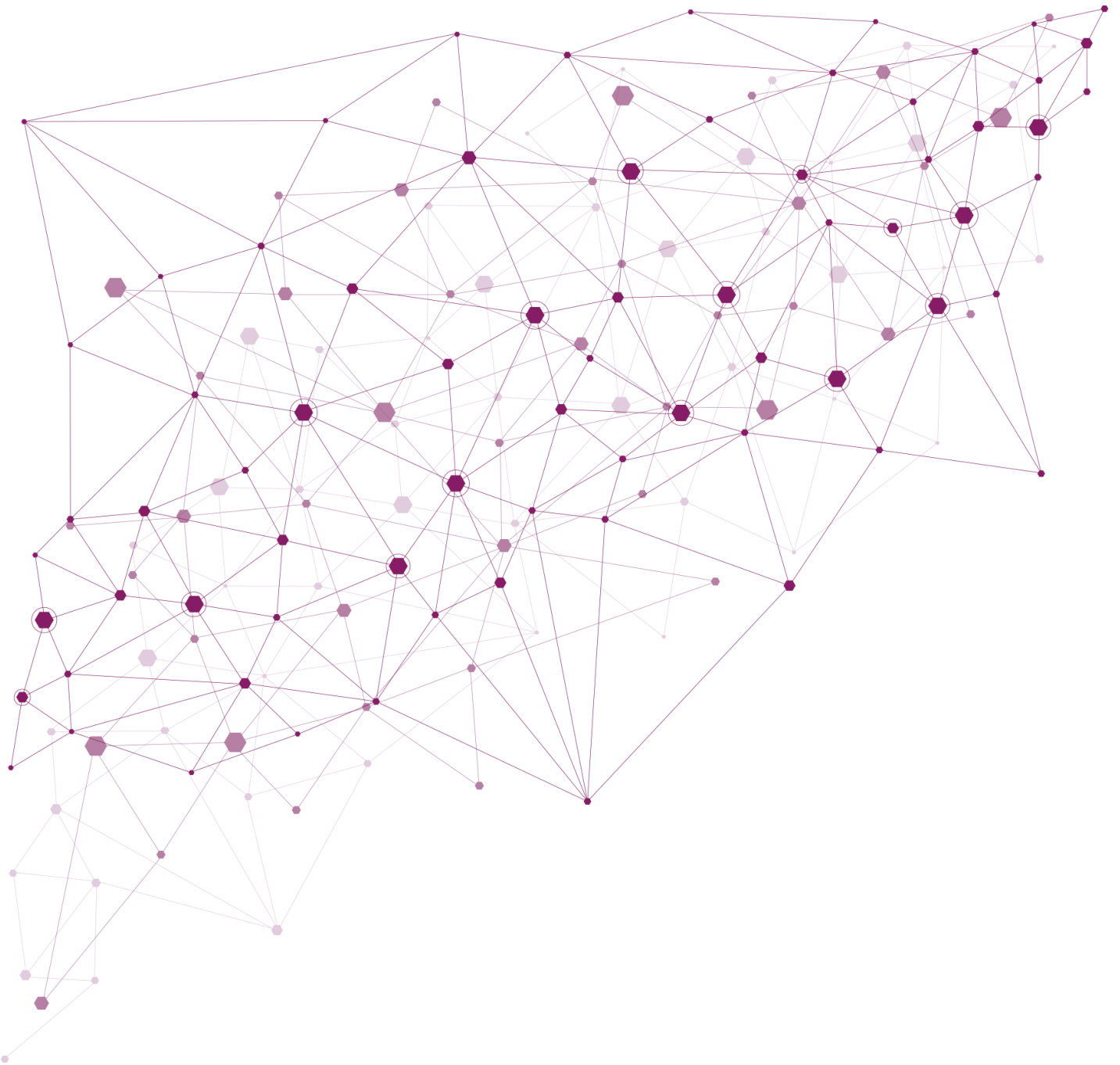


# Blackpool Efficiency Plan

Exploring Resident and Employee Views



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*This exercise was undertaken in accordance with the Market Research Society's Code of Conduct and UK Data Protection Law*

## 1. Executive Summary

Between 18 October and 13 November 2016, **539 people completed a public survey** on Blackpool Council's efficiency plan for making savings and increasing income.

There are **relatively high levels of agreement for the Council's seven efficiency workstreams**, ranging from 86% agreeing with a focus on how the Council negotiates contracts to 69% agreeing with a focus on how people access Council services.

The survey included opportunities to comment and make suggestions on each efficiency workstream. The feedback received through these comments is summarised in the table below.

**Figure 1.1: Agreement levels and main comments for each efficiency workstream (ranked by highest level of agreement)**

Efficiency workstream	% who strongly agree or agree	Main comments and suggestions received
How the Council negotiates contracts	86%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Processes and systems should be in place to hold contracts and commissions to account</li> <li>Quality should be considered when assessing value-for-money from contracts (cheapest not always best)</li> <li>General comments about the Council putting more focus on procurement</li> </ul>
How the Council manages its money	85%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Specific suggestions for savings and income generation</li> <li>Communication and transparency of the Council's finances</li> <li>Salaries, expenses and terms and conditions for Council employees and councillors</li> </ul>
How the Council generates income	83%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Various ideas for fees and charges for Council services</li> <li>Other income ideas, like funding bids and selling buildings/ land</li> <li>Importance of attracting investment to the area</li> </ul>
How the Council delivers its services	81%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A range of specific suggestions about the way services are delivered, including the prioritisation of statutory services</li> <li>Services need to be sufficiently staffed and they should receive the necessary training and support to deliver a good service</li> <li>Communication is important, particularly about changes to service offers and the way they are delivered</li> </ul>
How the Council works with partners and companies	80%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wide ranging comments about partnership opportunities</li> <li>The value of communication between partners and companies, as well as communicating the benefits to the public</li> <li>General positive comments about a partnership approach in the area</li> </ul>
Preventative measures to reduce demand	72%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Specific preventative suggestions for Council services, including recycling / waste and early intervention in social care</li> <li>Providing support and information to encourage service users to help themselves</li> <li>Focusing on investment in this area to realise outcomes</li> </ul>
How people access Council services	69%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relatively strong support for channel shift and improved access to online services</li> <li>Comments though about ensuring those without access to the internet are considered</li> <li>Some negative feedback on current access to services, such as call waiting times and difficulties finding the right service</li> </ul>

