

Budget Consultation Final Report

Introduction

This report gives an overview of the extensive public consultation and engagement activity undertaken with the residents of Perth and Kinross to inform the budget setting process for 2023/24.

Elected Members for Perth and Kinross met on Wednesday March 1st 2023 to set the Council's Revenue and Capital budgets for 2023/24.

This report is a summary of the outcomes of the consultation activities, comments received from residents of Perth and Kinross and final decisions made by Elected Members on budget priorities.

1.0 Consultation Process

During October – December 2022, our consultation and engagement activity combined both the budget and Corporate Plan for 2022/27. Activity included in-person focus groups, online meetings and social media engagement with all of our communities on these important priorities.

The Corporate Plan element of the survey closed on 28 November 2022 to allow us to report to Council in December 2022; however, the budget questions remained fully open until 29 January 2023. This allowed us to continue gathering responses and increase engagement.

2.0 Budget Consultation Response

Perth & Kinross Council is preparing for very significant financial challenges ahead as well as some difficult budget decisions in the coming years.

Between 18 October 2022 and 29 January 2023, we carried out a consultation exercise to gauge residents' views on budget issues and priorities.

Content remained broadly similar to the previous year with a few improvements made following suggestions from respondents and as a result of engagement with Elected Members.

As in previous years, introductory information was presented to improve our residents understanding of the challenges we currently face, where the Council gets its money from and restrictions on the areas where we can make savings. Respondents were asked for feedback around what issues concern them personally, preference for Council Tax setting for 2023/24, opinions regarding possibilities on how we deliver services, priorities for investment for our capital budget and feedback on how we work with our communities.

A social media campaign was launched across Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn with the aim to engage and inform the public and promote the consultation. Six in-person engagement sessions were also held throughout Perth and Kinross as well as 2 online sessions. In addition, the consultation was promoted to media outlets and promoted in the footer of every subscription email issued by the Council during the consultation period.

To encourage participation the sessions and the online survey were promoted by:

- Direct emails to community councils, individuals and community groups and Chief Officers of PKAVS, Culture Perth and Kinross, Live Active Leisure, Horsecross Arts and Gannochy Trust.

- Email subscribers (over 83,000 emails sent, resulting in 371 click throughs to the event details and survey page)
- News coverage – launch release sent to 45 journalists (community and professional), published in Perthshire Advertiser, Blairgowrie Advertiser, Strathearn Herald and on the front page of the courier, with broadcast coverage, web and social media reminders on Heartland FM.
- Information on digital timetable signs at bus stops
- Campus digital screens
- Posters sent to community contacts for local display
- Responses to web chats and emails via customer service centre
- Internal staff communication channel

Overall, there were 1092 responses submitted to the on-line survey as a whole and 1084 of these visited the budget sections of the survey, a considerable increase on the previous 2 years (739 in 2022/23, 642 in 2021/22, 484 in 2020/21).

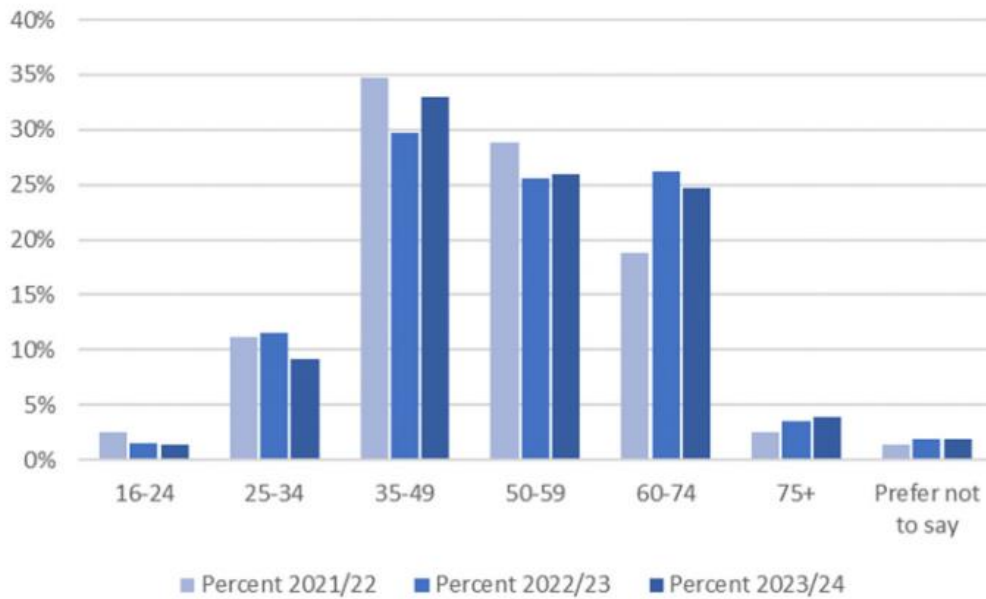
This report will provide details on the 1084 responses to the budget sections of the survey. Some questions were not answered by all respondents and this is indicated in the following analysis. As with an opt-in exercise of this type, results cannot be considered fully representative of all PKC residents but are indicative and influenced by the demographic of participants. 95% of respondents live in Perth and Kinross (99% in 2022-23; 95% in 2021/22), and 31% of respondents study or work locally (19% in 2022-23; 36% in 2021/22). 25% of responses stated that they are current employees of Perth & Kinross Council (17% in 2022/23), 4% said they had been employed by the Council in the last 3 years (2% in 2022/23).

