

Budget Consultation 2026/27

Consultation Feedback Report

January 2026



1 Background

Shropshire Council's budget consultation for 2026/27 was opened on the 12th of December 2025. The consultation was promoted widely through the Council's newsroom, in the local media, through newsletters and GovDelivery communications and through a wide range of other means to encourage responses from residents and other stakeholders. The consultation closed on the 16th of January.

The consultation communications emphasised that Shropshire Council is facing significant financial challenges. Costs continue to rise, while income is not keeping pace with the cost of delivering essential services. As a result, the Council declared a financial emergency on 10th September 2025. The council expects to spend more money than it has coming in by the end of March 2026. This financial pressure is likely to continue into next year and beyond. The main reasons for the projected overspend include:

- The ongoing challenge and rising costs of providing key services, especially for adults and children.
- 36% of savings planned to be delivered in the past three years have not been achieved.
- Rural councils like Shropshire face higher costs because of their size, dispersed population, and the need to maintain extensive infrastructure.
- Lower government funding and the loss of special grants make it harder to provide essential services, forcing councils to rely more on council tax or make difficult cuts.
- The council froze council tax for six years from 2010 to 2016 to help local people. However, this led to a significant drop in income and made the council's finances less sustainable.

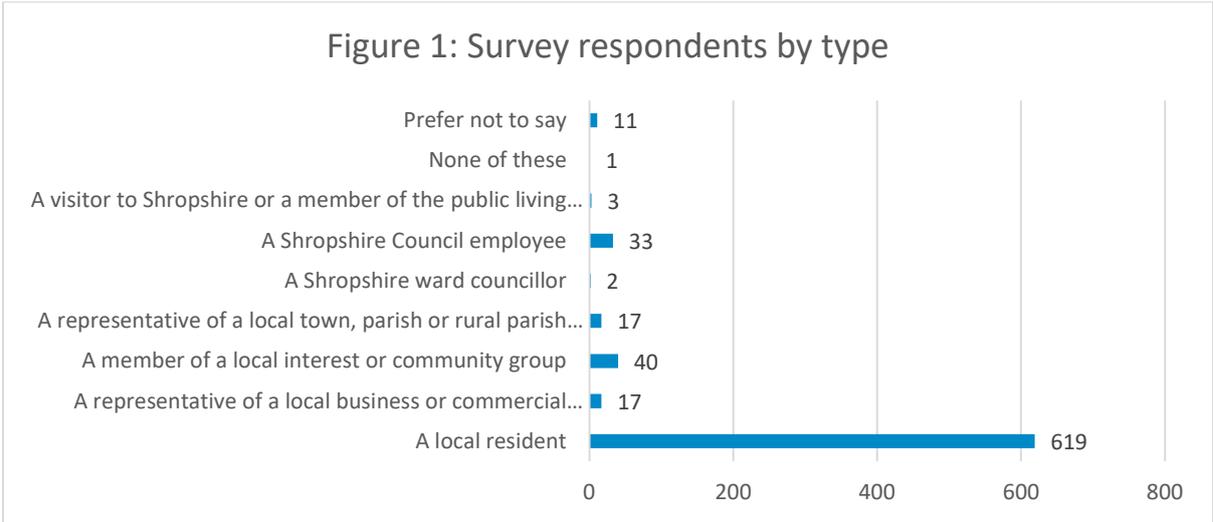
Significant changes are required to increase income and reduce spending so that it will be possible to operate within the budget. Examples of changes include help and guidance from the Local Government Association (LGA) following a Corporate Peer Review in July, the establishment of an Improvement Board and a request to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MCHLG) to borrow money. Changes will need to continue in future years, and many difficult decisions lie ahead.

To obtain public opinion on the range of options available to Shropshire Council (such as increasing income, reviewing contracts, reducing service delivery) a consultation survey was produced. This was available as an online survey, as a paper survey and also in an Easy Read survey format. A background document explaining the council's budget and financial position was also provided to allow residents and other stakeholders the information needed to provide an informed opinion. All documents were hosted on the 'Get Involved' section of the council's website and support offered within library buildings across the county for anyone in need of assistance completing the survey online or accessing paper copies of the materials. Responses to the consultation could also be made by email or letter.

This report details all of the findings of the budget consultation (survey responses, email and letter responses) and it will be used to inform papers being presented to Cabinet and Council from February 2026. The findings will inform the Financial Strategy for 2025/26 to 2029/30, Capital Strategy and other financial planning.

This report details the results of the survey within 15 main sections:

- **Section 1:** Background (this section) provides an overview of the survey and how it was promoted.
- **Section 2:** Survey Respondents covers those engaged within the survey to understand if feedback is representative.
- **Section 3:** Online Services considers feedback relating to online services and access.
Section 4: Savings Approaches explores the views on overall financial management and savings approaches available to Shropshire Council.
- **Section 5:** Council Tax considers the feedback provided when residents were asked for their views on council tax increase options.
- **Section 6:** Leisure Services covers feedback received when survey respondents were asked about possible options for savings in this area.
- **Section 7:** Library Services sets out the results of responses to questions about the options for library service savings.
- **Section 8:** Museum Services provides feedback from consultation respondents when asked about possible savings and options for budget changes.
- **Section 9:** Partnership Working details the results of the consultation questions on partnership working as a way of better managing Shropshire Council's budget and/or minimising the risks of savings approaches.
- **Section 10:** Social Care covers the response to two survey questions designed to obtain feedback on overall methods that can be used to manage social care costs and expenditure.
- **Section 11:** Capital Programme considers the way local residents would prioritise the capital budget for 2026/27 and beyond.
- **Section 12:** Resident Satisfaction looks at the responses received when residents and other stakeholders were asked for their views on the council's overall performance.
- **Section 13:** Other Feedback summarises some of the overall survey views on the budget consultation alongside more general written feedback provided by email and letter in response to the budget consultation.
- **Section 14:** Summary and Conclusion provides a brief summary and conclusion based on the overall analysis of the feedback received.



In order to find out more about the survey respondents a series of demographic questions were included in the survey. The response is briefly summarised within this report but can be used to undertake more detailed analysis where this can assist decision making or a deeper understanding of people and their views. Figure 2 displays the gender of respondents. 49% of survey respondents were female and 43% male. This is common within survey responses and national research suggests that women are more likely to respond to a survey or consultation on behalf of a household compared to men.

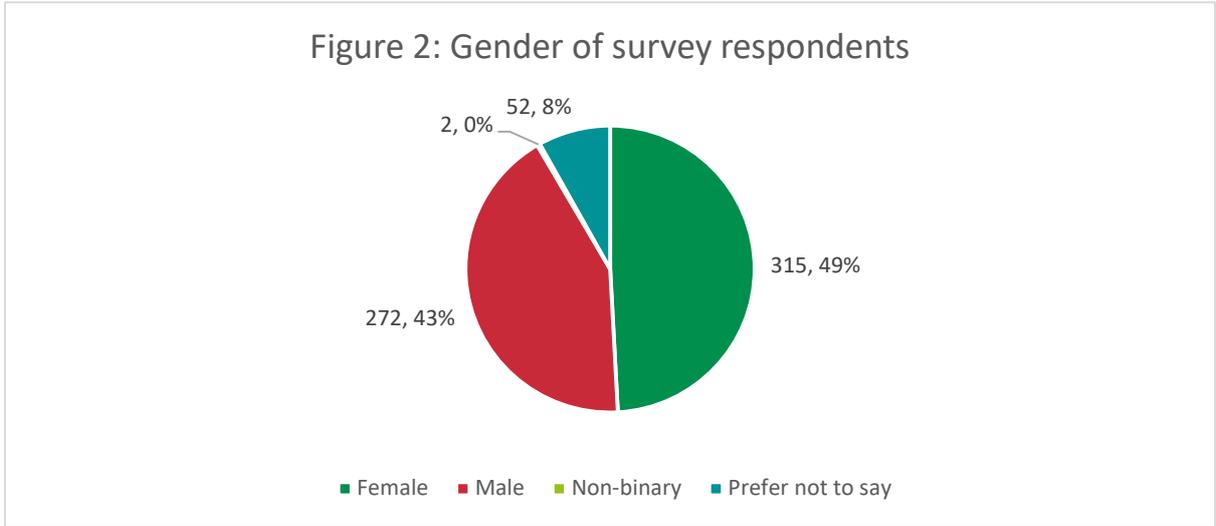
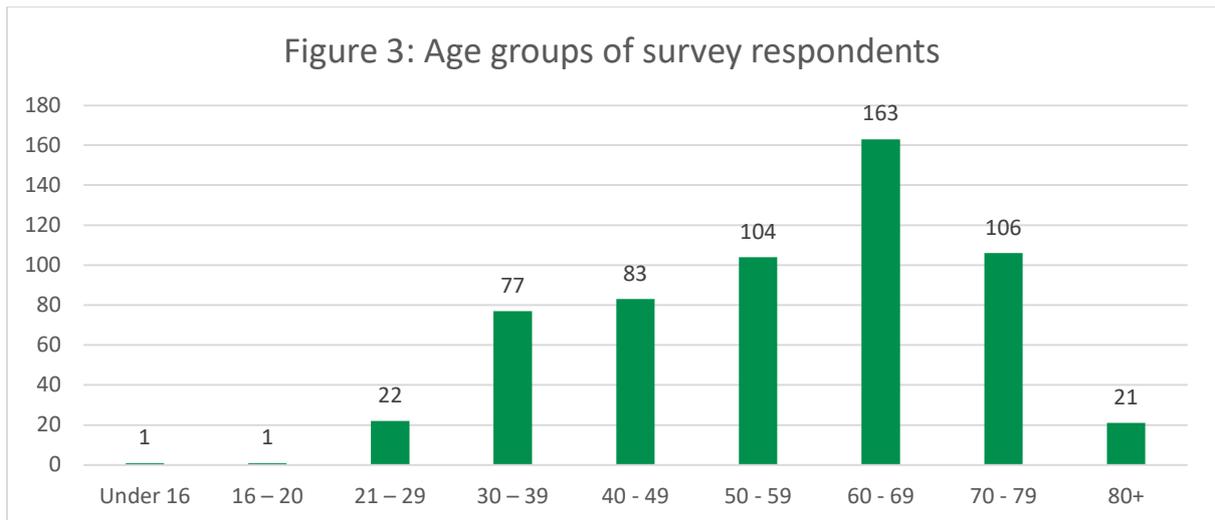
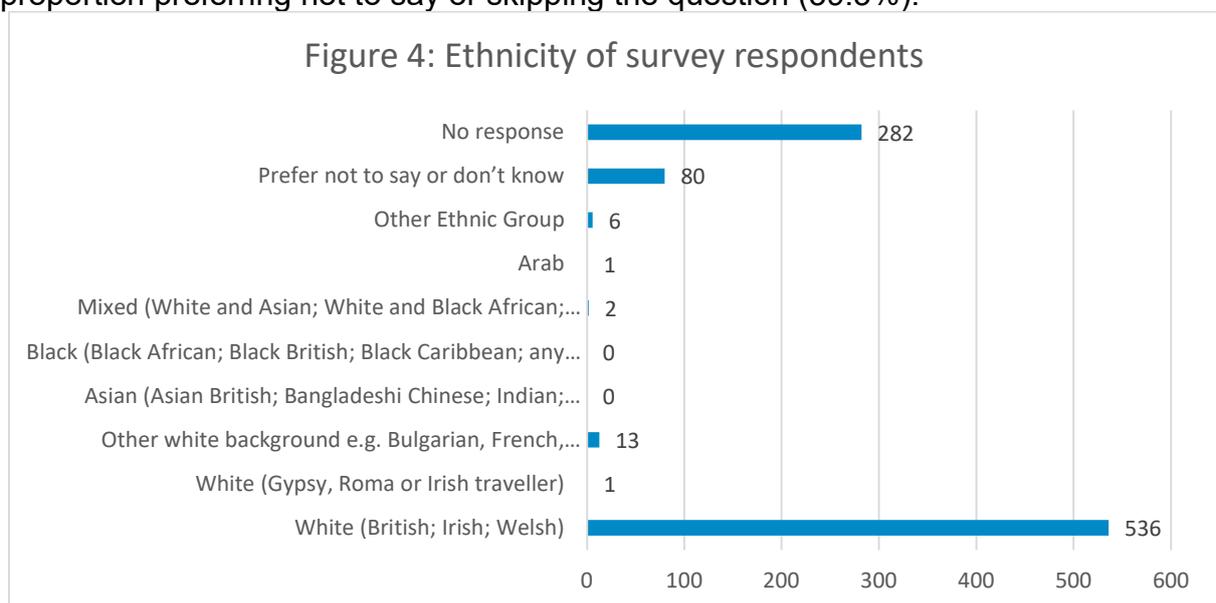


Figure 3 illustrates the distribution of responses by age group. The distribution of respondents by age group fairly typical of Shropshire Council survey respondents which tend to see a skew towards older age groups. Within the budget consultation last year, the 31-54 age group was dominant but this year there were more 60-69 year old survey respondents than any other age group. This may reflect the fact that the survey last year was spread widely through social media due to concerns about the future of waste services and there were fewer concerns expressed in social media this time. Overall, there is good representation within the survey sample from most age groups other than those under the age of 20.

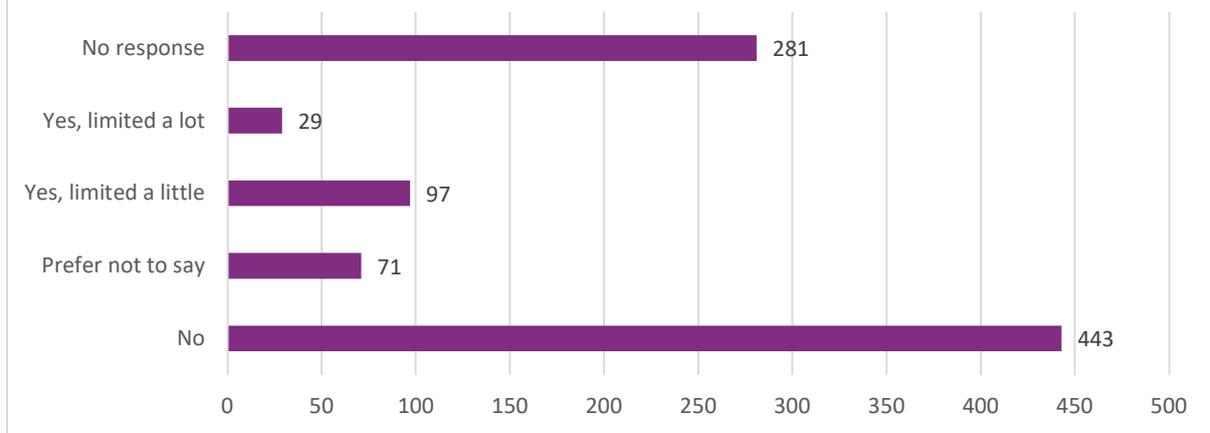


In any consultation it is important to understand whether people of all characteristics are represented and often people of different ethnic backgrounds can be underrepresented in surveys. This may be less of a concern within this type of survey but can be a challenge within surveys used to inform the design of services (e.g. opening hours/days, facilities that need to reflect cultural and religious considerations etc.) Figure 4 shows that the response to the budget consultation was fairly typical proportionately, but the slightly larger sample helped. 58.2% of the respondents were White British, Irish and Welsh with 2.5% from other ethnic groups and a significant proportion preferring not to say or skipping the question (39.3%).



