

Summary of Budget Consultation and Council Plan Engagement Feedback

1. Summary: public consultation on draft Budget 2024-25

Executive Summary

The consultation on the Draft Budget 2024-25 was open from Friday 15 December until Monday 22 January. There were 391 responses from residents, businesses and other stakeholders.

Council Tax

- **50% support/strongly support** a 2.99% increase in council tax. Reasons include acknowledgement of historic low-level of council tax collection, rising costs and the need to continue to invest in services and amenities across the borough. Some people support increasing council tax above 2.99%.
- **34% oppose/strongly oppose.** Reasons include concern about the efficiency and effectiveness of prior and future spending decisions, financial management at the Council, the lack of visible benefits to individuals and decline in services and places around the borough and concerns about affordability given the rises in the cost of living.
- 16% neither support nor oppose. Reasons were similar to those given by people who support or oppose including recognition of rising costs, concern about deterioration of services.

Adult Social Care Precept

- **47% support/strongly support** the 2% increase. Reasons include recognition of aging population and rising cost and demand for these services, the need to protect the most vulnerable in society, and recognising that fundamental changes to the funding isn't within the capacity of council.
- **27% oppose/strongly oppose.** Reasons include lack of trust in council to deliver value for money services and discontent with national government approach to funding adult social care.
- 26% neither support nor oppose. Reasons include lack of understanding or awareness of the services currently provided and how the increase would benefit service users.
- People who commented were keen that services were only provided to those genuinely in need and that services were easy to navigate.

Budget proposals

- **29% agree/strongly agree**
- **40% disagree/strongly disagree**
- 31% neither agree nor disagree.

Themes emerging from comments include:

- **Museum, libraries, tourist information centre:** support for funding to continue for these services.
- **Parking:** concern about the wider impacts of increasing parking charges including on quality of town centres, local businesses, tourism and residents.
- **Communication:** recognition of some improvements compared to last year but concern about lack of detail in some proposals, lack of clarity and transparency.
- **Economy, revenue and income generation:** Lack of ambition and imagination in generating revenue, some proposals viewed as 'short-sighted'.

Appendix B

- **Equity:** increase in tax and other charges not falling equitably, and benefits are not equitable
- **Contract management:** concern that contracts are poorly enforced, work is of poor quality and often requiring redoing at the expense of residents, inefficiencies in contract management between parishes and council.
- **Ways of working:** concern about accountability, quality and pay of staff.

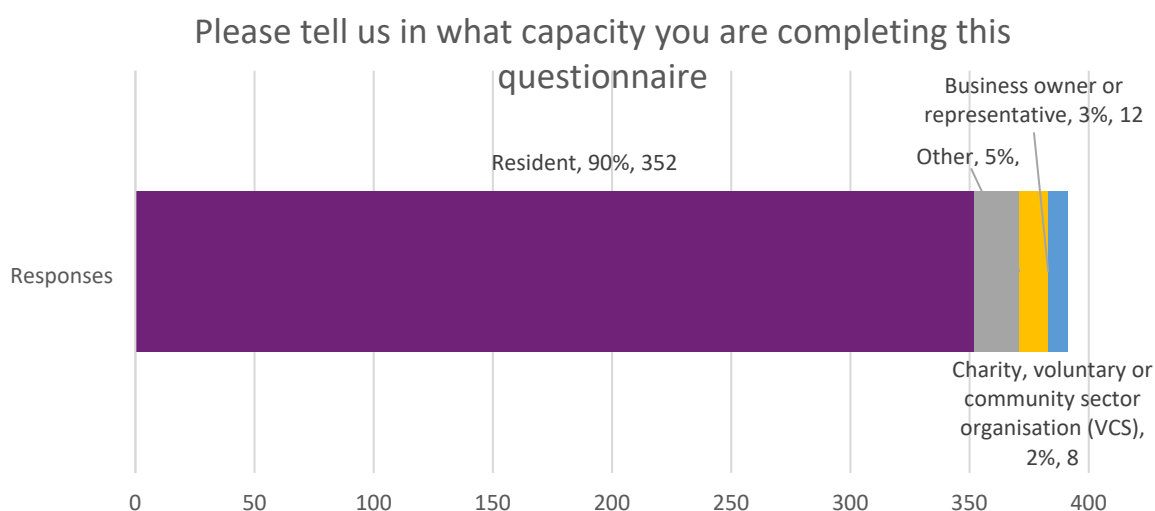
Report of findings

The General Budget Consultation was open from Friday 15 December until Monday 22 January. There were 391 responses from residents, businesses and other stakeholders.

