

Report of	Meeting	Date
Deputy Chief Executive	Special Council	25 February 2020

### BUDGET CONSULTATION 2020/21

#### PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. This report provides the Council with the results of the public consultation carried out on the Executive's draft budget investment proposals for 2020/21.

#### RECOMMENDATION(S)

2. That Members use the results which represent the views of residents, to inform their decisions when setting the budget for 2020/21.

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF REPORT

3. Consultation on proposed budget principles for 2020/21 received a total of 320 responses to the online survey and significant interaction online through social media.
4. The budget consultation this year included one open question format to enable individuals to give detailed feedback on the proposals overall.
5. Content analysis of the comments showed an overall positive response to the budget proposals and a relatively even distribution of negative and neutral feedback. Of the positive comments received to the online survey, the majority support the budget proposals and demonstrated support around the freeze on council tax for this year and positivity around the chosen investment for the year ahead.

<b>Confidential report</b> Please bold as appropriate	Yes	No
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#### CORPORATE PRIORITIES

6. This report relates to the following Strategic Objectives:

Involving residents in improving their local area and equality of access for all	✓	A strong local economy	✓
Clean, safe and healthy communities	✓	An ambitious council that does more to meet the needs of residents and the local area	✓

#### BACKGROUND

7. The 2020/21 budget consultation process started following approval of the budget position paper by Executive Cabinet on the 16<sup>th</sup> January 2020, which set out the

budget forecast and guiding principles for application of the budget over the next 3-year financial period.

8. The consultation question format set out the key principles of the budget proposals along with a summary of the current context and challenges facing the council in future years. Proposals included:
  - No increase to council tax for this year.
  - Continuing the strategic vision of not only protecting services but also investing in local services and investing to generate income.
  - Continued investment across the borough including investment in health services to build two new GP surgeries; £1.5m improvements in Astley Hall investment in employment sites and improvements to council infrastructure.
  - Delivering major projects to make the borough a better place to live, work and invest will continue including the sports complex at West Way, improvements to the customer experience at Union Street, improvements to Astley Hall and Park, delivery of new health facilities and improving the operation of the Chorley Bus Interchange.
  - A budget that is consistent with the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.
9. Respondents were asked to review the proposals and provide their comments in response to the budget, with the intention of gaining more qualitative feedback to gain a deeper insight into views and opinions.

## **BUDGET CONSULTATION RESULTS**

10. Consultation on the 2019/20 budget response ran from the 17<sup>th</sup> January to the 9<sup>th</sup> of February 2020. The consultation was publicised through a structured digital campaign including 14,481 emails delivered to residents signed up to receive communications via the My Account feature on the council website. The emails received 6,810 unique views (47.03%) and 1,998 link clicks (19.93%) both of which show a higher proportion of unique views and link clicks than last year. Awareness was also raised through traditional media outlets and local networks.
11. The formal consultation received 320 qualitative responses through a one open question format, via an online survey which provided detailed feedback. This is a lower level of feedback compared to last year's survey where 467 individuals responded to the online survey which included two open-ended questions. This decline could be due to last year's budget consultation asking residents to respond to more significant amendments to the budget and also the effect of GDPR.
12. As well as completing the online survey, residents were also invited to share their views and comments using social media. From across all the posts during the budget consultation period on Facebook and Twitter, we received a total of 21,799 post views, the posts reached a total of 87,546 users and 2,664 engagements (likes comments and shares) reaching a wide representation of the population. Analysis of Social Media responses (which totalled 41) is included in this report from paragraph 20.
13. The responses have been collated and analysed to identify the main keywords or phrases and then grouped together based on whether they indicated a positive or

negative response to the proposals. Most of the comments highlighted concerns around investment in housing and development on the green belt and the rest outlined neither a positive nor negative engagement and these have been grouped together as 'neutral' with further analysis by theme. It should be noted that responses often included more than one comment or suggestion, covering more than one area. Where this occurred, the main area of comment was selected.