## 2. Background and Methodology

### Background

Blackpool Council's Executive has identified seven efficiency workstreams through its Medium Term Financial Sustainable Strategy (MTFSS) which it hopes will help the Council to balance its budget and specifically inform the development of proposals for making savings and increasing income.

The seven efficiency workstreams within the MTFSS are:

- i) Technical savings, including debt and PFI restructuring and a review of reserves and provisions
- ii) Income generation and management
- iii) Procurement and commissioning to maximise best value from the market place
- iv) Demand management and self-help initiatives
- v) Transformational efficiency measures
- vi) Structural reform, including how the council works with its partners and companies
- vii) Service reductions and cuts

To ensure that these are the right efficiency workstreams for Blackpool, a programme of early engagement was undertaken to gather the views of residents, employees and a range of stakeholders in the town.

Infusion, the Council's in-house market research service, was commissioned to deliver a public feedback exercise in the form of an open-access survey. Targeted engagement with stakeholders and third sector organisations was undertaken by other officers at the Council and is therefore not included within this report.

### Methodology

A short public survey on the Council's efficiency plan was available to complete from 18 October to 13 November 2016. The seven workstreams were simplified to make it easier for residents and other respondents to understand the language and focus, with broad examples provided in the introduction to the survey.

An online survey was hosted on the Council's website and promoted via social media on both Facebook and Twitter and an article in the residents' Your Blackpool e-newsletter. The online survey was also promoted internally to encourage Council employees to have their say.

Moreover, paper copies were available in every library and children's centre in the borough to raise awareness of the survey and to enable access for those residents who do not use the internet.

Additionally, to ensure a proactive approach during the survey period a series of face-to-face street interviews were undertaken in Blackpool town centre with local residents.

In total, **539 responses were received** to the efficiency plan survey. This consists of 313 online responses, 23 paper returns and 203 street interviews.

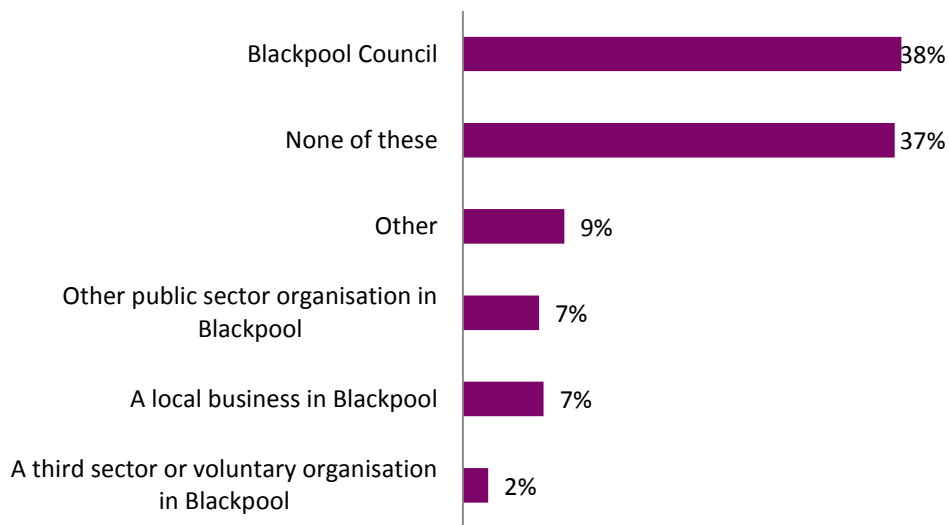
It is important to note that as this was an open-access survey which encouraged anyone to have their say, it should not be considered a representative piece of research. The findings are likely to be influenced by factors including self-selection bias and over or under representation amongst some demographic categories. However, the primary purpose of this exercise was to offer an open opportunity to comment and feedback on the efficiency plan to inform the next stages of the budget setting process.

## About the people who responded

As employees of Blackpool Council were actively encouraged to have their say on the efficiency plan, this survey captured the respondent's employment status within the town.

Of the 500 respondents who answered the question, 38% are employed by Blackpool Council whilst 16% are either employed by another public sector organisation, local business or third sector organisation in Blackpool. 37% indicated 'none of these'. Of the 'other' respondents, the majority are either retired, volunteer in the town or do not work for a variety of reasons.