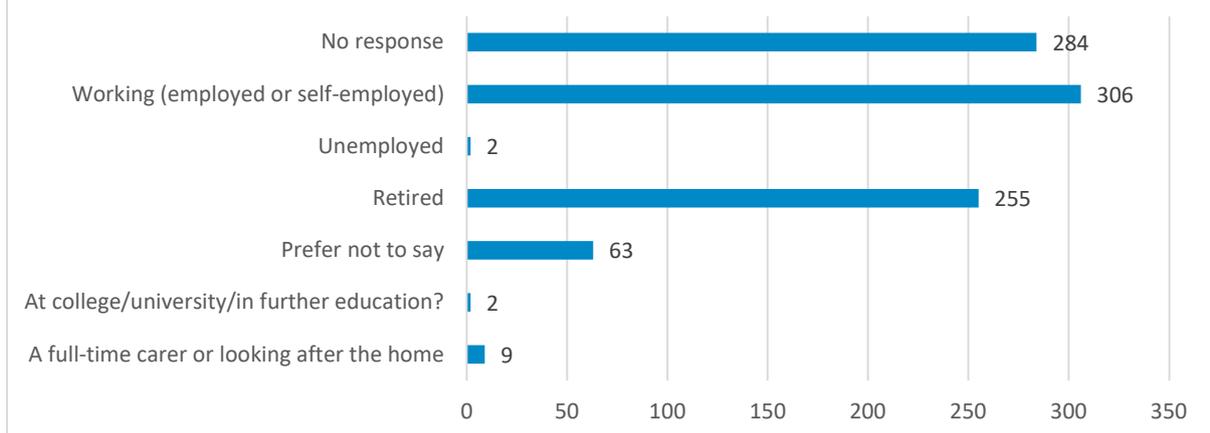
Survey respondents were asked whether they have any long-term illness or disability that limits daily activity. Figure 5 shows that 97 people (19.5%) have a long-standing illness or disability limiting daily activity a little and 29 survey respondents have an illness or disability limiting daily activity a lot (3.1%). Survey respondents were also asked about their caring responsibilities. 11.5% (106 of the 921 survey respondents) are an informal unpaid carer.

Figure 5: Survey respondents by long-term illness or disability that limits daily activity.



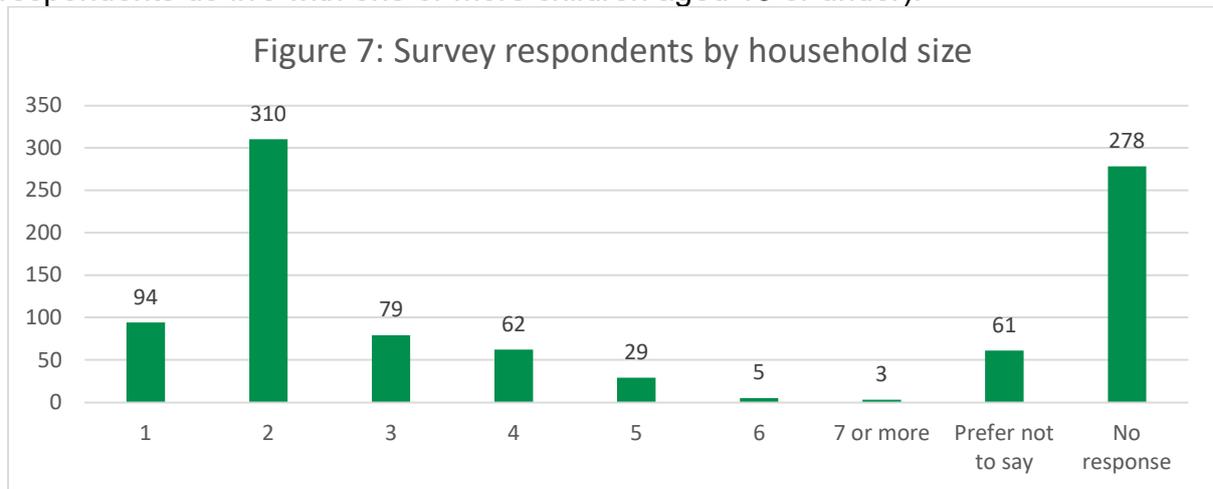
The survey was also used to gather information on labour market status/occupation and the results can be seen in Figure 6. Most respondents (33.2%) are working as employees or in self-employed roles and a slightly lesser proportion are retired (27.7%). Very few students or people who are unemployed or in education completed the survey. 1% of the survey respondents are full time carers. There were also other responses to labour market status/occupation question and these highlighted that, of the 15 other responses, 4 are volunteers, 2 have disabilities which prevent them from working, one is semi-retired and others would have liked to select multiple options (e.g. working and a carer or retired and a carer).

Figure 6: Survey respondents by labour market status/occupation

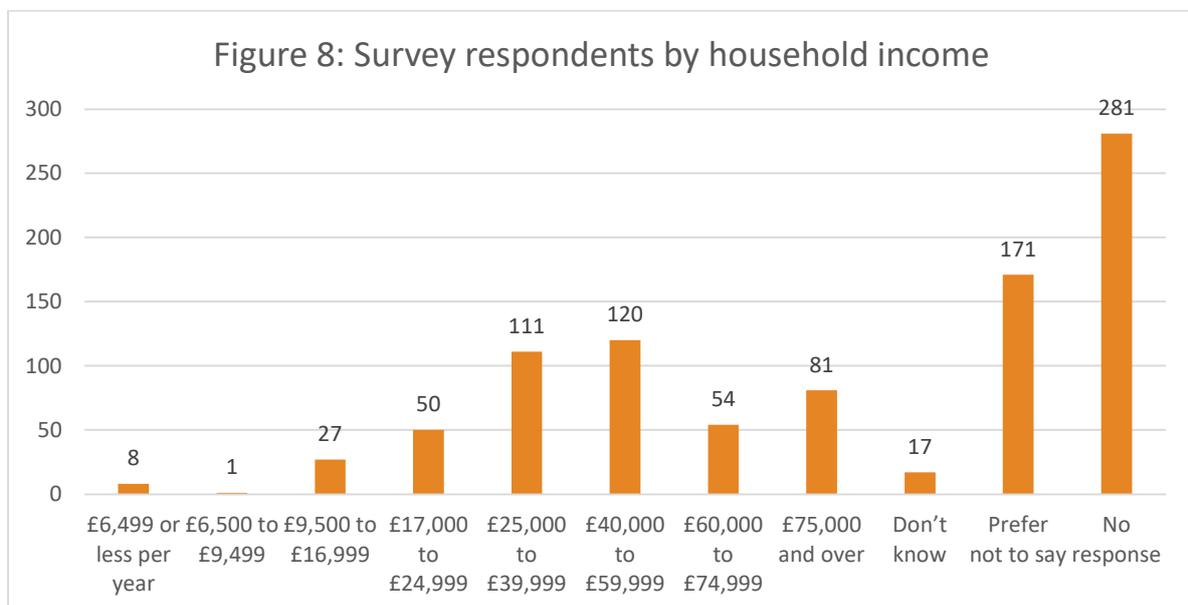


Household size was also a characteristic explored within the online survey. Figure 7 shows that most individuals responding to the budget consultation survey live in households where there are no more than 2 individuals aged over 16. 45.6% of respondents are from households with 2 people aged 16 or over and 11.9% from households with one person aged 16 or over. This result reflects the demographics of Shropshire with its older population.

Figure 7 confirms the results above and highlights that 49.6% of respondent households do not have any children aged 15 or under living within them (22.0% of respondents do live with one or more children aged 15 or under).



The budget consultation collected information on household income bands due to the financial impact of many of the difficult decisions that will need to be taken over the coming months and year. Figure 8 below shows that 3.9% have a household income of £6,015 or below, 30.5% have a household income between £16,105 and £59,999 and 14.7% have a household income of £60,000 or more. Many survey respondents preferred not to say or did not answer the question.

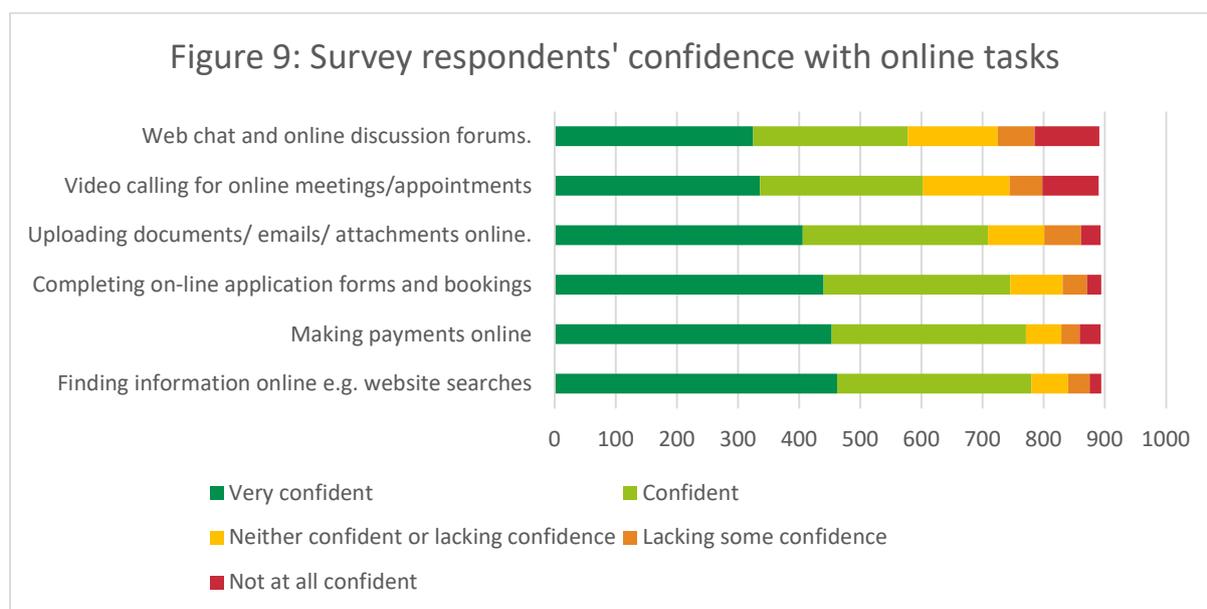


The demographic data collected helps the council understand the profile of respondents and ensure feedback from key groups is not missed. This information can be used for further analysis and to assist in the production of, and further development of equality and social inclusion health impact assessments (known locally as ESHIAs).

The next section of the report considers feedback on online access and service provision.

3 Online Services

One of the ways Shropshire Council can save money is to offer some services online, this form of service provision is usually less expensive than face to face or building based service options. However, it is recognised that many people can have challenges using online services for a wide range of reasons including, costs and equipment, internet connectivity, skills etc. To find out more about this issue all survey respondents were asked ‘How confident are you at completing the following online tasks?’ A list of tasks was included within the survey and Figure 9 displays the results below.

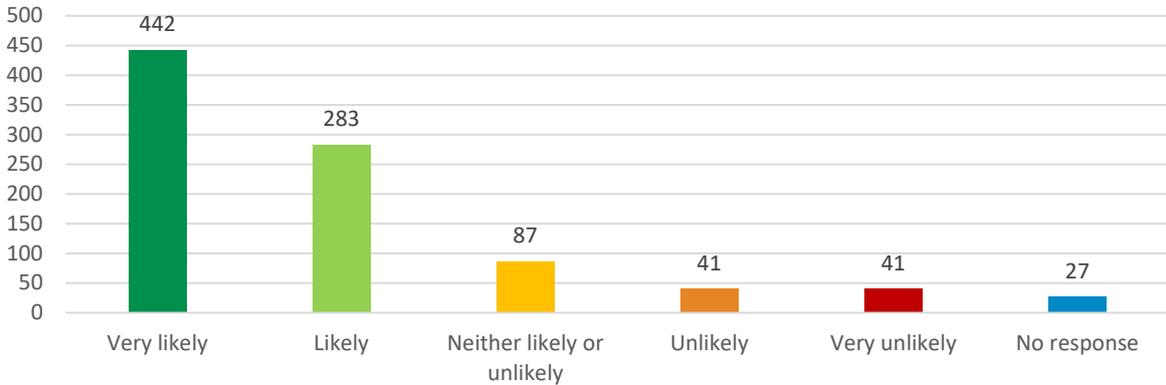


The response shows that 63% of the respondents were either very confident or confident with all of the online tasks listed. The tasks most people can complete with confidence were finding information online (e.g. webpage searches) at 84.7%, making payments online (83.7%) and completing on-line application forms and bookings (80.9%). There was less confidence with web chat and online discussions (62.8% were confident or very confident and 18% lacked confidence or were not at all confident with this online activity) and with video calling for online meetings /appointments (65.5% confident and 15.9% lacking confidence). It should be noted that although survey responses could be completed online and in paper format there were more online responses so there is a bias within the results.

The next question asked, ‘To what extent are you able to use a computer, tablet or your smart phone when using council services?’ It was explained with the question that contacting the council online reduces demand on the phone and face to face. This frees up staff members to assist those who are unable to use online services. The response to the question is shown in Figure 10.

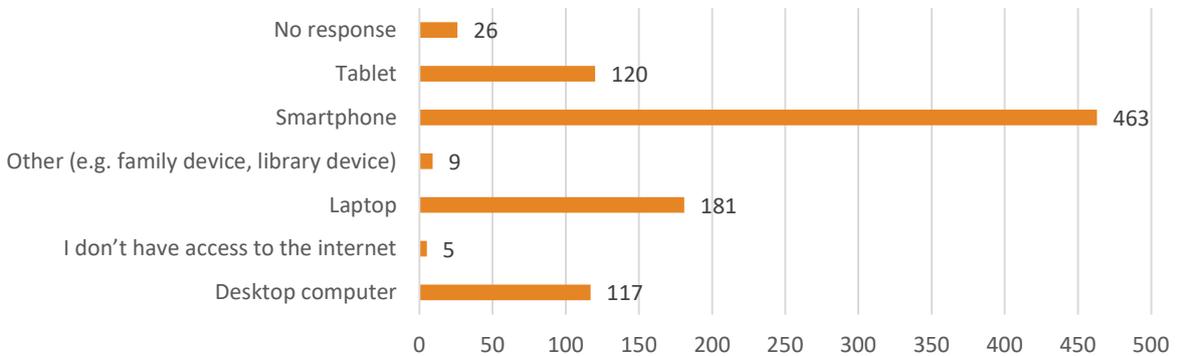
Figure 10 shows that 79% of survey respondents are now very likely or likely to use a computer, tablet or smart phone when using council services. 8% are unlikely or very unlikely to use services with these devices (4% unlikely and 4% very unlikely).

Figure 10: Respondent's likelihood of using council services with a computer, tablet or smart phone.



Survey respondents were asked a little more about this and requested to indicate which type of device they usually use to access the internet. Figure 11 shows that smartphones are now most commonly used for internet access with 50.3% of responses, followed by laptops (19.7%), tablets (13.0%) and desktop computers (12.7%). Less than 10 of the survey respondents use a device elsewhere such as with family members or at the library.

