

YOUR SAY ON HEREFORDSHIRE COUNCIL'S BUDGET AND TAX FOR 2025/26: RESULTS

V1.0

Herefordshire Council Intelligence Unit

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Introduction

Herefordshire Council's Budget and Tax consultation was conducted from 19 November to 20 December 2024. This year's consultation comprised two components: an online survey with a structured questionnaire and a budget simulator tool. The simulator was an interactive tool that allowed respondents to balance the council's budget by adjusting spending across various services and income sources. The aim was to address funding gaps while considering the potential impact on service delivery.

A total of 123 respondents completed the online questionnaire, and 78 respondents used the budget simulator tool. Since the questionnaire and the simulator tool were separate it was not possible to determine whether respondents participated in both or just one of the two components.

The results presented below shows the findings from each part of the consultation separately. Please note that these results should not be considered representative of the population of Herefordshire, due to the small number of respondents and potential bias from self-selected participation, where individuals who choose to participate may have different characteristics or opinions compared to the wider population.

Results

1. Responses to the budget simulator tool

Respondents were asked to balance the budget and close a £12 million funding gap by a combination of:

- increasing or decreasing spending in the four council directorates by a range of amounts
- increasing income from car parking charges, by either 5% or 10%
- increasing income from Council Tax by either 0.99%, 1.99%, 2.99%, 3.99% or 4.99%

It is important to note that the simulator did not enable respondents to balance the budget the budget solely by increasing income components to the highest level; they were required to reduce at least one expenditure component to achieve the target.

According to the 78 responses submitted for a balanced budget, an average income increase of 2.67% was suggested, along with an average spending reduction on services of 3.64%.

The increased income adjustment consists of 0.38% increase in car parking charges and 2.67% increase in Council Tax.

The overall average spending reduction of 3.64% proposed across all directorates consists of:

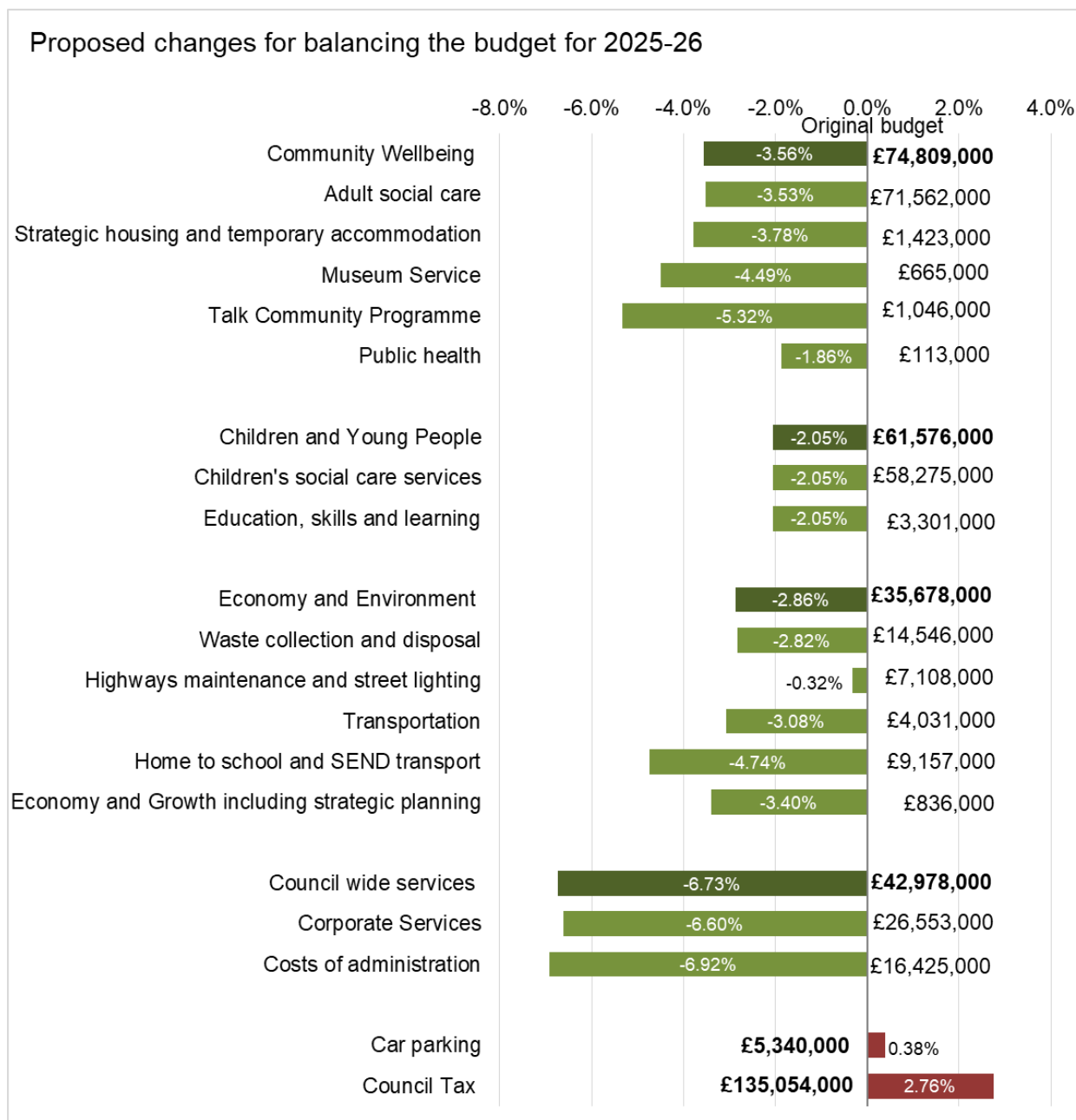
- 6.73% in council wide services – the largest reduction
- 3.56% in community wellbeing
- 2.86% in economy and environment
- 2.05% in children and young people's – the smallest reduction

