

# YOUR SAY ON HEREFORDSHIRE COUNCIL'S BUDGET FOR 2022/2023: KEY FINDINGS

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Herefordshire Council Intelligence Unit

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# The consultation

The formal public consultation on Herefordshire Council's budget for 2022/23 was carried out using an online questionnaire published on the council's website from 27 August 2021 to 04 October 2021. The consultation was also promoted via the council's social media channels.

A total of 134 responses were received to the online questionnaire, including one response on behalf of an organisation 'Echo of Hereford'. Responses to this year's consultation were relatively low, half the number of responses received to last year's consultation. It's important to be aware of this low response when considering the results; in particular the percentages: an apparently large percentage difference can equate to just a few individual responses.

There was an equal split of male and female respondents. The age profile shows a fair representation of working age (16-64 years) respondents and a marked bias from residents from the upper Council Tax bands (D to H) was also observed.

The following summary presents responses to this year's questionnaire, along with comparison to last year's responses where similar questions were asked. They are marked with this symbol:



## Results

### Satisfaction with council services (Q1)

The first section of the questionnaire asked about satisfaction with services that Herefordshire Council provides. Different services were listed for residents and for businesses/organisations, and respondents were asked to consider services that they have used themselves in the last year.

The graph (figure 1) below is ordered by the number of people who gave an opinion<sup>[1]</sup> on the service, with the most used services at the top. It shows three broad groupings of services in terms of usage.

Note that the percentages quoted in the text below are calculated out of only those people who had used the service, so don't match those on the chart (which shows the proportions of all respondents, to illustrate the wide variation in usage).

- Overall, there were three services which at least half of users who gave an opinion<sup>1</sup> said they were satisfied with: 'waste and recycling' (62%), 'parks and open spaces' (54%), and 'schools' (54%).
- There was a clear distinction in satisfaction levels among the most used services, with higher level of satisfaction for 'waste and recycling' (62% of users satisfied/very satisfied) and 'parks and open space' (54%), while 'highways and roads' has the lowest satisfaction (12%).
- In fact, 'highways and roads' is the service that the users are mostly dissatisfied with (83% of users dissatisfied/very dissatisfied).

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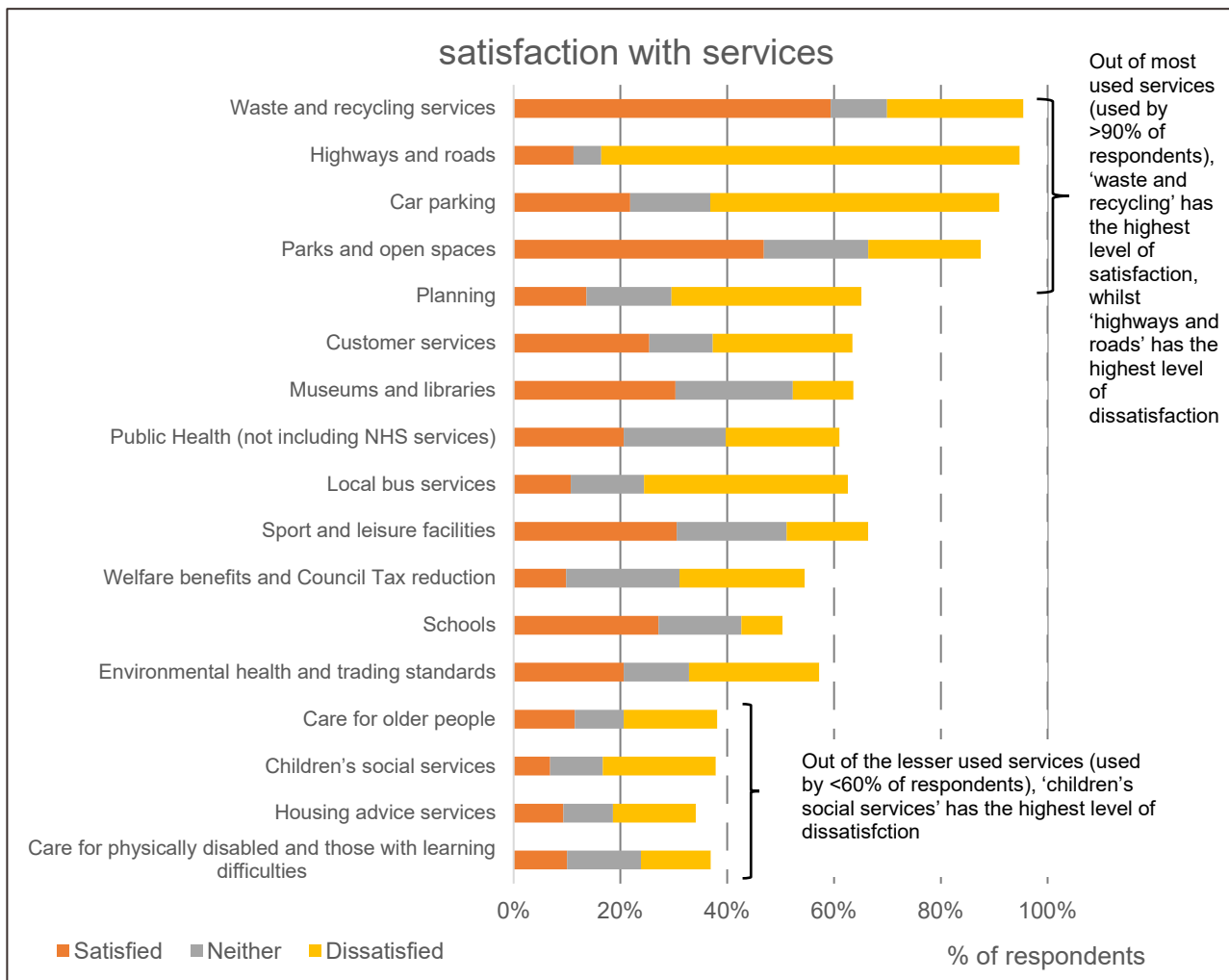
<sup>[1]</sup> i.e. respondents who said that they used the services, and excluding those who answered 'don't know'.