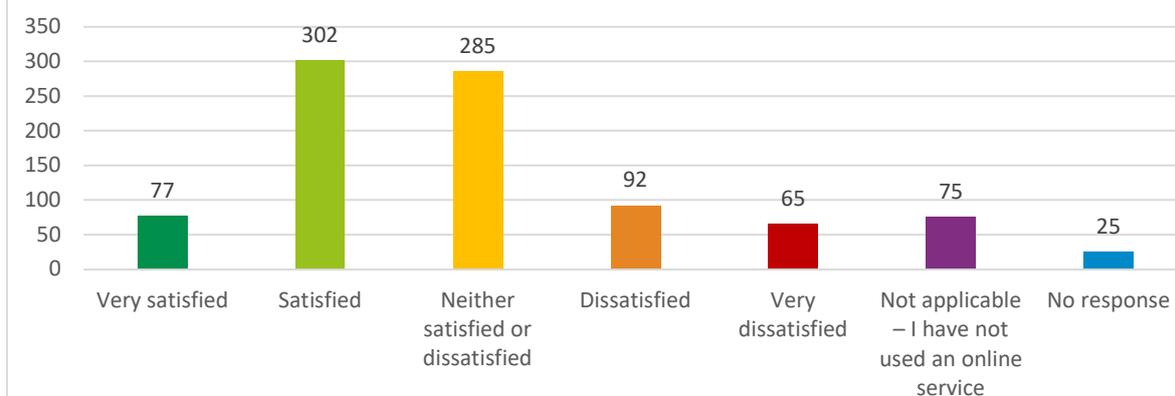
Figure 11: Devices used by survey respondents to access the internet.



All survey respondents were asked if they would be interested in accessing local support services or training to help improve computer skills and learn how to use online services. 87 people responded 'yes' (9.4%).

A question was included to understand experience of online services to date. All survey respondents were asked 'Overall, how satisfied have you been with any Shropshire Council online services you have used?' Figure 12 displays the results. Of all those who have used online services with Shropshire Council (excluding 75 people who have not used an online service and 25 who did not respond to the question), 9.4% are very satisfied, 36.8% are satisfied 11.2% are dissatisfied and 7.9% very dissatisfied (the remainder had a neutral view). This suggests a fairly even split between satisfaction (46.2%) and dissatisfaction (45.9%).

Figure 12: Satisfaction with Shropshire Council's online services



The last question within this section encouraged some comments on the theme of online services and read ‘Do you have any comments to make (including any improvements you would like to see) that would enhance your online experience with the Council?’ There were 286 responses with many people covering more than one main point within their comment (319 main points mentioned). Table 1 displays the feedback received with some example comments below.

Table 1: Comments and suggestions to enhance online experiences with Shropshire Council

Theme	Count	%
Make the service more user friendly/ easier to navigate/ accessible	96	30
Improve the online systems/speed up responses/ better processes	73	23
Personal contact preferred	42	13
Make SC departments more contactable /visible	39	12
Other comments not relating to online experience	35	11
Lack of awareness of demographic/ needs of the people	25	8
Works well/ happy with the service	9	3
Total	319	100

Example comments

- *“I would prefer a face-to-face experience and human interaction.”*
- *“I believe that Shropshire Council should answer the telephone and answer questions that individuals might have. Seems to be little communication directly with the public.”*
- *“I would like there to be easier access to knowing who to contact at the Shropshire Council departments e.g. direct contacts for email addresses and a staffing structure (which should actually be provided).”*
- *“It's all well and good having online services. But the bottom line is, they are seen as services and Government retreating from the public. Especially when a complaint or criticism is being made. People NEED people.”*
- *“It is impossible to speak to anyone via council, online services need to be improved dramatically for it to work.”*
- *“Re-enable Facebook Comments and only block abusive ones. Make it easier to contact you with complaints and issues.”*

- *“Have a live chat facility so that questions can be answered quickly, sometimes it takes ages to get a response.”*
- *“Instant online chat function allowing you to speak directly to a human not a bot.”*
- *“I only use it for council tax and although basic, it does what you need it to do and works well.”*
- *“Online forms need to be simple, straightforward for me to use them. If forms are long winded, complicated or not user friendly this creates stress and I will not complete them.”*
- *“Please do make provision for those that cannot interact online. Digital first is alienating, especially for our older members of the community.”*

The question didn't result in many specific comments about online services that would help further improvement of those online processes or forms. Comments were predominantly very general in nature with many suggesting they want the personal touch, concerns that Shropshire Council doesn't recognise the ageing demographic within service design, suggestions of “forcing” people into online service access and other general comments about how difficult it can be to speak to someone directly delivering the relevant service.

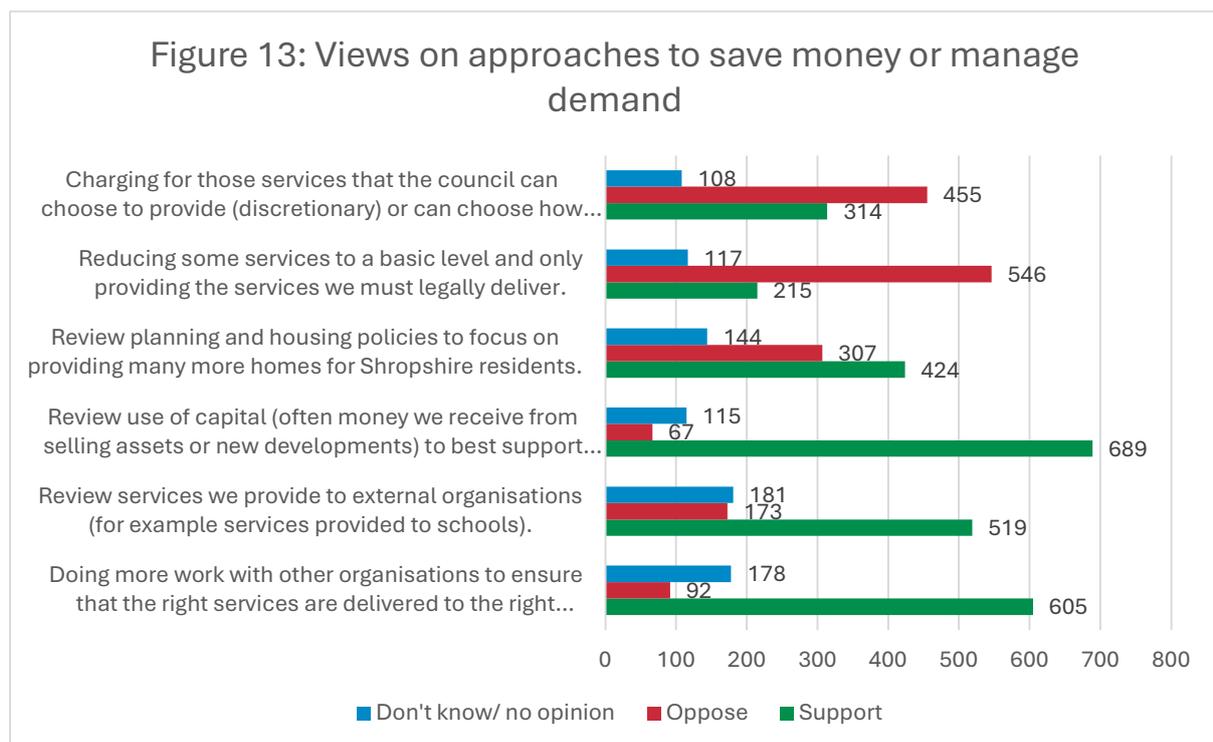
The next section of the report considers the feedback to survey questions covering the different savings and demand management approaches available to Shropshire Council.

4 Savings Approaches

The first question in this section on different approaches to address budget challenges read ‘Do you support any of these ideas for the council saving money or managing demand?’ The approaches listed were:

- Doing more work with other organisations to ensure that the right services are delivered to the right people, in the right places.
- Review services we provide to external organisations (for example services provided to schools).
- Review use of capital (often money we receive from selling assets or new developments) to best support local communities. This will include Community Infrastructure Levy (a charge a developer pays when building new housing).
- Review planning and housing policies to focus on providing many more homes for Shropshire residents.
- Reducing some services to a basic level and only providing the services we must legally deliver.
- Charging for those services that the council can choose to provide (discretionary) or can choose how they are delivered (e.g. leisure and library services).

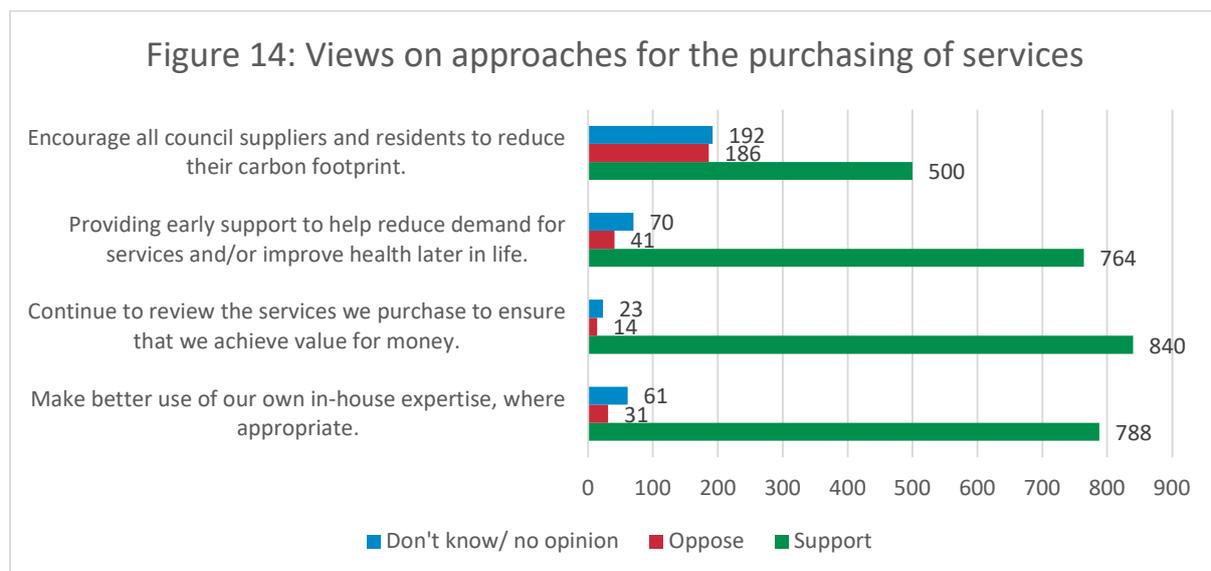
Figure 13 displays the response to this question. The approach with the most support is the review of capital (74.8% support, 7.2% oppose and the remainder don't have an opinion). Second most popular is doing more with other organisations (65.7% support, 10% oppose and the remainder don't have an opinion). Reviewing support to external organisations is also supported. There are more in opposition than support for charging for services (49.4% oppose to 34.1% in support) and reducing services to a basic level (59.3% oppose and 18.8% support).



The next question within this section was worded ‘Do you support any of these approaches that can be used to further change the way Shropshire Council purchases services?’. The options provided were:

- Make better use of our own in-house expertise, where appropriate.
- Continue to review the services we purchase to ensure that we achieve value for money.
- Providing early support to help reduce demand for services and/or improve health later in life.
- Encourage all council suppliers and residents to reduce their carbon footprint.

Figure 14 below shows that there is little opposition to 3 of the suggested approaches. 91.2% support work to review the services we purchase to achieve value for money (1.5% oppose). 85.6% support making better use of in-house expertise (3.4% oppose) and 83.0% support providing early support to help reduce demand/improve health (4.5% oppose). The use of in-house rather than external delivery also features elsewhere in the feedback received and is covered later in the report. The only suggestion with less overall support was for action to reduce carbon footprint (54.3% support and 20.2% oppose). This has been a theme of feedback within other council surveys. There appears to be a split within the local population between those who strongly encourage carbon reduction and environmental considerations and a smaller minority who stress concerns that this cannot be a priority currently within economic circumstances.

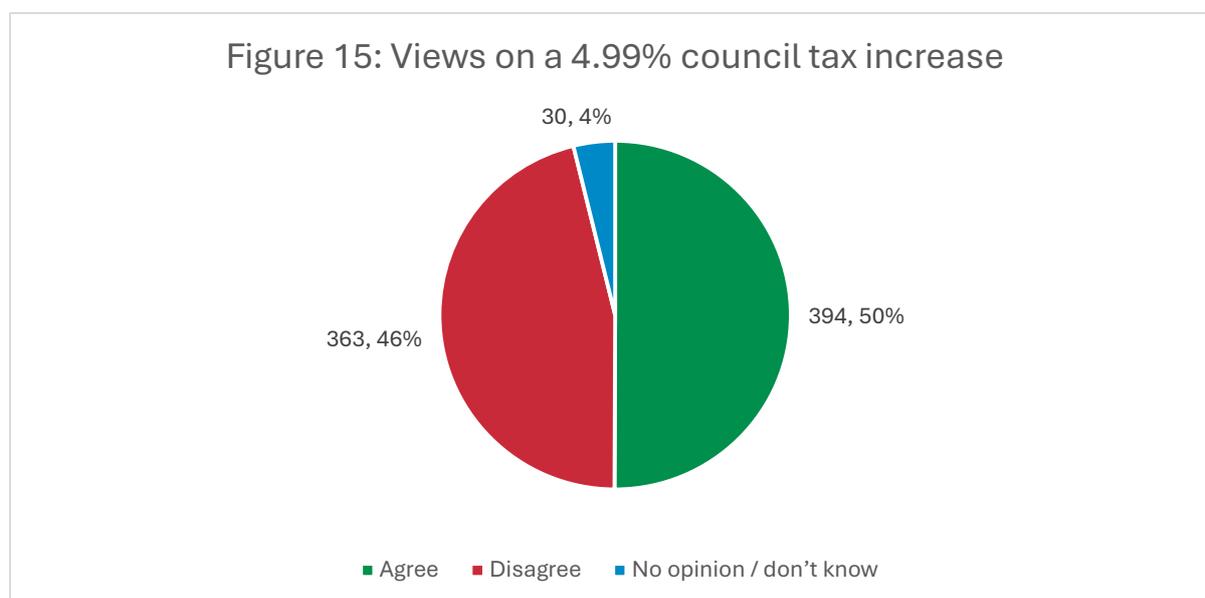


Overall, there is strong support for most of these approaches other than charging more and reducing service delivery. This reflects the public understanding of which decisions are most difficult to make.

The next section of the report looks more closely at the issue of council tax increases.

5 Council Tax

Each budget consultation includes questions about council tax to understand current public opinion. Due to economic challenges over recent years questions have focused on the need to increase council tax to cover rising costs. Shropshire Council's budget consultation for 2026/27 asked 'What is your view on Shropshire Council's proposal to increase Council Tax by 4.99% (2.99% on council tax, 2% on the adult social care precept)? This is equivalent to an extra £1.35 a week for a band B property and £1.73 a week for a Band D property.' Figure 15 below illustrates mixed views. 50% agree with a 4.99% increase and 46% disagree.



Additional analysis of the results by household income bracket shows that most of those who agree to the 4.99% increase live in household earning £25,000 a year or more, with proportionately more people agreeing if their household income is above £60,000. However, there are still mixed views within each income bracket and opinion about the need to increase council tax is not very closely correlated to household income.

Survey respondents were asked 'If allowed by Government, please indicate whether you would agree or disagree with paying more Council Tax above the 4.99% next year?' The response to the question is shown in Figure 16. Fewer local residents would be happy to pay above 4.99% (20.5% agree and 60.8% disagree, the remainder did not express an opinion). Approximately just under half of those who would agree to pay 4.99% would pay over that amount.

