

Budget Consultation Briefing – January 2022

1. Introduction

Over the past year, we have continued virtual consultation and engagement activities with our residents and communities in a number of priority work areas. Feedback from surveys, questionnaires and online meetings / events have been used as a way of gathering feedback and data to inform our policies and processes. We also engage well with our communities on our social media channels.

This process will continue to be iterative, especially as work on increasing external awareness and embedding the Perth & Kinross Offer.

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 2022/23.

2. 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 29 November and 19 December 2021, 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 remained broadly similar to the previous year with a few improvements made following suggestions from respondents and as a result of engagement with Elected Members. This year's survey contained introductory information 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. Respondents were asked for feedback around what matters most to them and what areas they think budgets should be focussed on and people's personal priorities. We also asked for their opinions regarding possibilities on how we deliver services.

The consultation was promoted via a press release. In addition, an interactive social media campaign was launched on Facebook with the aim to engage and inform the public and promote the consultation.

The PKC Budget Consultation page received **9,381** unique page views by the public. Overall, there were **739** completed surveys, an increase on last year (642 in 2021/22 484 in 2020/21; 1085 in 2019/20, 736 in 2018/19, 332 in 2017/18, 91 in 2016/17).

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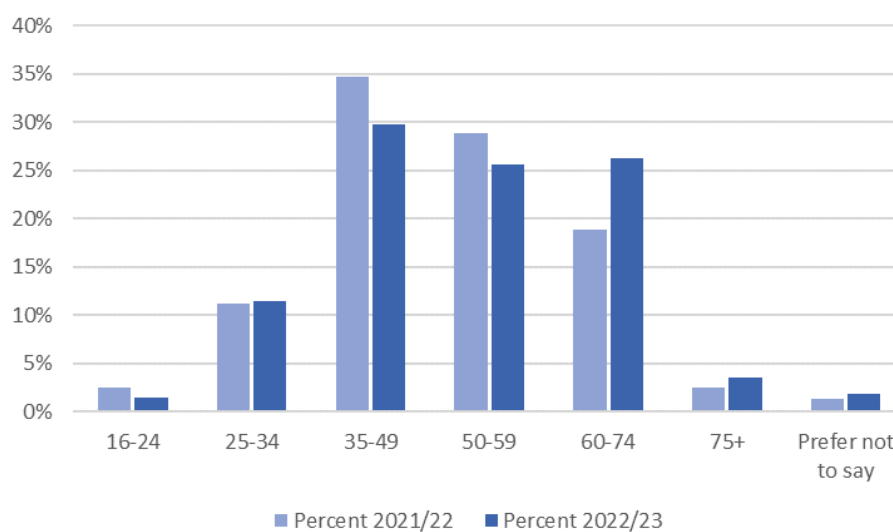


As with any exercise of this type, results cannot be considered fully representative of all PKC residents but are indicative and influenced by the demographic of participants. 99% of respondents live in Perth and Kinross (95% in 2021-22), and 19% of respondents study or work locally (36% in 2021-22).

17% of responses stated that they are current employees of Perth & Kinross Council, 2% said they had been employed by the Council in the last 3 years and 2% said they would rather not submit this information.

Encouragingly, the age distribution of respondents is more balanced when compared to all-inclusive consultations such as this (see Figure 1). This year however the slight increase in proportion of responses from the 60–74 year-old age range is noticeable and has contributed to the increased return rate.

