



St Helens Borough Council Budget Consultation 2024-2027

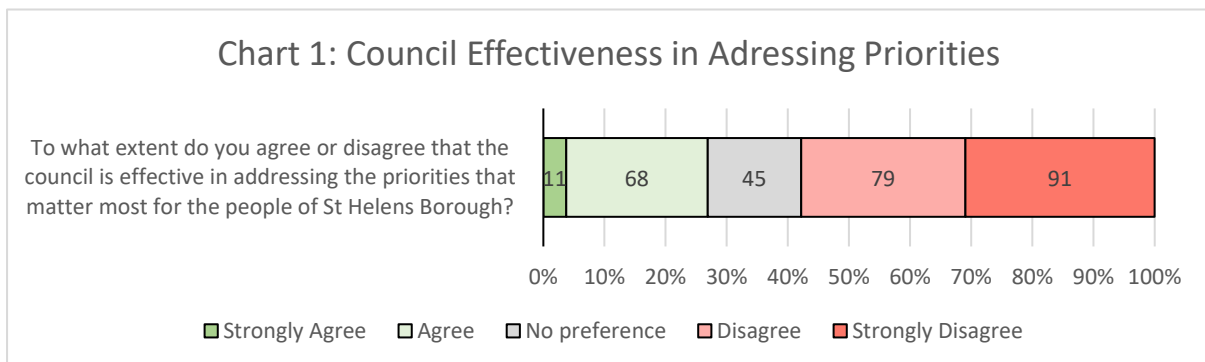
1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Council ran a public budget consultation exercise from 10 November 2023 to 11 December 2023. The consultation was developed to ascertain the views of residents and local businesses on the Council's 2024-2027 budget and spending priorities.
- 1.2. The consultation was promoted on the Council's webpage and an active social media campaign was undertaken, encouraging residents, Council employees and businesses to respond and share their views and provide comments.
- 1.3. A total of 299 people submitted responses to the consultation survey. However, not all respondents provided a complete response to every question. The number of participants has reduced significantly compared to the previous budget consultation exercise, which received 983 responses. However, last year response was not the norm, previous consultations have received far fewer responses.
- 1.4. The consultation website page set out the Council's draft net revenue budget and indicative capital programme for 2024-2027. The page also highlighted the significant financial challenges facing the Council, with particular focus on the increasing demand for services and increasing costs to provide services due to inflationary and pay pressures.
- 1.5. The survey comprised 11 main questions; the majority of which were closed questions to understand levels of agreement/disagreement. However, there were open questions where respondents could provide more detailed answers. Participation was higher on the closed questions.
- 1.6. This report provides a summary of the responses to each question. Appendix A details the full response to the budget proposal question. The first is ordered by highest number of agreeable responses, the second is by the highest number of disagreeable responses.
- 1.7. **Question 1 – Our St Helens Together Borough Strategy 2021-2030 is focused around six priorities. Please select the priority which is most important to you.**
 - 1.7.1. The following table provides a summary of responses received in relation to the Council's six priorities. Priority 6 was chosen as the most important priority by the highest number of respondents. Followed closely by priorities 1 and 2.
 - 1.7.2. This question was asked in last year's consultation. However, the outcome was different, Priority 1 was selected as the most important priority by 27% of respondents followed by priorities 2 and 3.

Table 1: Council Priorities	Total No. of Responses	%	Order
Priority 1 - Ensure children and young people have a positive start in life	60	20%	2
Priority 2 - Promote good health and independence and care across our communities	60	20%	2
Priority 3 - Create safe and strong communities and neighbourhoods for all	40	14%	5
Priority 4 - Support a strong, thriving, inclusive and well-connected local economy	47	16%	4
Priority 5 - Create green and vibrant places that reflect our culture and heritage	26	9%	6
Priority 6 - Be a responsible Council	61	21%	1
Total	294	100	

1.8. Question 2 – To what extent do you agree or disagree that the Council is effective in addressing the priorities that matter most for the people of St Helens?

1.8.1. Most respondents (58%) either strongly disagreed or disagreed that the Council is effective in addressing priorities of the Borough.