A further question within this set of questions on council tax was used to explore further increases. 3 levels of council tax increase were presented; alongside the income this would raise:

- An additional 2% (so, 6.99% increase in total) = £4 million
- An additional 5% (so, 9.99% increase in total) = £10 million
- An additional 10% (so, 14.99% increase in total) = £20 million

Figure 16: Views on paying above a 4.99% council tax increase (if agreed by Government)

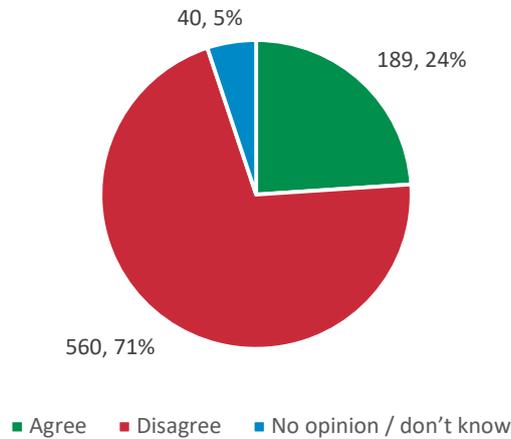


Figure 17: The level that would be acceptable for an increase in council tax payments

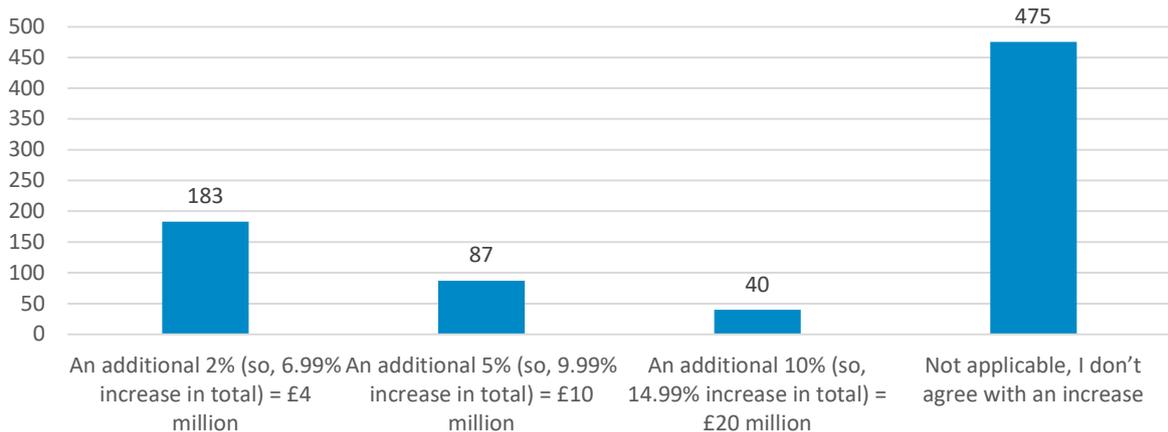
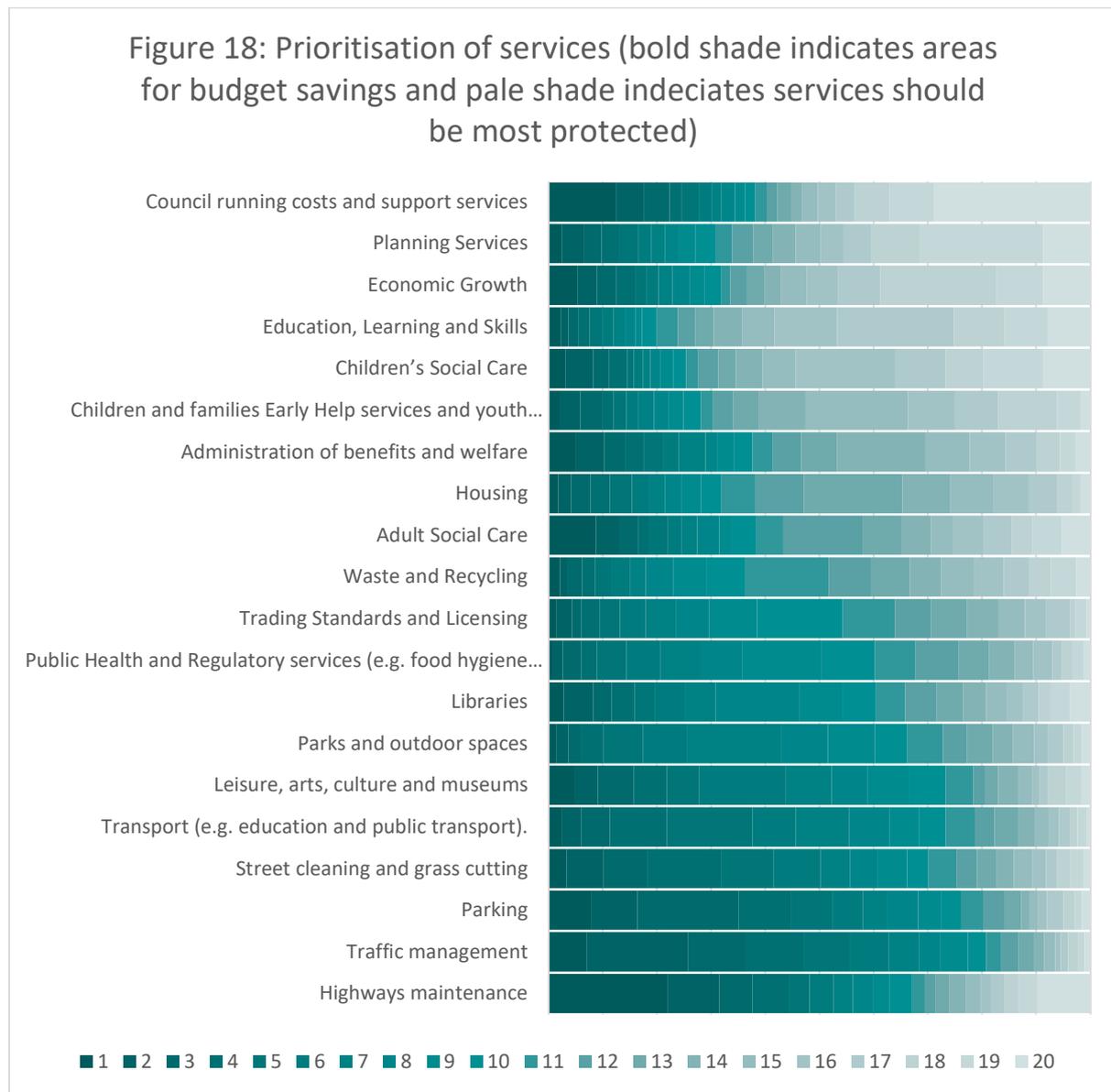


Figure 17 above highlights that when specifically asked about levels of council tax increases, 51.6% would prefer no increase at all (recognising that a 4.99% increase was presented as the likely level of council tax for the coming year). 19.9% of respondents would consider an additional 2% acceptable (a 6.99% increase in total), 9.4% would find an increase to 9.99% acceptable and only 4.3% would consider a 14.99% increase acceptable. The responses suggest an acknowledgement that the council's financial position requires consideration of council tax increases but the response to the question suggest there are very mixed views on this subject. Responses to other questions covered later in this report further explore the local impact of the council's budget situation.

Recognising that without council tax increases, there may be a need to reduce service provision in some areas, a question was included within the budget consultation questionnaire which read 'Which services do you think are least important and would form the most acceptable areas to make further savings? (Please rank these in order of greatest savings to be made top to least savings (most protected) at the bottom).' Figure 18 displays the results. Please note it is possible that there may have been

some confusion in responding to the question because responses to other survey questions contradict the results. However, taking the responses as provided, suggests that services that should be least protected include traffic management, parking, transport, leisure, street cleaning and grass cutting. Most protected services include education, learning and skills, children’s social care, children and families Early Help and youth services and planning services.



An opportunity was provided for any other comments on council tax. There were 392 comments in total, and many people made more than one main point within their comment. The summary of the themes raised is shown below in Table 2 with example comments below.

Table 2: Comments about Council Tax

Theme	Count	%
No to the increase - negative comments about previous/ existing administration/projects	65	15
No to the increase - current economic climate/cost of living crisis	63	14
No to the increase - any other reason e.g. rural areas, NHS plugging	33	8
No to the increase - no reason	11	3
Neutral comments e.g. wasting money, stop spending	28	6
Agree to increase - for meaningful change	24	5
Agree to increase - no supporting comments	3	1
Other comments e.g. green bins/spending/council wasting money	185	42
Other including comments about the consultation	27	6
Total	439	100

Example comments

- *“I do not support. Shropshire Council has been poorly run over a number of years, and countless opportunities have been missed to address its financial problems but through ignorance and lack of will this has not happened.”*
- *“Costs are already high and should be managed efficiently. I don’t see any evidence of innovative strategies to manage money - it just seems the option of ‘stop doing things’ is the only suggestion.”*
- *“Family budgets are already being continually reduced by costs of living etc for me anything above 5% is just not doable and will cause further financial hardship.”*
- *“Economic pressures mean families and those living in more expensive Banding areas are also facing tough financial times including redundancy or salary cuts. This means they also cannot afford % increases in Council Tax. This will force people to sell up and leave the county.”*
- *“We need a strong and high-quality local authority that serves the children, young people and adults of Shropshire well and I support increasing council tax to support this.”*
- *“Please minimise the use of external consultants. Please avoid very poor decisions such as buying shopping centres. Please increase Council tax steadily annually to avoid big hikes. Please take decisions based on need not political expediency. Please avoid “vanity projects”.”*
- *“My overall tax bill is too much i.e. HMRC and Council tax together = poor value for money. Stop spending on projects which do not show positive outputs. Learn to drop things which have no or little quantitative impact.”*
- *“This is one of the most economically deprived counties in England. Many residents are becoming frustrated and irate with misspending and tax rises. This applies extra pressure to struggling families. My concern is people will begin to vote for more extreme policies....”*

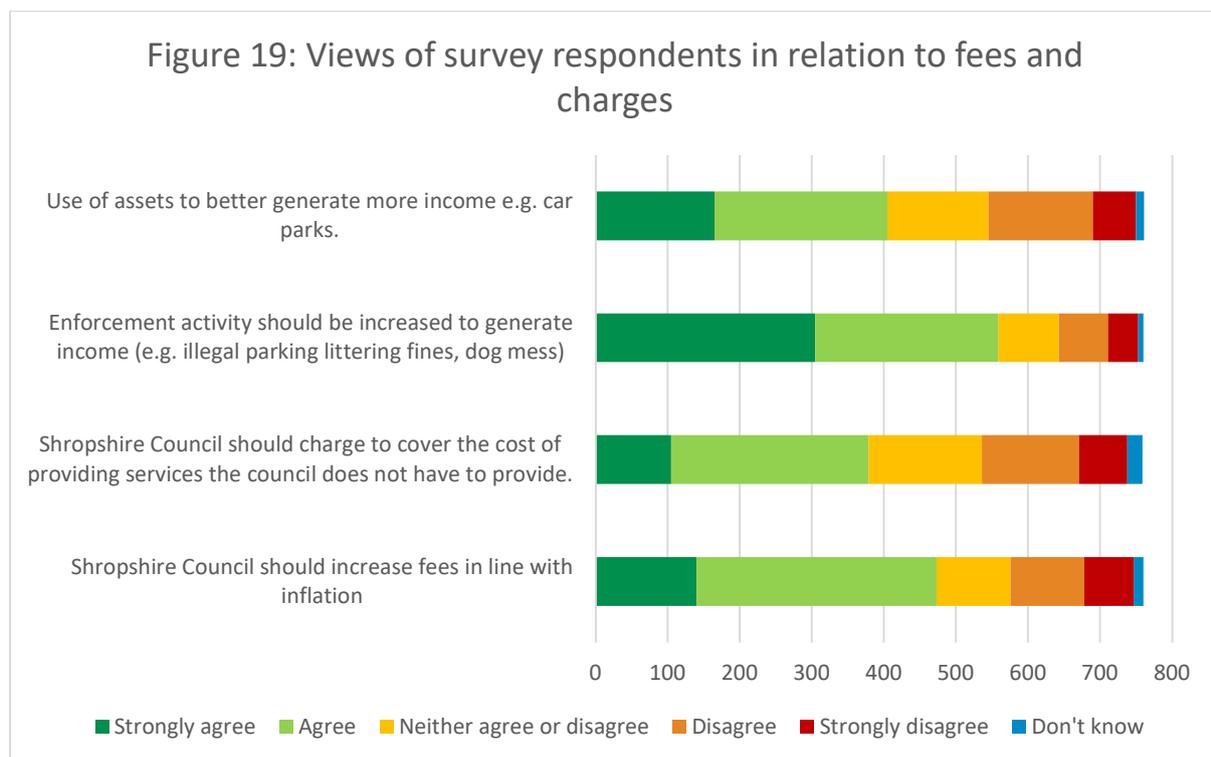
As shown above, local people predominantly do not want an increase in council tax (only 6% comment that they would agree with an increase). The reasons for concerns about council tax increases range from comments suggesting Shropshire Council has not managed finances well in the past, to the economic climate and other reasons including rural areas not seeing as much support or investment as Shrewsbury/urban centres. There were also a lot of 'no' responses without any comment to give a reason. For those who agreed to an increase this was caveated with comments that any increase must result in meaningful change. There were a high proportion of comments in this section about how to fill in the survey (with concerns about how long it took to

complete), and other comments that did not directly relate to council tax such as comments about charging for the green waste service.

The last question within this section of the questionnaire offered another way of generating income through the use of fees and charges. Survey respondents were asked their views on the following approaches:

- Shropshire Council should increase fees in line with inflation.
- Shropshire Council should charge to cover the cost of providing services the council does not have to provide.
- Enforcement activity should be increased to generate income (e.g. illegal parking littering fines, dog mess)
- Use of assets to better generate more income e.g. car parks.

