

Charging for local services

Key findings from qualitative and quantitative research
conducted on behalf of the Audit Commission

September 2007



Contents

Introduction	1
Key Findings	4
The groups and general views towards the local council	8
Council tax and value for money	11
Charging for local services	15
Findings from the business group	23

Appendices

- Discussion Guide
- Omnibus topline results

Introduction

Background and objectives

Local authorities have a number of means of raising revenue to fund local services. The most well known, at least from the perspective of the public, is council tax. However, service specific charges - for example on leisure facilities, library DVD loans, bulky waste collections and parking charges – provide another potential source of revenue.

Ipsos MORI, on behalf of the Audit Commission, undertook a programme of qualitative and quantitative research to explore residents' views towards such charges, set within the context of general attitudes towards the local council, perceptions of 'value for money' and the quality of service experience. The research feeds into a wider body of work by the Audit Commission on this issue.

Given the high profile and sensitive nature of issues pertaining to tax and charges, the purpose of the research was to explore how residents respond to the principle of charging, as well as the practice. For example, do they consider it a valid and fair means of generating income to maintain and/or improve services? Or do they think they are being "charged twice" on top of council tax?

In addition to their role in generating revenue to fund services, service specific charges also have significant implications in two important regards: firstly on equality of access to services (i.e. what impact would charges have on disadvantaged groups?); and second in terms of their potential to contribute to behaviour change objectives (i.e. is it acceptable to design charges to encourage certain behaviours and discourage others?). The latter is particularly salient in view of the potential for new service-specific charges around waste collections and car use, for example.

In relation to the general terms of reference for the research, it is important to note that it was an introductory and concise piece of research that explored initial attitudes and reactions to the issue of charging. In doing so, it identified emerging findings and areas for further deliberation and research. It is also important to note that the primary focus was on service charges, so fines and penalties were intentionally excluded from the research.

Methodology

The research comprised qualitative and quantitative research, as follows:

Qualitative research

Five discussion groups were held from 2-13 August 2007: four with residents; and one with managers of micro sized businesses, defined for the purposes of the research as those with less than nine employees. A total of 12 participants were recruited for each of the residents' groups, face-to-face and in street; while 14 local businesses were recruited.

The local authorities were chosen to represent areas with different combinations of council tax levels and service specific charges – some with relatively higher levels of income from council tax and proportionately less from charging, and vice versa. Quotas were also established on a number of factors: service usage (i.e. how many council services residents regularly use and/or engage with), age and social grade. Further details are outlined in the table below.

Group	Location	Service usage	Age	Social grade
1	North East	Min 3 lower and 3 higher	35-50	C2DE
2	London	Min 3 lower and 3 higher	25-35	ABC1
3	East of England	Min 3 lower and 3 higher	51-65	C2DE
4	South Central	Min 3 lower and 3 higher	65+	ABC1
5	South Central (Micro businesses)	Mix of sizes (1-4 employees and 5-9)	mix	mix

Overall, attendance at the groups was very good – all 12 recruits attended the North of England, East of England and South Central residents groups, eight attended the London group, and nine attended the micro business group.

The structure of the discussion groups is set out in the discussion guide (appended). Most of the discussions took place as a whole group, although at stages participants were split into two smaller groups to have break out discussions and then feed back results to the wider group.

Quantitative Research

The emerging findings from the qualitative research helped inform the development of a small number of quantitative questions which were asked of a representative sample of 1,941 residents across Great Britain. The survey was conducted across 23-29 August on the Ipsos MORI Public Affairs Monitor.

The purpose of the survey was to test the extent to which the views of participants in the qualitative research were indicative of wider public opinion. The questionnaire and top line results are appended.

Interpretation of the Data

The research involved both quantitative and qualitative research methods, and so it is important to understand the strengths and limitations of both.

Quantitative research provides “hard” data that is statistically representative of the UK population. From this it is possible to quantify observations and infer them to the wider population. Nevertheless, it is important to note two important caveats. First, a sample of the public has been interviewed and results are therefore subject to margins of error and not all differences are statistically significant. Within this survey results are accurate to between $\pm 2\%$ and $\pm 3\%$ (at the 95% confidence level).

On a general note when interpreting the data presented in this report, where percentages do not sum to 100, this may be due to computer rounding, the exclusion of ‘don’t know’ or ‘not stated’ categories, or multiple answers. An asterisk (*) denotes any value of less than half a percent but greater than zero.

Qualitative research, on the other hand, is not designed to provide statistically reliable data on what residents as a whole are thinking. It is illustrative rather than statistically reliable and therefore does not allow conclusions to be drawn about the *extent* to which something is happening. Discussion groups, such as these, enable a cross-section of local residents to participate in an informal and interactive discussion, allowing time for the complex issues and options for the future to be addressed in some detail. This approach in other words, facilitates deeper insight into attitudes underlying the ‘top of mind’ responses to quantitative studies.

Because of the nature of qualitative research it is important to acknowledge that the findings from each of the groups cannot be taken to be representative of the area itself – firm comparisons cannot be drawn, for example, between London and the North East or between the East of England and South Central. Variations in opinion may indeed reflect local variations in service delivery and expectations. However, they may equally reflect the make up of the groups and the types of people who attended (whether according to age, gender and social grade).

Verbatim comments from the discussion evening have been included within this report. These should not be interpreted as defining the views of the discussion evening as a whole but have been selected to provide an insight into a particular body of opinion.

Publication of the Results

As the Audit Commission has asked Ipsos MORI to undertake an objective programme of research, it is important to protect their 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 Louise Gitter and David Pottruff from the Audit Commission for all their help and assistance in developing this project. We also pass our grateful thanks to all the participants.

Key Findings

This summary provides an overview of the key findings. It looks first at general attitudes towards the council (which set the tone for the subsequent discussions) and perceptions of value for money. It then focuses on reactions to service specific charges and the potential impact on service use, equity and behaviour change. The final section explores these issues from the perspective of micro businesses.

Perceptions of the council

Each of the groups began with a discussion about the council in general. In terms of immediate, top of mind responses, attitudes varied markedly. For example, the London group adopted a positive stance which was in contrast to the North East group where the term ‘the council’ evoked, initially at least, negative perspectives.

Echoing research we have done before, it was of little surprise to see participants identify waste and recycling as the main services they see the council providing. Indeed, even with services like parks the link for some participants between the amenity and the council was not immediately clear. Nonetheless, on prompting and deliberation participants were able to extend the list, adding leisure, libraries, museums, education, parking and street cleaning.

Participants were quick to give specific examples of how their council could improve. Some of these were area-specific, for example, in the North East group council housing was mentioned repeatedly as a key area for improvement. In the South Central group it was parking and, in particular, alternate weekly waste collections which acted as a lightning rod for dissatisfaction with the council.

Though, perhaps predictably, participants spent proportionately more time talking about services that were not delivered so well, they also identified areas where the council was performing well. Examples included the buses in the East of England and South Central groups, leisure facilities in the North East and waste collections and street cleanliness in London.

Attitudes to council tax and ‘value for money’

Broadly speaking, and with the exception of the London group (whose council tax is particularly low), participants had only a very vague sense of how much they were paying relative to other areas.

Perceptions of the value for money of local services were mixed. The quantitative research shows that while 37% agree they receive value for money from the council, exactly the same proportion disagrees. This was also evident in the group discussions. In the London group, for example, participants were positive and acknowledged that they received value for money across a range of services.

They were the only group, though, to conclude that they were receiving value for money from the council on a *systematic* basis across services, whereas other groups

were more likely to identify one or two quality services amongst others which were not seen in such a positive light. Interestingly, and a potential area for further research, some participants intimated that the overall level of the tax was less important to them than *how the money was spent* and, by extension, the quality of services received.