. Encouragingly the age distribution of respondents is more balanced when compared to all-inclusive consultations such as this (see Figure 1). The profile of respondents is broadly similar to 2022/23 although a slight decrease (-2%) in responses from those aged under 35 years and a 3% increase from those aged 35-49 years are of note.

Information was shared across all the Council’s social media channels using a combination of post types either focussing on the corporate plan priorities or emphasising the nature of the difficult budget decisions ahead. Replies to public comment about Council budget spend or priorities during this period also highlighted the survey. Data below relates to content which appeared on the main corporate pages. Comparisons to previous figures relate to annual budget consultation only.

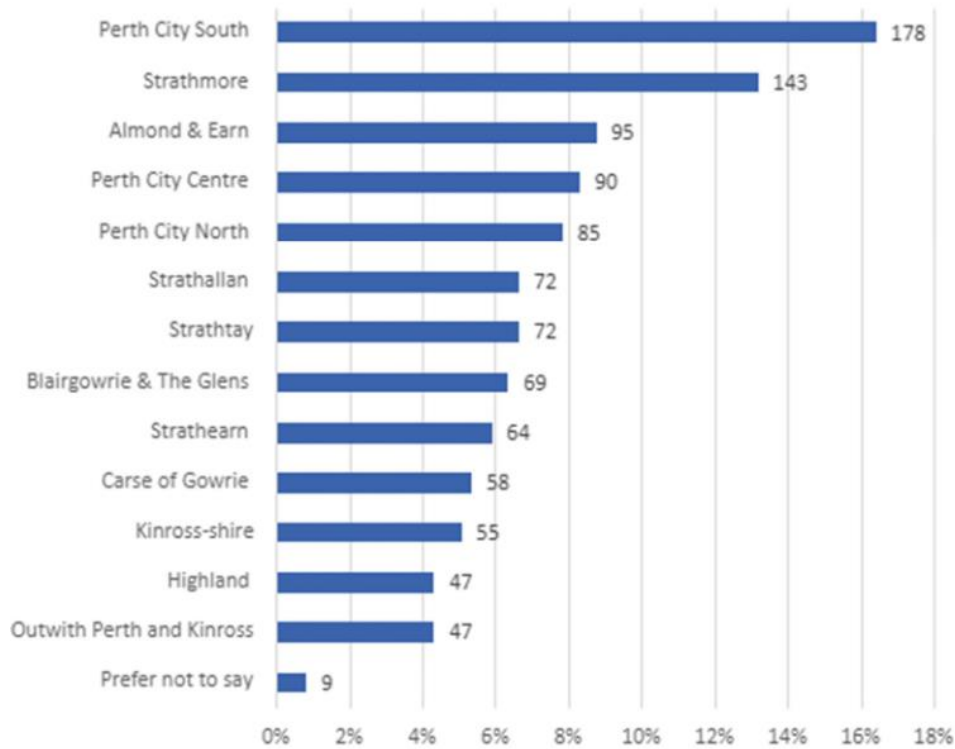
Consultation	Facebook		Twitter		Instagram		LinkedIn	
	22/23	23/24	22/23	23/24	22/23	23/24	22/23	23/24
No. of Posts	10	41	6	38	-	34	-	3
Comment	48	115	5	22	-	2	-	0
Reactions	284	211	23	26	-	2	-	0
Shares	45	138	11	58	-	0	-	22
Link Clicks	2,444	634	0	460	-	33	-	63

