



ST HELENS
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Cabinet

24 January 2024

Report Title	Budget Update and Council Tax Premiums 2024/25
Cabinet Portfolio	Corporate Services
Cabinet Member	Councillor Martin Bond
Exempt Report	No
Reason for Exemption	N/A
Key Decision	No
Public Notice issued	N/A
Wards Affected	All
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Borough Priorities	Ensure children and young people have a positive start in life	
	Promote good health, independence, and care across our communities	
	Create safe and strong communities and neighbourhoods for all	
	Support a strong, thriving, inclusive and well-connected local economy	
	Create green and vibrant places that reflect our heritage and culture	
	Be a responsible Council	X

1. Summary

- 1.1 The report provides Cabinet with an update on the Council's budget position following receipt of the provisional local government finance settlement 2024 to 2025 and the outcome of the Council's budget consultation exercise.

2. Recommendation for Decision

Cabinet is recommended to:

1) Note the budget position following receipt of the provisional local government finance settlement 2024 to 2025

2) Note the outcomes of the Budget Consultation exercise

3) Recommend to Council that a determination is made by 31 March 2024:

- **to apply a 100% Council Tax long-term empty premium after one year instead of two years, with effect from 1 April 2024**
- **to amend a local exemption from the long-term empty premium for new buyers for up to one year instead of two years, from 1 April 2024**
- **to introduce a 100% Council Tax premium on second homes (i.e. furnished dwellings which are occupied periodically or are unoccupied) from 1 April 2025 (in accordance with legislation that requires the first determination to be made at least one year before the beginning of the financial year that it relates to)**

3. Purpose of this report

3.1 The purpose of the report is to:

- Provide an update on key issues impacting upon the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), including details of the provisional local government finance settlement 2024 to 2025
- Provide an update on the results of the Council's budget consultation exercise.
- Update on the Council's budget gap projection for 2024-2027
- Approve the determination in regard to Council Tax Premiums for 2024/25

4. Background / Reason for the recommendations

4.1 Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement 2024 to 2025 and other funding announcements

- 4.1.1 The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities published the provisional local government finance settlement 2024 to 2025 on 18 December 2023, with a consultation period running through to 15 January 2024.

- 4.1.2 The Council and partners submitted an open letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, highlighting the financial challenges the Council faces as a result of rising costs and increased demand for services. The response from the Minister for Local Government said that he would “*strongly encourage the council to share their views*” as part of the consultation response to the settlement, which the Council will do.
- 4.1.3 The provisional settlement only covers a single year, 2024/25. This will result in a sixth consecutive one-year settlement for Councils and continues to limit strategic financial planning and the ability to prioritise financial sustainability.
- 4.1.4 Government contends that the provisional settlement will deliver real-terms growth in Core Spending Power (CSP) for local government. Assuming authorities increase their Band D council tax by the maximum allowed, and factoring an element of taxbase growth for authorities, CSP will increase nationally by 6.5% in 2024/25. This level of CSP growth is lower than in the past two settlements.
- 4.1.5 Given that, over the past 15 months, the rate of CPI has been greater than 10% for seven consecutive months, added to the underfunding of pay settlements, annual real living wage increases of 10% and the ever-increasing rise in the complexity and cost of children’s social care placements, the increase in CSP does not come close to tackling the financial strain on councils.
- 4.1.6 For local authorities, growth in CSP is not keeping pace with budget pressures. Demand-led pressures in adults and children’s social care are significantly outstripping increases in funding. As examples of this, in the current financial year, Physical Support for the Elderly and Frail costs have increased by 15%, Looked After Children by 13.6% and children’s social care staffing by 19%.
- 4.1.7 It must also be noted that over half of the increase in CSP nationally is as a result of the assumption that council tax will be increased by the maximum allowed.
- 4.1.8 The key points of the provisional local government finance settlement 2024 to 2025 for St Helens are as follows:
- Inflationary CPI increases to Revenue Support Grant (RSG) which equates to an increase of £0.834m in the Council’s allocation when compared to 2023/24.
 - The 2024/25 allocation for the Improved Better Care Fund remains the same as 2023/24 at £10.489m.
 - A further year allocation of New Homes Bonus (NHB) which results in an allocation for St Helens in 2024/25 of £0.030m, from a national allocation of £251m.
- NHB is paid annually from a top slice of RSG, and whilst the Government has previously committed to reforming the NHB, the method for calculating NHB will not change in 2024/25.
- A core principle of up to a 3% increase in the metropolitan district Council Tax levels for 2024/25 to apply, above which referendum requirements are necessary.

