

Report of	Meeting	Date
Deputy Chief Executive	Special Council	23 February 2021

BUDGET CONSULTATION 2021/22

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 2021/22.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

2. That Members use the results which represent the views of residents, to inform their decisions when setting the budget for 2021/22.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF REPORT

3. Consultation on proposed budget principles for 2021/22 received a total of 289 responses to the online survey and also 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 and positivity around the chosen investment for the year ahead.

Confidential report 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 2021/22 budget consultation process started following approval of the budget position paper by Executive Cabinet on the 21 January 2021, 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:
 - Capital investments of over £56m in corporate priority projects to drive forward ambitions for economic growth and ensure that Chorley is an even more attractive place to live, work and invest
 - To allow us to keep moving Chorley forward we are proposing to increase our portion of the council tax by 1.99% which equates to 7 pence per week.
 - Continued investment with over £1m revenue to deliver corporate strategy priorities with investment in high quality recreation grounds, health services and business development.
 - The council will also continue to work hard to deliver sustainable public services through transforming the organisation, taking a more commercial approach and working closely with partners to integrate services. The council has made a commitment to driving forward the green agenda and this is reflected in the priorities for investment.
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 2021/22 budget response ran from the 22 January to the 14 February 2021. The consultation was publicised through a structured digital campaign including 16,916 emails delivered to residents signed up to receive communications via the My Account feature on the council website. The emails received 8,672 unique views (51.3%) and 1,410 link clicks (8.3%) both of which show a higher proportion of unique views than last year. Awareness was also raised through traditional media outlets and local networks.
11. The formal consultation received 289 qualitative responses through a one open question format, via an online survey which provided detailed feedback.
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 78,815 post views, the posts reached a total of 128,168 users and 4,551 engagements (likes comments and shares) reaching a wide representation of the population. Analysis of Social Media responses (which totalled 124).
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. The majority 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

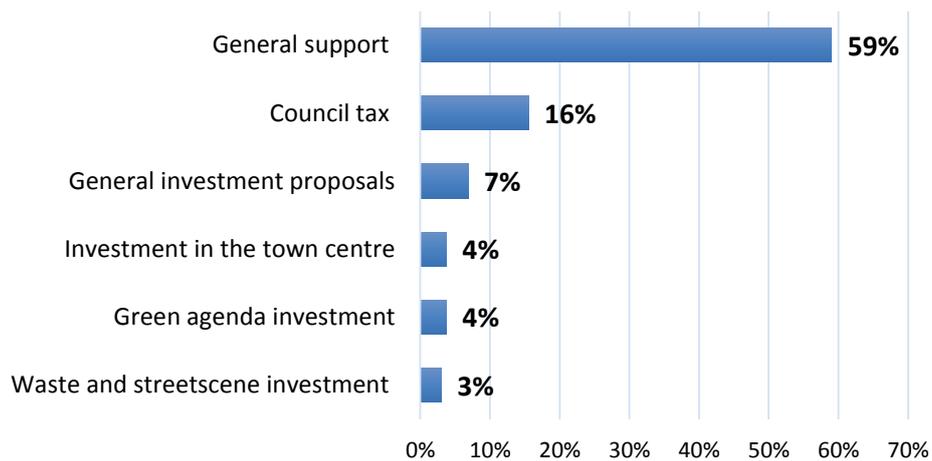
14. The following table outlines the distribution of positive, negative and neutral viewpoints from respondents to the open question which asked for comments on the overall proposals. These also include non-applicable comments where comments were submitted which were not relevant to the budget consultation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

Status	%
Positive view of the proposals	53%
Neutral point of view	12%
Negative view of the proposals	25%
Non-applicable comments	10%