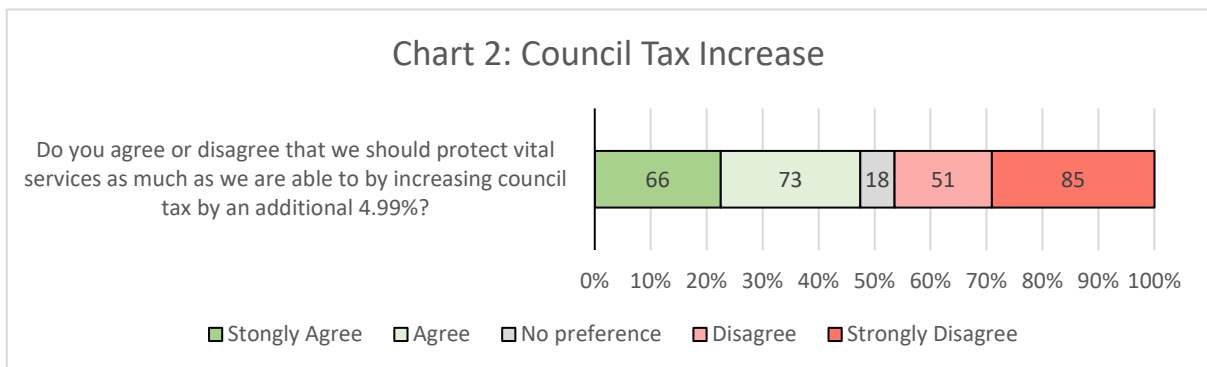
1.9. Question 3 - Please provide any comments, thoughts or suggestions that you feel we should consider in relation to the delivery of priorities.

1.9.1. This question enabled respondents to provide more general feedback, 154 people provided a response to this question. The top 5 themes about delivery of priorities are shown in the following table.

Comment Theme	Total No. of Comments	% of Responses
Continued or increased support for vulnerable people in the borough	22	14%
Childrens Services (including SEND and youth provision)	17	11%
Greater engagement with local residents to ensure everybody has the opportunity to say what are the most important priorities for the Borough	17	11%
Greater investment in the Borough	16	10%
Regeneration of the Town Centre	14	9%

1.10. Question 4 – From April 2024, the Government is allowing councils to increase council tax by up to 4.99% inclusive of an additional adult social care precept of 2%. The Council will decide what increase it will apply when it sets the revenue budget for 2024/25. Currently the full 4.99% has been incorporated into the draft 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%?

1.10.1. There were 293 complete responses to this question and the results were very close. Of the responses received, 47% strongly agreed / agreed to an increase whilst 46% strongly disagreed / disagreed.



Question 5 - If you disagree to increasing council tax by 4.99%, what alternative options would you propose that would help reduce the further increase to the budget gap? Every 1% increase in council tax generates circa £1.0million.

1.10.2. This question was open for respondents who disagreed to increasing council tax to provide alternative options. A total of 139 people answered this question, the main themes are summarised in the following table.

Comment Theme	Total No. of Comments	% of Responses
Reduce wasted spend (Better decision making and efficiency in spending and service delivery)	48	35%
Reduce the number and wage bill of staff (Senior management and non-essential staff)	17	12%
Reduce Councillors pay / allowances and Mayoral expenses	14	10%
Generate income from alternative sources	12	9%
Greater transparency on where Council Tax is spent (Residents may be more supportive if more clarity is provided)	10	7%

1.10.3. Some respondents expressed concerns of the additional cost to residents with some households already struggling to make ends meet and any additional increases would place a bigger strain on finances.

1.11. Question 6 – The table below sets out the Council’s draft net revenue budget across key service areas. Do you agree the budget has been prioritised correctly and should stay the same or should we spend more or less in any of the areas below?

