

## Budget Consultation Exercise 2010: Key Findings

### Report of the Chief Fire Officer

For further information about this report please contact Paul Raymond, Chief Fire Officer, on 01743 260201 or Steve Worrall, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, on 01743 260204.

#### 1 Purpose of Report

This report sets out the views and opinions of members of the public and business community, who recently participated in a budget consultation exercise.

#### 2 Recommendation

The Committee is asked to note the presented findings.

#### 3 Background

In support of the budget setting proposals for 2010/11 officers have facilitated three budget consultation events undertaken in Shrewsbury and Telford during January 2010. Each event lasted for approximately 90 minutes. The events were targeted at both members of the public and business communities who have 'experienced' the Service during 2009, be this through contact at incidents, inspections/visits, partnerships, compliments or complaints.

The aforesaid consultation events attracted a total of 29 attendees out of 43 individuals, who indicated that they would attend (many were forced to withdraw because of transport difficulties due to snow and ice during the week commencing 4<sup>th</sup> January 2010). Of those able to attend, statistically, they provide a 90% confidence level (with a margin of error of  $\pm 15\%$ ) of the entire population of Shropshire (including Telford and Wrekin).

Turning the theory into practice, this means that if 25 of the 29 attendees (e.g. 86%) stated that they wanted to see no more than a 2% increase in precept, their opinion would, statistically, be representative of 86% of the entire population of Shropshire, who would most likely express the same opinion. This opinion would statistically be 90% accurate, to within a margin of error not greater than 15% either way.

For ease of reading, the statistics presented within this paper have been rounded to the nearest decimal point.

The composition of attendees is set out at Appendix A.

In summary, the key findings arising from the consultation exercise were that:

- a) 72% of attendees stated that they felt that the Fire Authority delivered *excellent* value for money, with the remaining 28% indicating that they believed that *good* value for money was achieved. No attendees considered value for money to be either *satisfactory* or *poor*.
- b) 66% of attendees actually believed that they paid more than the current £1.57 per household (Band D) per week for their fire and rescue service. 27% were aware of what they paid (£1.57p for Band D); with only 7% believing that they paid less.
- c) When considering the services received, 14% of attendees believed the Fire Authority's annual budget to be in the region of £41m, with 66% believing it to be £31m. Only 20% believed it to be as low as the actual £21m.
- d) Attendees were advised of the current ratio of government grant versus council tax to fund the Service. 52% indicated that the current ratio formula to be *very unfair*, 38% felt it was *unfair*. Only 10% considered the formula to be *fair*.
- e) When asked how much a week, per household (Band D), they would be prepared to pay extra (as a cash amount) for their fire and rescue service during 2010/11, 69% were satisfied to pay as high as 10p extra per week. 10% were prepared to pay 8p; a further 10% were prepared to pay 6p (*which represents 3.9% increase in precept*). Only 11% indicated that they would be prepared to pay 4p or less per week.
- f) When presented with a *percentage (%)* increase, the attendees' responses varied to that when presented with a *cash* increase. 17% were prepared to pay up to a 5.9% increase, 21% of attendees would pay up to 4.9%, 17% preferred up to 3.9%, 14% preferred only up to 2.9% and the largest response of 24% was for an increase not greater than 1.9%. Only 7% wanted to pay not greater than 0.9%.

- g) Attendees were asked for their opinion regarding an increase of 6p per week, which also equated to 3.9%. Only 3% stated that they would like to pay less, 10% wanted to pay the same, but an overwhelming 87% indicated that the proposed increase of 6p or 3.9% represented *good value* and they would be prepared to pay it.
- h) The consultation events concluded with attendees being asked how useful they found the presentation. 59% indicated that they found the presentations to be *very informative* and that they had *learnt a lot* about their fire and rescue service. The remaining 41% found the presentations *informative* and provided a *good overview*. Attendees were offered the opportunity to indicate if they were left a little, or totally confused by the presentations, to which a nil response was provided.

