

Report of	Meeting	Date
Deputy Chief Executive	Council	22 February 2022

BUDGET CONSULTATION 2022/23

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 2022/23.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

2. That Members use the results which represent the views of residents, to inform their decisions when setting the budget for 2022/23.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF REPORT

3. Consultation on proposed budget principles for 2022/23 received 214 responses through an online survey, and 20 responses 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 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.

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 2022/23 budget consultation process started following approval of the budget position paper by Executive Cabinet on the 20 January 2022, 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:
 - Investments in what residents tell us is important to them, that benefit people right across the borough from renovations to our landmark Astley Hall through to supporting our famous Chorley Markets and town centre and major developments that will create jobs and provide better healthcare facilities for residents.
 - Capital investments of approximately £30m to drive forward ambitions to drive forward ambitions for economic growth and business development, to deliver high quality health services and to deliver sustainable public sector services through transforming the council.
 - A proposal to increase council tax by 1.99% which equates to 7 pence per week, and a below inflation increase in fees and charges, including an increase of £2.50 in the annual garden waste collection cost.
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 2022/23 budget ran from the 24 January to the 6 February 2022. The consultation was publicised through various Council channels, including 9,628 emails delivered to residents signed up to receive communications via the MyAccount feature on the council websites. The emails received 5,481 unique views (56.9%) and 637 link clicks (6.6%).
11. The formal consultation received 214 qualitative responses through a one open question format, via an online survey.
12. 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 24,368 times with 1,275 engagements (likes comments and shares) reaching a wide proportion of the population. Analysis of Social Media responses (which totalled 20) have been grouped alongside the consultation responses.
13. 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. 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.

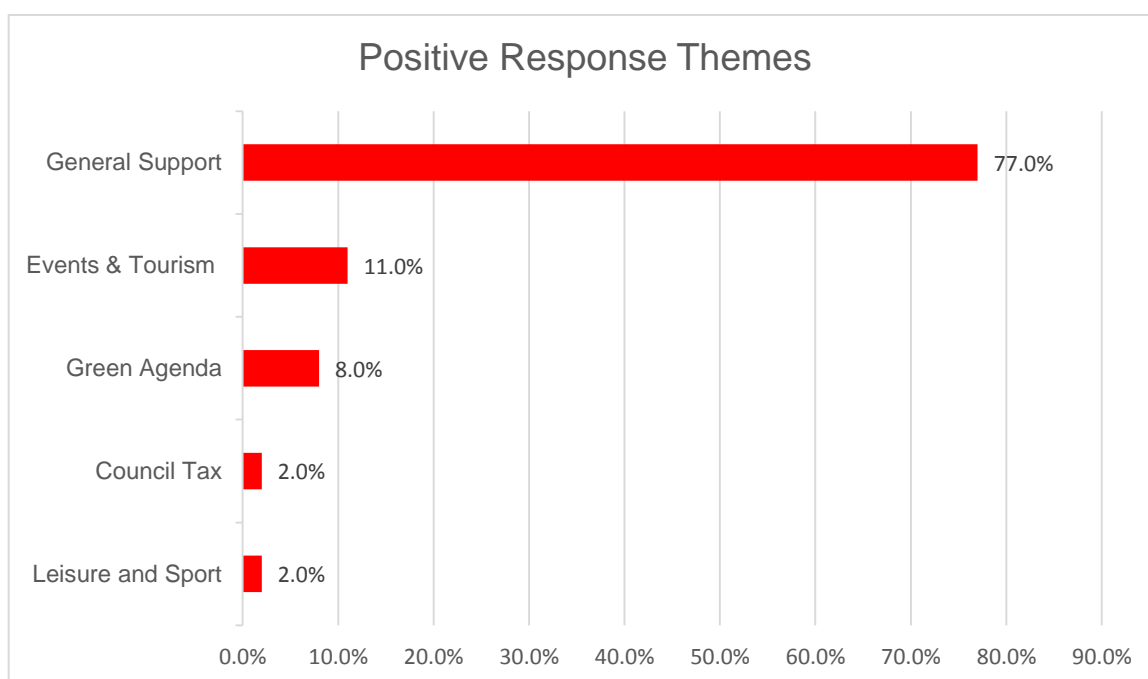
Consultation Findings

14. The following table outlines the distribution of positive, neutral, and negative from respondents to the open question which asked for comments on the overall proposals. These also include responses returned without relevant comment, where feedback was submitted that was not relevant to the budget consultation proposals.

