

STRATEGIC COMMISSIONING: GETTING MORE OUT OF OUR SPENDING

Appendix 7a - Public Realm Consultation Report

1.0 Background

- 1.1 As part of the Medium Term Financial Plan programme, it was proposed that in 2019/20, changes would be made to the Council's street cleansing and greenspaces offer. This would include the following, where the public would see a revised service:
- Street cleansing: a reduction in the frequency of the street cleaning outside of the town centre and local centres
 - Greenspaces: a reduction in greenspace maintenance, including a reduced mowing frequency for some highway verges and open greenspace, reduction in some pruning and other maintenance activity
 - Traffic and infrastructure: it was proposed that the delegated highways budget would be removed as a discretionary payment given to respective Area Committees.
- 1.2 Amendments have been made to the proposal since the consultation opened. The delegated highways budget contained within the original report will be consolidated along with other discretionary budgets available for Committees to award. Therefore, comments relating to this aspect of the consultation will be considered within the analysis of Proposal 6: Support and Governance.

2.0 Methodology

- 2.1 The online survey was available from Friday 16 November until Friday 11 January. A standard message was disseminated through the Council's social media and other communication channels that advertised a number of consultations relating to the MTFP proposals. Paper versions of the consultation survey were also available in local libraries.
- 2.2 In addition to this, the committee of the Stockport Greenspace Forum was asked to encourage their members to fill out the survey. The Forum is a network of voluntary community groups that help to maintain a variety of greenspaces, including parks, allotments and cemeteries.
- 2.3 The consultation asked the public the following questions:

- *How far do you agree or disagree with the following statement: “I understand why the Council has to make savings”?*
- *What impact would it have on you if these proposals were implemented?*
- *Do you have any alternative suggestions for reducing the budget within street cleaning and maintenance of parks and highway verges?*

3.0 Summary of the survey results

3.1 A total of 725 responses were received in total. Respondents categorised themselves as the following:

- Resident – 88.1%
- Stockport business owner – 1.4%
- ‘Friends of Park’ group member – 5.2%
- Sports facility use – 2.1%
- Other – 2.5%
- Not answered – 0.7%

Results of the consultation

How far do you agree or disagree with the following statement: “I understand why the Council has to make savings”?

- 45.4% of respondents said they either Tend to Agree or Strongly Agree that they understood;
- Those that Tend to Disagree or Strongly Disagree numbered 45.5%;
- 8.3% Didn’t Know, or selected Neither Agree or Disagree;
- 0.8% did not answer.

What impact would it have on you if these proposals were implemented?

- As this question invited free text responses, a more detailed analysis of what residents said is included in Section 4.0. In brief, the main areas for concern for residents was the deteriorating condition of the public realm and the negative impact it would have on their sense of pride in the Borough and also the environmental impacts. 663 people responded to this question.

Do you have any alternative suggestions for reducing the budget within street cleaning and maintenance of parks and highway verges?

- There was a wide range of responses to this question and 608 gave a response. A full list of suggestions has been included in Appendix 3.

4.0 Responses

4.1 As to be expected, the savings proposals contained within the Public Realm report has stirred debate and elicited strong emotions from those who responded. The Council understands that the proposals will have a visible effect on all those who live in the Borough. Comments that have been received have been largely opposed to the proposals. The public realm is a shared

