

Budget Consultation Briefing – February 2024

1. Introduction

This briefing gives a full overview of the public budget consultation undertaken to inform the budget process for 2024/25. Between 8 December 2023 and 7 January 2024, we carried out an online consultation exercise to gauge residents' views on budget issues and priorities.

The feedback builds on the extensive online and in person consultation undertaken in late 2022/early 2023 which informed the development and refinement of the Council's seven key priorities as set out in our [Corporate Plan](#) and the provisional 2024/25 and 2025/26 budgets set in March 2023.

We will continue to engage with our communities and people on an ongoing basis, ensuring that feedback from this exercise is used to inform improvement activity beyond the budget decision process, including more detailed investigation of the issues and priorities raised here. Contributing to our commitment to work in partnership with communities on common priorities and issues that affect and matter to them.

2. Budget consultation responses

Like all local authorities, the Council is preparing for very significant financial challenges ahead as well as some difficult budget decisions. Between 8 December 2023 and 7 January 2024, the budget questions were available on the Perth and Kinross Council Consultation Hub to allow to gauge residents' views and gather feedback on budget issues and priorities.

Questions in the survey remained broadly similar to the previous year to allow for comparison with a few improvements made following last year's feedback. As in previous years, introductory information was presented to improve our residents' understanding of the challenges we currently face, where the Council gets its money from and restrictions on the areas where we can make savings.

Respondents were asked for feedback around what issues concern them personally, preference for Council Tax setting for 2024/25, opinions regarding possibilities on how we deliver services, priorities for investment for our capital budget and feedback on how we work with our communities.

An online campaign was launched to engage and inform the public and promote the consultation. This included paid promotion of posts to reach a wider audience who may not engage with Council content regularly, and a newsletter to all registered subscribers to encourage participation.

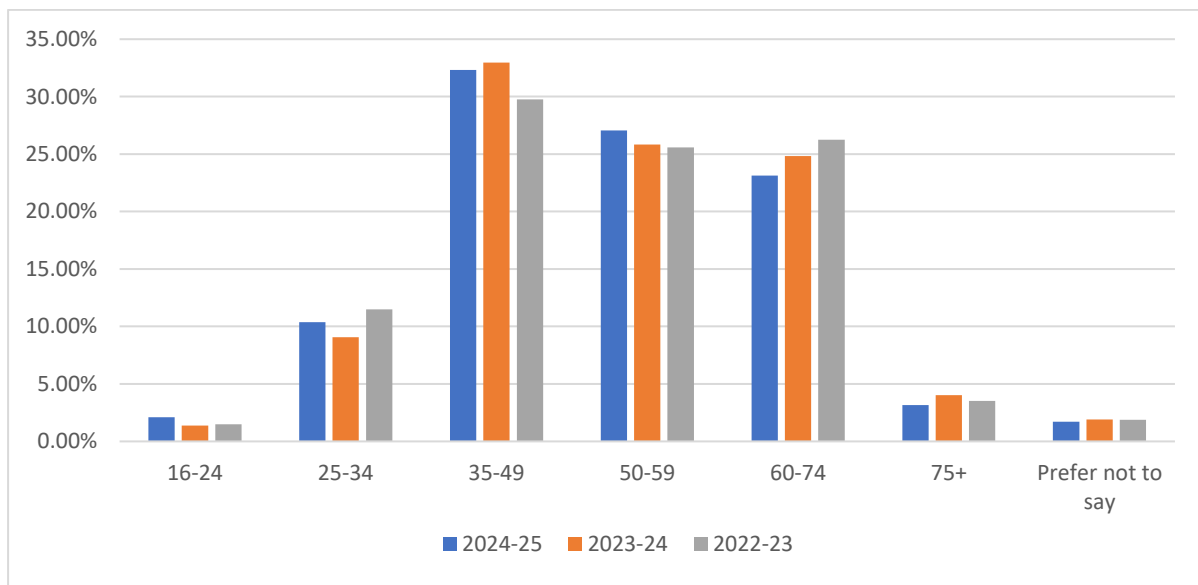
Overall, there were **761** responses submitted to the on-line survey as a whole (1,092 in 2023/24 which included Corporate Plan consultation responses, 739 in 2022/23, 642 in 2021/22, 484 in 2020/21).

As with any opt-in exercise of this type, results cannot be considered fully representative of all Perth and Kinross residents but are indicative and influenced by the demographic of participants. **96.19% of respondents live in Perth and Kinross** (95%, in 2023-24, 99% in 2022-23; 95% in 2021-22), and 24% of respondents study or work locally (31% in 2023/24, 19% in 2022-23; 36% in 2021-22).

18.79% of responses stated that they are current employees of Perth & Kinross Council (25% in 2023/24, 17% in 2022-23), 3.55% said they had been employed by the Council in the last 3 years (4% in 2023-24, 2% in 2022-23). As in 2024-25, 3.15% said they would rather not submit this information (3% in 2023-24, 2% in 2022-23), and 75% of respondents declared that they were employed by Perth & Kinross Council.