Status	%
Positive or neutral view of the proposals	50.9%
Negative view of the proposals	30.4%
Returned without Comment*	18.7%

*responded but did not comment on the investment proposals

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

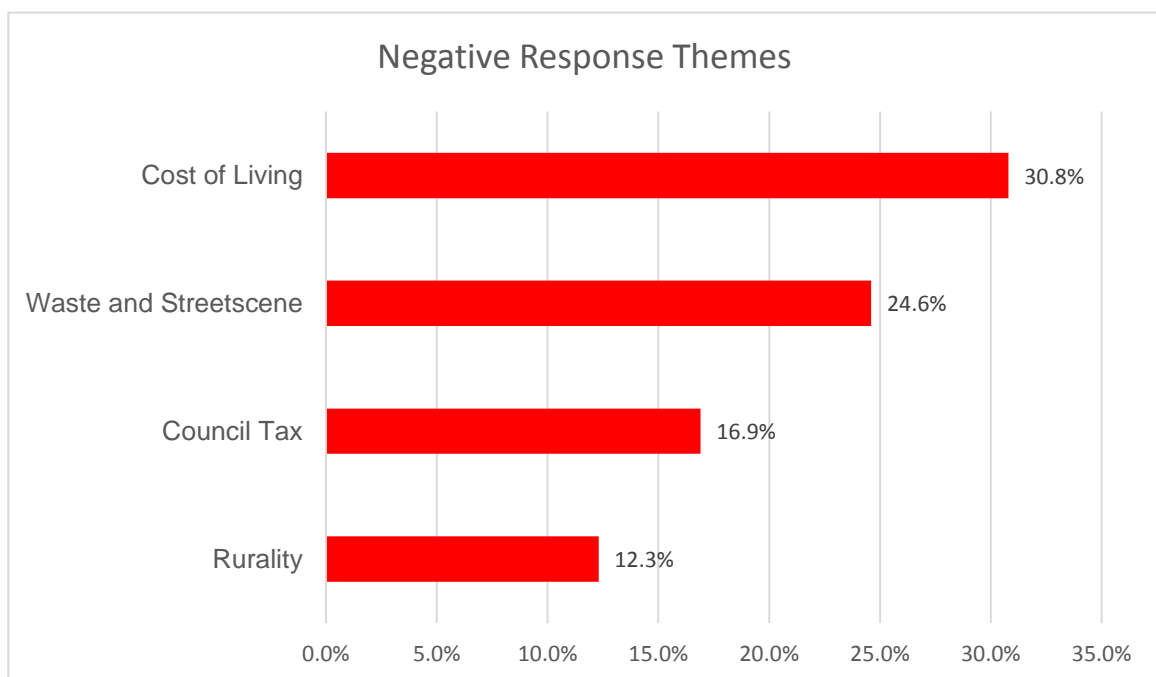


16. The majority of positive comments (77%) indicated general acceptance of the proposals, with some residents stating that they were 'logical' and 'sensible'. In addition to this, comments also referenced a positive view towards the Green Agenda (8%), Events & Tourism (11%). Other themes mentioned by positive comments include Council Tax (2%) and Leisure and Sport (2%).
17. Of those comments expressing a neutral viewpoint and providing comments or feedback, the following themes can be identified:

Additional Areas for Investment	Consideration to increase funding for particular service areas, e.g. health & social care, employability/skills building, local amenities
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Investment Levels	Suggestions included that the proposed investment levels contained in the budget should be adjusted. Examples include increasing allocation to the Green Agenda and reducing investments larger projects. Feedback also raised a desire for more funding to go into certain local areas.
Council Tax & Garden Waste Collection Fees	Respondents showed mixed responses to the proposed changes in Council Tax and Garden Waste Collection including reasons for the increase and the proposed level.

