

Budget Consultation 2024/2025

Purpose of the Report

1. This report provides the Council with the results from the public consultation carried out on the draft budget proposals for 2024/2025

Recommendation

2. It is recommended that Members use the results from the consultation to inform their decisions when setting the budget for 2024/25.

Executive Summary of the Report

3. The consultation on the proposed budget principles for 2024/25 received a total of 181 responses.
4. Participants were asked to allocate scores out of five for their preferred priorities for investment and to also share general feedback on the budget proposals. Analysis showed a broad level of support for the areas of investment with some options prioritised more highly than others.

Background

5. The budget consultation aimed to gather feedback from residents and promote engagement around the budget proposals for the next financial year.
6. The 2024/25 budget consultation ran from the 18 January to the 1 February 2024. The first part of the consultation asked residents to score each of the proposed investment areas on a scale of 1 (not important) to 5 (very important.) The second part of the consultation asked for general feedback on the budget proposals through an open text box format, with the intention of gaining more qualitative feedback to gain a deeper insight into views and opinions.
7. 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, posts on Facebook had a reach of 23,500 and on X a reach of 15,838.
8. 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

Priority Rankings

9. Respondents were asked to rate the priorities of the council budget 1-5 based off how important they value each one personally. All priorities were seen as medium to high priority:

| Priority Theme | Average |
|---|---------|
| Happy and healthy communities, including supporting resident's health and wellbeing and delivering a family wellbeing centre | 3.3 |
| Green and clean neighbourhoods, with improvements to play areas and open spaces and the delivery of the Jubilee Gardens Extra Care scheme | 3.8 |
| Opportunities for everyone, including investment through the Town Deal and development of a People and Skills Programme | 3.3 |
| An exemplary council, including enhancing the use of the Civic Centre | 2.6 |