**Figure 2.1: Are you an employee of...? (base – 500)**

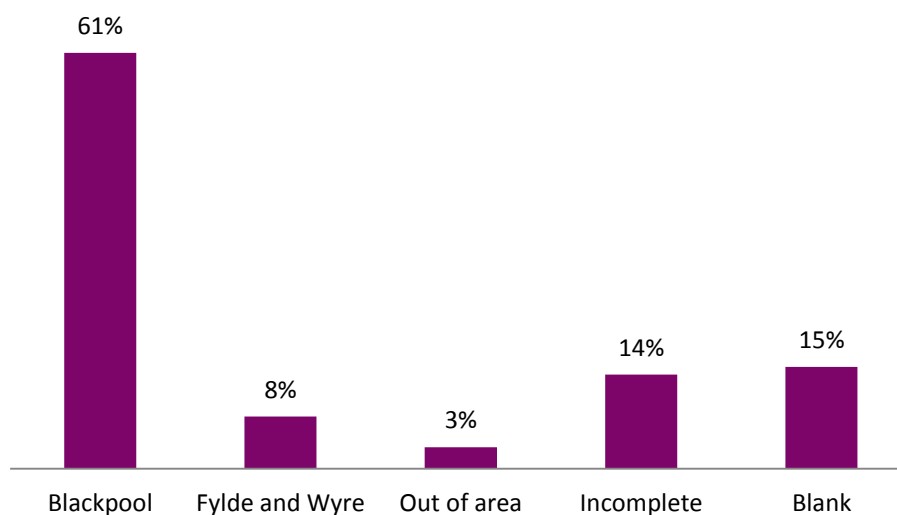


Three in five (61%) respondents to the survey provided a full Blackpool unitary authority postcode. Moreover, 14% of survey completions included a partial FY postcode.

The majority of Fylde and Wyre (28 of 40 submissions) and out of area (15 of 17 submissions) postcodes came from respondents who are employed by Blackpool Council.

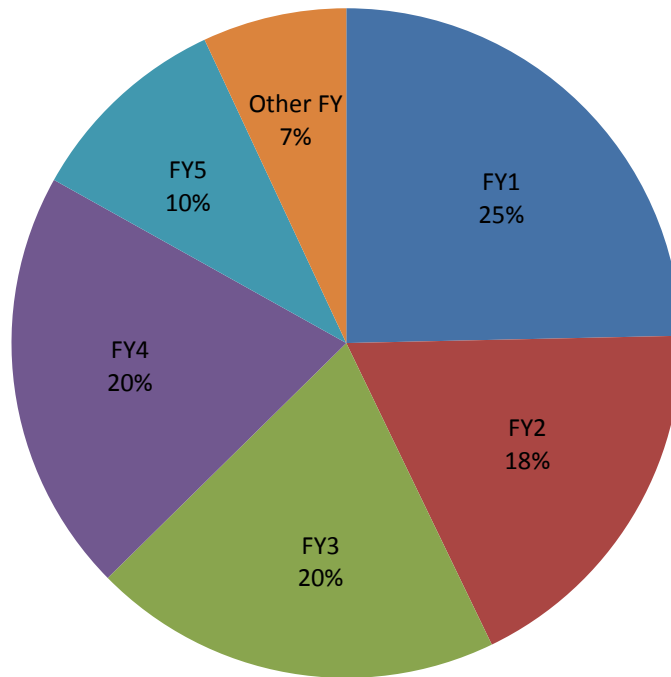
15% of respondents did not provide a postcode.

**Figure 2.2: What is your home postcode? (base – 539)**



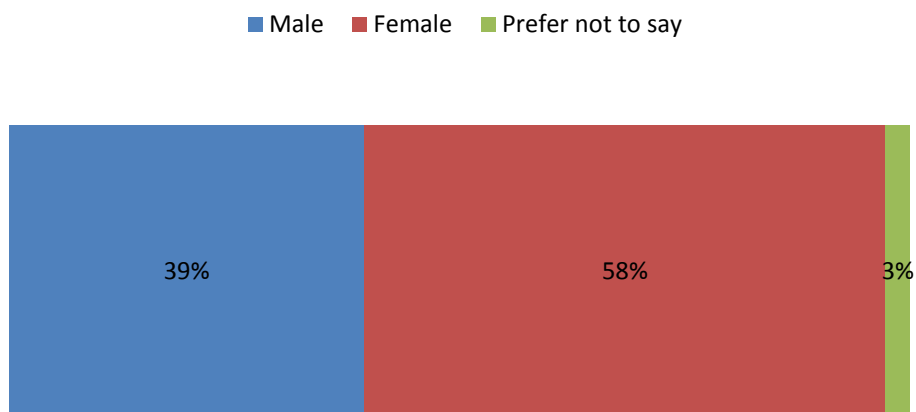
One in four of the FY postcode responses fall in the FY1 area of Blackpool. There is a fairly even split of postcodes across FY2, FY3 and FY4.

**Figure 2.3: Breakdown of FY postcodes submitted (base – 432)**



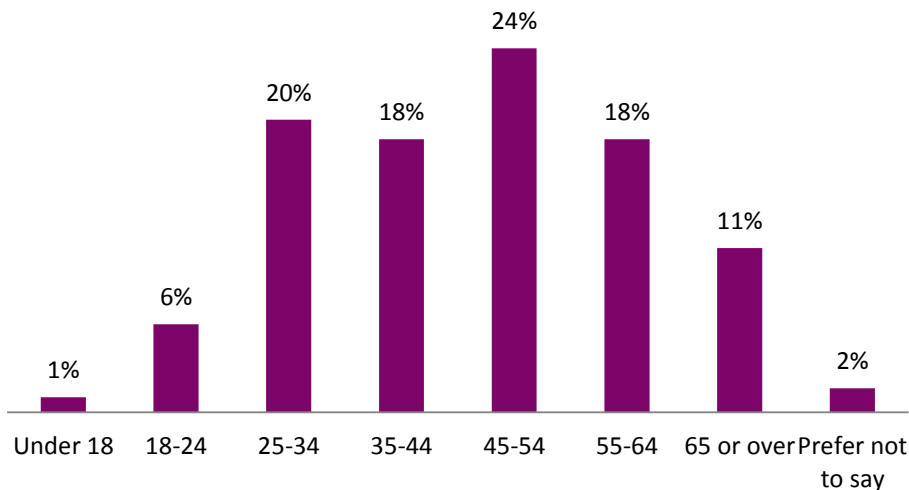
More women than men completed the survey, with two thirds (66%) of Blackpool Council employee respondents being female.

