



## **Budget consultation briefing – January 2021**

### **1. Introduction**

The Perth and Kinross Offer has been integral to our approach in terms of consultation and engagement with our citizens and communities over the past year. Working in collaboration with partners and communities' groups where possible to discuss impacts and issues that have arisen over the pandemic, we have adapted quickly, in these unique and uncertain times, to introduce virtual ways of working and engaging. As well as continuing to use surveys and questionnaires, we have introduced online platforms (like Zoom and MS Teams) as a way of gathering feedback and data as well as connecting with our communities on our social media channels.

We now know that 'everyone has something to offer' and we have witnessed this in action over the past year. Our communities have supported each other, shown neighbourliness and volunteered to support the most vulnerable in their areas all throughout the pandemic, highlighting the importance of developing the PK Offer approach further. Maintaining the strong partnership between our local areas and the many agencies and services that support them has never been more important.

This budget consultation briefing is intended to give all elected members a detailed breakdown of responses to the recent public budget consultation to help inform the budget setting process for 2021/22. It also contains a reminder of wider consultation feedback over the past year.

### **2. Consultation and Engagement Activity 2020/21**

Our consultation and engagement activity over the past year has centred around the impact of the pandemic on local neighbourhoods, communities (both geographical and of interest), families and individuals and how we can work together to build back an even better Perth & Kinross, using the PK Offer as a lever for change. A full report on the findings of our broad consultation exercise was submitted to P&K Council on 7 October (report no 20/181 refers).

In summary, many key themes have emerged which include the need for:

- increased volunteering and mobilisation of community groups
- growing and stronger sense of community with greater connections with neighbours and communities
- provision of support to those most vulnerable including the use of digital technology
- learning in different environments including online
- more reliance on our outdoor environment and maintenance of open spaces

Key feedback also re-emphasised the issues that have arisen or been exacerbated as a result of Covid, including:

- isolation, loneliness and mental wellbeing
- a decrease in household incomes leading to poverty
- communication challenges for some groups
- detrimental effect on businesses unable to keep trading and as a result, increased unemployment
- home schooling and caring, work responsibilities

Consultation and engagement with our communities will continue to be an iterative process, working together jointly to increase awareness and embed the principles of the PK Offer.

### **3. Budget Consultation response**

Like all local authorities, Perth & Kinross Council is preparing for very significant financial challenges ahead as well as some difficult budget decisions. Between 9 November and 9 December 2020, we carried out a specific consultation exercise to gauge residents' views on budget issues and priorities. The [Consultation](#) was published on the [Perth & Kinross Council Consultation Hub](#).

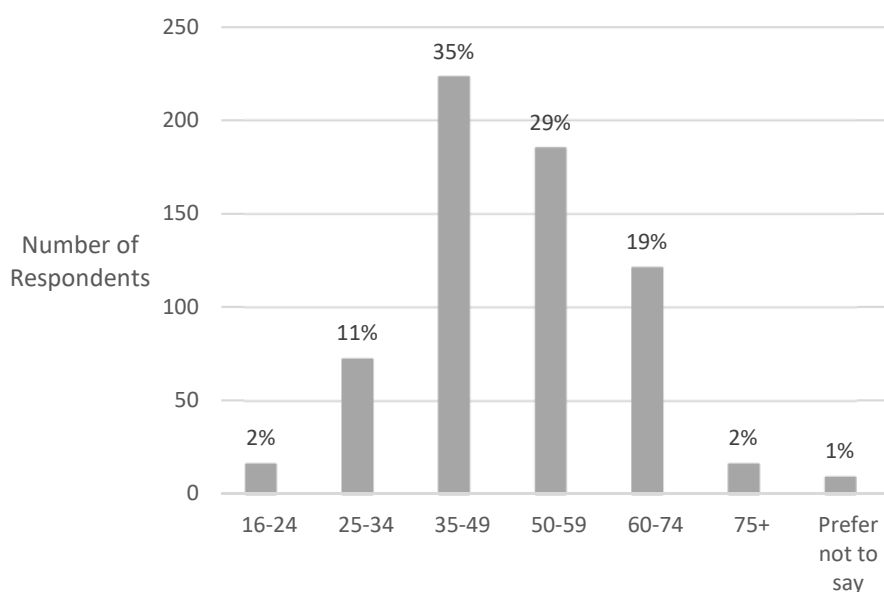
Content included some introductory information which aimed to improve our residents understanding of the challenges we currently face, where the Council gets its money from and restrictions on the areas where we can make savings. An online survey asked for feedback around what matters most to participants and what areas they think budgets should be focussed on. An additional question was asked to find out about people's personal priorities to help inform the PK Offer and reflect any changes as a result of the pandemic. Respondents were also asked for their opinions regarding new possibilities on how we deliver services.