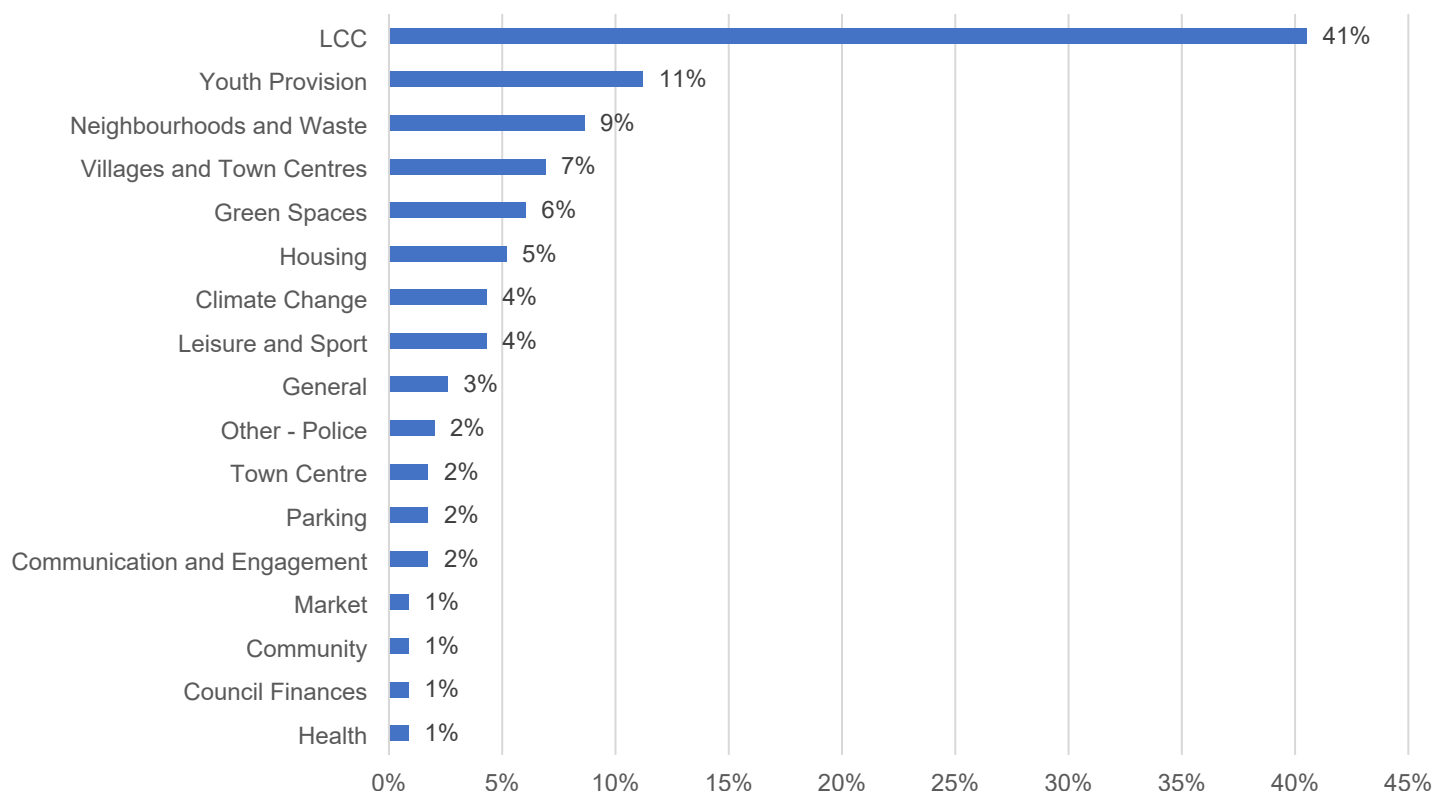
Open feedback

10. The following tables summarise the positive, neutral, and negative responses to the open question which asked for comments on the overall budget proposals. The majority of comments were either positive (expressing agreement or support with the proposals) or neutral (neither agreeing or disagreeing with the proposals or suggesting additional priorities/ areas for investment.)

| Type of response | % |
|---------------------------------------|--------|
| Positive | 3.31% |
| Positive or Neutral | 77.48% |
| Negative | 13.25% |
| Nil - not responding to the proposals | 5.96% |

11. The majority of positive comments were either supportive of the general investment priorities (40%) or generally positive around the council (60%.) There was particular positive feedback for the health and wellbeing initiatives.
12. Alongside the positive feedback, there was also a large number of neutral responses which did not provide a positive or negative response to the budget proposals but instead suggested other priorities and areas of investment:

Neutral Responses

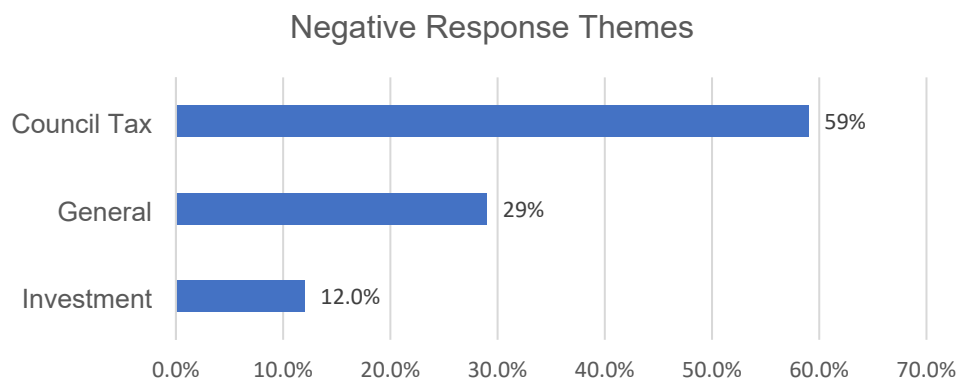


13. Of those comments expressing a negative viewpoint, the following themes can be identified:

| Theme | % | Feedback |
|---------------------------|-----|---|
| LCC | 41% | Feedback suggesting that there should be more investment in areas which are controlled by Lancashire County Council including roads, potholes, social care, schools and bus services. |
| Youth Provision | 11% | More places and activities for children, including for neurodiverse children and young people, and for wheeled sports. Baby friendly areas Youth centre to support action against anti-social behaviour. Mentoring and support for young people Social activities for young people such as cinema and bowling |
| Neighbourhoods and Waste | 9% | More investment in waste services, littering, fly tipping and grounds maintenance. |
| Villages and Town Centres | 7% | More investment in particular areas, towns and villages across the borough including Lostock Hall, Penwortham and Bamber Bridge |