**Figure 2.4: What is your gender? (base – 510)**



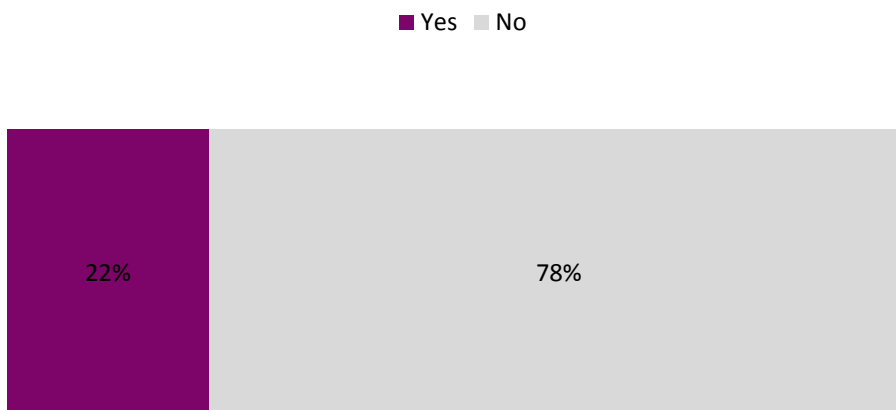
A broad range of age groups responded to the survey, although like many consultations and research projects, younger people in the borough are underrepresented. The highest level of response came from people aged 45 to 54, followed by the 25 to 34 age group.

**Figure 2.5: Of the following age groups, which do you fall into? (base – 509)**



22% of respondents have a long standing illness or disability. Of these, 71% indicated that it limits their daily activities in some way.

**Figure 2.6: Do you have a long standing illness or disability? (base – 500)**



The majority of respondents to the survey were White British or Irish (95%).

82% of respondents indicated that they are heterosexual whilst 13% preferred not to say. 4% are gay, lesbian or bisexual.

Of the 488 respondents who indicated their religion, 51% are Christian and 45% have no religion.

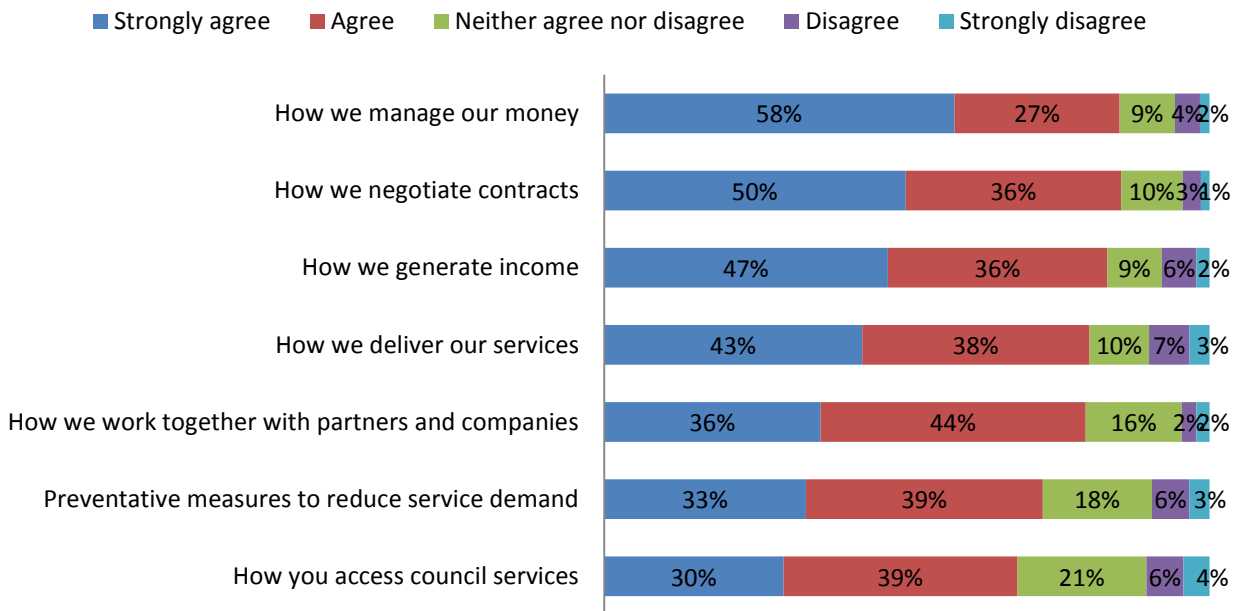
### 3. Level of agreement with efficiency workstreams

The survey asked respondents to what extent they agree or disagree that each efficiency workstream is the right area to be focusing on as the Council looks to balance its budget. For all analysis within this report the 'don't know' selections have been stripped out.

The highest level of agreement is for looking at how the Council manages its money (including debt management and reserves) and how it negotiates contracts (procurement and commissioning), with 85% strongly agreeing or agreeing with these workstreams.

Agreement, relatively speaking, is lower for the workstreams which focus on how people access council services (demand management) and preventative measures to reduce demand (transformation).

