



St Helens Borough Council **Budget Consultation 2026/27**

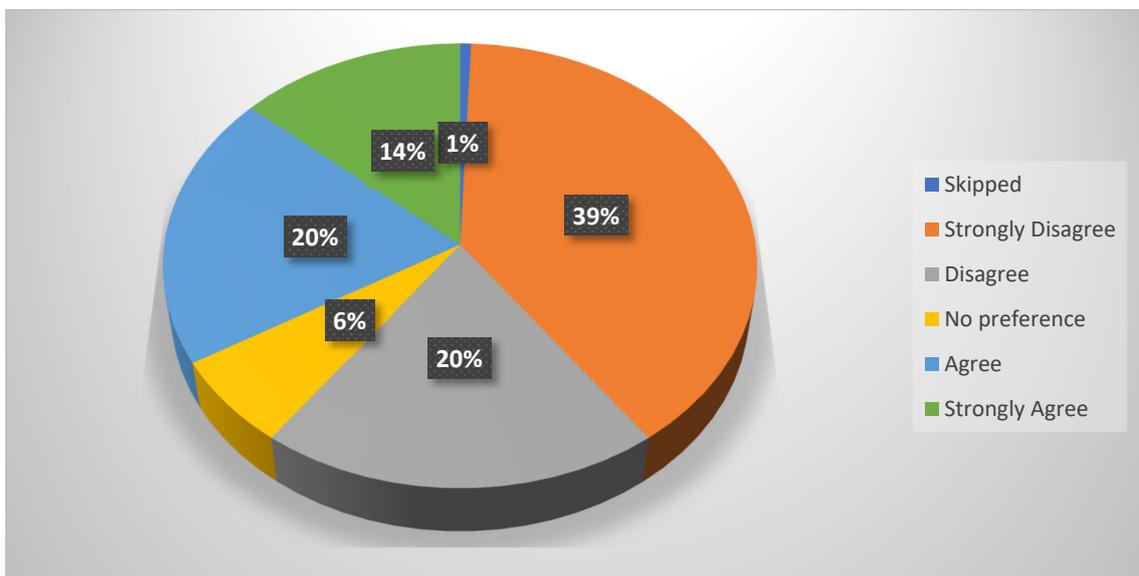
1. Introduction

- 1.1.** The Council conducted a public budget consultation exercise from 3 November to 28 November 2025. This consultation was developed to ascertain the views of residents to help inform the decisions the Council will make about its budget for the coming year.
- 1.2.** The Budget Consultation 2026/27 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.
- 1.3.** The consultation also explained the challenges the Council faces, including including inflationary pressures, uncertainty around future funding, and increased service demand.
- 1.4.** 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.
- 1.5.** The survey comprised 7 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.
- 1.6.** The number of responses received in the Consultation was **155**. This report provides a summary of the responses to each question.

2.1. Question 1 – Do you agree achieving a balanced budget in both the short and medium term is vital to ensuring the delivery of efficient and effective services.

2.1.1. The consultation results indicate strong support for maintaining a balanced budget in both the short and medium term. A significant majority (78%) of respondents—**41% strongly agree** and **36% agree**—emphasised the importance of this approach to ensure efficient and effective service delivery. Only **10%** expressed disagreement while **11.6%** had no preference. This demonstrates that residents largely recognise the necessity of sound financial management as a foundation for sustaining vital services and meeting community priorities.

2.2. Question 2 - Under the current modelling for the 2026/27 Local Government Finance Settlement, the Government has assumed a Council tax increase of 4.99% inclusive of an adult social care precept of 2.0%. The Council will decide what increase it will apply when it sets the revenue budget for 2026/27. 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%?



2.2.1.

2.2.2. Responses to the proposed 4.99% council tax increase, inclusive of the adult social care precept, show a mixed picture. While 59.4% of respondents indicated disagreement, **a substantial proportion**—33.5%—expressed support for the increase, with a further 6.5% having no preference. This indicates that although affordability remains a concern for many households, around one-third of residents recognise the need to raise council tax to help protect vital services. The split responses reflect the challenge of balancing financial pressures on residents with the necessity of sustaining essential local services.

2.3. Question 3 – If you disagree with increasing council tax by 4.99%, what increase would you be comfortable with and what would you do differently to prevent a budget shortfall? Please note that every 1% increase in council tax generates approximately £1.0million.

2.3.1. This open-ended question was directed specifically at respondents who disagreed with the proposed 4.99% council tax increase, inviting them to suggest an alternative level of increase and their ideas for avoiding a budget shortfall. The feedback reflected a range of views, with several consistent themes emerging:

- **Preferred Increase:** Many proposed smaller increases, typically between 1–3%, with some advocating for a 0% freeze.
- **Efficiency Savings:** Suggestions included reducing waste, scrutinising departmental spending, and limiting non-essential services.
- **Alternative Revenue:** Respondents proposed generating income through local events, reviewing property-related taxes, and introducing charges for empty homes.
- **Government Funding:** There was strong emphasis on lobbying for increased central government support.
- **Transparency:** Many called for clearer communication and greater public accountability in budget decision-making.

2.4. Question 4 – We previously asked you what mattered to you the most, and your feedback helped us develop our six key priorities.

1. Ensure children and young people have a positive start in life
2. Promote good health, and independence and care across our communities
3. Create safe and strong communities and neighbourhoods for all
4. Support a strong, thriving, inclusive and well-connected local economy
5. Create green and vibrant places that reflect our culture and heritage
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?