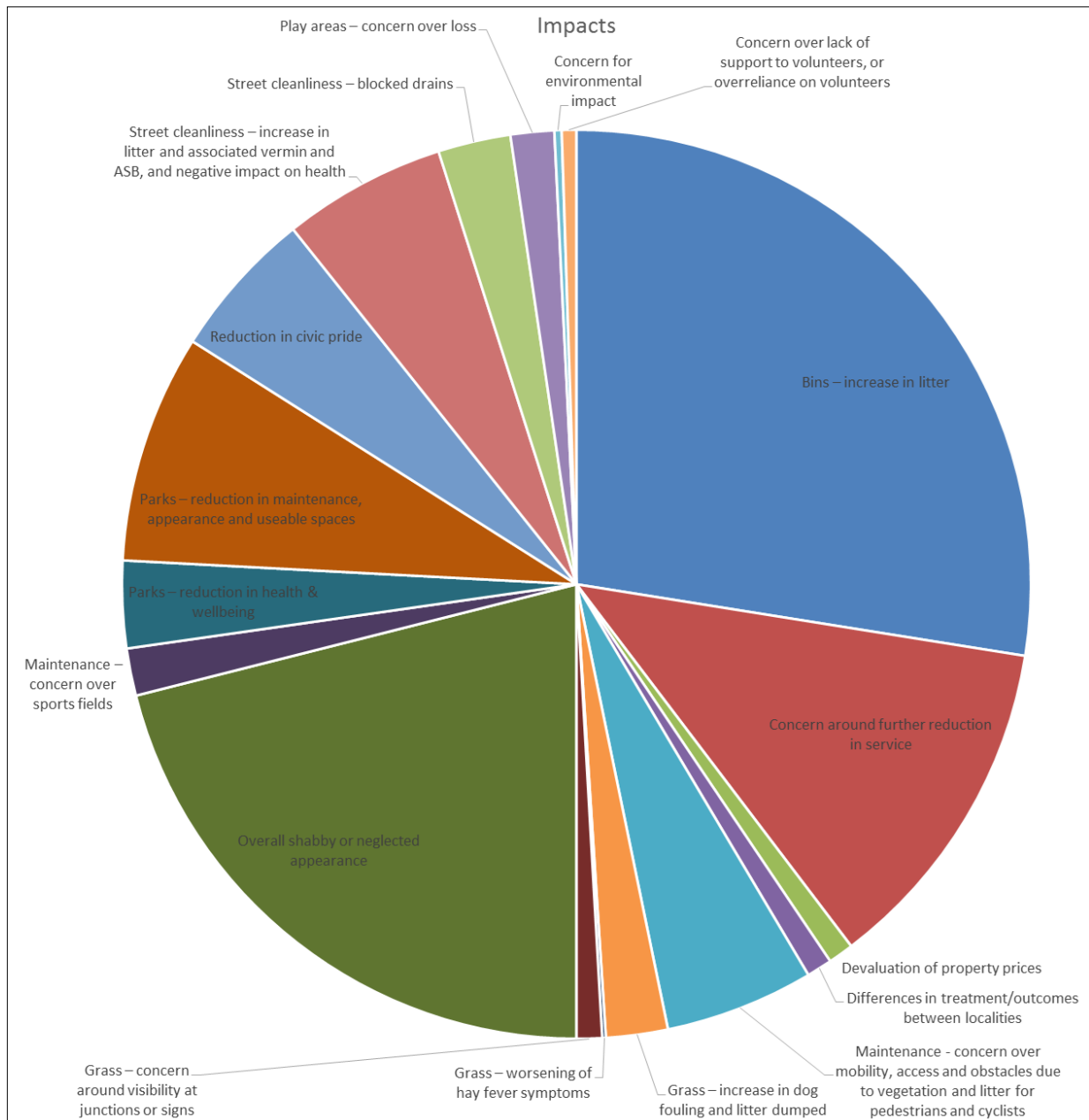
space and the respondents are concerned that these proposals will negatively impact on their enjoyment of Stockport's many and pleasing greenspaces.

- 4.2 The comments from respondents have been grouped thematically, following analysis. It details the main areas of concern that residents have identified. Some comments have been included that sum up the points made have been included.
- 4.3 7.4% of respondents reported that there would be little or no impact on them as a result of the savings proposals. Two people were unsure of the impact or requested more information. Four people wanted to see more information on what natural areas of play were.
- 4.3 The majority of respondents reported that the biggest impact that the proposals would have would be on the appearance of the public realm; many cited the increase in rubbish and litter that would result from a reduction in litter bins and street cleansing; 32% of people commented on this subject. Running along the same theme, respondents were concerned what a reduction in the appearance of the public realm would have on antisocial behaviour and residents' civic pride. There was concern that an increase in litter and long grass would mean people would be encouraged to take less care in their environment and would give a bad impression to both residents and those who live outside the borough. A number of people (2.6% of respondents) felt that longer grass would lead to increased dog fouling.
- 4.4 Parks were similarly a focus point for many; 15% of people raised this as an issue, particularly on the subject of a reduction in the maintenance of parks and worries around the adverse impact it would have on their usage of the parks and play areas, and indirectly their health or that of their family.
- 4.5 A number of respondents (4 people) requested more information about the revision to play area inspections they were concerned that this would result in both a deterioration in the condition of the play areas, or that the play areas would be removed over time.
- 4.6 Where respondents commented on the adoption of meadows and wildflower areas (4% of people), it was generally favourable; many thought that the benefits for wildlife would be the biggest benefit. A number (5 people) also felt that it was common sense that pruning schedules were reduced.
- 4.7 A number (3.6%) of respondents cited the importance of parks for their mental and physical health in their comments.
- 4.8 The impact of a reduced street cleansing schedule on cyclists was highlighted by 3 respondents. In terms of the risk posed by litter and gutters being clogged and causing obstructions in the road. One respondent was concerned about a reduction in pruning along cycle routes, which would also impact upon safety.

4.9 Of the business owners that responded, three worried that more litter would have a negative impact on their local community and in some way their business.

4.1.1 8.1% of respondents reported that the proposals would have little or no impact on them as individuals.

4.2.2 The graph below summaries the other impacts described by residents:



5.0 Responses from identified groups

5.1 A selection of responses from certain groups are included below:

5.2 'Friends of' groups

We received 6 comments, sent in on behalf of 'Friends of' groups. The full list of comments are included in Appendix 2.

The majority of comments from the groups highlighted concerns around the lack of capacity within the voluntary groups and what this might mean if support from the Council and its commissioned partners was reduced or stopped. They wanted to see continued engagement with the Council as they care greatly for the parks they help to look after.

5.3 Business owners

From the business owners that responded, none said that there would be a direct impact on their business. Most spoke in general terms about the impact the proposals would have on the aesthetics of their area, and the indirect effect it could have on their business. Below are three comments from business owners.

"I own a business, and I am proud of Cheadle with these cuts it would make the area look messy and could therefore turn people always from coming into the small village

"On me, personally, it would not have an impact. But it would have an impact on the general appearance of Stockport. In particular, the removal of bins in public places coupled with a reduction in street cleansing would inevitably lead to streets and other public places being overly littered. This is not going to make a good impression on visitors to the town, businesses looking to set up within the town and would lead to a general impression of deprivation. If you need to know what I mean, visit Gorsey Bank. The streets there are constantly covered in strewn rubbish and the area looks deprived, depressed and uninviting. That is not the impression the council should want for Stockport as a whole."