**Figure 3.1: Level of agreement with the focus of each efficiency workstream (base – 509)**

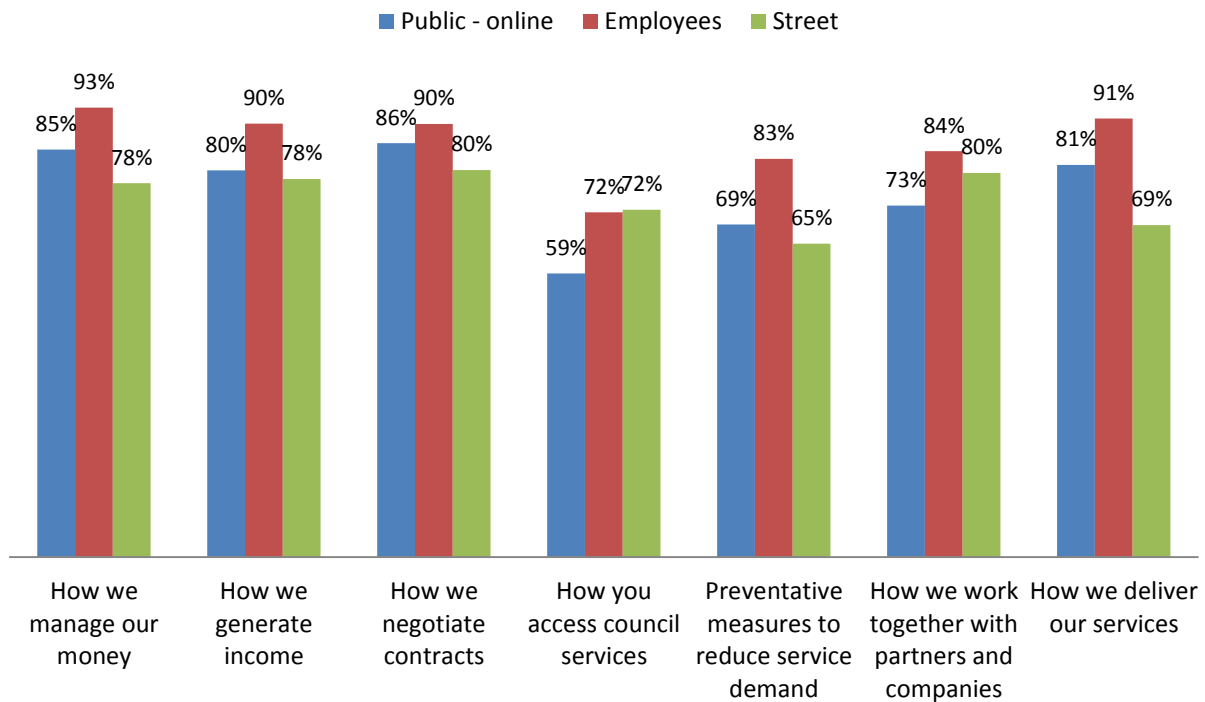




Blackpool Council employees who completed the online survey generally had a higher level of agreement with each workstream focus within the efficiency plan.

Those residents interviewed on the street generally had lower levels of agreement with the efficiency workstreams than online respondents. However, the exceptions were the focus on how people access council services and how the council works together with its partners and companies.

**Figure 3.2: % who strongly agree or agree with the efficiency workstreams by type of respondent (base – online public: 143, council employees: 180, street interviews: 190)**



Other findings of note when analysis by different demographic groups is undertaken include:

- 9 of 52 (17%) residents aged 65 or over strongly disagree or disagree that the Council should be focusing on how it manages its money, compared to 6% overall
- 89% of respondents aged 45 to 54 strongly agree or agree with the focus on how the Council generates incomes, compared to 83% overall
- 74% of women strongly agree or agree with the efficiency focus on how people access Council services, compared to 60% of men
- 67% of respondents with a long standing illness or disability strongly agree or agree with the focus on preventative measures to reduce service demand, compared to 74% of people with no long standing illness or disability

#### 4. Ideas and suggestions for each workstream

This section looks at all the qualitative comments received through the survey. The subsequent analysis is based on a coding process undertaken to identify the main types of comments and suggestions made for each question. The aim of this is to give the reader an indication of the themes emerging from the comments, but some caution should be applied, both due to the number of comments received to each question and the open-access nature of the survey. As anyone could respond there will be an element of self-selection bias and should not necessarily be considered representative of the Blackpool population.

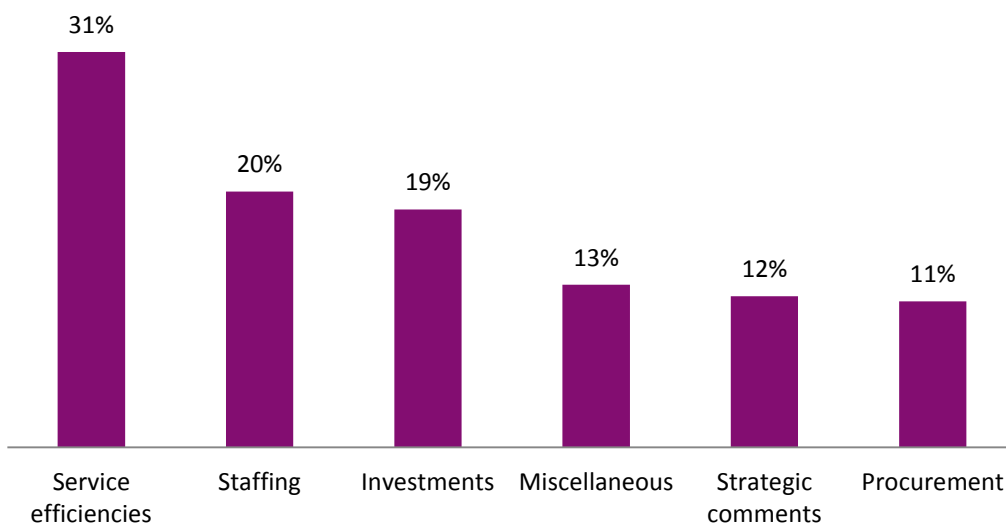
#### Other areas the Council should be looking at

After being asked to what extent they agree or disagree with each statement, respondents were given the opportunity to suggest other areas that the Council’s efficiency plan should be focusing on. Nearly a third of the comments related to specific service efficiencies at the Council. These included a focus on children’s services, tourism and waste/ recycling. One in five referred to staffing efficiencies.