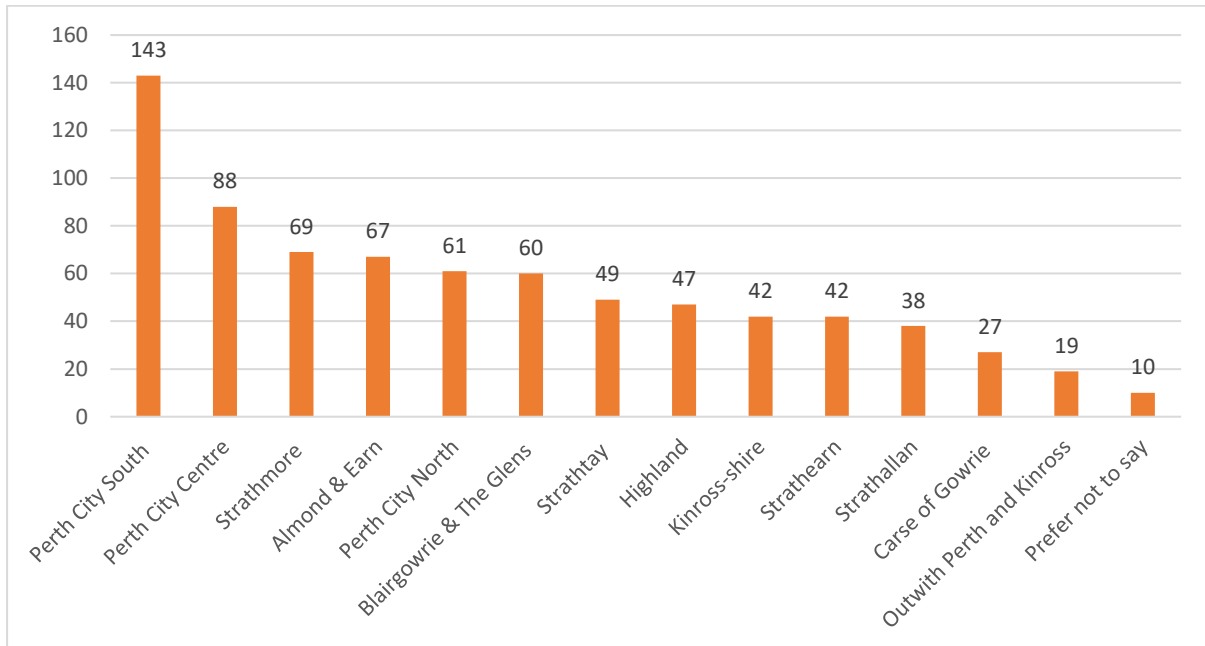
Encouragingly the age distribution of respondents is more balanced when compared to all-inclusive consultations such as this (see Figure 1). The profile of respondents is broadly similar to previous years, although a slight increase of 2% in responses from those aged under 24 years and a 2% increase from those aged 50-59 years are of note (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Breakdown of respondents by age



Respondents were asked to provide their Electoral Ward (common settlements within these were listed to make it easier for respondents). As shown in Figure 2, most responses were received from Perth City South (similar to 2023-24 data figures) and Perth City Centre wards, but all areas of Perth and Kinross are represented within the responses.

Figure 2: Breakdown of respondents by Ward

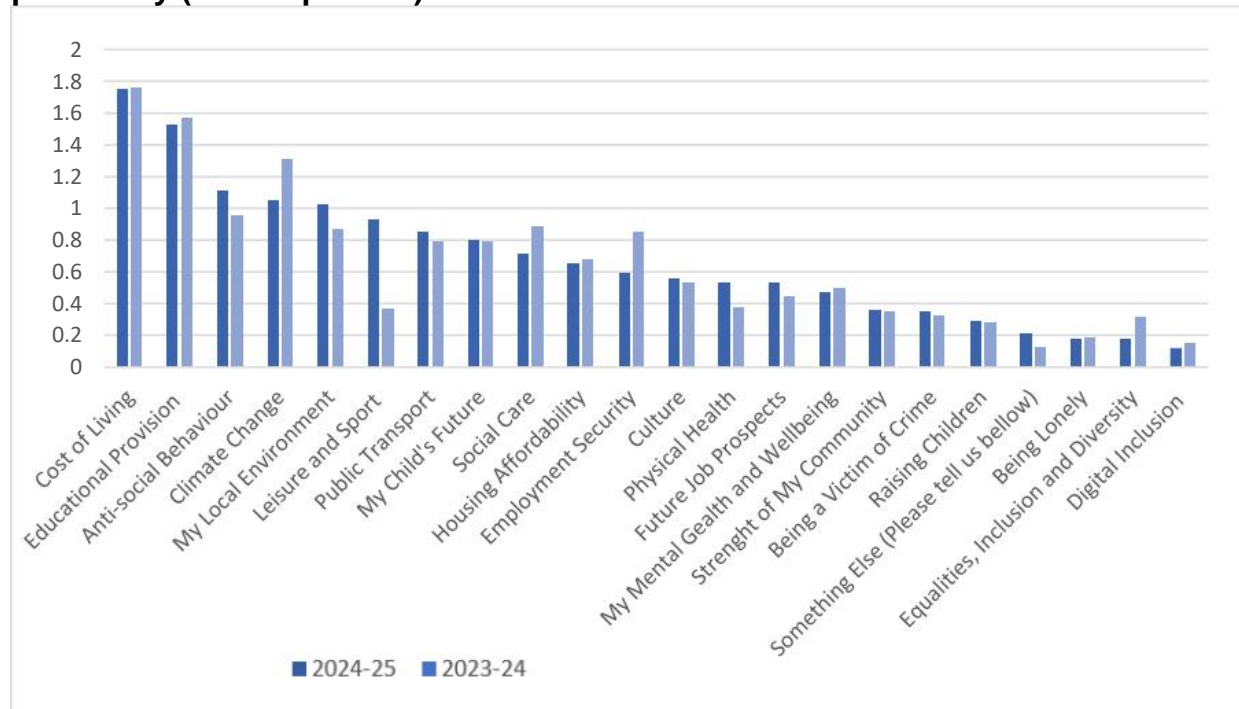


Results

2.1 *Setting the Council Budget – Issues of Most Importance for Individuals*

This question asked respondents to select the 5 most important issues facing individual respondents personally. These issues did not need to be ranked in order of importance.