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



19. The majority of negative comments (30.8%) relate to the cost of living, with respondents indicating this as their reason for disagreeing with the proposals. There were also negative comments around the proposed Council Tax increase (16.9%) and Rurality (insufficient investments within their local areas) (12.3%). In addition, there were negative comments (24.6%) in relation to the proposed increase in the Garden Waste service, with respondents querying why this is a separate charge, or noting that the service is unrequired during the winter months. Feedback also referenced the current economic context and post pandemic challenges.
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
Investments	6%

Green Agenda	5%
Transport and Highways	3%
Social Care	2%

Social Media

21. Residents were also invited to share their views and comments using social media. We received a total of 20 responses from social media, compared to 124 last year. The responses received reflected the key themes within the consultation responses.

IMPLICATIONS OF REPORT

22. 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

23. There are no comments.

COMMENTS OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

24. There are no comments.

CHRIS SINNOTT
DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Report Author	Date
Sophie Tsang	10.02.22

Appendix A: Summary of Comments – Question 1 (Budget Specific)

POSITIVE

I think the proposed increases are fair given the level of spend on the town in the past few years. I for one am very proud of what is happening in Chorley, especially compared to other neighbouring towns. I think you are doing a great job!

I think that due to the economy at the moment, it is inevitable that there had to be a rise in the council tax. It appears Chorley council are trying to keep the costs down at the same time maintaining services and development. Although, no one likes a price hike I think in this climate that it is an acceptable amount.

Having read your proposals and the reasoning behind them I fully support the proposed increases.

In particular, I use Chorley Leisure Centre a great deal and feel that additional resources directed towards this much needed and well used facility is well worth the investment. I also use the garden waste collection service but have no problem with your proposal to increase the annual fee.

Any resources that you spend to support those in financial need have my full backing. In summary I think that this a very sensible and practically astute budget.

NEGATIVE

I worry that these proposed increases in Council tax and the Green Waste charge may tip more people on the lowest income into poverty when budgets are already due to be stretched by energy price hikes n.i. contribution hikes etc etc.

I do not feel that my money will be spent in the areas of chorley that are close to where we live. There are definitely other services that need improvement than the ones outlined in these proposals. The roads are terrible and full of potholes and health services are really unacceptable.

The garden waste increase is hardly fair either.

I am a single working parent of three children, and I barely feel that I get the help I need. Why am I paying such high council tax, when I work so hard and the money does not get spent in my area or on the services that we use. It is hardly fair!

6 years ago garden waste collection was free. although £2.50 might not seem much £32.50 does. How many more will do like some of my neighbours and put it in a bin bag in household refuge.

It is unfair that we pay council tax and management maintenance fees for example Buckshaw village or Clayton le Woods (Lovell new development). Council tax should be reduced for us as we are paying twice

NEUTRAL

(No definable positive or negative viewpoint, or mixed)

I support all the decisions apart from the 9.2 million in the light industrial estate in strawberry meadows. In Chorley we have vacant industrial units and it would be better to utilise these and support local businesses with the proposed investment to become more competitive and retain employment within the area

I think like any budget you have to ask do we really need that, or can the money be used elsewhere? I feel that spending money in councils accommodation it's not that urgent really I've seen the accommodation and it's truly good at this time, do we need another GP office when the closing down or thinking of closing down the hospital could they not use that building to use the GPs offices possibility that we are using buildings for other people not building new buildings. Why not put the money into providing better Accommodation for the elderly and the services to go with her to me we need to take care and respect the elderly and give them the chance to have quality of life

Great but would appreciate no council tax increase

I'd like to know what proportion of my council tax goes back into my local area - buckshaw village.

It strikes me that paying both council tax and an estate fee to a management company is essentially me paying twice for what others who don't have an estate fee to pay are only paying once.

It would be nice to see my council tax going towards some of the public amenities on buckshaw that more than just buckshaw residents use.