- The flexibility for an additional 2% adult social care precept on top of the core principle referred to above.
- Inflationary CPI increases to Business Rates for 2024/25.
- The extension of Business Rates Retention Scheme arrangements for the six authorities in the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority area for 2024/25.
- The continuation of the Mid Merseyside Business Rates Pool with Halton and Warrington Councils in 2024/25.
- The un-ringfenced Services Grant, which had previously provided vital resources for local authority services, has been cut from £1.869m in 2023/24 to £0.294m in 2024/25. This is a £1.575m reduction from 2023/24 and is the main area of the settlement where an announcement had not been communicated to authorities in advance.
- Additional funding of £3.222m has been added to the Social Care Grant allocated to St Helens for 2024/25, bringing the Council's total allocation to £20.732m. Whilst the investment in social care funding made at Autumn Statement 2022 was very welcome, it is disappointing and concerning that the provisional settlement provides no new investment for adult social care beyond that.
- Continuation of the Adult Social Care Market Sustainability and Improvement Fund and funding introduced during 2023/24 for the Market Sustainability Workforce Fund.

The total allocation for St Helens in 2024/25 is £4.212m compared to £3.719m in 2023/24.

- Continuation of the Adult Social Care Discharge Fund with an allocation of £2.451m for 2024/25, compared to £1.471m in 2023/24.

The Discharge funding must be pooled as part of the Better Care Fund.

- Government have given no indication that the Household Support Funding scheme is being continued.

4.1.9 A summary of the main grants and allocations included within the provisional settlement for 2023/24 and 2024/25 is included in the following table.

Grant Name	2023/24 £000	2024/25 £000	Variance £000
Social Care Grant	17,510	20,732	+3,222
Adult Social Care Discharge Fund	1,471	2,451	+980
Market Sustainability & Improvement Fund	3,719	4,212	+493
Improved Better Care Fund	10,489	10,489	0
Services Grant	1,869	294	(1,575)
Revenue Support Grant	12,595	13,429	+834
New Homes Bonus	27	30	+3

- 4.1.10 The settlement confirmed a number of principles that had been suggested as part of the prior year's settlement.
- 4.1.11 Within the provisional settlement, the Government has reiterated the fact that it "continues to encourage local authorities to consider, where possible, the use of their reserves to maintain services in the face of pressures". The Government had previously asked authorities to "consider how they can use their reserves to maintain services over this and the next financial year, recognising that not all reserves can be reallocated, and that the ability to meet spending pressures from reserves will vary between authorities" as part of a Policy Statement released on 5 December 2023.
- 4.1.12 Other commentators have responded to the provisional settlement with disappointment at the lack of additional resource for local authorities. The LGA has stated that:
"The evidence of the financial strain on councils has been growing and the settlement does not provide enough funding to meet the severe cost and demand pressures which have left councils of all political colours and types warning of the serious challenges they face to set balanced budgets next year. Councils in England continue to face a funding gap of £4 billion across this year and next and the announcement does not change the funding gap facing councils." and
"It is unthinkable that Government has not provided desperately needed new funding for local services in 2024/25. Although councils are working hard to reduce costs where possible, this means the local services our communities rely on every day are now exposed to further cuts."
- 4.1.13 Overall, the funding announcements within the provisional settlement do not come close to meeting the impact of the 2023/24 budget pressures in next year's budget. The Council has already implemented a recruitment and non-essential expenditure freeze but without further significant action being taken to address the current year pressures, there may be a requirement for further savings to be found or reserves to be utilised.
- 4.1.14 In addition to the announcements within the provisional settlement, other funding announcements have been made recently, including:

- Indicative Public Health Grant allocations showing an increase of 1.382% for St Helens, taking funding in 2024/25 to £15.761m.
- DfE announcing an increase in High Needs Funding of £440m nationally, or 4.3%, with a formula ensuring that every council receives at least a 3% increase. St Helens will receive an additional £1m, which is an increase of 3.2%
- DfE also announcing funding through the mainstream schools' national funding formula will increase by 1.9% per pupil in 2024/25. Schools in St Helens will receive an increase of £3.2m (2.9%)
- Funding of £6.2m for the expansion of free childcare provision for the children of eligible working parents.

4.1.15 None of these funding announcements result in increases that provide adequate additional resource to address the pressures that services are facing.

4.2 **Budget Consultation 2024-2027**

4.2.1 A budget consultation exercise ran from 10 November to 11 December 2023, providing information on the Council's revenue budget, capital programme, the financial challenge that the Council faces and seeking the views of residents and businesses on the Council's priorities and how to balance the budget over the three-year period 2024 to 2027.

4.2.2 The consultation was promoted on the Council's website and was supported by an active social media campaign, with a total of 299 people submitting responses.

4.2.3 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.

4.2.4 The survey comprised 11 main questions; the majority 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.

4.2.5 The detailed outcomes of the public consultation have been posted on the Council's website.

4.2.6 Appendix A details the 11 questions asked within the consultation and provides a summary of the responses to each question.

4.3 **Budget Gap Projection 2024-2027**

4.3.1 Cabinet considered a report on 27 September 2023 that provided an update on the projected budget gap for the period 2024-2027, building upon forecasts and assumptions used in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2023-2026 and extending the period covered in the budget projections to include 2026/27.

4.3.2 The revised budget gap reported to Cabinet was as per the following table:

Revised Budget Gap			
	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
	£'m	£'m	£'m
Cumulative	6.2	11.0	13.4
In-Year	6.2	4.8	2.4

4.3.3 The provisional settlement has not materially changed the projected budget gap that was reported to Cabinet.

4.3.4 The additional funding provided through the Social Care Grant and the Adult Social Care Market Sustainability and Improvement Fund had already been communicated to the Council and had been factored into the MTFS projections, whereas the uncommunicated reduction in Services Grant had not been factored into the budget figures. However, higher yields from business rates / the business rates system are greater than previously forecast which will largely alleviate this unanticipated pressure.

4.3.5 Other major factors within the MTFS projections are being reviewed to arrive at the final budget gap for 2024-2027, with the report to Cabinet on 28 February 2024 agreeing the final budget to be recommended to Council and actions to address the budget gap.

4.4 Council Tax Premiums

4.4.1 The powers have been introduced to encourage owners of unoccupied dwellings to bring them back into use and increase the availability of properties for sale or rent.

4.4.2 As part of the budget consultation the Council proposed to implement premiums in accordance with these new powers. From the budget consultation, 67% agreed or strongly agreed with the proposals.

Long term empty premium

4.4.3 The legislation amends the definition of long-term empty so that, from the financial year 2024/25 onwards, dwellings unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for a continuous period of at least one year may be liable to the long-term empty premium. From 1 April 2024, it is proposed to apply this premium after one year instead of two years.