Written responses were received on email from Cookham Parish Council, Youth Council and carers. Verbal feedback was received in Learning Disability Partnership Board on 16 January. The consultation documents including the survey were available at borough libraries and we did not receive any completed paper surveys.

Responses

Most responses were from residents (352 respondents, 90%), followed by Other (19, 5%), Business owner or representative (12, 3%) and charity, voluntary or community sector responses.



Appendix B

Demographic representation

The following analysis is based on respondents that did not select 'prefer not to say' in response to demographic questions. The purpose of reviewing the demographic characteristic of respondents is to assess whether respondents are representative of the wider population in RBWM, therefore the results from the survey are compared to Census 2021 statistics and ONS mid-year population estimates.

Sex

	Budget Consultation		Census 2021
	Respondents	Percentage	
Male	126	38%	49%
Female	208	62%	51%

A larger proportion of women responded to the survey compared to the Census results (62% compared to 51%), correspondingly a smaller percentage of men responded to the survey compared to Census results (38% compared to 49%).

Age

The proportion of 18-64 years and the proportion of 65 year and over are similar to the resident population from the Census. The second table shows the breakdown within these age categories and shows that the younger adults are under-represented (categories 18-24 years and 25-34 years) and over-represented in middle-aged adults (categories 45-54 years and 55-64 years).

Age	Budget Consultation		Census 2021
	Respondents	Percentage	
18-64 years	244	74%	76%
65 years +	85	26%	24%

Age	Budget Consultation		Census 2021	Difference
	Respondents	Percentage		
18-24 years	5	2%	8%	-7%*
25-34 years	21	6%	14%	-8%
35-44 years	55	17%	18%	-1%
45-54 years	86	26%	19%	7%
55-64 years	77	23%	16%	7%
65 years and older	85	26%	24%	2%

*Figures to 1 d.p. for this line are 1.5%, 8.2% and -6.7%. So the 'difference' looks like an error due to rounding.

Appendix B

Location

Respondents were asked the first 3 or 4 characters of their postcode. Postcodes do not map directly uniquely to Wards. Wards with a large proportion of properties with the given postcode are listed in the table below. 'Others' covers multiple postcodes within the borough and out of area postcodes.

Postcode	Budget consultation		Parishes
	Respondents	Percentage	
SL4	241	62%	Clewer & Dedworth East, Clewer & Dedworth West, Clewer East, Old Windsor
SL6	87	22%	Belmont, Bisham & Cookham, Boyn Hill, Bray, Copx Green, Furze Platt, Hurley & Walthams, Oldfield, Pinkneys Green, Riverside
SL5	20	5%	Ascot & Sunninghill, Sunninghill & cheapside
SL3 or TW1	28	7%	Datchet, Horton & Wraysbury
Others	15	4%	

Ethnicity

A high proportion of total respondents (18%) selected 'prefer not to say' to this question. Based on those who did respond to the question only 5% were black and minority ethnic compared to 20% of the RBWM population.

	Budget Consultation		Census 2021
	Respondents	Percentage	
White	302	95%	80%
Black and minority ethnic	17	5%	20%

Disability

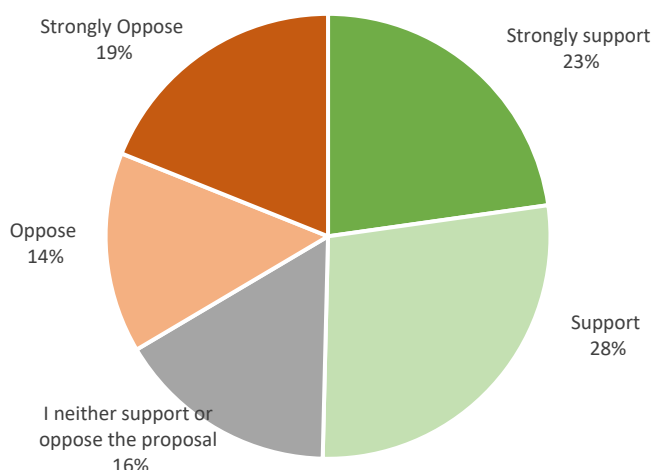
The question is not directly comparable to disability statistics collected through the Census.

	Budget Consultation	
	Respondents	Percentage
Disabled	27	8%
Not disabled	311	92%

Proposal to increase Council Tax

50% of respondents either strongly supported or supported the increase of 2.99% in general Council Tax, 34% either strongly opposed or opposed and 16% neither supported or opposed.

Do you support our proposal to increase general Council Tax by 2.99% in 2024/25?



Reasons given to support the proposed increase in Council Tax include acknowledgement of historic low-level of council tax collection and rising costs, and the need to continue to invest in services and amenities across the borough. Some people support increasing council tax above 2.99%.

