

## **Summary results of the 2024/25 budget consultation events**

### **Introduction to the consultation**

As part of the budget setting exercise for 2024/25 a series of 13 consultation events were held between 22<sup>nd</sup> November – 23<sup>rd</sup> December. These took the form of pop-up consultation stands. Locality specific consultation was undertaken in each of the market towns and twice in Hereford city centre as part of the Christmas market. Additional targeted consultation was undertaken with specific sections of the community; young people at Hereford Sixth Form College and a Young Farmers event, businesses at a Hereford Means Business conference, older people attending the 50+ Christmas lunch at The Kindle Centre and families attending the HAF Christmas event (HAF Holidays Activities and Food, targeted event for families in receipt of Free School Meals).

Approximately 652 people engaged with the consultation. A breakdown of the numbers engaged at each consultation events is attached as Appendix A.

### **Background to the 2023/24 budget consultation**

This year has seen another year of significant increases in costs for both residents and businesses across Herefordshire. These increases have also had a significant impact on the council's finances with large increases in costs for fuel, energy, adult social care, children's services (including children's social care, looked after children and child protection) and environmental services. With no assistance coming from central government, this means that additional cost pressures from inflation and growth in demand for services are unfunded and savings measures must be identified to address the resulting shortfall.

To ensure that the council remains in a financial position to progress their priorities of protecting and enhancing our environment, supporting the local economy and strengthening communities, they need to build financial resilience and make sure that they manage the council's finances very carefully.

They continue to deliver services efficiently but rising costs and increased local demand for services mean they are currently facing a budget shortfall of at least £21 million in 2024/25. This is such a serious shortfall that they can only address it by undertaking a complete review of the services the council can and cannot continue to provide.

This consultation presented some high-level options that could contribute towards balancing the budget for 2024/25 and their likely impacts which include reducing and changing services, increasing charging for services and increasing Council Tax.

## Overview of consultation approach

The consultation aimed to engage people in two main activities.

**Activity 1** asked people to indicate ‘in principle’ if they supported or did not support five key approaches suggested by Herefordshire Council.

**Activity 2** consisted of asking whether there were any specific services or activities they would like to see protected.

## Consultation engagement

The number of people approaching the stands was recorded using a tick sheet where people identified their gender and if any particular characteristics applied to them. Approximately 652 people were engaged through the events. A list of consultation events with the corresponding number of people spoken to is included in Appendix A. A summary of the characteristics of those engaged is shown below:

	Total
Male	270
Female	349
Other	4
Prefer not to say	0
Live in a rural area	125
Below 30 years old	110
Above retirement age	106
Own your own business	551
From an ethnic minority background	14
Have a disability/long term health condition	35
Care for someone with a disability/long term health condition (including old age)	25
Are/or live with a member of the armed forces or a veteran	14

Engagement consisted of the following:

- A conversation with the researchers or the Council representative present
- People leaving a comment in the comment box (comments were either specific and required a response or more general). A full list of the comments can be seen at Appendix B.
- Completing Activity 1 only (most people indicated a preference for each statement but some chose only to put tokens in one or two of the boxes)
- Completing Activity 2 only – mostly people completed the whole exercise
- Completing Activity 1 and 2

**It is important to note that due to the different types of engagement there are different total figures for the amount of people engaging, the amount of people participating in Activity 1 and the amount of people participating in Activity 2.**

Overall, there was lots of positive engagement, with members of the public sympathising with the difficult decisions that needed to be made and an appreciation of being asked their opinion.