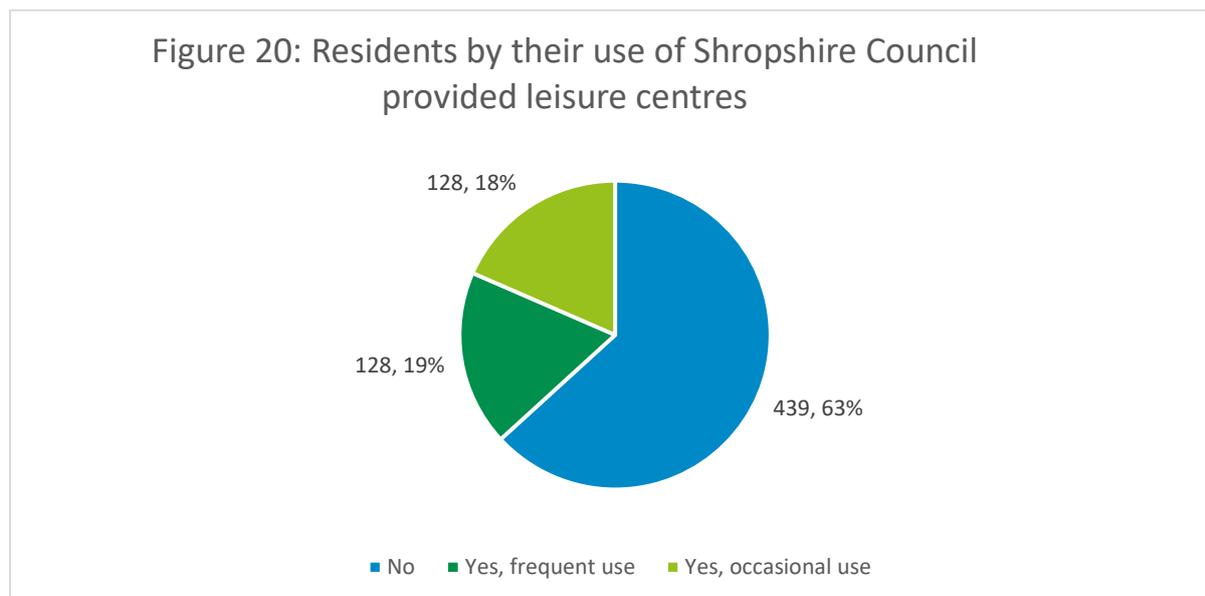
Figure 19 shows that 60.7% support enforcement activity to generate income (11.9% disagree), 51.4% support increases in fees in line with inflation (18.6% disagree). When considering increases in charges for services the council does not have to provide 41.2% agree and 21.9% disagree. The results are similar for use of assets to generate income (e.g. car parking charges, 44.0% agree and 22.3% disagree).



The next section of the report considers the responses from budget consultation respondents when they were asked about managing the future budget for leisure services.

6 Leisure Services

Leisure Services was one of the areas of service presented within the budget consultation for public feedback. The first question in this section explored use of leisure services by the survey respondents and showed that 63% of those who answered the question don't use Shropshire Council provided leisure services (47.6% of all survey respondents) compared to 37% of question respondents who do use the leisure services (27.8% of all survey respondents).

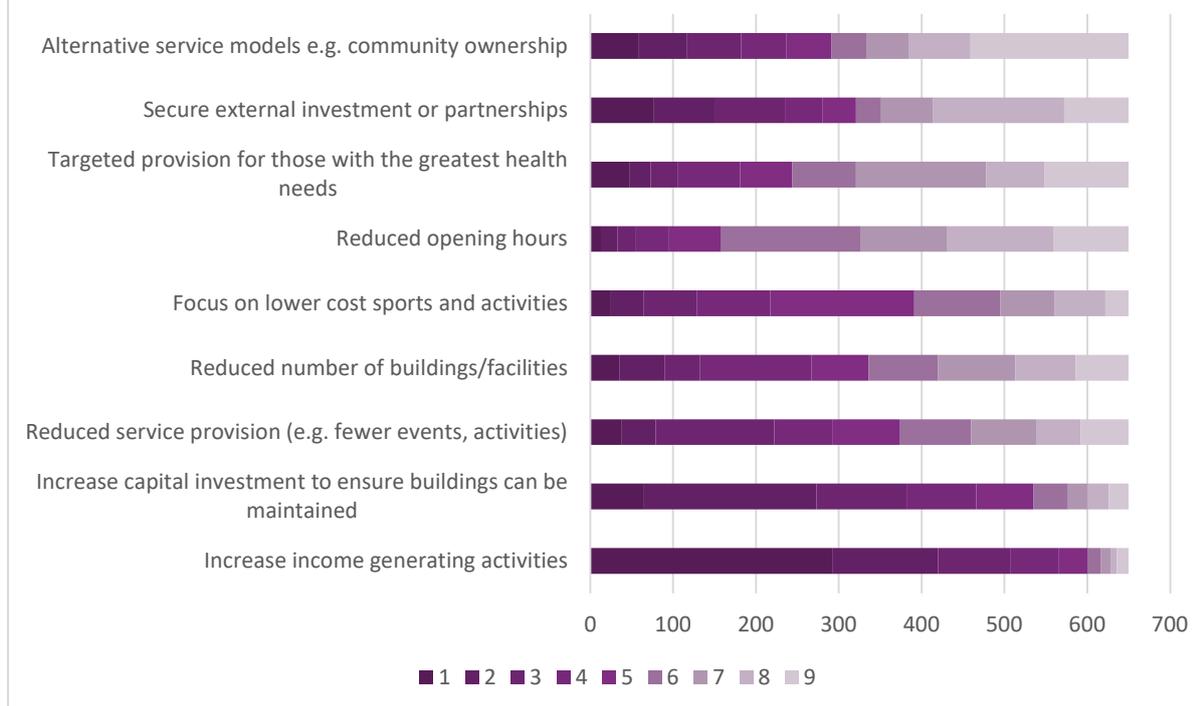


People were encouraged to consider a range of options for reducing budget pressures:

- Increase income generating activities
- Increase capital investment to ensure buildings can be maintained
- Reduced service provision (e.g. fewer events, activities)
- Reduced number of buildings/facilities
- Focus on lower cost sports and activities
- Reduced opening hours
- Targeted provision for those with the greatest health needs
- Secure external investment or partnerships
- Alternative service models e.g. community ownership

Each survey respondent was asked to rank each of these options from 1 (the option they found most acceptable) to 9 (the least acceptable to them). Figure 21 displays the response to the question and highlights that the most supported options are increasing income generating activities, increasing capital investment to ensure buildings can be maintained and focusing on lower cost sports and activities. The least popular options are reduced opening hours, targeted health provision for people with the greatest needs and considering alternative service models such as community ownership.

Figure 21: Residents views - the darker the shade the more support for the option presented for leisure services



The last question within this section requested comments and it read 'Please use the space below for comments in relation to future ways of reducing spend on leisure services and improving health and wellbeing'. There were 189 comments in total. Some people covered more than one main theme within their response, and this is illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3: Comments regarding ways of reducing spend on leisure services and improving health and wellbeing

Theme	Count	%
Charge more for services/remove concessions/encourage income generation	27	14
Don't close down the facilities	25	13
Run current ones more efficiently/develop models/provide more accessible facilities	25	13
Collaborate with others to share running costs/management	23	12
Manage the services according to popularity	15	8
Sell/close down facilities that are not used/underused	15	8
Community involvement needed	9	5
Stop outsourcing	8	4
Make services more accessible e.g. service distribution throughout county/ free walks	7	4
Leisure services not as important as others - let people take responsibility	7	4
Other comments - including negative comments	35	18
Total	196	100

Example comments

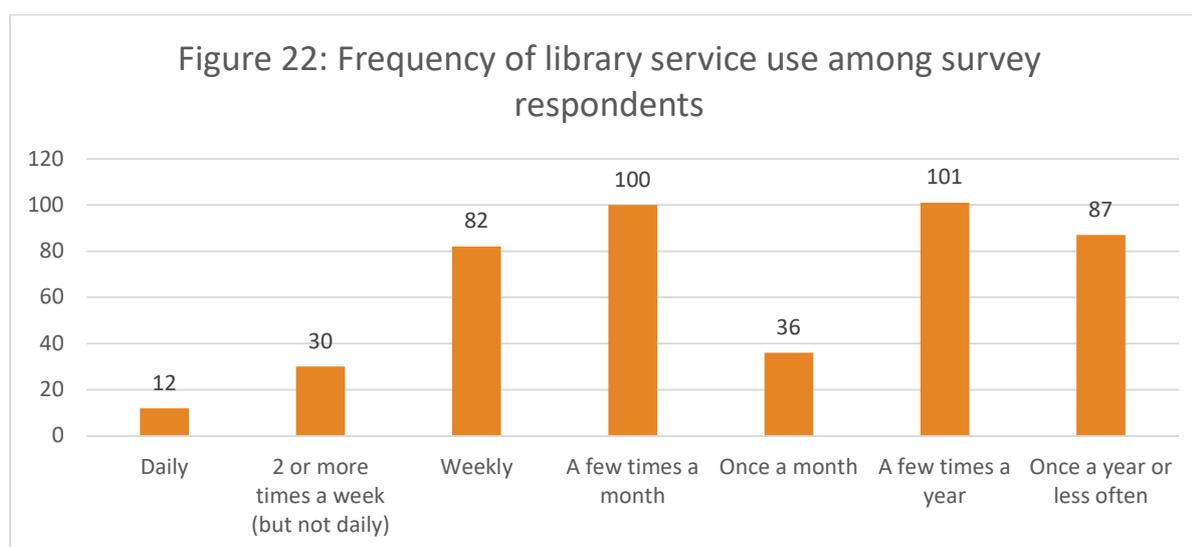
- *“Encourage people to make their own physical/mental activity instead of relying on council provision.”*
- *“Using outdoor space is free! Individuals need to motivate themselves to help themselves without being burdens on the rest that are just keeping their heads above the water themselves. It is not fair that individuals who work endlessly, cut back and go without to have to pay more for individuals that just take, take, take.”*
- *“Root and branch review of services to ensure leisure facilities are maintained.”*
- *“Ultimately, you may need to close down most leisure services in the short term. These are a luxury. In Shropshire, there are plenty of free walks etc. People will need to be creative.”*
- *“They need to be available when people want them, and effectively managed.”*
- *“Try to preserve infrastructure for future days when things get better.”*
- *“Use capital to lower energy costs e.g. solar panels for swimming pool.”*
- *“Maintaining and improving good levels of health in a community has long term benefits of reducing the need for medical intervention. Looking at engaging more voluntary workers to support skilled members of staff could enhance facilities and reduce costs.”*
- *“Telford council has a membership scheme to encourage use of council services i.e. leisure centres and its golf course, this has the effect of making people feel part of the area Shropshire has always been distant and seen by residents as the enemy.”*
- *“Sport and leisure are so important in our society and needs to be at low cost to encourage all to participate. The options given in this survey show the challenges that all councils face.”*
- *“You cannot improve Health and wellbeing by reducing spend, more community involvement is needed.”*
- *“Cutting leisure and sports services will lead to more demands on health and well-being services”*
- *“Closures of leisure centres or sports facilities should be the LAST resort of any council. Once lost, they're gone for good. 2. Avoid privatising at all costs. Any profits go to the private company, or shareholders, not back to the council for reinvestment.”*
- *“There needs to be a focus on long term income diversification. Partnerships with other local gyms or grants for people to open low-cost gyms and council memberships. Reduced prices for off peak hours etc.”*

Key messages include working to try to prevent any service losses by charging more for services, removing concessions and exploring other ways of enabling income generation. Many residents had strong views that leisure services should not be lost and there were quite a few negative comments suggesting that Shropshire Council has not done enough to ensure services are run efficiently. Many people suggest that new models of provision with more accessible facilities may benefit the county and there are other suggestions that Shropshire Council could collaborate with others to share running costs/management. A smaller proportion of residents commented that it may be necessary to prioritise and close some facilities to protect others. A smaller proportion feel that individuals should take more responsibility for their own health and wellbeing.

The next section of the report considers some similar issues in relation to Shropshire Council delivered library services and budget allocations.

7 Library Services

In the same way as leisure services, survey respondents were asked about their use of library services to understand how this may influence opinion. The first question within the section read 'How often do you, or a family member, use a Shropshire Council library (including library buildings and the mobile library)?' The response is illustrated within Figure 22. The results show that respondents either use library services a few times a month or more often or are very occasional users (a few times a year or less often). 224 of the 921 survey respondents use one or more libraries in Shropshire a few times a month or more often (24% of all respondents).



A range of options were presented in relation to financial management. These options were not all related to cost savings but there was a recognition that investment will be challenging in the current economic environment. The options presented were:

- Reduction in library buildings/ locations
- Reduced service provision (e.g. fewer events, activities)
- Reduced opening hours
- Reductions in library resources/stock
- Increases in self-serve options (reducing demand on staffing levels)
- Increases in online resources or lower cost access options
- Reduction in the mobile library offer
- Moving library venues to cheaper alternatives
- Increasing the services available within libraries

Figure 23 displays the response to these options when survey respondents were asked to rank them from the most acceptable option at the top (1) to the least acceptable option bottom (9). The most acceptable options are presented as a darker shade of green within Figure 23.

Figure 23: Residents views - the darker the shade the more support for the option presented for library services

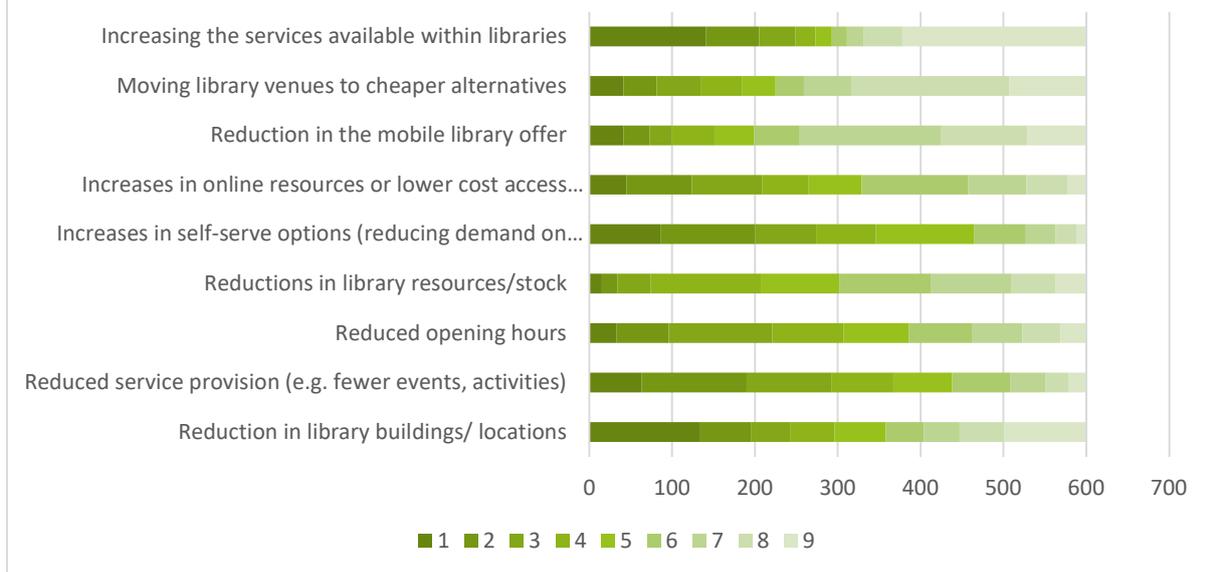


Figure 23 shows that increases in self-serve options are the most popular savings method followed by increase service provision within libraries and a reduction in library locations. The least popular approaches are moving libraries into other locations, increasing services within libraries and a reduction in library locations.