The consultation was promoted via various channels including press releases and internal news bulletins. A social media campaign was launched on Twitter and Facebook with the aim to engage and inform the public and promote the consultation.

The PKC Budget Consultation page received **5,744** unique page views by the public (not including **868** internal staff unique page views). Overall, there were **642** completed surveys, an increase on last year (484 in 2020/21; 1085 in 2019/20, 736 in 2018/19, 332 in 2017/18, 91 in 2016/17).

As with any exercise of this type, results cannot be considered fully representative of all PKC residents but are indicative and influenced by the demographic of participants. 95% of respondents live in Perth and Kinross, and 36% of respondents study or work locally. Encouragingly, the age distribution of respondents is more balanced than is often seen in open consultations such as this (see Figure 1). 14% of respondents were under 35 years of age (compared to 25% being the proportion of the total adult population in the area), and 48% were under 50 years of age (compared to 46% for the area)

**Figure 1: Age breakdown of respondents**

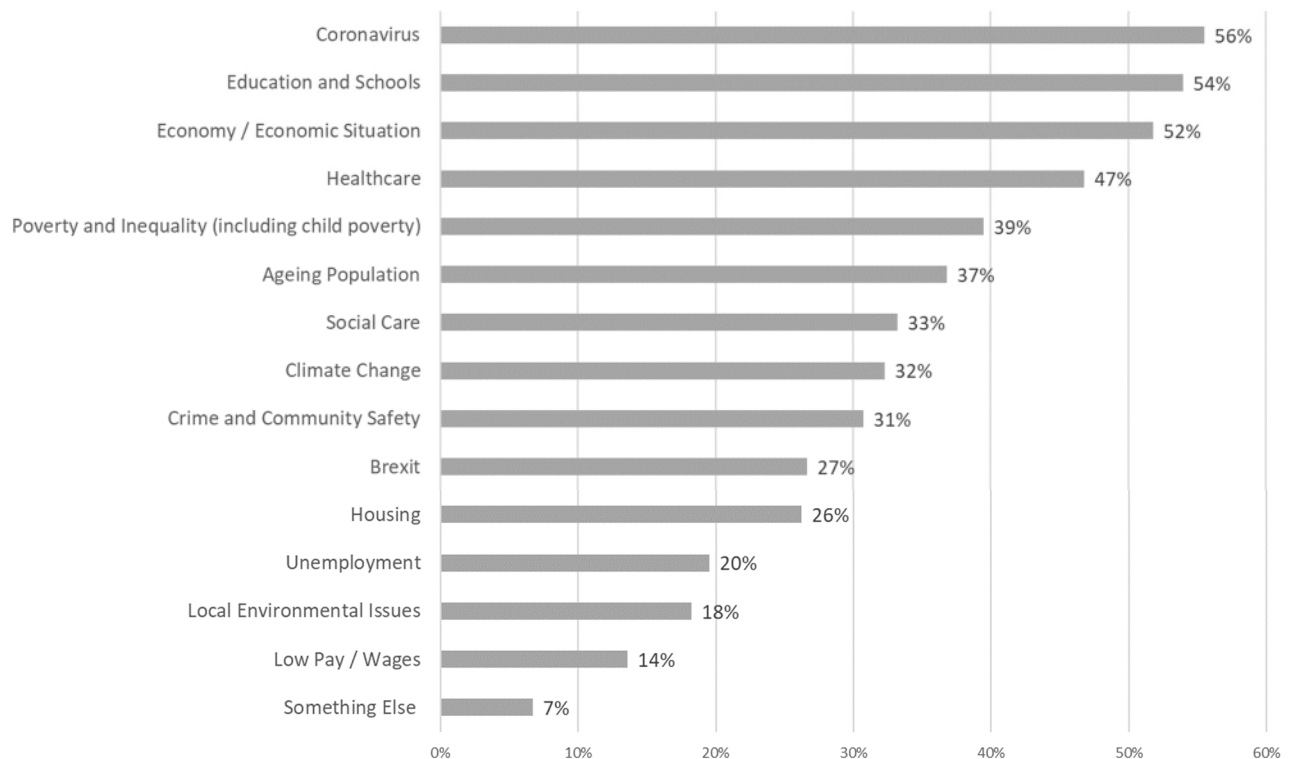


## 5. Results

### 5.1 Setting the Council Budget – Issues of Most Importance for Perth & Kinross

This question asked respondents to select the 5 most important issues facing Perth & Kinross today. These issues did not need to be ranked in order of importance but did limit selection to five issues. This replaced questions asked in previous years about the importance of the Council's five strategic objectives (2020/21) and twelve service areas (previous years).