- Amongst the lesser used services, satisfaction with services for older people is high (30% of users) – but less so for ‘children’s social services’ (18%).
- Other than ‘highways and roads’, there are four other services where dissatisfaction was higher than 50%: ‘local bus services’ (61%), ‘car parking’ (60%), ‘children’s social services’ (56%) and ‘planning’ (55%).



There appeared to be a broadly similar pattern in terms of the usage of services, although respondents this year were more likely to say they had used the services compared to last year’s response. Overall, respondents to this year’s consultation were less satisfied or more dissatisfied with most of the services than last year. The largest drop in satisfaction is with ‘care for older people’ (by 28 percentage points) which also has the largest rise in dissatisfaction (by 24 percentage points), however this is one of the least used services. There are clear variations in the levels of satisfaction with ‘car parking’, ‘local bus services’, ‘public health’ and ‘children’s social services’ with fewer users been satisfied and more users been dissatisfied with than last year.

Figure 1: Residents’ satisfaction with council services (ordered by usage)



## **Making services more affordable to run (Q2-Q4)**

Q2. This question asked respondents to specify their views on how to make the following services more affordable. The common themes from the comments received are listed below each service:

- a. Making more efficient use of council assets such as land and buildings (69 comments)
  - Use council assets to generate income
  - Diversify the usage of assets e.g. establish community hubs in council buildings
  - Convert council buildings to affordable housing
  
- b. Changing working practices to make better use of technology and more efficient ways of working (62 comments)
  - Enhance remote/flexible working for council staff where possible
  - Invest in fit for purpose technology e.g. Single data management hubs across agencies to manage interventions with complex clients and case workers, WiFi enabling village halls.
  
- c. Working in partnership and sharing services with other councils and public sector agencies (63 comments)
  - Make internal and local partnerships rather than sharing services with other authorities
  - Make partnerships only if it provides better services, cut down costs
  - Do not make partnerships as a cost cutting exercise/not with the expense of reduction in resources.
  