Figure 3. Percentage of respondents indicating an issue as of most importance personally (761 responses)



Cost of Living (most selected issue) and **Educational Provision** are the most commonly selected issues this year by some considerable margin. This year **Anti-Social Behaviour** ranked higher than **Climate Change**, but they remain popular for 2024-25. These 4 issues now surpass **My Local Environment** which has maintained its position in the previous 2 years.

Leisure and Sport ranked 15 in 2023-24, is now the 6th most important priority, followed by **Public Transport** which remains a top priority (ranked 7 in 2024-24, ranked 6 in 2023-24).

My Child's Future, **Social Care**, **Housing Affordability**, and **Employment Security**, remain popular this year, reflecting the current economic climate and overall social outlook.

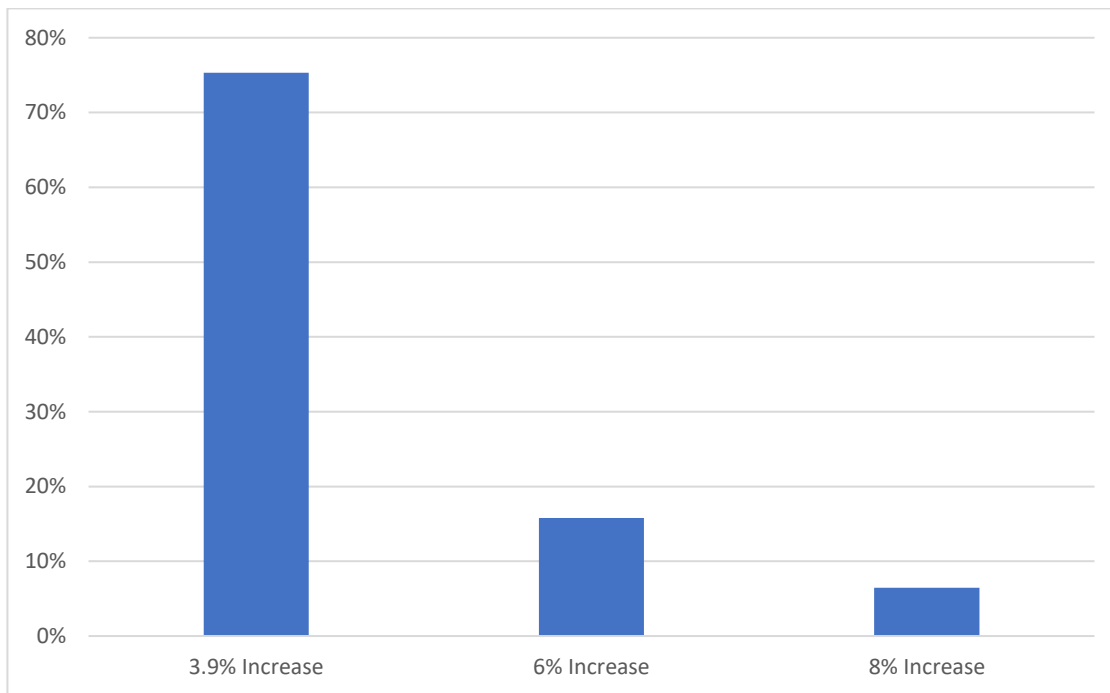
While **Culture** maintains its ranking position when compared to 2023-24, a notable increased proportion of respondents selected **Physical Health** and **Future Job Prospects** compared to last year.

2.2 Change in Council Tax

Please note that this question had been set before the Council Tax freeze announcement was made by the Scottish Government and it was not possible to change the question without creating a difference between the experience of earlier and later respondents.

Respondents were asked what **percentage change in Council Tax** was preferable. The options available were of 3.9% (as agreed in provisional budget for 2024/25 set in March 2023) and 6% or 8%.

Figure 4: Breakdown of preference on change in Council Tax (761 respondents)



Overall, 75.3% of respondents opted for a 3.9% increase in Council Tax, 15.77% opted for a 6% increase, and 6.44% opted for an 8% increase. 21 respondents (2.76%) preferred not to answer this question.

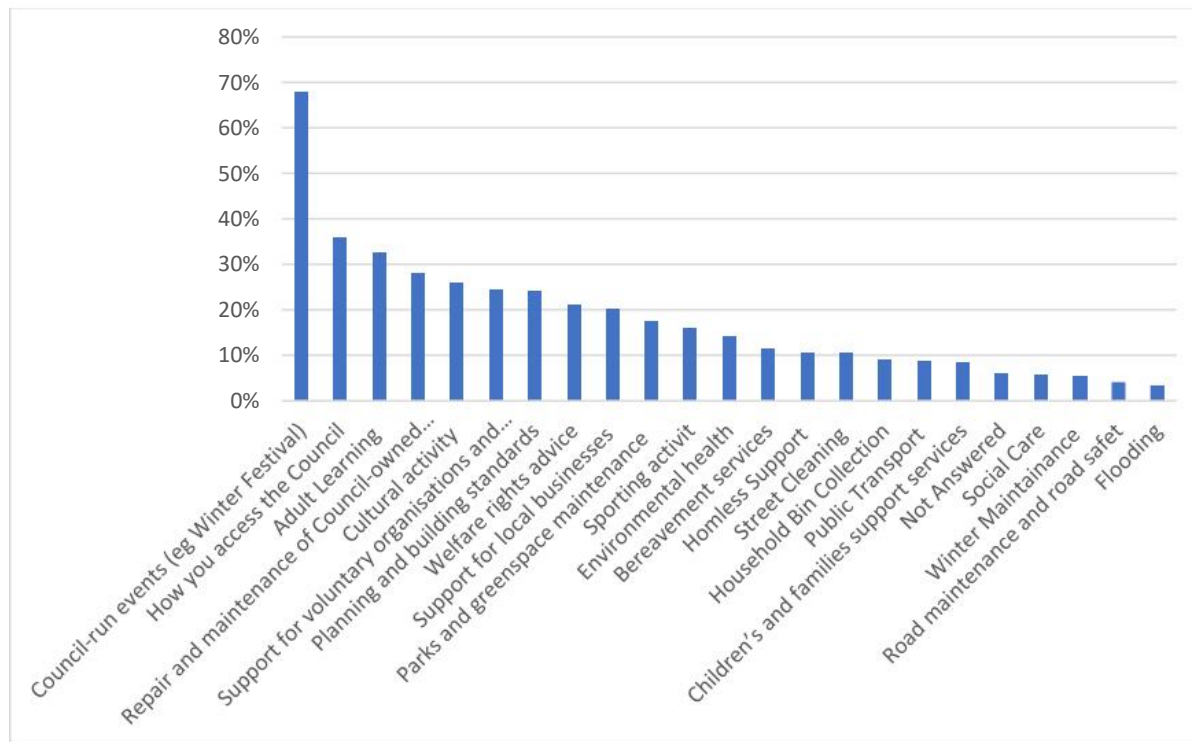
2.3 Changes in how services are delivered