Figure 1: Breakdown of respondents by age



Respondents were asked to provide their Electoral Ward (done by describing common settlements within these). As shown in Figure 2, the largest number of responses were received from Perth City South and Strathmore wards, but all areas of Perth and Kinross are represented within the responses. Some care will be required with any geographic breakdown of results due to the small numbers from some wards.,

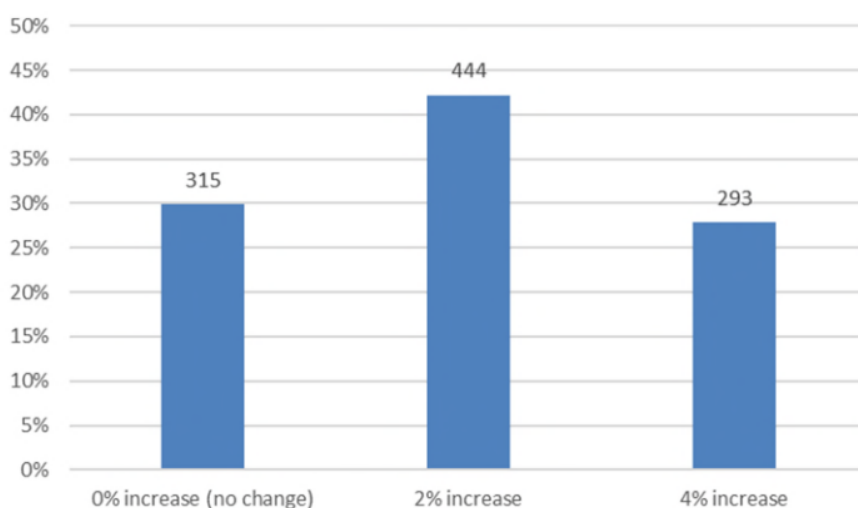
Figure 2: Breakdown of respondents by Ward



3.0 Budget Decisions

3.1 Change in Council Tax

Respondents were asked what percentage change in Council Tax was preferable (options of no change and 2% or 4% increases) – the survey highlighted that a 2% increase in Band D Council Tax is equivalent to around 7p per day per household and a 4% increase is around 15p per day per household. Respondents were unable to state a preference to reduce Council Tax.



Age Groups

Council Tax Preference: What percentage change in Council Tax is preferable to you, to help balance the Council's budget?

Age Group	Responses	0% increase (no change)	2% increase	4% increase
16-34	108	40%	39%	21%
35-59	624	32%	42%	26%
60+	299	22%	43%	34%
Prefer not to say	21	29%	52%	19%
Total	1052	30%	42%	28%

Overall, 70% of respondents opted for an increase in Council Tax of some kind rather than no change. Most respondents who would prefer an increase, opted for a 2% increase (42%). In the 2022/23 Budget Consultation, 56% opted for an increase of some kind. Age appears to influence preference for council tax changes with older respondents being more willing to propose increased charges.

3.2 Changes in how services are delivered

In a new approach this year, respondents were asked for which services the Council should consider reducing standards of delivery, reduce or stop delivery, introduce or increase charging, maintain current standards/investments and maintain current standards/investments. It should be noted that the list of services presented under each of the following statements is restricted to those services for which this is a realistic possibility. As would be expected, those services for which most

respondents specified for a reduction in standard or frequency were mirrored by those selected for reduction or even stop delivering. These were:

- Council-run events
- How you access the Council
- Adult learning
- Repair and maintenance of Council owned buildings
- Cultural activity.