On information the group discussions suggest residents are not generally well informed about how council tax is set and what it comprises. All groups were confused, for example, on the status of rescue and police services in relation to council tax. They did acknowledge, however, that information is available if they want to see it, something which is supported by the quantitative data .

Reactions to service-specific charges

Experience of service-specific charges is relatively widespread if not universal – around two thirds have paid a charge in the past year. However, experience to date has been rather narrow, with parking charges and leisure fees the only services which a large number of residents have paid for. Only small minorities - of around one in ten residents - have paid for library services, museums or bulky waste collections, and even less have paid for home care services.

Perceived value for money also produces interesting findings – while the vast majority of services associated with charges are rated highly and only one (parking) is singled out for dissatisfaction, this is of course the service that the public are most likely to have experienced charging through.

The groups also suggest that service specific charges could trigger a utilitarian response among many people. Several participants, for example, supported charges on the grounds that there would be a strong and clear link between the amount they pay, x, and the service they receive in return, y.

Overall, the groups suggest that service specific charges are received positively *in principle*. However, they also demonstrated that this support was subject to three caveats and conditions:

(i) Transparency and accountability – Most participants were concerned about how the charge would operate alongside council tax, and were generally suspicious that council tax would ever go down, or be offset, as part of a trade off with charges. Such a view potentially fuels the perceptions that charges are “additional” which could, for certain services such as parks, prove contentious. More research is needed here.

(ii) The context for charging - The research found that support or opposition to service specific charges varied considerably by service type and the context behind the charge. On the one hand, participants were comfortable paying an additional charge for things such as leisure, some library services and museums, which for many was the norm. Even on some issues where we might expect a negative reaction, such as parking charges, concern here focused on the level of the charge rather than the principle of charging itself.

On other issues however, charges prove much more contentious. For example, waste charges split the groups. Some participants were opposed in principle and thought they were being asked to “pay twice”; more, though, were actually sympathetic to the need for a charge and the underlying rationale but were concerned about unintended side effects, such as fly tipping and the disproportionate impact on large families.

(iii) Cross subsidisation of services - Participants preferred to see their money reinvested at the point of charge (at a specific gym or library). This was partly on the grounds of personal utility because they wanted to be a beneficiary of greater investment in the service/facility. It was also partly because the charge, and its management, would then be more transparent than is the case with the general council tax ‘pot’. Most were willing to allow some limited cross subsidisation, e.g. from one gym to another if they were notably poorer in quality, but tended to reject monies going further or into different areas.

Impact of service-specific charges

Moving on from the general principle and specific applications of charges, the groups also explored two further issues: on equity and behaviour change.

Equity and equality of access - most participants were comfortable with the idea of differential charging based on ability to pay, for example through a mechanism like means testing or discount cards. This is supported by the quantitative data. The only dissenting voices were amongst the South Central group with pensioners, who were very keen on discounts that applied to their age group but less sympathetic towards discounts based on income. However, on the issue of different local charges in different areas for the same service (the so-called “postcode lottery”) the public are split: 40% think this is acceptable, while exactly the same proportion disagree. Only those in social class AB and in the high income bracket tend to be noticeably more comfortable with this idea.

Behaviour change - the issue of using charges to further behaviour change objectives, i.e. charges to discourage ‘bad’ things and encourage ‘good’ alternatives, is generally supported as a matter of principle. However, once again the issue is very context-dependent. For example, the logic of charging for behaviour change was soon lost in the examples of ‘pay as you throw’ waste charges to encourage recycling, as well as parking charges to encourage public transport use. Even agreement on a ‘good’ thing was not particularly easy – in the London group, for example, participants all welcomed subsidies for activities for young people, but reacted negatively to the London scheme of free bus travel for under 16s.

Attitudes among micro businesses

In contrast to residents, the micro businesses group in South Central were overwhelmingly negative about the council and its performance. They were not able, even after prompting, to identify bespoke business services they felt they received in return for paying their business rates.

Because of these underlying attitudes to the council and business rates, participants did not initially react positively to charges. Again, a lack of trust in the accountability and transparency of the process led to them believing the charges would be additional and not offset against a reduction in business rates. There was strong feeling in this group about perceived inefficiency, ineffectiveness and poor quality services from the council, which inevitably made the concept of paying charges for these services unappealing at the outset.

However, on further discussion they did acknowledge some of the potential benefits of service specific charges so long as certain conditions were met (fairness, transparency, supportive rather than restrictive). Again, attitudes in principle were coloured by previous experiences, although there appears nonetheless room to consider more flexibility in local business charges and services, whether through charges or local powers to set/spend business rates.

©Ipsos MORI/J31180

Jerry Latter

Checked & Approved:

.....
Phil Downing

Checked & Approved:

.....
Andrew Collinge

The groups and general views towards the local council

All of the groups began with a broad discussion about participants' perceptions of the local council. Both within the groups, and when compared to one another, attitudes and experiences naturally varied, at times markedly.

In terms of those services most strongly associated with the council, waste and recycling collections were most readily identified and tended to dominate much of the early discussion. Some participants in fact felt this was the only service they received from the council (which we have found is a widespread view from similar research in other areas). Even local parks, for example, were not immediately associated with local councils, even if participants did have a general sense that they are connected:

"I suppose parks – obviously when I think about it – it's the council who provides them. But it's never really resonated before, yeah that's what we pay for"

Female, London Group

The issue is not that such associations cannot be made, but rather that the role of local authorities is not necessarily 'top of mind'. On further prompting, for example, participants were able to identify a range of additional services - such as leisure services, libraries, museums, education, parking and street cleaning. Among the exceptions, services such as noise teams were mentioned by only by a few participants, while social services were not mentioned spontaneously by any of the groups, and, on prompting, very few had used this service.

On the whole, participants in most of the groups (with the exception of London) tended to focus more on negative experiences and ways in which services could be improved. Experiences of local services were also very evidently variable, even between participants in the same group and on the same issue:

"I live in a little close and many times they [rubbish collectors] just miss us completely. And so you ring them up and they say yes, we'll be round tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow. Until the following week you have two loads"

Female, East of England Group

"I've been quite lucky actually. I've been missed just once, and I phoned them up and they did come down later that day, so obviously my area is ok"

Male, East of England Group

"They just think you've got no common sense. And I think they need to really concentrate on staff training."

Female, North East

“I went there [local park] with some friends once, and they had a dog, and we went in the wrong gate and we were pounced on within about five seconds. So it’s really well cared for”

Female, London Group

Because of the variations across the groups it is important to consider, upfront, such differences because they set the tone for the subsequent discussions in relation to charging and perceptions of value for money. Therefore, a brief summary of each is outlined below.

London

The London group consisted of participants aged between 25 and 35, and in social group ABC1. On the whole, the group were very positive about their local council. Participants described the council in terms like “excellently run”, “on the ball” and “impressive”. Particular services that were mentioned included waste collection, street cleaning and leisure services. Areas that participants were less happy about tended to be ‘smaller’ issues such as the council website – seen as “fiddly and awkward” – and some less positive experiences with noise pollution.

The majority of participants in this group had little or no contact with the housing department – an area that tended to dominate much of the conversation in other groups (the North East group in particular), though one participant who had been trying to apply for housing benefit, described the department as “horrendous ... just dreadful” compared to another London Borough where she had lived previously.