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



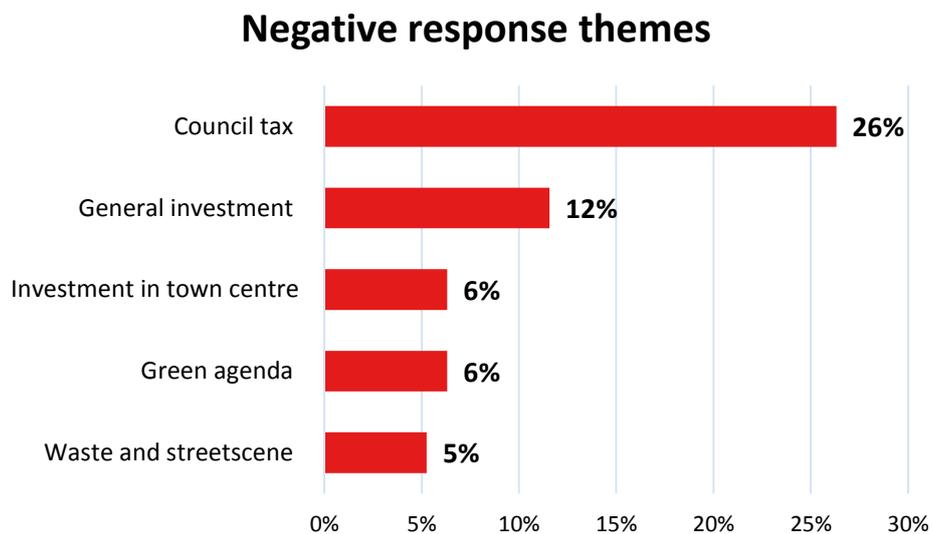
16. The majority of positive comments (59%) indicated general acceptance of the proposals, with many stating that they were 'achievable' and 'reasonable'. In addition to this, comments also referenced a positive view of the proposal to increase council tax (16%) with further positive views around general investment proposals (7%), investment in the town centre (4%), green agenda (4%) and waste and streetscene (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
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Transport and highways	3%
Waste and streetscene	3%
Housing (and greenbelt)	2%
Health	2%
Sport and leisure	1%

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



19. The majority of negative comments (26%) relate to the proposal of increasing council tax for this year with respondents querying the purpose of increasing council tax with the current economic climate. There were also negative comments around the general investment proposals (12%) with comments discussing a wide variety of investment areas. 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 (6%), comments around the green agenda proposing more should be done to combat climate change or that too much in the budget is allocated to spend on climate change (6%) and comments around insufficient investment waste and streetscene related issues (5%).

20. 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:

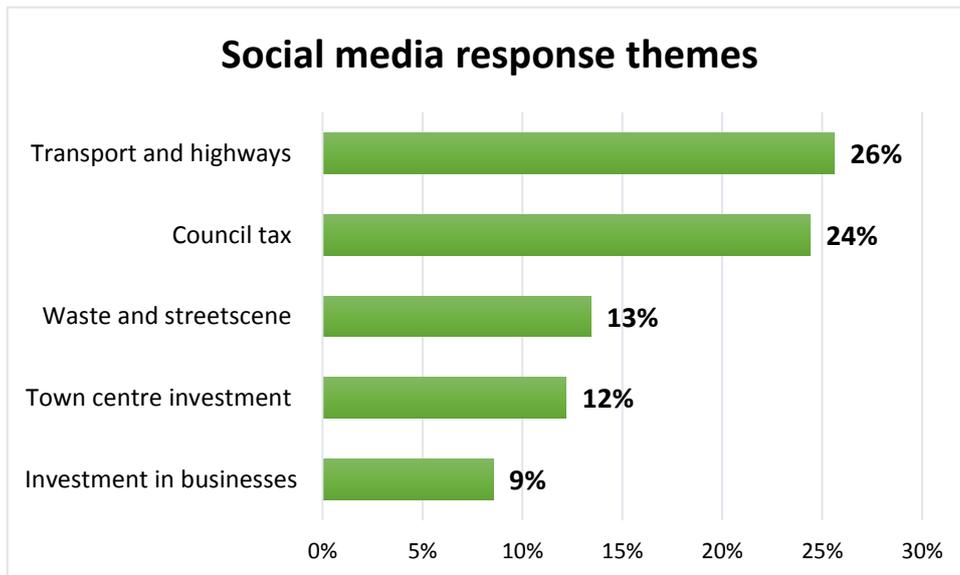
Theme	% of responses
Transport and highways	5%
Housing	4%
Health	3%
Sport and leisure	1%

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

Additional areas for investment	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.
Public service delivery	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.
Council tax	There were some comments that included mixed responses and opinions regarding the proposed council tax increase.

