

Council Plan and Budget Consultation and Engagement

The priorities in the Council Plan and draft budget proposals were subject to consultation and engagement during November and December 2023. This included an online public consultation, an all Member briefing on 18 October, by all Scrutiny Committees during November and by all key stakeholders (partners, voluntary sector, business representatives) at the event on 7 December 2023. The feedback is summarised in this Appendix and has been considered by Cabinet in putting together the final budget for 2024/25.

Online Public Consultation

A public consultation was conducted between Monday 30 October and Sunday 10 December 2023.

The consultation gathered views on WSCC priorities and vital services, where people would like the County Council to consider increasing and decreasing spend and options to achieve a balanced budget.

The consultation included a survey questionnaire, available from the WSCC website. Paper copies were made available if requested, and there was an Easy Read version of the survey where the text was presented in an accessible, easy to understand format.

In total, the survey received 3,397 responses, of which:

- 94% were residents in West Sussex, 3% West Sussex business owners and 3% other.
- 49% were female, 45% male and 6% preferred not to say.
- 52% were retired/not working and 48% of working age. Only 0.1% were aged under 18.
- 20% of respondents reported to have a disability.

The key findings include:

- General agreement (68%) with the West Sussex County Council priorities.
- Respondents were asked to add priorities they thought were missing, this was a free text question and the word clouds below summarise the key points made from both the general survey and easy read survey.

Figure 1: General Survey Responses



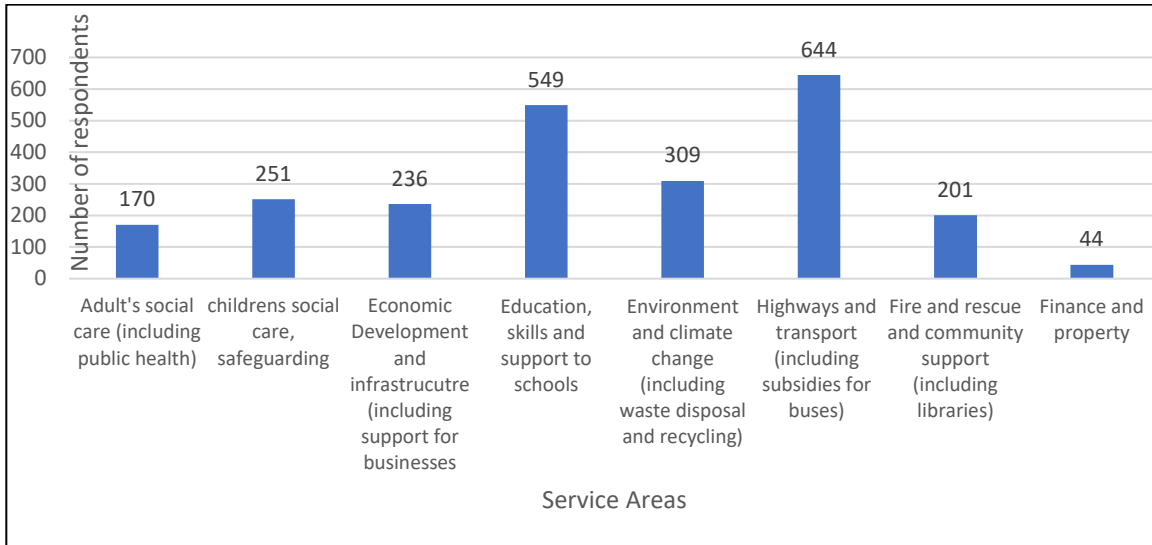
Figure 2: Easy Read Survey Responses



- In total 37% of respondents disagreed with where the council spends its money, compared to 28% who agreed.
- As shown in the Chart 1 below, the service area most commonly selected across all respondents for a need to increase funding was highways and