The North East

Participants in the North East group were between 35 and 50 years of age, in social group C2DE, and most were living in council houses. Their comments, therefore, were strongly influenced and narrowly focused around this issue. Many held negative attitudes in this regard - specific issues included the length of time taken to be re-housed, lack of transparency in terms of housing allocation and disparity between different areas within the same Council. However, at the same time most felt that the libraries were “very good”, and many felt that some leisure services in particular areas were well provided for.

East of England

The East of England group was made up of individuals between the ages of 51 and 65 and from social group C2DE. Their views also tended to be negative towards the local council, and tended to focus upon waste and community safety. Their main complaint was with the frequency of the rubbish collections as well as recycling which some saw as “doing the Council’s work”. Street wardens were a controversial area – some felt that these were an excellent use of resources and that they did a huge amount in terms of supporting the police and PCSOs, while others felt that they were a “waste of money” and saw no evidence that they were contributing anything. The main positive area mentioned was transport – in particular bus services which were described as “brilliant”.

South Central residents group

This group consisted of participants older than 65, in social grade ABC1. Just as in the case of the North of England group - where participants had a narrower frame of reference for assessing the council – this group were heavily influenced by their experiences as pensioners and the services and discounts available to them in this regard. Negative perceptions were driven by things like overall levels of council tax for pensioners, parking and, in particular, alternate weekly waste collections. Other services were seen positively, such as libraries and bus services.

South Central micro business group

In contrast to residents, the business group was overwhelmingly negative about the council and its performance – much more so than the residents from the same area. They were able to identify areas where they felt significant improvements were needed, and this generally centred on roads, parking, and the local neighbourhood environment – all of which were seen as key to supporting the “commercial environment”. Because of the distinct and specific nature of the discussion among the business group, this is reported separately.

Council tax and value for money

General attitudes towards council tax levels

The areas in which our groups were held were chosen specifically to represent different ends of the spectrum in terms of the balance between revenue collected from council tax and charges. Broadly speaking though, and with the exception of the London group, participants had only a very vague sense of how much they were paying relative to other areas.

General attitudes to the principle of council tax varied. For example, most were comfortable with paying for services irrespective of use although there were some dissenting voices. Other participants had more cause to disagree with the way in which council tax is calculated, rather than the principle itself:

“I don’t mind paying for schools and things because in the past I did. It’s like insurance but backwards – you carry on paying because your kids have the facility”

Male, South Central Group

“If I am paying for council tax to run that leisure centre, I don’t want to. I will pay more for collection, I will pay more for street wardens, more for police, more for lighting, parking, pest control and anything like that. But I don’t think I should have to pay for something I don’t use”

Female, East of England

“2007 prices don’t really bear any relationship to what they were valued at in, I live in a semi and we’re a band C. My neighbours were only band A. They’ve now completely gutted, extended, modernised and she’s still only paying band A, and she has a house far superior to mine. So I think they need re-evaluating, definitely”

Male, East of England

Value for money

Satisfaction with the level of council tax was strongly associated in the discussion groups with overall levels of satisfaction with the council. So in the London group, for example, participants were very happy with the (relatively low) amount they paid, and even said that they would be prepared to pay more *if tied* to specific improvements locally. In fact, when they were provided with council tax information for other boroughs they were surprised how council tax could vary so much within London:

“(They) can’t be getting three times the services surely. It’s amazing”

Male, London Group

In contrast, views in the other groups were more mixed. In the South Central group, for example, there was acceptance of council tax but resentment at the level expected of pensioners and a perception that annual council tax increases were a given and bore no relation to actual improvements in local services. In the East of England group there was a view that the amount of council tax they paid was ‘probably about right’ and they accepted their higher charges compared to some other areas because they perceived their services to be better. And in the North East not all participants were required to pay council tax although, among those who did, negative attitudes were in evidence, as with elsewhere.

“I pay council tax and I slam it down on the bench when I walk in. I cringe, and I ask ‘do you have to take it?’ Well what am I paying council tax for? What am I getting? What am I getting for it?”

North East

“Too much for old people to have to pay out of their pensions”

Female, South Central Group

“It’s more costly to run a city than a small town... they’ve got nothing there like what we have. Amenities, they’ve got nothing, swimming pools and gyms, they’ve got nothing like that”

East of England

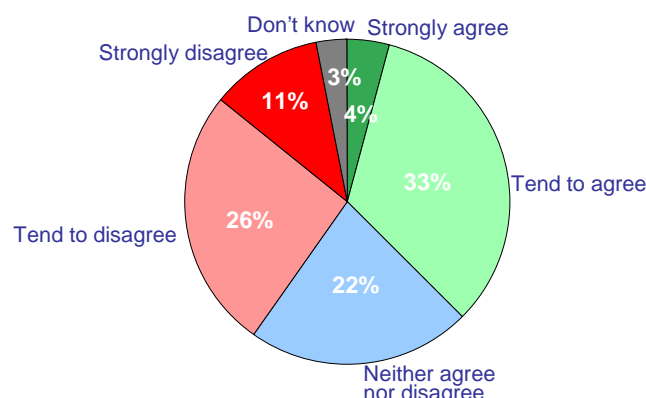
“You don’t know whether they spend it wisely or not but it keeps going up”

South Central Group

This mixed response to the question of value for money is supported by the quantitative findings which show the public split on the issue. Indeed, while 37% agree the council provides good value for money, the exact same proportion (37%) disagree. Attitudes vary notably according to age with younger respondents aged less than 35 less likely to feel they get value for money (33% agree), in contrast to older respondents aged 65+ who are typically more satisfied (51% agree), perhaps due to use of services increasing with age.

Ipsos MORI **Perceptions of value for money**

Q To what extent do you agree or disagree that the council provides good value for money?



Base: All respondents aged 18+ (1,941), fieldwork dates 23rd – 29th August 2007

Information provision

In all groups, information provision about council tax was seen as important and most people in the group discussions did not feel their council provided them with enough information about where their council tax was being spent. There was also some confusion among participants in terms of what services were included within the council tax bill, and some claimed to have received no information at all;

“The trouble is we don’t really know what we pay for... they should send a letter in your council tax bill so you can actually see what you’re paying for”

Male, North East of England

“Well, presumably all four of the emergency services are paid for by the council tax are they not?”

Female, South Central Group

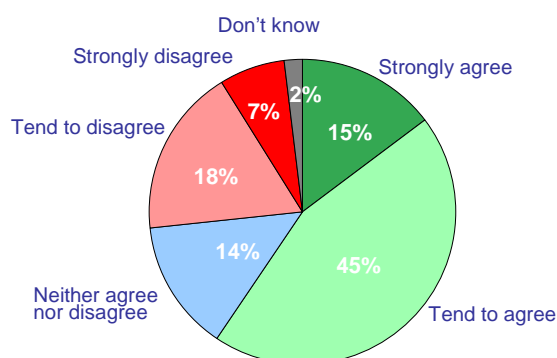
“We have all these evening papers and all they would need to do is put a two page spread in the paper saying ‘this is what we spend your money on, this is where it goes’ and then you wouldn’t mind handing over your money so much”

East of England

Turning to how revenue is raised, the group discussions are slightly out of step with the quantitative survey, which finds that 60% of the public are confident in their knowledge of how the council does this, compared to around one in four (24%) who disagree (a figure that unsurprisingly rises sharply among those aged 18-24). There is also a notable variation according to social class, with ABs significantly more confident than DEs (73% vs. 47% respectively).

Ipsos MORI **Public understanding of council income**

Q To what extent do you agree or disagree that you understand the way the council raises money?



