize the necessity of cuts to pay off the deficit, however this trend has appeared to reverse in 2011 and opinion is now split between the two views. This may well be linked to the public starting to personally feel the effects of service reductions in combination with the general effects of a recession and the effects of welfare reforms. A significant proportion of the wider public already say they have been affected by the cuts to public services, and the majority are concerned they will be in the future.
There is a real need to cut spending on public services in order to pay off the deficit

The British public have relatively strong views on how the process of cutting spending should play out. We know from our recent research that many British adults feel that the government’s priority should be to protect services for people who need the most help; even if that means other people are harder hit by tax rises and cuts to services they use. For example, people are willing to accept reductions in funding or a change of responsibility for some local authority services but they are very clear that education, policing and social services should remain as priorities and continue to be well funded.

In addition to identifying priorities for spending, it is also important to consider public views on how services should be delivered. For example we know that people also wish to be involved in decisions made about the funding of public services in their local area, even though this may lead to local variation of the services they receive.

We like the idea of more local control

To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:

- % Strongly agree  □ □ □ □
- % Tend to agree   □ □ □ □
- % Tend to disagree □ □ □ □
- % Strongly disagree □ □ □ □

People should have more control over how public services are provided locally, even though it will mean that the services residents receive will vary between local areas*

29 34 17 10

*Base: 631 British adults 18+  
Fieldwork: 18-19 April 2010  
Source: Ipsos MORI/Economist, Political Monitor, 2010
The funding dilemma in Kent

As the largest county Council in England, Kent’s total projected spend on services for 2012 is £1.78 billion pounds, with approximately a quarter of this coming from Council Tax. Given the rising cost of living, Kent County Council launched a consultation in September 2012 which proposes a freeze in Council Tax for this coming financial year. This, combined with a fall in predicted Council income over the next 4 years, and a significant rise in the costs of waste disposal and social care (as a result of the ageing population) means that KCC is facing the unprecedented prospect of having to make significant year on year savings for at least the next five years.

KCC estimates that there will be a reduction of 26 million pounds in grants from the national purse to the Council, a 2 million reduction in revenues from Council Tax and a reduction of 38 million of the schools grant, totalling a net reduction in budget of approx 60 million pounds for the year for a total of £1.71 billion pounds available to spend.

To manage this shortfall, KCC is proposing to make changes to some services such as adult social care, children’s centres, libraries, the apprenticeship programme, highways, the freedom pass, travel subsidies and regeneration work. Cost savings already made will save approximately 13 million pounds of the 60 million shortfall. The aim of the 2012 deliberative workshops was therefore to allow KCC to seek public views on whether or not to increase Council Tax and how to save the remaining £44 million.
Section 2: Kent - Views and Priorities

This chapter first considers how satisfied participants felt with living in Kent and what they considered to be service priorities. Understanding these priorities has been a recurrent aim of the budget workshops Ipsos MORI has run for KCC over the last few years. It gives KCC important context for later discussions on which services should be earmarked for spending priorities and those which should be protected from spending cuts. Many participants continue to prioritise the care of disabled, elderly and vulnerable adults.

The budget workshops used several tools to help gather views on resident priorities, including: a wall-space on which residents could contribute unprompted thoughts about Kent; interactive voting to track views throughout the day; and an exercise to consider whether specific county Council services were important, and which were in need of improvement. These exercises served as a useful warm-up for participants before deliberating alternative delivery models and considering their appropriateness in specific service areas in more detail. As such, they reflect participants' initial responses to the debate surrounding Kent's priorities.

Participants’ views of Kent

The Good: Green and pleasant land

Participants were asked to use electronic keypads to vote on how satisfied they are with Kent as a place to live. The results are shown on the graph below: over the two discussion days, three quarters of participants (77%) were satisfied with Kent as a place to live, compared with just one in ten (9%) who were dissatisfied.

This suggests broad satisfaction with life in the county. In order to understand these results, participants were encouraged to write on post-it notes what they considered to be the good and bad aspects of living in Kent which were then posted on a wall in the plenary room.
Access to nature and enviable Kent’s proximity to countryside, London and Europe (“gateway to Europe”) was one of the most commonly identified positive themes. Participants felt lucky that they live somewhere that is conveniently located to travel across the UK and Europe.

There was also pride in the history of the county and its extant historic buildings. Participants also spoke highly of the parks in Kent and its picturesque rural setting.

**The Bad: Town centres in decline, and lacking youth provision**

Whilst participants were on the whole satisfied with living in Kent, there remain elements of local life which they would like to see improved. When asked to describe the less positive aspects of living and Kent, we obtained unprompted views of what most needs improving. Many of the issues raised in this exercise about life in Kent pertain to its roads. Numerous participants were unhappy about the level of traffic congestion and the poor condition of the roads. Despite the apparent displeasure many feel at driving in the county, public transport is also criticised.

In coastal areas in particular, there was concern about the decline of many high streets, with participants criticising the “abandoned, 1960s style ugly buildings” and preponderance of charity shops and “£1 shops.” They also expressed worries about the local economy more broadly, highlighting the lack of jobs and the closure of small businesses. Possibly linked to bleak prospects for youth around unemployment, some participants commented on a lack of youth clubs or other facilities for young people.

Some participants were concerned by anti-social behaviour and crime more broadly, with street drinking named by several as a particular problem.

Given many participants highlighted the “picturesque” countryside and natural beauty of the county as being one of its strengths, it is perhaps understandable that some were dismayed at what they see as a problem of “litter louts,” with rubbish on many streets and increased amount of fly-tipping identified as particular issues. The
participants seem keen to preserve the aesthetics of their county which increased littering has eroded.

It also appears that at this early stage of the events (before any deliberation took place), a number of participants took the opportunity to express concern about the level of Council Tax they paid and about how they believe it is being spent. Commonly, post-it notes on this matter complained of cuts to services at the same time as Council Tax being too high, as if to suggest the money is not being used effectively. One resident summed up this sentiment by writing “no value for money from Council Tax.”

**Local life is generally fine but the Council could do better**

Although satisfaction with life overall is good, participants believed there was room for improvement in service delivery by KCC. They were asked to vote on to what extent they agreed that the quality of services is good overall. As the graph below shows, the balance of opinion is negative and no participant strongly agreed with the statement.

Participants were also asked whether they agreed that KCC provides value for money. At the beginning of the day, the balance of opinion was negative where only one in ten (11%) agreed with this statement, compared with half (53%) who disagreed.

Over the course of the day, participants were encouraged to think in greater detail about the financial constraints faced by KCC and the breadth of services that the Council Tax must fund. At the end of the day, when this question concerning value for money was asked again, there was a striking difference in results: The balance of opinion became positive where almost half (45%) of participants agreed that KCC provides value for money, twice the proportion who disagreed (23%). This suggests that the deliberative element of the workshop fostered a greater understanding of Council Tax and what it is spent on.
Kent County Council provides value for money

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Tend to agree</th>
<th>Neither/nor</th>
<th>Tend to disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>9%</td>
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Priority Services

Which services are important and which need improvement?

It is clear from the post-it exercise and initial voting session that participants felt that there was some room for improvement in terms of the Council delivering value for money and to a lesser extent improving the quality of services. The next exercise participants took part in enabled us to group services according to whether participants believed they were in need of improvement, and/or whether they felt they were important. They were asked to position a series of County Council services along two axis (needs improving and importance to the community). As a way of generating discussion around Council services and encouraging participants to think about where they would like to see more /less investment in the future, participants plotted services in one of four quadrants (important and needs improvement; important and in less need of improvement; less important and needs improvement; less important and in less need of improvement). This was useful for getting an initial sense of how much value participants placed on different services and the extent to which they considered some services a priority for KCC to focus attentions on.

As might be expected, there was variation across different age groups and between East and West Kent about which services should be prioritised, although there was some degree of consensus on a few:

- Most groups considered adult social care to be particularly important, along with children’s social services, possibly reflecting a desire to protect the vulnerable.
- There was a broad consensus on Highways Maintenance being in need of improvement, which is in line with the unprompted views about the poor condition of roads, but its importance varied. Younger groups tended to consider it less important, in part due to the fact several younger participants were not using the roads.
- Waste disposal services were often considered the least in need of improvement – possibly as it is a service few people think about on a day-to-day basis.
- Connexions was viewed as least important by several groups, and this may reflect previous years’ discussions around its fitness of purpose.