Figure 2. Percentage of Respondents Indicating an Issues as of Most Importance for Perth & Kinross Now (641 Responses)

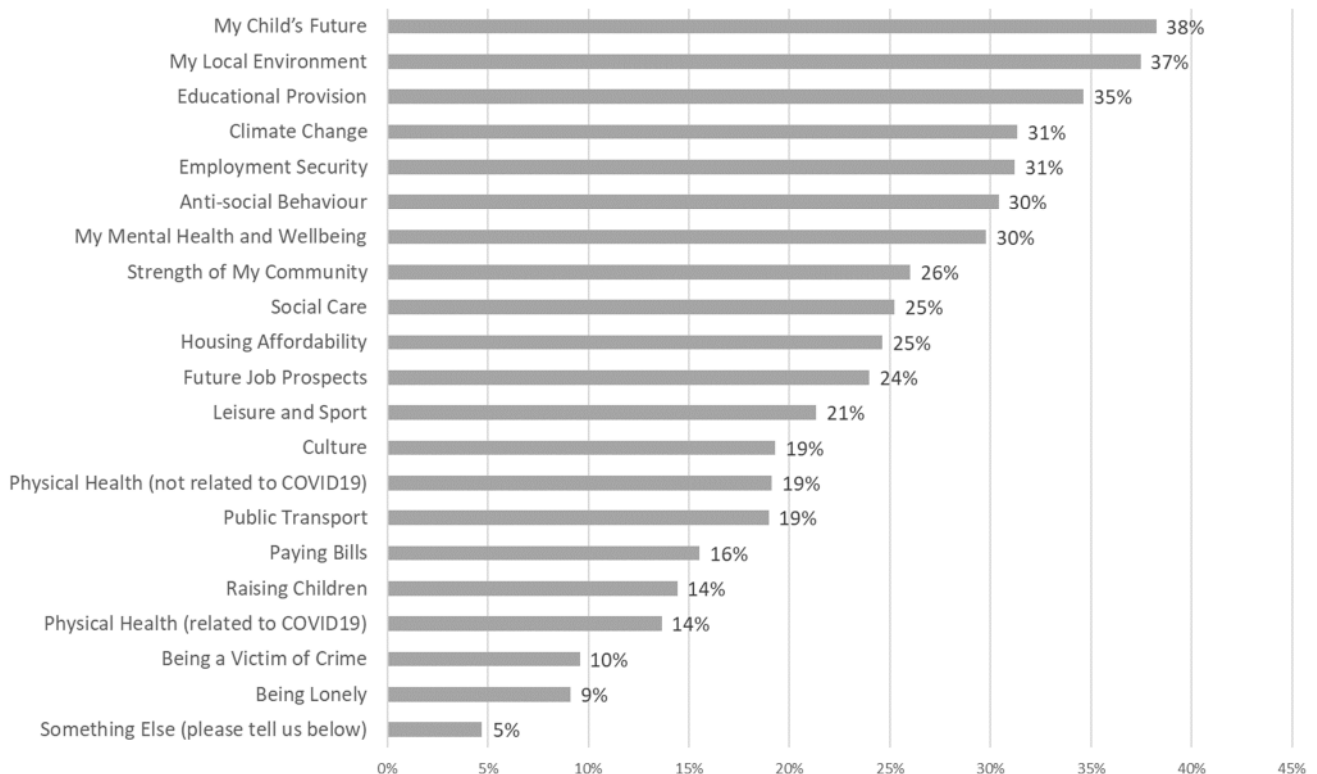


Over a half of respondents indicated that the coronavirus pandemic, education and schools and the economy/economic situation were of most importance at this time. In the previous two budget consultations, children and education have been identified as of most importance and so this is broadly reflected in the views this year. In last year's consultation, the theme of "promoting a prosperous, inclusive and sustainable economy" was identified as the least important of the Council's strategic objectives. This year's responses would suggest that the economy is now of much greater concern. Similarly, when compared to last year's consultation results, healthcare is an issue which is considered of greater importance at this time, with almost a half of people selecting this as a most important issue for Perth & Kinross, as the response to the coronavirus pandemic continues.