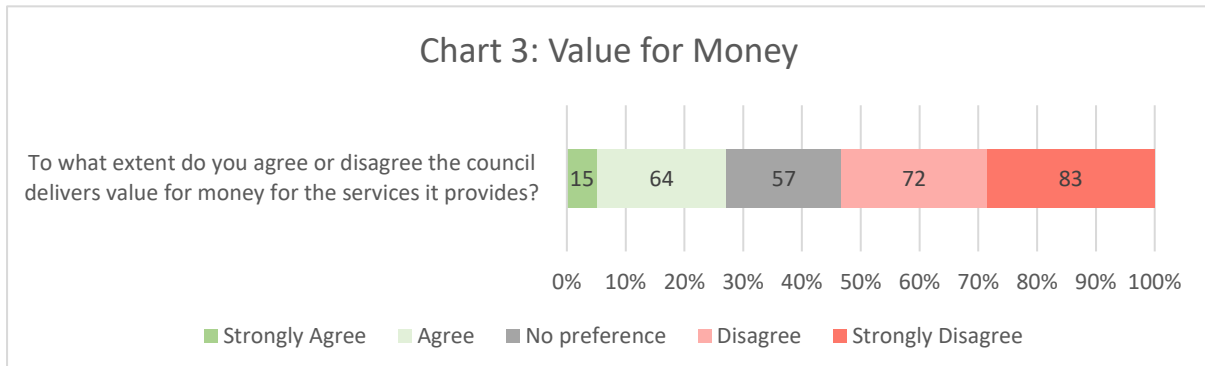
1.11.1. Most respondents thought the same should be spent on the key service areas, apart from 'Business Support, Finance, Legal, HR and IT' and 'Planning, Estates and Economic Regeneration' where the majority think less should be spent.

1.11.2. Responses are summarised in the table below, the highest number of responses for each key service area is in bold.

Draft Council Budget	Less	Same	More
Service Area			
Supporting Older People and Adults with Additional Needs	72 (25%)	159 (56%)	55 (19%)
Protecting Children and Vulnerable Young People	34 (12%)	174 (62%)	73 (26%)
Recycling, Waste Collections, Maintaining Roads, Parks, and Cemetery	70 (25%)	146 (51%)	69 (24%)
Supporting Young People and Adult Learning, Excluding Schools	80 (28%)	146 (52%)	56 (20%)
Community Safety, Housing, Homelessness and Environmental Health	42 (15%)	160 (56%)	82 (29%)
Business Support, Finance, Legal, HR and IT	157 (55%)	109 (38%)	20 (7%)
Planning, Estates and Economic Regeneration	133 (47%)	109 (38%)	42 (15%)
Leisure, Libraries, Heritage, and Culture	63 (22%)	118 (41%)	107 (37%)

1.12. Question 7 - what extent do you agree or disagree the Council delivers value for money for the services it provides?

1.12.1. There were 291 responses to this question, 53% of respondents either strongly disagree or disagree that the Council delivers value for money.



1.13. Question 8 - The Council's draft budget for 2024-2027 forecasts a budget shortfall of £13million. The following proposals have been identified to help the Council set a balanced budget. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each proposal?

1.13.1. The consultation sought views on 18 separate budget proposals. The majority of respondents generally agreed with most of the budget proposals. Appendix A includes detail of the full response to each proposal.

1.13.2. The three budget proposals that received the highest number of agreeable responses were:

1. Continuation of the foster carer recruitment campaign to reduce the number of external residential care placements, saving £1.6million. (77% agree)
2. Review of public events and twinning activities, saving £0.2million. (75% agree)
3. Fundamental review of residential care provision, increasing the number of council-operated children's residential care homes, saving £1.3million. (75% agree)

1.13.3. Conversely, the three budget proposals that received the highest number of disagreeable responses were:

1. Reducing residual waste and increasing recycling in the borough by introducing 3-weekly residual waste collection cycles, saving £0.7million. Most of this saving (£0.5million) relates to reductions in waste disposal costs and increased income from recycled waste. (53% disagree)
2. Review of respite services for adults with a learning disability, saving £0.3million. (43% disagree)
3. Review of Internal and external mental health floating support service, saving £0.4million. (33% disagree)

1.14. Question 9 - If you disagree with any of the proposals discussed in the consultation, what alternative options would you propose that would help reduce the Council budget gap?

1.14.1. A total of 107 people answered this question, the main themes are summarised below.

Comment Theme	Total No. of Comments	% of Responses
Better operational efficiency (Recycling system and collaborative working)	17	16%
Reduce the number and wage bill of staff (Senior management and non-essential staff)	16	15%
Reduce wasted spend (Better decision making, cyclops junction and value for money)	14	13%
Generate income from other sources	10	10%
Reduce Councillors pay / allowances and Mayoral expenses	7	7%

1.15. Question 10 - One of the proposals discussed in question 8 is around council tax premiums for second homes and empty homes. Are there any types of properties you think should be exempt from these new premiums on a short-term basis?