This year, respondents were asked for the given list of services/function which they believe that the Council should consider:

- reducing standards of delivery, including frequency,
- maintaining current standards/investments,
- improving current standards/investments.

As would be expected, those services for which most respondents specified for a reduction in standard or frequency (Figure 5) broadly mirrored the results of our 2023-24 budget consultation. These were **Council-run events, How you access the Council, Adult learning, Repair and maintenance of Council-owned buildings and Cultural activity**. In turn, these were the least popular areas for service maintenance (Figure 6) or improvement (Figure 7).

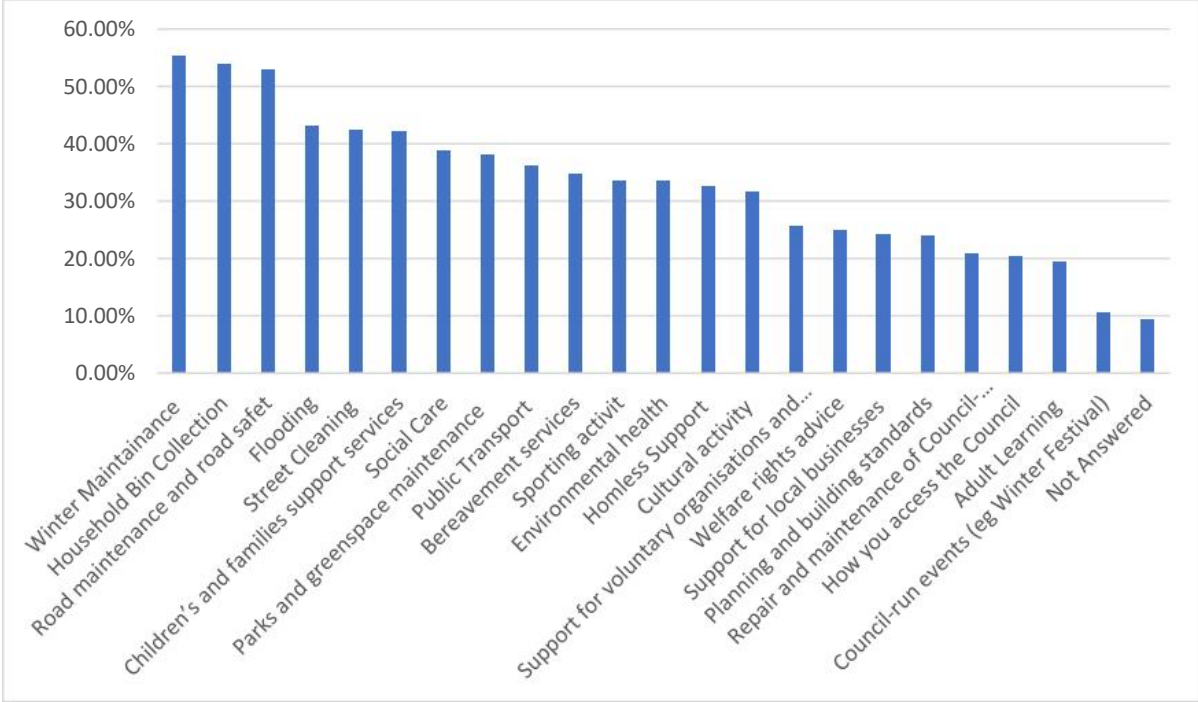
Figure 5. The Council reduces standard of service delivery, including frequency or time taken to carry it out



Similar to the 2023-24 Budget consultation outcomes, **Council-run events** were by far the most popular choice for service reduction and selected by 68 % of respondents (67.4% in 2023-24). Additional comments from survey respondents also highlighted events, with comments such as “*should be charging for Council-run events*”.

How you access the Council, (e.g. availability of offices in your community, customer contact centre by phone, email and webchat, etc.) (36% in 2024-25, 37 % in 2023-24), **Adult Learning** (33% in 2024-25, 32% in 2023-24), **Repair and maintenance of Council-owned buildings** (excluding Council housing) (28% in 2024-25, 30% in 2023-24) and Cultural activity (26%, in 2024-25, 28% in 2023-24), remain the most popular choices for respondents indicating their preference for reducing the standard of service delivery, including frequency or time taken to carry it out.

