



APPENDIX 1

Flintshire County Council

The Big Budget Conversation

Summary Report

September 2014

Contents

The Purpose of the Consultation	3
The Period of Consultation	3
Consultation Responses	3
What people told us	
The statistics	3
The feedback	4
Social media – Twitter @Flintshirecc	6
The Consultation Process	
The methodology used	6
Who could get involved	7
Demographic Information	8
Next steps	10
Graphs and charts	11

The purpose of the consultation:

- To raise awareness of the current budget situation and the significant financial challenges facing the Council, with particular reference to the impact of a potential 4.5% cut in Welsh Government funding
- To gauge the level of support for some of the difficult decisions ahead

The period of consultation:

- Monday 18 August 2014 – Friday 12 September 2014 - with early release to Elected Members and the workforce on the afternoon of Friday 15 August

Consultation Responses:

- A total of 690 forms were returned of which 654 were completed on-line and 36 via paper copy.

What people told us

The statistics

It was evident from the responses received that the majority of people taking part are either concerned (23%) or very concerned (72%) about the risks to local Council services from national budget cuts.

When asked whether local council services should be given more protection in national decisions on the budget, of those who responded there was fairly equal support for partial protection (47%) and complete protection (45%). 96% of people also felt we all should speak up so that National and Welsh Governments understand our concerns about the risks to local services.

The information provided to help people understand the challenges now facing the Council included the need to change the way services are delivered and a number of questions were asked to gauge the level of support.

There was a clear majority (85%) who supported local councils joining together to deliver services if they could be run more efficiently. 68% of people who responded would support the Council if it needed to make 'some changes' to the way it delivers some of its services. A lower figure (26%) would support 'major changes' whilst 6% would not support changes 'at any cost'.

When asked to identify their level of support for charging more for services if it meant that services could be protected, only 8% would support charging 'at any cost'. 75% however would support increases 'at an affordable' cost. 17% would not support any increased charges.

£61m (24%) of the Council's annual net budget is raised through the collection of Council Tax, with increases in recent years being kept at around 3%. Question 7 asked whether people would support an increase above 3%. Just over half (51%) indicated they would support an increase 'at an affordable' cost, although 44% would not support it 'at any cost'. A very small number (5%) were supportive of a higher increase 'at any cost'.

To meet the challenges ahead the Council explained that thought was needed not only about how services are provided but who should run them. On being asked whether town and community councils and voluntary organisations should run more local services and facilities 68% responded 'yes' with the remaining 32% saying 'no'. 60% would themselves be either 'interested' or 'very interested' in getting involved to help to run local services in their own community, however, 40% would not.

To assist in the next step of the Big Budget Conversation later in the year, people were asked to identify how they would prefer to get involved. The Council's website was the method most favoured. 'Your Council' the Council's new emagazine and Face to Face were favoured equally second, with Twitter coming in third. This question had the option for people to identify other methods. Suggestions received included focus groups, by post, email, SMS text messaging, online forums, roadshows.

Feedback

In addition to answering specific questions, people also had the opportunity to provide general feedback via a comments box. Just over half of all respondents provided further comments.

Other comments were also received through the emagazine feedback option and by direct email. All feedback has been collected into one comprehensive consultation feedback document.

The feedback received generally fell into the categories identified below.

- **Council Tax increases**

Overall 51% of those completing the questionnaire supported a council tax increase above 3% at an 'affordable cost'. However, of those who provided further comment, the majority of opinion was against increases.

- **Service protection**

It is evident from the feedback received that social services for the young and the vulnerable are particularly valued and should be protected at all costs.

Other services receiving mention were youth services and their role in building confidence and developing life skills and the contribution of leisure services to the health and wellbeing of Flintshire residents. Perhaps as a result of recent media coverage and social media debate specific feedback about the future of Holywell Leisure Centre was also received.

Alternatively there was opinion that in protecting essential social services there could be a risk to cultural services that also contribute to the wellbeing of the County. Whilst others felt that service protection should not be offered at all to make sure all services are run as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Bilingual services and the protection of the Welsh language was also raised.

- **Charges for services**

Generally the feedback received supported charges so long as services could be protected, however there was also an increased expectation that if people were to pay more, the council would need to be more accountable for making the best available use of all its resources.