The last question within this section requested comments and it read ‘Please use the space below for comments in relation to future ways of reducing expenditure within library services’. There were 201 comments in total. A few people covered more than one main theme within their response, and this is illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4: Comments regarding ways of reducing spend within library services

Theme	Count	%
Important to communities for education/resources/accessibility	55	26
Collaborate with other services/vary the services	45	21
Reduce opening hours/provision of services/go digital	31	8
Generate income e.g. fundraising/book fees/events/hire out kindles	18	8
Use of volunteers to support/run the library	8	4
Do not close the services - no supporting comment	15	7
Other comments relating to survey	13	6
Other comments including negative comments	29	14
Total	214	100

Example comments

- *“Libraries are key features of a civilised society. Keeping them going through these difficult times is critical so that they once again become the norm should financial circumstances improve again.”*
- *“Remember that libraries are the only truly accessible option left for many to access council services in their locality. These are statutory services and should be protected at all costs.”*

- *“Libraries should become hubs for different services to come together reducing the need for other premises.”*
- *“Widen the range of activities in Libraries to include some which generate income e.g. speakers/performances.”*
- *“Increasing opening and offering additional services will generate income, room hire, events etc.”*
- *“Cut where possible to look at savings, but never remove the service, it's a requirement and people need it, but it needs managing appropriately.”*
- *“Reducing the number of days main libraries are open rather than those in more rural areas.”*
- *“The larger libraries such as Shrewsbury are open six days a week. It would be fair to reduce their opening hours as smaller, more rural libraries already have reduced opening hours.”*
- *“The Church Stretton library is an extremely valuable resource for the local community and it's services should be maintained.”*
- *“Keep mobile libraries. Essential for families living in rural areas.”*
- *“It is of utmost importance that mobile and other libraries remain. Learning is of the most vital importance also rural areas get little other contact.”*
- *“Small villages miles from a town need support or isolation will increase mental health needs.”*
- *“Recruit and invest in more volunteers who can help support the functioning of libraries.”*
- *“The E library is very important to me, as a visually impaired reader.”*
- *“Collect in the £22 million of unpaid Council Tax and use some of that where it is needed for Library shortfall, those residents that have been paying have been led to believe their contributions were helping fund Libraries.”*

The example comments help to illustrate some of the themes raised within feedback but overall key messages from those who participated within the consultation included a call to protect library provision, especially within rural communities.

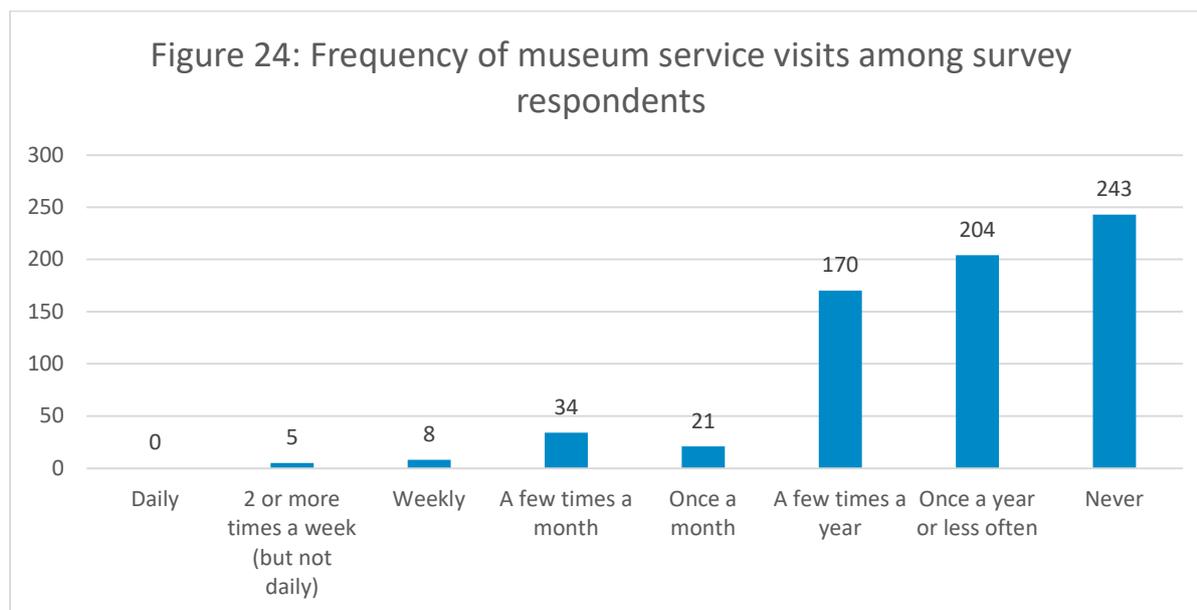
23% of all respondents commented and it is interesting to note that those over the age of 50 made 71% of comments. Alongside a dominant call for support for libraries there were suggestions of generating income and to collaborate with other services loss e.g. put a banking hub in the library. There was a view that if the council cannot support the libraries, then income should be generated by hiring out the buildings or charging for membership. There was also the idea to close any underused facilities to concentrate on the more popular/income generating ones, and to run the current ones more efficiently. There were also negative comments within the responses that generally comprised of views on the council or the budget consultation.

The dominant view in comments is that libraries are an important resource to communities for education, facilities and accessibility to council services.

The next section of the report considers feedback in relation to museum services.

8 Museum Services

A similar format to the previous consultation questions was used for Museum Services. All survey respondents were asked how often they or a member of their family uses Shropshire Council museums. These include Shrewsbury Museum and Art Gallery, Much Wenlock Museum, Shrewsbury Castle and Coleham Pumping Station. Shropshire Museums Collections Centre stores the museum collections. Figure 24 highlights that 26% (238 of 921) respondents use the museums service a few times a year or more.

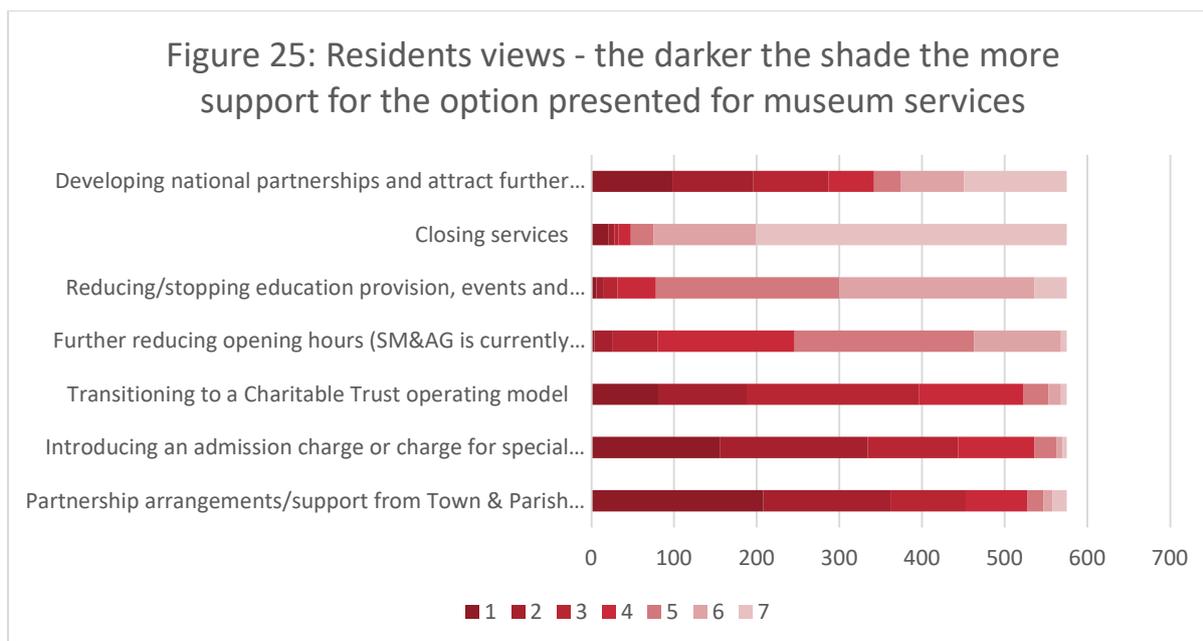


The possible options presented within the consultation for museum service savings and other budgets options included:

- Partnership arrangements/support from Town & Parish Councils
- Introducing an admission charge or charge for special exhibitions
- Transitioning to a Charitable Trust operating model
- Further reducing opening hours (SM&AG is currently closed Sundays & Mondays, Much Wenlock is closed four days per week in Winter, three days per week in summer)
- Reducing/stopping education provision, events and exhibitions
- Closing services
- Developing national partnerships and attract further external investment

Figure 25 displays the response to these options when survey respondents were asked to rank them from the most acceptable option at the top (1) to the least acceptable option bottom (9). The most acceptable options are presented as a darker shade of red within Figure 25. The most popular methods for future changes are partnership arrangements/support from Town & Parish Councils, introducing an admission charge or charging for special exhibitions. Developing national partnerships to attract external investment was also popular but overall charging seems to be accepted as a way to maintain museum services. The least popular approaches are closing services and reducing/stopping education provision, events and exhibitions.

Figure 25: Residents views - the darker the shade the more support for the option presented for museum services



An open comment box was used to capture opinion in more detail. There were 129 comments in total. A few people covered more than one main theme within their response, and this is illustrated in Table 5.

Table 5: Comments regarding ways of reducing spend within museum services

Theme	Count	%
Generate income/charge for exhibitions	27	21
Review/reduce provisions of services e.g. opening hours/reduction in opening/monitor how popular/staff reductions	22	17
Collaborate with others/outsource privately/involve the community	16	12
Museum services are important to society -education/health and wellbeing/visitors attraction	16	12
Current services need managing more efficiently/effectively	7	5
Use of volunteers to support/run museums	9	7
Other comments including negative/not relevant to question/regarding survey	34	26
Total	131	100

Example comments

- “Again - a more businesslike approach instead of ‘doing what we’ve always done’ can generate interest and income. Draw in talent and investment.”
- “A subscription model to services could be offered to those who use these services. Similar to say National Trust membership and season visitation tickets; personal and family.”
- “Get more grants for excellent touring exhibitions and charge appropriately, while offering free entry to students.”
- “Look at creative income-generating options of the facilities. ‘A Night at the museum’ events, social event space- you have a cafe there so maybe partner with them and offer a package to singles clubs, quiz night etc.”
- “Expand volunteer workers. Look for partnerships.”
- “Our family use the museum services on a weekly basis. Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery is a friendly and welcoming space we all enjoy spending time in. Our visits there significantly improve our health and wellbeing.”

- *“As above, the arts is usually an easy target to cut when budgets are tight. The culture and heritage of Shropshire is so important and should be maintained and celebrated.”*
- *“There is very little left to cut. Shropshire barely has a museum service anymore, and further cuts would effectively mean ceasing completely.”*
- *“Charging for special exhibitions is more acceptable than introducing a general admission charge.”*
- *“Reducing hours but only in museums that open full time.”*
- *“Shrewsbury museum should have it's 2-day closure in the week, surely a Sunday is a footfall day as working people are generally off Saturday and Sunday and having family days. I feel it is short sighted to close on a Sunday.”*
- *“As with libraries - venues could be maximised as community hubs.”*
- *“If Shrewsbury has a high footfall, then investing as listed above would bring more visitors. Try to get good and large exhibitions from the British Museums. Liverpool did it with the Terracotta Army.”*
- *“Look at best practice and adopt and or tweak the model. Plymouth is an interesting example.”*
- *“Do not target museums as low hanging fruit. SM&AG is a vital part Shrewsbury’s cultural offering and huge draw for tourism. However, our gem of a castle building is an awful dated sexist disaster of a museum which is ripe for targeting for complete overhaul with the help of investors, thus increasing its fundraising potential.”*

The comments show that many local residents highly value the museums service and the benefits it brings to the county. There appears to be strong opposition within comments to any closures or loss of provision but some support for increased charges.

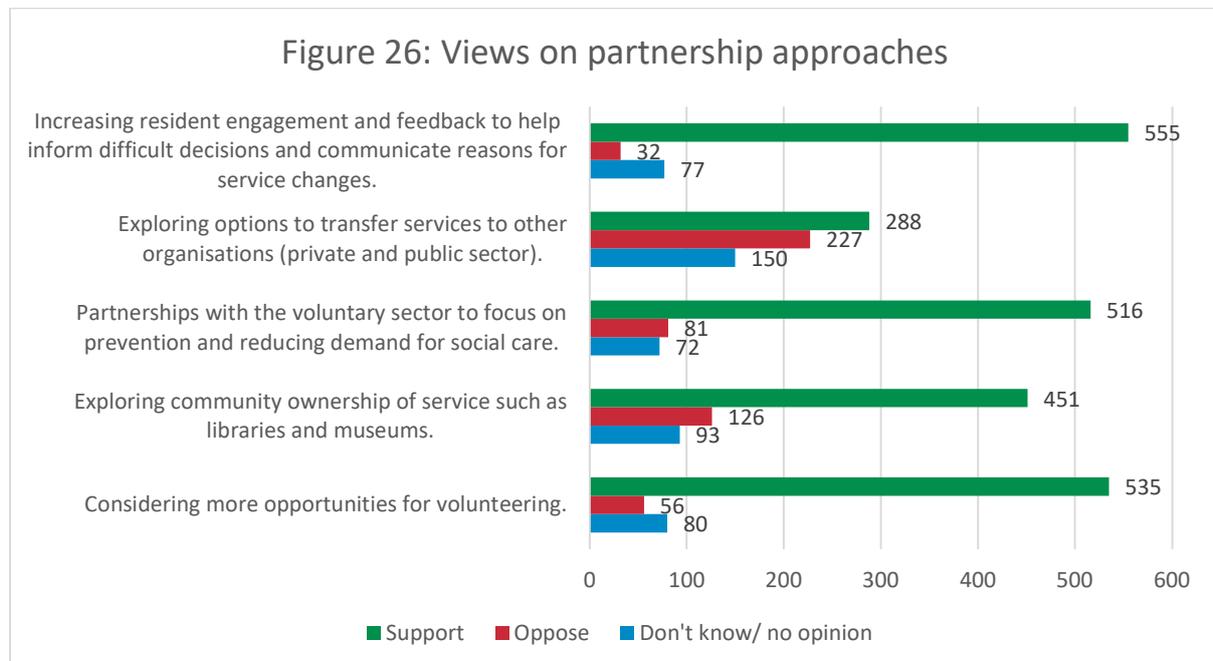
The next section of the report turns to look more closely at partnership working. This was an option mentioned within the questions on leisure services, library services and museum services and is an area the council was keen to explore further and to obtain public feedback on.

9 Partnership Working

Partnership working was a theme explored throughout the budget consultation, recognising how important this approach can be to ensuring the right services are delivered by the right organisations and in the right way. Collaboration can be a way of maximising efficiency and using skills and experience of different bodies to maximise community benefit. The budget consultation requested feedback on 5 approaches:

- Considering more opportunities for volunteering.
- Exploring community ownership of service such as libraries and museums.
- Partnerships with the voluntary sector to focus on prevention and reducing demand for social care.
- Exploring options to transfer services to other organisations (private and public sector).
- Increasing resident engagement and feedback to help inform difficult decisions and communicate reasons for service changes.

Figure 26 displays the response when asked about each approach. 60.3% support increasing resident engagement and feedback to inform difficult decisions and communicate reasons for service changes (3.5% oppose and others did not express an opinion). 58% support considering more opportunities for volunteering (6.1% oppose and the remainder didn't express a view) and 56% support partnerships with the voluntary sector to focus on prevention (8.8% oppose). There was less support for the other 2 options presented. 49.0% support exploring community ownership of services such as libraries and museums (13.7% oppose) and 31.3% support exploring options to transfer services to other organisations (private and public sector), quite a high proportion compared to the other options oppose (24.6%).



In the same way as the other sections of the survey, an open comment box was used to capture opinion in more detail. There were 128 comments in total. Some people

covered more than one main theme within their response, and this is illustrated in Table 6. Example comments are also provided.