Not all services which fell into the priority quadrant were placed there for the same reasons. Participants might have considered a service important because of its need for improvement, and vice versa.

These discussions around how to prioritise services have enabled us to think about services in five (rather than simply four) notional categories. These are:

**Priority: Services deemed important only because they need improvement**

Many named roads as a priority due their poor condition such as the prevalence of pot holes. They therefore firmly believe the Council should work to improve this. However, once the roads are all well surfaced, it is probable that many would consider roads to be less of a priority. Thus the importance of a service can stem from its perceived poor state, rather than in the case of roads, their strategic or economic importance to the county.

**Priority: Services in need of improvement because of their importance in their own right**

By contrast, other services were identified as so important that they are always in need of improvement, such as nursing, residential and domiciliary care. For these services, participants thought that the Council should always be working to improve them, and therefore will always be a priority. Even if provision is viewed as being of a high standard people worry about standards slipping. In other words, these services have an inherent importance to participants.
The voting exercise at the beginning and end of the day gauged the services participants thought should be protected the most from a reduction in spending. “Care for the elderly and adults with disabilities” was identified as most in need of protection initially, with four out of five (39%) of participants voting for it. In the afternoon, this had increased to half (49%) which reflects the importance attached to these services during the group discussions.

It is clear that participants wish to see protected, those services which are considered to always be in need of improvement so that standards cannot slip and good care of the vulnerable in the community is possible.

Not a priority: Important but current provision satisfactory

On the other hand, there are other services which were viewed as important in the eyes of participants, but because they are satisfied with current provision they didn’t believe improvement is so necessary, and therefore not priority areas for the Council to focus on. KCC would be expected to maintain the status quo, but not to improve them at the detriment of other service areas. Waste disposal and other environmental services seem to fall into this category.

Need to know more

For some services participants did not appear to be particularly sure if they need improving, perhaps due to low visibility overall or they are not the concern of particular individuals on a day-to-day basis. With such services, participants sometimes felt unable to make a decision and so placed them in the middle area of the grid. Waste disposal again fell into this category for some groups: they assumed the service is functioning reasonably well as “no news is good news” but didn’t really know a great deal. This contrasts with other groups where they were better informed about waste disposal and knew it was working well and therefore not in need of

This work was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the international quality standard for Market Research, ISO 20252:2006.

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improvement. Many groups were unsure what School Improvement Services entails. However, even after the service had been explained they were unsure of the role of KCC in delivering it.

**Not a priority: Not that important**

The fifth category of services is those that participants explicitly identified as not being important, suggesting their provision by KCC should be reduced or even ended if viable alternatives exist. Again, this to varied depending on people’s individual need for each service. Young groups viewed Connexions as unimportant, even though this service is aimed at them, as some were speaking from personal experience that the Job Centre is better suited to giving them advice about employment and careers. Older groups also tended to place Connexions as unimportant but suggested other forms of delivery such as schools and the local business community.
Attitudes to Council Tax
Section 3: Attitudes to Council Tax

Though the Council Tax Freeze grant from Government will no longer be offered to Local Authorities in 2013/14 financial year, KCC have noted the considerable squeeze most families are experiencing in the current financial climate and have outlined proposals to freeze Council Tax for the 2013/14 financial year. A key objective for the 2012 Budget Workshops was therefore to gauge residents’ views towards the level of Council Tax, and to explore whether they would welcome an increase in the amount they pay.

Interactive voting was used at the start and end of the workshops to monitor the change in attitudes towards Council Tax throughout the day. The itinerary also allowed for an initial discussion on Council Tax prior to presentations from Ipsos MORI and KCC, this allowed participants to share their top of mind thoughts and to establish a baseline of opinion before KCC presented the detail of the financial challenges faced by them.

General awareness and attitudes towards Council Tax

Participants’ awareness of how much they paid in Council Tax, how their contributions are calculated and how the money is spent was mixed; however it should be noted that, broadly speaking, awareness was higher than at previous budget workshops conducted by Ipsos MORI. Several participants had read the information provided with their Council Tax bill in detail, almost all understood that the amount paid is related to property size, and most had some understanding of the Council Tax exemptions. Nevertheless, there was broad consensus – even among the more informed – that the Council Tax system was complicated and not necessarily fair.

Participants questioned whether Council Tax is calculated fairly

The principle of fairness was linked to an understanding of value for money as “what individual residents received in return for their investment”. A number of participants felt that Council Tax should be based on the number of people in the household rather than the size of the household, and that likewise, those in larger buildings / dwellings should not have to pay more because they are no more likely to use county Council services. Others felt that contribution to local Councils should be based on income, and some felt it should be based directly on the number/type of service used (though it should be noted that the association of Council Tax with use of services was often based on access to universal basic services).

“I don’t see why you should pay more personally. I mean I’ve only got a three bedroom semi but... why should someone with a mansion pay more because they’re not getting any more services?”

(Male, 45-59, East Kent)
Council Tax exemptions were also important in assessing whether the Council Tax system was fair. Participants were broadly supportive of the single person discount, and many suggested that a 25% discount was not enough and presented a significant amount of money to come out of one wage.

“My brother-in-law was an example; he’s blind, lives on his own, three bedroom house, so he gets 25% off. There’s five of us living in our house, you know we’re only paying 25% more than him potentially for another four people.”

(Male, 45-59, West Kent)

However, there was less consensus on whether exemptions for second/empty homes should be granted. Though some believed the exemptions to be valid because the household would be using fewer Council services, others felt that exemptions should only be allowed for specific circumstances such as renovation or where the occupant has moved into a home. Furthermore, participants were generally unclear as to why those in the Armed Forces qualified for an exemption compared to those working in other key public services (nurses, for example), and thus several thought this to be unfair.

Participants were broadly happy with the amount they paid, but struggled to consider ‘value for money’

Though some participants felt that the amount they paid in Council Tax was too high, most were content with the amount they contributed. Younger participants were particularly keen to be seen to be supporting key public services, and others felt that that the amount they paid was reasonable considering the number of services provided.

“In reality we’re always going to say yeah it’s too much… but if you took away all the services, no refuse, no this, no that, I think we’d all then go: hang on a minute, actually £100 a month is not that bad. It could be worse.”

(Female, 18-29, West Kent)

"Do you know it’s really funny because I have very little money. I live on my own but I’m quite happy to pay my Council Tax because I can see the whole…I think if you break that down and how much it’s going to charge me to go to a park and to the library and stuff I think it’s not a lot of money really.”

(Female, 45-59, West Kent)

However, participants often found it difficult to comment on whether they felt Kent offered good value for money; this was either because they had limited exposure to some Council services (e.g. services for the vulnerable) or because they did not have an appropriate comparison. Most had lived in the Kent area for all of their adult lives, and thus few had the ability to compare the ‘deal’ they get in Kent with elsewhere. In
a rare exception, one participant who had recently moved from Essex was particularly happy with the amount he paid in Council Tax given his improved housing situation.

“Yeah, I’m actually quite happy because I recently moved out from Essex, like we’re paying a lot less than what we was before for a lot better property. I come from a Council estate where I got on the housing ladder and that Council Tax on that estate was coming up to £1500 a year. I’ve now moved to a detached house, loads of ground, swimming pool, the lot and I’m paying £1200 a year. So I’m very happy.”

(Male, 45-59, East Kent)

A number of participants queried the extent to which KCC offered good value for money because they were concerned about possible efficiencies and waste. Several participants cited unease about the way in which KCC is perceived to handle public money – with specific reference to the money tied up in Icelandic banks – others mentioned high Council staff pay and the amount of money apparently spent on local events.

“I’ve been to a few events run by the Council and just my general impression is there’s more money sloshing about in the local authority than there is a lot of the money going on bodies.”

(Male, 30-44, West Kent)

Reaction to proposed freeze in Council Tax

As shown through the interactive voting, findings from the workshop suggest that although more participants supported a freeze than not, views were mixed. Results from the voting held at the end of each workshop show that just over half of participants agreed that Council Tax should not go up; however a third were more open to the possibility of increasing the amount they pay if it helps protect spend on Council services.