- **Alternative service models/Town & Community Councils/Community Involvement/Volunteering**

There was a general level of support for doing things differently for example, outsourcing services, social enterprise, charitable bodies/trusts. Some of the areas mentioned that could benefit from adopting alternative service delivery models were leisure services, Clwyd Theatr Cymru, property design, waste & recycling. Other creative solutions were also suggested such as waste to energy and renewable energy schemes and private finance initiatives.

Overall 68% supported the devolution of some services to Town and Community Council and voluntary organisations. From the feedback received, it is evident that before this could happen there would need to be greater clarity around budgets and the transfer of appropriate skills and knowledge. Feedback in relation to volunteering was mixed. Some welcomed the opportunity to get involved and for the strength of Flintshire's voluntary support network to be recognised. Others however had concerns around sustainability, potential loss of professional expertise and the impact on the local economy.

- **Merging council services**

Generally there is support for merging council services to deliver more efficient and effective services across a wider geographic area, although some of the feedback received favoured a Wrexham, Flintshire, Denbighshire merger rather than Wrexham, Flintshire as currently suggested by Welsh Government. There was also the view that it should happen sooner rather than later.

Other comments received highlighted some scepticism about the cost of any potential reorganisation of councils.

- **Efficiency saving suggestions**

This area generated the most feedback. Suggestions covered a wide range of topics from front line service delivery to high level strategy e.g. postage savings, workforce rationalisation, improving efficiency and performance, customer service improvements, improvements to waste and recycling services, street lighting efficiencies, better use of council buildings and rationalisation of community assets, school and public transport, arts, culture and leisure.

- **The consultation process**

Suggestions were received about how the consultation and engagement process could be improved.

- **General comments**

A number of general comments were also received highlighting a range of personal views and opinions on a range of topics including the management of UK, Welsh and local budgets.

Social Media - Twitter @FlintshireCC

A Twitter campaign ran from 18 August until 15 September. On Monday 1st September the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive took part in a live 2 hour Twitter debate.

Overall for the 4 week campaign 56 people actively took part in the Twitter debate, with 11 engaging in the live on-line debate. A number of individuals and organisations also followed the conversation, retweeting and favouriting, but not actively contributing to the conversation.

The debate covered topics such as options for revenue growth and income generation, the potential merging of councils to deliver efficiencies, protection of front line services.

The Consultation Process

The methodology used:

A bi-lingual, on-line, self-selection consultation using Survey Monkey software accessible via the Council's:

- new e-magazine 'Your Council' / 'Eich Cyngor'
- website flintshire.gov.uk/FCCBudget / siryfflint/CyllidebCSyFf
- corporate Twitter account @FlintshireCC / @CSyFflint
- a number of paper copies distributed to Council libraries, leisure centres, Connects and receptions

Who could get involved:

The consultation was open to everyone and a range of methods were used to reach as many people across the County as possible, including:

Email links

- All elected members
- Council managers
- Council workforce
 - Main banner on Council's infonet site
 - Direct emails to All Notes Users
 - Direct emails to managers with action to reach all employees without email
- Schools
 - Posted on Moodle
 - Direct emails to Head Teachers with action to reach all staff
- 'Your Council' emagazine subscribers
- Corporate Twitter Account
- Existing networks / service user groups e.g. older people, young people, equality groups, tenants, businesses
- Partners e.g. NW Police, BCUHB, FLVC with request to publicise on their web sites and internal Intranet sites
- OWLWatch Eastern subscribers

Council website

- Home page main campaign link direct to Your Council
- Link via Big Budget Conversation web page
- Link via Your Council emagazine web page

Social Media - Twitter

- @FlintshireCC / @CSyFflint

Media

- Press Briefings
- Press releases

Digitally Excluded

- Paper copies available in Libraries, Leisure Centres, Flintshire Connects, council buildings with public receptions
- Public computers in Libraries and Flintshire Connects set to default to the Big Budget Conversation web page

During the period of consultation the following statistics were recorded:

	English	Welsh
No. of hits on page 1 of 'Your Council'	7625	400
No. of hits on the 'Tell us what you think' page of 'Your Council'	2368	70
No. of pageviews 'Big Budget Conversation'	10924	27
No. of pageviews 'emagazine'	1380	5

A main aim of the consultation was to raise awareness and help the wider public understand the challenges ahead before further consultations later in the year on more detailed options/proposals. The figures quoted above would suggest that the 'conversation' has gone some way to achieving this.

