

Budget consultation 2023/24

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 2023/24.

Recommendation(s)

2. That Members use the results which represent the views of residents, to inform their decisions when setting the budget for 2023/24.

Executive Summary of Report

3. Consultation on proposed budget principles for 2023/24 received 73 responses through an online survey, and 60 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.

Background

6. The 2023/24 budget consultation process started following approval of the budget position paper by Executive Cabinet on the 19 January 2023, which set out the budget forecast and guiding principles for application of the budget over the next financial period.
7. 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, and have refreshed our corporate strategy this year to put a greater focus on what we can do locally to meet people's top priorities. The strategy tackles some of the big issues that have a major impact on wellbeing and the quality of lives for our communities including housing, community facilities, access to good jobs, and a thriving town centre and local businesses.
 - Future Investments that support the priorities for the borough to deliver housing where residents can live as well as a green sustainable borough, healthy, safe and engaged communities and a strong economy.

8. 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

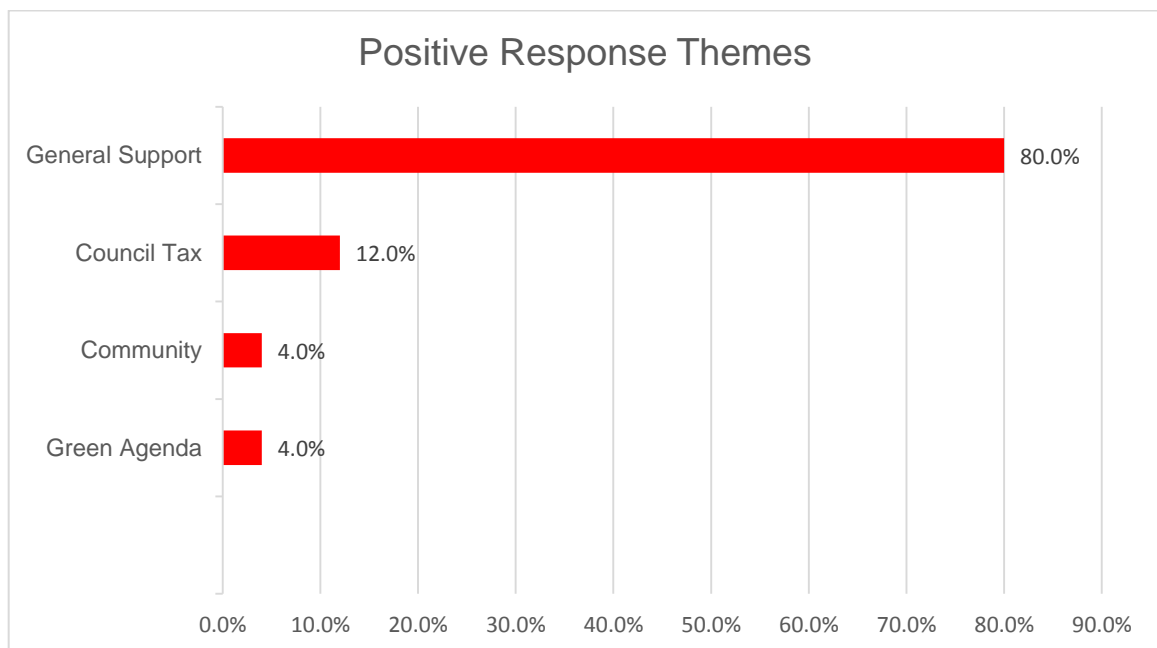
9. Consultation on the 2023/24 budget ran from the 24 January to the 6 February 2023. The consultation was publicised through various Council channels, including the council website, social media pages and local parish councils.
10. The formal consultation received 73 qualitative responses through an open question format, via an online survey.
11. 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 37,118 times with 2,589 engagements (likes comments and shares) reaching a wide proportion of the population. Analysis of social media responses (which totalled 60) have been grouped alongside the consultation responses.
12. 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