Base: All respondents aged 18+ (1,941), fieldwork dates 23rd – 29th August 2007

Where there is agreement, though, between the quantitative and qualitative research is on the subject of apathy amongst the public in not proactively seeking out information. In the group discussions, for example, participants acknowledged that the council did provide information about council tax in the form of information booklets and on the website, but that most people were not interested in following it up:

“The Council have been as transparent as possible. People just don’t read it”

London

This is backed up by the quantitative findings, with three in five (60%) agreeing that information on how the council raises money is available if people want it. Furthermore, just over half (52%) believe the information is useful, in contrast to 17% who disagree and a further 24% who are ambivalent. Again, there are notable variations according to both age and social class, with those in social class AB and older more likely to agree information is both available and useful, in contrast to those younger and in social class DE.

Ipsos MORI **Attitudes to council tax information**

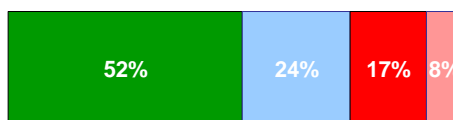
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements.....

Agree Disagree Neither/Nor DK

Information on how the council raises and spends money is available if people want it



The information provided on how the council raises and spends money is useful



Base: All respondents aged 18+ (1941), fieldwork dates 23rd – 29th August 2007

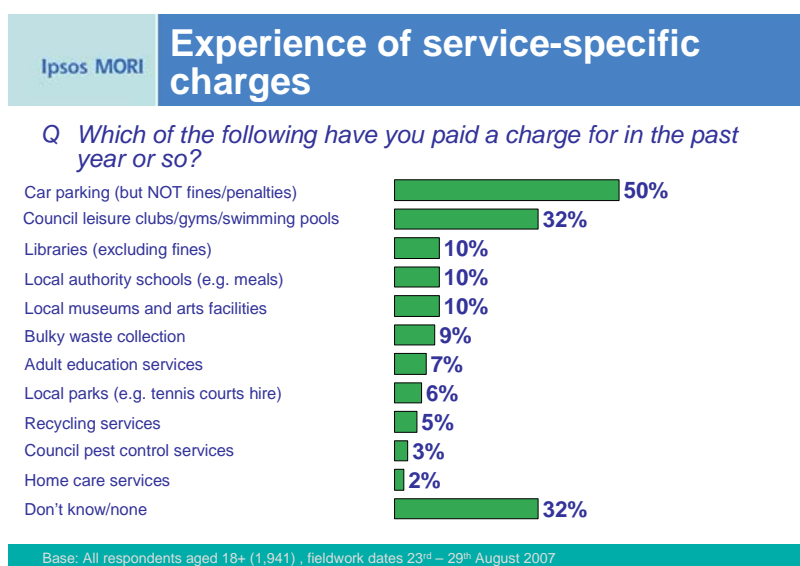
Charging for local services

Following consideration of general attitudes to council tax and perceptions of value for money, participants focused on service-specific charges and considered whether they are a positive or negative development. Subsequent discussions then focused on the likely impact this would have on their own use as well as equality of access more widely and finally on whether charges are a legitimate means of delivering behaviour change objectives.

Experience of charges

Firstly, the quantitative research provides a useful indication of the public's experience of service specific charges. It demonstrates that experience of charging is relatively widespread but by no means universal – over two in three (68%) have paid a local authority charge in the past year, while 32% have not. This rises among those aged 35-54 (77%) and those in social class AB (85%).

However, this experience is relatively narrow and predominantly in relation to just two services – 50% have paid a parking charge recently and 32% a council leisure charge. Beyond these charges, though, only relative minorities have paid for library services (10%), local authority school meals (10%), local museums and arts (10%), bulky waste collection (9%) or adult education services (7%).



Beneath the quantitative headlines the group discussions revealed a diverse range of experiences of charging, as well as conflicting attitudes towards the principle. In spite of some negative voices though, the prevailing view of charges among participants, at least *in principle*, was largely positive.

“You get really cheap swimming and really cheap gym. I’m really impressed, actually, how cheap it gets with that card. I used to pay £4.55 to swim, now it’s £1.70”

Female, London Group

So when there is perceived value for money, a charge is acceptable. But there were other considerations as well, relating to perceptions of how “standard” the service was and whether it was a “basic entitlement” through council tax or an “additional extra”. Views diverged here - some saw services they were currently charged for as unfair, whereas others considered the charge fair.

“When I cut them [the trees] back there’s that much that the council charge me £25 a bag for moving the debris. But the way I look at it, I pay the council tax, it’s for rubbish. Why can’t they help me get rid of this?”

Male, North East England Group

“They charged £10 to put my mattress in the tip. Charge you? Should be free”

Female, North East England Group

“I personally think it’s reasonable to charge [for bulky waste].

Female, South Central Group

Value for money

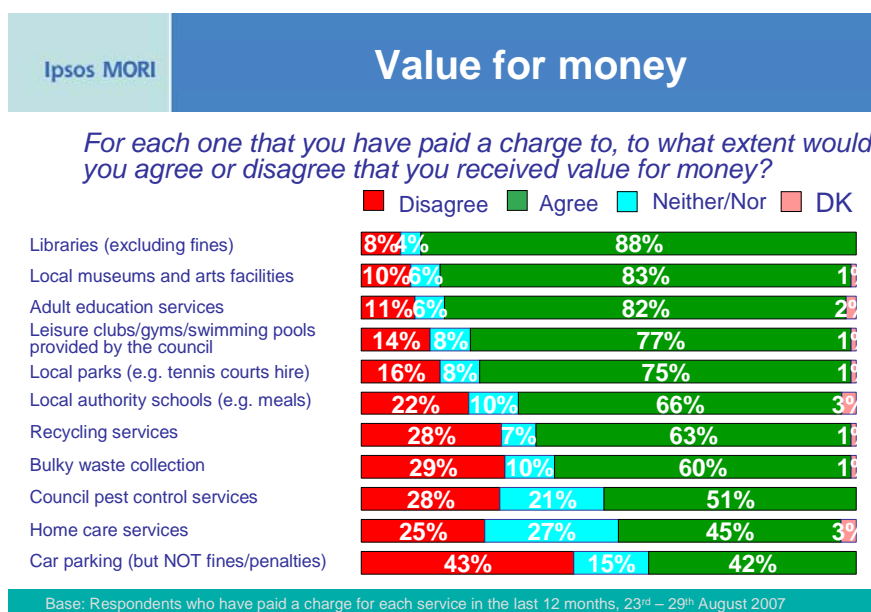
Within the group discussion, service specific charges appeared, anecdotally at least, to provoke a consumer-focused and utilitarian approach to local services. Several participants, for example, were happy to pay them *so long as* the charge provided for maintenance and/or improvement of the service. In contrast, charges appear far more contentious when personal benefits are more difficult to identify or perceived to be absent:

“I think people are getting more educated and have expectations from services, whether they be public or private, they don’t care, as long as what they put their money in, you expect to get that much back”

Male, London Group

This suggests that perceptions of value for money of each of the charges will play a key role in influencing their acceptability. Here, the quantitative data provides some useful data. In general, perceived value for money among those services subject to charges is in fact high. This is particularly true of library services and museums - 88% and 83%, respectively, of those who have paid a charge for these services believe they received value for money. It is also true, among strong majorities, for adult education (82%), leisure (77%) and local parks (75%).

Given this, it is somewhat unfortunate that the service through which most residents will have experienced a charge – parking – is one which naturally experiences a lower value for money rating (42%). Based on the findings from the groups it appears this says more about perceptions specifically in relation to parking charges than it does about charges in general.



Conditions for charging

The group discussions made clear that attitudes towards charges are subject to a number of caveats and conditions, three of which stand out in particular.