However, the percentage change varied across different service areas within the directorates – see table and figure 1.

Table 1: The original budget, the average revised budget and the percentage change across the wider service groups and their service items.

| Service Group/Service Item | Original Budget (£) | Average Revised Budget (£) | % change |
|---|---------------------|----------------------------|--------------|
| Community Wellbeing (expenditure) | 74,809,000 | 72,144,569 | -3.56 |
| Adult social care | 71,562,000 | 69,038,981 | -3.53 |
| Strategic housing and temporary accommodation | 1,423,000 | 1,369,181 | -3.78 |
| Museum Service | 665,000 | 635,160 | -4.49 |
| Talk Community Programme | 1,046,000 | 990,347 | -5.32 |
| Public health | 113,000 | 110,899 | -1.86 |
| Children and Young People (expenditure) | 61,576,000 | 60,312,903 | -2.05 |
| Children's social care services | 58,275,000 | 57,079,615 | -2.05 |
| Education, skills and learning | 3,301,000 | 3,233,287 | -2.05 |
| Economy and Environment (expenditure) | 35,678,000 | 34,658,142 | -2.86 |
| Waste collection and disposal | 14,546,000 | 14,135,728 | -2.82 |
| Highways maintenance and street lighting | 7,108,000 | 7,085,218 | -0.32 |
| Transportation | 4,031,000 | 3,906,969 | -3.08 |
| Home to school and SEND transport | 9,157,000 | 8,722,629 | -4.74 |
| Economy and Growth including strategic planning | 836,000 | 807,597 | -3.40 |
| Council wide services (expenditure) | 42,978,000 | 40,087,706 | -6.73 |
| Corporate Services | 26,553,000 | 24,799,821 | -6.60 |
| Costs of administration | 16,425,000 | 15,287,885 | -6.92 |
| Car parking (Income) | 5,340,000 | 5,360,538 | 0.38 |
| Council Tax (Income) | 135,054,000 | 138,784,434 | 2.76 |
| Expenditure | 140,394,000 | 144,144,972 | 2.67 |
| Income | 215,041,000 | 207,203,320 | -3.64 |

Figure 1: The original budget, and the percentage changes across the directorates and service areas.



Q1b. There were 10 respondents provided comments about their suggestions to balance the budget - see appendix A.

2. Responses to the online questionnaire

The 123 respondents to the online questionnaire were asked to answer the questions below. Please note that when calculating the percentage from a base of 123, each response accounts for only slightly below 1% of the total.

Q1. To what extent do you support or not support the following areas of potential investment across the county?