Reasons given to oppose the proposed increase in Council Tax include concern about the efficiency and effectiveness of prior and future spending decisions, financial management at the Council, the lack of visible benefits to individuals and decline in services and places around the borough and concerns about affordability given the rises in cost of living.

Reasons given to neither support to oppose the proposed increase in Council Tax were similar to those given by people who support or oppose including recognition of rising costs, concern about deterioration of services.

The table below gives examples of the comments received.

Support	Example comments
Strongly support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “As council tax is very low in RBWM, this is creating a loss of a huge amount of income.” “I would pay a higher percentage increase to retain and improve services. I strongly object to proposals to increase parking charges and remove free parking in pay-and-display car parks for electric vehicles.” “Raise it by more! Our services are underfunded, we need to have a financially stable council that runs decent services., I am happy to pay more Council Tax for that.”

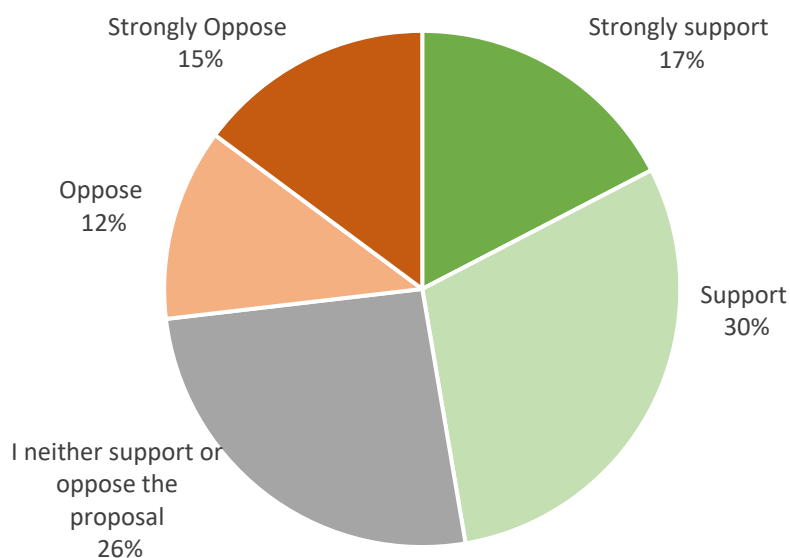
Appendix B

Support	Example comments
Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"I support in moderation. I would like to see a breakdown of the way the money is spent on a) Council Members' expenses and b) projects which are exploratory but eventually come to nothing so that the money is wasted"</i> • <i>"The cost of everything has risen, increase of some sort is inevitable"</i>
Neither support or oppose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I would prefer if the council tax remained the same or was increased at less than 2.99%. I cannot see any visible difference in the provision of services from last to this year."</i>
Oppose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"I oppose to the 2.99% increase of Council Tax because of the gross inefficiencies, poor quality and lack of supervision of contracts that currently exist."</i> • <i>"I believe service has gone down, there is less care about the environment and Windsor has been very dirty since covid things have drastically changed."</i> • <i>"I believe a 2% rise in council tax would be better, we are all feeling the pinch even those in larger properties. My Husband and I are pensioners still living in a larger family home as the children have moved out. A small increase would be manageable."</i>
Strongly oppose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"What are we receiving with council tax? Only fortnightly bin collections and potholes in roads"</i> • <i>"Another council tax rise and yet as a resident of Shurlock I am struggling to understand the benefits I'm receiving. We have no street lights or pavements to maintain for a start and our narrow country lanes are in desperate need of repair and yet you continue to leave them"</i> • <i>"We are in the midst of cost of living crisis, we don't need another increase, instead I'd like to see that the budget is spent on key priorities only."</i>

Proposal to increase Adult Social Care Precept

47% of respondents either strongly supported or supported the proposed increase in Council Tax to through the Adult Social Care Precept, 27% either strongly opposed or opposed and 26% neither supported or opposed.

Please tell us if you support or oppose our proposed increase in Council Tax through the Adult Social Care Precept?



29% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with the proposed budget proposals, 40% either strongly disagreed or disagreed with the proposed budget proposals and 31% neither agreed or disagreed.

Reasons given to support the proposed increase in Adult Social Care Precept include recognition of aging population and rising cost and demand for the services, the need to protect the most vulnerable in society understanding of funding arrangement.

Reasons given to oppose the proposed increase in Adult Social Care Precept include lack of trust in council to deliver value for money services and discontent with national government approach to funding adult social care.

Reasons given to neither support to oppose the proposed increase in Adult Social Care Precept included lack of understanding or awareness of the services currently provided and how the increase would benefit service users.

