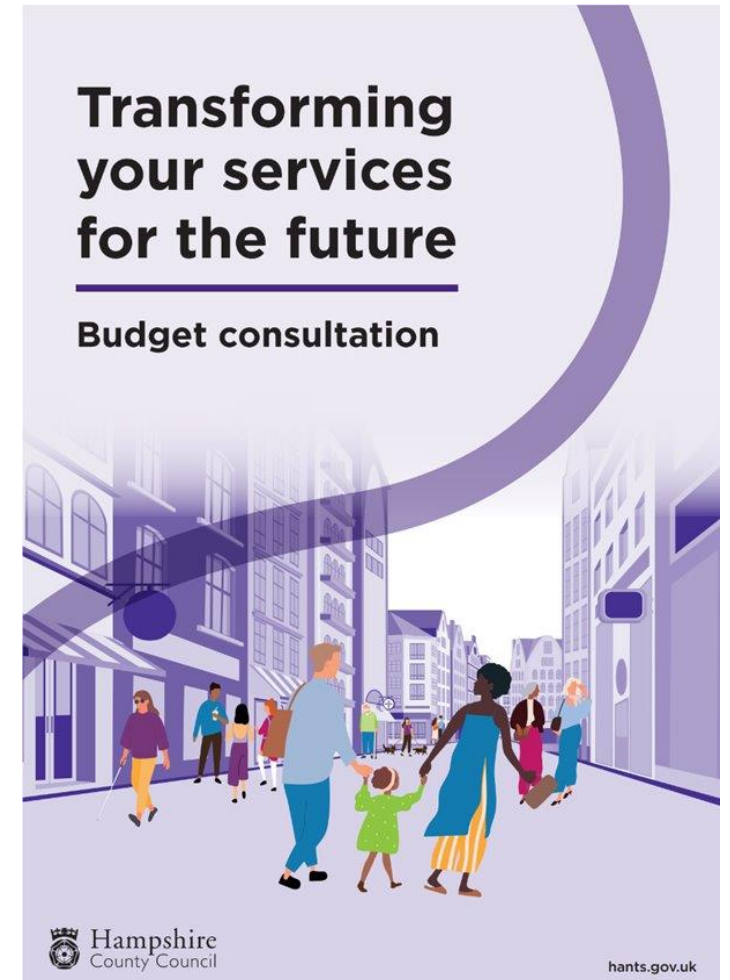


# 2025 Hampshire County Council Budget Consultation

## Insight Report

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*December 2025*



# Consultation Context

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- The 2025 Budget Consultation was designed to give all Hampshire residents and stakeholders the opportunity to have their say about ways to balance the County Council's budget.
- The consultation ran from 04 November to 07 December 2025 and was widely promoted through a range of online and offline channels.
- The Information Pack and Response Form were made available both digitally and in hard copy in standard and Easy Read formats, with other formats available on request. Unstructured responses could be submitted via email, letter or as comments on corporate County Council social media account posts.
- The consultation received **883 responses**: 871 via the consultation Response Form and 12 as unstructured responses via email / letter.
- 866 responses were from individuals, 8 from democratically elected representatives, and 9 from groups, organisations or businesses.
- Of those who responded in a personal capacity, in the previous 12 months, 97% had used Universal Services, 49% had used Children's Services, 47% had used Adults Health and Care services, and 4% had used Hampshire 2050 services.
- This report summarises the main findings from Hampshire County Council's 2025 Budget Consultation.

# Demographic analysis

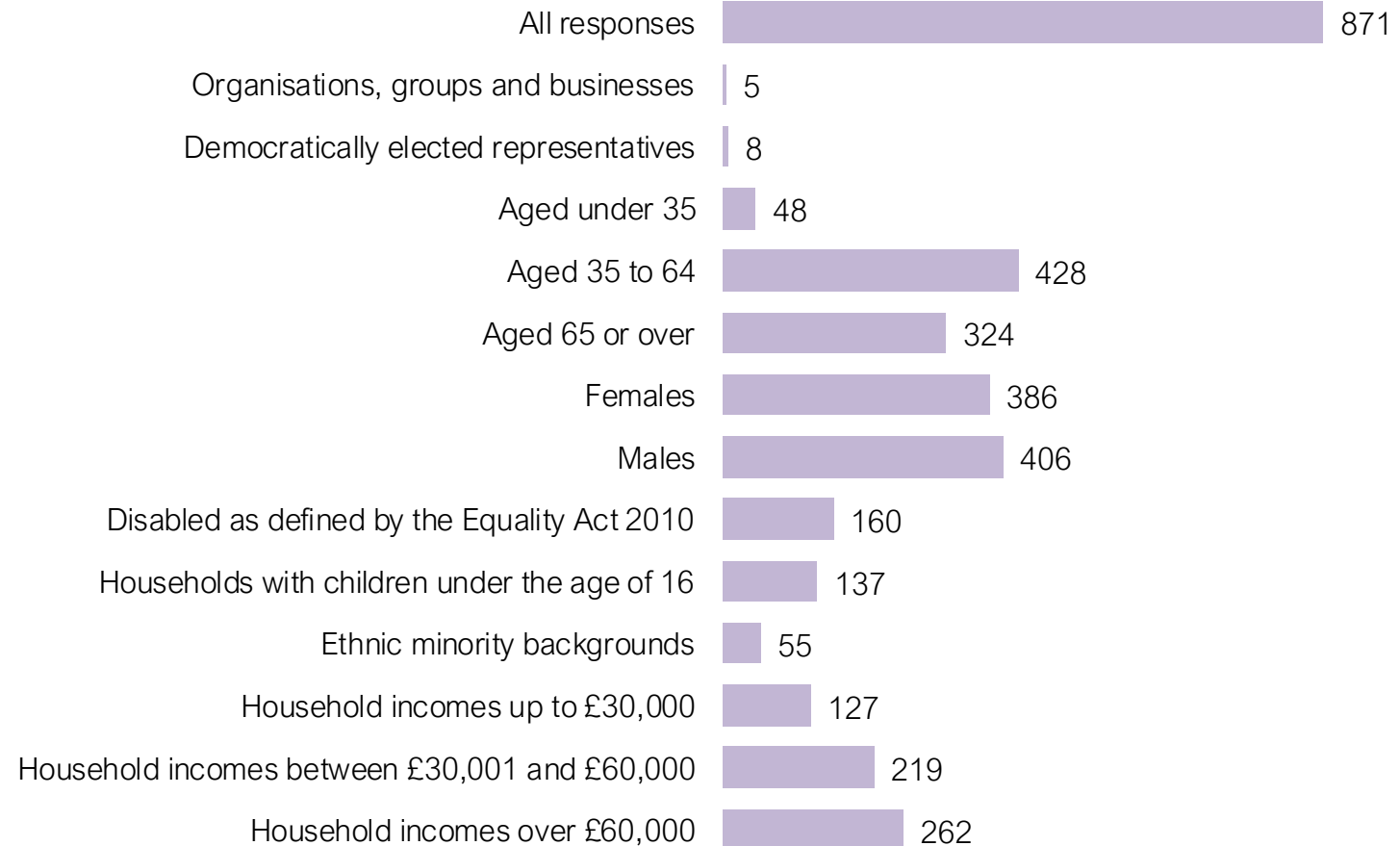
To understand how views may vary amongst different demographics, several groups have been identified for the more detailed analyses in this report.

The sizes of these response groups are shown in the adjacent chart, with further detail within the respondent summary.

In most cases, reported data has been re-based by excluding 'don't know' responses to facilitate these demographic comparisons.