(i) Transparency & confidence

The research finds that there is a degree of scepticism about charging because of a widespread presumption among residents that council tax will always continue to rise. In this context, charges are more likely to be considered an *extra* rather than an *alternative* means of raising revenue.

(ii) The context

Support or opposition to charging was very context specific and varied considerably across different services, driven to a degree by what participants were accustomed to already. So, on the one hand, participants were comfortable paying a charge for services such as leisure, libraries and museums. In fact, this appears so normalised that it would be almost be strange for them to conceptualise such services as free. Furthermore, even on some issues where we might expect a negative reaction, such as parking charges, concern here focused on the *level* of the charge rather than the principle of charging itself (which was seemingly accepted by all). Sometimes support or opposition was also based on relative, rather than absolute, price:

“I went yesterday to buy a car and for only £,100 a year, you get a resident’s parking bay, brilliant”

Male, London Group

On other issues, however, charges proved much more contentious. For example, waste charges split the groups. While some were opposed to the principle of variable charges for waste, more were more preoccupied with potential for

negative and unintended side effects, for example an increase in fly tipping and “free riders” abusing the system.

Who wants to look at somebody’s old rubbish that they’ve left in the front garden because they’re not prepared to pay £21”

Female, South Central Group

Another contentious area was charges for parks, raised as a hypothetical example to promote discussion. As charging for entrance is not common place, participants struggled to grapple with how or why a charge would be levied. Participants in the north east were generally most favourable towards charges on the grounds it would improve the security and upkeep of the park, whereas other groups were staunchly opposed to this particular proposition.

“But it’s a public park!”

Female, London Group

“If there was a charge then there would be someone there – the park would be looked after. You wouldn’t go in and pick up drug needles.”

Female, North East Group

(iii) Cross subsidisation

Participants were generally keen to see their money reinvested at the point of charge (e.g. at a specific gym or library), both because they stood to gain more personal utility from greater investment in a service/facility they use and value, and partly because the charge – and its management - would then be very transparent.

Most were, however, willing to allow some limited cross subsidisation, for example money from the gym being used to pay for another gym of poorer quality, or library services. However, they tended not to support monies going further into different areas. Only a few approved of revenues from leisure supporting, say, social services as one hypothetical example.

“It should all be ploughed back in to where it’s paid”

North of England

“The money should be spent on leisure. You pay for a service, you expect it to be re-invested in that”

Male, London Group

“If all the gyms were fine you still wouldn’t want the money going elsewhere, you’d want the prices reduced”

Female, London Group

Impact of charging on equity and behaviour

Moving on from the general principle and specific applications of charges, the groups also explored two further issues: the impact of charges on equity and behaviour change.

(i) Equity:

Most participants were comfortable with the idea of differential charging based on ability to pay, for example through a mechanism like means testing.

“It’s the poorest that need the support most and I’m happy for people who can afford it to pay more into other facilities”

Female, South Central Group

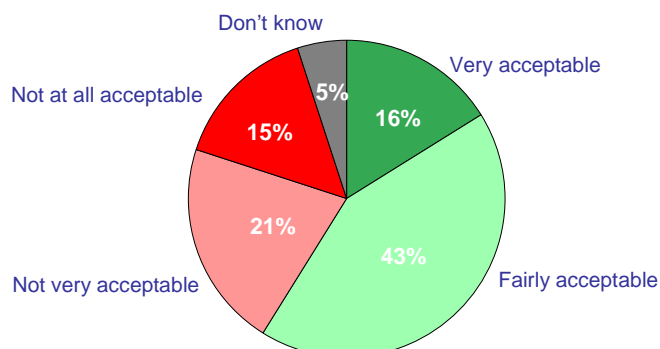
Concessions can be available on a number of different bases – including age groups, disability and income. Perhaps the only dissenting voices were amongst the South Central group with pensioners, who were very keen on discounts that applied to their age group but less sympathetic towards discounts based on income. There were also some concerns that discounts could in fact stigmatise the user, depending on how they are implemented.

The South Central group and some among the London group had real examples of discount systems in operation and made positive comments on them (although recognition, albeit from these limited samples, was only running at about one in four/five participants and awareness of the full range of discounts available was low, even amongst those who had the card).

The quantitative research supports these findings: 59% think it is acceptable to charge people different amounts – based on their ability to pay – in order to ensure everyone has equal access to local services. However, a significant minority -36% - do not think this is acceptable. There are also some notable variations across the public. Those in social class AB, for example, are more likely to find differential charging acceptable than those in social class DE (63% vs. 56%). Furthermore, acceptability is significantly higher – reaching 70% - among those who think they get value for money from the council and also among those who have experience of paying for two or more council services (63%).

Ipsos MORI **Equity and charging**

Q To what extent do you think it is acceptable or unacceptable for councils to charge people different amounts – based on their ability to pay – in order to ensure everyone has equal access to local services?

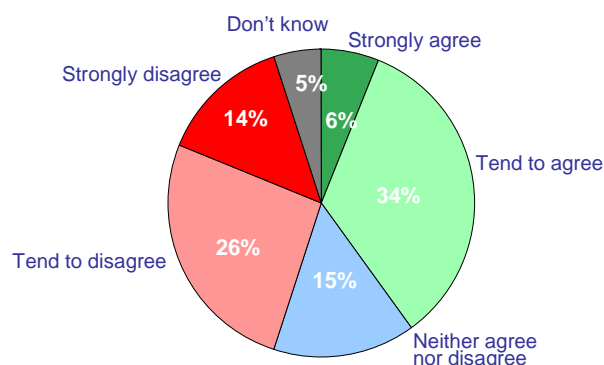


Base: All respondents aged 18+ (1,941), fieldwork dates 23rd – 29th August 2007

However, the public is firmly split when it comes to the subject of variations in service charges from one area to another. Here, 40% believe it is reasonable for other councils to charge different amounts for the same service, and exactly the same proportion (40%) disagrees. The issue of so-called “postcode lotteries”, and the impact this has on attitudes to charging, therefore needs further exploration. Those aged between 35-44 are more likely to agree (46%) than those aged between 18-24 (33%), and the same is true with social class AB respondents (56%) compared with DE respondents (27%). There is no variation according to experience of paying for council services.

Ipsos MORI **Same services: different charges?**

Q To what extent do you agree or disagree that it is reasonable for other councils to charge different amounts for the same type of service?



Base: All respondents aged 18+ (1,941), fieldwork dates 23rd – 29th August 2007

(ii) Behaviour change

The group discussions showed charges already have an impact on behaviour, for example in terms of the trade off between driving and public transport, primarily because of the parking charges.