## 5.2 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. This question was not asked in previous years but introduced to further inform the budget setting process from a different perspective. It will also take into consideration the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on individuals and their communities this year.

Figure 3. Percentage of Respondents Indicating an Issues as of Most Importance for Individuals Now (638 Responses)



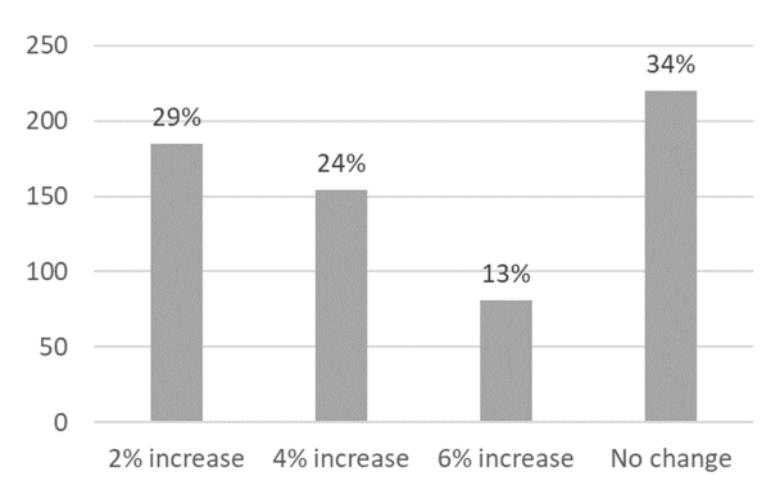
In reflection of the importance of education and schools for Perth & Kinross, educational provision and my child's future were indicated as of most importance for individuals, with over a third of respondents selecting these issues. Results suggest that climate change and environment are viewed as being of greater importance as a personal concern than as a concern/issue for Perth & Kinross. Other areas of most importance to individuals were employment security, anti-social behaviour and mental health and wellbeing, with around a third of respondents identifying these as issues on a personal level. The responses to both this question and the previous are important in understanding the nature and strength of issues felt by residents and others.

### 5.3 Change in Council Tax

Respondents were asked what percentage change in Council Tax was preferable (options of no change and 2%, 4% or 6% increases) – the survey highlighted that a 2% change in Band D Council Tax is equivalent to around 7p per day per household and a 6% change is around 22p per day per household. Respondents were unable to state a preference to reduce Council Tax.

Overall, 66% of respondents opted for an increase in Council Tax rather than no change. The majority of respondents who would prefer an increase, opted for a 2% increase. In the 2020/21 Budget Consultation, where options of 1%, 2%, 3%, more than 3% and no change were presented, 81% opted for an increase, the lower figure this year may be influenced by the exclusion of a 1% option. This year 37% of people opted for a 4 or 6% increase and this mirrors 37% in 20/21 who opted for 3% or more than 3%.

**Figure 4: Breakdown of preference on change in Council Tax (640 respondents)**



#### 5.4 Changes in how services are delivered

Respondents were asked how much they agreed with the following four statements about how the Council provides services, with 10 indicating "strongly agree and 0 indicating "strongly disagree":