Source: Response Form

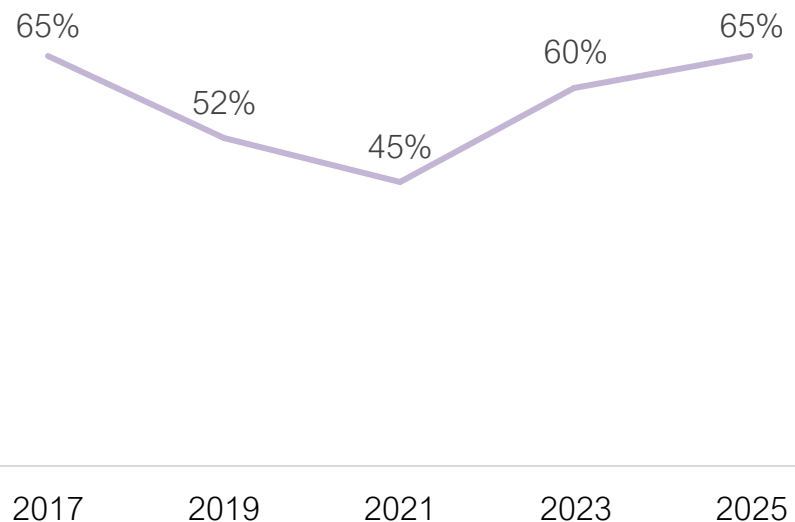
Number of respondents in demographic analysis groups



# Financial Strategy – direction of travel

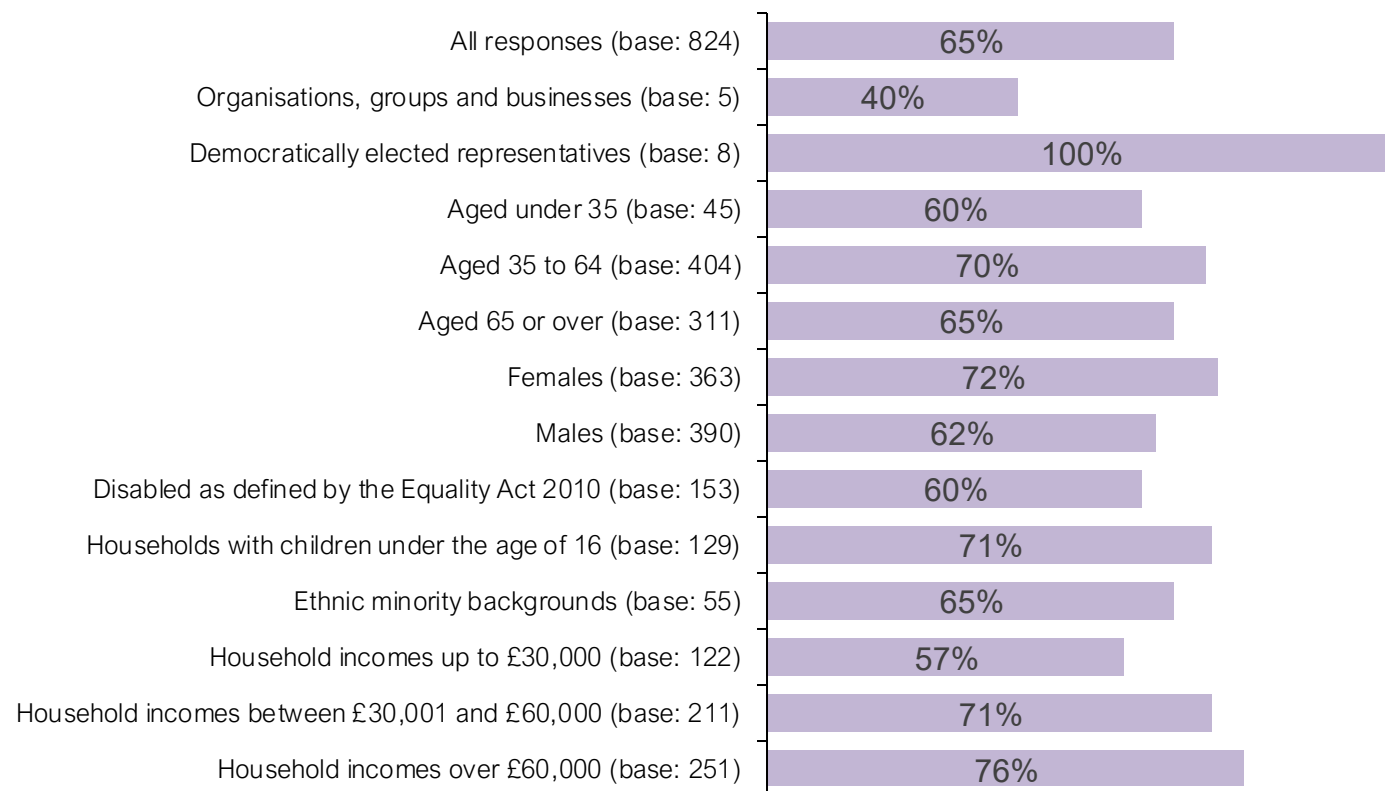
Agreement with the County Council's financial strategy increased to 65% this year, returning to the level reported in 2017.

Level of agreement with the County Council's financial strategy as described (Base: 824)



There was majority agreement across all key demographics, except for the small number of responding organisations.

Level of agreement with the County Council's financial strategy by respondent groups

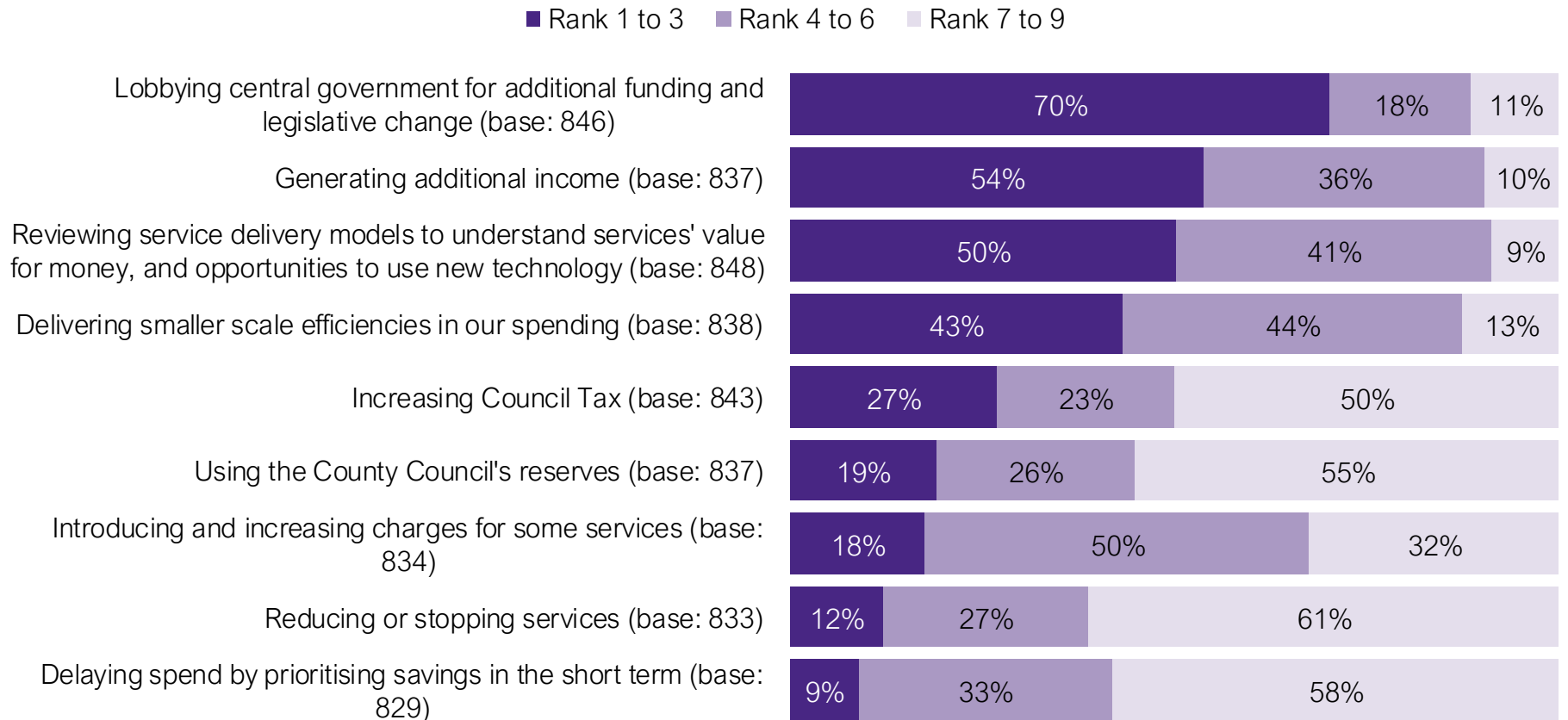


# Budget options ranking summary

Responses indicated a strong preference for the Council to lobby central Government and find alternate sources of income as ways to deliver a balanced budget. A majority of respondents selected these as one of their three most preferred options

In contrast, most respondents selected using the Council's reserves, reducing or stopping services, and delaying short-term spending as one of their three least preferred options.