All illustrated in figure 2 on the next page, all the seven areas of potential investment listed in the question, all were supported by the majority of respondents with the highest levels of support expressed for:

- 'Continue to invest in improvements to the road network.' (91% support vs 6% oppose)
- 'Invest in a prevention and maintenance programme to strengthen resilience and reduce/mitigate the impact of flooding for residents and communities' (87% support vs 11% oppose)
- 'Maximise use of the council's assets and resources to reduce revenue pressures' (83% support vs 10% oppose)

The following approaches were also supported by the majority of respondents, but with higher levels of opposition than those above.

- 'Continuing the 100% discount on Council Tax for people most in need' (66% support vs 32% oppose)
- Invest in the development of cultural and community space in the city centre (48% support vs 38% oppose)

Respondents were then asked to provide reasons for their answers, 41 did so – see appendix B.

Figure 2: Extent of support for the areas of potential investment across the county (ordered by support)

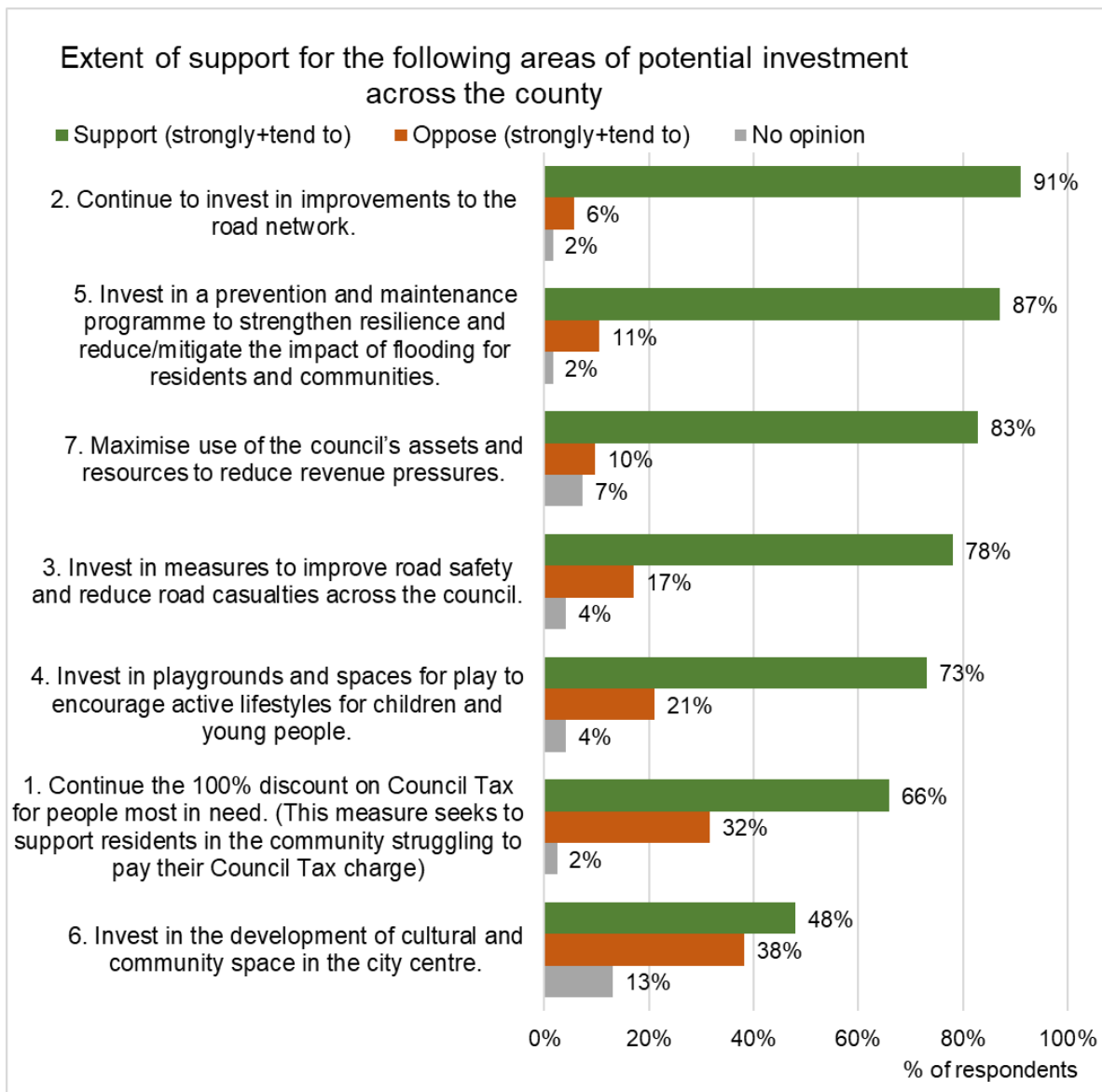


Table 2: responses to Q1 by percentage of respondents giving each answer

| | Strongly support | Tend to support | Tend to oppose | Strongly oppose | No opinion |
|---|------------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|-------------|
| 1. Continue 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) | 38 (31%) | 43 (35%) | 25 (20%) | 14 (11%) | 3 (2%) |
| 2. Continue to invest in improvements to the road network. | 66 (54%) | 46 (37%) | 4 (3%) | 3 (2%) | 2 (2%) |
| 3. Invest in measures to improve road safety and reduce road casualties across the council. | 36 (29%) | 60 (49%) | 16 (13%) | 5 (4%) | 5 (4%) |
| 4. Invest in playgrounds and spaces for play to encourage active lifestyles for children and young people. | 30 (24%) | 60 (49%) | 20 (16%) | 6 (5%) | 5 (4%) |
| 5. Invest in a prevention and maintenance programme to strengthen resilience and reduce/mitigate the impact of flooding for residents and communities. | 49 (40%) | 58 (47%) | 8 (7%) | 5 (4%) | 2 (2%) |
| 6. Invest in the development of cultural and community space in the city centre. | 23 (19%) | 36 (29%) | 18 (15%) | 29 (24%) | 16 (13%) |
| 7. Maximise use of the council's assets and resources to reduce revenue pressures. | 50 (41%) | 52 (42%) | 9 (7%) | 3 (2%) | 9 (7%) |

Q1b. 41 respondents made comments to provide answers on their selection to the Q1 - see appendix B.