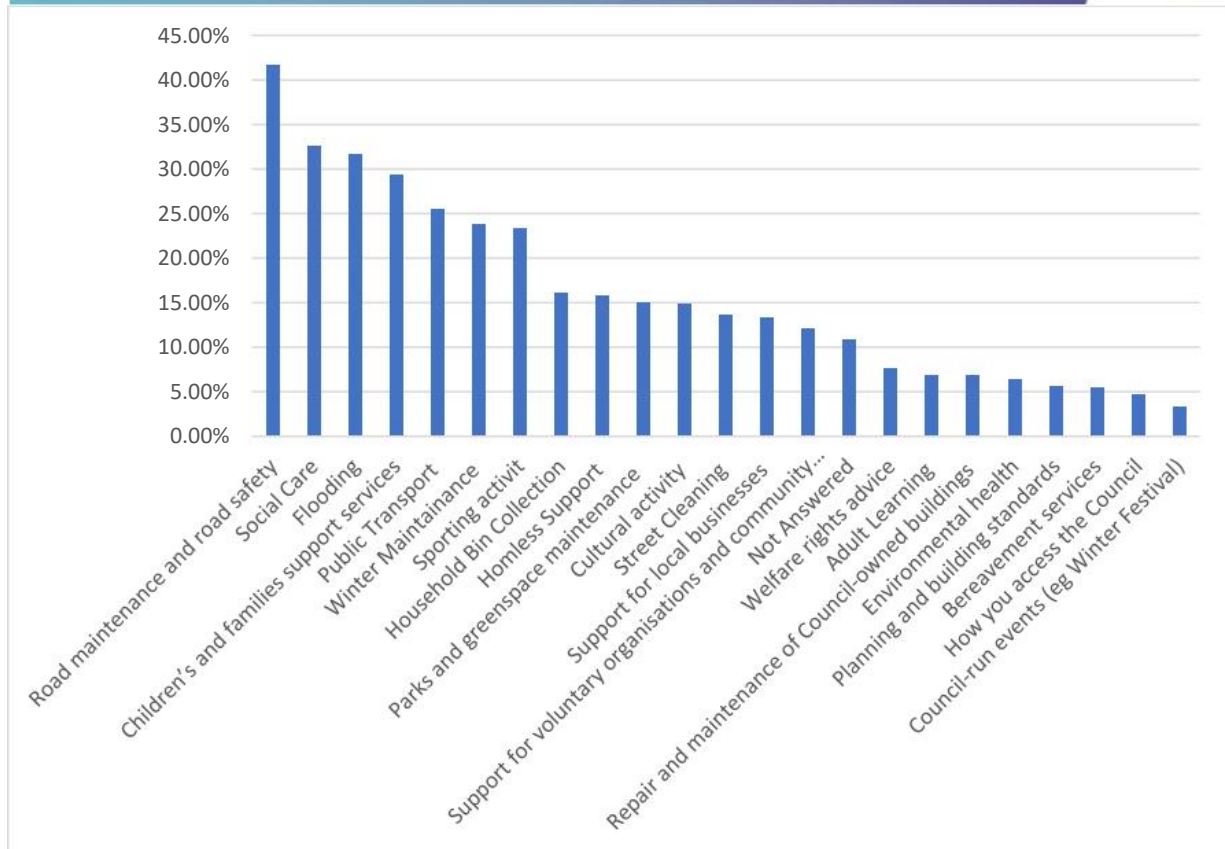
Figure 6. The Council maintains current standards/ investment for this service.



Winter maintenance (55% in 2024-25, 56% in 2023-24), **Household bin collections** (54% in 2024-25, 55% in 2023-24) and **Road maintenance and Road safety** (53% in 2024-25, 57% in 2023-24) were the most frequently selected areas for maintaining current levels of service (Figure 6).

Flooding (43% in 2024-25, 45% in 2023-24), **Street Cleaning** (42% in 2024-25), **Children's and Families support services** (42% in 2024-25), **Social Care** (39% in 2024-25, 41% in 2023-24), **Parks and greenspace maintenance** (38% in 2024-25, 36% in 2023-24) and **Public transport** (36% in 2024-25, 47% in 2023-24) were also popular choices for maintaining .

Figure 7. The Council improves current standards/ investment for this service



The most favoured areas for improvement in service standards/investment in 2024-25 is **Road Maintenance and road safety** selected by over 40% of respondents (33% in 2023-24) (See Figure 7), **Social Care** (32% in 2024-25, 43% in 2023-24), **Flooding** (31% in 2024-25, 21% in 2023-24), **Children's and families support services** (29% in 2024-25, 40% in 2023-24) and **Public Transport** (25% in 2024-25, 29% in 2023-24).

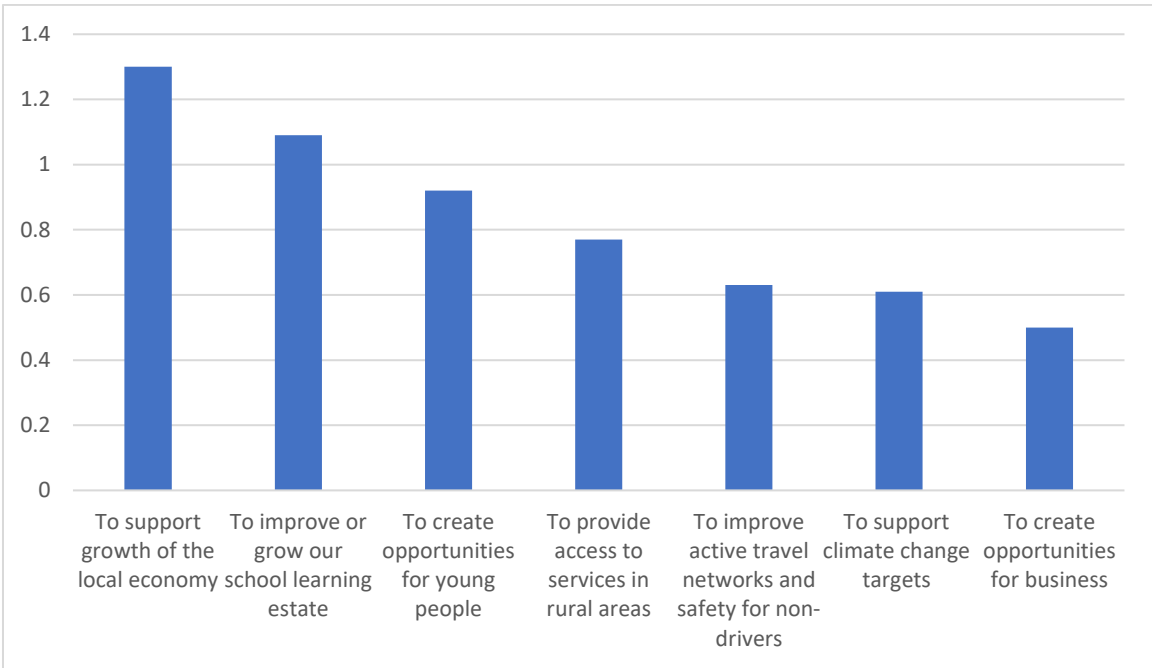
The least selected areas for improvement broadly mirror the services selected to have reduced standards of service delivery (see Figure 5). These are **Council-run events, How you access the Council, Bereavement Services** and **Planning and Building Standards**.