Demographic Information

How people best described themselves

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
1 I live in Flintshire	41.9%	278
2 I work in Flintshire	8.9%	59
3 I live and work in Flintshire	44.0%	292
4 I represent a Flintshire business	1.4%	9
5 I represent a business outside of Flintshire	0.3%	2
6 I represent a Flintshire organisation	2.0%	13
7 I represent an organisation outside of Flintshire	0.2%	1
8 I am a visitor to Flintshire	0.3%	2
9 Other	1.2%	8
Skipped question		26

Those people who ticked either option 2 or 3 above were asked a supplementary question 'Are you an employee of Flintshire County Council?' Overall 32% of those people who took part work for the Council.

Preferred Language

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
English	96.9%	626
Welsh	2.9%	19
Other	0.2%	1
Skipped question		44

Age

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Under 16	0.0%	0
16 - 24	3.0%	19
25 - 34	11.8%	75
35 - 44	24.1%	153
45 - 54	24.8%	158
55 - 64	21.7%	138
65 - 74	11.5%	73
75 +	3.1%	20
Skipped question		54

Gender

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Male	45.1%	283
Female	51.0%	320
Prefer not to say	3.8%	24
Skipped question		63

Disability

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	7.2%	45
No	86.8%	539
Prefer not to say	6.0%	37
Skipped question		69

Ethnicity

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
White	98.6%	620
Mixed	0.3%	2
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	0.2%	1
Asian/Asian British	0.0%	0
Other	1.0%	6
Skipped question		61

Those who selected 'Other' went on to specify the following: prefer not to say, white Welsh, British ..., Anglo Welsh, European.

Next steps

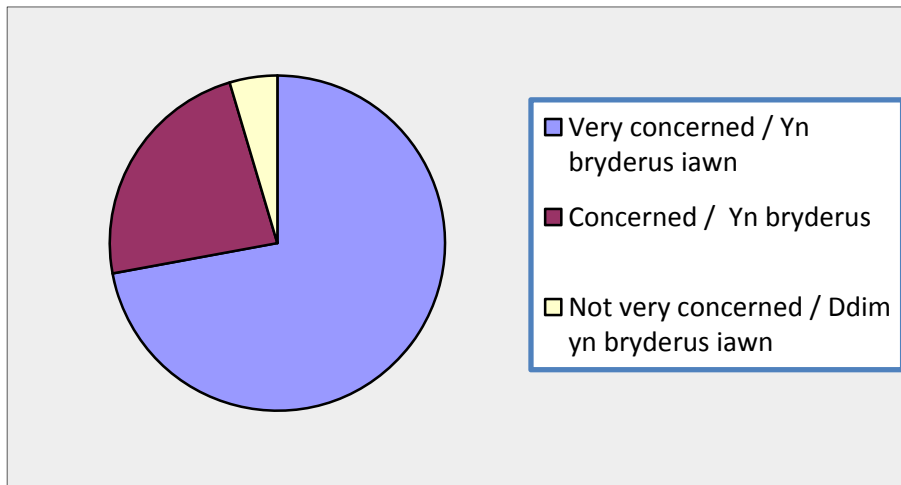
Initial talks are already taking place with Town and Community Councils and local organisations about possible local solutions.

We are currently planning how we best go about sharing our options and proposals later in the year.

Graphs and Charts

Question 1

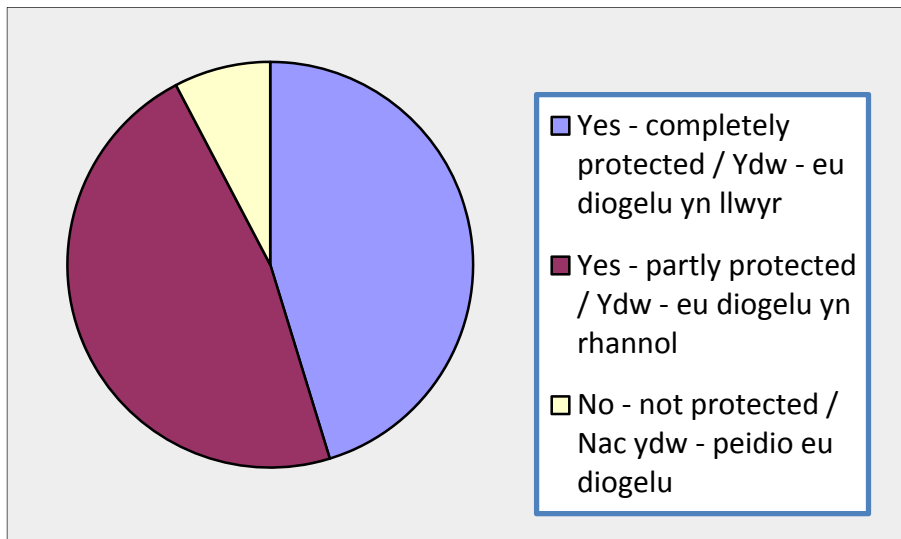
How concerned are you about the risks to local council services from on-going national budget cuts?



Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Very concerned	72.1%	491
Concerned	23.3%	159
Not very concerned	4.6%	31
<i>answered question</i>		681
<i>skipped question</i>		9

Question 2

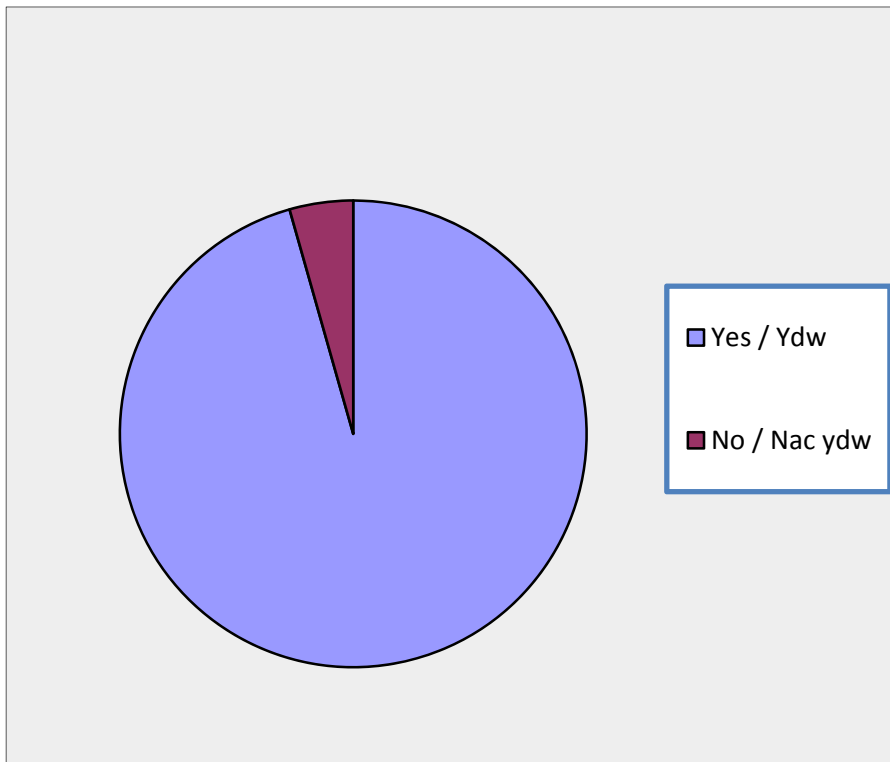
Do you think that local council services should be given more protection in national decisions on the budget?



Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes - completely protected	45.3%	307
Yes - partly protected	47.1%	319
No - not protected	7.7%	52
answered question		678
skipped question		12