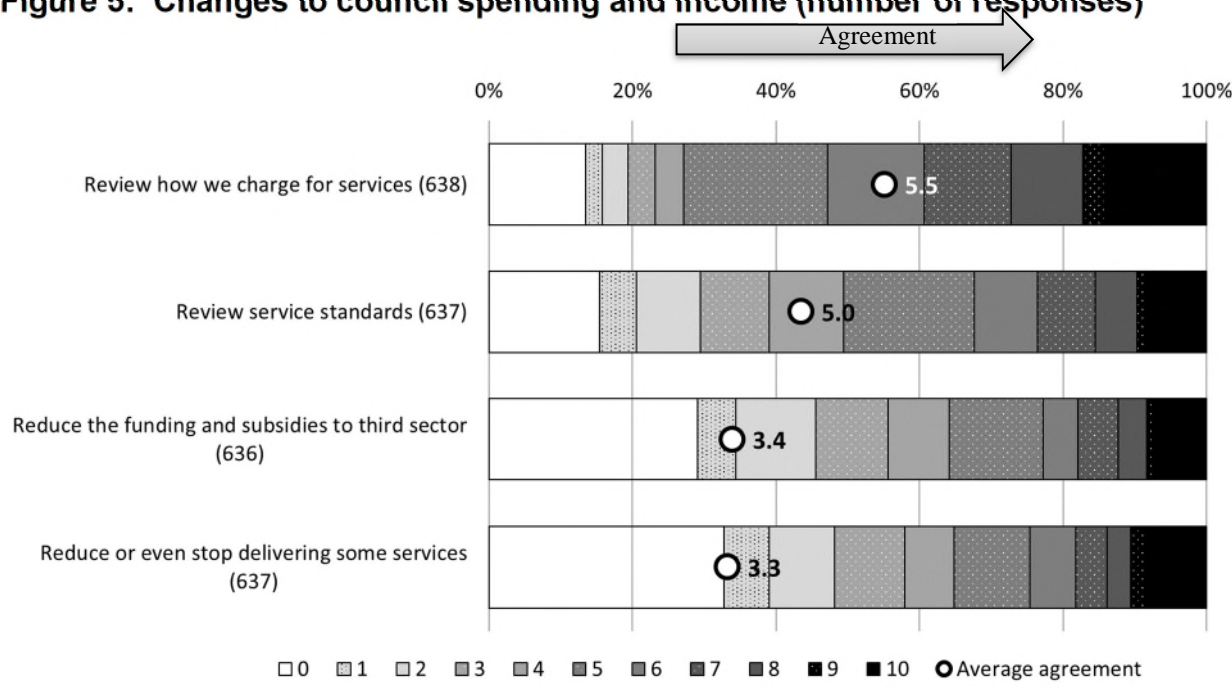
- The Council **reviews charges for services**, even if this means having to introduce or increase some charges to allow services to continue.
- The Council **reviews service standards**, even if this means that to continue the service, service levels are reduced, and delivery times increased.
- The Council **reduces or even stop delivering some services** to protect other services.
- The Council **reduces the funding and subsidies** it provides to voluntary organisations and community groups to make savings. These organisations help deliver a range of essential services to vulnerable and other groups across our communities, working together with the Council and other bodies.



Results showed a fall in favour for reviewing how we charge for services and reducing or stopping delivering services when compared to last year. There was little change in response regarding the review of service standards and reducing funding to the third sector.

Results shown in Figure 5 indicate that the public are most in favour of changes to how the Council charges for services (average score 5.5; 6.2 in 2020/21), even if this means having to introduce or increase some charges to allow services to continue. Respondents are least in favour of reducing funding or subsidies to voluntary organisations and community groups (average score 3.4) and reducing or even stop delivering some services (average score 3.3; 4.8 in 2021).

**Figure 5: Changes to council spending and income (number of responses)**



## 5.5 Changes to spending and income

Respondents were asked how much they agreed with a further six statements, with 10 indicating "strongly agree and 0 indicating "strongly disagree". 2 additional statements were added this year to reflect the Perth & Kinross Offer.