- d. Using digital technology more widely to support the delivery of services (58 comments)
  - Combination of methods need to be used including face to face meetings
  - Make services accessible for all – vulnerable, elderly, people with learning disability, people who are not computer literate, and already disadvantaged groups.
  - Place better infrastructure, more mobile signal coverage first
  
- e. Making more services available online (53 comments)
  - Do not make services fully automated, make services accessible for people who are not capable of using automated services
  - Not all services are suitable for online provision

Q3. This question asked respondents to provide preventative measures that they would like to see in any of the following service areas.

a. Children's services (48 comments)

- Early identification of needs
- More robust, effective and timely early intervention process
- More competent, committed, qualified, permanent social workers
- Reduce workload of social workers to spend more time on cases
- Provide more resources to early help

b. Adult social care (54 comments)

- Collaborative working with all agencies e.g. NHS, council, care agencies
- Provide care in the community instead of institutional care and improve provision of home care to prevent unnecessary and unwanted residential placements
- More days centres, support hubs to provide leisure facilities, activities and clubs

c. Support for vulnerable people (45 comments)

- Develop community based support e.g. mentoring for young and vulnerable people, more day centres, activities/clubs and meals provided for them
- Improve support for independent living
- Provide a single point of contact for all sectors, collaborative work between all agencies involved and a charter of what is to be offered and where it can be found
- Improve access to mental health services, training in coping strategies

d. Specific prevention measures for any other service area (27 comments)

- Improve access to services and more services to refer to e.g. mental health services, financial help, bereavement
- Improve council practices and standards
- Take actions to protect environment and promote recycling

Q4. Local authorities have the opportunity to borrow money from central government and other sources, and currently Herefordshire Council has not borrowed as much as it is able to.

Respondents were asked whether they agree that the council should borrow more money to achieve its wider aims.

- 58% of respondents agreed for the council to borrow more money to achieve its wider aims while 26% did not agree and further 17% chose to select 'don't know'.

Q5. Only the respondents who agreed that the council should borrow money were then asked to rank areas in order of priority to spend the additional money on.

The results presented in Figure 2 are based on a weighted average of those responses.

There were no stark differences seen in the order of priority for these areas, however, 'children's services (not education) e.g. children in care, respite care, support for children with disabilities' was ranked slightly higher overall. 'Road maintenance' and 'measures to address the climate emergency' have polarised views – Table 1.

Figure 2: priority spending areas ordered by weighted score

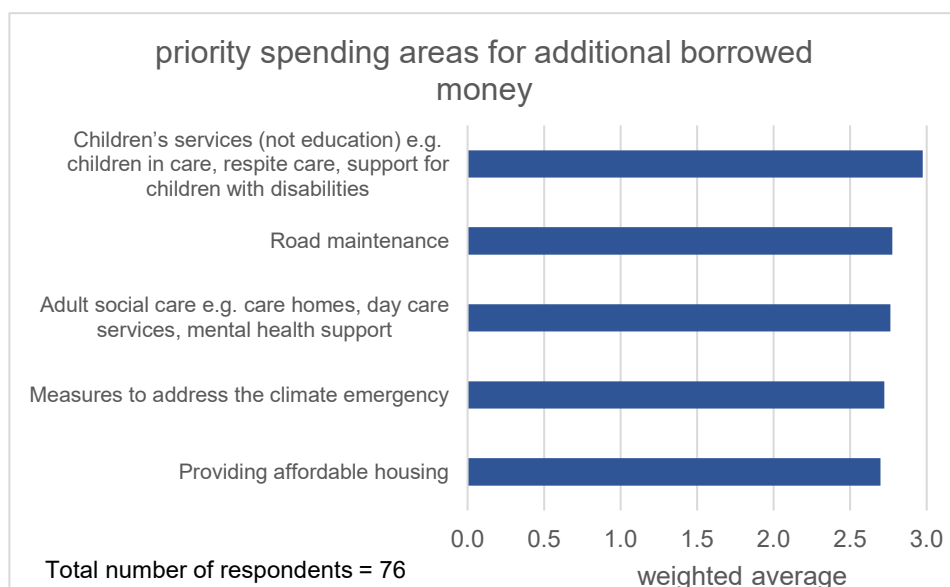


Table 1: proportion of responses to Q5 based on total respondents who ranked at least one option.

