Budget Consultation 2026/27

Executive Summary: Consultation Feedback Report

Shropshire Council's Budget Consultation for 2026/27 generated 952 responses, including 921 survey returns and 31 email/letter submissions, providing a comprehensive picture of public views on the council's financial challenges, priorities and potential approaches to savings and income generation. Responses were received from across the county, with 67.2% of respondents identifying as local residents and more representation from businesses, community groups, councillors and council employees.

Across all themes, residents consistently acknowledged the severity of the council's financial pressures while expressing strong concerns about financial management, past investment decisions, and the impact of rising living costs. Feedback demonstrates a desire to protect essential community services, combined with calls for improved leadership, transparency and engagement.

1. Online Services

- 63% of respondents were confident or very confident in completing online tasks.
- 79% said they were likely or very likely to use a computer, smartphone or tablet for council services.
- Satisfaction with online services was evenly split, with 46.2% satisfied and 45.9% dissatisfied.
- The dominant feedback themes were:
  - Need for easier navigation and faster responses
  - Desire for better telephone access and human contact
  - Concerns that digital-first approaches may exclude older or vulnerable residents

2. Savings Approaches

Support was high for approaches that improve efficiency without reducing frontline provision:

- Reviewing capital use – supported by 74.8% of respondents.
- Working more with other organisations – 65.7% support.
- Reviewing services provided to external organisations – strong support.
- Using in-house expertise – 85.6% support.
- Reviewing purchased services for value for money – 91.2% support.
- Providing early support to reduce demand – 83% support.

Least supported approaches were:

- Reducing services to the legal minimum – 59.3% oppose.
- Charging more for discretionary services – 49.4% oppose.
- Carbon reduction requirements – more divided, with 54.3% support.

3. Council Tax

- Views were highly polarised: 50% agreed with the proposed 4.99% increase. 46% disagreed.
- Willingness to pay above 4.99% was low. Only 20.5% would consider paying more if permitted. 51.6% preferred no increase at all.
- Written comments highlighted:
    - Cost-of-living pressures
    - Perceptions of past financial mismanagement
    - Concerns about fairness between rural and urban areas

Only a very small minority expressed unconditional support; these comments stressed the need for meaningful improvements.

4. Leisure Services

- 63% of respondents do not use council leisure services, but among all respondents:
    - Top preferences were increasing income generation, capital investment, and focusing on lower-cost activities.
    - Least acceptable options were reduced opening hours, targeted provision only, and community ownership models.
- Comments emphasised:
    - Strong opposition to closures
    - Recognition of long-term health benefits
    - Calls for better efficiency and modernised service models

5. Library Services

Libraries were widely viewed as essential community assets, especially in rural areas.
Preferred approaches were:

- Increased self-service options
- More services delivered through libraries
- Income-generating activities

Least acceptable approaches were:

- Reducing buildings, stock, mobile library services or opening hours.

Comments (over 200 received) stressed libraries' roles in:

- Education and literacy
- Access to digital services
- Reducing social isolation

6.Museum Services

- 26% of respondents use museum services at least a few times a year.
- Most acceptable approaches:
    - Partnerships with town/parish councils
    - Introducing charges for exhibitions
    - National partnerships and external investment

- Least acceptable:
  - Closures
  - Reductions in education provision, events or exhibitions

Respondents emphasised museums' value to culture, wellbeing and tourism.

7. Partnership Working

Support was strong for:

- Increasing resident engagement – 60.3% support
- More volunteering opportunities – 58% support
- Partnerships with the voluntary sector – 56% support

But respondents were cautious about:

- Community ownership, with only 49% support
- Transferring services to private providers, supported by just 31.3%, while 24.6% oppose

Comments emphasised:

- Limits of volunteer capacity
- Risks of asset loss under private models
- Concern about cost-shifting to town/parish councils

8. Social Care

All proposals received strong support:

- 67% support enabling people to remain at home
- 64% support reablement
- 60.8% support increased use of technology
- 60.5% support reviewing inhouse services for cost effectiveness-house services for cost-effectiveness
- 56.9% support increasing supported living accommodation

Feedback highlighted:

- Concerns about provider costs and profit levels
- Calls to improve preventative work
- Risks to the wider care system if support structures are removed.

9. Capital Programme Priorities

Residents want investment directed towards core infrastructure:

Top priorities:

- Highways/road maintenance – far ahead of other options
- Public transport & park and ride
- Parks, outdoor spaces and rights of way
- Safe walking/cycling routes

Lowest priorities:

- Arts, culture and heritage buildings
- Library refurbishments
- School site improvements
- New technology / carbon reduction measures

Comments repeatedly raised concerns about:
- Past “vanity projects”
- Poor value for money
- Uneven investment across the county

10. Resident Satisfaction

Comparison with national LGA benchmarks shows significantly lower satisfaction in Shropshire:
- Only 14% were satisfied overall, compared to 51% nationally.
- Only 13% felt the council offers value for money, compared to 39% nationally.
- Only 18% felt the council acts on residents’ concerns, compared to 53% nationally.

Highest satisfaction levels locally:
- Waste collection
- Parks and green spaces
- Libraries
- Leisure services

Highest dissatisfaction with local services compared to national feedback:
- Road and pavement maintenance
- Street cleaning

11. Written Feedback (Emails and Letters)

Written responses amplified key themes:
- Strong opposition to council tax increases (22 of 31 responses)
- Concern about past financial decisions
- Perceived inequalities between rural and urban areas
- Desire for more transparency, including clearer financial information.

Overall Conclusions

The consultation highlights a community that understands the council faces severe financial pressures yet strongly questions past financial management. Many participants believe the council’s current financial situation is a result of poor financial management, past “vanity projects,” and a lack of long-term planning. These perceptions strongly shaped attitudes to savings, charging, and council tax. The consultation respondents would like to see essential community services protected, especially libraries and the mobile library, leisure centres and museums. The consultation respondents call for Shropshire Council to prioritise capital budgets in core infrastructure, particularly roads and transport. Local people would like to see significantly improved communication, transparency and resident engagement from the council.

The feedback includes comments from people deeply concerned about service affordability, with many households commenting that they are unable or unwilling to absorb further increases in council tax or charges. There is support for preventative and efficiency-based approaches over service reductions or losses. Overall, residents value their local services and want to see strong leadership, improved financial stewardship and better future engagement as difficult budget decisions are made for 2026/27 and beyond.