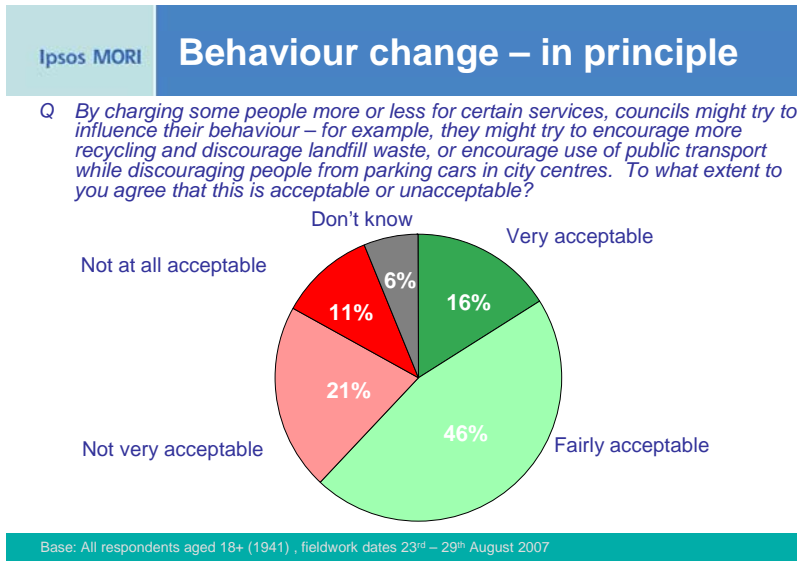
“And if we go to the cinema, coming out late at night we usually catch the bus”

“It’s cheaper”

“Definitely”

Females, South Central Group

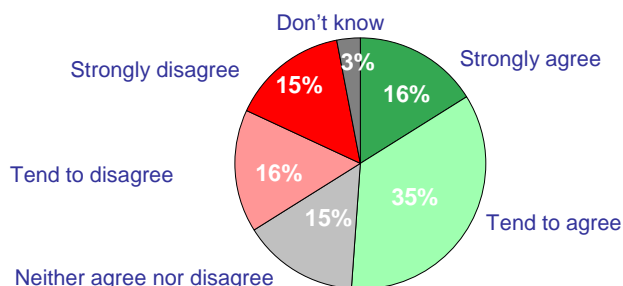
Furthermore, the explicit use of charges to discourage ‘bad’ things and encourage ‘good’ alternatives was widely supported – *in principle* – in both the groups and the quantitative survey. Indeed, 62% agree that this is acceptable, compared to 32% who disagree. AB respondents are more likely to agree (71%) than those in social class DE (55%).



However, this is another issue where overall, in principle support does not necessarily feed through smoothly into practice as one might expect. This is supported, to an extent, by the quantitative research where a follow up question was asked using the specific example of variable waste charges. The survey shows that the proportion who believes that such a charge would influence behaviour in their own household falls from 62% who back behaviour change charges in general to 51% in this specific case. This may also be influenced by people’s perceptions of whether their own behaviour already complies with the desired effect.

Ipsos MORI **Behaviour change – an example**

Q I would like to provide you with a specific example. There are broad proposals for the councils to charge less council tax to individual households, but to then charge for services such as household waste collection – based on how much is thrown away. This would have the effect of making people think more about recycling and reduce the amount they throw away, thus helping to improve the environment. To what extent do you agree or disagree that this approach would work for your household?



Base: All respondents aged 18+ (1941), fieldwork dates 23rd – 29th August 2007

Furthermore, the groups showed that even achieving agreement on what constitutes a ‘good’ behaviour change objective is not easy. In the London group for example, participants all welcomed subsidies for activities for young people, but reacted negatively to the London scheme of free bus travel for under 16s.

“The buses with the kids now, they just run riot and hassle regular commuters. Maybe just give them a school bus, much easier”

Male, London Group

It was also clear that certain issues - such as the London Congestion Charge - already come loaded with baggage, which may explain why in principle support can very quickly turn into comments about “stealth taxation”, which hitherto had not been raised at all. It was also evident that the public can hold very different perspectives on closely related issues - some participants, for example, were opposed to taxes on congestion but supported taxes on 4x4s in the city.

“To be able to get down Belgrave Road and drop your kids off, you don’t need a 4x4 with an exhaust designed for driving through rivers”

[Same respondent, of the congestion charge] *That’s just a stealth tax*

Male, London Group

Findings from the business group

This final section of the report focuses on the single discussion group held with proprietors of micro sized businesses. It provides an important indication of the views and perspectives of this group (although the results should be treated as indicative given the limited amount of research with this group of stakeholders).

In contrast to discussions among residents, the group was not able – even after prompting – to identify benefits or services they felt they received in return for paying their business rates:

“It’s like pouring money down a rat hole. I can’t think of any positive benefits we get from the council. As a resident I get my bins collected, [as a business] we don’t even have that”

Micro business group

“I have a negative view of the council. When I look out of my shop front first thing in the morning I think why are the streets not clean? On the continent the first thing you’ll see is someone sweeping the streets walking past. So you think – what am I paying my money for?”

Micro business group

“I’d love to be able to say something positive but I really can’t because there isn’t anything.”

Micro business group

“The thing is, you’re paying nearly £350 a month and they won’t even pick up your cardboard”

Micro business group

Although not able to say where they thought the money *was* being spent, the group were more than able to suggest how the money *should* be spent, pointing to the local environment, anti-social behaviour, parking and business development/support:

“They should be helping businesses, helping them to build their business”

Micro business group

“Now if you look at the town centre, that’s been done up quite nicely in terms of block paving and all the rest of it. It’s a nice shopping environment and that needs to be rolled out in other places”

Micro business group

The perceived disconnect between the level of business rates and services received led to a perceived lack of transparency in how revenues are allocated and spent locally. While there are parallels here with residents in terms of council tax, it appeared even more acute among businesses:

“Where does it [the money] go? I think it’s like all Government taxes, it goes where they want it to go?”

Micro business group

“That road tax licence, it’s supposed to go to fund roads but I very much doubt if all or even part of it is used that way. And I think it’s the same with business rates, I don’t think it has much association with business”

Micro business group

The group were also suspicious about general council spending practices, citing a concern that repeated road works towards the end of the financial year were actually a sign that the local authority was spending money solely to justify next year’s budget. There were some (albeit flippant) jokes about bad financial management.

“What does that mean, other operating cash payments?”

Bonuses, that would be.”

Micro business group

Furthermore, even when presented with the council’s official booklet outlining income and outgoings the group still had many questions and were less placated by the information than residents:

“Correct me if I’m wrong but they operate a strange system where they say ‘we’ve allocated you £100 million and you’ve only spent £95 million, so therefore next year we’re going to cut it. So it looks to me, being a cynical person, that they run round trying to spend this money”

Micro business group

“What does that mean ‘other operating cash payments’?”

“Bonuses, that would be!”

“It hides a multitude of sins, it really does”

“For cash payments that’s a lot. My accountant would have a field day if I said to him: you know what? About two thirds of whatever I do is cash payments going out”

Micro business group

All of this fed in negatively to discussions about charging, and initial reactions were consequently that this amounted to being charged ‘extra’ or ‘twice’:

[In response to idea of graffiti cleaning charges] *“I bet if you looked in our council tax there’ll be graffiti cleaning in that. So you’re double paying here”*

Micro business group

[In response to four examples of specific charges] *“Hey, now they have four opportunities to increase the prices rather than one [i.e. business rates]!”*

Micro business group

However, the factor underpinning negativity towards service-specific charges appeared less to do with the principle and more, again, with the issue of trust and the lack of a clear link between monies paid and services received. Indeed, the group by and large agreed that value for money was their key concern, and some participants intimated that the amount they were charged was less of an issue than the quality of services received. On this basis, attitudes to charging softened and even became more supportive:

“I’ve got a little understanding of taxation systems like, say, Scandinavian countries, and they pay through the nose but nobody seems to complain because they know what they’re getting for their money”

Micro business group

“If you actually had proof of what it’s being spent on and you felt that you got your money’s worth you would pay”

Micro business group

“We’d still bellyache but at least you could actually see it, because in this discussion we’ve had I haven’t heard one person who actually said ‘well, that’s a perceivable benefit from paying our rates’”

Micro business group

“Because of our mistrust of the council, I prefer to pay a relatively small business rate and then know I have to pay for my recycling and parking. Rather than the council lump it together, give us a service”

Micro business group

“If a greater proportion of our tax went on, say, flood defences then it’s transparent. You can see a big wall.”