Mapping these findings against the views held at the start of the workshop shows that attitudes towards Council Tax did change as different options for delivery were discussed throughout the day.

Participants in East Kent were asked to consider whether “Council Tax should not go up in any circumstances, even if this means some reductions in front line Council services”. As shown in the chart below, the number who strongly agreed with this statement increased throughout the day (from 10% to 25%) as participants explored (and liked in some cases) the alternative service delivery options to raising Council Tax.
Participants in West Kent were asked to consider whether “Council Tax should not be increased to make up for a reduction in funding, even if this means KCC has less to spend on services”. However, in contrast to their counterparts in East Kent, opinion shifted away from freezing Council Tax. This is perhaps reflective of discussions which raised questions about how the alternative delivery options would really work in practice, as explored in the chapter below.

Despite a split in opinion, participants were ultimately more likely to agree that Council Tax should not be increased, which suggests that although a number of participants were happy to consider an increase in theory, they may be more hesitant to increase their own personal contributions.

Participants were most likely to support a freeze in Council Tax

As anticipated in the Kent Budget Consultation document, participants were most likely to support the idea of freezing Council Tax than not. These participants felt strongly that residents across a range of incomes are struggling as wages fail to keep up with the cost of living; and therefore freezing Council Tax was appropriate in the
current climate. This was particularly the case for older participants who felt they had limited scope to increase their income.

“I think en masse people are in desperate straightened circumstances. I think people are pushed to the limit just with the basic costs of the gas and electric, the food, the petrol, everything is going up and our wages are not going up”.

(Female, 45-59, East Kent)

Concern about raising Council Tax was broadly in line with participants’ wider views about whether or not the public pay too much in tax already. Those who felt that tax was too high in general or that the cost of welfare was too generous were more likely to agree that Council Tax should be frozen.

Support for a freeze in Council Tax was also apparent among those who felt that more could be done to streamline the current budget. Such participants felt that this should be addressed first before considering whether an increase in Council Tax was needed. They suggested that streamlining could come either from a transformation of service, or efficiencies in staff, salaries and buildings.

“I must admit I hit the strongly disagree with it (Council Tax) going up because I’m a firm believer that a lot of the cuts that need to be made can be made by changing the way the Council operates, without there necessarily being an impact on the end user.”

(Male, 30-44, West Kent)

“What needs to happen is the Council needs to be more efficient in terms of what they’re doing. They need to be more efficient in their budget spending, more efficient with their staff numbers, they’ve got too many managers, too many high salaries.”

(Male, 45-59, East Kent)

Some participants were open-minded to an increase under the right circumstances

However, a number of participants were happy to consider a reasonable increase if it guaranteed support and improvement in the right service areas.

Participants were broadly aware of the challenge facing public finances and there was a minority view that it was therefore reasonable to expect Council Tax to rise a little. Though participants were generally against a significant rise in the amount they contribute, most would consider an increase in line with inflation. For these participants, a significant increase would only be acceptable if they received an increase in their income.

“So not like a massive hike, but I do understand slightly above inflation in the present climate. Not huge rises. Inflation yes, things cost more so it’s obviously going to cost Council s more to pay for them so I’m fine with inflation.”

(Male, 30-44, West Kent)
Some participants were reluctantly open-minded towards an increase in Council Tax because they felt there was no acceptable alternative for protecting delivery in particular service areas. Even prior to the presentations by KCC and Ipsos MORI, the more informed participants acknowledged that in order to maintain the existing level of service – and seek improvements – in the current economic climate, residents would either have to contribute either more of their time or money.

“You can’t say it can’t increase when we want the same services and we refuse to do them ourselves…here’s got to be something, obviously there's money being cut. Increase the efficiency would be good because there’s a hell of a lot of inefficiency in Council’s. Aside from that we’ve either got to pay more, do more ourselves or accept that services are going to get worse so that is the options.”

(Female, 18-29, West Kent)

In addition, a number of participants were willing to accept an increase in Council Tax if it could guarantee them improvements in the areas they wanted. This was particularly pertinent to those who were more sceptical about the way in which the Council handled its budget. Acceptance of an increase in Council Tax was therefore service specific and relied on participants identifying an explicit need for investment, rather than accepting that Council Tax needed to be increased across the board.

“If you had to pay more, I don’t know for schooling, because they want to improve the services, the majority of people wouldn’t mind paying that. It depends how you break it down.”

(Female, 30-44, West Kent)

Accepting a rise in Council Tax over a reduction in spend: increasing universal contribution

In addition to stating their top of mind thoughts on Council Tax, participants were asked to consider the possibility of increasing universal contribution to mitigate the need to reduce spending or transform delivery across 21 specific service case studies. Increasing universal contribution would require an increase in the financial contribution made through Council Tax, sharing the cost of the service across all residents rather than specific communities or individuals.

In line with their initial reactions to freezing Council Tax, participants opted to raise universal contribution for case studies where:

- they felt the service was a great priority
- they felt the alternatives were not viable and too risky
- they wanted accountability for delivery to remain with KCC

Participants saw raising Council Tax was an appropriate option acceptable for services that had a particular focus on supporting vulnerable or disadvantaged groups. This included services such subsidised bus routes used by elderly residents, residential care, supporting vulnerable adults, and looked after children.
“I’d pay extra Council Tax for disadvantaged families to be able to put their kids into early years schooling – I’d be prepared to pay additional tax for that.”

(Male, 45-59, West Kent)

“I would pay more Council Tax, especially for children needing the care system, that’s one thing I would do.”

(Female, 45-59, West Kent)

The option to increase Council Tax was also chosen in services which groups felt were important to society per se. For example, the younger participant group in East Kent opted to increase Council Tax for access to school services, employment and advice services, which they felt were important ‘rights’ to residents which required a consistent approach across the county.

Assessment of risk was also key. Even if residents were sympathetic to the concept of increasing the involvement of the community or placing further responsibility on the individual, they were often guided by pragmatic considerations of whether the alternatives would work in practice. For example, participants aged 45-59 in West Kent felt that community delivery of subsidised bus routes was not practical and that users were unable to contribute more financially.

In each of these instances, participants did not want to reduce the quality of the service and felt that risk of providing a sub-standard service was too high when increasing community or individual responsibility.

“I think it’s such a sort of serious subject, children that need families. It would be lovely that the community could step in and people can do lots and you do get families that will take children in. But I don’t think reducing the service is a good idea ‘cause it will end up with kids in homes that they shouldn’t be in or on the streets and things like that. Personally I think that the increase in the Council Tax for this one is the option ‘cause I think it’s something that has to stay and has to be improved and looked at and it shouldn’t then be cut.”

(Female, 18-29, West Kent)

In contrast, participants were least likely to consider increasing universal contribution for services which they felt were already over-provided, where they felt that it was acceptable to reduce the quality of the service, or where the alternatives were particularly viable. This was particularly apparent in deliberations over Community Wardens, during which participants found it difficult to see the merit of the service or its added value; and also in community services where participants felt that it was acceptable to reduce the KCC offering, merge local community services together and ask individuals to contribute more.
Models for Service Delivery
Section 4: Models for service delivery

After covering views on Council Tax and the service areas participants saw as being top priority\(^3\), the main focus of workshop discussions moved to testing participants' tolerance and appetite for three ways to fund and manage services:

1) **The responsibility for budgeting/spending and delivery lies with Kent County Council.** This might mean decreases in quality or the level of the service, the frequency with which it is delivered and/or the number of residents eligible to use a service;

2) **The responsibility lies with the community.** This would mean devolving responsibility for budgets locally, allowing local communities to choose how services could be run, raising finances locally and/or organising volunteers to help provide services;

3) **Increased contribution or responsibility lies with the individual user.** This would mean users decide for themselves how to interact with each service and this could translate into behaviour change of some sort (e.g. borrowing e-books rather than hard copy books from a library), increased costs at point of use, the management of individual budgets or a transformation of the how the service is run to ensure that costs are not passed on at a universal level.

To fully understand how participants engaged with each of the models of service delivery, the options were presented for discussion with reference to specific county Council service case studies which covered eight broad service areas\(^4\). For each service, participants were asked to consider whether they would rather maintain the current level of service by increasing Council Tax, or place responsibility for making necessary changes to service delivery with either KCC, the community or the individual.