## CONSULTATION FINDINGS

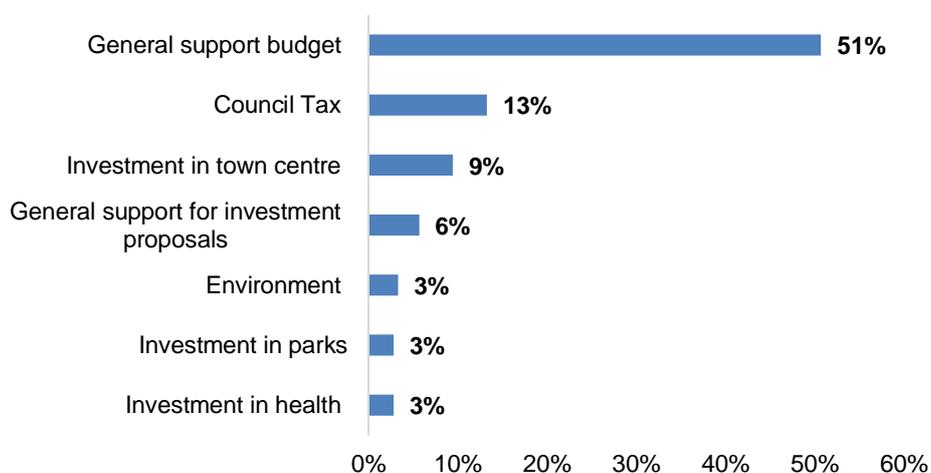
14. The following table outlines the distribution of positive, negative and neutral viewpoints from respondents to the open question which asked for comments on the overall proposals. These also include non-applicable comments where comments were submitted which were not relevant to the budget consultation proposals.

Status	%
Positive view of the proposals	63%
Neutral point of view	13%
Negative view of the proposals	19%
Non-applicable comments	5%

A selection of comments is available at appendix A.

15. Of those comments indicating a positive viewpoint, the following themes can be identified:

### Positive response themes

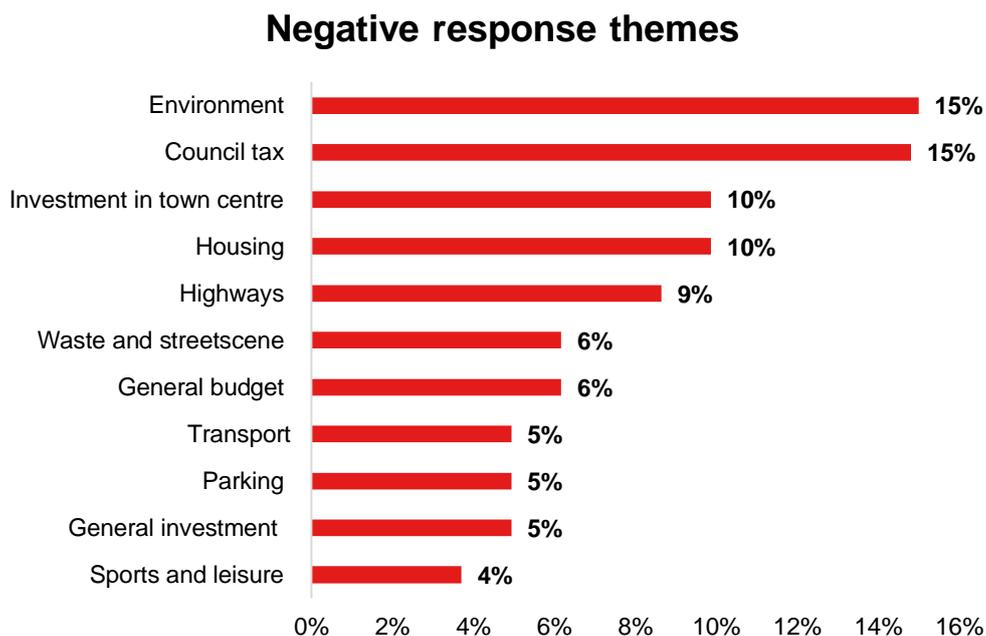


16. The majority of positive comments (51%) indicated general acceptance of the proposals, with many stating that they were 'achievable' and 'reasonable'. In addition to this, comments also referenced a positive view of the proposal to freeze council tax (13%) with further positive views around investment in the town centre (9%), environment (3%), parks (3%) and health (3%).