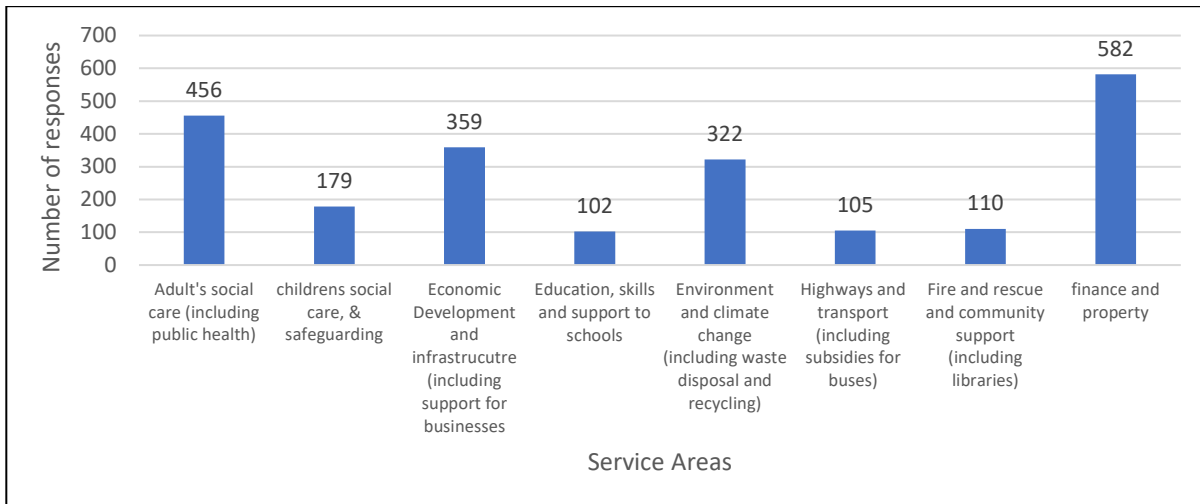
transport (including subsidies for buses) followed by education, skills and support to schools.

Chart 1: Services areas selected for increase in funding



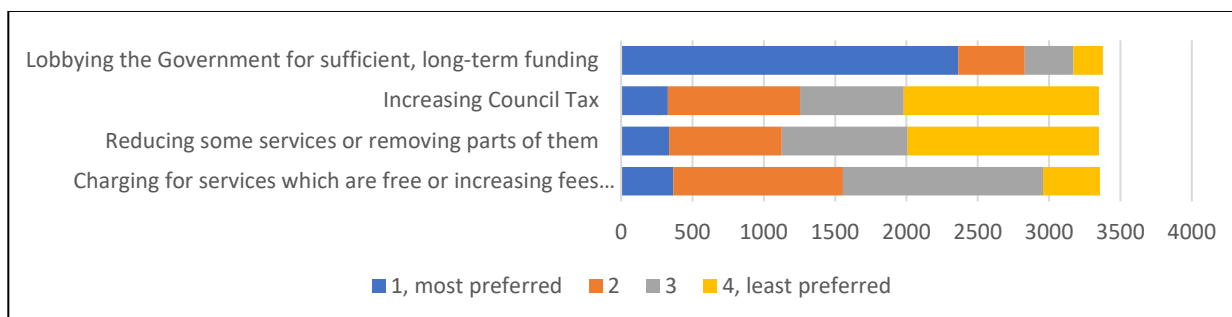
- The service areas most commonly selected for a decrease in funding included finance and property, followed by adults’ social care (including Public Health) as shown in Chart 2.
- Highways and transport and fire and rescue and community support (including libraries) were areas least selected to decrease spending on.

Chart 2: Services areas selected for decrease in funding



- Lobbying Government for additional funding was the most preferred option for balancing the budget with increasing Council Tax and reducing services being the least preferred.

Chart 3: Options for balancing the budget



- The services used the most by respondents over the last 12 months were waste services, such as household waste and recycling centres, followed by rights of way, footpaths, cycleways or country parks and libraries and archive services.

All Member Session (18 October)

An all member event was held on 18 October which updated on the budget proposals, including estimated pressures and proposed budget reductions.

November Scrutiny Committees

The draft budget proposals (pressures, budget reductions and changes to the Capital Programme) were discussed at each scrutiny committee meeting in November for relevant cabinet portfolios that fall under the remit of each committee.

In addition, the full budget proposals were discussed at Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee on 27 November.

Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee – 24 January

Feedback is included in Annex 4.

Stakeholder Events

Feedback from 7 December Stakeholder Engagement Session and 11 December Voluntary and Community Sector Engagement Session

- **Engagement on the Council Plan and Budget is welcome** as it allows transparent understanding of the pressures the County Council is facing and the difficult choices that need to be made.
- **All sectors facing unprecedented pressures** – working in partnership to manage these challenges is more important than ever.
- **Complexity of need** is having a real impact on joint commissioning arrangements and planning. More work is needed to ensure best use is made of voluntary sector resource and capacity, as well as funding opportunities.
- **Early engagement** – would allow for greater cross-sector collaboration to address the challenges faced.

- **Use of reserves/level of reserves** – it would be preferable for the County Council to dip into reserves rather than put increasing financial pressure on partners.
- **National Living Wage increase** will put further pressure on the County Council's budget as it needs to be reflected in the social care uplift.
- **Economic development and productivity** – need to ensure we maximise the opportunity from LEP transition and any funding that comes with that to ensure we address economic development needs and productivity issues in the county.