4.4.4 The following table details the proposed charges for unoccupied and substantially unfurnished dwellings:

Empty Period*	Current Charge (2023/2024)	Proposed Charge (2024/2025)	Comment
1 st month	0%	0%	100% discount for up to 1 month
From 2 nd month to less than 1 year	100%	100%	No discount available
From 1 year to less than 2 years	100%	200%	100% premium from 1 April 2024
From 2 years to less than 5 years	200%	200%	100% premium applied
From 5 years to less than 10 years	300%	300%	200% premium applied
10 year or more	400%	400%	300% premium applied

**Occupation of less than 6 weeks will be disregarded when deciding on an empty period*

Local exemption to long-term empty premium

- 4.4.5 The Council currently provides new buyers with a local exemption from a premium charge for up to two years when they purchase a property to bring it back use. As a result of the change in the definition of a long-term empty dwelling, it is proposed to amend this local exemption for a period of up to one year, instead of two years, after a property is purchased.

Second Homes Premium

- 4.4.6 Second homes (furnished dwellings which are occupied periodically or are unoccupied) are charged at 100% of Council Tax liability unless they are eligible for a national exemption or disregard. The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 allows billing authorities to apply a new premium of up to 100% (200% charge). Billing authorities are required to approve the introduction of this premium at least one year before the beginning of the financial year that it relates to. It is proposed to introduce a 100% premium from 1 April 2025.

Short-term exemptions from Council Tax premiums

- 4.4.7 In addition to national exemptions, the Government has consulted on introducing mandatory new short-term exemptions when applying a premium charge. These have yet to be finalised but could include dwellings undergoing probate, being actively marketed for sale or let, undergoing major repairs or annexes forming part of a main dwelling. The authority will implement any such exemptions once finalised.

5. Consideration of Alternatives

- 5.1 The upcoming Medium Term Financial Strategy report will provide updates on savings options that have been considered as part of the financial planning process and decisions that are made regarding the implementation of the savings necessary to set a balanced budget.

6. Conclusions

- 6.1 The provisional settlement has clarified the funding that, pending confirmation in the final settlement, will be provided to the Council by the Government, as well as the referendum limits for Council Tax and business rates increases. The funding that is provided is not enough to meet the increasing demands that are placed upon the Council and will result in a significant budget gap.
- 6.2 Work is ongoing to arrive at the final budget gap for the period 2024-2027, factoring in the latest movements in major financial assumptions.
- 6.3 The MTFS report that will be considered by Cabinet and Council will report on budget savings options to be implemented as part of the financial planning process and the requirement for actions to ensure the financial sustainability and resilience of the Council.

7. Legal Implications

- 7.1 The Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 has amended provisions within section 11B of the Local Government Finance Act (LGFA) 1992 (as amended) to change the period that a dwelling is classed as long-term empty from two years to one year.
- 7.2 The Act has also inserted new powers within section 11C of the LGFA 1992 to enable billing authorities to apply a 100% premium on furnished dwellings which are occupied periodically (second homes). The Act requires billing authorities to make its first determination at least one year before the beginning of the financial year it relates to.

8. Financial Implications

- 8.1 As detailed in Section 4.

9. Equality Impact Assessment

- 9.1 The financial challenge is such that potential savings options have been proposed for consideration and included within the budget consultation exercise. Any potential adverse impacts will need to be considered and understood when implementing actions necessary to ensure sustainability of the Council's financial position.
- 9.2 In respect of Council Tax premiums, the Equality Impact Assessment indicates that there is a potential negative impact for couples who are married or in a civil partnership. The issue will be that if a civil partner or spouse works away and the couple have two dwellings. One property will be treated as the main residence and the other a second home. As such, both properties will attract a charge of 100%. Under the proposal, the second home would attract a charge of 200% from April 2025.
- 9.3 To mitigate against this potential negative impact, the Council will explore the possibility of developing a local exemption. However, the powers to make such an exemption, and the scope and criteria for its application will be dependent on the Government's final guidance on other exemptions.

- 9.4 There is no evidence of any disproportionate outcome or disadvantage for other groups of people who share different protected characteristics as a result of this proposal.

10. Social Value

- 10.1 Whilst there are no implications directly arising from this report, the financial challenge is such that potential savings options have been proposed for consideration and included within the budget consultation exercise. Any potential adverse impacts on local economy spend / procurement will need to be considered and understood when implementing actions necessary to ensure sustainability of the Council's financial position.