Respondents' profile

Although the online survey and budget simulator tool were self-selecting and cannot be considered a representative sample of the population's views, it is useful compare the characteristics of respondents to those of the county's population as a whole.

For this reason, respondents were asked a few questions about themselves. The entire section, as well as the individual questions, was entirely optional to complete. 33 out of 123 online survey respondents (27%) indicated that they did not wish to complete the 'about you' section. 6 out of 78 respondents (8%) who used the simulator tool did not complete this section.

The profiles of responses varied between the two components of the consultation – tables 3-7

Overall, the most notable differences were that respondents were less likely to be from an ethnic group other than 'White British' or in the lower Council Tax bands A and B.

Which Council Tax band are you in?

Table 3: percentage of respondents and percentage of dwellings in Herefordshire by Council Tax band

| Council Tax Band | Percentage of respondents (online survey) | Percentage of respondents (simulator) | Percentage of dwellings (2021) |
|-------------------|---|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| A | 3% | 8% | 15% |
| B | 19% | 8% | 23% |
| C | 19% | 15% | 19% |
| D | 24% | 19% | 15% |
| E | 10% | 11% | 14% |
| F, G or H | 14% | 19% | 12% |
| Don't know | 11% | 19% | - |
| Total respondents | 96 | 73 | |

Your gender?

Table 4: percentage of respondents and percentage of Herefordshire 16+ population by gender

| Gender | Percentage of respondents (online survey) | Percentage of respondents (simulator) | Percentage of MYE 2022 aged 16+ years |
|-------------------|---|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Male | 45% | 57% | 49% |
| Female | 53% | 40% | 51% |
| Other | 2% | 3% | - |
| Total respondents | 96 | 72 | |

What is your age band?

Table 5: percentage of respondents and percentage of Herefordshire population by age band

| Age band | Percentage of respondents (online survey) | Percentage of respondents (simulator) | Percentage of MYE 2022 aged 16+ years |
|-------------------|---|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 16-24 years | 1% | 3% | 8% |
| 25-44 years | 26% | 36% | 26% |
| 45-64 years | 44% | 47% | 28% |
| 65+ years | 28% | 14% | 26% |
| Total respondents | 95 | 70 | |

Do you have a disability, long-term illness or health problem (12 months or more) which limits daily activities or the work you can do?