"The grass verges were in a complete state last year when they were left for months without cutting. When they were cut they looked even worse resulting in residents going out with their own equipment and tidying them up. Reducing the number of litter bins and frequency of street cleaning will cause the area to go into decline and less people will want to live, work and therefore invest in the local area resulting in even less income to Stockport Council. If the area starts to look in such a state, then I personally will move my business and home to a better area and give my money to a local authority that cares about investment in the local environment."

5.4 Sports facilities user

All comments around the sports facilities were made about the need to maintain the standards of the pitches to enable clubs to continue to use them. This was linked to health outcomes for children and the positive effects on behaviour.

“Grassroots football for 11 a side teams is reducing so it is vital that local facilities are maintained in support of the FA's attempts to regenerate the growth of the game. Junior football is thriving and can only continue to do so if the facilities are retained and maintained.”

“I run a Sunday league football team and already feel that the pitches provided are not sufficiently maintained”

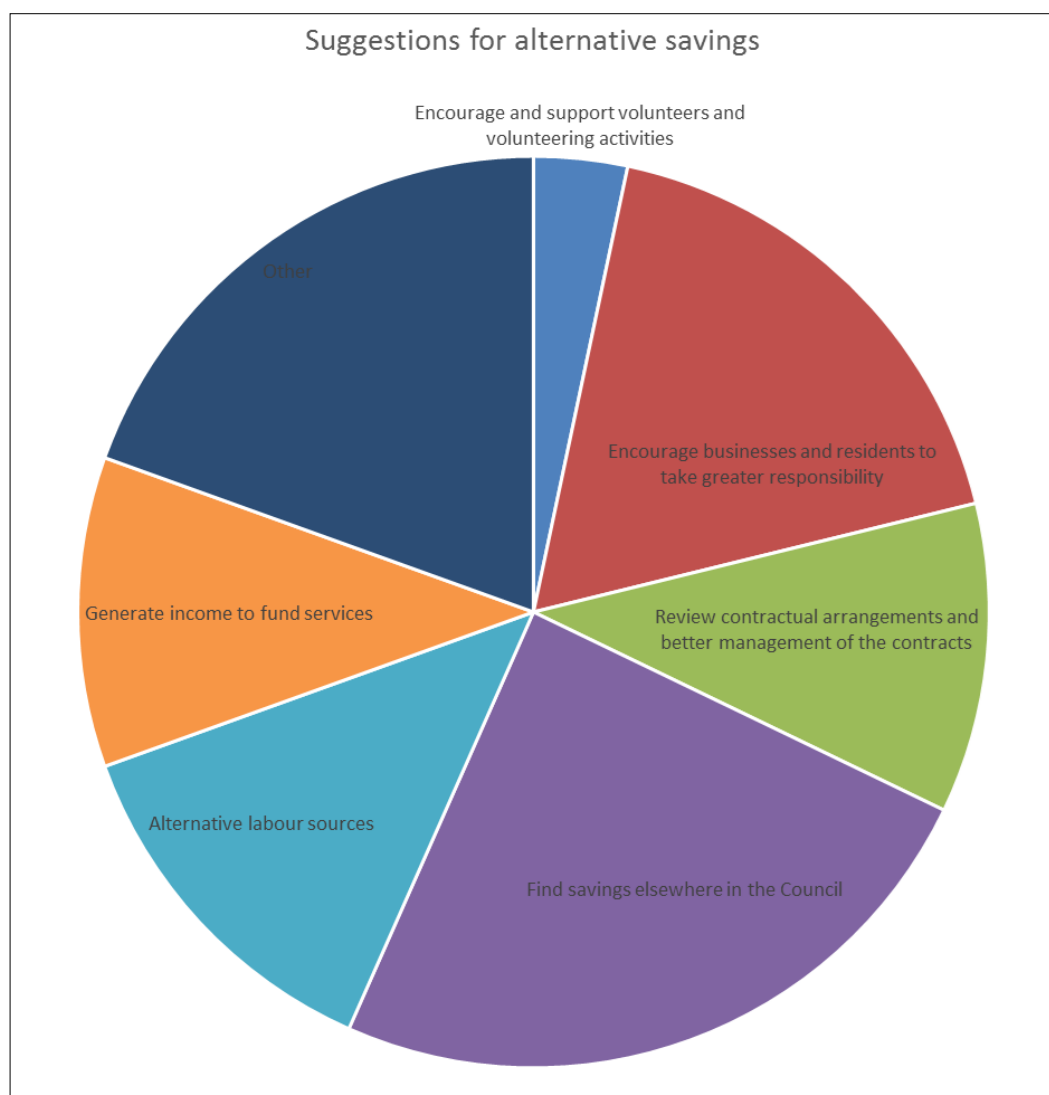
“Bramhall North 75 JFC

Clubs will turn to Astro Turf pitches instead of grass, and as well as the council losing revenue for these pitches the cost of moving onto these Astro pitches will increase pressure on smaller clubs unable to maintain football for an average of 200 kids.