Micro business group

Indeed, as the discussion progressed the group very quickly began to develop conditions of acceptability for charges. For example, some charges were considered acceptable whereas others were not, depending on whether the service applies universally to all businesses (e.g. recycling cardboard vs. collecting a specific trade waste) or, interestingly from a behaviour change perspective, whether it is a social good and something that should therefore be promoted:

“You shouldn’t have to pay for recycling, you should pay for trade waste because that’s another thing, but not recycling”

Micro business group

“Graffiti, I know it’s a problem but I can understand them charging for that”

Micro business group

“Once we had a lot of graffiti on the shutters and they wanted to charge us 50, nearly 60 quid to clean it. So we got it done but two days later there was more graffiti on there. So what, you’re going to pay 60 quid every month?”

Micro business group

“I’m thinking that general waste should be for everybody but if it’s a specific, or potentially hazardous, waste requirement then I think that maybe ought to be on top.”

“Yeab because also when you go into business you know that. It’s going to be in your business plan.”

Micro business group

On the subject of business rates themselves and how these are calculated and administered, the group reacted relatively positively to the idea of locally set rates as they believed that this would increase the accountability of their council, a point which has already been raised as important (above). However, it was also evident they worried that they would pay more than other areas given the affluence of the area and the relative strength of the local economy.

Furthermore, they were preoccupied with the fairness of the charge re large companies and indeed were resentful at what they perceived as preferential treatment for larger companies like Tesco.

Licensing services were also discussed in broadly negative terms. While there was some cautious praise for some of the training provided by the council, there was also considerable resentment about trading standards enforcement activity. There was a perception that the money they paid as small businesses in licensing fees was used in turn to target them for enforcement activity, while big businesses were perceived to be getting off lightly because it was unfairly assumed that bigger businesses would have more stringent systems in place. In addition, one participant complained of repeated clerical errors on forms and certificates issued by the council - particularly annoying when the service is being charged for.

Clearly the views of this one sample of small business owners in one particular area were negative, both about their local council and what it does and, moreover doesn’t, do for them. It would be interesting to compare this with a group of proprietors of medium or large sized enterprises in the same district, to see to what extent dissatisfaction was shaped by their particular council, or their experience of running small businesses in general. This area could benefit from further research and/or supporting evidence from other sources.

Concluding remarks

The research demonstrates that the public are broadly content with the principle of charging for local services. Moreover, they consider that service charges potentially offer several advantages, two of which stand out in particular:

- First, in assessing “value for money” residents consider that service specific charges can provide a much stronger link than taxation between what they pay to the council on the one hand, and what they receive on the other.
- Second, charges can contribute to greater accountability in relation to council finances;

This support for service specific charges nonetheless comes with a number of conditions and caveats attached, as follows:

- Receptivity to charging varies, according to both the context and the service in question. So, for example, charging for some services is considered “the norm”; for others the debate is more polarised. It is important, therefore, to recognise that reactions to one service specific charge *cannot be* taken as representative of all charges.
- Residents sometimes see charges as “paying twice” for things that they expect to be covered by council tax. The general assumption that council tax will rise year on year *ad infinitum* leads to scepticism about the possibility of charging providing an alternative means of funding services.
- Cross subsidisation across service areas is not favoured. There is a desire for charges to be re-invested as close as possible to the point of charge, on the grounds of greater accountability and greater personal utility.
- The use of charges to explicitly (rather than covertly) reinforce behavioural goals is accepted by many as a matter of principle, as is the premise that charges should be differentiated according to ability to pay. The key issue is actually how *in principle* support feeds through to support *in practice*.
- Experience is key. While a majority already have experience of charges, this has tended to be in the somewhat narrow context of parking charges (which are naturally contested). The debate therefore needs rebalancing to include those services that are considered value for money.

As an overarching comment the research provides a useful exploration of the key and emerging issues around charging. There is now, in our judgement, a need to research in more detail the conditions outlined above and the trade offs between them, as well as unpick the disconnect at times between in principle support and reactions to *actual* implementation of *specific* charges.

Appendices

Residents groups discussion Guide

Description	Comments	Time (mins)
<p>Introduction</p> <p>Moderator(s)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Thank participants for attending; outline the 2 hour discussion; explain that it is tape recorded but comments are not attributed to any individuals; emphasise there are no right or wrong answers; and opinions can/may change as we begin to discuss in more detail. ▪ Introduce the Audit Commission and explain that this is an independent body that assesses local authority performance and the value for money that residents get from their local council services. Explain that the AC - not the local council - has commissioned the work ▪ Inform participants that the purpose of the group is to discuss two things: the services that the council provides <i>and</i> the way in which money is raised to pay for these services. On the latter, mention in broad terms council tax as one option and service specific charges as another. Do not go into any more detail at this stage. Very important to state this discussion is <u>not about</u> fines and penalties (speeding, parking fines) - these are excluded from the discussion. <p>Participants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Participants to introduce themselves and give some background (e.g. name, where they live, length of time living in the area). Go round the group and ask them to say one interesting fact about themselves. 	<p>If they talk about their prior knowledge of the AC, allow brief probe on this.</p> <p>Priority is to get them speaking</p>	<p>5</p>
<p>1. General Attitudes towards Council and Service Use</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ General opening comments about the local council. Stick to 'top of mind' responses, using rapid word associations going around everyone in the group. Focus in and explore some views in a little more depth, inviting wider discussion. ▪ Establish what the council are perceived to do well and what they are perceived to do badly. Explore underlying factors e.g. direct experience of good/poor services, direct contact with council representatives, communications and media, trust/cynicism. ▪ Probe, briefly, any experiences from other councils and how they compare in terms of strengths/weaknesses. Is this based on their own experience, or what they read or 	<p>Allow some general discussion early on about the council to facilitate discussion but keep this limited and make the segue to views about service provision and which they use and don't use. <u>Do not</u> go into</p>	<p>20</p>

<p>listen to from the media, friends etc?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Undertake a summary exercise now about which services they use, writing these down. Prompt, if not already raised, on: libraries/arts, parks, schools, refuse collection, recycling services, bulky waste collection, street cleaning, home/social care services, leisure facilities, local events, parking (including car parks, on-street, residents parking permits), pest control, council housing. ▪ Probe on attitudes to each of these and whether the services are perceived differently, e.g. on the grounds of essential vs. optional, basic vs. quality, entitlement vs. active choice. Do they perceive all of them as services, e.g. do they think parking is a service? 	<p>council tax or funding issues yet, park any discussion on this issue for later</p> <p>Be aware of any confusion over which services are provided by the council and which are privately provided, or provided by health services</p>	
<p>2. Value for money</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Begin now to make the link between service provision and money. In relation to the services they have just mentioned, do they think they are being given “value for money” ▪ Why? Why not? What is good or bad about these services – PROBE for efficiency/attitude of staff, regularity, reliability, cleanliness, quality etc. On quality, can they see the link between the money they pay and the service they get? ▪ Any experience of any of these services being delivered better in the private sector (e.g. gyms, social care services, parking). Do respondents make the comparison/do they think it is a fair one? ▪ Suggestions of how the money could be better spent – is there too much emphasis on some services and not enough on others? And are some residents perceived to be missing out? How do participants prioritise services – which would they spend more/less on? 	<p>Discussion moves to thinking about spending with the understanding that the council's budget is finite. Avoid spillage into the next sections of the discussion – will require tight reign on discussion.</p>	<p>10</p>
<p>3. Current levels of tax and charging</p> <p>(a) Intro and council tax</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Return to and recap the idea initially touched upon in the introduction that there are different ways for councils to raise money to pay for services. Explain that we want to explore two: council tax and charging for specific services and how these work together. ▪ First, ask about general views towards council tax – perceptions on whether they pay a lot; more/less than in other areas; too much/little for what they receive, whether they can perceive a link between tax and quality of service? ▪ Probe on knowledge about the council tax system. Do they know what services they're paying for and why? Do they know how much is spent on various services? Do they think the process of council tax is transparent? Do they think it is fair (e.g. everyone pays the same vs. differential 	<p>Discussions about council tax form the introduction to this discussion but not the main focus – need to control discussion accordingly and move it on where necessary.</p>	<p>15 & 50</p>

