

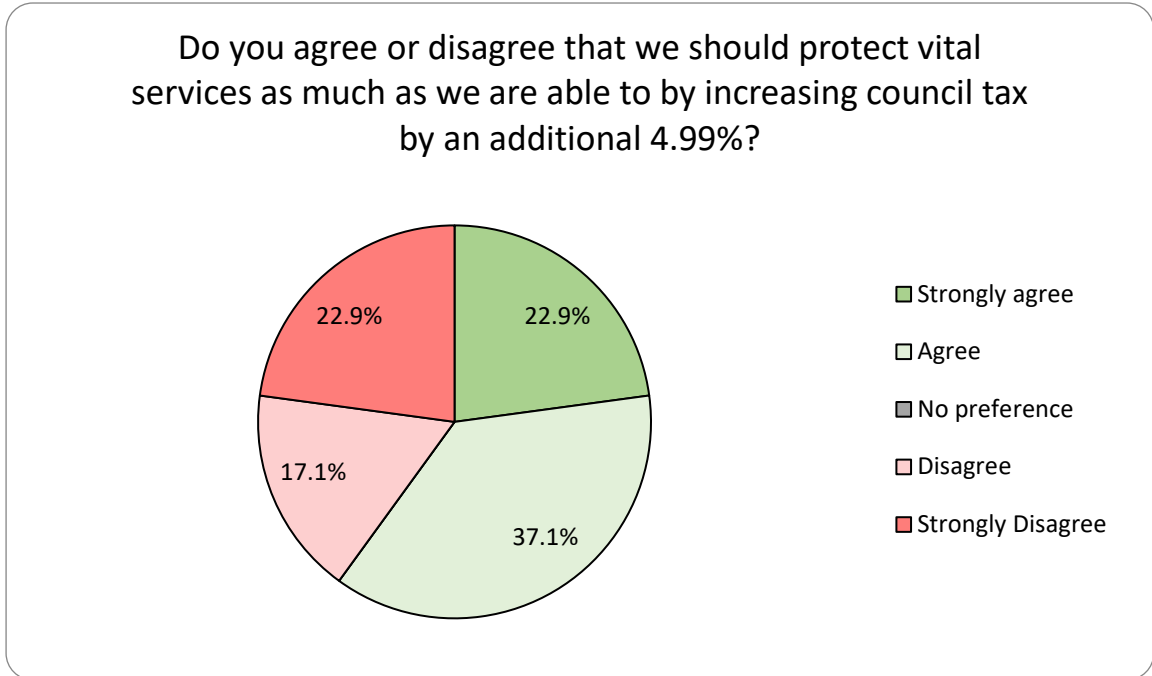


## **St Helens Borough Council Budget Consultation 2025/26**

### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1.** The Council conducted a public budget consultation exercise 16 January to 7 February 2025. This consultation was developed to ascertain the views of residents on the level of council tax and social care precept for 2025/26 and the spending priorities of the Council.
- 1.2.** The Budget Consultation 2025/26 included supporting information to help residents and businesses understand the Council's financial position and decision-making process. The documents provided an overview of the Council's Budget which included details of the revenue and capital budgets, key service areas, and funding sources. The consultation also explained the challenges the Council faces, including rising service demand, social care costs, inflation, and homelessness pressures. Additionally, the Council's long-term financial strategy was outlined, highlighting planned investments in regeneration projects and ongoing efforts to balance the budget without additional savings beyond the existing three-year plan.
- 1.3.** The survey comprised 6 main questions; the majority of which were closed questions to understand levels of agreement/disagreement. However, there were open questions where respondents could provide their general views and comments.
- 1.4.** The number of responses received in the Consultation was low (35) and not all respondents provided a complete response to every question.
- 1.5.** This report provides a summary of the responses to each question.
- 1.6.** **Question 1 – From April 2025, the Government is allowing councils to increase council tax by up to 4.99% inclusive of an adult social care precept of 2%. The Council will decide what increase it will apply when it sets the revenue budget for 2025/26. Currently the full 4.99% has been incorporated into the draft balanced budget. Do you agree or disagree that we should protect vital services as much as we are able to by increasing council tax by an additional 4.99%?**

- 1.6.1. The response to the question on increasing council tax by 4.99% to protect vital services was mixed. A majority (60%) supported the increase, with 37% agreeing and 23% strongly agreeing. Conversely, 40% opposed the increase, with 17% disagreeing and 23% strongly disagreeing. No respondents selected "No preference".