Council-run events were by far the most popular choice for service reduction and selected by more than 70% of respondents. Almost 70% of respondents think we should charge for the events. Those wards in closer to proximity to Perth generally were more supportive of events, remoter areas less favourable. The younger age groups, those who are probably more likely to be parents of younger children, are more supportive of events than the older age groups.

When considering the kinds of projects to invest in, please choose three of the following as your priorities for investment

The top 3 priorities for investment overall were “Support for the growth of the local economy” (selected by 58% of respondents), “Create opportunities for young people” (selected by 52%) and “Improve or grow our school learning estate” (selected by 45% of respondents). When taking age of respondents into consideration, “Support for the local economy” was most popular in the 35-59 age group. “Create opportunities for young people” was clearly more favoured by those aged under 60. “Provide access to services in rural area” and “Improve active travel networks and safety for non-drivers” were more popular amongst the 60+ age group.

Age group	Responses	Improve or grow our school learning estate	Support growth of the local economy	Create opportunities for business	Create opportunities for young people	Support climate change targets	Provide access to services in rural areas	Improve active travel networks and safety for non-drivers
16-34	110	45%	51%	24%	61%	41%	36%	34%
35-59	617	47%	60%	29%	54%	34%	37%	34%
60+	294	43%	56%	28%	43%	35%	48%	42%
Prefer not to say	19	37%	58%	16%	47%	21%	58%	58%
Total	1040	45%	58%	28%	52%	34%	40%	37%

Perth & Kinross Council should encourage and support local people and communities to deliver certain services. Do you agree/disagree with this?

75% of respondents agreed that Perth & Kinross Council should encourage and support local people and communities to deliver certain services. 8% of respondents were in disagreement. Age did not appear to influence agreement.

Age Group	Responses	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
16-34	110	30%	45%	17%	7%	1%
35-59	619	30%	46%	16%	7%	1%
60+	287	28%	48%	17%	7%	1%
Prefer not to say	19	11%	37%	42%	11%	0%
Total	1035	29%	46%	17%	7%	1%

Perth & Kinross Council should help people to help themselves more so they have less reliance on publicly funded services. Do you agree/disagree with this?

71% of respondents agreed that we should help people to help themselves more so they have less reliance on publicly funded services. Levels of agreement with this statement were notably lower from respondents aged under 35+ when compared to those aged 35+.

Age Group	Responses	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
16-34	109	27%	29%	23%	15%	6%
35-59	619	32%	42%	13%	10%	3%
60+	287	30%	42%	18%	8%	2%
Prefer not to say	19	21%	26%	42%	11%	0%
Total	1034	31%	40%	16%	10%	3%

3.3 Consultation Comments versus budget Decisions

You Said		We Did
Theme of Response	Consultation Comment	Decision of Council
Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Too much focus on events/spending in Perth city rather than outlying areas of the council I understand it's hard and difficult but perhaps charging for some events that are free, even a small amount would help generate some money. Like the winter stuff, 	<p>Retain event budget to support communities and visitor opportunities</p> <p>Officers have been set a target of achieving £100,000 income target for Council run and Council supported events through sponsorship</p>

	<p>£2 a head would help a bit more or even £5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organise more events in Perth that can be partially charged for 	
Council Tax	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Instead of cutting back put council tax up to maintain and enhance current service levels I believe that difficult though it is that Council Tax has to be raised Only raise council tax for bands D and above Create a tax band for the more expensive properties I know it's likely not a popular opinion but I'd be happy to pay more Council Tax to support essential services 	Increase Council Tax across all bands by 3.9%.
Use of Council Buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintenance of school estate will stop the buildings literally falling apart in front of our eyes and then needing to be completely rebuilt Reduce / sell offices as more staff can now work from home. Reinvest these funds in capital projects that meet your priorities Open up primary school facilities for local groups to book access to hall facilities (dance, exercise, indoor sport, music, yoga, zumba, tai chi etc.). 	Mothball Pullar House from 2024/25, saving £400,000
Street Cleaning/ Winter Maintenance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Streets being cleaned at the weekend, 	Reject budget savings for street cleaning and winter