As well as attendees being asked to respond to a number of set questions, each with a range of multiple-choice responses to select, attendees were also invited to ask questions of the Chief Fire Officer. A summary of the questions/statements arising is set out at Appendix B for information.

Of the 29 persons who attended, all stated that they would like to participate in future consultation events.

## **4 Legal Comment**

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

## **5 Equality Impact Assessment**

Officers have considered the Service's Brigade Order on Equality Impact Assessments (Personnel 5 Part 2) and have decided that there are no discriminatory practices or differential impacts upon specific groups arising from this report. An Initial Equality Impact Assessment has not, therefore, been completed.

Attendees were asked to complete Equality and Diversity Monitoring forms and analysis of the information provided has resulted in the information given at Appendix A.

## **6 Appendices**

### **Appendix A**

Composition of Attendees

### **Appendix B**

Summary of Questions/ Statements Raised by Attendees

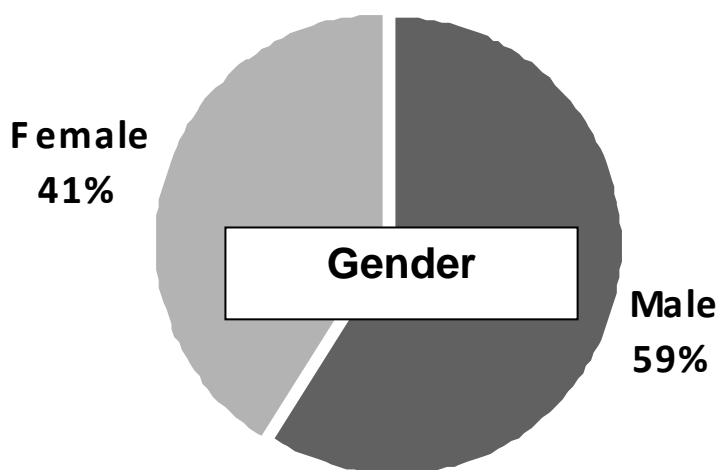
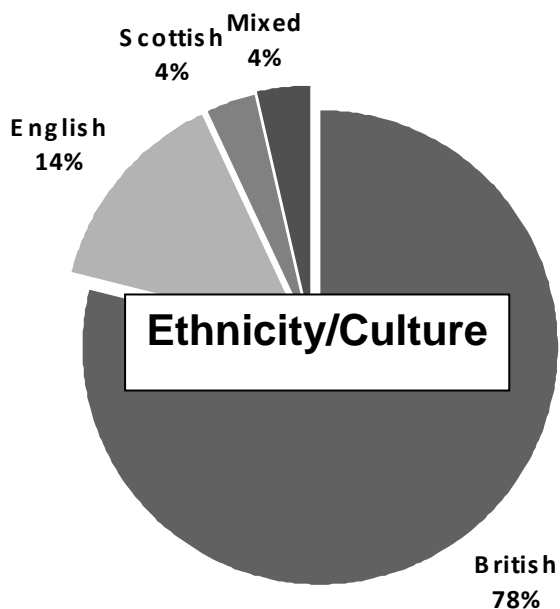
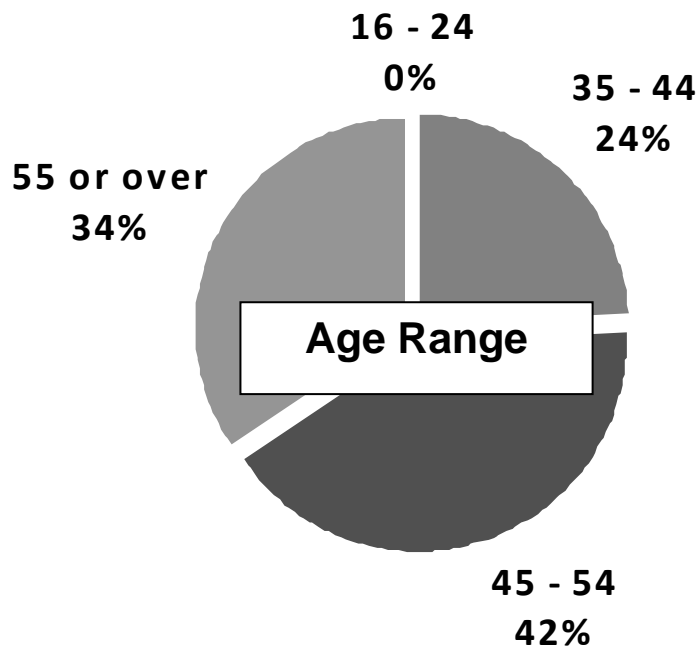
## 7 Background Papers