- 1.7. **Question 2 - If you disagree with increasing council tax by 4.99%, what alternative measures would you suggest to prevent a budget shortfall? Please note that every 1% increase in council tax generates approximately £1.0million.**

- 1.7.1. This question was open for respondents who disagreed to increasing council tax to provide alternative options. Responses were low, however, the key themes identified in their responses included:

- Reducing the number of staff and lowering the wage bill for highly paid employees.
- Implementing stricter scrutiny of departmental spending.
- Minimising unnecessary expenditures.
- Reducing costs in children's and adult social care services.
- Enhancing transparency in the Council's budgeting process.

**1.8. Question 3 – We previously asked you what mattered to you the most, and your feedback helped us develop our six key priorities.**

**Priority 1** Ensure children and young people have a positive start in life

**Priority 2** Promote good health, and independence and care across our communities

**Priority 3** Create safe and strong communities and neighbourhoods for all

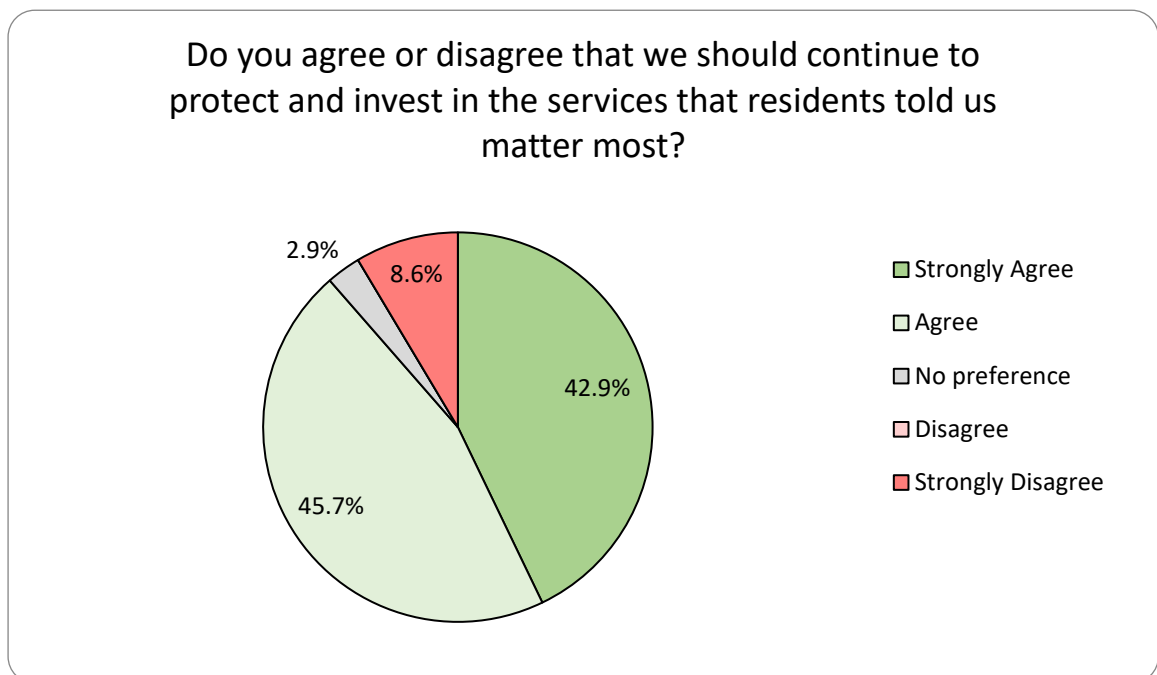
**Priority 4** Support a strong, thriving, inclusive and well-connected local economy