1.15.1. Most respondents thought that there should be no exemptions to premiums on empty and second homes. However, those that did identified the following, properties:

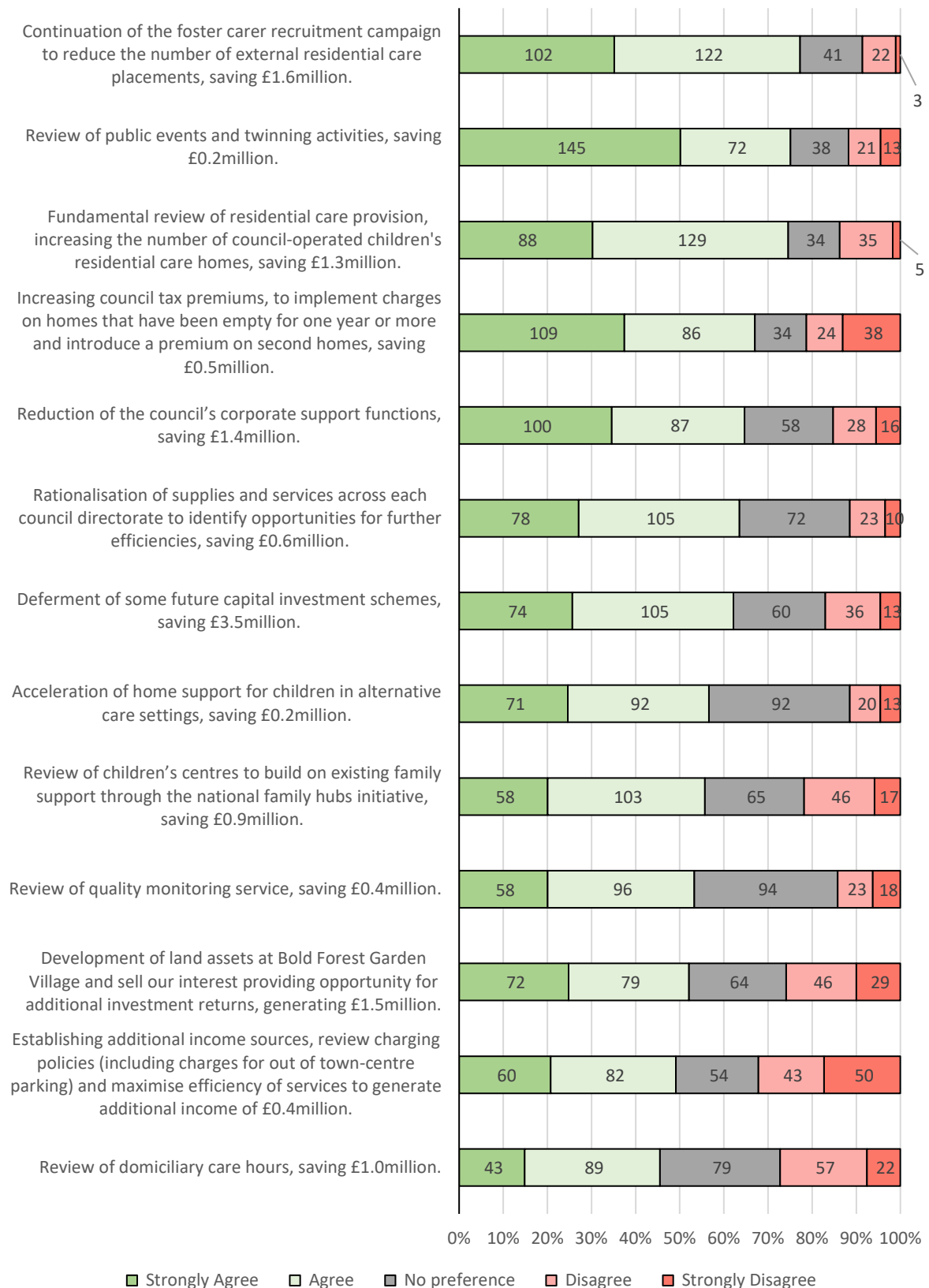
- empty due to illness/residents in care
- in probate
- undergoing renovations or inhabitable
- being sold / awaiting tenants