A further one in five comments focused on investments in Blackpool, including Blackpool Airport, Central Drive and more deprived areas of the town. Although a few comments suggested “money isn’t spent in a cost effective manner”. 12% referred to strategic opportunities for the Council such as devolution, the Combined Authority, shared services and lobbying the Government. Comments included “Blackpool's strategic options and requirements in respect of opportunities for devolution and decentralisation” and “look at governance like the Combined Authority”.

11% reaffirmed the efficiency workstream relating to procurement. 13% of comments were on a range of topics which could not be categorised into groupings of substance. These ranged from negative remarks about Council services and the area to comments about communication and listening to residents.

**Figure 4.1: Are there any other areas you think we should be looking at? (base – 220)**



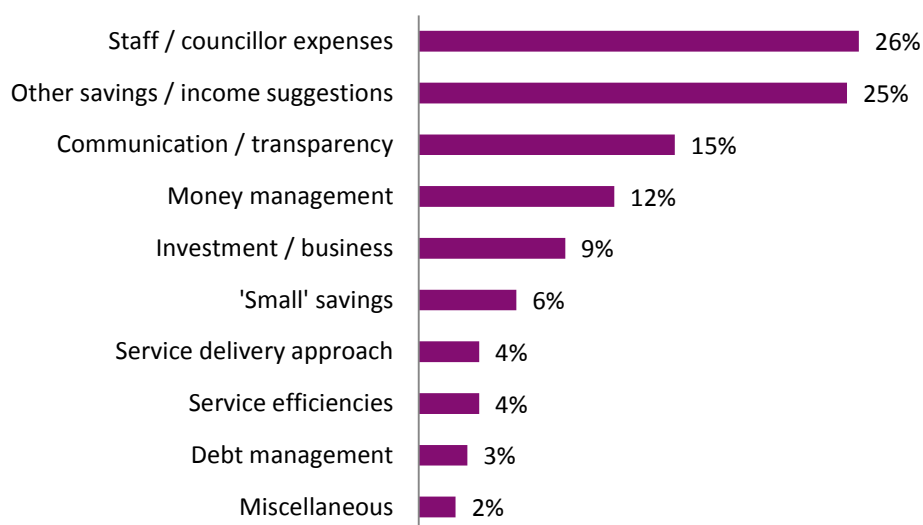
## How the Council manages its money

The most common comments made about how the Council manages its money related to either staff and councillor expenses or specific savings/ income suggestions.

15% of comments related to communication and transparency about how the Council manages its money with specific comments including “maybe more transparency and consultation groups” and “increased public scrutiny”.

There were a number of general comments about money management such as “tighter controls on what is being spent”, whilst several respondents emphasised the importance of “looking at the small savings too”.

**Figure 4.2: Coding of comments about how the Council manages its money (base – 138)**



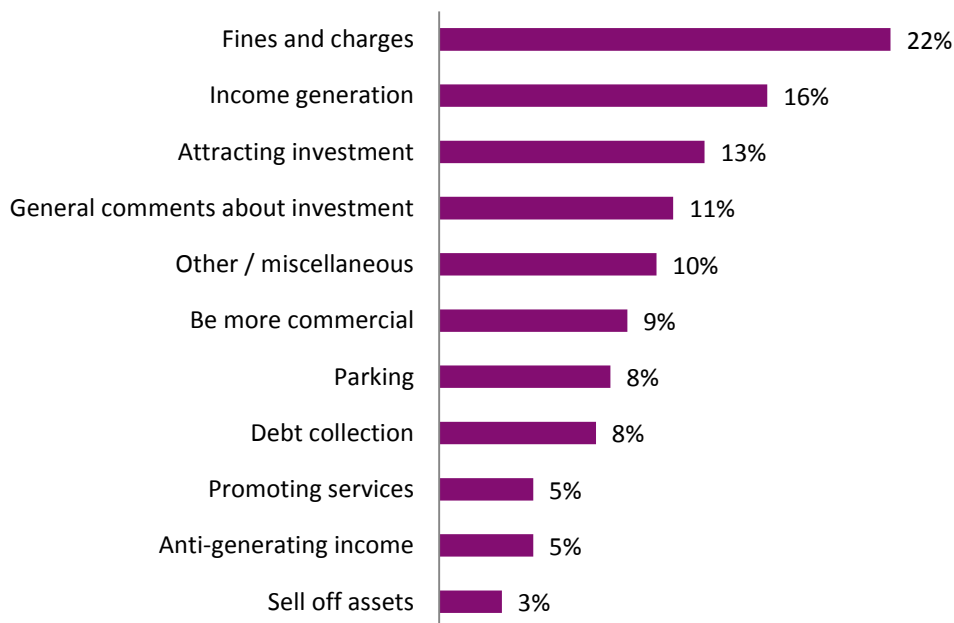
## How the Council generates income

Fines and charges were the most common suggestions when it came to how the Council generates income, with comments including “charge for services that could be seen as discretionary / ‘nice to have’” and “look at the charges already in place”.