Figure 1: Age breakdown of respondents

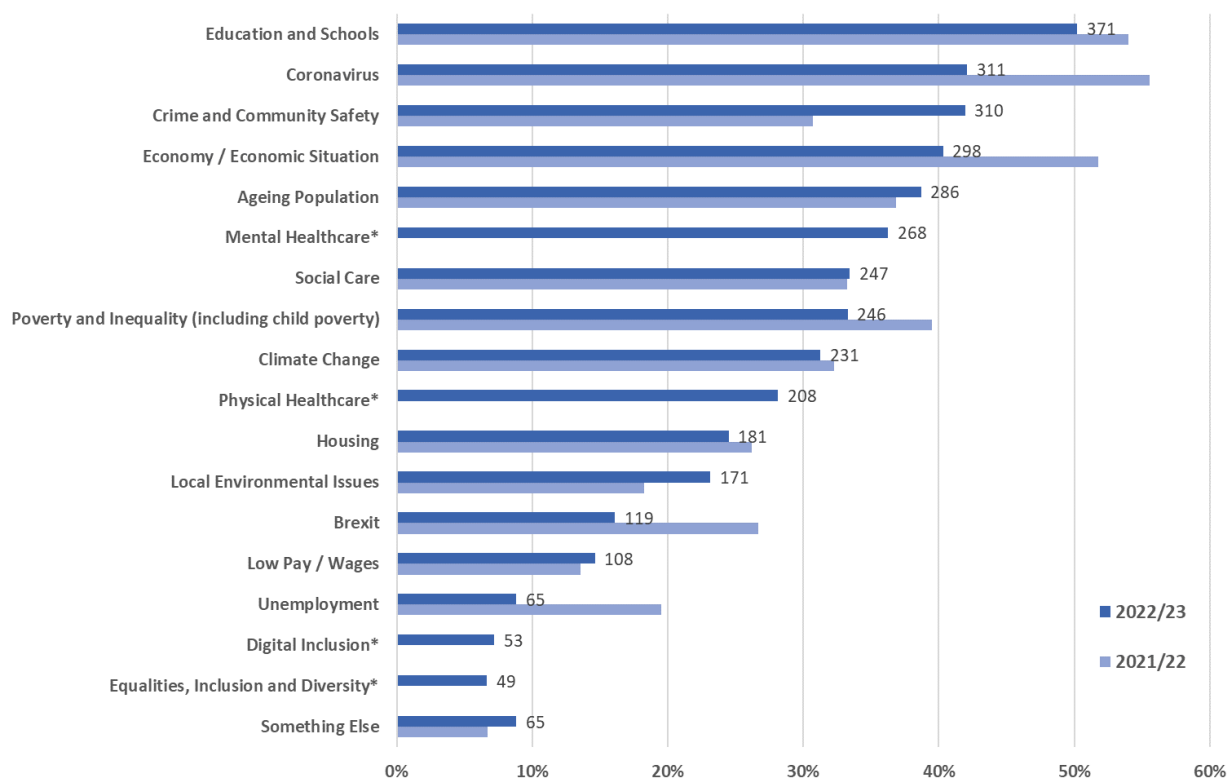


3. Results

3.1 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 question was also asked in the 2021/22 budget consultation and replaced questions asked in previous years about the importance of the Council's five strategic objectives (2020/21) and twelve service areas (previous years). Reflecting on feedback last year we included additional issues* (see Figure 2) of digital inclusion and, equalities, inclusion and diversity. Healthcare was divided into mental and physical healthcare to give added insight. Although these changes make direct comparison between years more difficult, we can draw out some broad trends.

Figure 2. Percentage of respondents indicating an issue as of most importance for Perth & Kinross Council (739 responses)