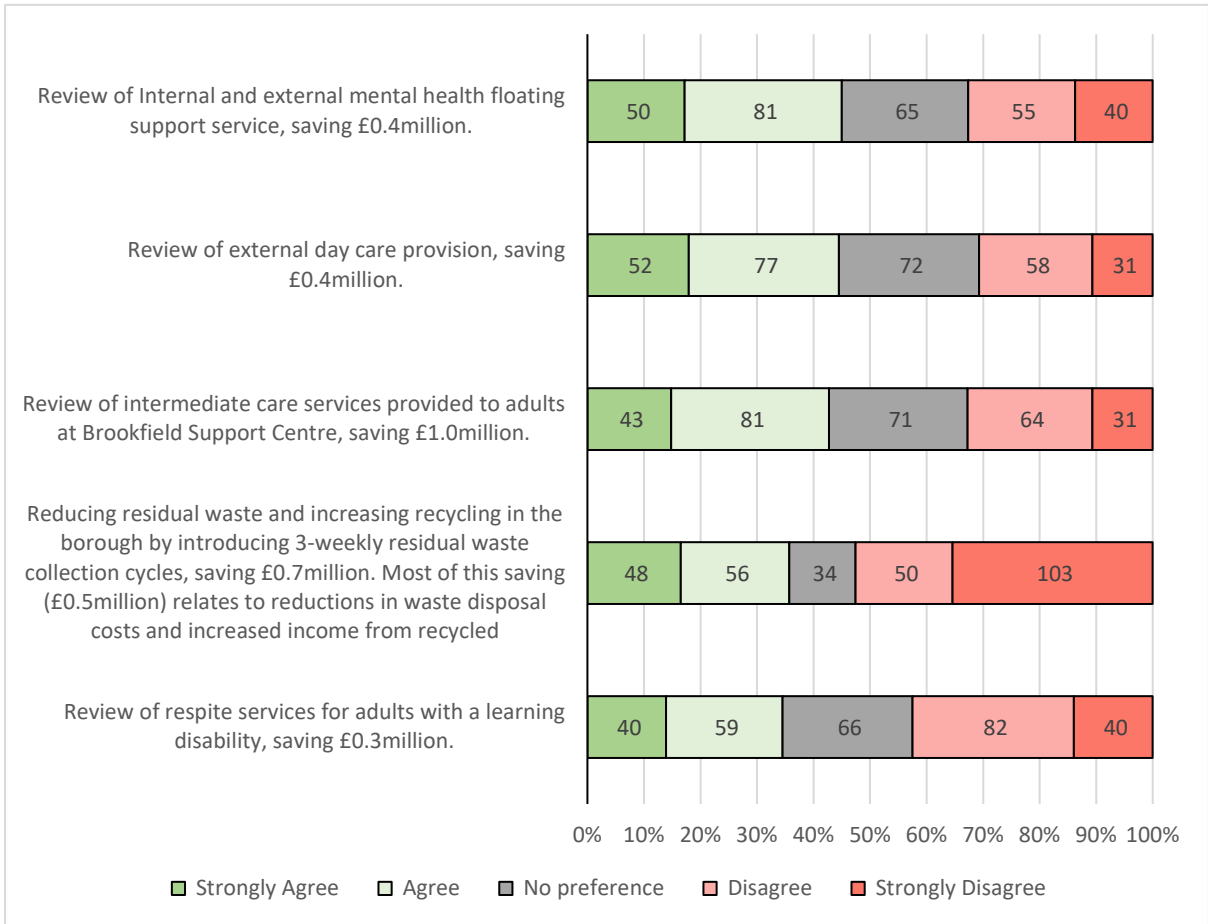
1.16. Question 11 - Are there any other proposals the council has not considered which you think it should?

1.16.1. A total of 112 people answered this question, the main themes are summarised in the following table.

Comment Theme	Total No. of Comments	% of Responses
Reduce Councillors pay / allowances and Mayoral expenses	26	23%
Generate income from other sources	12	11%
Reduce the number and wage bill of staff (Senior management and non-essential staff)	11	10%
Community payback system	7	6%
Invest in the Borough	7	6%

Budget Proposals - Sorted by Highest % of Agreeable Responses





Budget Proposals - Sorted by Highest % of Disagreeable Responses