Table 6: Comments regarding partnership working options

Theme	Count	%
Make better use of the voluntary sector and community groups	20	13
Listen to local people/ use local knowledge to make decisions	18	12
Need to protect public assets and services to ensure they are not lost	18	12
Make better use of volunteers to support local services	16	11
Volunteers and Charities will not be able to deliver public services	15	10
Improved partnership working by Shropshire Council required	14	9
Changes in delivery should not impact the cost or quality of services	13	9
Objection to private companies being used to provide public services	12	8
Improved financial management by Shropshire Council required	10	7
Objection to using consultants / should be using council staff	5	3
Private companies to take on services	5	3
Other	6	4
Total	152	100

Example comments

- *“Again - Do not use outside agencies! It will end up costing the council even more.”*
- *“Careful consideration needs to be made when potential transfer of provision is made to private sectors as they will have other motivations such as making profit which could result in poor service delivery. Proper consultation and careful consideration is needed to hold accountable when things inevitably go wrong!”*
- *“Preference should be with the voluntary sector organisations for delivery.”*
- *“Don’t fob off. Volunteer library means shut library. You cannot expect volunteers to do social care.”*
- *“A reminder that volunteering is on its knees since Covid. You can increase opportunities but that doesn’t mean more people will be interested. The voluntary sector is not free either. It still requires funding.”*
- *“Partnerships can be an invaluable source of help and support, the selling off of assets and severe reduction of services will benefit no one in the long run (and the biggest losers will be the residents!)”*
- *“I’m very concerned that extra costs will be transferred to town councils at an extra cost to residents, many of whom are struggling already to make ends meet.”*
- *“See previous. You need to stop this - get a grip on your own money and contracts.”*
- *“Keep profit out of services. Stop signposting people to other services.”*
- *“There are so many consultations, and they make little to no difference.”*
- *“I would be amazed if SCC actually bothered with what rate payers thought!”*

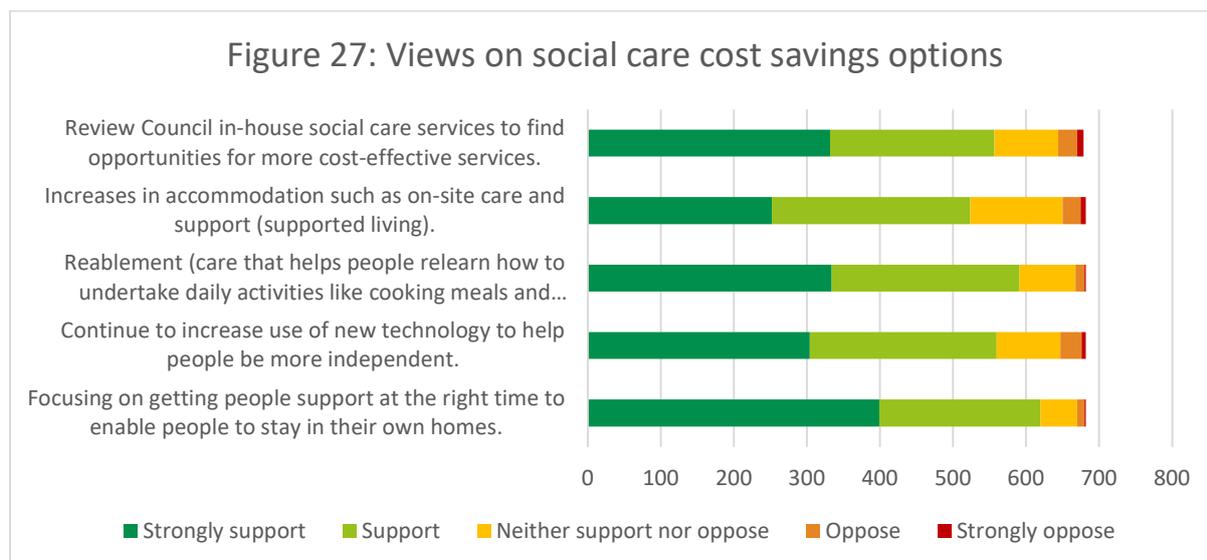
People are keen to involve the voluntary sector but there is a nervousness the council recognising that services cannot rely entirely on volunteers and that the voluntary sector needs financial support to operate. People highlight that volunteers are very different to paid staff. Some express concern about private sector involvement meaning services/ assets could be lost to public ownership and, if unprofitable, close. People are concerned about costs being transferred to town and parish councils. Despite all these concerns there is not widespread opposition to exploring partnerships. The next section of the report considers social care.

10 Social Care

The budget consultation survey asked two questions in relation to the budget for social care. Many social care services are statutory in nature and therefore there are fewer options for local decision making. The question focused mainly on adult social care and provided the following options which local authorities commonly use to increase efficiency and manage costs:

- Focusing on getting people support at the right time to enable people to stay in their own homes.
- Continue to increase use of new technology to help people be more independent.
- Reablement (care that helps people relearn how to undertake daily activities like cooking meals and washing) to reduce the need for home care and residential care.
- Increases in accommodation such as on-site care and support (supported living).
- Review Council in-house social care services to find opportunities for more cost-effective services.

Figure 27 displays the response to each option and whether members of the public strongly support, support, neither support nor oppose, oppose or strongly oppose. Figure 27 highlights that most options suggested are well supported by survey respondents. Of all respondents, 67% strongly support or support a focus on getting people support at the right time to enable people to stay in their own homes (only 1.3% oppose or strongly oppose). This was the most supported option of all those listed. 64% support reablement (1.5% oppose), 60.8% support continuing an increase in new technology for independence (3.8% oppose) and similarly 60.5% support reviewing in-house social care services to find opportunities to increase cost effectiveness (3.8% oppose). The least supported option (although the majority still support it) was increasing accommodation (e.g. supported living); 56.9% support and 3.5% oppose.



The views expressed suggest widespread support for Shropshire Council to continue or further develop these approaches. To check public opinion further an open comment question was included within this section of the questionnaire. There were 100 comments. Table 7 below displays the summary of the responses.

Table 7: Comments regarding options for social care cost-effectiveness

Theme	Count	%
Council services need to be more cost effective / efficient	21	21
Preventative work / enabling people to stay in their homes longer	17	17
Improved financial management of Social Care providers	15	15
Reassess to ensure only support for people who are truly in need	14	14
Appropriate levels of funding ensuring high quality ASC services	8	8
Partnership working with Voluntary and Community groups	7	7
Reductions in Adult Social Care services offered	5	5
Must prioritise and support vulnerable people in our society	5	5
Other	8	8
Total	100	100

Example comments

- *“Continue to lobby national government and reassess wages to ensure that care work for our loved ones is valued. Care work should not be paid less than an Aldi till operator - their skills, compassion and delivery of personal care for our loved ones must be valued.”*
- *“There is zero evidence anywhere in the country that any Council can provide social care services more cost effectively than the private sector.”*
- *“Stop spending money on private services charging high prices and making enormous profit. More in house not for profit serviced.”*
- *“We all get old and we will all need some care of some sort. The issue the private sector has many care homes and make lots of profit. We should develop a non-profit method to support the elderly in well run facilities. Each one of us will face this issue and maybe loss of all your wealth due to unacceptable costs. We should be the leaders in the country to make a non-profit excellent in-house social care units.”*
- *“As someone who has had to deal with care of family members in the past, I am struck by how closely the fees charged by third-party service providers in this area are always very close to the maximum extractable from the state and individuals. A proper approach is to break the cycle of costs v. the demand on Council Tax by providing these services in-house or in partnership in such a way that costs are under direct control of the Council and are made transparent to the public. I would also advocate a reconsideration of care homes etc to be multi-generational, so that both old and young could, in part, help each other....it requires an imaginative approach to local planning.”*
- *“At home care can be just as expensive as residential care. Yet the care givers earn minimum wage and generally travel at their own expense. Looking at the account available on companies house indicates that many of these care companies are making large profits with these contracts. Why is this the case? Why are these services profit making? They should surely be a direct cost to council not inflated for shareholders.”*
- *“A review of care management is needed to see where the money is being spent.”*
- *“SC need to use an assessment service to check ‘true’ disability. Lots of disabled people could work rather than living wholly on benefits. The balance needs to be weighted in favour of work, not benefits financially.”*
- *“Work closely with and support care and wellbeing charities.”*

- *“Needs to be more preventative support to reduce the amount of people who need more intensive care. Firefighting when someone has been left to deteriorate is expensive and rarely effective.”*
- *“Prevention is better than cure, hence importance of sports facilities and libraries to help maintain mental and physical health and reduce cost of care.”*
- *“Increase in support and help at an earlier stage will prevent overall need. Firefighting is expensive and mostly ineffective with poor outcomes.”*
- *“This is all person centred and dependent on need. Shoving tech in supported living causes costs elsewhere in the system!”*
- *“Work in conjunction with the NHS. Set up Discharge Liaison hub.”*
- *“As long as people can use the technology properly - otherwise it can end up costing services more potentially - hospital etc. etc.”*
- *“Cost effectiveness needs to factor in; care home fees need to be sustainable and only funded where appropriate.”*
- *“Cost effective measures often result in a reduction in effectiveness.”*
- *“Adult social care has massively expanded to unreasonable levels. Most care was initially set up to assist people in getting back on their feet but was not intended to operate as an ongoing care system. There are definitely people who require ongoing help but the overuse of motability and PIP etc have reached ridiculous levels.”*
- *“Council should not be responsible for 'health and wellbeing' of people except in only most extreme cases.”*
- *“Stop allowing retirement flats being built and importing old people.”*

Table 7 and the example comments above help to show that public opinion differs. Some people comment that council services need to be more cost effective/ efficient, some highlight the importance of preventative work to enable people to stay healthy for longer and also remain in their own homes. There are comments suggesting that improvement is needed within the financial management of Social Care providers (some suggesting concerns over low wages and management profit margins). There are a smaller proportion of comments calling for reassessment of individuals to ensure only those truly in need receive support. The comments suggest that there may be a need to more effectively communicate with local people if evidence contradicts comments, and where concerns are valid a need to undertake more work in those areas to build understanding.

Shropshire Partners in Care (SPiC – a not for profit training and support network of adult social care providers) offered an organisational survey response and it is important to highlight some of the key points made within this report to provide a more balanced view of all feedback received (the response has been considered in full).

The impact of Shropshire Council’s proposed withdrawal of support for SPiC from April 26 means the organisation will be at risk and could be lost in its entirety. The consequences described within the survey response will include:

- Loss of support to 315 providers employing 17,700 staff and supporting 10,200 people. Without SPiC, providers lose a key source of sector coordination, advice, and operational support.
- An end to strategic engagement with Shropshire Council, Telford & Wrekin Council and the NHS. Closure means providers lose coordinated representation during a period of rising costs, funding pressures, and workforce crises and this could generate costs for Shropshire Council and its neighbouring authorities

because there would be a need to engage separately with independent care providers.

- An end to practical advice and support such as support for local safeguarding Boards and daily safeguarding support to providers will end.
- Loss of hands on support to providers rated '*Inadequate*' or '*Requires Improvement*' by the CQC. Removing this support increases the risk of service deterioration, provider collapse, and gaps in essential care.
- Loss of training programs, DBS checks, and workforce initiatives across the region. Without SPiC providers struggling with recruitment and retention would lose access to training and essential checks which could then exacerbate workforce shortages.
- Without SPiC's support in stabilising providers, offering early help, and preventing market failure, more providers may struggle or close. This may then lead to an increase in hospital admissions, delayed transfers of care, and demand for council commissioned services, potentially further exacerbating-commissioned services, potentially further exacerbating financial pressures for Shropshire Council.

Both comments from local residents and the response from Shropshire Partners in Care (SPiC) highlight that social care operates within a wider system of care and a decision taken in one area can have far reaching consequences elsewhere. This feedback is very important for decision makers considering Shropshire Council's financial strategy for the years ahead.

The next section of the report turns away from considering individual areas of service such as libraries, leisure, museums and social care, and instead considers feedback on the design of Shropshire Council's capital programme and strategy.

11 Capital Programme

All councils manage two main types of budget: capital and revenue. Each serves a different purpose and is used for different kinds of spending. Revenue budgets (the main focus of the previous questions) cover every day running costs such as staff salaries, running services, utility bills and maintenance. Capital budgets are generally long-term investments in large projects that create or improve assets and infrastructure. Examples could include building new schools or leisure centres, road repairs and upgrades, buying land and buildings, and regeneration projects. Capital funds are ringfenced. Money set aside for capital projects can't be used to pay for everyday services.

However, there are ways of using capital budgets in a way that considers support for revenue pressures. The budget consultation questionnaire included three main questions to gauge public views on how capital income should be allocated. The first question asked 'Considering the types of capital investment listed below, please rank these in order of importance from most important at the top to least important at the bottom.' The list of types of capital is shown with the results in Figure 28.