13. 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	57.7%
Negative view of the proposals	35.9%
Returned without Comment* <i>Responded but did not comment on the investment proposals</i>	6.4%

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

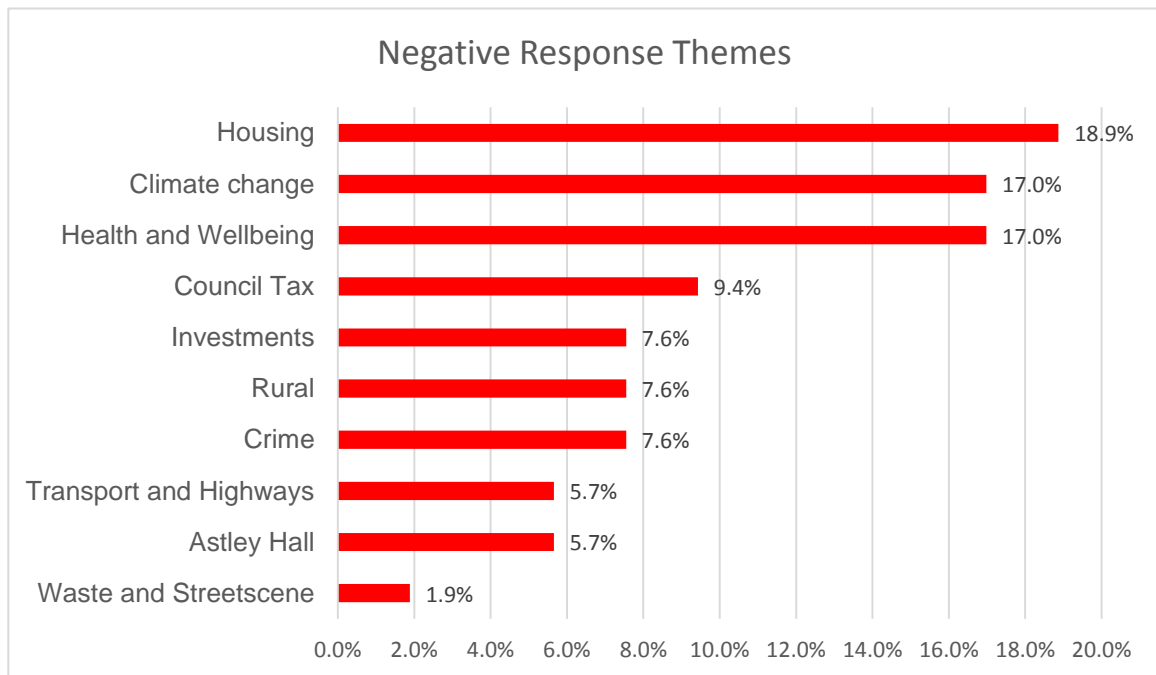


15. The majority of positive comments (80%) indicated general acceptance of the proposals, with some residents stating that they were 'overall very positive' and 'sensible'. In addition to this, comments also referenced a positive view towards Council Tax changes (12%), the Green Agenda (4%), Community projects (4%).
16. 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, local amenities, additional transport facilities, mental health support, homelessness prevention and antisocial behaviour prevention.
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Investment Levels	Suggestions included that the proposed investment levels contained in the budget should be adjusted. Examples include decreasing allocation to the Green Agenda and reducing investments for larger projects like Astley Hall and new affordable housing. Some responses want future investment to be spread more around the borough and less focused on the town centre.
Council Tax	Respondents showed mixed responses to the proposed changes in Council Tax including reasons for the increase and reasons against the proposed level. Some residents were accepting of the need for a slight increase whereas others were less receptive and think it will not be easy for some people to afford.