| | | |
|------------------------------|----|---|
| Green Spaces | 6% | Keep spaces green, more plants and trees, creating more woodland space. |
| Housing | 5% | Reducing the amount of house building in the borough |
| Leisure and Sport | 4% | Investment in Leisure Centres, with one comment suggesting that new leisure centres should be built instead of updating the existing buildings. |
| Climate Change | 4% | Mixed responses- some suggesting not to spend any money on climate change and others saying that climate change is important, and that investment should be made for decarbonisation and a local energy plan. |
| General | 3% | General/ miscellaneous feedback including more young councillors to generate new ideas and more diversity and inclusivity courses. |
| Communication and Engagement | 2% | More communication around when council meetings are held so that residents can get involved/ raise their concerns. |
| Parking | 2% | Parking to be included in the plans for the market. Free parking to encourage support for the local economy. |
| Other - Police | 2% | Proposals relating to policing, which is outside of South Ribble Borough Council control. Feedback varied with one response saying there should be more police, with another suggesting that the role of the Police and Crime Commissioner should be removed. |
| Town Centre | 2% | Variety of businesses in Leyland Town Centre with regards to the Town Deal i.e. ensuring a balance of different types of businesses |
| Health | 1% | Importance of health for all including access to council programmes and improving air quality |
| Council Finances | 1% | Spend money carefully/ wisely. |
| Community | 1% | Working with community projects such as 'big clean up' |
| Market | 1% | Ensuring that all market traders are relocated during the market works. |

14. The negative response themes are set out in the chart below:



15. The majority of negative comments were in relation to the proposed council tax increase (59%) or general feedback relating to council-tax being too high/ spending being too high (29%.) 12% of negative comments were in relation to the proposed areas for investment, including specific disagreement with the proposals to spend money on play areas and wellbeing services.

| 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 |
|---|
| We think the council is doing a good job for residents and the budget proposals seem sensible. |
| Definitely prioritise family well-being hub as a great idea, but please ensure these are linked in wider LCC family hubs network. |
| I love the work you've done on play areas across Leyland and South Ribble. |

| NEGATIVE |
|---|
| Every service needs to freeze council tax no one can afford it. |
| In this time of hardship, you should not increase council tax. |
| People don't need some wellbeing service, they need a whole new doctors surgery. |
| We don't need you to be ripped off by companies willing to install soft floors and slides for play areas. |

| NEUTRAL |
|---|
| Please can you spend some of our money creating more woodland and green space and protecting it from future developments |
| As mentioned previously, we need more youth centres. Something to engage the youth instead of them feeling they're being forgotten about and blamed for the problems in our communities. Provide them with skills, whether it be manual skills or social skills etc. so as they can either be ready to leave school with a good head start, or progress in life if they've already left school and have been left on the scrapheap as schools often do with ones they deem to be problematic. |
| We need investment in our leisure centre, bigger, better pool with step access rather than ladders to make it easier to access for the less able. The changing rooms are very run down with several cubical out of order and doors missing and have been for a very long time and showers that hardly work and go hot and cold with no warning. |
| Empty the bins a bit more. |
| Fix the roads! |
| Green spaces are disappearing to roads and houses. This is costing us our health through pollution etc. |
| The development of Leyland town centre leaves out other towns such as Lostock Hall, Bamber bridge and Penwortham. Focus on Leyland leaves other areas feeling underserved. |