People who commented were keen that services were only provided to those genuinely in need and that services were easy to navigate.

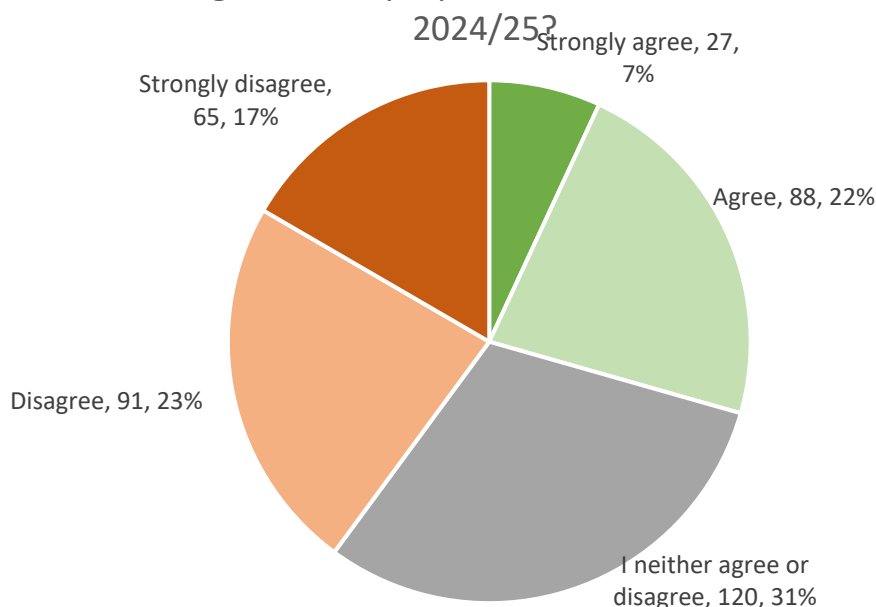
The table below gives examples of the comments received.

Appendix B

Support	Example comments
Strongly support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Demand is growing so you have to spend the money, dont want other services cut. I would say, though, that there is some element of people using services that they do not deserve or need so the Council should have very sound processes for checking this money is only spent where needed.”</i> • <i>“Support should be available to adults at the most vulnerable times in their lives. Good adult social care can reduce the burden on health and emergency services.”</i>
Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Social care is vital to so many, particularly those who cannot self fund private care.”</i> • <i>“Though I find it hard to support, there are people who really need your support. Though some are pulling the wool over your eyes.”</i> • <i>“Important that we support the most vulnerable in our society”</i>
Neither support or oppose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“In principle I would support this option but without knowing fully understanding the net impact of this change on services it is hard to comment. Residents should not pay more to receive less so it would be useful to understand how this increase will directly maintain or improve the current level of service”</i> • <i>“Don’t have enough info on how this works in the borough and what the connection and integration with local NHS services is or isn’t.”</i>
Oppose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“It is impossible to support this proposal as the documents provided as part of this consultation do not clearly show how this money is going to be spent. RBWM need to ensure that they are not subsidising support that other agencies should be providing at their cost ie. NHS/Health. RBWM need to robustly pursue those who have failed to pay for the Adult Services they have received and ensure that future monies are collected accordingly.”</i> • <i>“Adult support increase should be a central government responsibility and not funded via council residents”</i>
Strongly oppose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Social care should be better targeted to those in genuine need who do not have the funds/resources to pay for care.”</i> • <i>“Too much waste in funding. Should look at how much agencies and care homes charge”</i> • <i>“If reasoning is that people are living longer that also means they are paying taxes longer so funds are available through that matter not by increasing council tax”</i>

Budget proposals

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the savings and income generation proposals that we have identified for



Of the 391 respondents, 208 submitted a comment about their reasons. 55 comments were from those who agreed with the proposals, 47 comments from those who neither agreed nor disagreed, and 106 comments were from those who disagreed with the proposals. Many of the comments referred to specific proposals, and others highlighted wider challenges.

“Without those proposals the budget gap will continue to rise, on the other hand it has to be done very carefully in order not to deprive the public from essential services and facilities that may cease to exist, if too many cuts are made or done inappropriately”

“It is essential for services that support all those with disabilities are funded appropriately to fulfil their potential and quality of life”

Of the respondents who neither agreed or disagreed with the proposals, nine comments mentioned the museum and 10 comments referred to the quality of communication. If the 106 comments from respondents who disagreed or strongly disagreed with the budget proposal, 35 mentioned the museum, 26 mentioned parking and 15 referred to the quality of the communication of the budget proposals including the lack of details and transparency.