Ranked preference of options presented in the Budget Consultation



# Budget options ranking summary – direction of travel

Budget options ranked by order of preference based on top three choices  
2025 vs 2023 vs 2021 vs 2019 vs 2017 comparison (Base: 871, 2694, 1772, 4305, 3583)

A comparison with the findings of previous Budget Consultations helps to illustrate shifts in public opinion.

Seeking legislative change and generating additional income remain the most popular options.

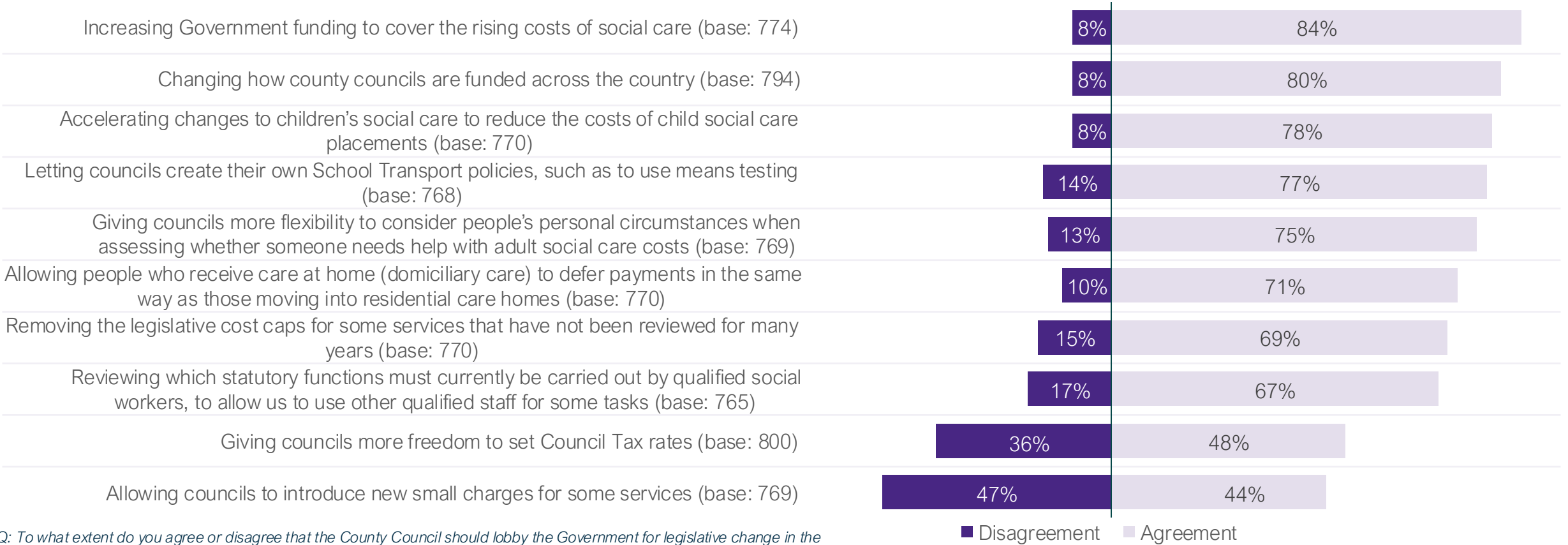
In contrast, proposals to use reserves and introduce and increase charges have become less popular, with comments indicating that suggested HWRC charges are a major driver for those who disagree with charges.

Budget options	2025 rank	2023 rank	2021 rank	2019 rank	2017 rank
Lobbying Government for legislative change	1 <sup>st</sup> (70%)	1 <sup>st</sup> (76%)	2 <sup>nd</sup> (69%)	2 <sup>nd</sup> (61%)	4 <sup>th</sup> (44%)
Generating additional income	2 <sup>nd</sup> (54%)	2 <sup>nd</sup> (68%)	1 <sup>st</sup> (70%)	1 <sup>st</sup> (71%)	1 <sup>st</sup> (73%)
Reviewing services for efficiency	3 <sup>rd</sup> (50%)	N/A*	N/A*	N/A*	N/A*
Changing local government arrangements	N/A*	3 <sup>rd</sup> (37%)	3 <sup>rd</sup> (42%)	3 <sup>rd</sup> (45%)	5 <sup>th</sup> (43%)
Making small savings to services to save money	4 <sup>th</sup> (43%)	N/A*	N/A*	N/A*	N/A*
Increasing Council Tax	5 <sup>th</sup> (27%)	6 <sup>th</sup> (28%)	4 <sup>th</sup> (38%)	5 <sup>th</sup> (40%)	2 <sup>nd</sup> (47%)
Using reserves	↓ 6 <sup>th</sup> (19%)	5 <sup>th</sup> (30%)	5 <sup>th</sup> (36%)	6 <sup>th</sup> (27%)	6 <sup>th</sup> (28%)
Introducing and increasing charges for some services	↓ 7 <sup>th</sup> (18%)	4 <sup>th</sup> (32%)	5 <sup>th</sup> (36%)	4 <sup>th</sup> (43%)	3 <sup>rd</sup> (45%)
Reducing or stopping services (previously “reducing services” and “reducing and changing services”)	8 <sup>th</sup> (12%)	7 <sup>th</sup> (7%)	7 <sup>th</sup> (12%)	7 <sup>th</sup> (16%)	7 <sup>th</sup> (22%)
Delaying spend by prioritising savings in the short term	9 <sup>th</sup> (9%)	N/A*	N/A*	N/A*	N/A*

\* Option not presented in the Budget Consultation in this year

# Lobbying central Government for legislative change

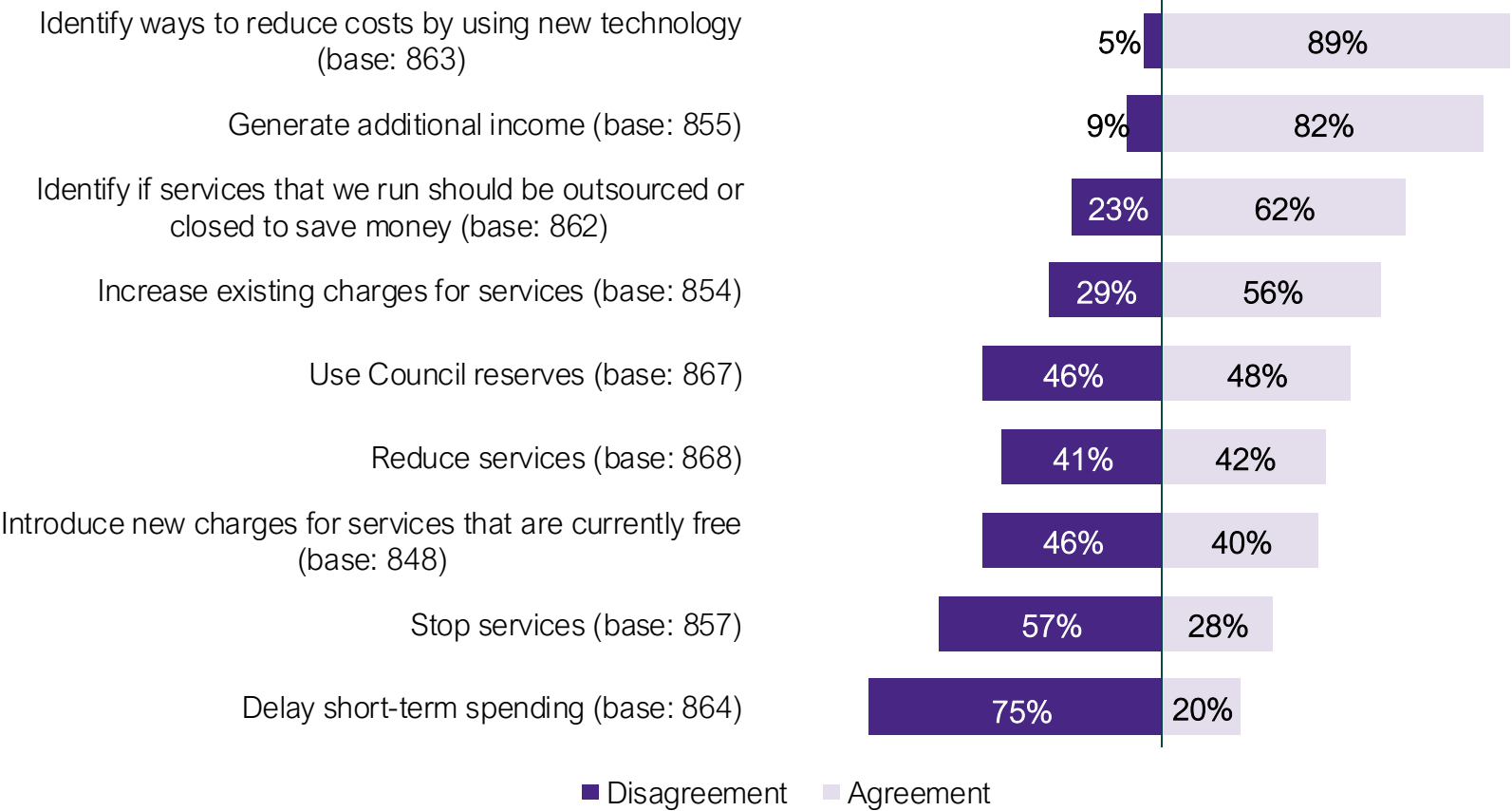
Respondents advocated lobbying central government for change in most suggested areas, although lobbying for new powers to introduce charges and set Council Tax rates were less popular



Q: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the County Council should lobby the Government for legislative change in the following areas in order to help maintain local services?