Our bill for just training on 2 evenings a week is a staggering £8,500 per year. Extra useage of these facilities would be unaffordable to us and many other Clubs.”

6.0 Suggestions

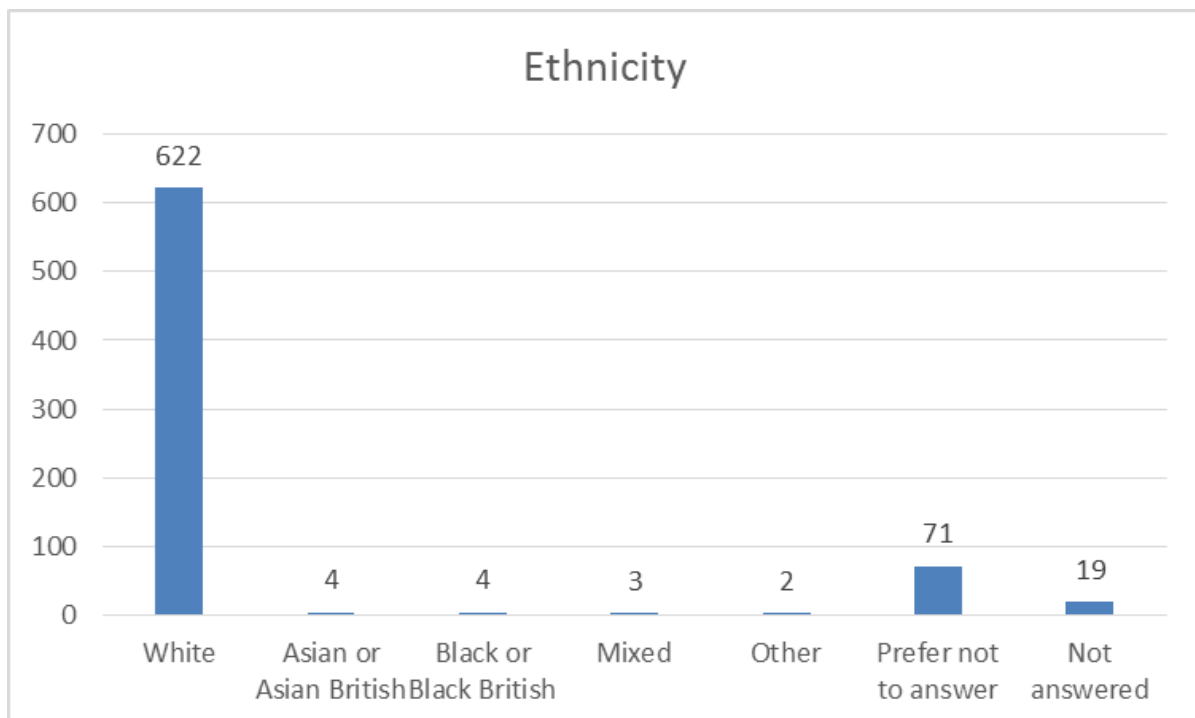
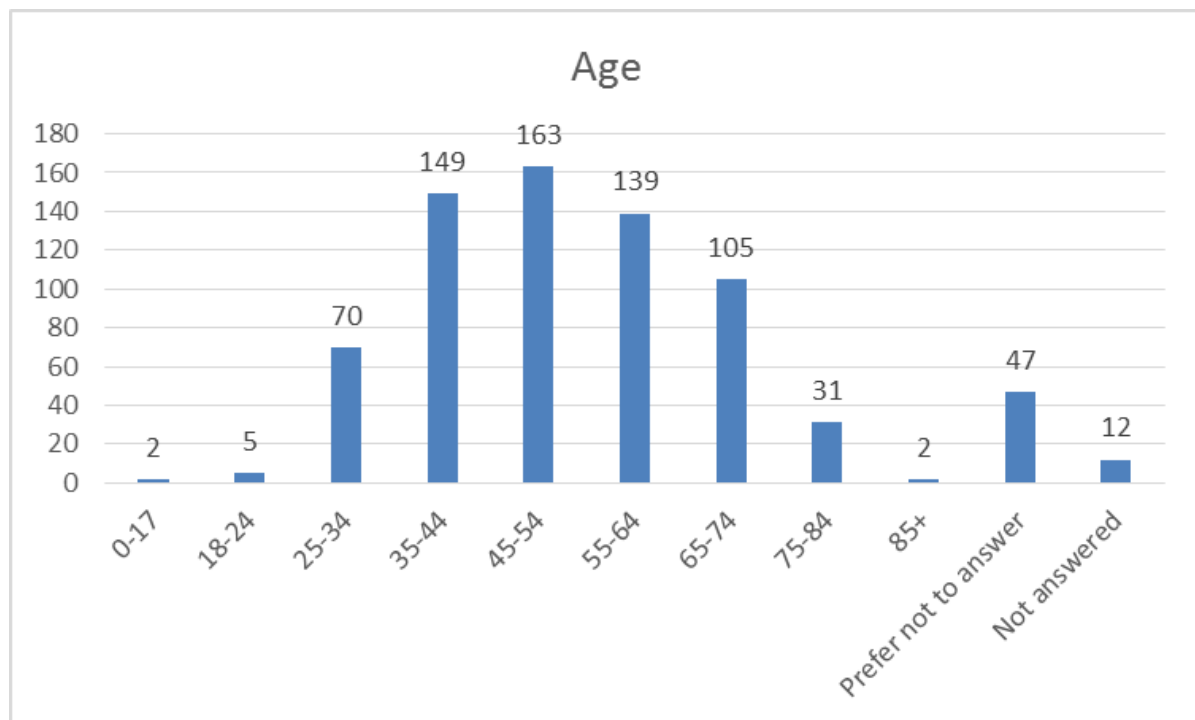
- 6.1 Respondents were invited to suggest other savings that could be made within the street cleansing and parks and highways maintenance budgets. There were a wide range of suggestions. The suggestions have been categorised into the pie chart below. A full list of what makes up these categories has been included in Appendix 3. Overall, respondents wanted to see the Council make savings elsewhere; this made up 24.5% of the suggestions made. 17.9% of the suggestions made were around encouraging businesses and residents to take greater responsibility for the maintenance of the public realm in their area, through grass verge mowing to sponsorship of an area of greenspace.
- 6.2 The 'Other' designation (19.5%) represents the suggestions that does not fit into the other categories. The full list is included in Appendix 3.
- 6.2 There were 205 respondents who had no suggestions for where other savings might come from and 2 people who agreed with the proposals.