Question 3

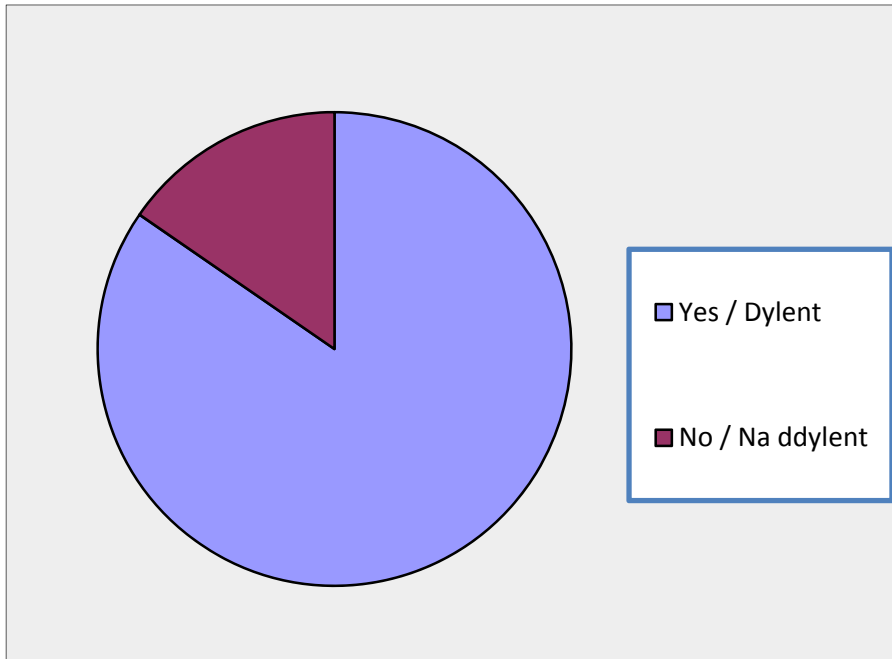
Do you think we all should speak up so that National and Welsh Governments understand our concerns about the risks to local services?



Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	95.6%	645
No	4.4%	30
<i>answered question</i>		675
<i>skipped question</i>		15

Question 4

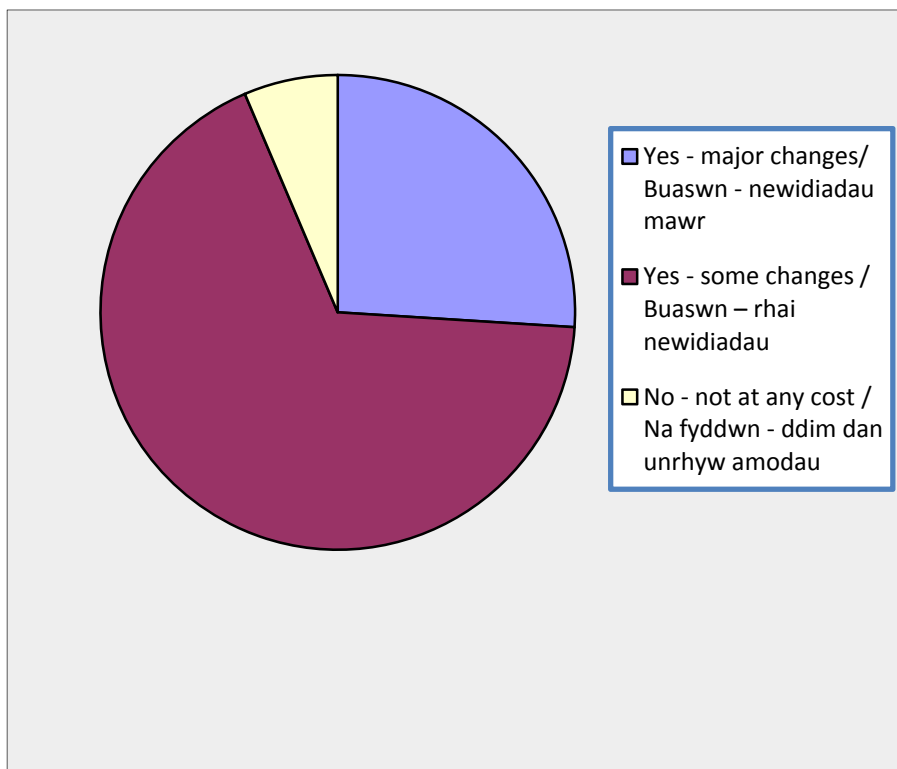
Should local councils join together to deliver services if it means they can be run more efficiently?



Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	84.6%	572
No	15.4%	104
<i>answered question</i>		676
<i>skipped question</i>		14

Question 5

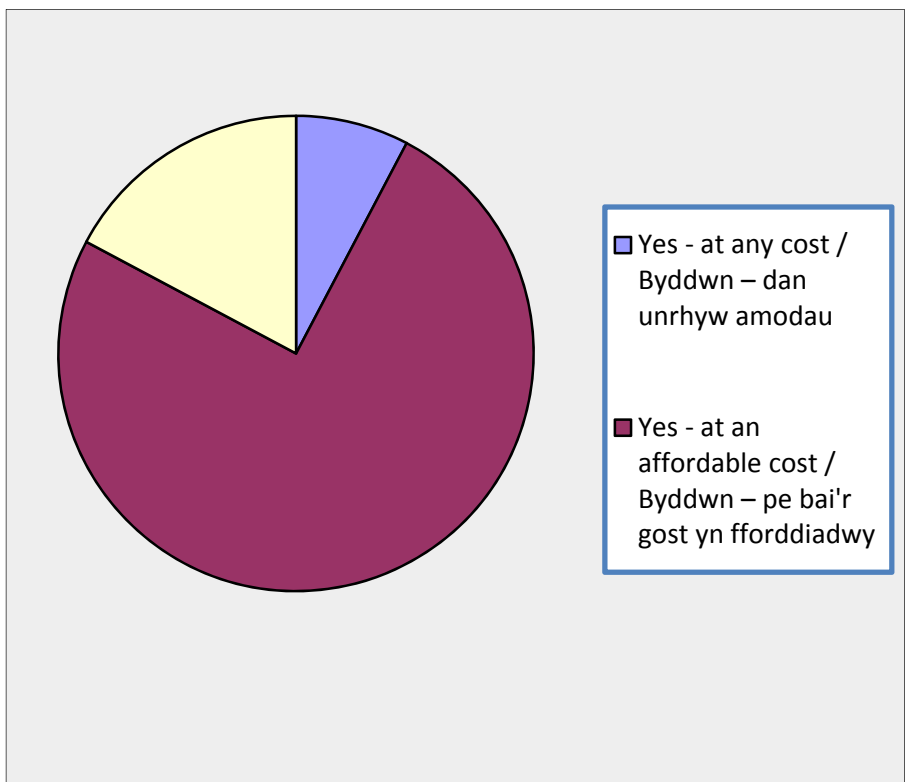
Would you support the Council if it needs to change the way it delivers some of its services because of the pressures it faces from national budget cuts?



Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes - major changes	26.0%	176
Yes - some changes	67.6%	457
No - not at any cost	6.4%	43
<i>answered question</i>		676
<i>skipped question</i>		14

Question 6

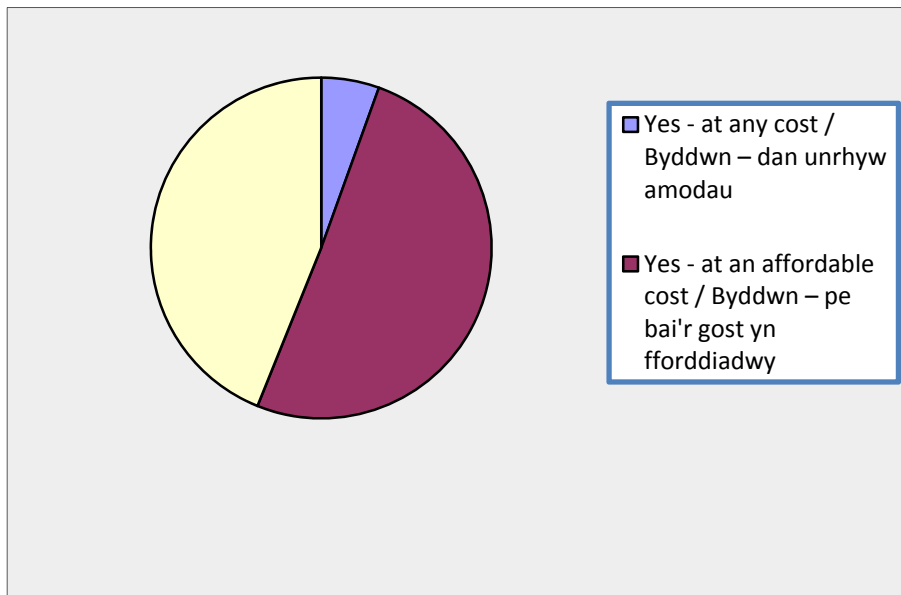
Would you support the Council charging more for services if it meant that services could be protected?



Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes - at any cost	7.7%	52
Yes - at an affordable cost	75.0%	505
No - not at any cost	17.2%	116
<i>answered question</i>		673
<i>skipped question</i>		17

Question 7

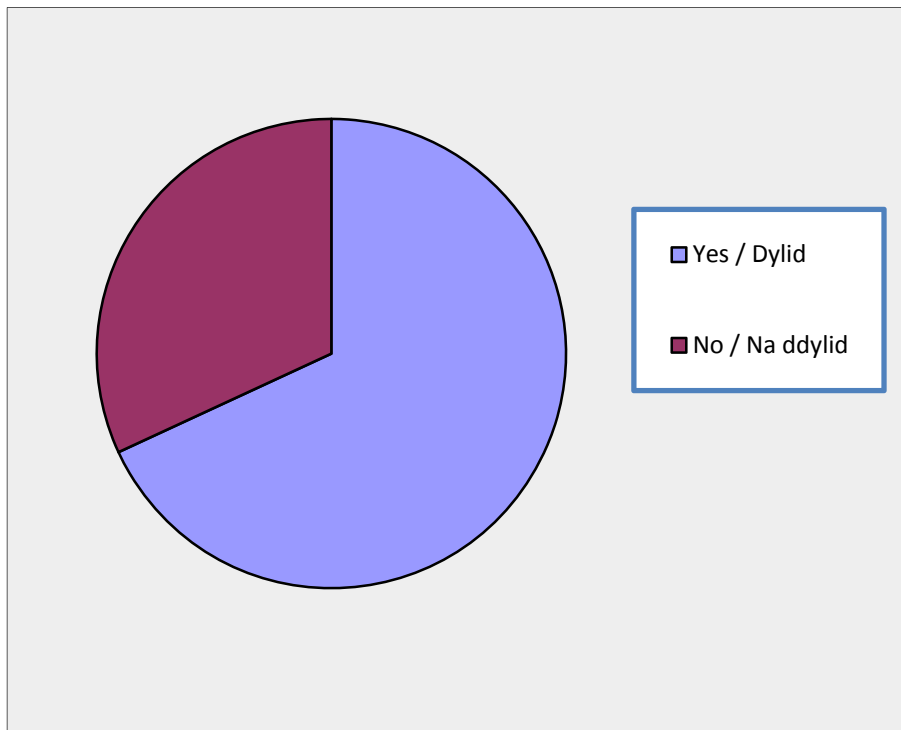
In recent years the Council has kept its Council Tax increases at around 3%.
Would you support the Council in raising its Council Tax to a higher level?



Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes - at any cost	5.5%	37
Yes - at an affordable cost	50.6%	342
No - not at any cost	43.9%	297
answered question		676
skipped question		14

Question 8

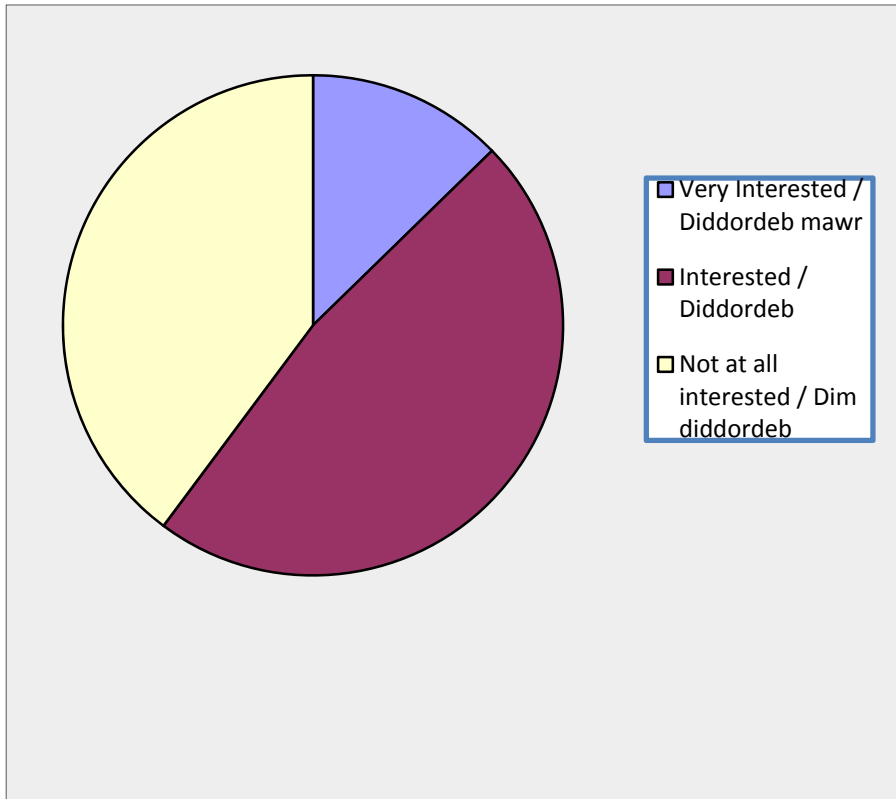
Should town and community councils and voluntary organisations be asked to run more local services and facilities e.g. running local community buildings, maintaining local open spaces, decorating and maintaining local school buildings?



Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	68.1%	458
No	31.9%	215
<i>answered question</i>		673
<i>skipped question</i>		17

Question 9

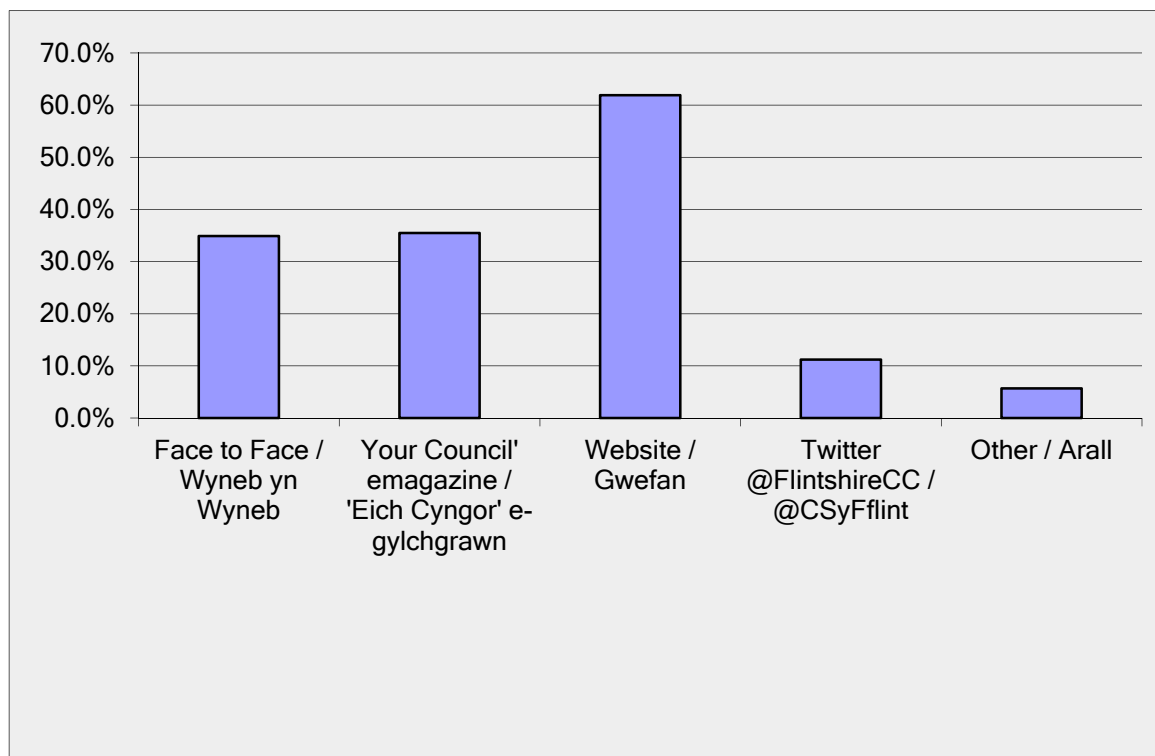
How interested would you be in getting involved to help run local services in your own community?



Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Very Interested	12.7%	85
Interested	47.5%	319
Not at all interested	39.8%	267
<i>answered question</i>		671
<i>skipped question</i>		19

Question 10

This is only the beginning of the conversation. Later this year you will have the opportunity to tell us what you think about more detailed options/proposals. How would you prefer to get involved?



Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Face to Face	34.9%	228
Your Council' emagazine	35.5%	232
Website	61.9%	405
Twitter @FlintshireCC	11.2%	73
Other	5.7%	37
answered question		654
skipped question		36