Table 6: percentage of respondents and percentage of Herefordshire 16+ population by disability status

| Disability or Limiting Long Term Illness (LLTI) | Percentage of respondents (online survey) | Percentage of respondents (simulator) | Percentage of population aged 16+ (Census 2021) |
|---|---|---------------------------------------|---|
| Yes | 24% | 16% | 17% |
| No | 76% | 84% | 83% |
| Total respondents | 93 | 70 | |

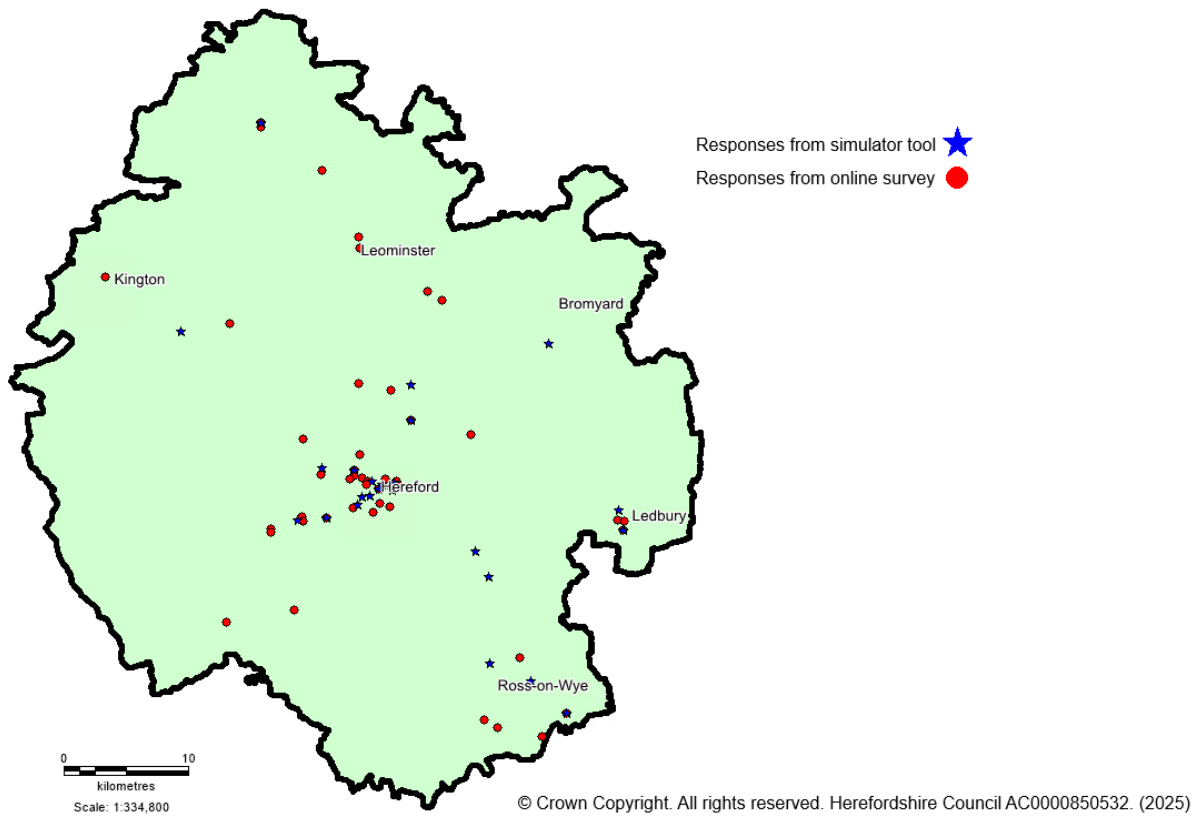
Table 7: percentage of respondents and percentage of Herefordshire 16+ population by ethnic group

| Ethnic Group | Percentage of respondents (online survey) | Percentage of respondents (simulator) | Percentage of population aged 16+ (Census 2021) |
|---|---|---------------------------------------|---|
| White British/English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish | 97% | 96% | 92% |
| Other White | 3% | 1% | 5% |
| Any other ethnic group | 0% | 3% | 3% |
| Total respondents | 94 | 69 | |

Postcode

Respondents were asked to provide their postcode with the aim of understanding the distribution of the responses across the county. There were 76 respondents to across both components of the consultation chose to provide their full postcode, 74 of these are within Herefordshire. The following map shows where the postcodes spread across the county. Please note that the points on the map represent the centre of a postcode, not the actual address.