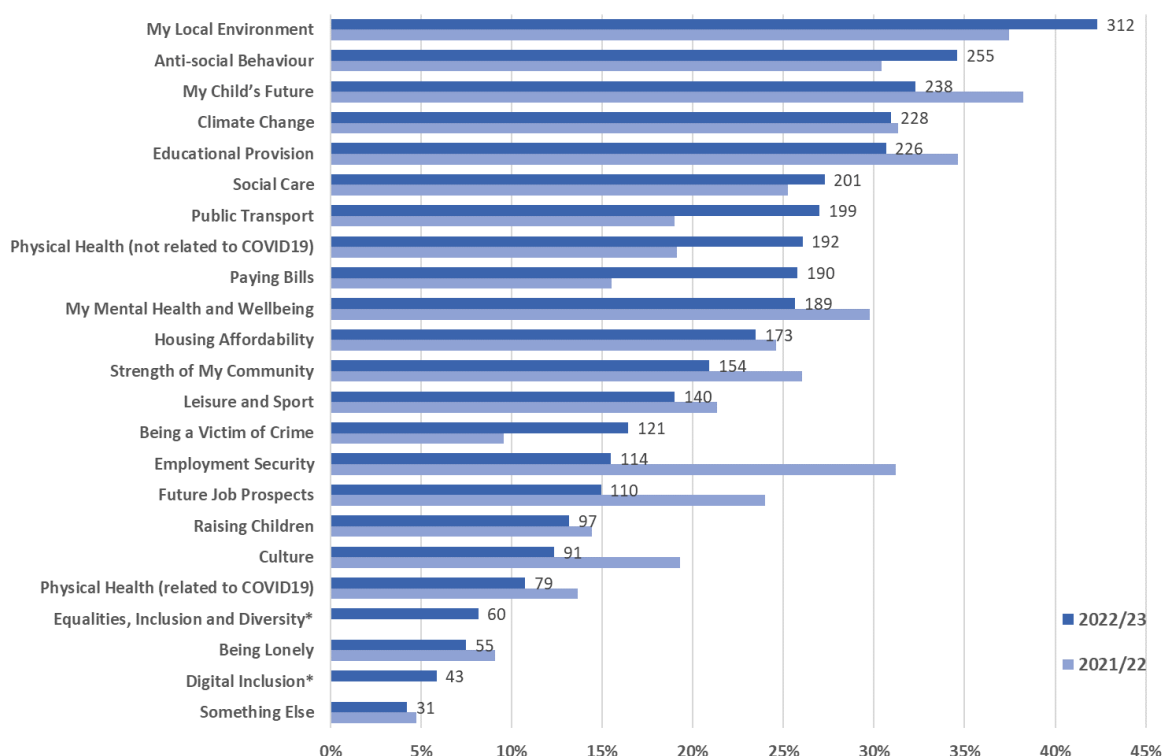


Education and schools is considered to be of most importance now with a half of all respondents selecting this as an important issue. In the previous three budget consultations, children and education/schools have been identified as of high importance and so this continues to be considered a priority. **Coronavirus** remains an issue of high importance, although it was selected by a lower proportion of respondents than last year when it was the most commonly identified issue. **Crime and community safety** has emerged as a popular issue and was selected by 41% of respondents, compared to only 30% in 2021/22. As seen in last year's budget consultation the economy/economic situation was selected by a high proportion of respondents. This suggests that the **economy** is now of much greater concern to respondents in comparison to 2021/22 when the theme of "promoting a prosperous, inclusive and sustainable economy" was identified as the least important of the Council's strategic objectives. This year we differentiated healthcare as mental and physical. The broader term of "healthcare" was used last year and selected by a half of respondents. Healthcare remains an important priority, however this year we identify **mental health care** as being considered a priority by more than respondents (35%) than physical health care (28%). There has been a reduction in the proportion of people concerned about Brexit and unemployment, compared to last year. **Local environmental issues** is selected by a greater proportion of people when compared to last year. Other issues have a broadly similar importance compared with the previous year.

3.2 *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 (as opposed to the Perth & Kinross area more widely). These issues did not need to be ranked in order of importance. This question was asked last year when it was introduced to further inform the budget setting process from a different perspective. It takes into consideration the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on individuals and their communities in recent times. Reflecting on feedback last year we included additional issues (highlighted with *) of digital inclusion and, equalities, inclusion and diversity. Although these changes make direct comparison between years tenuous, we can draw out some broad trends.

Figure 3. Percentage of respondents indicating an issue as of most importance personally (737 responses)²