	<p>because it is not always necessary. Gardening work done on weekends. Any unnecessary weekend work cancelled</p>	<p>maintenance; the existing services will be enhanced with extra investment of £90,000 to add grit bins and to tackle anti-social fly tipping, littering and dog fouling</p>
Roads Maintenance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stop wasting money 'fixing' individual potholes that are quickly re-opened by heavy traffic and resurface larger area of road to provide an unbroken surface • Early interventions on repairs, e.g while the potholes are small • Stop wasting money doing really bad road fixes that then have to be fixed 2 months later as the materials being used are clearly not fit for the job 	<p>Budget saving proposals were rejected and there was a commitment to invest £2million in non-trunk roads infrastructure</p>
Biodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider Community Led Greenspace Maintenance through existing bloom groups etc, they do a fantastic job locally and take pride in where they live. Pride of Place etc. Consider review of charges for Greenspace Events, higher charges for large organisers 	<p>£75,000 to support biodiversity in open spaces</p>
Public Transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase cost of parking in town and city centres to fund active travel measures and public transport • Increase investment in active travel and public transport. Encouraging people to use sustainable options and take fewer short journeys will 	<p>Rejected proposals to reduce budget for local bus services</p>

	<p>increase the health and well-being of residents, make streets safer and quieter, make a cleaner and greener environment, improved air quality, reduce congestion</p>	
Car Parks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase cost of parking in town and city centres to fund active travel measures and public transport • Possibly increase the parking charges a wee bit, the extra monies identified for car park repair and running costs - an increase with a purpose. <p>Increase car parking penalty fees.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase car parking charges. They are ridiculously low by UK standards and encourage car use to the detriment of public transport & climate change. 	<p>£250,000 investment to provide electric vehicle charging points in rural area</p> <p>Increase in parking charges tbc</p>
Leisure and Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Live Active needs more investment. Memberships are too high in rural areas. Make them cheaper and get more people moving • Charging for adult learning 	<p>£150,000 to be invested to carry out a review of the Council's leisure and cultural assets to ensure the best of use of them is being made</p> <p>A replacement of Blairgowrie Recreation Centre was approved as one of the projects that should continue with an additional £9.3 million being agreed to meet revised construction costs</p>
Support for Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proactive approach to encouraging the development of a service industry around the circular 	<p>£10 million invested in the first phase of work to unlock new business land to the west of Perth</p>

	<p>economy to increase occupation of city and town centre premises</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perth city is depressing and boring place. Council need to wake up and think outside of the box to attract more business and exciting unique opportunities 	
Cost of Living	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Help our community by allowing parents to work and have affordable childcare 	<p>Invest £100,000 to provide further support to families and children in poverty</p> <p>Commit to invest over £1.5 million in projects to support local residents most in need; including £600,000 to fund projects aimed at helping communities deal with the cost of living crisis</p>
Community Groups/Third Sector Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are many volunteer groups throughout Perth & Kinross that do many tasks that the Council should be doing but these groups are very much aware that the Council cannot do these. I guess that some of these groups and or individuals would possibly take on more if they were given more recognition, direction and tools for some of these jobs Mental health is at an all time low/ crisis. This needs to be addressed! Support third sector organisations to deliver non statutory roles. 	<p>An increase in funding of 7.5% for local voluntary organisations</p> <p>An additional £100,000 specifically to support mental health self-help groups</p>

Energy Efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Switch off street lights between midnight and 5am in residential streets • Every council building should have solar panels to generate electricity • Stop lighting up bridges to highlight certain causes. At a time when we are being asked to reduce energy consumption I find it an outrage the council is wasting energy and public money. 	Officers have also been asked to find £2million of energy efficiency savings
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide PKC facilities for children and young people needing intensive learning support rather than paying huge fees for placements and transport to independent schools in and out with PKC 	<p>Remove breakfast club charges and keep school meal charges at existing rates</p> <p>Invest £100,000 to provide study support in schools over the Easter holidays for senior secondary school pupils ahead of their exams</p> <p>£120,000 to pay for food and fun activities during school holidays</p>

A full list of budget decisions agreed on March 1st 2023 is available on our website.

4.0 Acknowledgements

We would like to thank everyone who took the time to engage with the consultation both online and the in-person events. The comments received as part of the consultation process are invaluable to Council Officers and Elected Members as they consider all options and proposals for setting the Council's Capital and Revenue budgets.