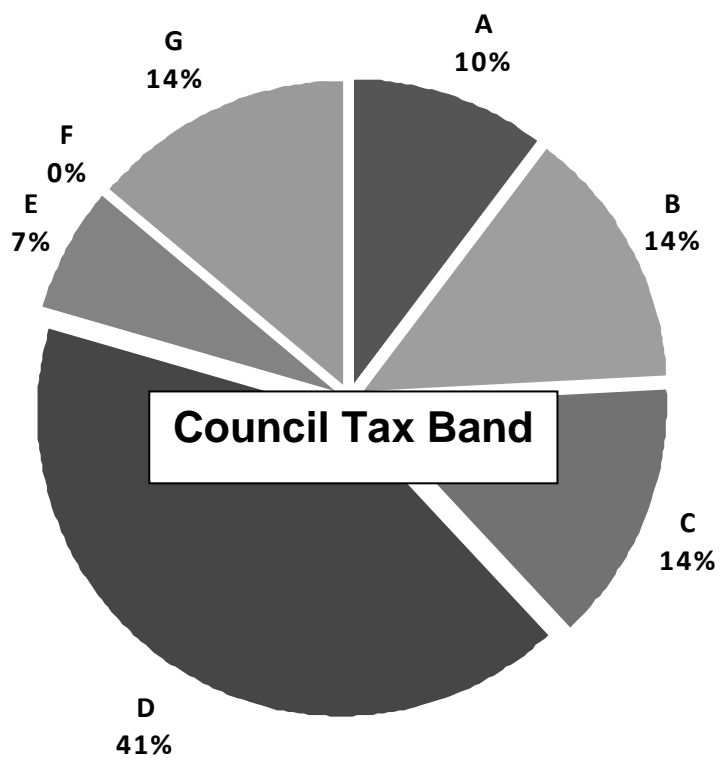
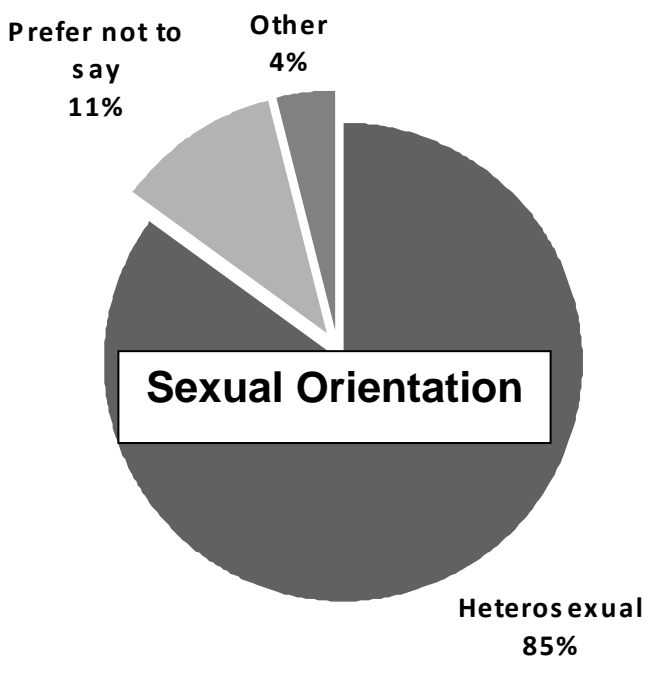
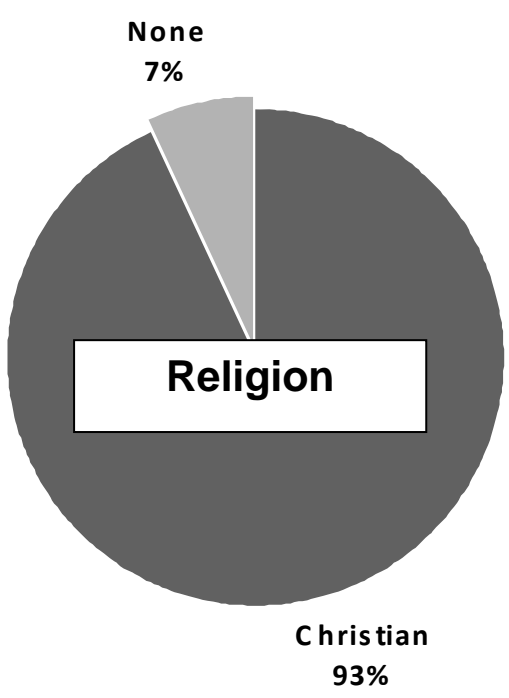
January 2010 Budget Consultation Presentation given by the Chief Fire Officer