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



18. The majority of negative comments (18.9%) relate to housing, with respondents indicating this as their reason for disagreeing with the proposals. The vast majority of reasons given suggested dissatisfaction with the number of new houses being built and concerns about over-development and there not being a need for affordable housing within Chorley. There were also negative comments around the proposed ideas for climate change (17%) with some respondents disagreeing with the proposed levels of investment and considering it to be too high compared to other priorities. Health and wellbeing (17%) was also a key theme, with respondents identifying a need for greater investment in this area. Other comments were around the rise in council tax (9.4%) and prioritisation of investments including Astley Hall. (7.6%)

Social Media

19. Residents were also invited to share their views and comments using social media. We received a total of 60 responses from social media, compared to 20 last year. The responses received reflected the key themes within the consultation responses.

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

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

POSITIVE

Overall very positive in the time of great uncertainty

Given the constraints imposed by the central government, the Chorley budget proposals are sensible. I congratulate the Council on the initiatives that have taken to raise additional income.

I think the proposals are a sensible way forward at this present time.

NEGATIVE

I don't see why money needs to go to Astley Hall or to affordable housing yet again. What about helping us with houses but can't afford to heat them, can't afford to get enough food for the week yet work full time.

We should not be wasting £50000 on vehicle charge points or £2.8 million on affordable housing

Some poor choices. £50,000 to increase electric charging when the demand for ev is on the wane with hydrogen catching up is a waste of the peoples (not yours) money !! Why can some people with ev be allowed to charge their vehicles for free in the car park whilst residents are cutting down on their heating as they can't afford to pay for the electric coming into their homes. ? Please get a grip on these scroungers !!!

NEUTRAL

(No definable positive or negative viewpoint, or mixed)

Health and well-being activities are great but please keep in mind those that are working but would still like to attend. We don't all have loads of extra cash to pay for various activities: some of us are just surviving.

Overall, the budget proposals seem ok. £15k for health and well-being actions is low though. It is important to invest in things like making sure Brinscall, Clayton Green and All season's leisure centres remain open and deliver on promises to invest in them. Also important is looking after libraries and promoting these hubs for what they offer residents. Protection of trees is really important to make the town centre and other urban spaces attractive but also good for mental well-being and climate. Making sure you retain a good workforce is also important to ensure that due process and scrutiny can be made of the massive amount of building that is going on, to invest in infrastructure and to keep Chorley alive and well rather than giving itself up to become a sprawling mass whereupon it loses its identity.

For me investment in Inspire Youth Zone is a must. We need to educate our young people to become decent citizens and we also need to give them low cost or free entertainment to keep them off the streets.

Investing in Astley Hall will hopefully bring more people into the town but it needs to be published more.

I'm not sure about the housing, yes more affordable housing us needed but it needs to be both for sale and to rent and also there needs to be the infrastructure to go with it. Schools, Doctors and shops as well.

An example response we received from a local Parish Council is below:

A Local Parish Council

The Parish Council discussed the Chorley Council Budget proposals at their Meeting last night and confirmed that overall they are very good, with some good initiatives going forward.

One point which was raised was that these initiatives are not always communicated down to Parish level so that they can support them, get the information out there, or make local residents aware of them. In addition to this, a question was raised as to whether it is possible to re-purpose funding if it is determined that the money is not being used as per the budget. Could this money not then be moved to where it is needed after finding out what residents do want? The Parish Council also feel that a large proportion of the Chorley Council budget and resources is being used in the Town Centre, whilst the rural areas and villages get very little. eg: There are some great facilities and amenities in the Town Centre such as the Library, the Youth Zone and all the shops, but these are of little use to residents living in outlying villages if there is no decent bus service to get them into the Town Centre. The Parish Council realise that this is not just an issue in Charnock Richard, but that other rural villages, who have few facilities or amenities in the village, also have poor public transport links to allow them to access the growing amenity which can be found in the Town Centre.

However, having commented as above, the Parish Council feel that the revenue ideas and investments outlined in the consultation are good as are the initiatives proposed.