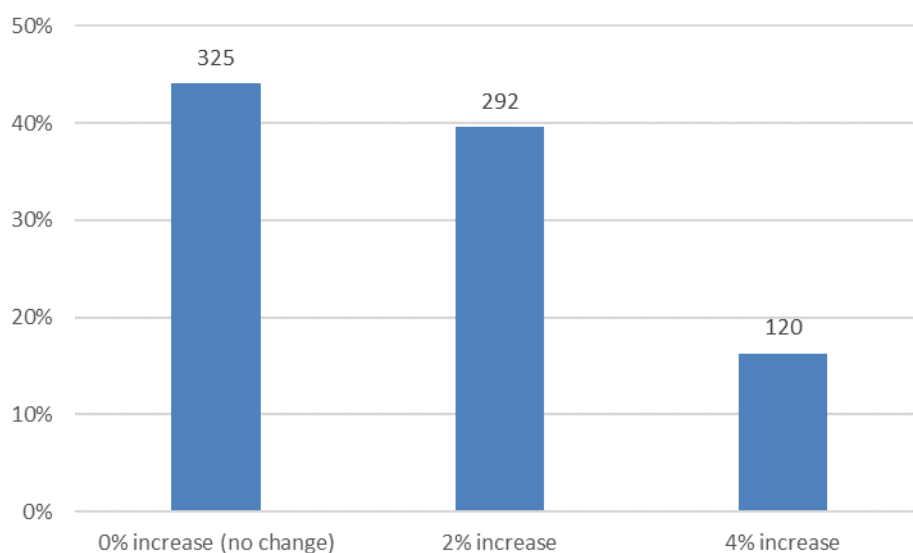


My local environment is the most selected issue on a personal level which is the same response as in last year's consultation. than for the wider area. **Anti-social behaviour** has emerged as second top priority and this reflects the increased concern about crime and community safety from a PKC perspective. **My child's future** and **educational provision** remain priority concerns although were selected by a smaller proportion of respondents when compared to last year, possibly reflecting the demographic of respondents. **Climate change** and **social care** remain popular issues of concern. A notable higher number of respondents selected **public transport**, **physical health**, **paying bills** and **victim of crime** compared to last year. A reduced proportion of responses were received for employment security, future job prospects and culture.

3.3 Change in Council Tax

Respondents were asked what percentage change in Council Tax was preferable (options of no change and 2% or 4%) – the survey highlighted that a 2% change in Band D Council Tax is equivalent to around 8p per day per household and a 4% change is around 14p per day per household. Respondents were unable to state a preference to reduce Council Tax.

Figure 4: Breakdown of preference on change in Council Tax (737 respondents)



Overall, 56% of respondents opted for an increase in Council Tax of some kind rather than no change (44%). Most respondents who would prefer an increase, opted for a 2% increase (40%). In the 2021/22 Budget Consultation, where options of 0%, 2%, 4% and 6%, were presented, 66% opted for an increase.

3.4 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”;

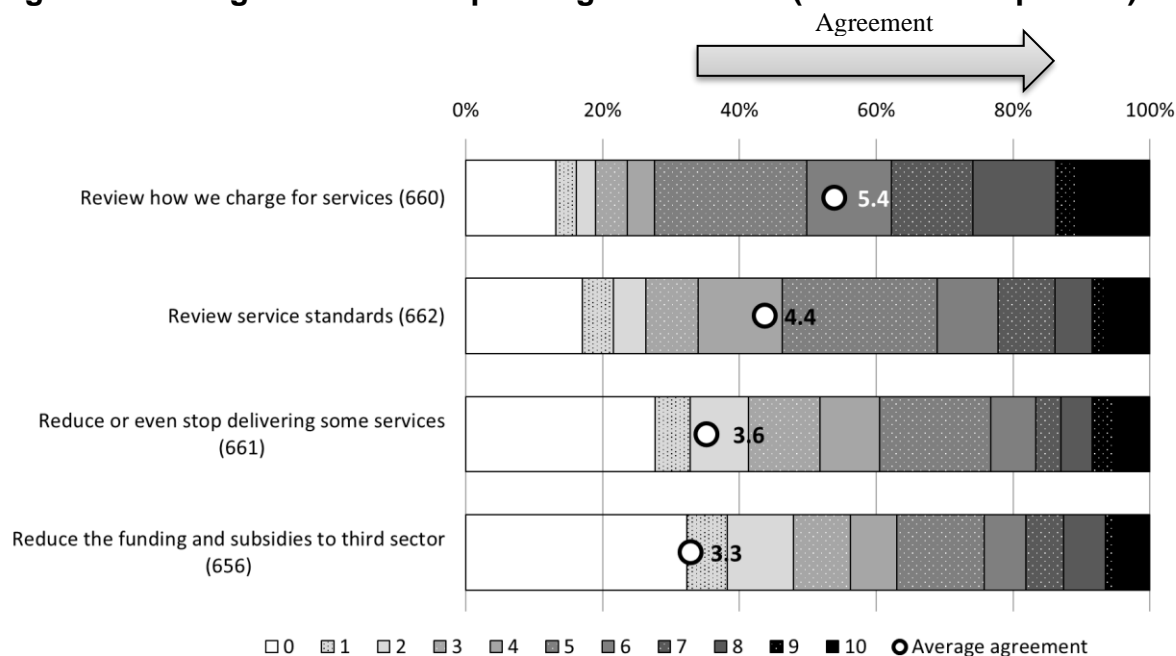
- The Council **reviews charges for services**, even if this means having to introduce or increase some charges to allow services to continue.
- The Council **reviews service standards**, even if this means that to continue the service, service levels are reduced, and delivery times increased.
- The 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.