A further theme emerging from this section was around other forms of income generation but not relating to fees and charges. Suggestions included “maximise opportunities to generate/ bid for funding opportunities” and “selling off buildings”.

Moreover, some people feel the Council should be focusing on attracting investment to the area and generally adopt a more commercial approach.

**Figure 4.3: Coding of comments about how the Council generates income (base – 134)**



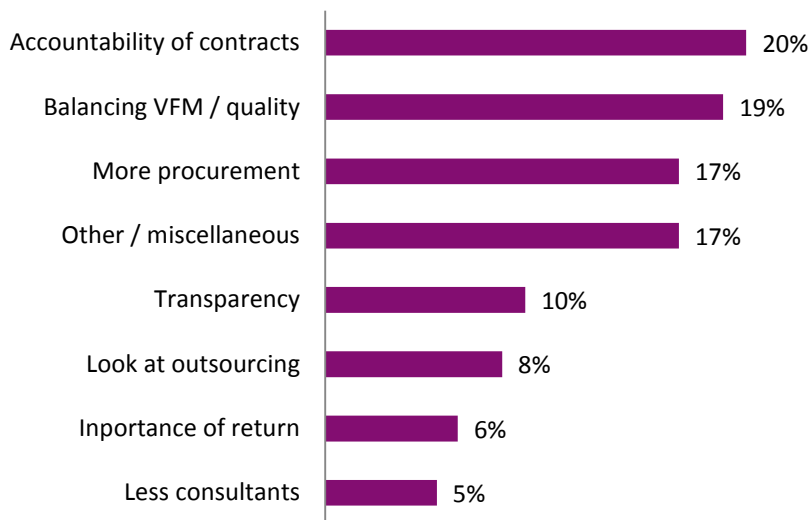
## How the Council negotiates contracts

One in five comments about how the Council negotiates contracts focused on accountability with examples including “ensure that the contracts are water tight and have clauses to apply costs if not completed in line with agreement or agreed date” and “ensure contracts clearly set out standards and measures of performance required”.

Moreover, some people who responded to the survey feel the Council should be mindful of the quality of the service and contracts when assessing value for money with comments such as “best value for money not necessarily the cheapest” and “tend for cheapest but not the best long term”.

Other comments made included the need for more procurement and contracts, more transparency and more focus on outsourcing.

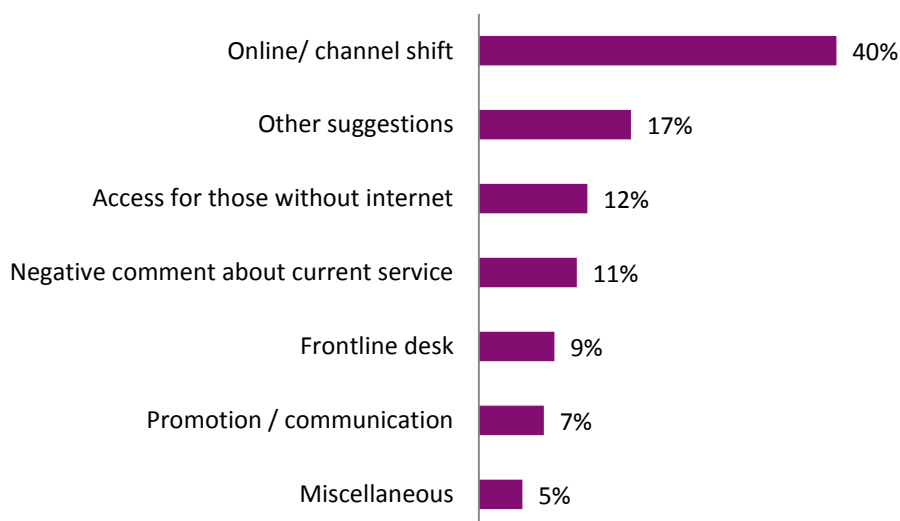
**Figure 4.4: Coding of comments for how the Council negotiates contracts (base – 95)**



### How people access Council services

The main comments made about how people access Council services related to online services and channel shift. The majority were supportive of this approach with comments including “look at more services that can be moved online” and “increase online and reduce the need for front service”, but some people did stress the need to cater for those people who do not use the internet. Other suggestions about accessing services included more weekend access, incentivising online services and using community services and the third sector to improve access to services in different localities.

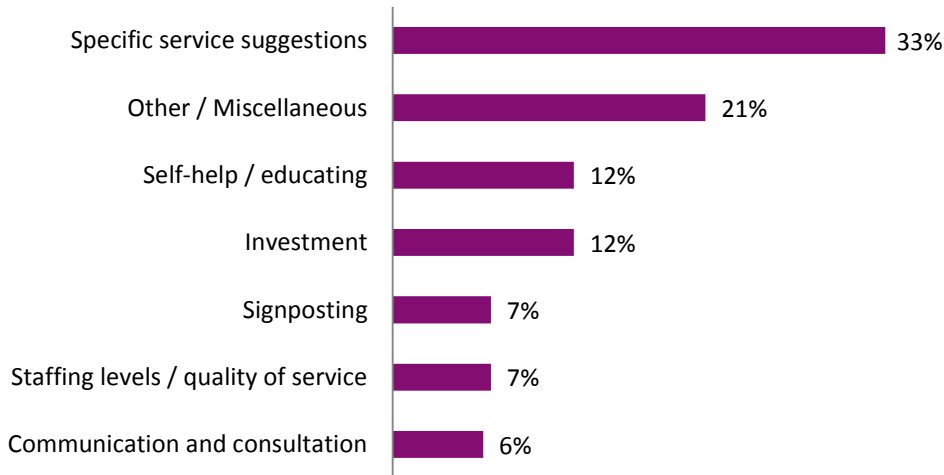
**Figure 4.5: Coding of comments for how people access Council services (base – 82)**



## Preventative measures to reduce demand

A third of the comments made about preventative measures to reduce demand were specific suggestions about different Council services. These included ideas about recycling and fly tipping and suggestions relating to social care and families. More than one in five (21%) of comments could not be easily categorised into a specific theme and so were coded as 'other'. These ranged from general comments about the importance of a preventative approach to the challenges of achieving such an approach in reality.