## **Content of consultation session**

### **Activity 1**

Participants were asked to vote in each of the five token boxes. Each box included one of the following headings:

#### **Budget Themes**

- 1. Continuing the 100% discount on Council Tax for people most in need** (this measure seeks to support residents in the community struggling to pay their council tax charge)
- 2. Reviewing the council's assets to maximise returns and benefits** (a review to ensure the council's land and building assets are used efficiently to get best use and value for money)
- 3. Investing in Potholes repair and the road network** (To improve the road network and prioritise those roads identified as requiring the most urgent work)
- 4. Raising money through increases in parking charges across the county**
- 5. Introducing a paid-for subscription based garden waste collection service** (The introduction of a paid for subscription based collection service would replace the current arrangement and green sacks for garden waste will no longer be available for purchase)

People were asked to indicate whether they supported each approach by inserting a blue token in the box or a red token if they didn't support it.

### **Activity 2**

Activity 2 consisted of asking whether there were any specific services or activities they would like to see protected within the budget setting exercise. Participants wrote their priorities on an A1 grid. The grid also had space for more general comments that people wanted to make.

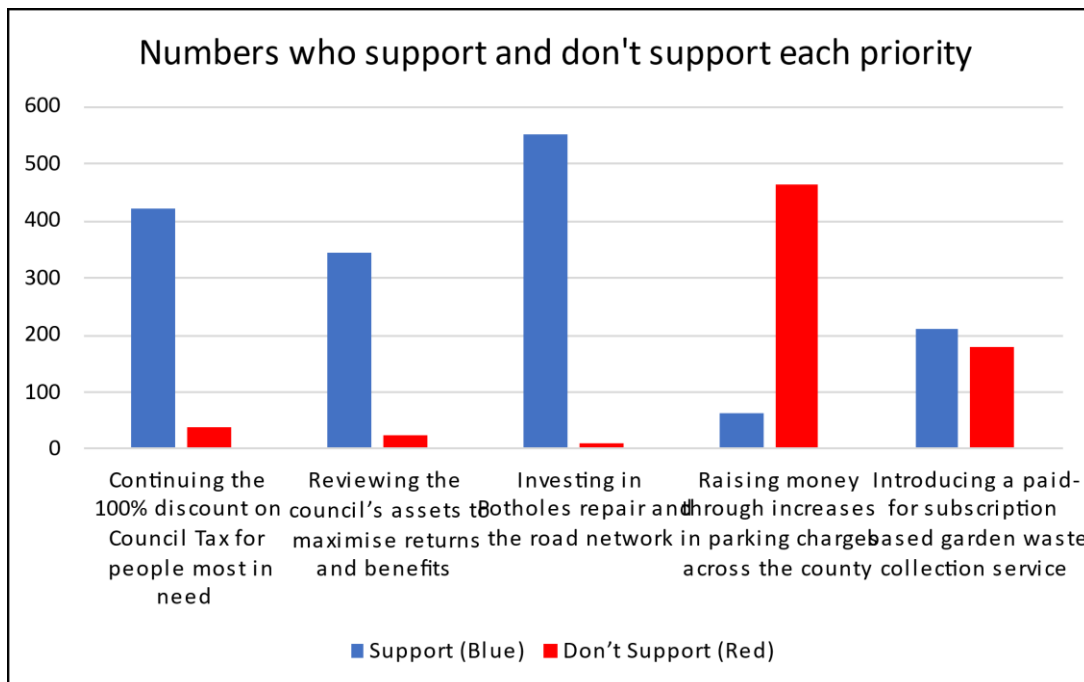
## **Consultation event results**

Throughout this report we refer to comments made by, for example, 'a few' or 'many' participants. This reflects comments that were made during participant engagement. As with other qualitative research it is not possible to specifically quantify the participants making these comments but points referred to in the report reflect areas where there were outlying opinions or strong consensus or divergence of opinion.

### Activity 1: Suggested approaches to save money or generate income

The table and graph below illustrate the result of the token voting.

	Priority	Support (Blue)	Don't Support (Red)
1	Continuing the 100% discount on Council Tax for people most in need	422	39
2	Reviewing the council's assets to maximise returns and benefits	345	25
3	Investing in Potholes repair and the road network	551	10
4	Raising money through increases in parking charges across the county	62	464
5	Introducing a paid-for subscription-based garden waste collection service	212	181



There was **clear support** for:

- Investing in Potholes repair and the road network
- Continuing the 100% discount on Council Tax for people most in need
- Reviewing the council's assets to maximise returns and benefits

There was a **majority opposition** for:

- Raising money through increases in parking charges across the county

There were **mixed views** about:

- Introducing a paid-for subscription based garden waste collection service

### **Additional comments**

#### **Investing in Potholes repair and the road network**

A significant number of comments were made about the quality and approach to road repairs undertaken by Balfour Beatty these included:

- Pothole repairs are not undertaken in a strategic way e.g. filling some holes on the same stretch of road but not others that are just as deep.
- The poor quality of previous pothole repairs and a perception that they are being 'patched up' rather than being filled properly.
- That companies that use heavy load vehicles should be charged more for the damage they cause to the roads.

#### **Continuing the 100% discount on Council Tax for people most in need**

There was strong support for continuing the 100% discount for people most in need in recognition of the challenges faced by many people due to the cost-of-living crisis. Where people did not support this they commonly expressed the following views:

- That there should be a discount for people in need but this should return to the pre-Covid levels.
- People wanted assurance that the discount was being given to those that most needed it.

One idea was that the discount should be phased back to pre-Covid levels over a period of years to give people more time to adjust from paying nothing to paying 25%.

E.g. Year 1 - 100% discount Year 2 90% discount Year 3 80% discount Year 4 75% discount

#### **Reviewing the council's assets to maximise returns and benefits**

The majority of people that supported this review felt it was something the Council should be doing regularly and that it made commercial sense to be reviewing rents etc.... Some people raised concerns that this would be a pre-cursor to the Council selling off many of its assets which was something they were not in support of. This was the primary reason that many people voted against the review.

## **Raising money through increases in parking charges across the county**

There was strong opposition to raising car parking charges. This was predominantly due to a fear that it would drive people out of the towns for shopping and that this would have a negative impact on the retail sector locally. This sentiment was expressed in all the market towns and Hereford. Some people stated they would be more inclined to support an increase in parking charges if they knew that money was being reinvested in road maintenance. Those who supported increases in parking charges were most likely to cite support for anything that encouraged people not to use their cars as the reason for their response. Many of these were cyclists and raised concerns about the environmental or health impacts of excessive car use.

## **Introducing a paid-for subscription-based garden waste collection service**

Whilst more people were in support of the introduction of a Council run paid-for subscription-based garden waste collection service than against it this was the approach that divided opinion. Those in support of the scheme felt that it would make sense for the Council to deliver this service as part of their existing recycling offer and felt it would be a good opportunity to raise additional revenue. Many people gave the caveat that they would only support the introduction of this scheme if the waste collected was going to be composted.<sup>1</sup> Those that opposed the approach were most likely to state that they felt the garden waste should be part of the existing recycling offer and that they wouldn't want to pay extra for it. In addition, many people that did not support the introduction of this service stated they would not use it because they took their garden waste to the tip, composted it or used the green sacks.

Users of the existing service run by Biffa had divided opinions some took a 'if it's not broken why fix it' attitude, whilst others said as long as the service was the same quality and cost they didn't mind who provided the service.

## **Activity 2: Priority service areas or activities to be protected**

There were 260+ comments in total with some clear themes coming out around:

<b>Priority areas to protect</b>	<b>No. of comments recorded</b>
Public transport / Bus services – most commonly rural bus services	24
Children's services	20
Road maintenance	19
Adult services – specifically service for the elderly	17
Youth services – most commonly activities for young people	15
Library services	12
Support for businesses	9
Support for the environment	9

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<sup>1</sup> Many people raised this in reference to the existing 'green sack' garden waste collection service that is not separated out for recycling.

Leisure facilities	5
Housing	5
	5
Mental health services	4
Development of infrastructure	3
Support for SEN / people with learning disabilities	3
Bypass in Hereford	3

### **Additional comments**

In addition to the comments about protecting services people were also given the opportunity to write general comments relating to the budget setting exercise. The most common comments received were:

- Perceptions that the Council wastes money E.g. the investment in the planters in the town centre, money on projects that never get off the ground.
- The wages of the senior staff at the Council.
- That Balfour Beatty are inefficient and do a poor quality job.

## Appendix A - Engagement at each of the events

Date	Event	Total no. engaged
22-Nov	Hereford Means Business Conference	55
25-Nov	Ledbury	80
28-Nov	Livestock Market	23
30-Nov	Ross on Wye	46
01-Dec	Leominster Market	73
02-Dec	Open arms Kington (Oxford Arms pub)	92
03-Dec	Bromyard Market Square	28
03-Dec	Hereford Young Farmers	36
07-Dec	Hereford High Town	29
08-Dec	Hereford Sixth Form College	74
14-Dec	Hereford High Town	56
15-Dec	South Wye Pensioners lunch	31
23-Dec	HAF event	29
	Total	652



## Appendix B – All comments received

Support for people with learning difficulties, esp children  
Respite (free) for people with learning difficulties  
Bring road repairs back inhouse and get rid of balfour beatty  
Traffic in Ledbury, possibly pedestrianise main road through Town, with the exception of taxis, buses, bikes.  
Bypass through the hill to Malvern, would link up bypass  
Bypass around Hereford  
ANPR cameras to charge drivers going through Ledbury to reduce traffic congestion  
Grassroots sports for Kids  
Grassroots sports for Kids  
Maintain library services  
More activities for young people  
More activities for young people  
Community spaces for people to use especially older people  
Less house building on green space to protect wildlife  
Cycle lanes important  
More infrastructure to support new developments and stop any further house building  
Residents parking  
More activities for children and young people  
More financial support for pensioners  
Adult and children's services  
Road conditions  
planning and building control are poorly managed currently  
Departments that manage the environment including pollution and protection  
pavement quality in Ledbury - poor quality, difficult for those with visual difficulties and old age  
The natural environment - wildlife and climate change is an incredibly important issue. Create open space and habitats around Ledbury especially in light of all the housing development. Housing should only be allowed if energy efficient  
We need tourists and cheap parking - all roads into Ledbury have a line of parked cars all day, especially since charges at the station. The narrowest roads are dangerous  
No more housing development in Ledbury, especially creeping towards other towns  
Childrens Services  
Children & YP Services  
Childrens Services  
Youth services & hubs  
Planning and Development management  
Care sector  
Childrens Services  
Return of mental health community Services that has recently stopped  
More community mental health support talking groups in wider areas  
More funding for children's services  
Training of staff within children's services  
Mental health  
Homelessness  
Childrens Services  
Elderly care  
Infrastructure and bus services

Highway maintenance  
Support for local business owners  
Bus routes and late buses at weekends to rural areas and especially subsidy for YP  
Total overhaul of a non-working system CS  
Teacher support  
Bus services  
encouraging and supporting local businesses  
Elderly support within home care  
Housing delivery  
Road care  
Reduced business rates for hospitality  
More money to care and carers  
Mental health  
HCC to stop wasting money - projects started invested in then stopped. Assess priorities and stick with them. Invest in decent staff to ensure retention.  
Change of government  
Support for 20mph limit on roads as in Wales - good experience  
Don't waste money e.g. cycle lanes in Hereford City  
Wages of the higher ups at the council and partners including Police crime commissioner are too high  
No business rates for the High St  
Look at their own salaries compared to local employers  
Recycling from businesses  
Funding for businesses and voluntary sectors  
Build more homes, schools, leisure, Health facilities Drs/dentists  
Make the green sacks more available x 3  
Council to buy houses to rent to local people  
Reduce pay for those at the top of the Council  
More council houses  
Review council assets but need to look at community benefits. Less use of external consultants who do not view the bigger picture. Cost benefit analysis with triple bottom line.  
More support in caring for older people - the cared for and the carer. Help with information. Difficult to get carers out to rural areas.  
Bypass in Hereford  
Councillors and those at the top of Herefordshire Council on a more realistic wage  
Top end Herefordshire Council employees on a more realistic wage  
Bus routes in rural areas  
Community spaces for older people to meet up.  
Higher pay for carers paid by the Local Authority as agency workers get paid a lot more.  
Planning timescales - max turnaround of 1 month, especially for small local projects worth less than £100k.  
Look at the impact of phosphates on planning permissions - look at whole farm e.g. if the whole farm is within the boundaries then permission should be granted based on the site.

Don't charge high rates for charities occupying Council buildings  
Roads and potholes B roads  
Verge clearing / litter picking  
Protecting ecological projects  
Planting different trees

Youth activities / youth clubs in Bromyard  
Services for elderly  
Services for children & young people  
Build more Council housing that cannot be sold through right to buy  
Help SME's with affordable rates  
Waste collection / recycling and the tip  
Make better use of empty properties both retail and residential  
Support use of cash and small businesses - no carp parks with only phone / card payments  
Would only support garden waste scheme if waste was recycled back into compost  
Community hospital parking is too expensive so people park dangerously on the road  
All parking in MTs should be free to encourage people to shop locally  
Spend money on tidying up the streets, repairing manhole covers and signs on side of the roads.  
Money from parking should be used to repair the roads - people would be happier to pay for it then.  
Review salaries for top jobs  
Garden waste scheme if introduced NOT to be done by Balfour Beatty  
Don't oppose to parking charges in some areas but not in MT's to encourage shop local  
Better public transport from Bromyard to Hereford for working people  
Review speed limit on Stourport Rd - reduce to 30  
Schools / education  
Libraries  
Libraries  
Libraries  
Youth services  
Youth services  
Youth services  
Electric bin collection lorries to reduce pollution  
Refuse collection  
Cleaning rubbish in Hereford City  
Leisure facilities  
Leisure facilities  
Leisure facilities  
Leisure facilities  
No cycling in Hereford City centre  
Childrens Services protecting the most vulnerable  
Bus services  
Childrens services  
Childrens services  
Childrens services  
Childrens services  
Support for leisure activities for young people  
Keep rural bus services  
Keep rural bus services  
Keep rural bus services  
Keep rural bus services  
Swimming pool  
Post pregnancy early support  
Residential care support for elderly  
Supporting the market towns

Supporting the market towns  
Would prefer a modern building for the library not an old building  
Leominster public toilet  
Libraries  
Potholes  
Rural bus services  
Support for young people  
Bypass bridges across Hereford  
More investment in tourism particularly in MTs support from the central areas. Robust tourism strategy.  
Disappointed that Leominster didn't have a light switch on due to road closures  
Lack of provision for young people need more free activities  
Consider reducing the CT discount rather than removing it  
Stop wasting money on projects  
Don't raise rents for people delivering services for people e.g. Halo  
Scrap payment for garden waste collection  
Ebnal Close - we are paying additional £ for Groundwork by Connexus but they don't do it.  
Support discount but not at 100%  
Support discount but not at 100%  
Support discount but not at 100%  
Support discount but not at 100%  
Support discount but not at 100%  
Support discount but not at 100%  
Support discount but not at 100%  
Don't waste money on projects that overspend  
There should be an option for people to pay more for services via CT  
Stop parking in Corn Square  
Lack of confidence in the democratic process  
Concern with quality of pothole repairs from Balfour  
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Anti-zoned car parking - we are a small town  
Take a more strategic approach to pot hole repair  
Better policing of who receives CT discount  
Tackle speeding on Etnam St  
Support young people especially the most vulnerable  
River Wye pollution  
SEN provision  
Public transport  
Public transport  
Buses from Leominster from Kington  
Care for the elderly  
Youth provision  
Help for addiction  
Better bus services  
Don't build on the meadow behind Headbrook  
Speed bumps in Headbrook and Bridge St  
Make heavy load road users pay more