The main themes across all comments from both the budget proposal comments and the subsequent request for any further comments include:

Museum, libraries and Tourist Information Centre

There were 65 respondents whose comments mentioned the Guildhall Museum. Comments about the museum predominantly expressed a concern about the possibility of closure or substantial change to the operating of the museum. Comments refer to the benefit of the museum as a tourist attraction, a free activity for residents particularly for families and older people who may be on a limited budget, and the value of the museum as a cultural asset. The

Appendix B

Tourist Information Centre was seen as a valuable asset alongside the Museum given the reliance on tourism in Windsor. Comments were also submitted in relation to libraries in terms of their community value and particularly their benefit to improved equality.

“It is a false economy to close/curtail the Tourist Information service. Tourists help the local economy and this should be developed , not cut back. We have an excellent facility which combines the tourist office with the museum, sited in the historic Guildhall building - a great opportunity to develop the service”

“In 2019-20 we had over 65,000 visits to the museum, our library exhibitions around the borough and our online collection. We organised 100 events for over 2,000 residents including school group visits to the museum.”

“I am disgusted that the closure of the Windsor town museum is being proposed. Libraries, museums and archives are valuable resources for the community, and indirect revenue is collected by visitors to these services. The councils support of this asset (rather than managed decline) would grow income.”

Parking

Residents feel strongly about changes to the cost of parking in town centres and also to residents permits. Residents believe the impact of increasing parking charges is unfair, ‘a stealth tax’ and will cause further deterioration of the quality of town centres and reduce tourism in Windsor.

“Savings agreed, income generation through punitive parking charges, not agreed. You just need to look at the utilisation of Windsor town centre car parks to show they are already overpriced as they are very rarely full. The council should support local shops and seek to have full utilisation of the car parks through more off peak and off season rates. Two hours of parking shouldn’t cost the same on a Tuesday morning in Winter as it does a Saturday afternoon in July. Having 9am to 9pm charges at the same rate, 7 days a week all year discourages town centre visitors at quieter times. More revenue can be earned from lower charges but a higher number of visitors, with additional benefits for shops and restaurants in the town”

“Increasing parking charges will just reduce footfall. There is currently little reason to visit Maidenhead town centre so increasing charges will just make it go downhill faster.”

“The increase to the resident parking charge is egregious and regressive. It punishes the less affluent in the borough that cannot afford properties with off-road parking. Also the increase is not linked to any investment in roadside EV parking infrastructure. It will just get swallowed up in general Council expenditure and it’s a certain vote loser.”

Communication

Some respondents felt that the consultation documents provided lacked the detail to be able to agree to the proposals, others felt that the consultation documents demonstrated a lack of openness and transparency of the council. The Youth Council complimented the consultation booklet and recognised that the council had responded positively to feedback given in response to the consultation last year. The Learning Disability Partnership Board (LDPB) recommended in future that an easy read version should be available to make the consultation more accessible. LDPB also raised concerns about whether important consultations reach key groups such as carers and that the council relied excessively on social media channels.

Appendix B

"The reports and papers don't really explain what the changes will be in a practical way as they are very top line and assume a knowledge of current services that the general public do not have, therefore this part of the consultation is relatively meaningless."

"You make vague claims without quantifying specifics"

Economy, revenue and income generation

Some residents are concerned that services will continue to be cut and their local area will continue to deteriorate, instead they want more investment in their local area. Some comments refer to a lack of ambition in revenue generation and are keen for an introduction of a tourist tax in Windsor.

Concern has been raised about the charges to be introduced for charities to use public spaces and also the rate of increase for private companies which will make RBWM an undesirable location for both community-run and external events (such as fun fairs).

Some residents are concerned that budget proposals are "short-sighted" and undermine the longer terms aims of the council. For example, reducing investment in libraries undermines equality, lack of investment in the upkeep of Windsor will deter tourists and lead to fall in economic activity, charges for usage of parks will lead to less community activities which promote a sense of community and reduce social isolation, increasing in car parking charges will lead to the further deterioration of town centres.

"I strongly disagree with proposals to charge small charities and community groups who use parks and open spaces to provide free events to local residents or events where they are raising funds to support charitable good causes."

"The decision making over recent years has been appalling statements like "Preparation of a new Economic Growth Plan building stronger business partnerships with a focus on the growth industries of culture, film and health and life sciences". What the heck!!! I really worry that no one reads a thing or knows anything about RBWM. Bray Studio's only reopened in 2019 it closed because of competition from other studios. It has been granted planning permission on Green Belt and made promises to gain it. Please ensure the promises made are kept, before considering commitment. Film does not generate local jobs or local business, Bray Studio has existed since 1950 in RBWM if it is such a money spinner why is RBWM in financial difficulty? Focus on fact not fiction."