	Rank (1= highest and 5 = lowest)				
	1	2	3	4	5
Measures to address the climate emergency	<b>30%</b>	9%	8%	17%	<b>26%</b>
Road maintenance	<b>29%</b>	13%	12%	8%	<b>29%</b>
Adult social care e.g. care homes, day care services, mental health support	8%	<b>25%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>29%</b>	4%
Children's services (not education) e.g. children in care, respite care, support for children with disabilities	12%	<b>28%</b>	<b>29%</b>	17%	7%
Providing affordable housing	17%	17%	17%	18%	<b>28%</b>

Respondents were invited to provide other suggestions too. The most common areas suggested to spend the additional borrowings on were: road infrastructure, preventative services, housing, employment opportunities, and public transport.

## **Tackling climate change and protecting nature (Q6-Q8)**

The questions in this section were about the council's carbon management plan and the corresponding action plan.

Q6. 40% of respondents said that Herefordshire Council is not doing enough towards achieving its ambition of a net zero and a nature rich county, compared to 20% who agreed that the council is doing enough. 13% said that they don't agree with the council working towards this ambition.

Sixty respondents commented on Herefordshire Council's work towards achieving its ambition of a net zero and nature rich county. The majority (57%) of comments indicated that the council is not doing enough to achieve its targets, 18% acknowledged that the council is doing enough and heading in the right direction and 12% represented respondents' view on they do not agree with Herefordshire Council working towards this ambition. Despite their varied opinions, respondents provided suggestions for improvement such as tougher planning regulations, more recycling facilities, better and safer cycle routes further afield than the centre of the city, and raising public awareness. Some comments also addressed concerns over other priorities that the council should focus on and some believed the work towards net zero ambition needs to be done by the public and not the council.

Q7. Figure 3 shows the level of support that respondents are prepared and able to do for mitigating climate change.

- The majority (60% or more) of respondents said they are already
  - using reusable bottles and containers (75%)
  - walking more for local journeys (61%) and
  - composting food waste, paper, etc (59%)
- The options with the largest proportion of respondents who 'are intending to do' were 'changing to an electric or hybrid car' (36% compared to fewer than 10% who already have) and 'aiming for zero food waste' (29%, in addition to the 50% who are already doing).
- 'Using Beryl bikes' and 'cycling more for local journeys' were the most common options for people to say they support but are unable to do themselves (26% and 20% respectively), but