**Figure 4.6: Coding of comments for preventative measures to reduce demand (base – 92)**



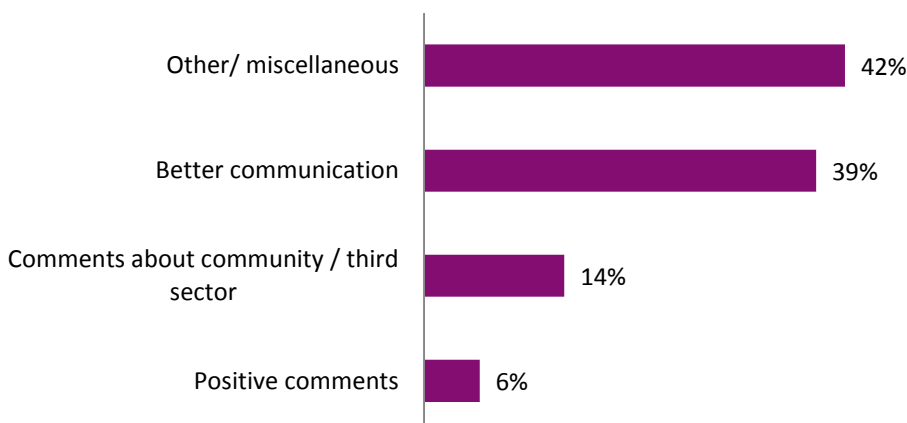
## How the Council works together with partners and companies

Relative to other efficiency workstreams, the comments received about how the Council works together with partners and companies were more varied and therefore more difficult to categorise.

Better communication emerged as the most significant theme, both in terms of communication between the Council and other organisations but also communication of the benefits and value to local people and the local area. Specific comments include “better communication and relationships so information can be shared more easily” and “joined up plans and practice”.

A range of other comments and suggestions were made, from focusing on bringing more services in-house to the importance of monitoring and streamlining processes where possible.

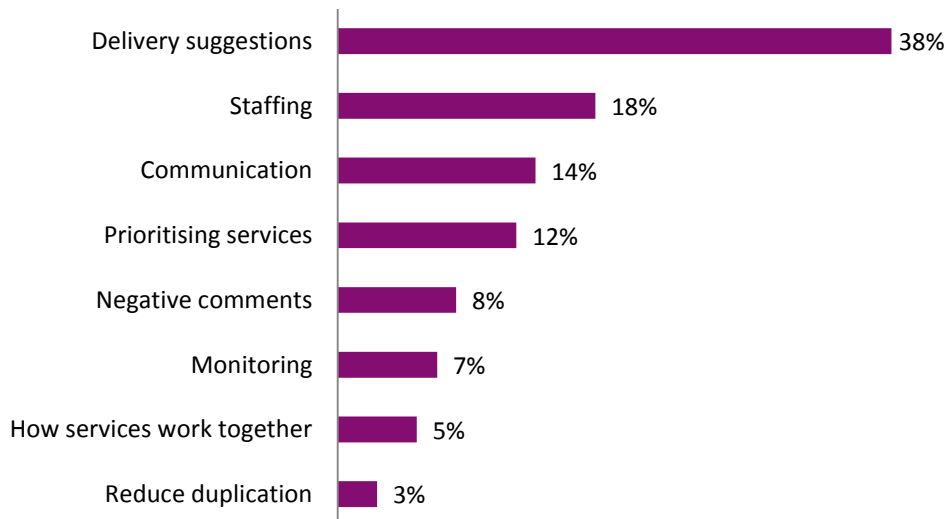
**Figure 4.7: Coding of comments for how the Council works together with partners and companies (base – 71)**



## How the Council delivers its services

Nearly two in five (38%) of comments made were specific suggestions relating to how services are delivered, including “give residents and visitors an option to pay for services instead of reducing them” and “stop some services that are not statutory”. 18% of comments focused on staffing of Council services, including the “necessity to ensure that [the Council] maintains sufficient staffing to be able to deliver a quality service” and “ensure frontline staff are valued and well trained”.

**Figure 4.8: Coding of comments for how the Council delivers its services (base – 74)**



## Other areas of focus

Of the final suggestions made about any other areas of focus, many were very specific and so it has not been possible to categorise. However, some examples of the suggestions made include:

- Reviewing the number of councillors in Blackpool
- More comments about salaries, expenses and terms and conditions
- Various examples of spend considered to be excessive or unnecessary
- General comments about the ambition and focus of the Council and the town

## Final comments on the efficiency plan

The survey gave respondents a final opportunity to make comments relating to anything else not covered in previous questions. A number of comments repeated those already made earlier in the survey, such as reviewing the number of “middle managers”, charging for services and a range of views of existing projects and regeneration in the borough.

Other comments made in this final section not already covered include:

- Queries about what happens now and how the efficiency plan will be used in practice
- Some doubt that there are much more savings which can be made without having an impact on service delivery and outcomes
- Other specific comments about further efficiencies and tackling “wastage within the council”
- Some positive comments about the approach and the services that the Council delivers during difficult times