11. Net Zero and Environment

- 11.1 Whilst there are no implications directly arising from this report, the financial challenge is such that potential savings options have been proposed for consideration and included within the budget consultation exercise. Any potential adverse impacts on sustainability and the environment will need to be considered and understood when implementing actions necessary to ensure sustainability of the Council's financial position.

12. Health and Wellbeing

- 12.1 Whilst there are no implications directly arising from this report, the financial challenge is such that potential savings options have been proposed for consideration and included within the budget consultation exercise. Any potential adverse impacts on health and wellbeing will need to be considered and understood when implementing actions necessary to ensure sustainability of the Council's financial position.

13. Customer and Resident

- 13.1 There are no direct implications on people accessing Council services or resident in the Borough from this report, but the financial challenge is such that potential savings options have been proposed for consideration and included within the budget consultation exercise. Any potential adverse impacts will need to be understood when determining actions necessary to ensure financial sustainability of the Council's financial position.

14. Asset and Property

- 14.1 There are no direct implications on assets and property from this report, but the financial challenge is such that potential savings options have been proposed for consideration and included within the budget consultation exercise. Any potential adverse impacts upon assets and property will need to be understood when implementing actions necessary to ensure financial sustainability of the Council's financial position.

15. Staffing and People Management

- 15.1 There are no direct implications on staffing from this report, but the financial challenge is such that potential savings options have been proposed for consideration and included within the budget consultation exercise, including over £1.5m of savings through staff reductions. Any potential adverse impacts upon staffing will need to be understood when implementing actions necessary to ensure financial sustainability of the Council's financial position.

16. Risks

- 16.1 This report outlines the forecast budget position of the Council and highlights a number of the risks that exist in relation to the Council's ongoing financial position and sustainability.
- 16.2 The development of the Medium Term Financial Strategy will address the risks in relation to the financial sustainability that the Council faces and implement actions to mitigate these and enable a balanced budget to be set.

17. Policy Framework Implications

- 17.1 None arising directly from this report, but due to the extreme financial challenge, the potential policy framework implications need to be fully understood when determining actions necessary to ensure financial sustainability of the Council's financial position.

18. Impact and Opportunities on Localities

- 18.1 None arising directly from this report, but due to the extreme financial challenge, the potential impacts and opportunities need to be fully understood when determining actions necessary to ensure financial sustainability of the Council's financial position.

19. Background Documents

- 19.1 Medium Term Financial Strategy 2023-2026 and Revenue & Capital Budget 2023/24 (Cabinet 22 February 2023, Council 1 March 2023)
- 19.1 Update of Medium Term Financial Strategy 2023-2026 (Cabinet 27 September 2023)

20. Appendices

- 20.1 Appendix A – Budget Consultation Responses
- 20.2 Appendix B – Equality Impact Assessment

Budget Consultation Responses

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.

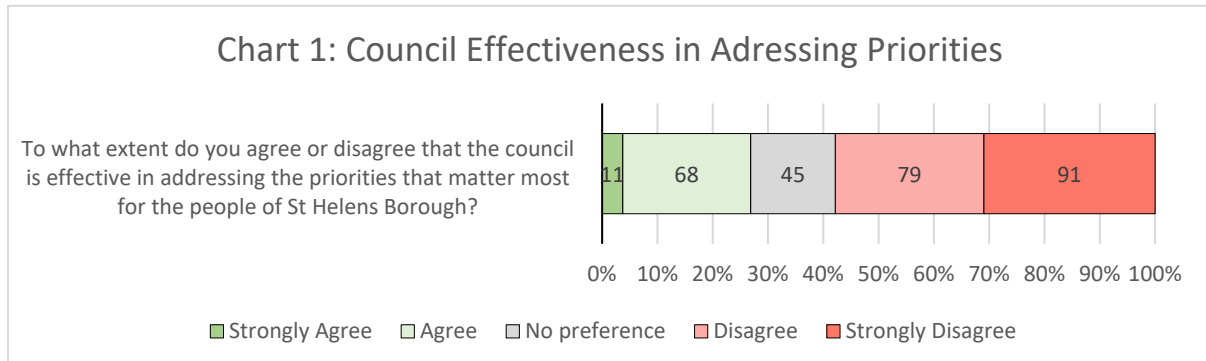
The following table provides a summary of responses received in relation to the Council's six priorities. Priority 6 was chosen as the most important priority by the highest number of respondents. Followed closely by priorities 1 and 2.