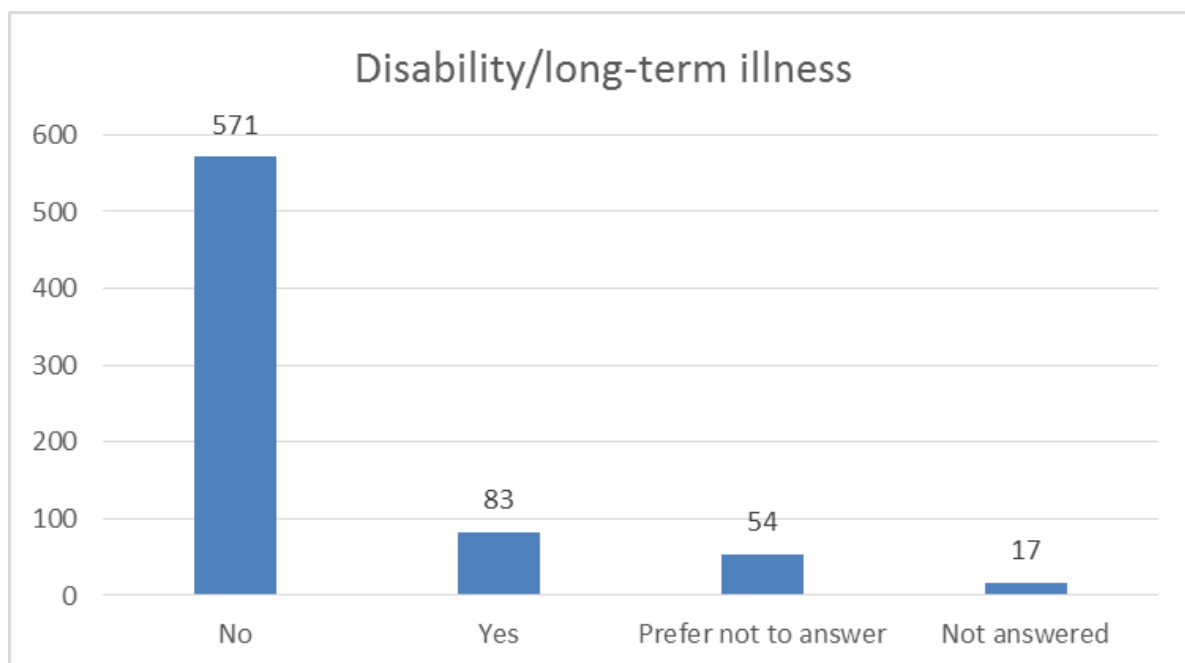
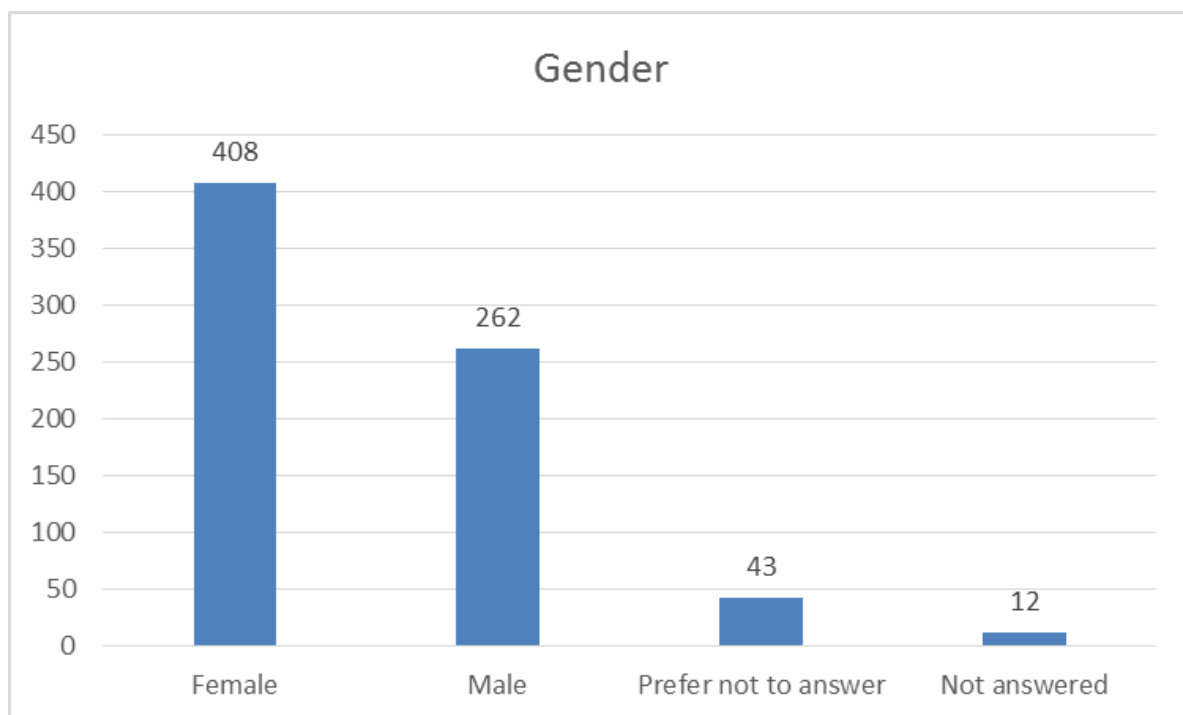