There has been little change in agreement/disagreement with these statements change when compared to the previous year.

Results shown in Figure 5 indicate that the public continue to be most in favour of changes to how the Council charges for services (average score 5.4 out of 10; 5.5 in 2021/22), even if this means having to introduce or increase some charges to allow services to continue. There has been a slight fall in agreement with reviewing service standards in comparison to the previous year with an average score of 4.4 (5.0 in 2021/22). Respondents are least in favour of reducing or even stop delivering some services (average score 3.6; 3.3 in 21/2022) and reducing funding or subsidies to voluntary organisations and community groups (average score 3.3, 3.4 in 2021/22).



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



3.5 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.

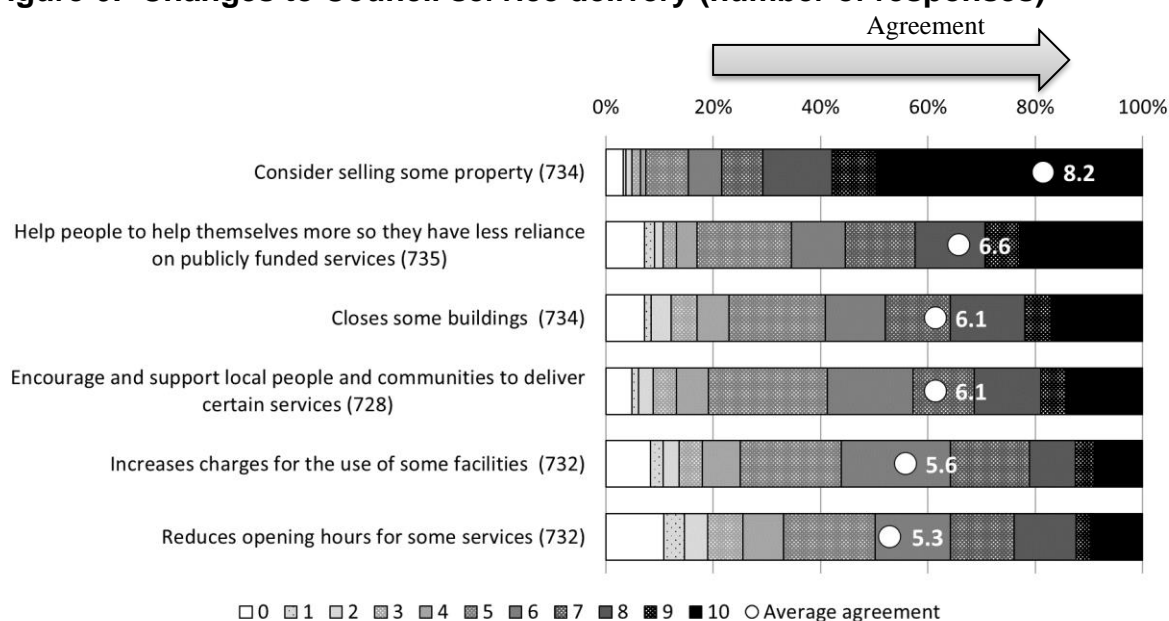
- The Council changes or **reduces opening hours** for some public services and facilities to reduce running costs.
- The Council **closes some buildings** in order to maintain others.
- The Council **considers selling some of the property** it owns and no longer has a use for.
- The Council **increase 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** (added this year).
- **Help people to help themselves more so they have less reliance on publicly funded services** (added this year).