# Current level of agreement with proposed options

Agreement or disagreement as to whether the County Council should...



Most respondents agreed that the Council should identify ways to reduce costs by using new technology and should generate additional income.

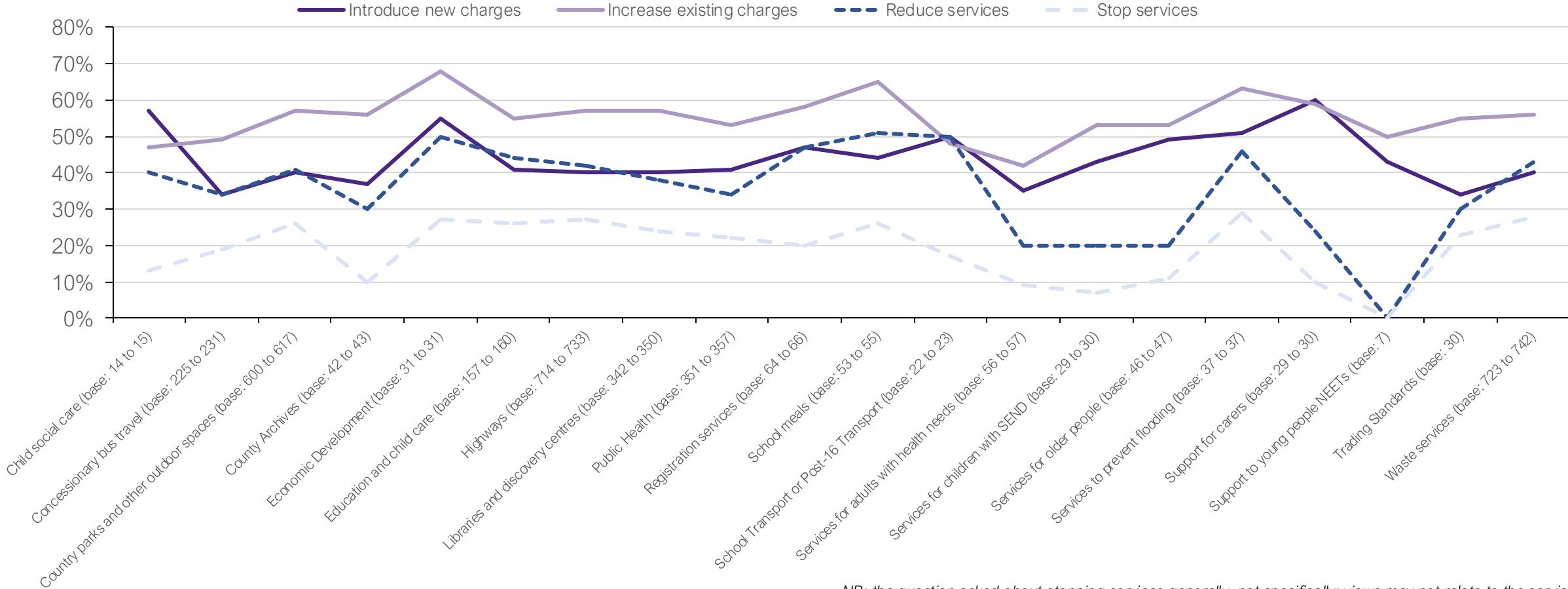
There was also overall support for identifying if outsourcing or closing services would be financially beneficial, and for increasing existing charges.

Views were split on whether the Council should balance its budget by using its reserves, reducing services, and introducing new charges for services which are currently provided for free.

A majority disagreed with proposals to save money by stopping services or by delaying short-term spending.

# How users of different services felt about charging for, reducing, and stopping services

Level of agreement as to whether the County Council should...

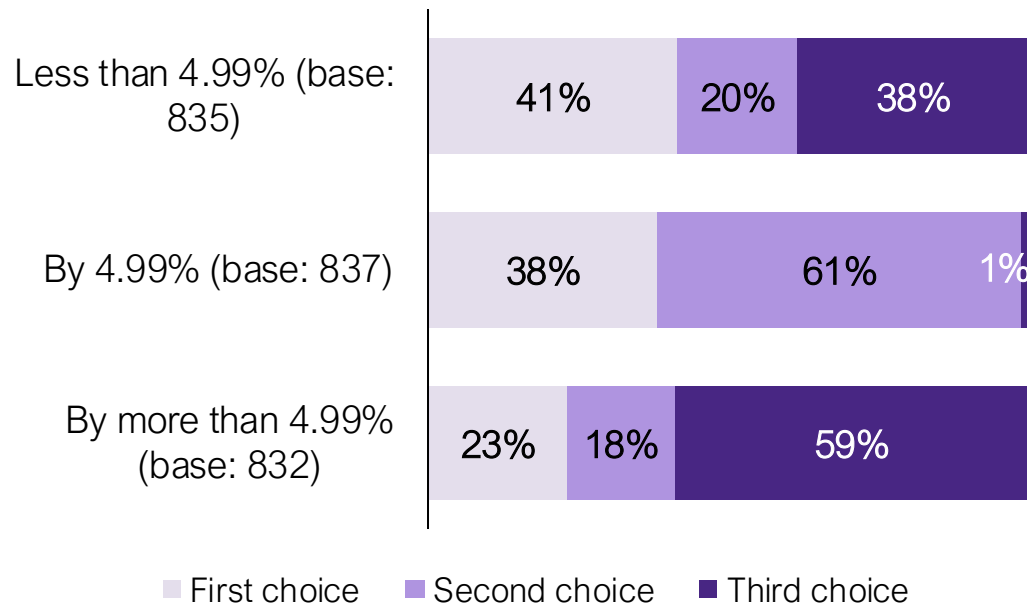


NB: the question asked about stopping services generally, not specifically: views may not relate to the service used

# Council Tax

Although first preference was for the lowest council tax rise (41%), this was by a relatively small margin, with 38% of respondents selecting that their first preference was for a 4.99% increase.

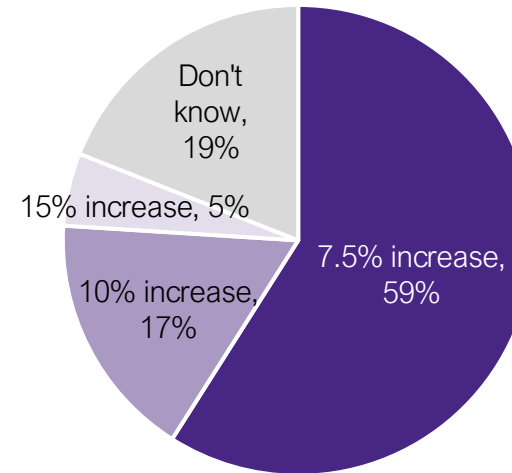
Please indicate which of the following three options is your first, second, and third [Council Tax] preference



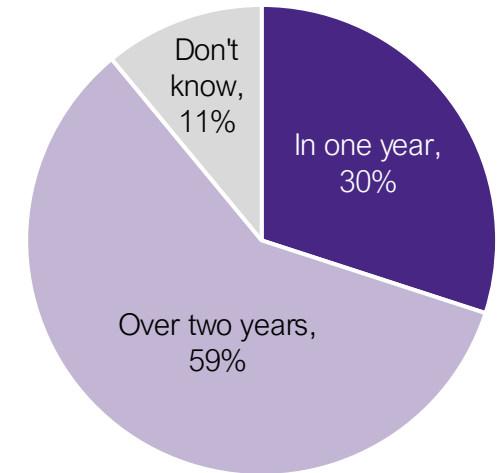
If the Council were to request permission for a Council Tax increase of over 4.99%, respondents preferred the minimum proposals of a 7.5% increase, which should be spread over two years

If we asked central Government for permission to increase Council Tax by more than 4.99%...