"Too many false economies. First and foremost we need a vibrant local economy. Many of the measures are regressive in nature."

"Total lack of creativity in revenue generation opportunities:

- *Tourist tax for visitors (apart from Maidenhead as no-one in their right mind would bother visiting)*
- *licencing fee for Airbnb*
- *double Council charge for rental properties, - quadruple Council tax for empty properties.*

In brief, tax wealth not income!"

"Raise the Council Tax even more, especially on larger and empty properties."

"One thing that puzzles me. In the rich and tourist-heavy borough (Windsor mainly) why isn't there a tourist tax. Also ... Private members clubs snapping up hotels for wealthy

Appendix B

people who didn't live here. They're not being asked to contribute anything more other than standard business rates. Sorry....but we have to make everyone chip in”.

“Savings agreed, income generation through punitive parking charges, not agreed. You just need to look at the utilisation of Windsor town centre car parks to show they are already overpriced as they are very rarely full.”

Equity

Some residents are concerned about the equity of both increases in taxation and fees and charges and the perception of the which areas benefit. This included claims that increases in council tax are regressive and increases to parking charges are a greater burden on the poor. Residents in more rural areas feel that more money is spent on services in more urban areas, residents in urban areas (particularly Windsor) feel insufficient money is spent on the upkeep of their town. Residents feel that the costs (including council tax have increased) but they have a deterioration in the services they receive such as grounds maintenance and bin collection.

The equality impact assessment provided with your documents is dire. On multiple occasions it states 'NA' where just a little bit of research would have been able to provide further information on impact. For example, saying 'homelessness can effect anyone regardless of sex' is lazy. As the Women's Budget Group reports, although men are the vast majority of those sleeping rough (84%), women are the majority of people statutorily homeless (67%). Single mothers are two-thirds of homeless families with children (they are just one quarter of all families with children). A sub-par equality impact assessment is not worth carrying out, detail must be filled in and proper consideration and research undertaken to ensure it is effective.

Little investment seen in Ascot & The Sunnings and yet we provide more per capita in terms of council tax

What about unparished areas in Windsor

"You need to consider the fact there is deference between who pays on band D and who pays on band H!

band A,B, , E are middle class who have been hit stronger by cost of living than others, these increases can be ok for upper bands, but normal people can't take it anymore.

Listen more to residents and stop introducing schemes that are unnecessary and unwanted.

Windsor needs upgrading. It is a mess and embarrassment, the place looks dilapidated, given the castle is here, and the tourists it attracts. We have nothing but cafes, repetitive restaurants, endless barbers. Homeless people and dirty streets. Start smartening the place up.

Contract management

There is concern that contracts are not properly managed and enforced at the council and poor workmanship by contractors needs to be redone at the cost to residents. Opportunity to work more efficiently and effectively with parishes in the provision of services.

There are some contracts held by the council that do not give value for money, for example Tivoli and the maintenance of verges and hedgerows etc. I have personally experienced the shocking work undertaken by borough contractors repainting public areas in Eton Wick and inside the ground floor of the Eton Wick Village Hall where they did not bother with any preparation and painted over dirt and cobwebs (and the spiders

Appendix B

occupying them) !!!! The council wastes money on inept workmen who are not supervised.

There is scope for eliminating duplicate services provided between Borough and Parish Councils such as cutting of verges, grass, hedges etc. This seems to be an inefficient use of tax as both bodies are contracting separately, often to cut adjacent areas. In the same topic, there are many areas of grass and verge that do not need to be cut as often as they are which would save money as well as improving the environment and reducing the Council's climate impact.

Ways of working

Some comments are made about the spending control panel and are broadly positive, although others are concerned this will not address root causes of overspending, may be overall inefficient use of time and others feel the £500 threshold is either too high or too low.

Others are concerned about historical poor decisions made by the council and that there is a lack of accountability and recourse for poor decision-making. Some are concerned that council staff may not be properly trained or qualified for their roles and are overpaid.

The comments are not split by support for proposals because the themes cut across all responses eg negative comments about contract management are from people who agree with proposals and those who disagree.

I think it is important to channel limited resources to where they are needed as long as cuts are not detrimental long term, for example will not participating in the graduate scheme limit the scope for growing your own new officers?

The removal of the Inclusions Post sounds like a backwards misstep. The benefit this post brings to the borough outweighs the cost and it should remain.

Better use could be made of the Public Health Grant to support residents and services, rather than increasing staffing numbers.

A spending control panel for any cost over £500 is an unnecessary waste of time which could be better employed at ensuring council staff retention. Spending control panel should focus on prevention of overspending (high cost of placements in children/adult services and unnecessary costs caused by inappropriate decisions, lack of staff training, lack of joint working between directorates).