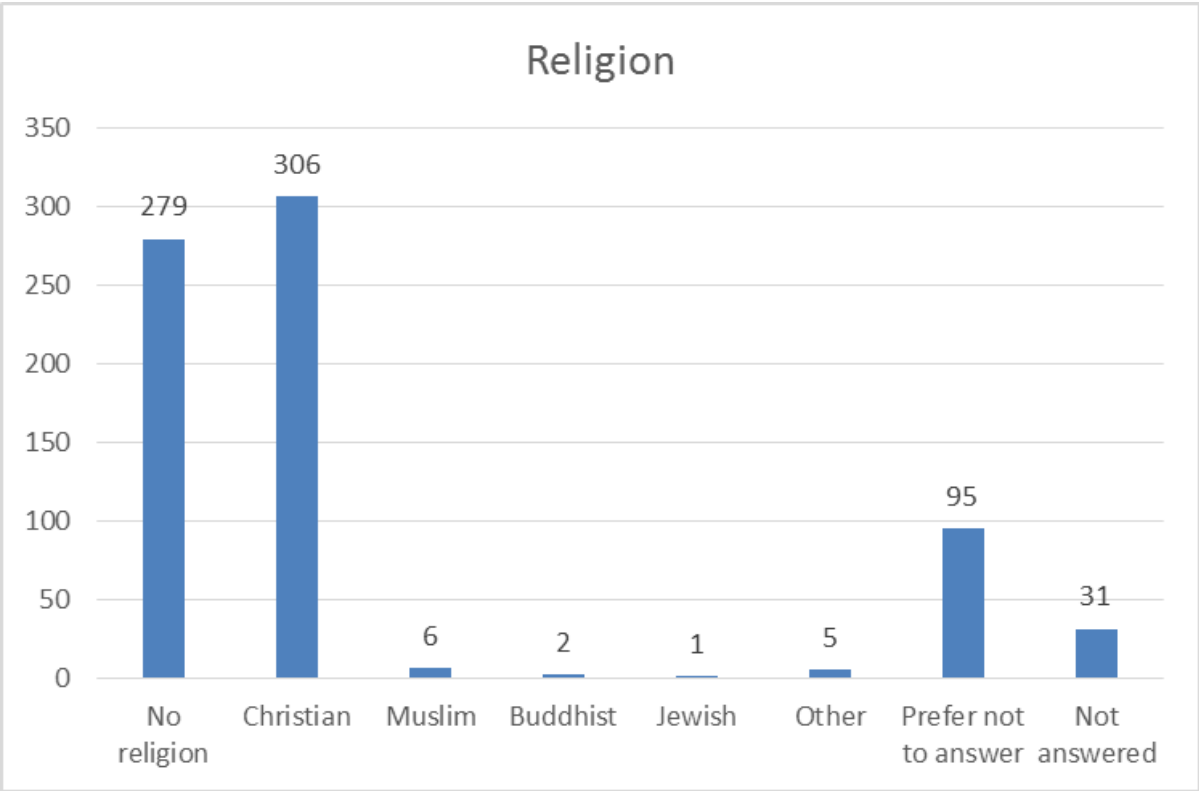
7.0 Summary

- 7.1 Overall, the consultation has shown that public realm is important to Stockport residents. Whilst many people understand why the Council are having to make reductions in services, the majority responding are uncomfortable with the reduction in standards that will follow these financial savings.
- 7.2 A significant number suggested that the Council looks elsewhere within the Council to find savings.
- 7.4 Another significant proportion of people who put forward suggestions were in favour of the Council encouraging residents and businesses to get involved with voluntary activities or maintaining public spaces in some way.

Appendix 1 – Demographic information of respondents







Appendix 2

Comments on behalf of 'Friends of' groups:

- *"As a Friend of Romiley Park, we already do many of the jobs that used to be done by the council. Cutting the grass less often will not be too much of a problem but reducing the number of litter bins is a false economy. As a group, we do not have the capacity to keep on top of litter in the park now and litter encourages more litter. The play and fitness equipment in the park is well-used and in good condition. It contributes to keeping people healthy and helps prevent them having to use other services. It requires little or no maintenance and should be left where it is."*
- *"Here at Stockport Greenspace Forum, we support and encourage Friends of parks groups to organise volunteer activities in their park or green space and throughout the borough, we put in thousands of volunteer hours a year. However, there are activities we cannot do and on many occasions, groups rely on the council to remove large quantities of green waste resulting from those activities. Were this to be substantially reduced, the work of volunteers might cease."*
- *"As a Friends of Park group it took us five years to fundraise for a new playground on Tangshutt. It is very well used by both local children and children who visit when their older brothers play in the Stockport Junior Football League. To now find out that you may start removing parts of this hard won equipment is heart-breaking."*

The LEAP designation for playgrounds like ours makes it much harder to receive funding from commuted sums compared to parks designated as NEAPS which attract the bulk of commuted sum money. It should really be on a needs basis rather than the present system. We have seven pieces of equipment in our playground plus the adjacent MUGA and plus the outdoor gym which is said to be suitable for older children aged 14 plus yet we are still classified as a LEAP.

Cherry Tree Estate, which is where the majority of children using the playground are from, is recognised by the NHS as having health inequalities. We also know of local families facing financial hardship and inequalities which directly impacts children so please don't start taking bits of their playground away."

- *"I write on behalf of the Friends of Reddish Vale Country Park.*
1 If the Park loses what support it has from the Council and TLC , the volunteers who have done so much to maintain this beautiful green space would be demoralized and possibly severely reduce in numbers.
2 if we were to lose the services of our one paid TLC staff member, the toilets would not be cleaned as often, if at all. Daily indoor volunteers did not sign up for that sort of work. The many visitors we have who really appreciate the excellent facilities would be very badly served.

3 The Visitor Centre might have to close because the volunteers who run it are not able to do the sort of work done by the TLC staff member.

4 Our highly successful Friends Group would be quite likely to disband and with us would go the funds we raise for Park maintenance and Events for the community. The Vale has become a community hub and it is our hard work as a team of volunteers working closely with TLC that has made it so.

5 If the Park is less well maintained and litter et cetera accumulates, visitor footfall will decrease and a valuable community asset will fall into decline.

6 There would also be consequences for the groups who use the Park because it is well maintained. Runners, cyclists, horse riders, walkers, all would find pathways eventually blocked by undergrowth and their healthy pastimes curtailed.

7 All the above hinges crucially on our keeping that one member of TLC staff."

- "I am secretary of the Friends of Brooklyn Crescent Park, Cheadle village. We volunteer to maintain the park as much as possible, but we rely on the council to mow the grass and twice a year to cut the hedges on the perimeter of the park.

Next Saturday, about 15 to 20 people will come to clear up the huge leaf fall from all the trees and we have been doing this for 12 years. However the council collect the green waste as it is much too big for domestic recycling.

So we keep the partnership with the council going, but any substantial reduction in terms of grass cutting and hedge trimming would seriously impact on this small urban park."

- "As a key member of Friends of Marple Memorial Park these proposals are alarming. The council is at grave risk of alienating and losing the support of groups like Friends of Marple Memorial Park if they make further changes to our parks maintenance without detailed consultation with these groups as key stakeholders. The impact of previous cuts to park maintenance budgets have largely been kept at bay by the increased efforts of volunteers rising to the challenge of filling the gaps left by previous cuts. If Friends Groups were to cease their activities out of frustration at further cuts because they were not consulted properly then the impact on the park would be devastating. All the cuts previously made and mitigated by volunteers would become apparent in a very short timespan.

Grass verges on highways would be mowed less often: The regime adopted this year left the verges around Marple in a total mess and I don't see how it can get much worse by not doing them at all – the verges looked scruffy when uncut but a complete disaster when they were. Is there a way that a plan to plant larger verges as wildlife meadows and progressively remove all smaller grass verges completely could be instigated to save money in the long term?

The frequency of street cleansing rounds would be reduced: I would like to see Street Cleansing focused mostly on the Marple District Centre and the park and would not wish to see the removal of bins or the reduction of them being emptied as they are often overflowing already. I think it would be worthwhile to support more volunteer litter-picking in the town and also to make much more use of community payback.

The number of litter bins would be reduced across the borough, both on the streets and possibly within parks: I do not want to see this happen in Marple and especially not in Marple Memorial Park. It is not long since bins in the park were upgraded and new ones installed with consultation and agreement of Friends of the Park. The bins are regularly full and their removal would lead to a significant increase in littering problems. Friends of the Park and other regular visitors often pick litter and credit needs to be given for this and volunteers supported more. It is crucial for safety that park attendants check the skatepark area each day for broken glass as this is a regular problem, especially on Saturday and Sunday mornings.

Many smaller play areas will be modified over time to reduce the demand on maintenance costs by increased use of natural play equipment: I understand this and accept it to a degree in smaller parks but Marple Memorial Park is a destination park for families with children and the council needs to carry on working closely with Friends of Memorial Park to continue the improvements that we have achieved together over many years. We wish to continue striving to improve the play areas in the park and have long-term ideas for creating a better larger play area that amalgamates the existing Infant and Junior facilities into one. We also consider it essential that the play areas remain protected by fencing due to the disgusting high level of dog fouling in Memorial Park – we cannot allow this fouling to happen where our young children play.

Grass mowing in all greenspaces, except sports pitches and play areas, would be reduced. There would be longer grass for longer periods. It is anticipated that several areas will become space for wild meadows: Friends of the Park are generally satisfied with the current grass cutting regime in the park, although we believe that some of the machines need to be better maintained as the grass done using the triple machines are often not cut properly. If further reduction in grass cutting is to be made then we would not wish this to effect the mowing of the grass around the flowerbeds and formal areas. The attendants do a good job with these and when coordinated with the activities of our volunteers, who do the edging, the results are still very good. We would not wish this to deteriorate and would be pleased to meet with the council and TLC to discuss how savings may be made without impacting the appearance and upkeep of the park. We would also be happy to discuss which areas of the park may be suitable for additional wild meadows.

All aspects of park maintenance such as pruning shrubs and hedge cutting would be reduced: Apart from the hedge around the Bowling Green and the perimeter of the park most pruning of hedges, shrubs and shrub beds is done by Friends of the Park already. We have also adopted all the flowerbeds in the park, preventing them from being grassed over since 2011, and have been hugely successful in maintaining these and the War Memorial beds, plus numerous other small beds within the park. We have taken over maintenance of all the benches in the park too, enabling the refurbishment, adoption and replacement and installation of new benches all at no cost to the council. Our volunteers have saved huge expense to the council with these initiatives whilst contributing significantly to the improved standard of maintenance of the whole park. We have also directly raised over £113,000 for maintenance and improvements to the park and been instrumental in the investment of many more thousands of pounds from grants and other sources. We therefore feel that we should be considered key stakeholders and directly consulted over any detailed proposals for additional savings to be made by further cuts to the council's commitment and effort to maintain Memorial Park.

Greenspace – a reduction in greenspace activity will result in a deterioration in the quality of the finish in parks and verges across the borough. It could also mean that an increase in the amount of land converted from lawned to natural habitat, a reduction in the number of bowling greens, litter bins across the park, removal of all horticultural beds etc. and reduced time spent with voluntary groups: The council has already removed from their responsibility and cost the maintenance of all horticultural beds in Memorial Park and this is now done by volunteers, so there are no more savings to be made on this but much to loose by alienating volunteer groups while trying to do so. The Bowling Green is extensively used and has recently had considerable investment by the council to enclose it in fencing and from Friends of the Park and Marple Area Committee to protect it from vandalism. These initiatives have been very successful and it would be counter-productive and wasteful to remove the Bowling Green from Memorial Park. It is not clear what is meant by reducing time spent with voluntary groups. TLC and SSK before them never spent any time with our volunteer group during our task days. They have provided training in the past, but not for several years. Apart from emptying the green waste area for us and coordinating efforts at Remembrance time it is not clear what could possibly be subjected to further cuts in terms of time spent with volunteers. We do receive limited but very welcome support from stretched Greenspace Officers. If the level of support from these Officers is to be reduced further, or withdrawn, it is likely that it will lead to the demise of the Friends Group and the consequent loss of significant volunteer hours being invested in the park. This will result in a rapid decline of existing maintenance standards currently achieved with the help of Friends of the Park. Please consult with us in detail before actioning further cuts.”

Appendix 3

A full list of the suggestions submitted are included below:

Final category	Suggestions
Encourage and support volunteers and volunteering activities	Easier policies to encourage volunteers in parks
	Encourage volunteers for litter picking
	Promotion of Friends groups
	Organise litter picking groups and sessions
	Allow rental of equipment
Encourage businesses and residents to take greater responsibility	Takeaway premises held responsible for cleaning up their litter
	Fast food outlets to pay tax or charged for cleaning up litter
	Create community/resident maintenance schemes
	Council Tax reduction for resident maintenance
	Sponsorship of greenspaces
	Encourage community responsibility towards the public realm (i.e. public information campaigns or school awareness)
	Handover maintenance of pitches to sports clubs
Review contractual arrangements and better management of the contracts	Source alternative contractors
	Bring teams in-house
	Alternative working methods
	Management of employees
	Employ park rangers
	Merge services with other Councils
Find savings elsewhere in the Council	Reduce number of Councillors
	Look elsewhere for savings
	Fewer Council managers
	Reduce wages of Council staff
	Back office savings
	Stop capital investment and building
	Use efficient machinery and vehicles
	Stop planting trees
	Reduce green bin collections
	Devolve budgets to area committees
Alternative labour sources	Use community service
	Household refuse collectors to pick up street bins on their rounds
Generate income to fund services	Greater enforcement of littering and dog fouling

	Run businesses from buildings in parks
	Charge for green bins
	Charge extra tax
	Increase number of speed cameras
	Increase car parking charges
	Increase Business Rate base
Other	Larger or more bins
	Tarmac over grass verges
	Minimum maintenance in the winter
	Analysis of bin emptying schedule
	Sports clubs could hire grass cutters
	Wildflower/meadow areas
	Cut number Christmas decorations
	Vote for different parties
	Better representation of communities
	Fewer street bins, more in parks
	Tax single-use plastics
	Install public recycling bins
	Bottle return scheme
	Pressure on central government to stop cuts
	Awareness campaign on need for cuts