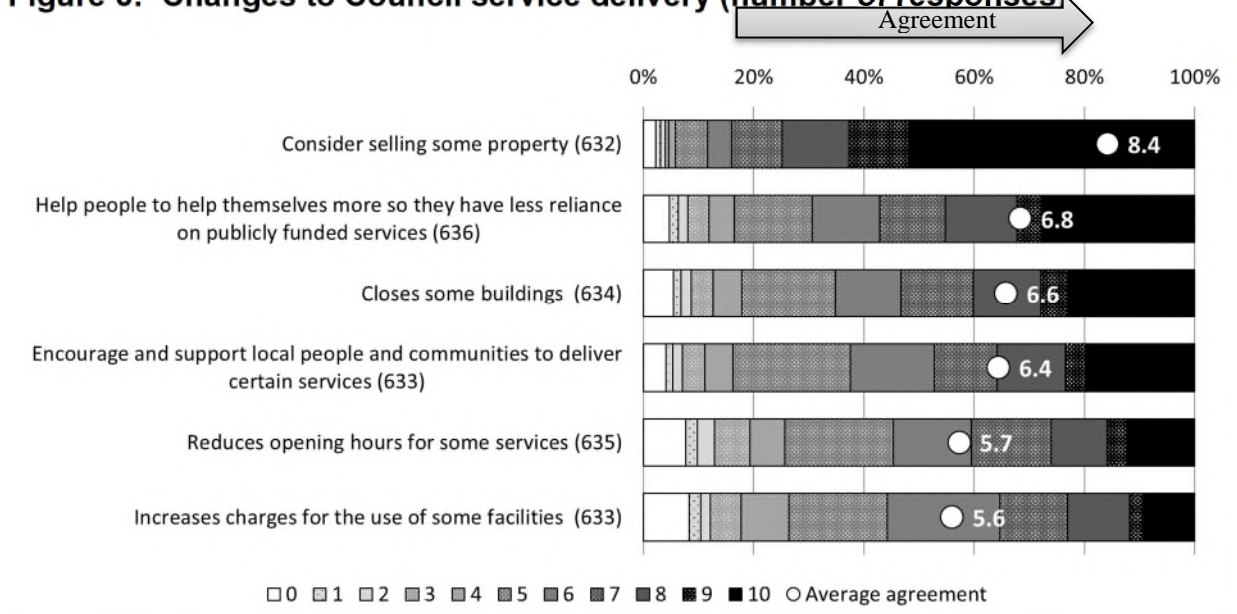
- The Council changes or **reduces opening hours** for some public services and facilities to reduce running costs.
- The Council **closes some buildings** in order to maintain others.
- The Council **considers selling some of the property** it owns and no longer has a use for.
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- The Council **increase charges for the use of some facilities** to ensure they can continue to be provided.
- **Encourage and support local people and communities to deliver certain services.**
- **Help people to help themselves more so they have less reliance on publicly funded services.**

## 5.6 Changes to council delivery

Responses detailed in Figure 6 show that the public were most in favour of the Council considering selling some of the property it owns and no longer has a use for (average score 8.4 out of 10). Selling property has 51% of respondents indicating full agreement. Over a quarter of people strongly agreed that the Council should support people to be more independent. Respondents were less in favour of reducing opening hours for some services (average score 5.7) and the possibility of increasing charges for the use of facilities (average score 5.6). Results broadly mirror the findings from last year's consultation but with an additional 2 options.

**Figure 6: Changes to Council service delivery (number of responses)**





## 6. Comments

When asked to share ideas that could help the Council save money or generate additional revenue **267** (41%) people chose to leave a comment (compared with 49% in 2020/21 Budget Consultation). Many respondents offered multiple suggestions and comments cover a wide variety of themes. Comments will be analysed and presented by theme in a subsequent report.

## 7. Social Media

This year's budget consultation generated more engagement via social media when compared to the 2020/21 Budget Consultation. Both Facebook and Twitter promotions included a series of quiz questions to find out how much people know about the Council Budget with answers posted and links to find out more and give views/consultation responses via the budget consultation homepage on the Consultation Hub.

- In response to Facebook promotion there were 21 comments, 11 reactions and 33 shares (the Budget Consultation 2020/21 generated 9 comments, 14 reactions and 22 shares)
- Promotion on Twitter generated 5 comments, 23 reactions and 11 retweets (the Budget Consultation 2020/21 generated 1 comment, 9 reactions and 23 retweets).

## 8. Next Steps

The response to our budget consultation 21/22 has increased from last year. This increase was achieved even with all engagement being carried out virtually and no face to face discussions taking place. We are aware that 2020 was a unique and uncertain year for everyone and this will impact upon the nature and number of responses received. However, the feedback is in keeping with our wider consultation and engagement themes and reflects the areas most important to people in Perth and Kinross.

We recognise the need to boost engagement in future years to ensure as many of our residents have the opportunity to comment and influence this important process. We will continue to benchmark with other local authorities to identify best practice, seek feedback from communities about their preferred methods of engagement and explore different formats and channels to improve engagement through our work to fully deliver the Perth and Kinross Offer.

Social media channels like Facebook and Twitter reached a different demographic and we will continue to explore them as a way of reaching those demographics like

younger people and communities of interest who do not always consult the PKC website regularly. In addition, our equalities team have been carrying out “quality conversations” with groups representing protected characteristics such as disability, race, religion and LGBTI. We will continue to expand on this work in the coming year.

## **9. Conclusion**

The Perth and Kinross Offer details our commitment to working together with the communities we serve. Continuous engagement and discussion will be key to its success and ensuring that we feedback on progress (you said, we did and we are doing) is critical to 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.

The budget consultation 2021/22 and wider engagement feedback gives a picture of the themes and issues that are important to the communities and citizens, who have responded to our wide ranging consultation activities.