Participants often struggled to select just one preferred model of service delivery for each service area. Each of the three models of delivery was considered appealing and concerning to some degree. It was not uncommon for participants to suggest combining two approaches together to create a partnership of delivery.

This section first looks at the three service delivery model options in turn, presenting the level of appeal and concern for each. It then later explores the underlying guiding considerations used by participants to help come to a decision about how best to deliver services.

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\(^3\) A group exercise was conducted where participants mapped local services according to importance and in need of improvement. Any service which participants considered both important and in need of improvement was understood as a *priority* service. See Section 5 for more detail on priority services.

\(^4\) See Section 5 for a full list of services tested.
Appeals and concerns regarding models for service delivery

Responsibility with Kent County Council – best for overview and expertise

The image below outlines both the appeal and concerns expressed by participants when considering responsibility for service changes and delivery at the county Council level.

**Appeals**

Participants were likely to favour responsibility remaining with KCC for ‘high risk’ services which required consistency, strong oversight and accountability to ensure that they were not provided to a sub-standard. This was in particular contrast to the alternatives of community volunteering and more individual responsibility where it was felt that there was a chance that not every community/individual would be able to make the right decisions or be able to deliver the appropriate service.

“Someone in KCC has got to make a decision [about home to school transport] and then that person’s got to be accountable for it being the right decision.”

(Male, 45-59, West Kent)

The ability to look across all districts was seen as a particular strength to this approach. Participants were willing for the Council to consider reductions in services so long as those most in need were protected. And the county Council was thought to be best placed to take an overview of how to target services and spend the budget fairly across the County. Moreover, it was seen to be unfair that those communities
whose needs are greater might have to contribute more to ensure a high standard of service in their area.

“The areas with greater numbers of people and therefore more children that require these services [school attendance] are going to be charged more. There are actually probably more deprived areas in the first place so it’s probably much better to stay in Kent [County Council’s remit].”

(Female, 18-29, West Kent)

Delivery at the county Council level was also favoured for services which would benefit from a more strategic, cross district delivery. This was particularly the case for more universal services such as transport, highways maintenance and for some groups, waste management.

**Concerns**

Participants were less likely to opt for responsibility to remain with the county Council where they felt that there was room for improvement in the way current services were delivered. One of the ways in which participants identified efficiency savings was for local community services such as libraries and contact centres to come together and form community hubs.

In particular, participants were concerned that some county Council services lacked local intelligence about the needs of the local area and the demand for the service. This was most relevant to services that were more community based such as libraries, youth services or community wardens.

“Some people don’t need a massive great library, some other people do. Some places you don’t need so much free entertainment for children and parents, whether it’s more of a commuter town or something like that.”

(Female, 18-29, West Kent)
Responsibility with the Community – more local responses matching local need

The image below outlines both the appeal and concerns of taking a more community based approach to service delivery, either through devolving decision making or encouraging communities to work together.

**Should responsibility be transferred to communities?**

![Diagram showing responsibilities and concerns]

**Appeals**

Overall, participants supported the idea of having greater community input into service delivery. Though they did not always want accountability to be devolved from the county Council level, participants felt that communities could provide local insight and welcomed the opportunity for local organisations to come together to create a more joined up delivery.

“They’re using it [the library] as a community hub, they’ve got the IT biscuits thing that they’ve just done to encourage older people to get on the internet via volunteers. They’ve also got a hub for births, marriages and deaths registrations in there, they have group meetings in there...”

(Male, 30-44, West Kent)

The community model was more popular for services where local structures were already in place to manage or deliver them, and participants could see how the service could be provided. This was particularly the case for delivery of services through schools.
Participants were split as to how reliable delivery through community volunteering would be. However, several were buoyed by recent showings of individuals contributing to the community in their own time through involvement in either Olympic or Jubilee events.

“The thing is you see everyone getting together for like Jubilee things and all special occasions so if people can get together for special cases, why can they not get together to do certain community projects?”

(Female, 18-29, West Kent)

Others suggested creative ideas for how to encourage local participation. These included better information to retired people about how they can use their skills, building community volunteering into local qualifications, and offering an incentive through a discount on the amount of Council Tax paid in return for volunteering. However, it was noted that such volunteering would only be appropriate for simple tasks (such as delivering meals on wheels to homes or verge cutting) that did not require extensive training.

“I think you’d have to give people an incentive if I’m being brutally honest. If you’re looking for work or something like that then the voluntary work could almost be a trade off for your Council Tax.”

(Female, 18-29, West Kent)

Results from the interactive voting suggest that there is willingness to help communities deliver services. The number of participants who agreed that they would be “willing to work together with people in my community to help provide a local service or facility if funding was reduced by the Council” increased from 38% to 51% throughout the day – after they had had the chance to consider in depth how community involvement could work and where it would be of value. It will therefore be important to communicate the value of the contribution volunteers are able to make, what is to be expected of them and how this would work in practice.

Concerns

Participants raised concerns about the potential success of community volunteering across the board, and suggested that it would only work for certain services. Some feared the operational or technical side of managing a service might be beyond the skills of volunteers in the community, and this might have a detrimental effect on the quality and reliability of the service; others felt that it was unrealistic to expect residents to volunteer without additional incentives for certain tasks.

“It’s all about a balance. You think you’re going to have everyone putting their hands up going yeah I’ll get involved in that [waste disposal]? People’d much rather sit in a... helping out in a youth centre rather than going round collecting other people’s waste.”

(Female, 18-29, West Kent)

A second area of concern with the community responsibility model touched on diseconomies of scale. For some participants, it was important to consider whether such a model would save residents any money overall (i.e. they would just be paying
more to their district or local neighbourhood rather than county Council), others queried the potential cost of transformation to a more local system of decision making.

“It seems a bit stupid to switch that to a community run scheme that may or may not work and will probably cost quite a lot of money to switch over, and actually we'll still be paying for it as a tax payer, whether it’s through Council Tax or not. So that sounds a bit stupid to me.”

(Female, 45-59, East Kent)

For some services, participants also felt that it was inappropriate to have different quality standards and/or different access to services by area. This was not only presented a logistical challenge for universal services such as transport, but was important in ensuring that residents across the county had access to the same opportunities and support.

Participants’ final strategic concern related to confidence in very local politics. Some pointed to very positive and negative experiences of dealing with district Councils and parishes. A view was expressed that there was a risk that very local politics was less likely to consider a wider range of residents and might base service changes on the preferences and priorities of a small group of those who are willing to get involved in local decision-making.

“And I also think that local politics can become very difficult to deal with 'cause you're talking about personalities ... particularly if you go much lower, if you're talking about parish Council...”

(Female, 18-29, West Kent)
Responsibility with the Individual User – acceptable where users can contribute more

The image below outlines both the appeal and concerns of participants when considering increasing the responsibility of the individual service user.

**Appeals**

Participants were broadly supportive of the idea of encouraging individuals to be more responsible; especially in supporting parents to be more accountable for their family members' behaviour, and in asking residents to plan ahead for their future care needs. Transforming services towards more preventative approaches was also broadly welcomed, though residents noted that it was likely that this would only be a long-term solution.

A further option for increasing individual responsibility is to ask residents to pay for a service at the point of use. Participants were willing to consider this as an option for services where there was scope to increase fees because the service is totally free or existing charges are very low (for example small charges for waste recycling and library book hire).

“So, if it’s like a reasonable cost like that [to dispose of waste], not obviously like £10 a drop but £1, if you’re getting 4 million visitors or… £1 I’m sure no one would mind.”

(Female, 18-29, West Kent)


“I was surprised, actually, when I first took my daughter along [to a children’s centre], I was surprised that it was free. I couldn’t believe that I didn’t have to pay for anything.”

(Female, 30-44, East Kent)

**Concerns**

Participants concerns surrounding increased individual responsibility often related depended on the profile of service users. They were least likely to support this model for services where they felt the individual might be unable to make decisions that would be in their best interests (particularly where the user is vulnerable), or where they could not trust all individuals to act appropriately.

[Thinking about preventative family support] “I think sometimes the parent themselves might be vulnerable. Sometimes the reason those children have issues is because their parents are in vulnerable situations.”

(Female, 30-44, East Kent)

Some participants were also concerned that many the support services required a case-by-case approach to whether a family would respond well to increased responsibility and accountability for the care of their family members - for example it would not be a fair system to discharge responsibility for school absences on parents who need a great deal of support, only to penalise them for severely for when they fail to improve school attendance.