Social media

22. Social media feedback also provides an indication of views; comments were in the main about transport and highways, council tax and waste and streetscene.
23. Of those comments expressed on social media, the following themes can be identified (this includes both positive and negative comments):



24. The majority of social media comments (26%) relate to transport and highways, primarily the roads and the proposed increase in council tax (24%). There were also comments around waste and streetscene (13%) and respondents expressed issues around littering and recycling. 12% of respondents also outlined the need for further town centre investment and 9% expressed investment in local businesses 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.

CHRIS SINNOTT
DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

There are no background papers to this report.

Report Author	Ext	Date	Doc ID
Rebecca Aziz-Brook	5348	15.02.21	Budget consultation report 2021

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

POSITIVE
Excellent proposals to enhance what is already and efficient Council
I believe that the proposals reflect a very reasonable approach in trying to maintain an acceptable service in a very challenging financial background. I have been pleased with the way that the Council has been proactive in trying to develop the town centre, making it more attractive to both local and outside trade to the economic benefit of the town. On a minor point, I believe that this is also encouraged by the seasonal floral displays all over the town especially in baskets on dual carriageways which to me are a real attraction in the summer. I accept that in order to maintain this solid service a small increase is inevitable. Well done Chorley Council, keep up the good work!!
I feel the budget proposals are very well thought out and comprehensive. You appear to be spreading a limited budget in a very sensible way.
I am in favour of the proposed 1.99% Council Tax increase and am pleased to hear the Council already pays more than the new minimum hourly rate. I am also in favour of the proposed 2% pay rise mentioned in the papers. Given recent comments on the news etc the government's £35K for us leaving the EU seems paltry. The reserve levels quoted seem sensible. I also like the work being done regarding the sharing of services with South Ribble. I am pleased to see the work being done regarding exploring an increase in High School provision. I am afraid I do not understand the 'new homes bonus' but am glad to see that the Council is planning to explore ways of how it can have a greater say in proposals from the government re future developments. I am particularly pleased to see the allocation of funds for the restoration of Ashley Hall and the priorities listed in the Corporate and Investment sections of the report. Finally let's hope the reconfiguration of the space in Strawberry Fields bears fruit (pun intended!). Finally thank you for the wealth of information you have provided. From my lowly position can I say "well done".
I am in complete agreement with the 1.99% increase. I firmly believe that Chorley Borough Council are working for the best interests of the borough and wholly believe that CBC are offering excellent value for money for their services.

NEGATIVE
Totally disagree. In these current times I would be looking for the council to be making savings and as a minimum to freeze the charges, and if possible look for ways to reduce them.
I think investment into more housing is a poor idea. This is causing extra pressures on gp surgery's, dentists and other medical facilities, along with schools and yourselves with bin collection services. This money would be better invested in new business, cleaner industry and actually getting business back onto the high Street.
Capital expenditure on large scale projects should cease pending the end of the current Covid restrictions. A full review of the spending on Market Walk, Friday St car park & Strawberry field should be carried out given the failure to generate revenue returns
Consideration should be given to improving the gateways into chorley. On most roads into town there are derelict sites mostly public houses, several which have been on fire. These are the first impressions for people entering the town. These should be addressed rather than putting wicker figures on roundabouts, if you want to attract people to live and invest in the town. And to allow people who already live here to be proud of the town.
Due to the current pandemic I think there shouldn't be an increase. People have been/currently on the furlough scheme, some people are struggling financially. More people are using food banks.

NEUTRAL (No definable positive or negative viewpoint, or mixed)

I want to understand how you intend to fund and support the increased infrastructure and services required to support all the home building that is taking place.

Very difficult to understand what the budget proposals are, and I am a qualified with significant experience in local government. The papers referred to do not make clear what the options are and the impact of these options so not sure how anyone can comment meaningfully.

Please maximise work to develop new sporting opportunities for adults