



St Helens Borough Council Budget Consultation 2021-2022

Introduction

As part of the budget setting process for 2021-2022 the Council ran a budget consultation exercise which sought the views of residents in relation to increasing the level of Council Tax by up to 1.99%.

St Helens, like other Councils with social care responsibility, may also apply an adult social care precept of up to 3% in 2021-2022 to fund increased demand for care services.

This brings the possible overall Council Tax increase for 2021-2022 to 4.99%.

In addition, residents' views were invited in relation to the potential savings options to balance the budget and suggestions to balance the budget gap.

The consultation was promoted on the homepage of the Council website and an active social media campaign was conducted through Facebook and Twitter.

The Council also sought the views of residents on what services they would like the Council to prioritise next year using a service prioritisation simulator.

The consultation and the service prioritisation simulator ran through to 12 February 2021. The number of responses received exceeded those from the previous year, with 179 responses received in relation to the level of Council Tax and 35 responses in relation to service prioritisation.

Key Findings

The following table provides a summary of the responses received through the website in relation to Council Tax

Table 1:

	Agree		Disagree		No View Expressed	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Increase Council Tax by 1.99%	64	35.8	115	64.2	0	0
Apply a 3% Adult Social Care precept in 2021-22	58	32.4	120	67.0	1	0.6

A number of responses to the specific questions regarding budget saving options were made, and respondents did take the opportunity to provide more general feedback. A summary of responses is included within this document.

The service prioritisation simulator allowed residents to identify, from a basket 15 service areas that covered the range of Council's services, those services that they considered to be a priority for future years and/ or those they did not consider to be a priority. Residents ranked services on a scale from -10 (low priority) to +10 (high priority).

The following table provides a summary of the responses received through the website in relation to service prioritisation and is ranked in order of respondents viewing the service as a priority.

Table 2:

Service Area	No. of Responses - Prioritise	No. of Responses - No Change	No. of Responses De-Prioritise	Average Score
Public Health	30	3	2	5.5
Street Cleansing	28	6	1	5.1
Education	27	6	2	5.6
Children's Social Care	27	5	3	5.4
Parks and Open Spaces	26	6	3	4.6
Community Safety	26	6	3	4.5
Waste Collection and Recycling	25	8	2	4.3
Adult Social Care and Health	25	3	7	4.5
Highways, Roads and Transport Services	21	10	4	2.8
Environmental Health and Trading Standards	17	12	6	1.7
Libraries and Art	17	8	10	1.1
Leisure	16	7	12	0.6
Planning and Development	11	9	15	-1.0
Private Housing Initiatives	5	6	24	-3.7
Democratic Representation and Management Services	3	11	21	-4.0

Appendix 1 provides further analysis in relation to the feedback. For example, of the 30 respondents who viewed Public Health as a priority the average score of those responses was 6.9.

To summarise the findings in Table 2 and Appendix 1:

- Respondents this year were highly supportive of the prioritisation of Public Health Services, 9 of 35 respondents scored the service 10.
- In regard to services to Children and Young People (Children's Social Care and Education) respondents were supportive of prioritising these services, with 13 respondents scoring Education with the highest possible 'score' of 10. Education had the highest overall average score.
- In relation to Street Cleansing, respondents viewed this as a very high priority with only one respondent viewing this as a low priority. The scores ranged from -3 to +10, with 12 respondents scoring 8 or more and the average score being 5.1.
- Adult Social Care was considered a priority by 25 respondents. Overall, the average score was 4.5, but 7 respondents did not prioritise the service and scores ranged across the whole spectrum from -10 to +10.
- Overall, respondents viewed Community Safety, Waste Collection and Recycling, and Parks and Open Spaces as high priorities.
- Respondents viewed Private Housing Initiatives as a low priority, with 24 respondents out of 35 scoring the service less than 0.
- Respondents considered Democratic Representation and Management Services to be low in terms of priority.

In relation to respondents' feedback on saving options the comments were widespread, but included the following themes:

- Protect Adult and Children's Social Care, Special Educational Needs and Public Health, minimise the reductions in these areas during a pandemic.
- Prioritise Regeneration.
- Stop outsourcing social care.
- Embrace digital transformation and maximise commercial opportunities across the borough, not just St Helens Town Centre.

- Consider community needs, for example, children's centres and libraries for support especially after long periods of isolation.
- Take a commercial approach to encourage new business to start up and support current businesses to grow.
- Budget options require more detail to provide meaningful consultation.
- Options should have been considered / taken previously.

Some respondents provided general commentary in relation to Council Tax and Council activity. The main themes of this feedback are as follows:

- Council Tax is already incredibly high for the value received by residents.
- Year on Year Council Tax increases, and applying the maximum allowed increases, but a reduction in services.
- The affordability of Council Tax increases for some residents, particularly during a pandemic.
- Modernisation is necessary for all Council services and for the benefit of the borough.
- Only fund statutory services and / or reduce non-essential services.
- Reduce the number of Libraries and Leisure Centres.
- Incentives to attract business to the Town Centres.
- Consider outsourcing services, sharing resources across Councils or learning from other Councils.
- Reduce the number of senior managers and Councillors, together with their salaries and allowances.
- Review the use of agency and consultants.
- Promotion of consultation was limited; a number of individuals do not have access to the internet.
- Rationalise buildings, some car parks and open spaces, or use buildings differently.
- Run the Council like a business.
- Look for a new holistic organisational model for leading community wellbeing in partnership with the community.
- Support people to retrain and gain employment.

The following are some comments in relation to the application of a 3% Adult Social Care Precept:

- Precept and rise in Council Tax should be used for Social Care.
- Transparency on the use of the Adult Social Care precept.
- Government should be funding Adult Social Care under the NHS umbrella as promised.