The second biggest area of concern related to the potential knock-on effect of introducing user charging. Though participants felt that this may be appropriate for in some circumstances, they felt that this should only be applied in areas where there would not be the risk of a negative behaviour change and where the cost of accessing the service was already minimal.

“But I think the very fact that we’ve got free tips is the reason why people use them and take their stuff in, when we start charging that’s when we’ll end up with fly tipping again...”

(Female, 45-59, East Kent)

Furthermore, participants wanted reassurance that there was protection for those who genuinely could not afford to pay, and that the initial introduction of a small charge would not be seen as a ‘foot in the door’ to significant increases further down the line.
**Guiding considerations – the 8 point test**

Participants’ preferences for a type of service delivery approach were service specific, and were often guided by several ethical and practical considerations. These are summarised below. The first five of these consider the extent to which it is appropriate for service delivery to be transferred to the community or the individual; the final three consider whether it would be appropriate to transfer responsibility for quality.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guiding Considerations for Changes to Service Delivery</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose:</strong> Does the service provide for the whole community, individuals or specific persons in need?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Coverage:</strong> Is the service best served through a strategic county wide oversight, or would it benefit from local understanding?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Quality of existing provision:</strong> How good is the current quality (frequency/capacity/delivery/cost etc…)?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>User:</strong> Looking at the profile of the user, is it appropriate to ask them to take on more responsibility?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Viable alternatives:</strong> How feasible are the alternative scenarios? Are the structures and demand already in place or been proven elsewhere?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accountability:</strong> Who should oversee and be responsible for guaranteeing standards &amp; quality?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Risk:</strong> What is the risk to the individual/community if the service is not being delivered/accessed to an acceptable standard?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trust in competency:</strong> can the organisation/body (eg. KCC, District Council, School, individual) be trusted to make the right decisions on behalf of the user/beneficiary?</td>
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*This work was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the international quality standard for Market Research, ISO 20252:2006.*

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**Purpose:** does the service provide for the whole community, individuals or specifically those in need, and who is best placed to make sure the service reaches those users?

An important consideration for participants was who was best placed to ensure services are of an acceptable minimum standard, and are targeted at those who most need them? This is distinct from ‘coverage’ below in that this is a question of who is best placed to make decisions about where resources go and who to target with limited resources. In some cases (such as subsidised rural transport), the Council might be better placed to compare the needs of one rural area against another for such a service, and is more likely to take a more objective and dispassionate view, free from local influence.

**Coverage:** is the service best served through a strategic county wide oversight or would it benefit from local understanding?

Participants were aware that certain services - for operational or economic reasons - might best be managed and controlled by the County. From a very practical perspective, services such as highways maintenance and freedom bus passes for young people were said to work better if managed on a county level to ensure consistency and ‘seamlessness’ of service across the county. These services would simply not be able to function properly if responsibility was put in the hands of local communities or individual users, given that by their nature they crossed area boundaries and needed to be accessible to all county residents. Also, there was some concern that there could be diseconomy of scale if some services were managed and delivered by communities rather than the Council.

On the other hand, services like schools and community safety were considered by many to actively benefit from more decentralisation. The success of these services was often seen in terms of how well they responded to local needs and wants, and there were clear advantages to local residents assuming more responsibility.

**Quality of existing provision:** How good is the current quality (frequency/capacity/delivery/cost etc.)?

As we have seen in previous years' workshops, the standard of service that participants felt was currently on offer often swayed their views on whether alternative options were worthwhile considering. For example, a number of participants were quite happy to see the responsibility for subsidised bus routes continue to reside with the county Council – with input from communities, of course. In this particular case, it was hard to see how a community or individual users could do a better job at ensuring essential rural bus routes are subsidised to the level they currently are.

By contrast, people were more open to the idea of changing the status quo where a service had a question mark around its value and/or impact. Connexions was discussed in this context by a number of people in that it did not appear to fulfil its intended purpose very well, and perhaps alternative community or individual user solutions to job seeking and career advice might work better.
User: looking at the profile of the user, is it appropriate to ask them to take on more responsibility?

In some service areas, such as support for vulnerable children and adults, or nursing and residential care for the elderly, participants felt there was only so much responsibility that could be passed onto individual users, given their support needs. Whereas in others such as community safety or library services it was considered easier to pass some responsibility on to users. In some of these areas it was felt that user input would actually provide a better quality of service, given the level of insight and local expertise that users could bring.

Viable alternatives to the Council: how feasible are the alternative scenarios? Are the structures and demand already in place or been proven elsewhere?

Participants also considered to what extent there were already structures in place for the community or individuals taking more control of services and their budgets. One view expressed was that schools’ services more naturally lend themselves to greater involvement by the community given that most schools have parent and teacher associations and that existing community and education groups often interact with and support local schools. Such networks and existing infrastructure appear to be in place in some communities and make the possibility of devolving some school and children’s services more realistic.

By contrast, participants struggled to envisage how responsibility for adult social services such as domiciliary, nursing or residential care could effectively be moved on to community groups or individuals without great risks being taken. Whether it is commissioning preventative or reactive services, it was thought that the County Council had the right technical expertise and experience to make the best decisions about adult social care provision and that it was generally considered the most accountable body for overseeing these kinds of service (not withstanding some significant areas for improvement, as discussed in the next section of the report).

Risk: what is the risk to the individual/community if the service is not being delivered / accessed to an acceptable standard?

This was usually a later consideration but nonetheless key to deciding which services suited alternative management and delivery. Adult social care, for example, was a service area which participants felt could do with improvement and therefore they were initially open to considering alternative options in the hope they may increase the standard of service currently provided. On reflection, however, the risks to individual users involved in any change to the delivery model were generally considered too great to change the status quo. At least the Council is a clearly accountable and is big enough to manage the risks of care packages going wrong, for example.

There were also grave social risks involved with changing services like subsidised bus routes which are currently heavily subsidised at county Council level. Passing the responsibility of managing and negotiating bus subsidies was considered to be potentially detrimental to individuals and rural communities as it was imagined they probably would not be able to get such a large subsidy and this would lead to undesirable consequences such as rural exclusion.
However, there were some services it was considered more acceptable for communities and/or individuals to decide on service standards or access to facilities. These tended to be services where the main user group is the general public rather than vulnerable people/ those for whom a change in service could have dire consequences. Changes to household waste recycling services, for example, were considered to be less risky if managed by the community and participants could not see how having variable or more limited access to such facilities (as determined by the community) could have severe social consequences beyond some increased incidences of fly-tipping. (Participants did however struggle to envisage the practicalities of how local communities and individuals would take on more responsibility).

**Accountability:** Who is accountable for making decisions and for when things might go wrong?

People were keen to ensure that if services are transferred from the County Council to a locality that clear accountability structures are in place. More transparent and accountable structures include District Council and boards of governors of schools, but people struggled to see where the accountability lay in less formal community groups (say groups of volunteers) and this would need to be addressed.

**Trust in competency:** can the organisation/body (e.g. KCC, District Council, school, individual) be trusted to make the right decisions on behalf of the user/beneficiary?