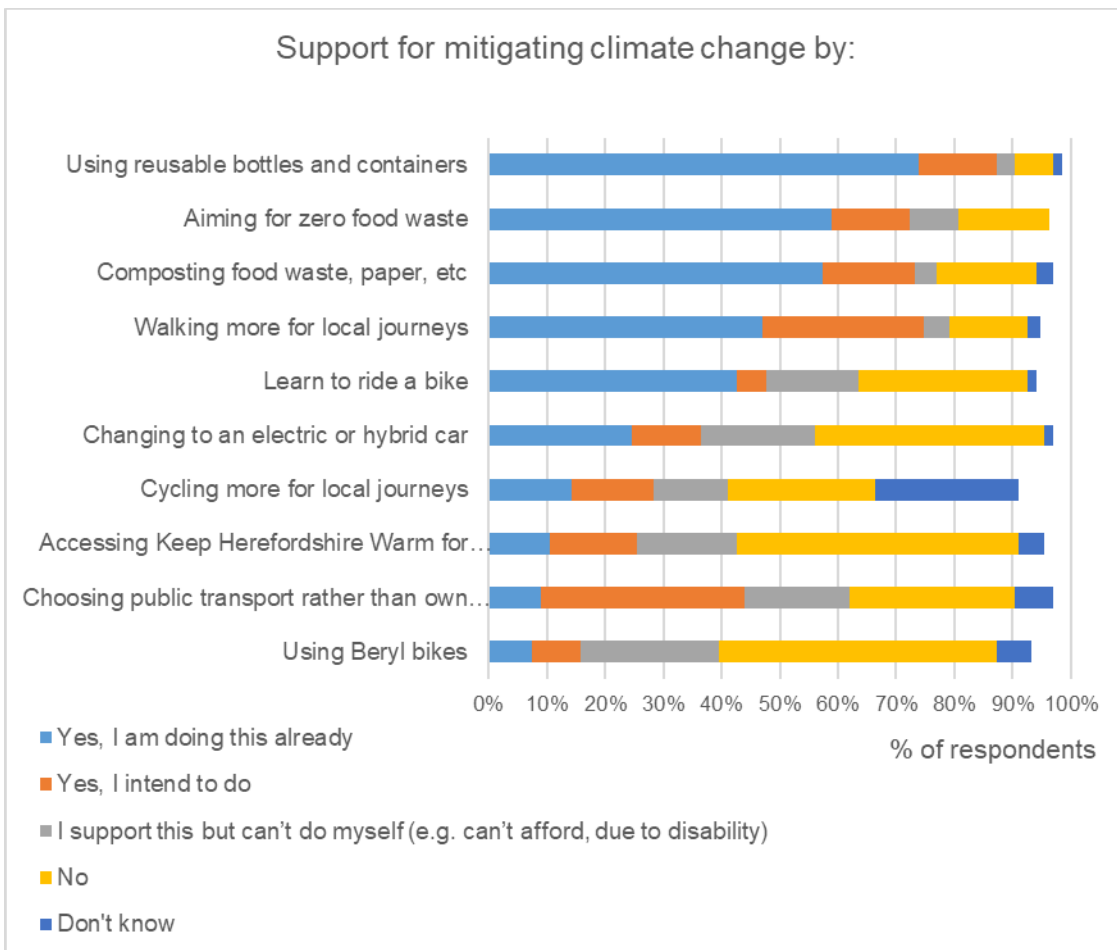


- They were also the options that people were most likely to say ‘no’ they didn’t support (51% and 41% respectively): along with ‘choosing public transport rather than my own vehicle’ (51%).

Lack of safer and lengthier cycle lanes or lack of reliable public transport were mentioned as to why respondents are not prepared to give up their car journeys towards mitigating climate change.

Forty respondents commented on other activities that they already do or intend to do. Life style changes such as eating less or no meat, using sustainable clothing, choosing sustainable travel choices, making their homes energy efficient or using green energy by adapting to solar power and using energy saving bulbs were cited most frequently. A few respondents said they practice self-sufficient gardening or organic gardening and provide green waste for making bio fuel.

Figure 3: level of support for mitigating climate change (ordered by level of support – already do or intend to do)



Q8. There were 90 comments made when asked about the key things respondents would like to see done differently in the county to help mitigate the Climate Emergency.

## **Schemes to help support vulnerable residents (Q9)**

In last year's consultation there was support for raising money to help support vulnerable residents through a Voluntary Contribution Scheme. Building on that, this year respondents were how they would like to see any money raised through a Herefordshire Lottery Scheme or Voluntary Contribution Scheme spent.

Respondents could select as many of the four options as they wanted, but areas that stand out as being most popular:

- Allocated to parish and town councils to decide with local residents for their area (48%)
- Thematic areas such as children, vulnerable adults, climate emergency (47%)

'Specific charities or local groups' and 'Geographical priority areas' were selected by 37% and 22% of respondents respectively.

Of those who provided details, some respondents thought parish/ town councils and local voluntary or charity organisations would be best placed in understanding their local needs and how these might be best supported. Social housing, young adults with limited capabilities or eligible children were also mentioned by respondents as to where the money should be spent.

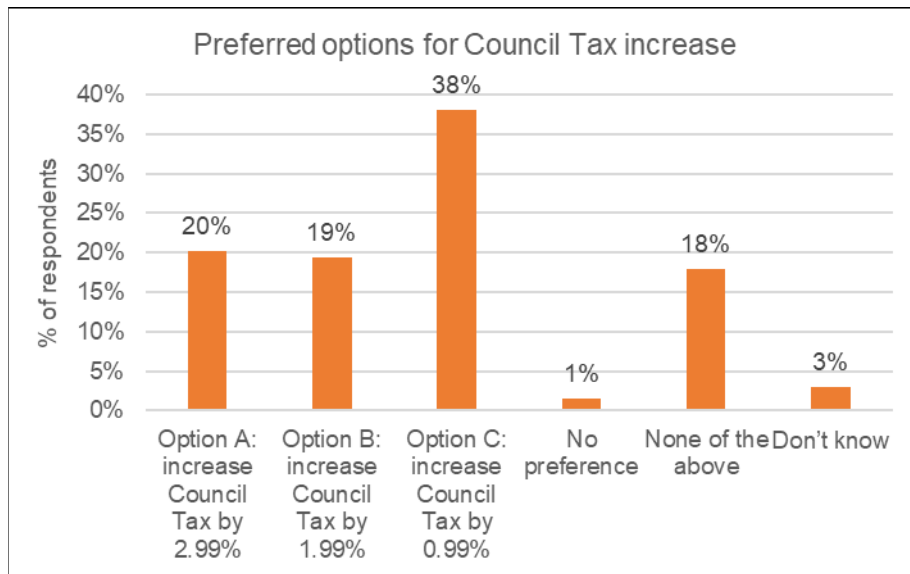
## **Council Tax options for 2022/23 (Q10 to Q12)**