17. It should be noted that not all response themes have been included in the graph above, the full breakdown can be found in the table below:

Theme	% of responses
Housing	2%
Transport	2%
Highways	1%
Parking	1%
Sports and leisure	1%
Education	1%
Markets	1%
Astley Hall	1%
Employment	1%
A&E	1%
Investment in rural areas	1%
Investment in good services	1%
Investment in developments	1%

18. Of those comments expressing a negative viewpoint, the following themes can be identified:



19. The majority of negative comments (15%) relate to the freeze of council tax for this year with respondents querying the purpose of freezing council tax when public services need more funding and proposals around the investment in the environment, in particular proposing more should be done to combat climate change or that too much in the budget is allocated to spend on climate change (15%). In addition, there were concerns around the investment in the town centre, in particular in relation to the amount of investment comparatively in rural areas (10%) and comments around insufficient investment in housing (10%) and highways (9%).

20. It should be noted that not all response themes have been included in the graph above, the full breakdown can found in the table below:

Theme	% of responses
Investment in health	2%
Accessibility	1%
Anti social behaviour	1%
Business rates	1%
Crime and policing	1%
Education	1%
Markets	1%

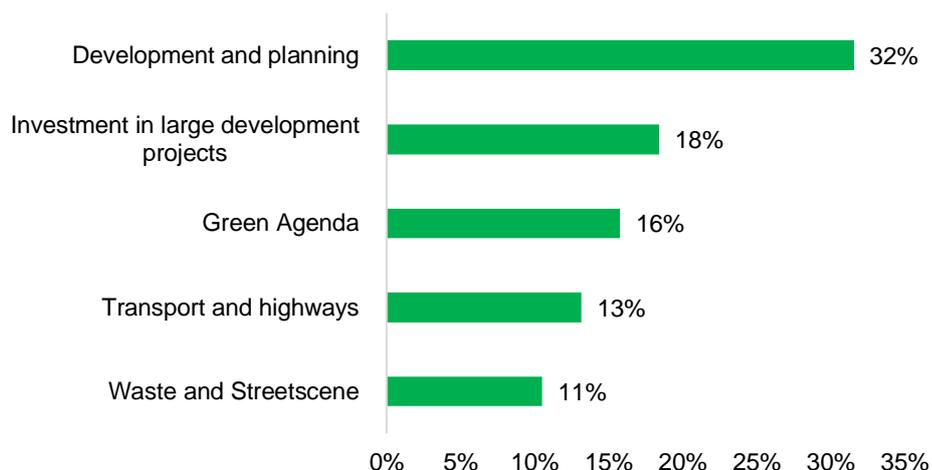
21. Of those comments expressing a neutral viewpoint and providing comments or feedback, key themes include:

<b>Health provision</b>	Consideration to increase funding for particular service areas e.g. other public services including health services in particular GPs, hospital services, dental services and leisure centres.
<b>Services delivered by partners</b>	Concerns regarding partner delivered services and confusion in terms of what services are provided by partners and by Chorley Council, in particular highways, hospital services, schools and social services.
<b>Spatial planning</b>	There were some concerns around planning policy and future development.

## Social media

22. Social media feedback also provides an indication of views; comments were in the main about housing and development on green belt land and the investment around proposed large development projects.
23. Of those comments expressed on social media, the following themes can be identified (this includes both positive and negative comments):

## Social media response themes



24. The majority of social media comments (32%) relate to housing and some in related to the future local plan development. There were also comments around the investment in large development projects (18%) and respondents expressed an over investment on the building of new developments. 16% of respondents also outlined the need to do more on climate change and felt this should be more strongly reflected in the proposals.