The appeal of whether to change the status quo also depended on whether communities or individuals can be trusted to make important service decisions on behalf of others. Naturally, competency, skills and resources were part of the narrative around trust. Is there enough social capital and know how for localities or individuals to successfully change the way things are delivered? Negative experiences of the local Council (e.g. appearing not to listen, alleged incompetence) meant that for some participants, the district, borough or city Council could not be trusted to manage and deliver some of the services the County currently does. But there is another aspect to trust. Can communities and individuals who volunteer to take on more responsibility for services be trusted to set aside vested interest or partisan views when making decisions about the shape and nature of local services? It was in this context that some parish Councils were described as unsuitable community structures as they can be perceived run by 'local busy-bodies' with vested interest. Generally, participants were confident that Kent County Council could provide their services ‘well enough’ and they trusted them to do so. While other organisations / bodies might show promise for taking on more responsibility, there were usually questions about their ability to make the ‘right decisions’ by service users.
Service Areas
Section 5: Service Areas

This section considers how the options for service delivery map across eight broad service areas. The table below outlines the 21 services discussed during the workshops as case studies, across the 8 broad service areas. For each service, participants were asked to consider whether they would rather maintain the current level of service by increasing Council Tax, or place responsibility for overseeing a reduction in KCC spend with either KCC, the community or the individual.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Service area</th>
<th>Case study</th>
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<td>Freedom Pass</td>
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<td>Home to School/College Transport</td>
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<td>Waste Recycling and Disposal</td>
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<td>Children's Services</td>
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<td>School Attendance &amp; Behaviour Service</td>
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<td>Employment and Careers services</td>
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<td>Children social care (vulnerable)</td>
<td>Preventative &amp; Family Support Services</td>
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<td>Community services</td>
<td>Library Services</td>
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<td>Highways</td>
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<td>Independent Special Schools</td>
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Transport

Participants were willing to consider all of the different options for service delivery in relation to transport, but placed significant consideration on whether or not the practicality of giving more responsibility to communities or individuals would work for such a county-wide and economically important service area. Though participants felt that a community approach might generate better insight into the specific needs of the local community, they were concerned that community based transport schemes (e.g., car pooling, volunteer driven mini-buses) were unreliable and difficult to coordinate. Similarly with specific reference to SEN transport, participants welcomed the opportunity for families to have more of a say in how their child was transported to school, but felt that there was a risk that some parents would not be able to take ownership and organise this provision successfully.

“It's not always reliable though. What if someone's not well for the day? Well, what if you're the child then, the one who cannot get to school?”

(Female, 18-29, West Kent)

“We think some parents would be fantastic and other parents would have real problems and that might then impact on where they educate their child. They might end up at an inappropriate local school because they can't manage the transport.”

(Female, 45-59, East Kent)

The cost of public transport and various fees car users pay through car tax, tolls, petrol and so on means that participants generally feel unwilling to pay more at the point of use for transport services. The exception to this being the Freedom Pass which was seen as a very ‘good deal’. Though if the individual contribution were to increase, participants suggested a discount for families with more than one child might ease the burden on larger families.

Ensuring public transport works well is particularly important for those who rely on it and who would suffer serious consequences if it was mismanaged. Participants therefore tended to favour the status quo and wanted KCC to oversee the running of transport services. It was imagined that retaining responsibility for transport services with KCC meant that the delivery of the service would be more seamless across the county and would help to avoid a postcode lottery in provision, or incompatible schemes operating in neighbouring areas.

In some circumstances people were willing to consider a reduction in the quality, frequency or eligibility of a transport service. Though some were happy to reduce the number of subsidised bus routes if proper local consultation was conducted, other groups opted to increase Council Tax to help maintain current levels of service.
Waste Recycling and Disposal

No groups were prepared to increase Council Tax to fund this service, preferring to see a decrease in provision to manage the costs of the service - for example by reducing opening hours or charging individual users. The three other delivery options all had some degree of support. There was a reasonable degree of consensus on responsibility lying with a combination of KCC, and the individual. Most groups were prepared to pay an individual charge, particularly for disposing larger items. Some were drawn towards some form of community involvement (e.g. community organised disposal days), but this was less popular than the easier to understand user charging option or the reduced service option and there was ambiguity over how exactly community involvement would be achieved.

Trust appears to be an important consideration in determining provision of this service: several participants felt it was right that users had to pay for the disposal of some items, particularly large items, given that proposed charges were quite low. Whilst there was initially some resistance to charging individuals, these concerns were reduced when participants were assured that the charges would be low.

“Fifty isn’t a massive amount [to pay], but it’s 50 pence they’re not get at the moment.”

(Male, 30-44, East Kent)

However, there was concern that some people would not want to pay and would simply fly tip.

“That’s assuming that everyone is responsible and there’s a hell of a lot of people in the county that aren’t responsible and just wouldn’t care. And if they’ve got to pay anything to get rid of their rubbish, they’re going to just leave it...”

(Female, 30-44, East Kent)

There was also concern that if communities were responsible for recycling then there would be differences in provision across different communities, and this “postcode lottery” was deemed unacceptable by some participants. One group doubted the ability of the community to provide an effective service, fearing that waste would pile up. Trust is therefore a major consideration, both in whether individuals are trusted to pay rather than fly-tip, and in the community’s skills to provide a good service.

Highways

Most groups felt that responsibility for this should remain with KCC due to the imagined impracticalities in devolving Highways to local communities or district Councils. It appears to make logical and operational sense for Highways to be under the auspices of KCC. However, there was some support for increased community involvement on whether traffic calming or traffic management measures are needed locally and where maintenance is most in urgent need. There is no support for increasing universal contribution for Highways. This is because participants felt that it is already expensive enough to run a car and it is not transparent how monies are...
spent on road improvements raised through various other taxes (such as fuel tax) and existing user charges (such as road tolls).

“No, we pay enough in road tax, the taxes, you know, diesel or fuel.”
(Male, 45-59, East Kent)

For similar reasons there is not much support for increasing user charges for roads although the group of 18-29 year olds in West Kent did express a willingness to pay charges, but only where if there were viable alternatives to private car use through public transport provision.

“You can only start doing that kind of thing in areas where you have absolute alternatives because in London we have the congestion charge but everybody can get around in London, you do not need a car, absolutely do not need a car to get around in London.”
(Female, 18-29, West Kent)

A key consideration for Highways maintenance was that KCC can ensure economies of scale, and that communities may lack the necessary expertise and skill to ensure they get the best deal from contractors:

“I think there will be an additional cost in devolving it from KCC. I think you would be into an additional cost setting up this.”
(Female, 65+, East Kent)

**Community Services**

Participants welcomed elements of all three types of service delivery for community services, and therefore felt that there was no need to consider increasing universal contribution. In practice, groups often failed to opt for a single model of delivery and instead suggested doing a combination of the three.

In contrast to other service areas, participants were willing to consider a reduction in the quality of these services. This was particularly the case for Community Wardens, where participants struggled to see value of the service and how it enhanced other police portfolios. However, it was also the case for other community services, such as reducing the number of buildings for libraries/contact centres, or increasing the length of time it took to speak to someone at the phone centre.

“You expect that anyway. I wouldn’t ring the Council, you’re not going to get straight through anyway so.”
(Male, 18-29, West Kent)

Participants were particularly enthusiastic about the potential for increasing community delivery by bringing local services together in a reduced number of locations and diversifying the types of services available.
“It’s making it multipurpose, really multipurpose and being smart, but also looking at other ways, so not just buying books and accepting donations, looking at things like, there are sites like read it swap it, and book mooch where you basically are interacting with people to swap books. Make libraries a hub for other things like they’ve done with Gravesend.”

(Female, 30-44, West Kent)

Allowing communities to decide whether they would like to fund their own community warden also appeared a more intelligent way of resourcing.

Finally, participants were willing to increase individual responsibility either through relying more on online services or contributing a small charge at the point of use.

Adult Social Care

Participants were asked to consider ideas around encouraging older people to live independently in their own homes rather than relying on residential or nursing home placements. Also, they were asked to consider reductions in KCC funded domiciliary care, encouraging friends, family, and those in the local community to increase their involvement in helping older people in their own homes.

Across the groups, there was a consensus that the current model of service provision is unsustainable due to the increase in the ageing population set against reduced funding. However, participants in different age groups responded to the problem in different ways. Older participants felt it was a realistic expectation for individual users to contribute more towards the cost of care if they need it, despite some opposition by those who believe older people have already contributed to their care through paying taxes. One view expressed is that people should increasingly expect to see their elders use their assets to fund social care rather than pass it on as an inheritance.

“The idea of having money to leave to your children is outdated. We are the last generation who are going to get anything from our parents and some of us won’t. It’s for our care when we’re too old to look after ourselves.”

(Female, 65+, East Kent)

With the responsibility lying with the individual user, older participants were keen that younger people start paying towards their care from an early age, to allow them to make informed choices in younger life about the options available to them when they are older.

There was agreement across the groups that only in the most acute circumstances should people be ‘taken into care’, and that domiciliary care should be prioritised. In principle, there was support for all the different funding models for this, though younger participants favoured the responsibility remaining with KCC to ensure consistency of service.