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	

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?

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



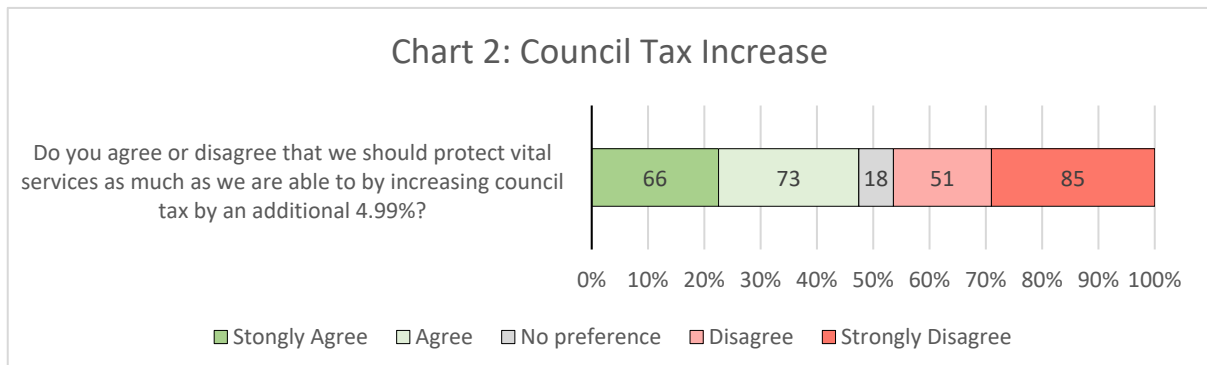
Question 3 - Please provide any comments, thoughts or suggestions that you feel we should consider in relation to the delivery of priorities.

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%

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%?

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.

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%

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.

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?

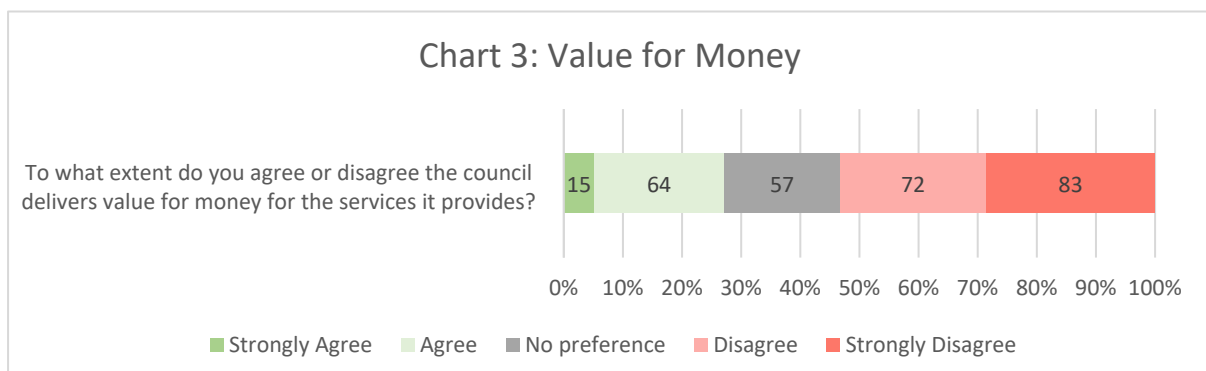
Most respondents thought the same should be spent on the key service areas, apart from 'Business Support, Finance, Legal, HR and IT' and 'Planning, Estates and Economic Regeneration' where the majority think less should be spent.