2. Summary: Council Plan Engagement

Introduction

Following the change of administration after the May 2023 local elections it was considered appropriate to review the Council's aims and priorities as expressed in the Corporate Plan, developed in 2021. The public engagement around the development of the 2021-26 Corporate Plan took the form of a public consultation, held in early 2022, which sought the public's agreement on the proposed headline commitments and objectives.

The development process for the 2024-2027 Council Plan (previously referred to as Corporate Plan) sought to undertake internal and external engagement that was broader than that carried out for the previous Corporate Plan, and took place at an earlier stage. This enabled a wider range of stakeholders to have greater opportunity for input into the council's emerging aims and priorities. The challenging financial situation of the council makes effective engagement, and the enhanced insights and stakeholder buy-in associated with that, especially important for this Council Plan.

A series of separate engagement activities and events were carried out involving a range of stakeholders:

- 9-13th October 2023: Community (including residents and VCS organisations)
- 5-13th December 2023: internal colleagues (including Achieving for Children and Optalis)
- 11-12th December 2023: Elected Members
- 11th December 2023: Parish Councils

As the community engagement took place first, the Council Plan was at a more incipient stage and so the information presented to participants focused on the council's financial situation and the broader priorities for the council and borough. Discussions then took place in small groups on topics of interest that were relevant to each stakeholder group, and which aligned with the broad themes emerging within the Council Plan. For the later sessions held with staff, elected members and parishes, it was possible to share a draft of the aims and priorities for the Council Plan and for discussion to focus more on the proposed structure and content. Although formal early engagement did not take place with these latter groups, ongoing conversations with the Cabinet and with colleagues ensured that their priorities and focus areas were taken into consideration in the development of those aims and priorities.

Summary of Engagement Sessions

Community engagement

Four in-person engagement sessions were planned, targeting specific groups of stakeholders: young people (aged 12-18, up to 25 years for care leavers); older adults (65+) and people with disabilities; voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations; and local businesses. These groups were chosen to represent a range of community stakeholders with different interests within the borough. The two 'resident-focused' sessions targeted demographic groups that are most likely to be in touch with the services which account for most of the council's budget (Adults and Children's Services) and that have the most potential to be affected by changes in budget allocation and service delivery. There was insufficient interest for the in-person business session to go ahead so this was replaced by an online survey, promoted through the

Appendix B

Chamber of Commerce. Excluding current councillors and officers, there were 16 participants at the older and disabled people's session, 19 at the VCS session, and 8 at the young people's session (with an additional 10 having attended an initial planning session to identify relevant discussion topics).

Alongside the in-person discussion sessions, a Facilitation Pack was created which contained information and resources to enable community groups and residents to run their own discussion session and to feedback their comments for inclusion with the feedback from the council-run sessions via an online survey. This approach was intended to increase the reach of this engagement and to make it more inclusive. Three additional groups provided feedback in this way.

Staff engagement

Three sessions were held for staff members, which were open to colleagues from RBWM, AfC and Optalis. To maximise participation, two of these were online (with one promoted particularly to colleagues resident in the borough) and one was held as an in-person session in the Town Hall. Attendance across the sessions was good, with a total of 127 colleagues participating and all three organisations represented.

Councillor engagement

Two online sessions were held for elected members of the council. There was good attendance from councillors, with a total of 28 attending the sessions.

Parish Council engagement

One session was held for Parish Councils with 16 Parish Councillors attending.

Community engagement feedback on local area

Participants at the community engagement sessions were invited to share what they felt were the strengths of the borough and what were the main challenges and areas for improvement.

Strengths of the local area

Some strengths were mentioned in all three in-person sessions:

- the location of the borough, particularly in terms of its connectivity and access to green spaces;
- the safety of the local area;
- local facilities, such as the libraries.

The strength and potential of the local voluntary sector came through strongly, although this is unsurprising considering the number of participants who were involved in the VCS. The relative affluence of the area was mentioned in several comments relating to residents' general health and wellbeing. This also fed into expressions of community cohesion, highlighting the sharing of community spaces and the willingness of people to look after those less well off.

Areas for improvement

From the in-person and online feedback received from the community engagement some issues were consistently mentioned as areas for improvement:

- Travel and transport
- Communication and engagement
- Community facilities
- Maidenhead town centre

Feedback on Council Plan themes

General feedback

There was overall agreement across the engagement sessions that the emerging aims and priorities were appropriate and reflected the direction that the council should be taking. Several participants in different sessions noted that without having more detail about the activities, metrics and timescales that would underlie the aims, it was difficult to provide as much feedback as they would like. Participants were keen to understand how the aims would translate into measurable actions and how residents could hold us to account.

Structure and language of the Plan

There was discussion about the importance of highlighting the co-benefits of the different aims and priorities, and how best to reflect areas of work which span more than one aim. This also linked in with comments about the importance of moving away from the practice, or perception, or silo working.

Some suggestions were made about refining the wording of certain aims, in particular the reference to 'resilient neighbourhoods' (Aim 3). However, overall it was felt that the language and wording of the aims and priorities were acceptable and understandable for the council and its residents.

Communication and engagement

A desire for better communication and engagement by the council (Aim 4 in the version shared) was a key theme for stakeholders in all sessions. From a community perspective, there were comments about the sharing of information and responsiveness to communication from council officers and members. Potential improvements in the council's communication and engagement of specific groups of residents, namely young people and people with learning disabilities, were also discussed.

There was a general feeling from internal and external stakeholders that the council should undertake engagement which is more representative and inclusive of the diversity within the borough and which enables a broader range of residents and stakeholders to inform council decision-making. Community engagement and local volunteering were identified as opportunities for building a sense of community and strengthening residents' feeling of responsibility and ownership for their local areas. More effective engagement and communication with partners was also highlighted as a key aspect in strengthening our approach to partnership working.

There was also an acknowledgement of the importance of the communication and engagement around the ongoing development of the Council Plan, and in particular the need

Appendix B

to 'close the feedback loop' with stakeholders who have been involved in the process so far. There was discussion about how the Council Plan is presented to residents and what the narrative is, particular in terms of relevance to residents who are not in more vulnerable groups and so are not currently in touch with higher-need council services.

Maidenhead town centre

A common theme with residents, as reflected in the staff sessions and in the community sessions, was a concern about the changing character of Maidenhead town centre. This was expressed as a reduction in the sense of pride in the town, the absence of 'destination' shops/venues in the town and a perception of a lack of a coordinated vision for recent development works. Concerns were also raised over the capacity of existing (and planned) infrastructure to support the increased demands from new developments. A suggestion was made to involve residents more through the coproduction of a town plan. It is worth noting that the focus on Maidenhead may reflect the fact that the in-person community engagement sessions were all held in Maidenhead (although involved participants from across the borough) and that the location of the main council offices at Maidenhead Town Hall may have resulted in a greater number of Maidenhead residents amongst the participants at the staff sessions. Discussion of how 'clean and green' the borough was prompted comments about littering, graffiti and poor maintenance of public spaces.

Travel and transport

Travel and transport (and the infrastructure to support it) came across as a key priority in the community engagement sessions. Discussion focused primarily on dissatisfaction with public transport and active travel provision, including the accessibility of pavements. Some specific travel issues were mentioned, such as children travelling to school, bus transport in rural areas, and poor public transport services to key community assets such as Norden Farm. Car parking was also mentioned as an area to improve.

Local facilities

Local assets and facilities including the libraries, heritage assets and community spaces were highlighted in the community sessions as strengths of the borough. However, this was coupled with a concern for the future of libraries and community facilities in particular and discussions about the lack of facilities and spaces that cater to young people and to older adults who want places to meet and engage with others. This feeling that there should be more focus on the needs of these particular demographic groups, especially as the borough has an ageing population, featured in more general comments as well.

Other areas to include in Council Plan

The sharing of the draft aims and priorities at the sessions with staff, elected members and parishes enabled a discussion of whether certain topics and service areas were underrepresented in the Council Plan. One issue raised was that business and the local economy did not feature as prominently as it might and that there was also no consideration of benefits to visitors to the borough. A similar point was also made about aims and priorities around children and young people, beyond the council's role as Corporate Parent, and around adult statutory services.

Changes to the Council Plan following this engagement

As a result of these engagement activities and the feedback received, a number of amendments have been made to the draft aims and priorities:

- The original Aim 3 previously related to services supporting both children and adults. This has now been expanded into two aims: Aim 3 which focuses on children and young people and is aligned with the priorities of Achieving for Children, who deliver this service; and Aim 4, which focuses on adults.
- Aim 5 (formerly Aim 4), 'a high-performing council that delivers for the borough', now includes strengthening accountability and transparency in response to feedback from a number of sessions.
- Aim 4 (formerly Aim 3) has been changed from 'People live healthy and independent lives in inclusive and resilient neighbourhoods' to 'People live healthy and independent lives in supportive communities', responding to feedback on the term 'resilient neighbourhoods'.
- The priorities under Aim 5 have been expanded to include reference to working with business.
- The process has been adapted to enable Corporate Overview and Scrutiny to review the KPI and Deliverables Technical Appendix in March. The full Council Plan, including the Technical Appendix, will be agreed at Full Council in April.