Q10. In this section, residents were asked about their preference on the level of Council Tax increase that the council should consider for 2022/23: increase Council Tax by 2.99%, 1.99% or by 0.99%.

Figure 4 shows the respondents preferred options.

- 38% of respondents supported an increase of 0.99%
- Around 20% supported an increase of either 2.99% or 1.99%. A similar proportion said that they preferred neither option.
- The other 20% preferred neither option; it is not possible to know if they would support less than 0.99% or more than 2.99%.

Figure 4: preference on increasing Council Tax



Q11. In last year's consultation, residents were asked if they would be prepared to pay more Council Tax to help households on low incomes. Given the adverse consequences of Covid-19, the question was repeated in this year's consultation in order to collect views again for the forthcoming year 2022/23.

- Whilst 28% of respondents indicated that they would be willing to pay more Council Tax if the increase was used to help households on low incomes, 56% said they wouldn't and 16% were undecided.

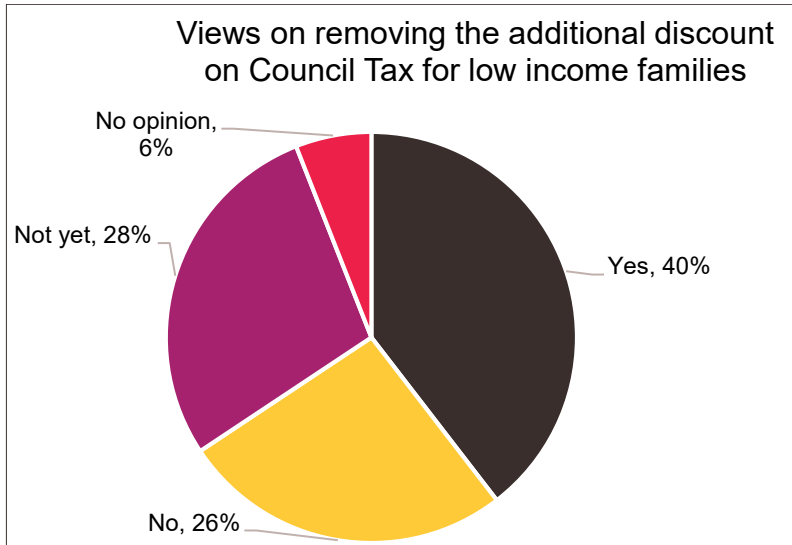


Notably fewer respondents supported this than last year: 41% (2020) compared to 28% (2021). Although fewer respondents also said they wouldn't be willing to pay more (56% compared to 59% in 2020), a sixth of respondents (16%) selected 'don't know' this year – an option that was not included in last year's question.

Q12. Families on low incomes receive a discount on Council Tax, however, due to the pandemic low income families currently receive an additional discount on their Council Tax.

When asked about whether to remove this additional discount, the majority (54%) felt that it should not be removed this year – half of whom said it shouldn't be removed at all, and half said 'not yet'. 40% of respondents thought that the additional discount should be removed now and 6% chose not to express an opinion – Figure 5.

Figure 5: Views on removing the additional discount on Council Tax for low income families



### Participation in other consultations (Q13 and Q14)

43% of those who responded to this year's budget consultation had also taken part in previous consultations. Most of them had completed Herefordshire Council's recent waste consultation. Amongst the other consultations mentioned, this year's bus consultation and local consultations such as parish surveys and neighbourhood development plan surveys were the most common.

## **Appendix 1: Top line report**