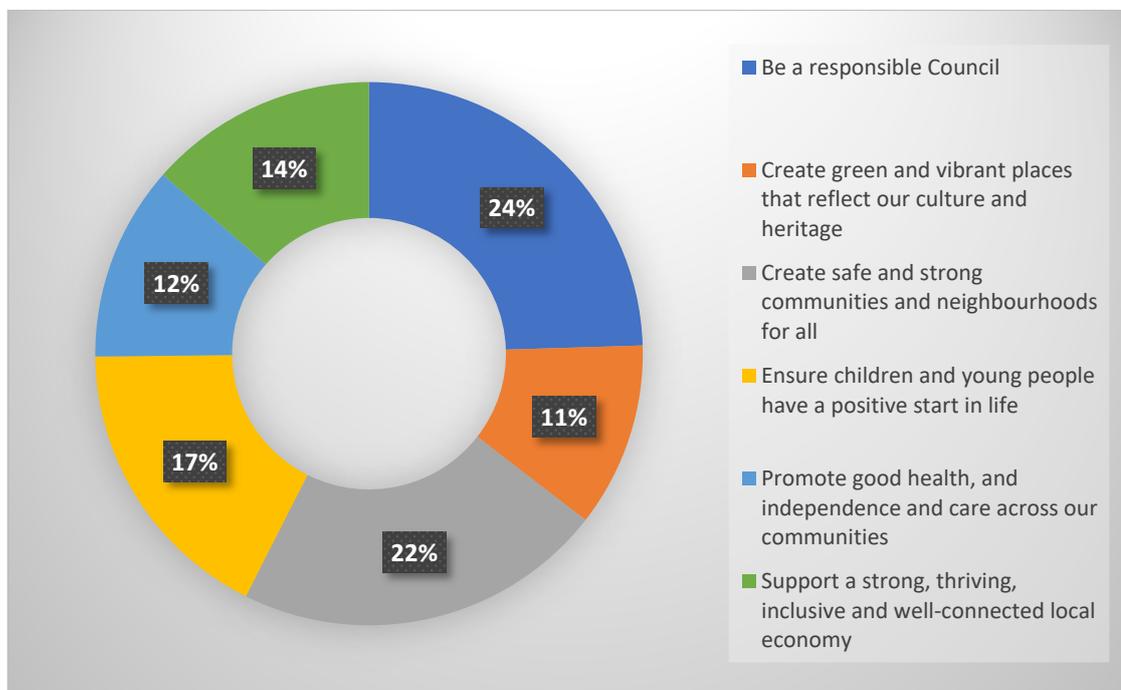
2.4.1. The results show strong and clear support for continuing to protect and invest in the services residents identified as most important. **Over 72% of respondents** agreed with this approach, demonstrating broad endorsement of the Council's six key priorities. While 19% expressed disagreement, this

represents a relatively small minority compared with the significant majority who back ongoing investment in these priority areas.

2.5. Question 5 – Please select the priority which is the most important to you (please select one priority only).

2.5.1. Respondents were asked to identify the single most important priority from the six agreed by the Council. The results show that governance and community safety were considered most critical, while all priorities retained notable support. Key findings include:

- **Be a responsible Council:** 24%
- **Create safe and strong communities and neighbourhoods for all:** 22%
- **Ensure children and young people have a positive start in life:** 17%
- **Support a strong, thriving, inclusive and well-connected local economy:** 14%
- **Promote good health, independence and care across our communities:** 12%
- **Create green and vibrant places that reflect our culture and heritage:** 11%



2.6. Question 6 – 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?

2.6.1. The chart below summarises responses to the proposal to increase income from sales, fees, and charges in line with pay awards, inflation, or market demand. Just over half of respondents either agreed or expressed no preference, **with 34% agreeing and 17% strongly agreeing**, and a further 17% indicating no preference. While there was some opposition—with 18% strongly disagreeing and 15% disagreeing—these views highlight concerns primarily around affordability. Overall, the responses suggest a reasonable level of acceptance that income generation plays an important role in supporting the Council’s financial position.

2.6.2.

Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Strongly Agree		16.77%	26
2	Agree		33.55%	52
3	No preference		16.77%	26
4	Disagree		14.84%	23
5	Strongly Disagree		18.06%	28
			Answered	155
			Skipped	0

2.7. Question 7 - Please give any general views and comments on the proposal or wider budget issues.

2.7.1. This question allowed respondents to provide open-ended feedback on the proposals and wider budget issues. A total of **67 participants submitted comments**, which highlighted several recurring themes:

- **Recognition of Achievements:** Positive remarks on improvements in children’s services, with calls for greater focus on mental health and learning disabilities.
- **Concerns About Tax Increases:** Many respondents expressed worry about affordability and requested clear justification for any rise in council tax.
- **Efficiency and Management:** Suggestions included reducing senior management layers, cutting wasteful spending, and prioritising frontline services.
- **Transparency and Consultation:** Calls for clearer communication on how funds are allocated and more detailed information during consultations.
- **Town Centre Regeneration:** Requests for visible progress and realistic timelines for redevelopment projects.

- **Community Safety and Wellbeing:** Emphasis on improving public spaces, tackling anti-social behaviour, and investing in youth facilities.

These comments reflect a strong desire for accountability, cost control, and tangible improvements in local services and infrastructure

3. Conclusion

Overall, the consultation reflects a community that values both affordability and the preservation of vital local services. Although many residents expressed concern about cost pressures, a sizeable minority supported a 4.99% council tax increase to help protect frontline provision. Respondents consistently reaffirmed the importance of the Council's six key priorities, particularly community safety, responsible governance, and services for children and young people. These insights provide a clear mandate to continue focusing resources where they have the greatest impact, while maintaining a balanced approach to financial sustainability and transparent decision-making.