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%)

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

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



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?

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.

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)

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)

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?

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%

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?

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

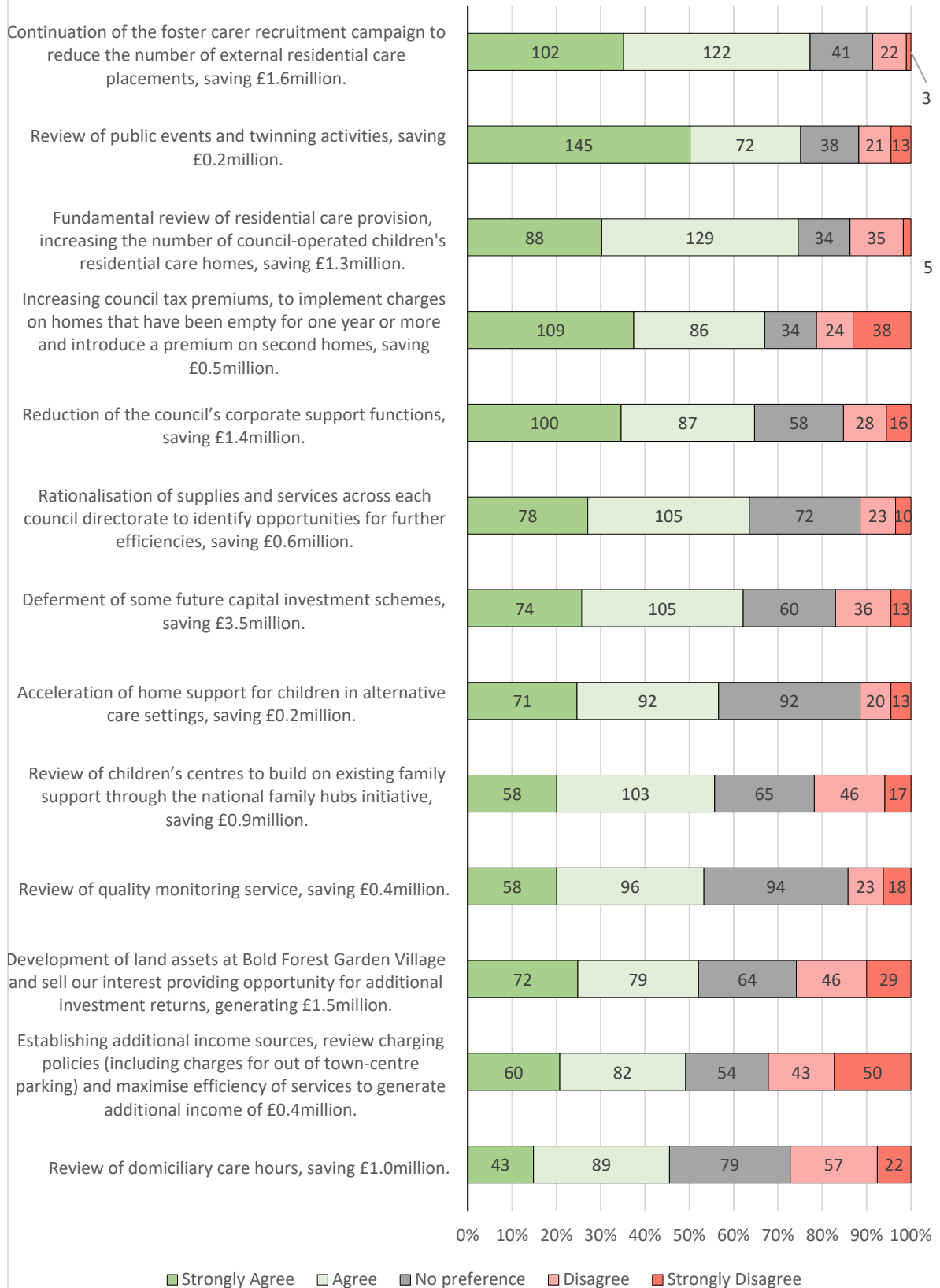
- empty due to illness/residents in care
- in probate
- undergoing renovations or inhabitable
- being sold / awaiting tenants