2.4 How Our Capital Budget is Spent

We asked what kind of projects we should invest our capital budget in. Respondents were asked to select their three priorities for investment. These priorities did not need to be ranked in order of importance.

Similar to results from 2023-24 Budget Consultation, **Growth the local economy**, followed by the **Learning estate** and **Opportunities for young people** were given the highest priority overall in 2024-25.

Figure 8. When considering the kinds of projects to invest in, please choose three of the following as your priorities for investment¹



2.5 How We Work With Communities

We asked about to what extent our respondents agree/disagree that individuals and communities can develop and delivery local solutions to local needs without relying on the Council to provide services as may have been the case in the past. There was **good agreement (>70%)** that the Council should encourage/support communities to deliver certain services and also help people to help themselves to reduce reliance on public services.

Figure 9. Perth & Kinross Council should encourage and support local people and communities to deliver certain services (761 responses).

¹ Scoring generated by survey system based on all responses received

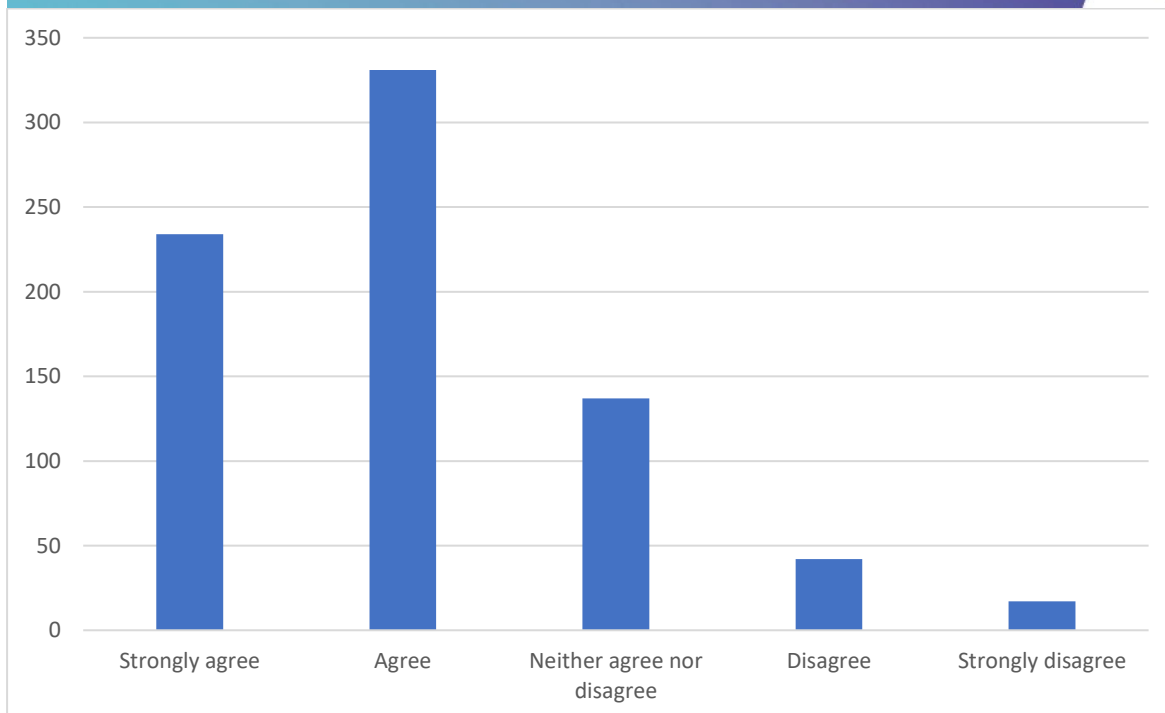
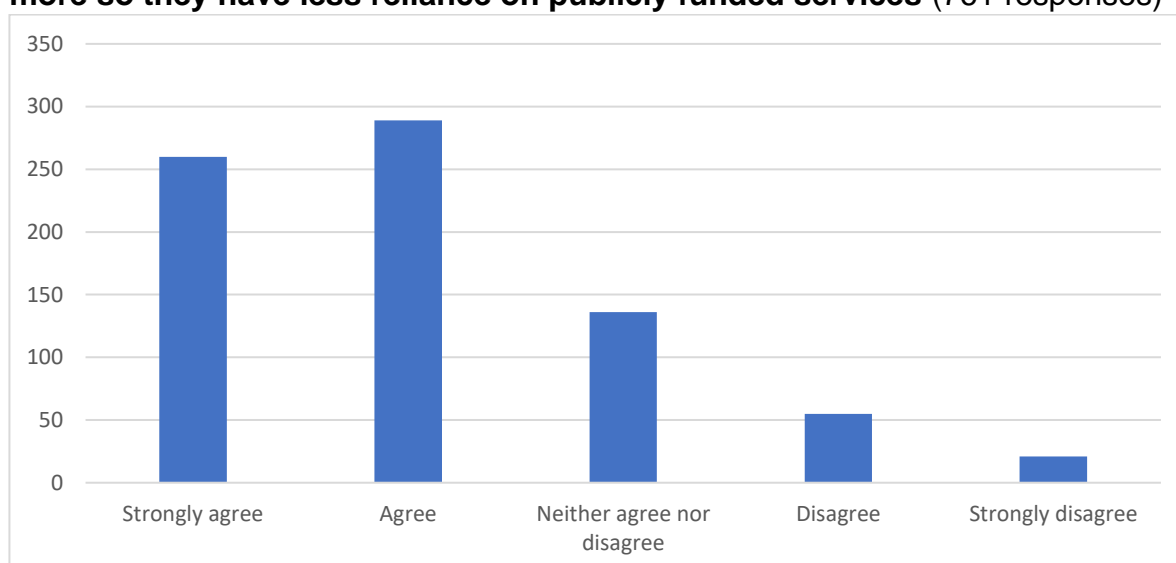