“I want to increase [funding spent on domiciliary care] because it’s cheaper to keep the elderly in their homes then to go into a
Thought not appropriate for more acute needs (where appropriate training would be needed), a number of participants were enthusiastic about the potential role for communities in delivering low risk support services to adults. They felt that this was a service area that would generate interest among volunteers and suggested several innovate ways to formalise community involvement through businesses sponsorship or incorporating volunteering into local work based qualifications. Other participants were more sceptical and suggested that a clear incentive would be needed to encourage volunteering.

“The if you can encourage like local businesses, like my firm up in London we do this thing where we go to these places for the homeless and they help out. Like on a Friday morning we'll be serving breakfast or that kind of thing, and if people can kind of maybe encourage that within the area to have people from those businesses to go.”

(Female, 18-29, West Kent)

Overall, many participants lacked sufficient understanding of how adult social care was funded currently to express particularly strong feelings about how alternative delivery models might work.

Children’s Services

Familiarity with and awareness of individual children’s services among participants was often limited and it was therefore difficult for many to envisage how alternative delivery models might work or indeed to support increased Council Tax in this area.

Most children’s services, such as school attendance and behaviour services, youth and youth offending services and children’s centres were considered too high risk to lose the oversight of the county Council completely. A combination of county Council oversight, increased parental responsibility (where possible) and greater input from other community organisations working together was the preferred option.

The expectation that expert social workers ultimately needed to play a key role in delivering good children’s services meant people felt that KCC should continue to provide substantial direction and support in this area. Participants were also wary that each family and child is a unique case, and would respond to increased individual responsibility in varying ways. Participants were concerned about how vulnerable parents, for example, would cope with having to deal with less support in trying to prevent youth (re) offending and of the negative consequences on their families.

“It's a case by case basis because there'll be one child where you think, does the parent really need to be penalised for not facilitating the child’s trip to school? And there’s others where you think well actually, this could be sorted out in other ways...if they were persistent offenders for example you would need to go up a level. It would have to be about the individual case.”
There was more appetite for changes to the delivery model for employment and careers’ services since participants felt better provision might be achieved through involving different external agencies, and replacing the Connexions Service commissioned by KCC.

“I think there are agencies out there already doing it and I’m not quite sure what Kent are, what the county Council are adding.”

(Female, 18-29, East Kent)

Children’s Social Care

Participants were asked to consider how KCC might reduce costs of children’s social care by providing less support or cheaper alternatives such that fewer children require care. They also discussed how other public bodies and community organisations might step in, and the possibility of promoting family resilience such that they do not require as much external support.

Some people expressed the sentiment that communities should help to look after their most vulnerable children, and the easiest way of doing this is to increase funding to the services that support such youngsters. However, many stopped short of agreeing to a raise in Council Tax.

By a process of elimination, participants generally agreed that KCC with the support of communities should be responsible for managing and supporting children’s social care. Most of the groups could not see how individual carers/parents could take on more responsibility for children’s social care given the range of problems they might be experiencing. For example, they felt that promoting family resilience is very difficult due to the circumstances of some of the families in question, and that leaving responsibility with the parents may have negative consequences for the children.

“Sometimes the parent themselves might be vulnerable. Sometimes the reason those children have issues is because their parents are in vulnerable situations.”

(Female, 18-29, East Kent)

Several groups believed there was a role for more community volunteering but were concerned by the risks involved in ensuring that those delivering the service could guarantee quality and be made accountable. One group had a detailed discussion on balancing the need to ensure the safety of children by checking staff/volunteers did not present a risk, without having such a bureaucratic process that it puts off members of the community who may wish to foster or adopt.

For the most part, however, participants had too limited experience or understanding of children’s social care services to be able to fully envisage how alternative models for service delivery would work and identify where savings could be made.
Schools

There was appetite, particularly among some older participants, for handing greater responsibility for local school improvement down to individual schools. Schools were considered well-placed to share best practice with each other and the principle of underperforming schools learning directly from the example of better performing ones widely held appeal.

However, many were sceptical about whether this would work in practice given some poorly performing schools may be hesitant to accept what they saw as ‘charity’ from another school. A key concern for participants was the willingness of well-performing schools to help those who were struggling, given the strain it could put on resources that could otherwise go straight into assuring their own self improvement.

“Being selfish I would probably be thinking to myself...I’d want all that money for our school.”

(Female, 30-44, East Kent)

People also worried that increased responsibility at an individual level - encouraging greater input from parents, head teachers and other staff - could eventually lead to a worse situation for students as decisions may be driven by self-interest or a group of ‘busy-body’ parents wanting to push a certain agenda.

“You don’t want lots of little dictators all over the place. This is the concern I have with putting a headmaster in charge or a governor...If we have community responsibility at this really local level...there’s no strong oversight, that’s a concern.”

(Male, 30-44, West Kent)

Another worry was simply that the lay parent did not have the skills or know-how to help deliver school improvement services.

“It’s a massive responsibility for the average guy on the street, I’m not being rude!”

(Male, 18-29, East Kent)

Participants also accepted that it may be unrealistic to expect parents to be involved in improving an underperforming local school rather than putting efforts into sending their child to a better school relatively nearby.
Appendices
## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Participant profile

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Appendix 2: Discussion guide

Kent CC Budget Consultation Workshop

29 September / 6 October 2012

FINAL

09:45 – 10:00 Arrival

- Participant welcome and registration.
- Completion of pre-questionnaire. And ask participants to write up their ‘three important issues’ on the ‘Wall of importance’

10:00-10.30 SESSION 1 - PLENARY SESSION

Introduction by Ipsos MORI

- Welcome and introduce day
- Introduce Ipsos MORI, moderators and staff
- Introduce Kent CC representatives
- Confidentiality – Kent CC bound by this as well/participants to respect confidentiality of each other
- Introduce purpose/importance of day, how information will be used by KCC.
  Stress this workshop is to shape important decisions KCC need to make about the future of council services in the area. Remind participants that a more detailed consultation on what they think about the impact of changes to services will follow – show consultation website.
- Quick show of hands – who has heard of the council’s consultation?

- Outline how the day will work – rules of workshop (e.g. give everyone the opportunity to speak; have a right to change your mind; no right or wrong answers etc);
- Fire regulations/mobile phones/toilets
- Any questions?
- Ensure participants are sitting in the right groups

Interactive voting exercise

- Explain process
- Show questions

10:30-11.30 SESSION 2 - BREAK OUT GROUPS

Brief introduction (5 mins):
MODERATOR NOTE: CHECK IF ANY FURTHER QUESTIONS FROM THE FIRST PLENARY. INTRODUCE YOURSELF AND THE KCC MEMBERS OF STAFF WHO WILL BE JOINING THE TABLE TO OBSERVE/ACT AS EXPERT WITNESSES IF NEEDED. IT’S LIKELY THAT KCC STAFF WILL BE JOINING AND LEAVING THE TABLE THROUGHOUT THE WORKSHOP.

REITERATE WORKSHOP RULES AND CONFIDENTIALITY

ASK PARTICIPANTS TO GO AROUND THE TABLE AND COMMENT ON:

- Where do you live? How long have you lived in the Kent area?
- Why did you move to the Kent area?
- What work do you do, if any?
- Have you any children?
Kent’s priorities (15 mins)

- What do you think of the area (generally satisfied or dissatisfied)?
- What are participants’ priorities for their local area? – general covering all public services and non-service related issues (not just related to the local authority) Reflect on the ‘Wall of importance’
- What do participants think should be KCC’s priorities?
- Have priorities changed in recent years? Are they different across Kent – East vs West, North vs South etc?
- Are priorities different for the individual and the community in Kent?

KCC Services priorities (25 mins)

Brief overview of the services provided by KCC through a card sorting exercise - using service blocks, plotting individual services along an ‘important vs. need improving’ graph

MODERATOR NOTE: CHART THE GRAPH IN THE MIDDLE OF THE TABLE AND STICK THE SERVICE BLOCKS (WRITTEN ON POST-ITS) ON THE WALL INTO ONE OF THE FOUR QUADRANTS BELOW:

- Are important and in need of improvement
- Are important but not in need of improvement
- Are not important but in need of improvement
- Are not important and not in need of improvement

MODERATOR NOTE: IN PAIRS/THREES, ASK PARTICIPANTS TO CONSIDER THE PLACEMENT OF THREE/FOUR SERVICES EACH. BRING PARTICIPANTS BACK TOGETHER, FOR EACH SERVICE ASK PARTICIPANTS:

- If they know what this service is; are they aware that this is a service provided by KCC?
- How important it is to society? Do others agree with its current placement?
- And does it need improvement? What specifically needs improvement? (PROMPT: differences across Kent)
- If too many services are bunched together in one quadrant, prompt as to the differences between them.