3.6 Changes to council delivery

There has been little change in agreement/disagreement with these statements change when compared to the previous year.

Responses detailed in Figure 6 show that the public remain most in favour of the Council considering selling some of the property it owns and no longer has a use for (average score 8.2 out of 10, 8.4 in 2021/22). Selling property has 56% of respondents indicating a degree of agreement. The sway in opinion remains slightly in favour of helping people to help themselves (6.6 average, 6.8 in 2021/22), closing buildings (6.1 average, 6.6 in 2021/22) and encouraging local communities to deliver services (6.1 average, 6.4 in 2021/22). Respondents remained less in favour of the possibility of increasing charges for the use of facilities and average score of 5.6 is unchanged from last year and reducing opening hours for some services (average score 5.3, 5.7 in 2021/22).

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



4. Additional Comments

When asked to share ideas that could help the Council save money or generate additional revenue **309** (44%) people chose to leave a comment (compared with 41% in 2021/22 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.

5. Social Media

This year's budget consultation generated more engagement via social media when compared to the 2020/21 Budget Consultation. Facebook promotions included 'would you rather' questions which users were invited to respond to by using emoji reactions e.g. use the 'like' reaction if you would make choice 'a' and the 'surprise' reaction if you would make choice 'b' to demonstrate how difficult it can be to choose between options where there is only the budget available to support one. All social media posts included a link to the budget consultation homepage on the Consultation Hub to invite people to complete the survey.

Twitter users tend to be a more business-focussed/politically involved audience. We took the decision to focus on informational posts inviting people to comment and sharing posts from other Twitter users who were encouraging people to respond to the survey (as long as their encouragement was presented in a politically neutral way).

- In response to Facebook promotion there were 48 comments, 284 reactions, 45 shares, and 2,444 clicks of the link to the budget consultation survey web page for more information. (The Budget Consultation 2020/21 generated 27 comments, 17 reactions, 31 shares, and 1,147 clicks to the web page.)
- Promotion on Twitter generated 5 comments, 23 reactions and 11 retweets (the Budget Consultation 2020/21 generated 1 comment, 9 reactions and 23 retweets).

6. Next Steps

The response to our budget consultation 22/23 has increased from last year. This has been encouraging as an increase was achieved even with all engagement continuing to be virtual and no option of face to face discussions available at this time. We are aware that 2021/22 continued to be an uncertain time for everyone and that covid response including support to vaccination centres remained a Council priority. While this does impact upon the nature and number of responses received our increased social media engagement and more informal approach on these channels has proved to be successful. In addition, feedback continues to be in keeping with our wider consultation and engagement themes and reflects the areas most important to people in Perth and Kinross.

As restrictions start to ease and we begin to see a tentative return to social engagements and events, 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

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preferred methods of engagement and explore different formats and channels to improve engagement through our work to fully deliver the Perth & Kinross Offer and our transformation programme.

We will continue to increase use of our social media channels like Facebook and Twitter to reach a different demographic of our wider community – including young people and communities of interest.

To support this work, our equalities team have been carrying out “quality conversations” with specific groups representing protected characteristics such as disability, race, religion and LGBTI. We will continue to expand on this work in the coming year.

We will also begin to plan the return of face to face engagement events and briefings for people of Perth & Kinross in 2022, taking into consideration the needs of communities and providing opportunities for all to be involved.

7. Conclusion

Our budget consultation for 2022/23 has provided us with feedback on priorities and themes that are important to people in Perth & Kinross. It has also provided further suggestions which can be used to inform our budget process as well as in wider engagement exercises. This approach supports our Perth & Kinross Offer which details our commitment to working together with the communities we serve. 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.

The budget consultation 2022/23 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.