**Priority 5** Create green and vibrant places that reflect our culture and heritage

**Priority 6** Be a responsible Council

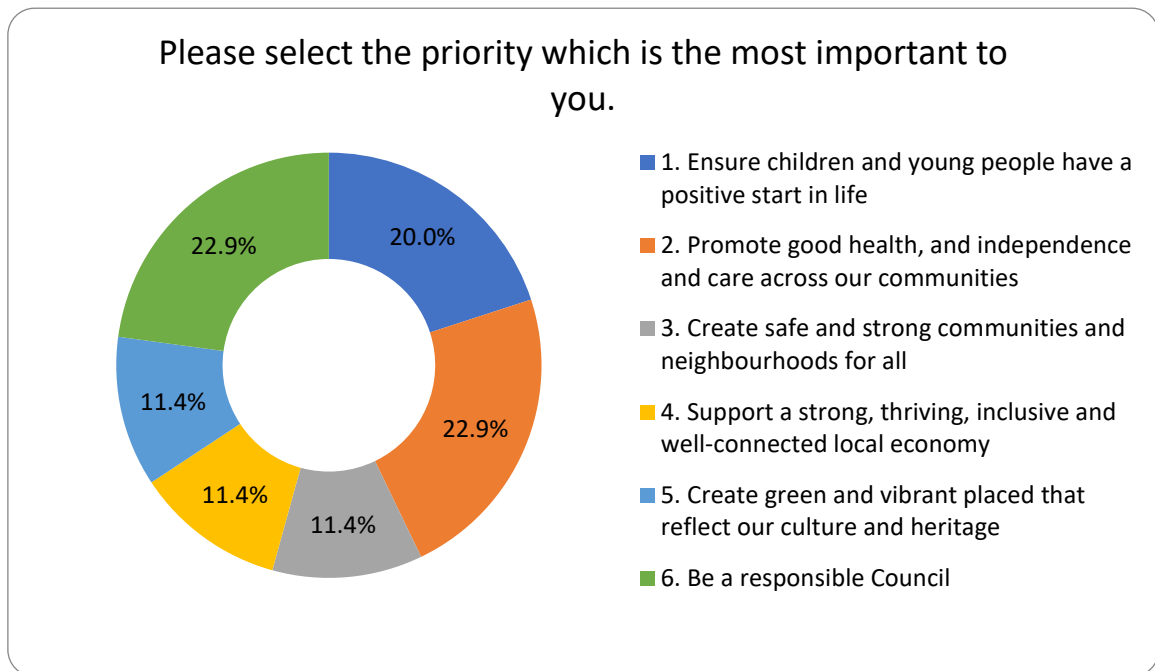
**Do you agree or disagree that we should continue to protect and invest in the services that residents told us matter most?**

1.8.1. The majority of respondents (89%) supported the continued protection and investment in services identified as key priorities by residents. Of these, 46% agreed, and 43% strongly agreed. A small proportion (3%) selected "No preference", while 9% strongly disagreed, and no respondents disagreed.



**1.9. Question 4 – Please select the priority which is the most important to you (please select one priority only).**

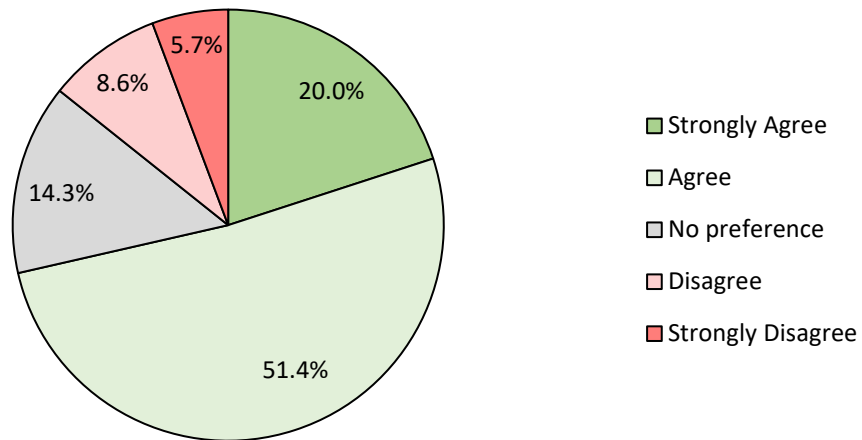
1.9.1. The chart below summarises the responses regarding the Council's six priorities. The highest number of respondents (23%) selected Priority 2 (Promote good health, independence, and care across communities) and Priority 6 (Be a responsible Council) as the most important. This was closely followed by Priority 1 (Ensure children and young people have a positive start in life), which received 20% of the responses.



**1.10. Question 5 – Do you agree with maximising income from sales, fees and charges, by increasing them in line with the pay award, general inflation or to match market demands, to support the council's budget position?**

1.10.1. The majority of respondents (71%) supported the approach of maximising income from sales, fees, and charges to support the Council's budget, with 51% agreeing and 20% strongly agreeing. A smaller proportion (14%) selected "No preference," while 15% opposed the measure, with 9% disagreeing and 6% strongly disagreeing.

Do you agree with maximising income from sales, fees and charges?



**1.11. Question 6 - Please give any general views and comments on the proposal or wider budget issues.**

1.11.1. This question enabled respondents to provide more general feedback. The key themes identified in their responses included:

- **Recognition of Achievements** – Acknowledgment of improvements in children's services, with a call to focus on learning disabilities and mental health.
- **Justification of Tax Increases** – Concern over the impact of tax rises on residents and businesses, with a request for clear explanations and justification.
- **Council Management and Efficiency** – Feedback that the council is top-heavy, with suggestions to reduce management layers and redirect funds to frontline services.
- **Transparency and Consultation** – Requests for more supporting information to the consultation and transparency in budget allocations.
- **Town Centre Projects** – The need for clear progress updates and realistic timelines for town centre developments.