

Budget consultation 2024/25

Purpose of the 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 2024/25.

Recommendations

2. That Members use the results to inform their decisions when setting the budget for 2024/25.

Executive Summary of the Report

3. Consultation on the proposed budget for 2024/25 received 148 responses.
4. Content analysis of the comments showed an overall positive or neutral view of the proposals. Positive comments indicated broad agreement with the proposed areas of investment while negative themes mainly related to the current economic context and increases in council tax.

Background

5. The 2024/25 budget consultation process started following approval of the draft budget position paper by Executive Cabinet in January, which set out the budget forecast and guiding principles for application of the budget over the next financial period.
6. 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.
7. Respondents were asked to number each of the Council's Corporate Strategy priorities and areas of investment from 1 (low priority) to 5 (high priority) and also to review the proposals and provide any other open feedback or comments in response to the budget.

Budget Consultation Results

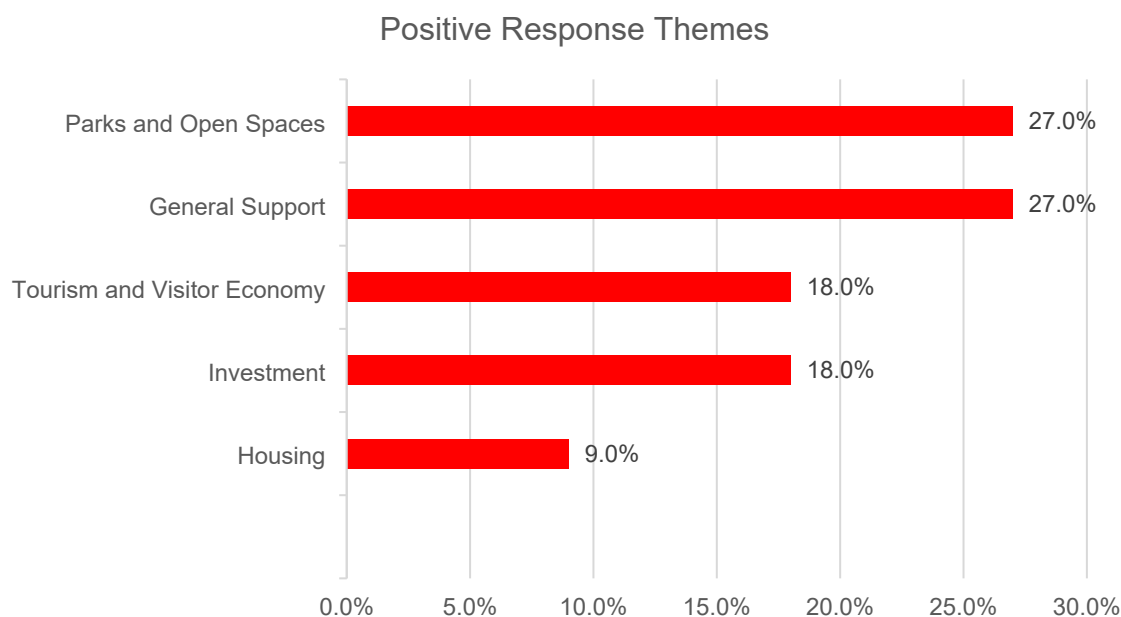
8. Consultation on the 2024/25 budget ran from the 19 January to 1 February 2024.
9. As well as completing the online survey, respondents also shared their views and comments using social media. From across all the posts during the budget consultation period, on Facebook the posts were viewed 28,300 times, and on X the posts reached 18,777. Analysis of social media responses have been grouped alongside the consultation responses.
10. The responses have been collated and analysed to identify the main themes and then grouped together based on whether they indicated a positive or negative response to the proposals.

Consultation Findings

11. The following table outlines the distribution of positive, neutral, and negative from respondents to the open question which asked for comments on the overall proposals. The majority of responses were either positive (expressing agreement with the budget proposals) or neutral (neither agreeing nor disagreeing with the budget proposals, for example suggesting additional priorities/ areas of investment.)

| Status | % |
|----------------------------|-------|
| Positive view of proposals | 9.32 |
| Neutral view of proposals | 75.42 |
| Negative view of proposals | 15.25 |