Council tax (15 mins)

- How much do you feel you know about council tax?
- Initial reactions to the amount of council tax they pay – is it too much? Is it fair?
- To what extent do you think all residents should pay the same amount?
  PROBES: single person households, empty properties, tax exemption

MODERATOR TO CONFIRM THAT THEIR QUESTIONS ABOUT HOW IT IS ADMINISTERED WILL BE ANSWERED IN THE KCC PRESENTATION

- What is the maximum increase you think is acceptable, if any? Why?
- Under what circumstances, or for which services would you be prepared to pay more council tax? Why?

11:30-11:40 Tea/coffee break

11:40-12:30 SESSION 3 - PLENARY SESSION

KCC presentations and clarification question time

- Short 5-10 minute presentation by Ipsos MORI to ‘set the scene’ and present the national context. Present Ipsos MORI tracker survey data on public attitudes to national social policy, in particular welfare, different points of view,
changes over time. Emphasise that there is a debate and this workshop is their chance to have their say.

- Introduce BBC documentary ‘The Street’. Ask participants to keep this in mind during the afternoon session and discussions around individual and community involvement in public spending.

Presentations: KCC in a nutshell, budget background, the current state, what management and efficiency cuts KCC is making, the impact that this will have, the future of Council’s finances and its priorities. Around 20 minutes.

- Question and answer session with the panel (speakers, chaired by Ipsos MORI) around 15 minutes.
- Introduce the plan for the rest of the day.

12:30-13:10 LUNCH

13:10-14.00 SESSION 4 – BREAK OUT GROUPS

MODERATOR TO INTRODUCE THIS SECTION: NOW WE'RE GOING TO MOVE ON TO A DISCUSSION ABOUT THE DIFFERENT WAY IN WHICH SAVINGS CAN BE MADE. WE ARE GOING TO LOOK AT 4 BROAD THEMES IN PRINCIPLE FIRST, AND THEN LATER THIS AFTERNOON WE WILL CONSIDER DIFFERENCES BY SERVICE AREAS LATER. WE'RE GOING TO BE USING EXAMPLES TO HELP THE DISCUSSION BUT I AM REALLY INTERESTED IN YOUR RESPONSE TO THE OVERALL CONCEPT.

MODERATOR NOTE: USE SPECIFIC EXAMPLES OF COUNCIL SERVICES TO ENCOURAGE DISCUSSION. IF PARTICIPANTS STRUGGLE TO THINK OF THEIR OWN EXAMPLES, REFER TO THE SERVICES YOU HAVE BEEN ALLOCATED.

Acknowledged the spending gap and revisit council tax (15 mins)

- Initial reactions to KCC presentation
- Have views on the possibility of council tax changed?
- Reactions to KCC proposal to freeze council tax?
- Is this really desirable and who benefits in this scenario? Does anyone lose out?
- Is it sustainable as savings will need to be found next year too?
- Are there potential risks? What are they? (PROMPT on what is the likely impact on services?)
- Reactions to exemptions (NOTE that if everyone paid the full amount, the spending gap would be closed and no reductions would be needed to services)
- How fair do you think this scenario is? Why?
- Are there any services for which you would welcome an increase in council tax?
- Should all services share the burden of the spending gap, or should some be protected?

- MODERATOR NOTE: clarify that we need to think beyond efficiency savings/staff pay etc – these are already built in to the assumption about how much KCC needs to save. The challenges faced by KCC are greater than the cost of all efficiencies put together (even the most efficient Council in the world would still be faced with a spending gap and need to consider how it delivers services.

- There are three broad ways of going forward if we accept savings have to be made but these will impact on how services are delivered and who decides on how they are delivered.
Way of making up shortfall 2a: KCC Responsible (15 mins)

- How do you feel about KCC being responsible for deciding how to make the savings and changes to services for the whole county? They may do this by deciding to
  o decrease quality,
  o decrease frequency, or
  o reduce the number of residents eligible for a service.
- Are there any services where this would be acceptable? For which would it be the least acceptable?
- Which services do you feel are best organised by the Council at a County level? Why do you say that?
  o Cost efficiency?
  o Strategically makes sense e.g. transport across county?
  o Skills not in community/technical service?
  o High risk service, needs minimum standards?

Way of making up shortfall 2b: Make local communities more responsible (15 mins)

- Reflect on the amount of Council Tax that the County Council uses, and the proportion used at a district/parish level. Is this a fair distribution?
- One option is to devolve responsibility locally, by asking local communities (all residents, even if they do not use the service) to be responsible for the budget for the service. They could raise the finance for a particular service, and make local decisions about the service.
- Are there some services that the Council provides that the Community could take more control of? PROBE FOR DIFFERENCES BY: area of service (eg, transport, adult social care), and type of user (eg, universal service, targeted service, service for those in need)
- How might this work in practise? How would decisions be made locally?
- IF NOT MENTIONED: this could be achieved through local parish precepts on Council Tax rather than on the County precept; OR through local fundraising.

Way of making up shortfall 2c: Increasing individual responsibility (15 mins)

- Are there some services where it is acceptable for individuals to pay more for use? PROBE FOR DIFFERENCES BY: area of service (eg, transport, adult social care), and type of user (eg, universal service, targeted service, service for those in need)
- E.g. Adult Social Care – care home residents pay for use of the service (on a means-tested basis)
- Increasing individual responsibility might also mean that the Council gives those eligible an amount of money to choose how to spend, rather than providing the service themselves. E.g SEN transport.
- Who benefits in this scenario? Does anyone lose out? Who?
- What does this mean for quality / consistency of user experience?
- Are there potential risks? What are they? IF NOT MENTIONED: are the always users fit and healthy to take on the extra responsibility?
- How fair do you think this scenario is? Why?

14:00 – 16.00 SESSION 5 – BREAK OUT GROUPS
(with a 10 minute break at around 14:30)

Mapping models by service areas

Based on the discussions in the previous session, consider each of the CASE STUDIES and consider which outcome they would prefer: to be made either through:
v) Increasing universal contribution – everyone pays more
vi) KCC takes responsibility for making the savings across the County;
vii) Local communities take more responsibility – allow more local variation and control;
viii) Increase individual responsibility – pass more onto users.

MODERATOR NOTE: we’re keen for them to choose one of the above options, although in practise they may be willing to accept a reduction in the funding of that service.

USING THE HANDOUTS DISCUSS EACH OF THE 8 AREAS BUT PLEASE REFER TO THE TWO CASE STUDIES YOU HAVE BEEN ALLOCATED UNDER EACH AREA. PROBE FOR DISCUSSION ON THE WIDER SERVICE AREA, AND THEN MAP SERVICES ON TO THE TRIANGLE.

About 10 minutes on each service area and within each area there are two services to discuss:

1. Transport (see list)
2. Waste and recycling (see list)
3. Adult social care
4. Children’s services
5. Children’s social care
6. Community services
7. Highways
8. Schools

ADD PROBES IF NECESSARY/RELEVANT

e.g.
- What would the impact of this change be on you personally? And on others?
- How would this work in practise?

- Who would benefit in this scenario? Does anyone lose out? Who?
- What does this scenario mean for quality / consistency of local services?
- Are there potential risks? What are they?
- How fair do you think this scenario is? Why?

IF TIME

- Assess progress: - ie, have they mapped all areas, which are left?
  - If/when yes, consider which were the easiest decisions?
  - Also, if time, consider which areas they would least like to see savings in and explore how some of the savings might work in practise.

16:00 – 16:30 SESSION 6 – PLENARY SESSION

Feedback Session

- Each moderator to sum up their groups’ key findings, each moderator has 2 minutes to present and then asks group members if there’s anything that has been missed.
  - Which models of saving were favoured most? Why?
  - How did it differ by service areas?
  - Where were the easiest/hardest decisions?
- Ipsos MORI to round up.

16:30 Day ends

- Completion of post-questionnaire.
- Hand out incentives and travel expenses