Figure 10. Perth & Kinross Council should help people to help themselves more so they have less reliance on publicly funded services (761 responses)



3. Additional Comments

When asked to share ideas that could help the Council save money or generate additional revenue **571** (52%) people chose to leave a comment (compared with 44% in 2022/23 Budget Consultation and 41% in previous year). Many respondents offered multiple suggestions and comments cover a wide variety of themes.

3.1 Workforce

When respondents commented on council's workforce this was either as stand-alone comments or in relation to other areas of concerns to them such as the standards of various service delivery and the council's budget. In general respondents were concerned with **staff and management productivity/efficiency, work duplication, middle management, pay/expenses benefits, cohesion between services** and **access to Council staff** are areas that the respondents suggest as in need of review.

3.2 Service delivery

When suggesting services as a budget saving potential, the comments were categorised under the following themes: **Service standards** (maintain, reduce, stop), **new alternative approach** to how some services are delivered, **outsourcing/privatising, community/3rd sector** delivery, **focus on priorities/outcomes, invest, partnership working** (other local authorities), **consolidate/efficiency**.

In general, when discussing different services respondent indicate that the Council should move away from organising events and entertainment (such as the Christmas Lights Party), and instead focus on the priorities laid out In the Corporate Plan (examples mention investing in youth, supporting families with additional needs and education, and invest in better social care provisions).

3.3 Local economy

In this category, comments largely focused on **parking, local businesses, organised events/attractions** (e.g., Christmas Lights Party, Perth Museum), **partnership working, ambition** (focus on the ambitions set in the Corporate Plan), **public transport/active travel, flagship** (referred to by some respondents as 'vanity' projects).

Respondents take pride in being Perth and Kinross residents and they believe it is important that the Council and residents set out a "vision of what Perth wants to be" for the local economy to improve. This places the focus of most of the comments, and suggestions residents offer to improve local economy and suggestion towards making Perth an attractive city for both tourists and residents.

Respondents also asked for an increased focus on (all natural) attractions in Perthshire, which in their opinion would bring visitor and economics benefits in Perth throughout the year.

3.4 Assets

In this category additional comments referred to **leasing/renting assets; looking after/using what we have/avoid new (assets); sell/get rid of/downsize/consolidate; energy efficiency.**

A great number of answers suggested that the Council should focus on increasing the energy efficiency of their building stock, either by adopting green energy measures (for new and old buildings) or by better managing energy spend.

3.5 Charges and income generation

In relation to the Council Tax charge the opinions of respondents are split between reducing and increasing Council Tax. Those suggesting an increase suggest this should be applied to “second homes”, “larger properties”, and “holiday lets”.

Respondents who referred to fee increases, particularly mentioned **increased parking charges and fines**, as long as the number of parking spaces particularly within the city centre are also increased.

A large number of respondents suggest that *“the Council need to focus the generation of income not the removal of services. Offer premium services at an additional cost. For example, want a private grit bin on your street, then pay for it.”*

3.6 Business processes

Respondents asked for increased focus on **technology and digitalisation** as a way to increase efficiency and better manage all council operation whilst also reducing waste. Respondents would also like to see what the council is doing to reduce bureaucracy and increase efficiency through the council.

4. Social Media

This year’s budget consultation generated more engagement on social media when compared to the Budget Consultation which took place in 2022/23, but fewer clicks through to the survey page. We are reviewing the content approach taken this year to consider the impact this may have had on the reduced call to action. Although it is worth noting that the much higher click through rate last year was not representative of participation in the survey, with more than half of the clicks from social media to the consultation hub not resulting in participation in the survey.

We trialled paid boosting of posts on Facebook for the first time (for budget consultations, we have used this previously for other campaigns) to increase the reach to people who may not otherwise engage with the Council’s content, which appears to have been successful, albeit that it did not carry through to participation. This promotion cost £70.

In response to Facebook promotion there were 141 comments, 209 reactions, 70 shares, and 601 clicks of the link to the budget consultation survey web page for more information. (The Budget Consultation in 2022/23 generated 48 comments, 284 reactions, 45 shares, and 2,444 clicks to the web page.)