...by how much should we ask to increase it? (Base: 847)



...how should the additional increase be applied? (Base: 851)

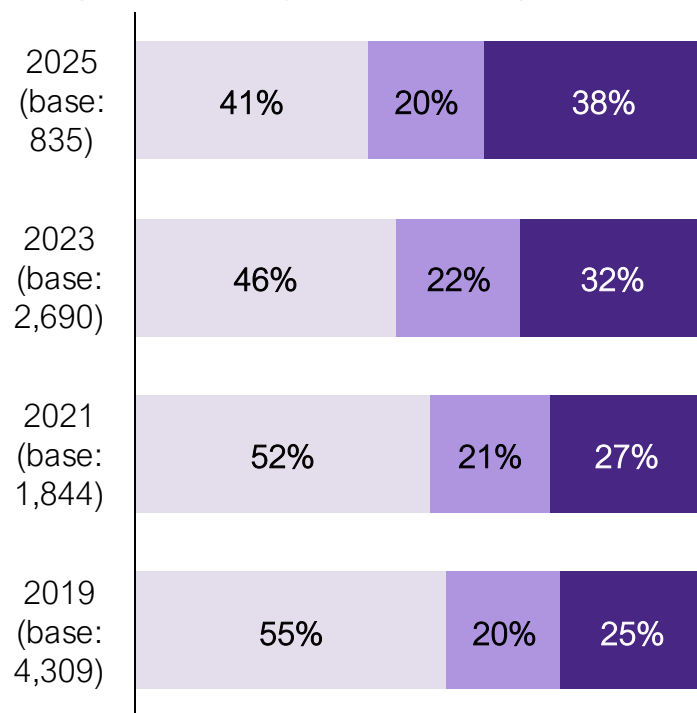


# Council Tax – over time

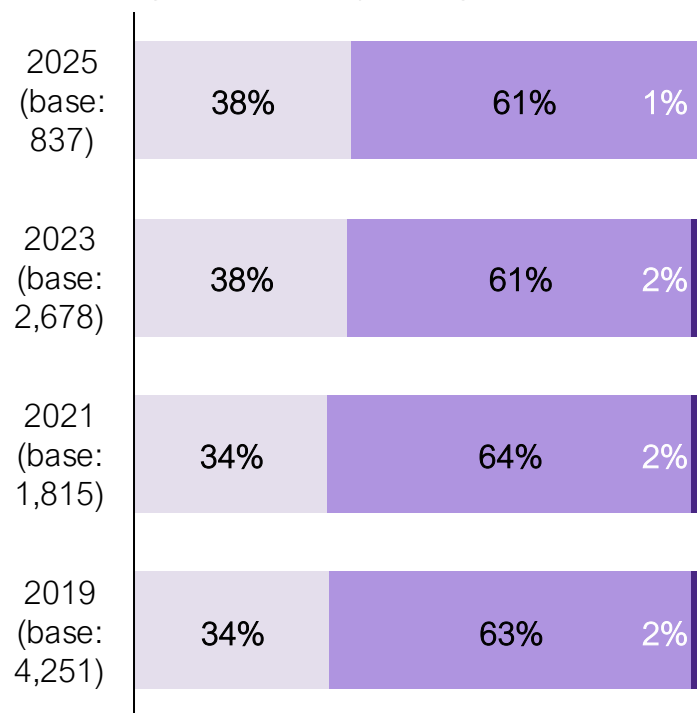
Smaller Council Tax rises remain the most popular preference amongst respondents

However, between 2019 and 2025 there has been a steady increase in preference for higher Council Tax rises

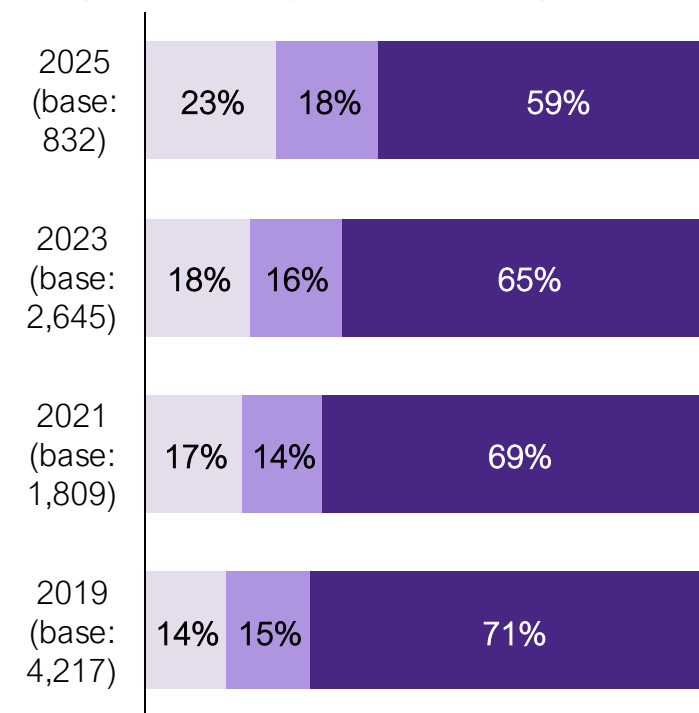
Raising Council Tax by less than the legislative cap