<p>impact on certain groups)? Have they ever been asked to comment/take part in a local council budget consultation exercise?</p> <p>[introduce the concepts but do not dwell too much here – keep to a strict 15 minute limit – and use as a warm up to the idea of service charges and the link to council tax]</p> <p>5 MINUTE BREAK</p> <p>(b) service specific charges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Introduce again the idea of charging. Have they paid for specific council services? Which ones? ▪ Explore how they feel in principle to the idea of charges. How are these perceived - as things they are paying for twice? As things not covered by council tax? As a top up for a better quality service? Optional extras? ▪ Give some examples locally, e.g. leisure charges, bulky waste collection etc. ▪ Disclose the relative level of council taxation vs. service charges in the local authority area compared with the average and gauge reaction? ▪ Probe then on specific services and see how support/ opposition varies e.g. between leisure centre vs. parking charges. Is it ok for some services but not others? <p>BREAK INTO 3 GROUPS OF 4 – TWO QUESTIONS ON PRE-PREPARED STIMULUS MATERIAL</p> <p>(a) Confront the idea of charges as “revenue raising”. Is it a good/bad thing? What are the pros and cons?</p> <p>(b) Are there any conditions on acceptability? Which? Probe if not raised spontaneously - are there are conditions placed on charges by residents according to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hypothecation and whether they think the revenue should be spent at point of charge (e.g. leisure club charges spent at that particular centre); on the subject category (e.g. leisure club charges spent on leisure facilities in general); and whether it is acceptable to cross subsidise other services (e.g. leisure club charges spent on social care services)? Do they want to get “something back for their money”? Do they know which services are being subsidised and to what extent? - Equity – is it fair to pay according to usage? What about impact on vulnerable groups? Should charges be differentiated – for example, should non-residents pay more to swim in the local pool? What about concessions for people who can’t afford to pay, for example reduced charge or free service for people on benefits? Should services cost the same across the council area? What are reactions to variations between different councils, e.g. so called “Postcode lotteries”. - Accountability and traceability – would they want more 	<p>Social care charges are likely to provoke different reactions to other services – avoid getting stuck on this issue</p> <p>Subsidy generally exists through council tax/RSG</p> <p>Need to be very clear about the differences between taxes and charges</p>	
--	---	--

<p>information on this and how?</p> <p>FEEDBACK TO THE GROUP, THEN CONTINUE WITH DISCUSSION ON THE FOLLOWING AREAS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Introduce idea of charges being used for behaviour change [Rather than a flat rate tax] charging for some activities more or less depending on whether they are considered a 'good' or 'bad' thing? Is this acceptable in principle? Discuss then in the context of specific examples, e.g. pay as you throw waste charges? And parking charges? A congestion charge? Subsidies for leisure facilities to encourage healthier lifestyles? ▪ What do they think the impact of charges would be on service use? Would it impact positively or negatively on their own use? People in general? Are there any examples where higher charges could increase usage, e.g. leisure facilities is linked to improvements? 		
<p>4. Summarising attitudes to charging</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Present a summary of section 3 back to participants and gauge reactions – how much do views compare/differ across the group? Do they have any fresh views following the course of the discussion? Have their top of mind reactions changed at all given the detailed discussion? ▪ Break into groups one last time – based on what they've heard, final views on charges and how they should operate alongside council tax. Should their local council have a different balance between the two? 		15
<p>5. Thank and close</p> <p>Where will findings be published and how will they be used, thanks for coming, hand out incentives.</p>		5

Audit Commission – Charging for Local Services

Topline Data

- Ipsos MORI interviewed 1941 adults aged 18+ across Great Britain
- Interviews were conducted face-to-face between 23rd – 29th August 2007
- Data are weighted to match the known profile of the population.
- The base for all questions is 1941 British adults unless stated otherwise
- Where percentages do not sum to 100, this may be due to computer rounding, the exclusion of “don’t know” categories, or multiple answers
- Throughout the volume, an asterisk (*) denotes any value of less than half a per cent.

Q1. Which of the following have you paid a charge for in the past year or so?

	%
Libraries (excluding fines)	10
Local parks (e.g. tennis courts hire)	6
Adult education services	7
Local authority schools (e.g. meals)	10
Recycling Services	5
Home care services	2
Leisure clubs/gyms/swimming pools provided by the council	32
Local museums and arts facilities	10
Council Pest Control Services	3
Car parking (but NOT fines/penalties)	50
Bulky waste collection	9
None/DK	31

()

Q2. For each one that you have paid a charge for, to what extent would you agree or disagree that you received value for money?

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	
	%	%	%	%	%	%	
Libraries (excluding fines)	51	37	4	4	4	-	(191)
Local parks (e.g. tennis courts hire)	16	59	8	11	5	1	(59)
Adult education services	31	50	6	9	2	2	(126)
Local authority schools (e.g. meals)	21	44	10	16	5	3	(193)
Recycling Services	23	40	7	17	11	1	(99)
Home care services	22	24	27	10	15	3	(42)
Leisure clubs/gyms/swimming pools provided by the council	21	56	8	11	3	1	(625)
Local museums and arts facilities	34	48	6	9	1	1	(189)
Council Pest Control Services	23	28	21	14	14	-	(49)
Car parking (but NOT fines/penalties)	9	33	15	23	20	*	(972)
Bulky waste collection	18	42	10	16	13	1	(166)

Q3. **To what extent do you think it is acceptable or unacceptable for councils to charge people different amounts - based on their ability to pay - in order to ensure everyone has equal access to local services?**

	%
Very acceptable	16
Fairly acceptable	43
Not very acceptable	21
Not at all acceptable	15
DK	5

()

Q4. **By charging some people more or less for certain services, councils might try to influence their behaviour – for example, they might try to encourage more recycling and discourage landfill waste, or encourage use of public transport while discouraging people from parking cars in city centres. To what extent do you agree that this is acceptable or unacceptable?**

	%
Very acceptable	16
Fairly acceptable	46
Not very acceptable	21
Not at all acceptable	11
DK	6

()

Q5. **I would like to provide you with a specific example. There are broad proposals for the councils to charge less council tax to individual households, but to then charge for services such as household waste collection – based on how much is thrown away *This would have the effect of making people think more about recycling and reduce the amount they throw away, thus helping to improve the environment.* To what extent do you agree or disagree that this approach would work for your household?**

	%
Strongly agree	16
Tend to agree	35
Neither agree nor disagree	15
Tend to disagree	16
Strongly disagree	15
Don't know	3

()

Q6. **To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements...**

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion	
	%	%	%	%	%	%	
I understand the way the council raises money	15	45	14	18	7	2	()
The council provides good value for money	4	33	22	26	11	3	()
Information on how the council raises and spends money is available if people want it	17	43	15	12	4	9	()
The information provided on how the council raises and spends money is useful	9	43	24	13	3	8	()
I think that it is reasonable for other councils to charge different amounts for the same type of service.	6	34	15	26	14	5	()