The environment  
Adult social care  
A44 pot holes  
Bus service to Leominster to larger shops  
Public transport  
Traffic wardens  
Quarry lorries speed limits  
Review Balfour Beatty as a contractor and keep in-house. Too much is involved in repairing pot holes.  
It is not in Balfour Beattys interest to do repairs properly  
Support CT discount but not at 100%  
Support CT discount but not at 100%  
Support CT discount but not at 100%  
HC needs to maintain public buildings e.g. market hall  
Address pollution of River Wye  
Support business start-up - retail reduced rates for 1st 12 months  
Reduce bus prices especially for people going to education  
Stop timed stops at recycling centre - waste of time and resources  
Invest in training and recruitment of local social workers i.e. centre of excellence  
Care home and Care for the elderly  
Clean the drains all around Ross Town and estates  
Care homes  
Adults with disabilities  
Rubbish collection - keeping towns tidy, cutting grass  
mental health services  
Cut the senior management to a sensible level. Use with the right skill set in the right post.  
More resource for planning and building control to allow them to better planning of house building  
Road maintenance  
Parking cheaper and more affordable in towns  
Services for CYP with special needs and/or disabled  
Public transport in rural areas  
Current method of fixing potholes not effective  
Public transport  
Wasting too much money paying those at the top of Herefordshire Council  
Spend more money in Ross on Wye and less in Hereford City  
Pay less/reasonable amount of money to Chief Exectutive at Herefordshire Council  
Put forward a plan of cuts Herefordshire Council will make (show you are trying to reduce cuts)  
Consideration to me made to owners of rental properties on whether they should pay the full 100% council tax when the property is empty.  
100% discount on CT make sure it is well policed and only those who genuinely in need get it.  
Public transport provision  
More support for the Police  
More help for single parents  
mental health support  
more help for the elderly  
Access to GP (HMG)  
Infrastructure to support new house building  
Protect mental health services  
Support for pothole repair but not through Balfour Beatty. (For example 6 men working at Victoria Bridge on Monday 12th December for 1 badly filled pothole)  
Library services

Library services in a central location  
Protect children's services  
Library - should be in Maylords its central (I can't get to Shirehall as I have mobility problems)  
100% discount if well managed and only those that really need it  
Public Toilets  
Roads - wouldn't support 20mph  
Another river crossing  
Bypass on the East  
Park and ride  
Bus service  
Waste too much money  
Inequality of Council Tax bands - Don't feel equal - may need to be looked at. X2  
Parking charges are killing the Hight St.  
Green sacks are expensive already  
Garden Waste goes into the same recycling as general waste so what is the point?  
New library asap - should have been in Maylords  
Do the best for everybody - talk to people about how to do that  
Stop people parking on pavement (wheelchair user)  
Sorting the council local offices and staff out first in terms of costs  
Too high pay for those at the top of Herefordshire Council  
Pay more for those at the bottom  
Stop commissioning lots of services - do it in house  
Higher road charges for bigger vehicles on the road, e.g. haulage lorries, large farm vehicles  
Waste of money on projects e.g. planters of poor quality, Christmas trees in town  
Don't waste money on projects - planters, learn from past failures  
Disappointed in waste of money over the mess of the bypass  
Climate change and sustainability  
Disappointed the Zipper bus doesn't travel further up Belmont road  
Phased approach to return Council Tax from 100% discount over to 75% discount  
Don't put green waste in with the general waste  
Better equality of land management charges for communal areas with private, council and rented properties e.g. grass mowing charges  
Do the by-pass  
Preventative measures to reduce the number of looked after children  
Don't waste money on projects