### IMPLICATIONS OF REPORT

25. This report has implications in the following areas and the relevant Directors' comments are included:

Finance	✓	Customer Services	
Human Resources		Equality and Diversity	
Legal		Integrated Impact Assessment required?	
No significant implications in this area		Policy and Communications	

### COMMENTS OF THE STATUTORY FINANCE OFFICER

26. There are no comments.

### COMMENTS OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

27. There are no comments.

GARY HALL  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

There are no background papers to this report.

Report Author	Ext	Date	Doc ID
Rebecca Aziz-Brook	5348	11.02.20	Budget consultation report 2020

## APPENDIX A: SUMMARY OF COMMENTS – Question 1 (Budget Specific)

<b>POSITIVE</b>
It is great to see so much investment in the town centre and surrounding areas. The achievement of this against continued central government cuts in funding should not be underestimated. I believe this demonstrates clear vision and strategy delivering good services and value to Chorley residents.
The continuation of investment in the areas of commerce, sports and leisure as well as provision of more GP surgeries are good proposals, council tax payers are able to see where money being spent.
Excellent proposals. A very exciting and ambitious agenda.
The proposals will continue to enhance Chorley, support town centre footfall and diversity, address the needs of specific areas/groups in the Borough and bring people into the area plus employment. The programme of investment and revenue raising is impressive and innovative in times of austerity. I am proud to live in such a vibrant town.
I moved to Chorley some 20 years ago upon retirement because I found it to be an ideal place for me. Over the years I have been impressed with the way the town has developed and fully approve of the budget proposals.
These proposals confirm to me that Chorley council really cares about its citizens.
Chorley Council has always made significant effort to improve facilities for residents and it looks like this will continue. It's important to have a vibrant and attractive town centre as well as all routes into Chorley being maintained so that visitors will continue to come and support the local economy. The new health facilities/GP surgeries are long anticipated and need to be supported by adequate parking facilities. I love Chorley Council and I love living here - I think you are doing a good job!

<b>NEGATIVE</b>
I would welcome and increase in council tax at a local level for two main reasons:1. Maintaining council tax at the current rate for Chorley only has a minimal effect on the overall cost due to the inevitable increases from LCC, police and fire. This is a political gambit due to the local election which has limited positive impact on the electorate.2. The council has an excellent record of local investment and maintenance of services which benefit the entire community. I would be happy to pay more to ensure that the council can continue to improve the borough.
Needs more on commitments to tackling climate change and biodiversity loss.
We think that Chorley council should make more use of all the empty buildings and shops in and around town, before they build all these new ones Also, we don't agree with all the new housing estates that are being built, because the roads and highways structures won't be able to cope with them, without Chorley and surrounding villages, becoming gridlocked regularly.
The Council is to be praised for the developments in Chorley town centre. However, for those living in Houghton there is no convenient public transport to get there. If we wish to use the train or shop it costs a taxi ride.
Chorley remains an unattractive centre, closed shops, Victorian housing, block of flats built overlooking the backs of terraced housing. "Famous" market a bit over the top
Need improvements on crime control (especially drugs) in our area. Also rail improvements and reopening's in the area are not mentioned in the plan.

<b>NEUTRAL</b> <b>(No definable positive or negative viewpoint, or mixed)</b>
I propose maintaining current services but I still feel that a charge for garden waste collection is excessive.
I would like to see continued repairs and improvements to our roads and infrastructure systems.

Reduce the overall finance deficit to the population of Chorley.

Investment in the town centre should include connecting the covered market to Market Walk with a full covered area. Market Walk should also be fully covered and directly linked to the new building. To encourage shoppers to use the town's main shopping area, they need to do this regardless of the weather. This would make this area closer to a retail shopping experience such as other major developments outside of Chorley.

I propose maintaining current services but I still feel that a charge for garden waste collection is excessive.