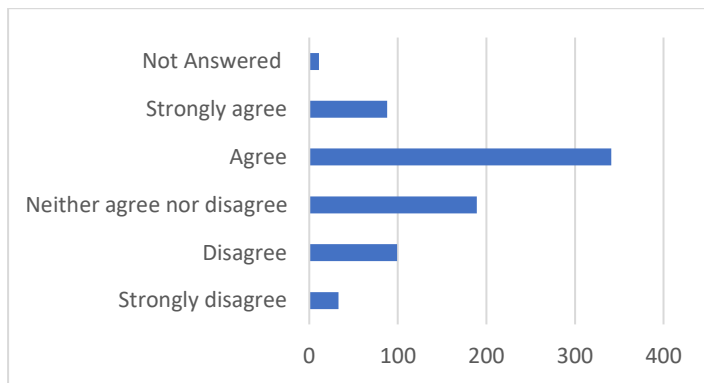
Promotion on X (formerly Twitter) generated 2 comments, 4 reactions, 7 retweets and 129 clicks to the survey webpage (the Budget Consultation 2022/23 generated 5 comments, 23 reactions, 11 retweets and 0 clicks to the survey).

5. Lessons learned for future consultation

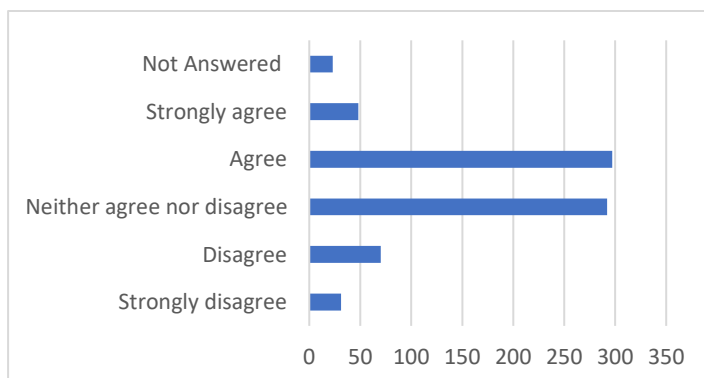
This year respondents were also asked to evaluate the consultation and indicate if the consultation allowed them to have their say. As shown in Figure 11, almost 40% of respondents indicated that they have found the consultation clear/easy to understand, and 40% of respondents found the consultation to be interesting, 46% of respondents indicated that the consultation allowed them to have their say and 33% were overall satisfied with the consultation.

Figure 11 To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statements about this consultation:

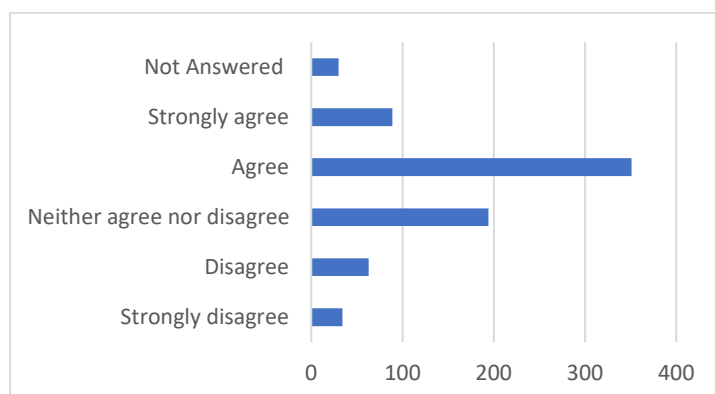
Q1 Evaluation - It was clear/easy to understand.



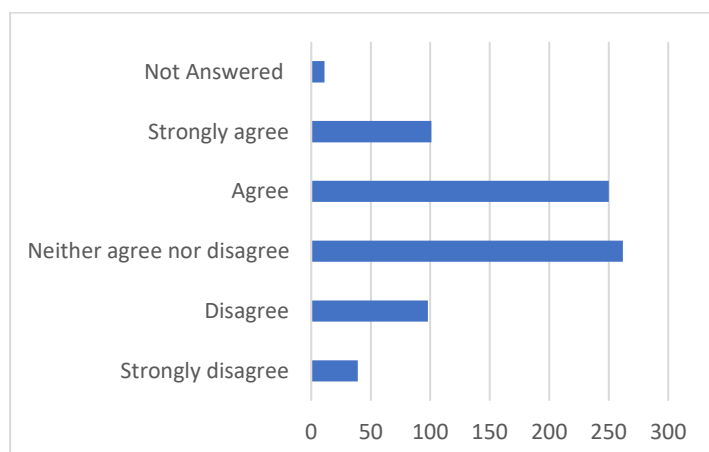
Q2 Evaluation - It was interesting.



Q3 Evaluation - It allowed me to have my say



Overall, how satisfied/dissatisfied were you with this consultation



197 respondents added additional comments to help with the evaluation and improvement of future Budget Consultations. The most common themes from the detailed evaluative feedback about this consultation are as follows:

- Greater accessibility: clearer presentation and wording of questions (e.g., less formal language), balanced options for answers, along with examples or details related to budgeting questions, visual aids or graphs to aid “for those less familiar with the public sector space and for those who aren’t familiar with the consultation process”, and suggestions to include a “budget model” for citizens who are not familiar to
- Improved structure and layout of the consultation
- Engage with wider demographic.
- More extensive promotion of the consultation
- Explanation definitions and terms where necessary
- Clarity on how and if the feedback will be used along with a request for feedback on results – you said, we did type of exercise (include/consider past suggestions)
- Feedback on how, if and where the results of the consultation will be made available.

6. Conclusion

Our budget consultation has provided us with feedback on priorities and themes that are important to people in Perth and Kinross. It has also provided further suggestions which can be used to inform our budget process as well as in wider engagement exercises. Continuous engagement and discussion are key to its success, and we are looking forward to continuing building trust and productive relationships. We will continue to build on our methods to involve communities who are seldom heard, benchmarking with our Community Planning Partners and local community groups to ensure that we understand the issues important to them.