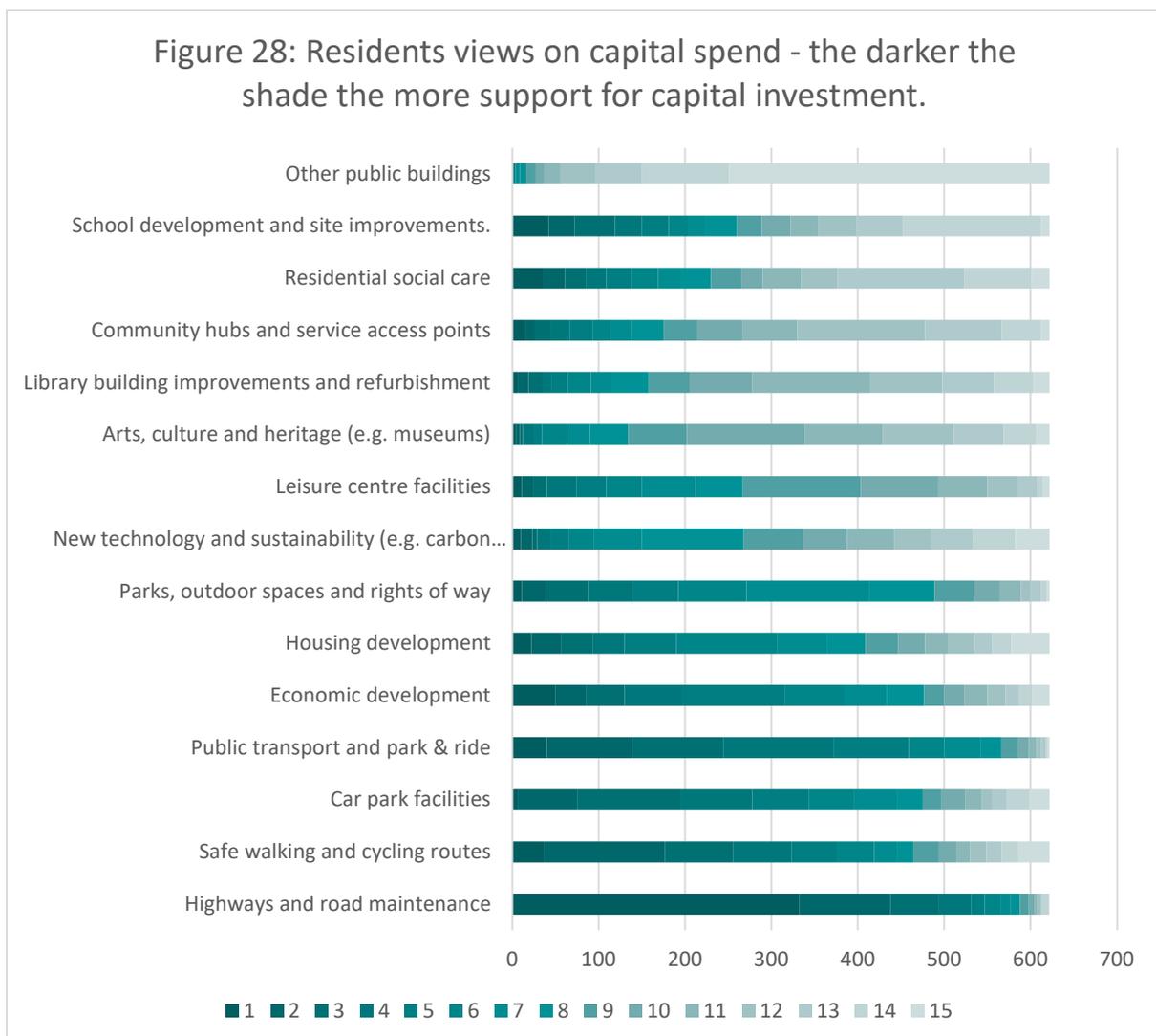
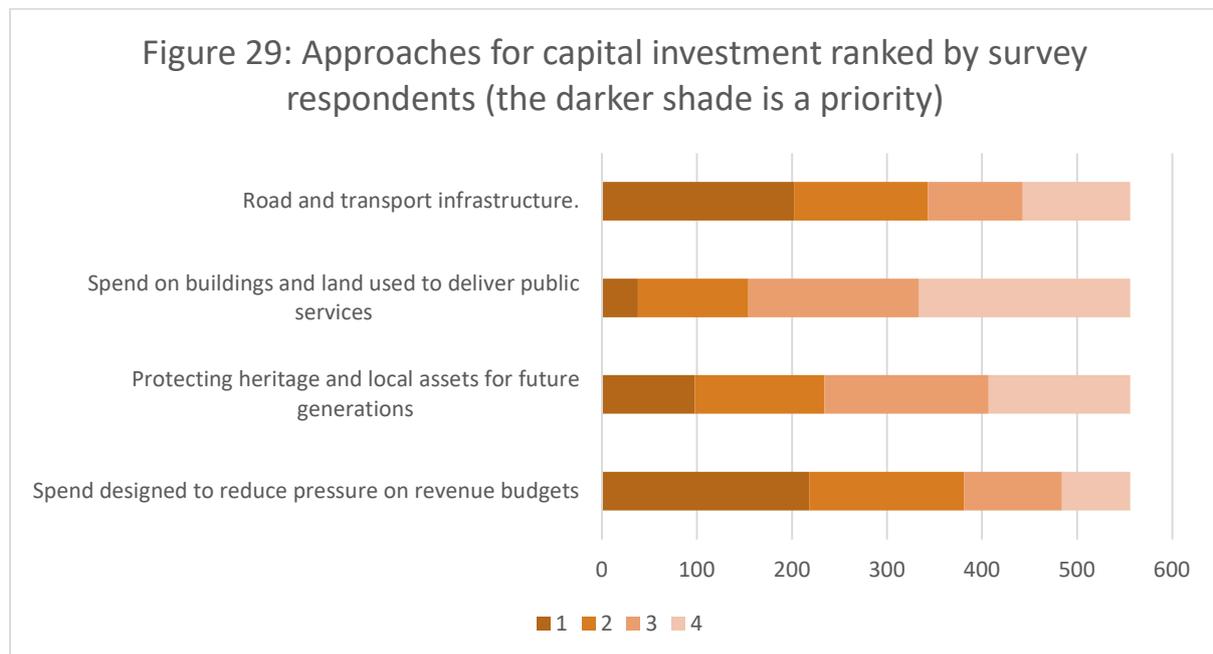


Figure 28 shows that the capital investments residents would like to see prioritised are: highways and road maintenance and public transport and park & ride (both significantly dominant) followed by parks, outdoor spaces and rights of way and safe walking and cycling routes. Economic development is also seen as an important area for capital investment.

The least popular for capital investment are other public buildings, arts, culture and heritage, library centre facilities, school developments and site improvements, residential social care and new technology and sustainability.

Figure 29 illustrates responses to a question asking survey respondents to rank 4 approaches to capital fund allocation.



Capital spend to reduce pressure on revenue budgets and road and transport infrastructure are considered main priorities. Capital spend to protect heritage and spend on buildings and land for public services are considered of lesser importance.

To find out more a comment question was included. It asked 'Please add any other comments on the way Shropshire Council should focus its capital programme for 2026/27 below'. There were 114 comments.

Table 8 below displays the summary of the responses. Top themes within comments included views that Shropshire Council has not had effective financial planning and has been wasting money, requests that roads and transport should be prioritised within the capital programme, concerns that Shropshire Council has invested in 'vanity projects' examples given included the shopping centre purchases and re-development in Shrewsbury. The example comments help to illustrate some of the feedback further.

Table 8: Comments regarding the capital programme

Theme	Count	%
More effective financial planning / stop wasting money	28	25
Prioritisation of roads and transport	25	22
More effective strategic/ long term planning/ less vanity projects	20	18
Improved /reduced management and effective staffing levels	14	12
Prioritisation of Health and Social Care	9	9
Prioritisation of economic and business development	8	7
Prioritisation of Housing	6	5
Fair distribution across the county e.g. not in Shrewsbury/ urban areas	5	4
Invest in existing buildings and infrastructure rather than create new	4	4
Prioritisation of education and schools	4	4
Other	5	4
Total	114	100

Example comments

- *“Again, this spending needs to be spread equitably across the county and not concentrated in Shrewsbury.”*
- *“You have wasted capital on the shopping centres, Pride Hill paving, station gyratory and the redevelopment of Riverside. All Shrewsbury based. Stop the vanity projects.”*
- *“Shropshire’s schools are some of the worst performing in the country. They should absolutely be a priority along with road maintenance.”*
- *“Bring services together under one roof - multi functional. Residential Care that is central community - so other services included within - and not stand alone.”*
- *“CIL what, where and when are you spending CIL to support community infrastructure? My primary care practice is no longer fit for purpose yet more housing developments are being granted. How can you expect existing inadequate infrastructures to support the public if there has been no investment in services. Why are you not releasing CIL money to support the development of services?”*
- *“Shropshire Council need to be accountable for the decisions they make, and decisions need to be made after meaningful public consultations and possible votes for options of services or programmes.”*
- *“Stick to core services and reduce other services and staff costs.”*
- *“Short term, close services on luxuries. Needs only. Cut spending on anything unnecessary. Must have only. STOP wasting money!”*
- *“Focus should be on spend that encourages economic growth. Utilising the Council's assets focussing to deliver income should be a priority. Roads are generally poor and there needs to be an emphasis on this for the next few years, but longer-term utilising assets (selling where profitable) should be considered as part of a broader agreed strategic capital plan.”*
- *“Getting value for money whilst paying the private sector for adult and children’s care. Don’t waste money.”*
- *“Capital needs to be spent more wisely in future!”*
- *“Invest in the buildings you have, which deliver the most council services, i.e. libraries/ Community Hubs.”*

Although some commented they didn’t understand capital expenditure enough to comment, others were very critical of past capital projects and decision making and called for more investment in services that benefit everyone and the whole county. The next section builds on this feedback and considers resident satisfaction with Shropshire Council overall.

12 Resident Satisfaction

Shropshire Council's budget consultation for 2026/27 included some national benchmarking questions produced by the Local Government Association (LGA) in order to better understand the public perception of Shropshire Council and how local people currently feel about the council's overall performance. It should be noted that this is not an ideal comparison due to different methodology and inclusion within the budget consultation could have influenced results. However, despite the imperfect methodology it nevertheless provides a helpful reference in the absence of other data.

The Local Government Association (LGA) measures resident satisfaction with councils every four months. This data used in this report presents the results of the 40th round of polling conducted in October - November 2025.

Although some local authorities share their own results, the national data set is based on one overall picture for more effective benchmarking. Between 13th October and 20th November 2025, a representative random sample of 1,001 British adults (aged 18 or over) was polled by telephone by Yonder Data Solutions. The same set of questions is asked in the same order each round to allow for the reporting of any changes in the overall views of the general public about the reputation of local government.

The first resident satisfaction question used within the budget consultation was 'Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way Shropshire Council runs things?' Figure 30 displays the local response against the national LGA benchmark.

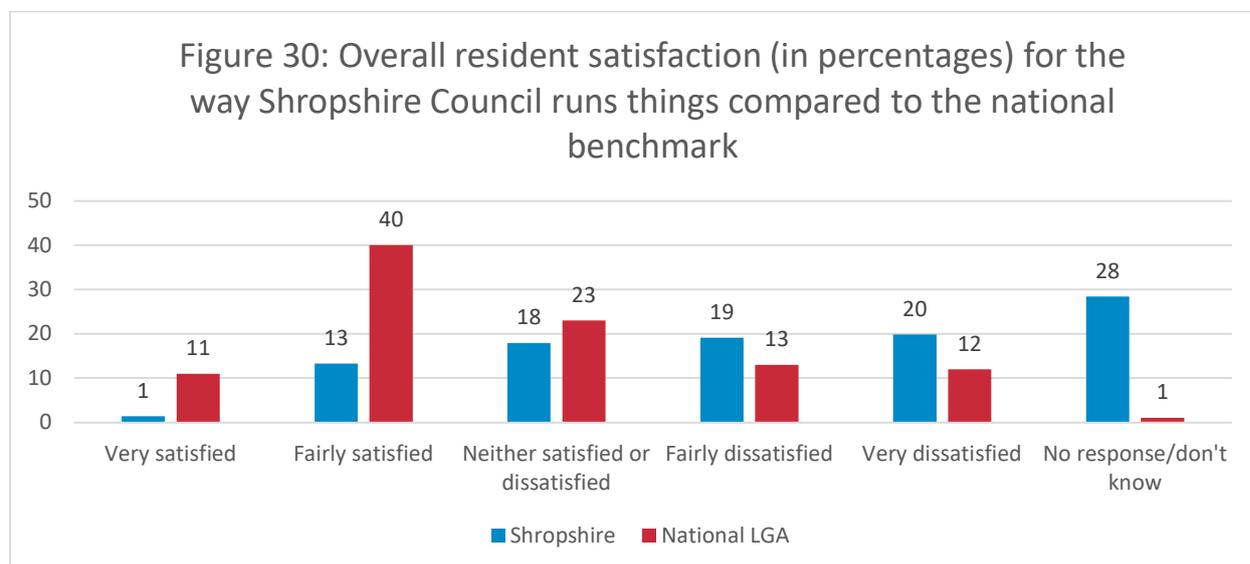
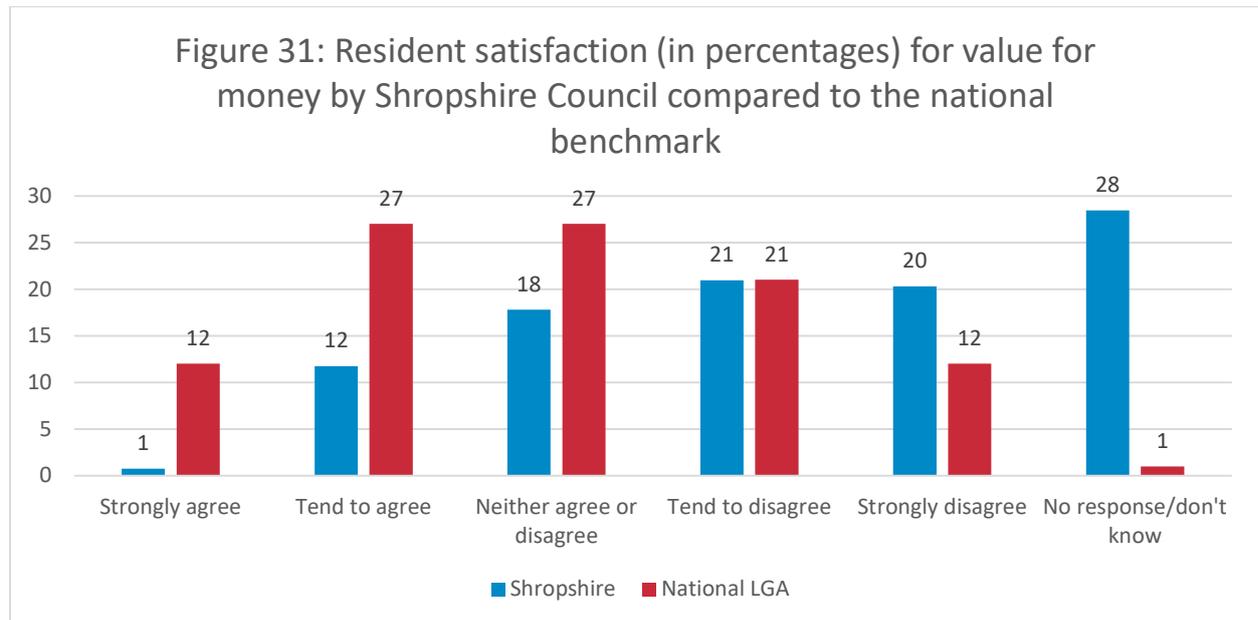


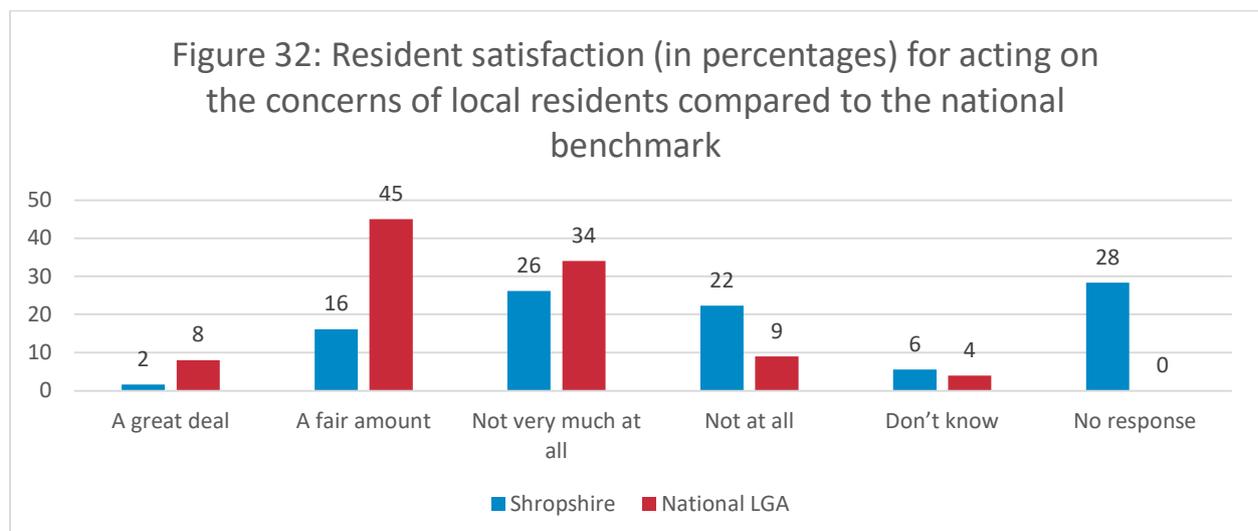
Figure 30 highlights that 14% of Shropshire Council's residents are very satisfied or satisfied with the way Shropshire Council runs things compared to the national benchmark of 51% who are satisfied or very dissatisfied. