

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

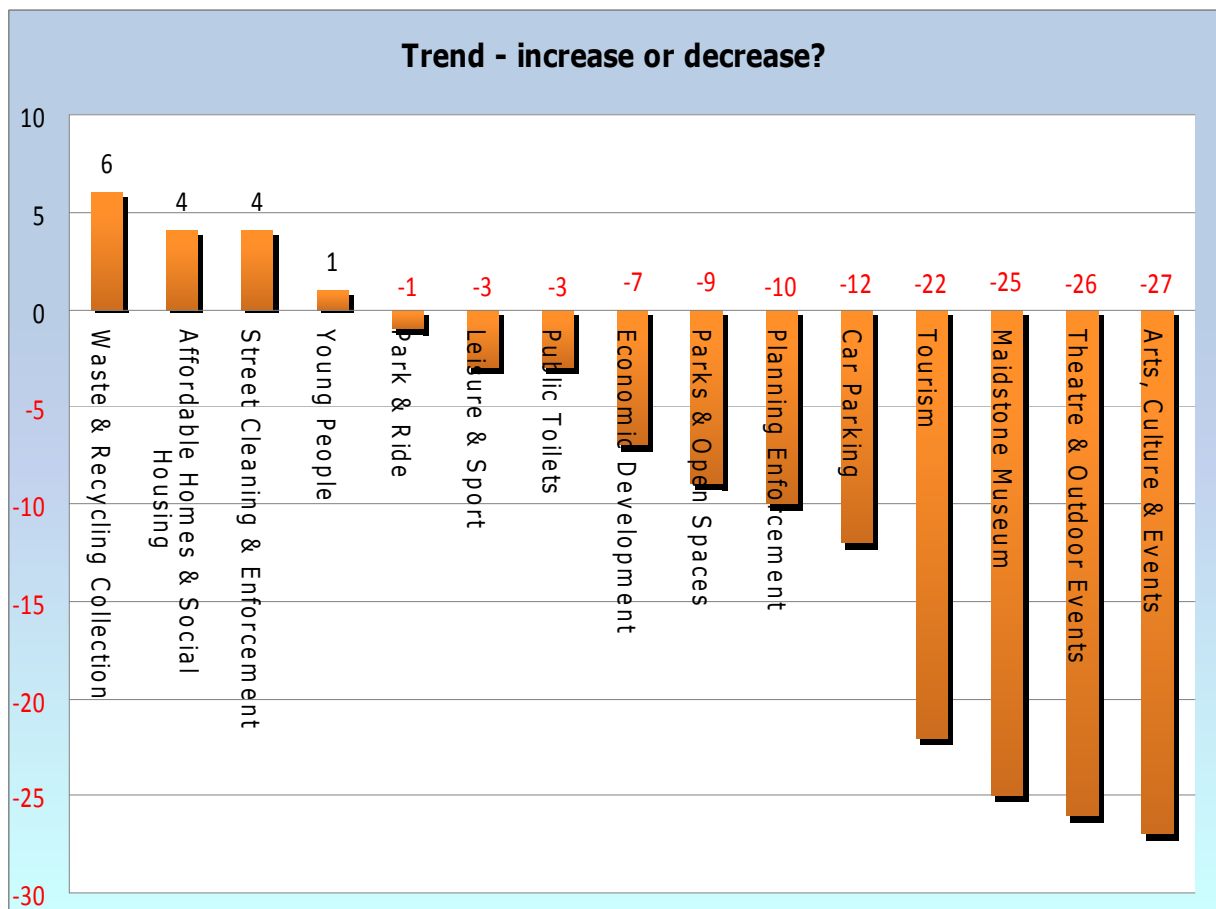
CABINET

Budget Consultation 2011-12

The 2008-09 Budget Consultation

For the 2008-09 Budget the cabinet used a web based Budget Simulator backed up by a general information campaign and targeted focus groups. The simulator provided users with background information on specified budget headings. Users could see the consequences of adjusting budget items up or down on council tax and services. They compared their budget to the previous year's budget and their allocations were stored along with their comments.

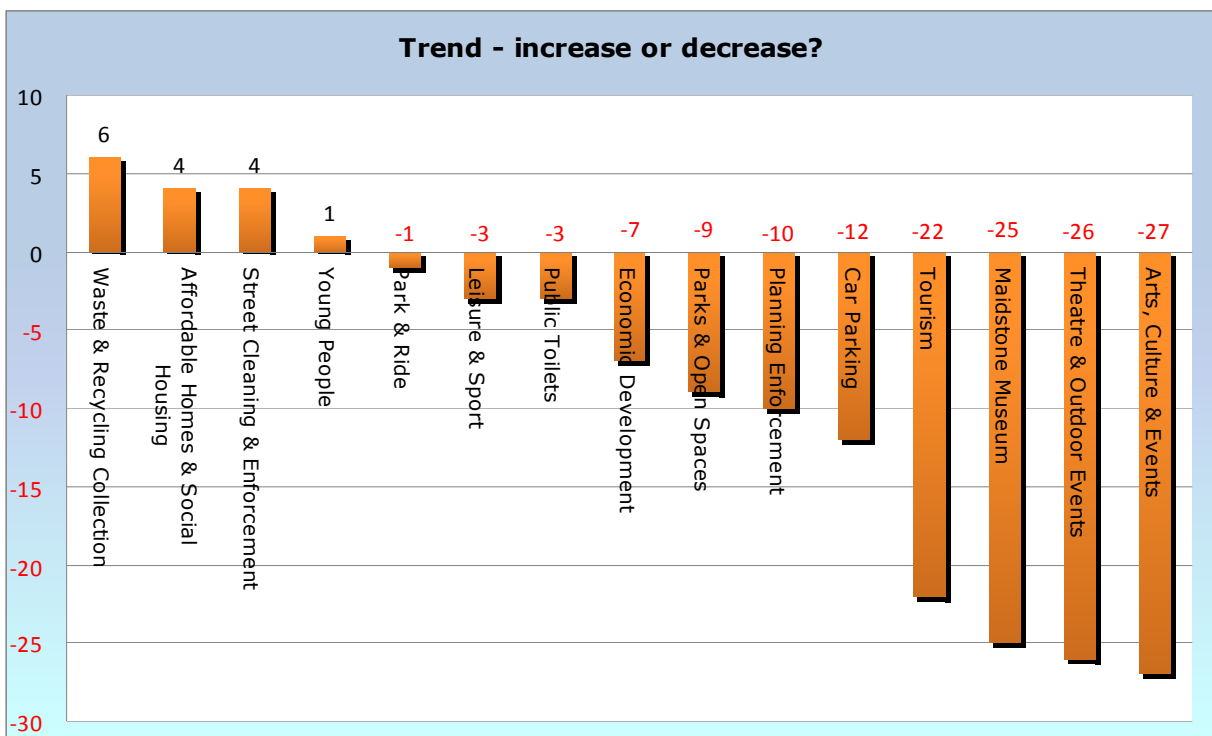
The 2008-09 summary:



The 2009-10 Budget Consultation

For 2009-10 the cabinet used Budget Simulator to test residents' preferences for spending on services and overall spending. This was supported by a general information campaign and a programme of meetings to encourage participation and gain qualitative feedback.

The 2009-10 summary:



In both the 2008-09 and 2009-10 exercises consultees found it very difficult to make savings in order to keep the Council's increase in its Council Tax to no more than 5% (about £10 a year for a Band D Taxpayer). For 2008-09 the average increase was 6.4%. For 2009-10 the average increase was 7.6%.

The 2010-11 Budget Consultation

For 2010-11 budget consultation the Cabinet employed a Maidstone based market research company to explore residents attitudes to fees and charges, together with attitudes to council tax levels and cuts in services. The council carried out additional work including a feature in Borough Update and on the Council's website, and meetings with stakeholders.

The 2010-11 Summary

When given the choice of service cuts or increase in council tax and charges, the clear majority (63%) of residents wanted to see a cut in services.

However, when asked to choose between no increase in council tax and charges under any circumstances and an acceptance that increases were not desirable but may have to be applied depending on where the cuts might be, 74% chose the latter course, 19% the former. The third choice of no service cuts but an increase in tax and charges was selected by 7%.

The most common suggestions for cuts in service centred around economies in Council salaries and staff. 6% of residents specifically mentioned a reduction or cessation of 'artwork' projects.

Residents were asked their views regarding 'pay as you use' versus increased tax for each 7 services. The overall trend was a clear preference for an increase in charge for use especially with services such as the Hazlitt, Park and Ride and town centre car parks. The one service where the majority view was for an increase in Council tax was for green waste removal.

The overall level of increases in council tax and charges that residents was prepared to pay to keep services as they are averaged 27.5p. This figure was based on the assumption (in the question asked) that an amount of 50p per week for each resident would be sufficient to keep services at the current level. This average varied across the different demographic groups but differences were relatively low ranging from 22.2p amongst the DE class group up to 32.9p for the AB group.