Figure 3: Respondents' postcodes



Appendix A: List of free text comments to Q1b. suggestion to balance the budget - budget simulator tool

| Comments: |
|---|
| How about removing all the public waste bins and asking people to take their litter home? how about building that bypass around Hereford - quality of life for people living next to wall to wall traffic jams would improve, businesses would improve because they can get in and out of the town quicker - charge cars who still want to go through the town - do something to help Hereford football build a better stadium but have a partnership in ownership so your revenues increase - why not propose a new development where it can be combined with some development of theatre across the road i.e. more space for other entertainment establishments. |
| Overall budgets do nothing for waste of effort, equipment, ill informed decisions, poor working practices, repetitive actions/duplications that drag away funds for no real return. |
| It is clear that despite the emotive subject matter, adult social care and children's social care services are by far the biggest budgets and any efficiency savings in these departments has a much more dramatic impact than trying to make the same % of savings in other service areas. |
| All I get from this "Simulation tool" is the council trying to justify more plans to increase our taxes, with little to no improvements to overall services and ripping us off. Herefordshire Council is not fit for purpose. Reduce your own Internal spending and lavish salaries first, before levying more money from the people you are supposed to represent and serve. |
| I believe there are many areas which need to have some tough scrutiny to bring back into balance with affordability. |
| I do not believe this is a fair consultation and would consider a legal challenge to it if such a budget is passed. |
| Want to see move investment in culture. Particularly the museums |
| I do not support additional funding for roads and transport (apart from for active travel) from Council tax. These should be funded by central government through motor taxation and by road users and not funded by the general Council tax payer whether or not he or she uses the roads. General emphasis of progressive taxation should be to encourage low carbon behaviours, higher rates of reuse and recycle, greater motivation to personal healthy lifestyles and cultural enrichment. I support a 4.99% increase in the Council Tax to keep pace with inflation. I support higher charges on car park encourage modal shift to sustainable forms of transport especially for short trips which are the main cause of congestion. Taxation, housing and planning all need to encourage adults to make healthier lifestyle choices so they need less care later in life and everyone who can afford to fund their care should do so. |

I believe there is an opportunity to invest in strategically empowering and enabling community organisations and charities to scale up to meet the unmet need and reduce the pressure on council-led initiatives and services by supporting them to attract more private sector and regional, national and statutory funding. I strongly believe social enterprises, charities and voluntary organisations offer an amazing return on investment opportunity for local councils and the potential to support of their public services.

This could be made more effective and supportive of HCC strategic objectives by creating specific key areas of focus around geographical hot spots and priority areas of public need by better using the data we have to evidence, target and deliver support and funding (See Buckinghamshire Council's 'Opportunity Buck's Priority Wards - that are communicated with national, regional and statutory funding to get the best return on investment for funds invested but also help foundations and grant givers provide more money to areas that are helpful to the council).

The recent loss of the majority of the grants team within the council may have reduced the strategic oversight or effectiveness of cross departmental collaboration of driving through and activating vital funding held within HCC reserves that if processes and more focus and assistance on expediting these funds (106 funding from housing development etc...) could underpin and cover costs of investments in roads, community infrastructure and services, sporting facilities and cultural venues that would mean the costs outlined in this rough budget projections could be mitigated and covered reducing the impact of suggested cuts.

Working across Talk Community, Sports, Culture, Transport and Economic Development additional grants and funds could either be administered quicker to full the gaps or with a more proactive approach to supporting local charities and community organisations could upskill them to better achieve objectives around public health, cultural engagement, transportation and most importantly help underpin the unmet needs of the most vulnerable members of our community.

Areas that could yield benefit of mitigating the cost reductions required in the next budget could include:

- Investing in improving the flow of 106 money through the council systems by analysing 'log jams' and implementing actions to help this flow more swiftly (support to the project delivery teams to help community organisation fundraise or apply for grants that will close the gap on the funds that are delaying projects. In effect 'Teaching them to fish' for funding through grants, diversifying fundraising and income raising efforts.
- Developing key priority areas and within them a plan for what support would both serve the community and help achieve HCC strategic objectives and reduce pressure on budgets and services
- Proactively convening national and regional funders to better understand their priorities and help support them to achieve their objectives by scoping strong, well designed projects and programme with charitable organisations who can help meet this need
- Working closer with Parish councils to improve their scoping, consultation and development of community wish lists to inform 106 funding
- Reducing the amount of money being used on high paid external consultants to solve problems that expertise within existing staff can be empowered to support
- Better using our data to understand the needs of our community by live GIS mapping and the development of a CRM database of community and voluntary organisations to help target funds and delivery
- Empowering the amazing work of the Talk Community team to join up regional knowledge, partnerships and data gained by working their areas daily to help better

Comments:

support wider council initiatives and to reduce the decline and risk of decline in regional micro charities doing essential work on a hyper local basis.