Raising Council Tax by the legislative cap



Raising Council Tax by more than the legislative cap



■ First choice ■ Second choice ■ Third choice

# An indicative overview of demographic variances in opinion

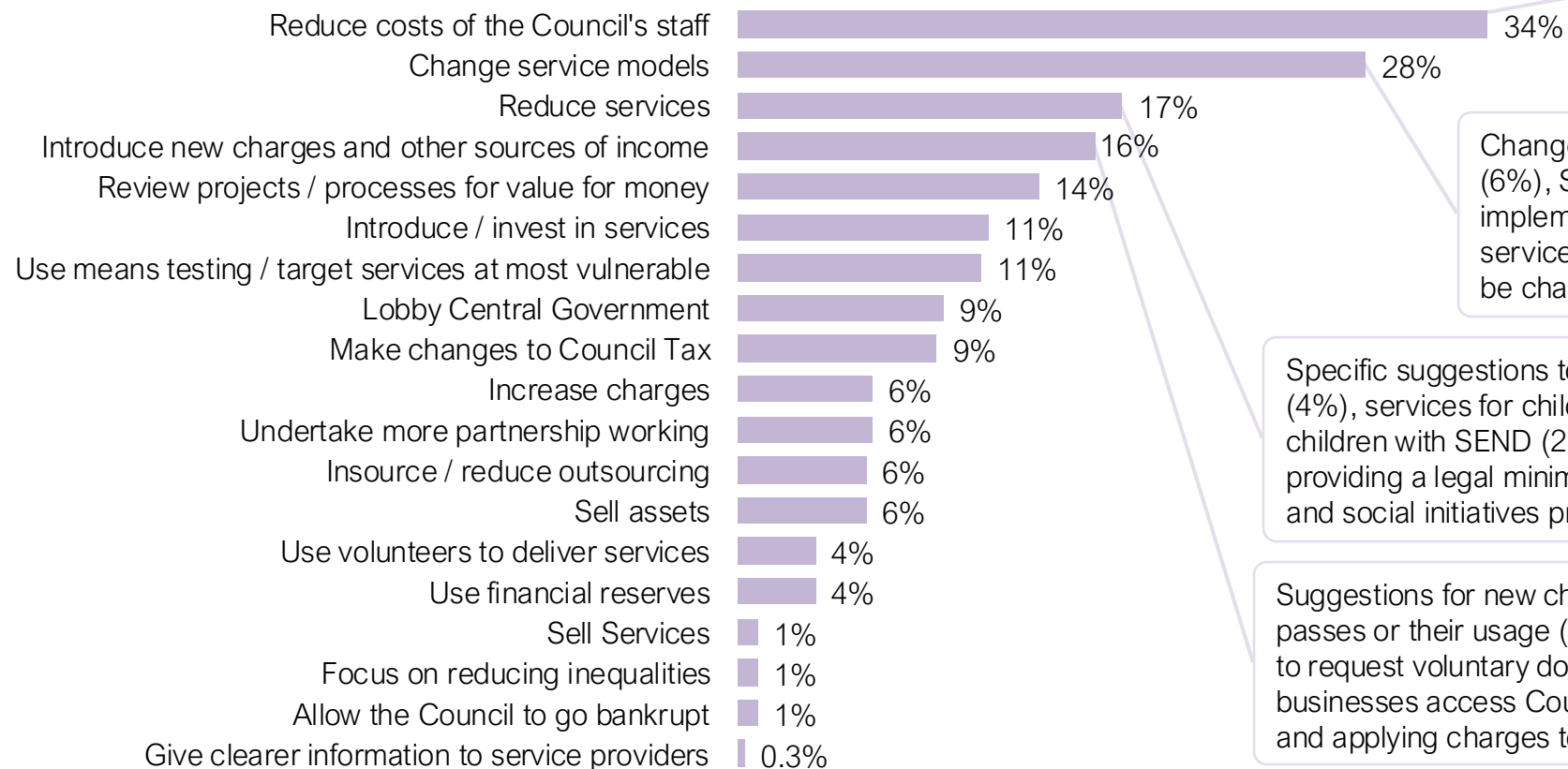
Budget option	Agreement higher amongst	Agreement lower amongst
Financial Strategy	Elected representatives, females, households earning over £60k, residents of Hart	Individuals whose activities are impacted a lot by health or disability, users of carer support and services for adults with health needs
Lobbying	Respondents outside Hampshire, households earning £90,001 to £100,000, users of School Transport or Post-16 Transport services and services for children with SEND	Ethnic minority groups (particularly Asian or Asian British groups)
Generating income	Households earning over £60k, residents of Hart, users of services to reduce flooding	Asian or Asian British ethnic groups
Introducing new charges	Households earning over £60k, residents of Basingstoke and Deane, users of services that support young people NEET	Residents of Eastleigh, Havant, and Council Tax Band H properties
Increasing existing charges	Households earning over £60k, Council Tax Band G residents	Residents of Eastleigh and Havant, users of services for adults with health needs
Reviewing services for opportunities to outsource / close	Residents of rural villages	Non-binary genders, Council Tax Band C residents, households with children aged under 5, users of services for children (particularly those with SEND)
Reviewing services for opportunities for new technology	Council Tax Band E residents	Council Tax Band C residents, individuals whose activities are impacted a lot by health or disability, users of services for adults with health needs, young people NEET, and County Archives

# An indicative overview of demographic variances in opinion

Budget option	Agreement higher amongst	Agreement lower amongst
Service reduction	Households earning over £40k, households with children aged 5 to 8, 'other' (unlisted) ethnic groups	Households earning up to £30k, users of targeted services (particularly services for children with SEND, young people NEET, older adults and adults with disabilities, carers, and Public Health services)
Stopping services	Households earning over £100k, 'other' (unlisted) ethnic groups, residents of rural villages	Users of targeted services (particularly services for older adults and adults with disabilities, concessionary bus travel, County Archives, services for children with SEND, carers, and Public Health services)
Council Tax rise of over 4.99%	Respondents aged 65 or over, males, residents of Hart and Test Valley, and rural areas, households earning over £100k, users of concessionary bus travel and County Archives, and services to prevent flooding	Respondents under 35, females
Using financial reserves	Organisations, businesses and groups	Households earning over £60k, residents of rural areas
Delaying short term spending	Residents of rural hamlets and isolated dwellings	<i>No notable variances</i>

# Suggested ways to manage the Council's budget

## Suggestions of ways to help balance the budget (base: 345 comments)



Comments about staff cost savings mentioned reducing the overall staff budget (13%), as well as finding ways to improve staff efficiency (10%), reducing senior management costs (8%), and the costs of council pensions (6%)

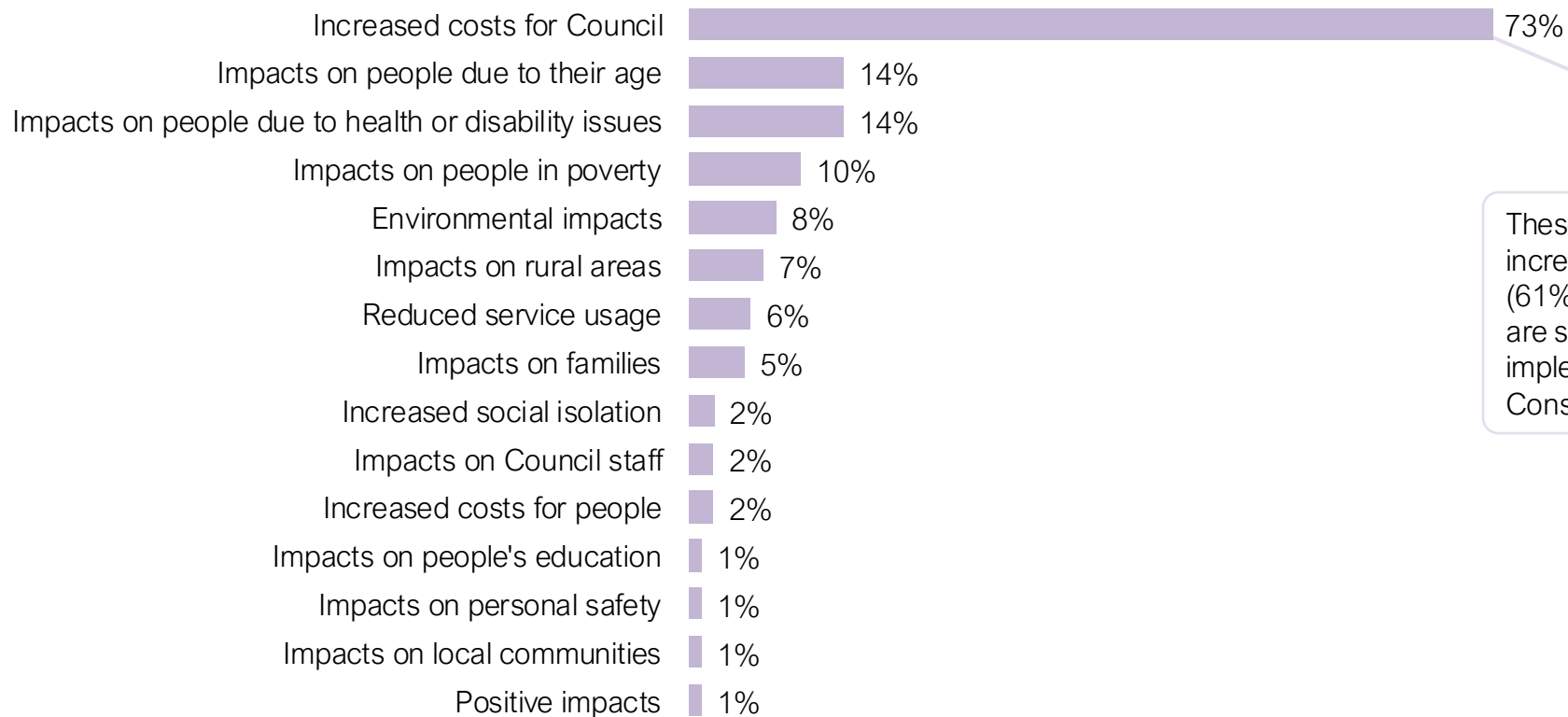
Changes to service models related to adult social care (6%), School and Post-16 Transport (6%), and implementing new technology or automation to support service delivery (5%), as well as suggestions that services be changed to reduce bureaucracy (3%)

Specific suggestions to reduce services referred to highways and transport (4%), services for children such as School Transport (3%), or services for children with SEND (2%), and reducing services in general to only providing a legal minimum service (3%), as well as adult social care (1%) and social initiatives provided by the Council (1%)

Suggestions for new charges included charges for concessionary bus passes or their usage (5%), charges for waste services (3%), opportunities to request voluntary donations for services (1%), new charges for businesses access Council services (1%), creating new local taxes (1%) and applying charges to discretionary or non-essential council services (1%)