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



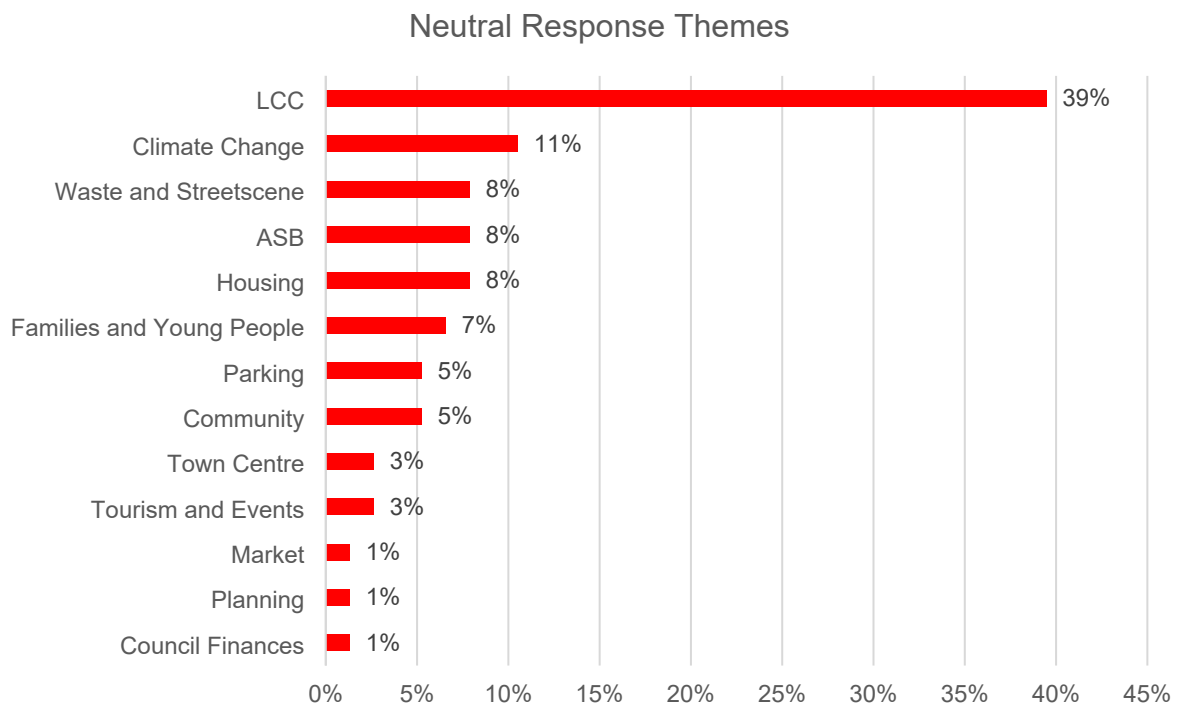
13. The majority of positive comments showed either general support for the proposals (27%) or particular support for proposals to improve parks and green spaces in the borough (27%.) There was also support for the other areas of investment including the general investment proposed by the council (18%,) plans to improve the visitor offer and tourism (18%) and housing and homelessness (9%.)

14. Respondents were also asked to respond to a prioritisation exercise, ranking the investment priorities from 1 (low priority) to 5 (high priority.)

15. The results show that respondents agree that all of the investment areas are of a medium-high priority, with all having an average ranking of 3.8 or 3.9 out of 5:

| Priority Theme | Average out of 5 |
|--|------------------|
| Housing where residents can live well, including improving housing standards and preventing homelessness across the borough | 3.8 |
| Delivering a green and sustainable borough, improving our parks and open spaces and delivering improvements to Chorley's Bus Shelter Network | 3.9 |
| An enterprising economy in both urban and rural areas, encouraging more visitors to the borough and focusing on the growth of Chorley's economy | 3.8 |
| Healthy, safe and engaged communities, supporting the health and wellbeing of residents and launching an enhanced social prescribing service for younger years | 3.8 |

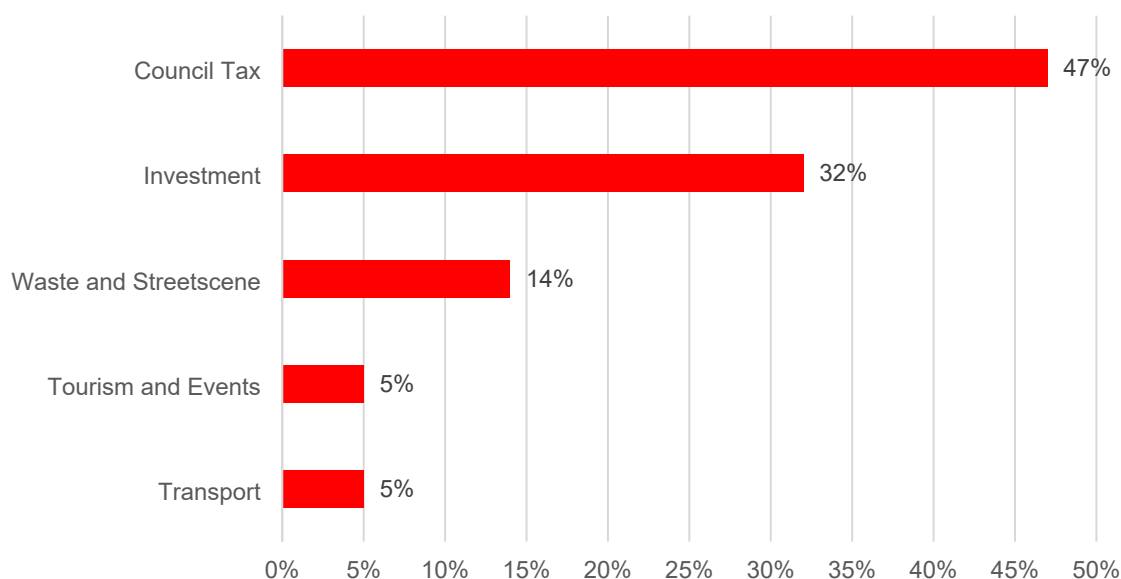
16. Neutral feedback was also received through the open text box question. This feedback neither demonstrated a positive or negative view of the budget proposals, but did suggest other areas of investment or priorities for the council:



| Theme | % | Feedback |
|---------------------------|----|---|
| LCC Responsibilities | 39 | The majority of neutral comments expressed dissatisfaction with the condition of roads (including potholes), street lighting, or bus routes which fall under the responsibilities of Lancashire County Council |
| Climate Change | 11 | There was a mixed response relating to Climate Change with some respondents suggesting new ideas and areas of investment to help tackle climate change, and other suggesting that this should be avoided as a priority. |
| Anti-Social Behaviour | 8 | Investing in CCTV and activities for youth to help in tackling anti-social behaviour. |
| Waste and Streetscene | 8 | Increased litter picking and waste collection |
| Housing | 8 | More social, council owned and affordable housing. Too much house building on green spaces/ without supporting infrastructure. |
| Families and Young People | 7 | More groups for families and young children, more facilities for older children and youth clubs, free holiday club |
| Parking | 5 | Free parking in the town centre, under cover areas for disabled parking, more parking in the town centre |
| Community | 5 | Investing in community groups and clubs to help deliver the council's priorities, joining up with groups already delivering services. |
| Town Centre | 3 | More shops/ variety in the town centre |
| Tourism and Events | 3 | Reducing unnecessary events |
| Market | 1 | Doors for the indoor market to reduce the impact of cold weather. |
| Planning | 1 | Rejecting more proposals for development |
| Council Finances | 1 | Ensure strong council finances and avoid bankruptcy. |

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

Negative Response Themes



18. The majority of negative comments (47%) relate to feedback suggesting that there should not be an increase in council tax. 32% of negative responses also related to general investment, particularly disagreeing with spending on bus shelters, high cost projects and general council spending.
19. 14% of negative comments relate to Waste and Streetscene, and the proposal to increase the cost for the optional garden waste collection service.
20. 5% of comments disagreed specifically with proposals for the visitor offer and work on bus shelters, which they felt were less of a priority when compared to other areas for the council.

| Report Author | Date |
|---------------------|------------|
| Caroline Winstanley | 05.02.2024 |

Summary of Comments

An example of the types of comments received through the consultation is outlined below:

| POSITIVE |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Keep up the good work |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I am a pensioner but would be happy to pay double the proposed rates rise to help people to live in warm, safe homes. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Good caring council |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Just try to keep doing the things you are and that you know benefit everyone wherever possible |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I am in favour of parks and open spaces |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The bus stops in Chorley need a lot of work and modernisation a lot of them are just poles with a sign there needs to be more proper shelters in Chorley that offer shelter from the elements and even potential bee bus stops to help insects thrive in the area |

| NEGATIVE |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I understand inflation but I don't agree about putting the price of garden waste collection up against the backdrop of its only collected 11 months a year and is regularly missed. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cut out unnecessary spending and lower the Council Tax. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not really in favour of further work on the bus shelters, but we have no bus service, so this doesn't directly affect me |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I'm not sure visitors are that important versus the other priorities |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Don't raise council tax! People's wages don't increase in line with all these extra costs. Stop all unnecessary events to keep costs to an absolute minimum! |

| NEUTRAL (Comments not directly related to budget proposals, suggestions for further investment) |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• More investment in activities for the young. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• We have loved the investment in the libraries as we use them weekly and we recycle as much as we can. Any green initiatives would be welcome especially if they involved local schools. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• More food banks for those in need. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• There is still too much building of housing without the infra structure of schools etc. Also, the green belt needs protection by using brown sites first. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fix the roads |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Repairing the EV chargers please |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cleaning the streets |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• More affordable council housing, more affordable rent prices. Basically, aimed at helping those in need rather than sky high private rented being there only option |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A focus on providing outlets for teens to socialise and to spend their free time should be considered. This will help reduce potential for antisocial behaviour due to boredom. Could spare ground be used to build basketball courts, table tennis tables, tennis courts, 5 aside football pitches? |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure all new buildings (whether commercial or domestic) have solar panels fitted to the roof space. Also ensure the road network is fit for purpose around new building projects (Botany Bay area!! |

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|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Invest in CCTV of good quality for all car parks, shopping areas, known hot spots of ASB i.e. parks and town centre. Obviously, this CCTV needs to be working 24/7 and ideally monitored. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• more EV chargers on council owned properties, car parks & streets - low cost to attract people into the area to spend money in shops.• solar & battery storage on council owned buildings - free sun energy and batteries charged on cheap night rates for day use, also provides power cut protection.• council buildings change over to heat pumps from gas boilers, increase insulation and convert to all LED lighting.• more parking near Buckshaw train station, vacant land could be used!• more parking in Chorley centre, often full.• offer incentives for bus companies to change to electric / hybrid busses, provide chargers at bus station.• create an EV taxi rank to promote uptake of electric taxis, toilet, brew and seating facilities. Solar on roof. Provide rapid chargers at low cost compared to public charge network. (Some companies are doing this already, would provide income for council and could be done on land already owned.) |