- Developing a number of highly skilled specialists who can work across HCC departments and help scope, shape, attract and deliver more external funding into the council by having a strategic framework and horizon scanning ability to search, qualify, share and support applications that are available to local authorities.

- Supporting the strategic development of our new cultural assets to attract new external programme and engagement initiatives through grant funding; increasing well-being, tourism, economic growth and enhancing the regional brand of the county as a great place to live, work and do business.

- Supporting the speed of delivery for sporting infrastructure that is within section 106 funds - helping to mitigate some public health objectives by also supporting additional funding from these organisation to activate their new developments.

- Working closer with conservation partners to support them to attract funding to mitigate the loss of habitats and bio-diversity by helping them to scope external funding for a role to work with parish councils, to, to further invest in their farming cluster engagement to drive more regenerative and nature friendly farming (reducing pollution in the river whilst maintaining a profitable farm) and to attract major national and international funding to look at long term nature based solution for funding and peoples engagement with nature to reduce mental health.

I am relatively new to the council and so may have made some incorrect assumptions and have limited knowledge of existing deliver in some areas. I do believe however, there is a huge potential to mitigate the budget cuts suggested through proactive income generation/strategic fundraising and by working closer together internally to speed up the processes to expedite frozen money benefiting our ambitions.

I hope this is helpful, of value and what you were expecting from comments.

p.s. three books I have recently read add some context to some of this thinking:

Vitalising Purpose by Jamie Veitch and Jonathan Bland

New Power by Henry Timms and Jeremy Heiman's

Doughnut Economics by Kate Raworth

Best <name removed> / Conflict of Interest / New HCC Council Employee

There isn't any information on where the council has capacity to generate income from trading its services and to manage cost pressures by delivering services in new ways and by working more effectively with partners. The model is a bit meaningless because there is huge disparity between +/- 5% across service lines. Your impact statements are sweeping and make loaded assumptions about where the impacts would fall - e.g. reducing costs in Children's COULD come from reducing the number of children in residential care rather than impacting family support and prevention services. Overall - this is a rather pointless exercise - unless it's designed to deliver the message 'It's all very complicated and difficult, and beyond most people to engage with meaningfully'. In which case, job done.

Appendix B: List of free text comments to Q1b.reasons for the answers to support or not support the areas of potential investment across the county - online survey

| Comments: |
|---|
| Number 7 needs to make it clear what type of assets it relates to, from the wording it sounds like reduction of public services to save money. The council needs more investment. |
| play areas, flood prevention should be done by the house builders as part of their social remit to the communities they are building in. |
| Reduce spending on environmental issues and cycle path (i am a cyclist w a degree in the environment) and sort out basics first. Also we are an F council tax band but in a house worth £450,000 - that's not right! |
| There are so many things needed, but we have to prioritise. We can all do our bit, we can no longer expect the council to do everything for us. |
| Investment needed in housing and support for those to maintain their housing through education (early years), support packages. |
| Avoid the questions the public want asked |
| For those who work and aren't in receipt of Benefits because they earn above the threshold doesn't mean they too aren't struggling financially, instead we're expected to continue funding those that are in receipt of such benefits, funding vanity projects that are an utter waste of money. Its about time you started listening to your Constituents. |
| The council own a lot of empty buildings, these should be sold or rented at an appropriate rate to get a return, review of wasted revenue on locum staff. Stronger legal challenges for lost revenue in the care sector, recently advised lost items are not invoiced when they should be. Similarly care fee avoidance schemes should now be challenged to ensure council are receiving the money they should get. |
| It would be most imprudent to build more road network. Rather - for the sake of public health, cost benefit and the climate emergency we should invest in sustainable alternatives for active and public transport. This therefore needs to become the option. |
| Perhaps a 75% discount on Council Tax for people most in need. |
| Stop wasting money on trendy issues and go back to basics. |
| What is meant by invest in improvement is to the road network? I would support improvements to existing network, but not the major investment of as yet a proven case for a bypass or other link roads. |
| A large investment into social care |
| Cut the wok elements of the council. |