# Perceived impacts of proposed budget options

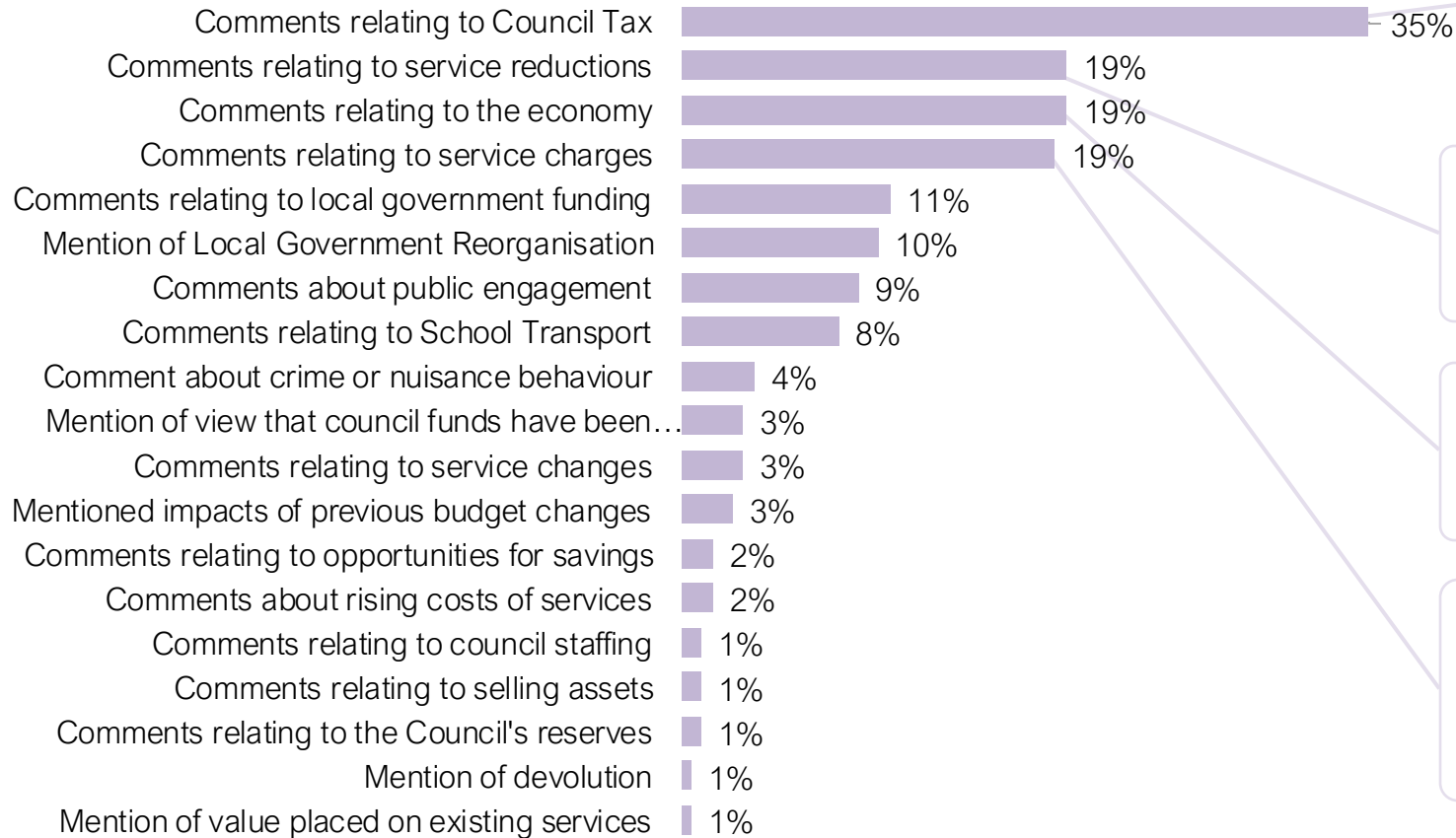
Themes of mentioned potential impact(s) from the Council's budget proposals  
(base: 88 comments)



These costs related to a perceived need to clear up increased fly-tipping as a result of HWRC charges (61%), increased demand for other services if there are service reductions (11%), and the costs of implementing changes proposed in the Budget Consultation (2%)

# General comments about the Council's budget and proposed budget options

## Themes of other comments about the Council's budget and the proposed budget options (base: 191 comments)



Comments mentioning Council Tax noted that households cannot afford higher Council Tax levels (15%), mentioned disagreement with Council Tax rises (10%) or agreement with Council Tax rises (7%), and expressed views that people are not getting value from their Council Tax (7%)

Comments about service reductions indicated disagreement with these (8%), views that essential services or those supporting the most vulnerable should be protected (8%), as well as views that libraries should (2%) or should not (3%) be closed

Where respondents mentioned the economic situation, 17% commented that people are already struggling with the cost of living, and 2% felt that public services should focus on reducing unemployment to benefit the economy

Comments about service charges often included views that charges should not be introduced or increased (10%), with 6% opposed to charges for HWRC visits and 3% noting that charges should not be applied to the statutory services provided by councils. Only 1% suggested that charges should be added/ increased.

# Unstructured responses

Unstructured responses include the emails, letters and other correspondence that the Council receives as part of the consultation that do not use the Response Form. The County Council received 12 unique unstructured responses to the Budget Consultation, 4 of which were from organisations and 8 from individual respondents.

Most responses gave suggestions to help the County Council balance its budget. Responding organisations stated their willingness to work alongside the County Council to resolve challenges that spanned across the public sector in Hampshire

The themes covered by these comments are summarised within this section.

# Unstructured responses from groups and organisations

## Police and Health service respondents noted:

- concern about any reduction in services that support vulnerable residents, especially where there is a joint or overlapping responsibility
- concern that HCC service reductions may result in increased demand
- a stated desire to be kept apprised of potential service changes and to work more closely / in partnership with the County Council, to benefit all organisations

Additionally, health partners expressed:

- a willingness to explore opportunities for greater integration including joint work and co-location of services (e.g. CSD / Health), and discussion on single frameworks and market management for AHC particularly in mental health
- support for changes which address the excessive costs and the lack of regulation in the care market; increased flexibility to consider people's personal circumstances when assessing whether someone needs help with adult social care and for using a strengths-based approach and signposting people towards voluntary and other community services.

## The advocacy group presenting views of adults with learning disabilities noted that:

- the Government should give more / fairer money to councils
- the Learning Disability community should be protected as much as possible from any budget cuts, with particular mention of Day Services, bus passes and support workers, which are very important to them
- further reductions to street lighting would make adults with a learning disability feel more vulnerable

To help fund these services, they suggested

- increasing Council tax for the wealthy
- selling land and buildings
- further efficiencies – such as more people working from home
- charging for HWRC use
- using more mobile libraries and fewer library buildings.

They also felt they could have been better enabled to respond (information / time)

## The Local Authority respondent was

- broadly supportive of the County Council's lobbying efforts, whilst emphasising the need for proper funding from central Government and detailed consultation with local stakeholders.
- only supportive of fee / charge increases to offset management / admin costs
- unsupportive of lobbying for more control over Council Tax where the objective is to increase it
- keen that the County Council should do everything possible to avoid Council Tax rises, which they feel are regressive
- supportive of sustainable efficiencies which ensure service quality and accessibility are maintained
- clear that any additional income generation should deliver improved place-based outcomes. It should be prudent, not-for-profit, used to fund services and help offset overall service costs.
- concerned that introducing fees and charges is likely to hinder economic growth and increase the cost of living for residents
- clear that HWRC charges should be nominal, only for non-statutory items, to offset running costs and with evidence that fly tipping does not increase
- in agreement with the County Council's position that proposals for service reduction should be subject to consultation
- opposed to short-term decisions that risk undermining the organisation's medium-term sustainability

They also emphasised that:

- LGR should be factored into delivering efficiencies
- sales of assets must not include community assets that a future Unitary Authority might wish to retain.
- LGR means it is essential to engage in strategic, collaborative discussions with partners to ensure long-term resilience and value.
- the County Council should set its budget in a way that clearly demonstrates the achievability of the 2027/28 position
- reserves should only be used for one-off costs or as a last resort.

# Unstructured responses from individuals encompassed the following themes

## Financial efficiency

- Reduce expenditure in major spend areas (1)
- Reduce spend on media and TV campaigns (1)
- Cut councillor expenses (1)
- Start a Quality Improvement workstream (1)
- Strict supervision of outside contractors, including clear timeframes for project completion (1)
- No preferred contracts for construction and facilities management (1)
- Ensure reserves are safe, & funds well invested (1)
- Examine care home contracts to address substantial profit-making (1)
- Land to revert to council ownership if development not carried out within a 3-year window (1)

## Service prioritisation and eligibility

- Reduce services for the undeserving - focus on those in genuine need (1)
- Unemployed parents should not be entitled to school transport (1)
- Use low-cost sleep pods for homeless people (1)

## Transport

- Stop unviable bus services (1)
- Make employers provide buses for workers, especially on industrial estates (1)
- Reduce empty buses by co-locating jobs, shops and communities (1)

## Revenue generation

- Introduce road tolls on main roads (1)
- £7 annual user fee for library services (1)
- Charge a token fee (£10) to people who use schools, prisons, or residential care (1)
- Minimal increase in car parking/charges not applied in beauty spots (1)
- Pay per use system for public toilets (1)
- Pay per use for Council EV charging points (1)
- Provision and 5-year rental of affordable housing to workers (1)

## Environmental sustainability

- Reduce street lighting (1)
- Tax wood burners/firepits (1)
- Suggestions relating to pets - ownership fees, pet waste fines/ chargeable bin collections (1)
- Improve health by reducing long commutes and lowering the price of electric vehicles (1)
- People should pay for their waste disposal (1)

## Governance

- Concerns that views submitted via the consultation would be ignored (1)
- The County Council has no legitimacy to raise taxes given the cancellation of 2025 elections (1)
- Noted that the Information Pack was helpful (2)

## Resource allocation

- Lobby central government for change (2)
- Unsustainable to keep asking for more money (1)
- Government must give more/fairer money to councils (1)
- Re-value council tax bands & increase number of tiers (1)
- Council tax should only be used to fund HCC services, not given to Government (1)

## Employment and workforce

- Reduce/stagger working hours to increase retention/ enable job sharing/help people back into work (1)
- Pay more than basic wage to attract care staff (1)
- Provide fair salaries at all levels (1)
- Don't issue NFDC parking clocks to ASC social workers (1)

## Reduce crime

- Reduce crime by paying people to report it and not sensationalising it on social media (1)

# About this report

# Open consultation

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This report summarises the main findings from Hampshire County Council's 2025 Budget Consultation. Notable demographic variances from the average response are also highlighted, with further details available in the supporting data report and respondent summary at [www.hants.gov.uk/budgetconsultation](http://www.hants.gov.uk/budgetconsultation).

As this was an open consultation, the respondents do not provide a representative sample of the Hampshire population. All consultation questions were optional, and the analyses only take into account actual responses – where 'no response' was provided to a question, this was not included in the analysis. As such, the totals for each question generally add up to less than the total number of respondents who replied via the consultation Response Form. In most cases, reported data has been re-based to exclude 'don't know' responses to facilitate demographic comparisons.

Respondents could disclose if they were responding as an individual, providing the official response of an organisation, group or business or if they were responding as a democratically Elected Representative. Given the relatively low number of organisations / democratically Elected Representatives that responded, the usefulness of percentages in quantifying their views is limited. However, analysis has been completed by 'respondent type', using indicative percentages for each closed question in order to help illustrate any contrast between their views and those of individuals – recognising that organisations / democratically Elected Representatives provide both an 'expert' view and speak on behalf of a larger audience.

# A note on verbatim coding

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All of the comments and unstructured responses received through the consultation were shared directly with services for full review, in order to inform the ongoing development of further proposals to balance the Council's budget, and associated Equality Impact Assessments.

Additionally, consultation codeframes were created using an inductive approach\* from replies from each general open-ended question received across the course of the consultation, in order to understand key themes arising.

Unstructured responses were also coded in full.

The codeframes aimed to draw out the key themes and messages from the comments covered, including any:

- specific groups to which they related;
- impacts that they mentioned;
- suggestions for how the Council could ensure a balanced budget; and
- feedback on the consultation process.

One individual worked on each codeframe to ensure a consistency of approach for each.

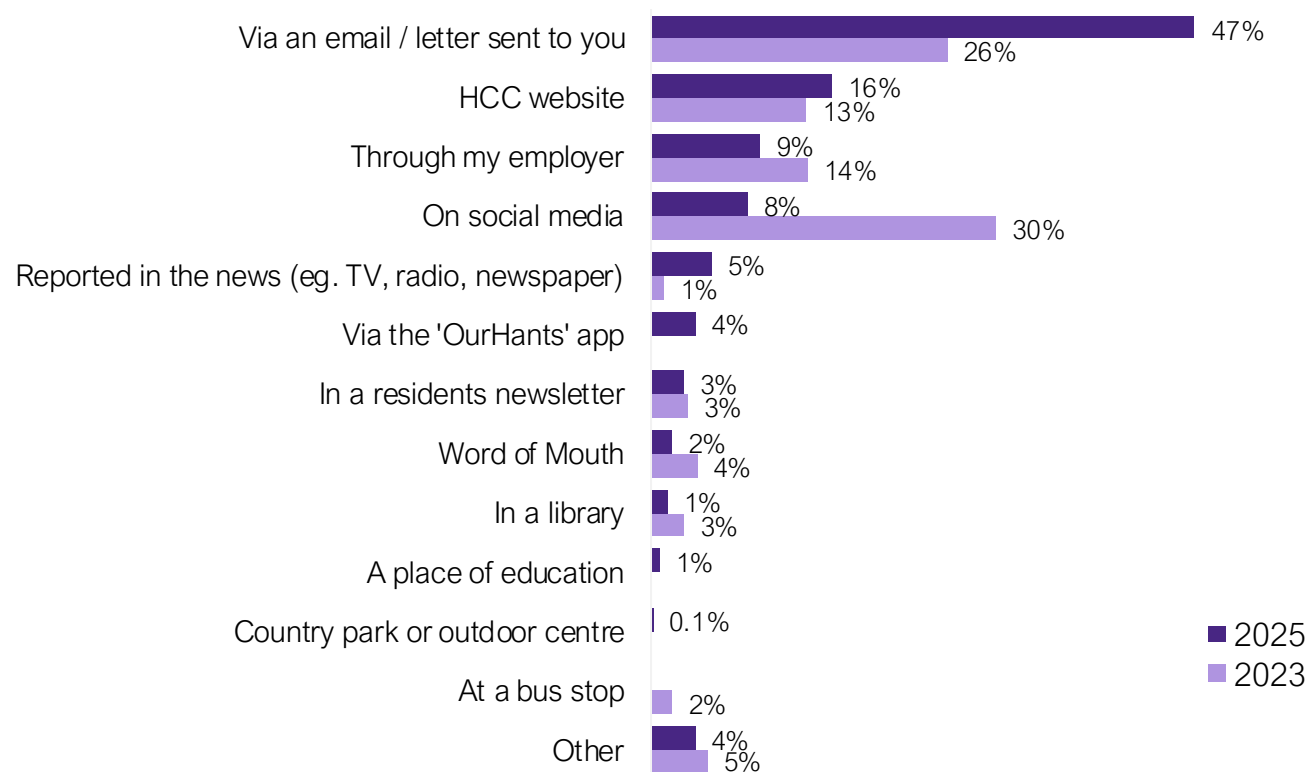
In addition to the analysis in this report, all comments have been shared verbatim with the project team

*\*This means that the themes were developed from the responses themselves, not pre-determined based on expectations, to avoid any bias in the analysis of these responses.*

# How respondents heard about the consultation

Almost half of respondents heard about the consultation through direct correspondence (47%) reflecting the targeted emails that were undertaken to stakeholders and service users. Fewer respondents were made aware of the consultation by social media, and awareness via employers also fell this year.

How respondents heard about the consultation (Base: 844, 2718)



In 2025, the consultation was promoted via a range of channels, including:

- Press releases
- Consultation webpage
- Promotional email banner added to HWRC bookings
- *Your Hampshire* resident newsletter, Leaders stakeholder newsletter and Parish / town council newsletter
- HantsHeadlines news items to all staff
- Organic social media posts\*
- Digital screens in County Council run-buildings (e.g. libraries)
- 6 sheet advertising posters in 10 sites
- Cascade via elected Members, staff, partner organisations, stakeholders, Interfaith and multi-cultural networks
- Newsletter to Hampshire Perspectives residents' forum and consultation distribution list

\*NB: no paid for social media was undertaken this year



Hampshire  
County Council