Implications of all of the following have been considered and, where they are significant (i.e. marked with an asterisk), the implications are detailed within the report itself.

Balanced Score Card		Integrated Risk Management Planning	
Business Continuity Planning		Legal	
Capacity		Member Involvement	*
Civil Contingencies Act		National Framework	
Comprehensive Performance Assessment		Operational Assurance	
Efficiency Savings		Retained	
Environmental		Risk and Insurance	
Financial	*	Staff	
Fire Control/Fire Link		Strategic Planning	
Information Communications and Technology		West Midlands Regional Management Board	
Freedom of Information / Data Protection / Environmental Information		Equality Impact Assessment	*

## Composition of Attendees





## Summary of Questions/Statements Raised by Attendees

1. The Shropshire Star reported recently that a Telford fire engine responded to an incident in Much Wenlock. Why were the local crew not available?
2. Are you closing retained stations, as they are in Warwickshire?
3. Why don't you share services with the police and ambulance services?
4. I'm concerned over the RCCs\* and I have a lack of confidence in the technology. Will RCCs happen?
5. Are we going down a route of nine regional brigades?
6. What were the areas for improvement identified by the Audit Commission?
7. Is the new audit process an improvement on the old HMIFS\*\* approach?
8. Do you get the opportunity to talk to others regarding value for money and good performance arising from audits!
9. Have you paid for the audits from your own budgets?
10. Do the audit commission come on site?
11. If money were no object, where would be your weakest area to address?
12. What are you planning to do with the findings from this consultation exercise?
13. What are the implications of the RCC on your budgets?
14. What is the purpose of the RCC?
15. What are the benefits of the RCC?
16. Do you think government will realise that localism works far better than regionalism?
17. Shropshire is the right size for all it represents.

18. How many false/malicious alarms do you get?
19. It worries me about how RCCs will deal with malicious calls.
20. Could you pull out of the RCC?
21. How many stations do you have, and are you going to cut back any?
22. How many part-time staff firefighters do you have at each station?
23. Every year your money should go up more to get the best equipment, it should be [budget] £23m.
24. You cannot cut the Service down.
25. The economy will hit the public services hard, it is our Service, what can we give to make things easier and reduce the cost to you?
26. The elderly haven't got a clue about fire.
27. There needs to be incentives to the community to reduce council tax.
28. Why are gas pipes installed external to houses?
29. How do you think you can reduce fires further beyond a 30% reduction?
30. Thank you for what you do for our children.

\* RCCs        Regional Control Centres  
\*\*             Her majesty's Inspector of Fire Services