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| Comments: |
| Stop wasting money. |
| Drastic cuts required, start from 50% of budget. Remove all non jobs, pay on efficiency, get local business owners to scrutinise and advise where waste is. |
| I believe that active lifestyles should encompass all ages and one way of encouraging this is to introduce more dance related events. Dancing is a cultural activity which covers all ages, abilities and ethnicities. |
| Budget needs to be spent more wisely, money is wasted on projects that bring very little to the city. Salaries could be reduced amongst highest earners to enable the budget to stretch more rather than taxing normal people more. Spending seems to be frivolous. |
| All of these are of importance |
| Deliver the new museum! |
| There is nothing about social care nor children's services in your plan, both of which are crucial. Older people's services also need a review with more money being spent. There is also no box to tick to promote the council to reduce waste and to recycle wherever possible. Item 7 is a non question as it really does not explain anything but I suppose it looks good on a tick box questionnaire! There are many more items that could use investment from the council but to keep it to just 7 is really a non exercise. |
| Employ more people with local knowledge |
| Where is Social Care investment? |
| Stop wasting money in ridiculous things i.e. plant pots weather station etc. and concentrate on the roads and infrastructure and not bike lanes either! |
| The 100% discount on council tax, is simply a lazy option. This should be means tested against what each family earns, and can ultimately afford. Almost everyone can pay something, be that £1, £5, £10 etc... and that is all money coming in and contributing while also reducing the burden on the remainder of the tax payers. Furthermore, the council should put a hold on vanity projects and frivolous spending, focussing only on the absolute essentials. As the people you are supposed to be representing, we simply cannot afford anymore annual, maximum percentage tax increases. |
| You have to be aware of Central Government plans for net zero and to take this into consideration. |
| everyone should contribute something to council tax otherwise it is not fair on people who do pay but are struggling |
| The wording of Question 7 is opaque. |
| Herefordshire is reliant on road transport. A bypass is needed for Hereford. Failure to deliver this will limit growth and harm attracting visitors. |
| no mention here of the extra resources needed for adult social care |

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| Comments: |
| I agree with maximising the use of the council's assets and resources so long as this does not involve selling them off. I also strongly support the development of the Golden Valley Parkway station near Pontrilas to improve access to train/public transport for residents, students, and businesses alike, which will also reduce road use. |
| I feel that so far the funds have been mis-managed. A bypass is definitely needed proven over again. Building so many houses with no infrastructure and poor planning authority is inelegant. The council need to stop and think for their communities needs not what they think they need. |
| road safety is important, people should pay for services a discount should be given but not 100% |
| 4. this is important but can the community being doing more - investment from local communities and businesses. Similarly with 5. and 6. for 7. are there assets that can be sold? |
| Hereford's road infrastructure is shockingly inadequate & badly thought out, with too many traffic lights & a lack of mini roundabouts & pedestrian bridges. A relief road/river crossing is desperately needed to remove congestion of through traffic within the City. Rural bus services are also woefully inadequate, with no late services even on weekends, all of which impacts on people's ability to maximise use of bus services that we're all supposed to use instead of driving our cars! |
| 7. Make CCTV a 24 hour service so that it could provide out of hours services to save and/or generate revenue. |
| Some vague questions. People that are in need shouldn't pay council tax however those that choose not to work should still pay or be encouraged to work. People that are "in need" should not include economic/ illegal migrants. Road safety should be a priority however speed cameras are not safety features. |
| Leominster Town Council Additional comments; 2. Should be spent on active travel and public transport, not just roads. 3. Should this be reduce road casualties across the county, not council. 6. The investment should be shared across the market towns too. 7. The town council is not keen on assets being sold, they should be asset transferred. |
| Hereford is grinding to a standstill because of poor infrastructure including a new river crossing, poor alternative transport options, park and ride. |
| Select areas for building that are not liable to flood in the first place! |
| Assuming "maximising council assets and resources to reduce revenue pressures" is about investing to increase efficiencies that create an ongoing reduction in costs then this would also be supported as a priority. |