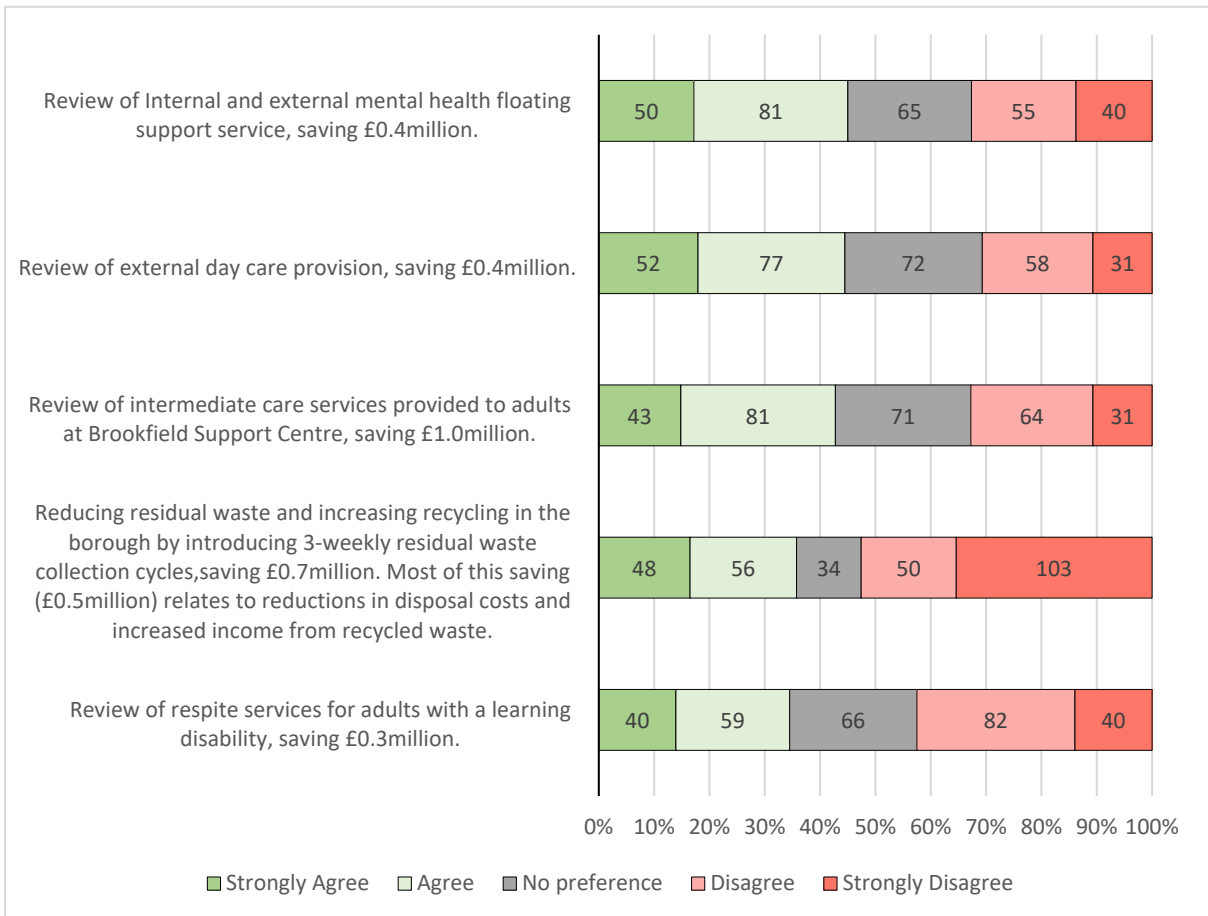
Question 11 - Are there any other proposals the council has not considered which you think it should?

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



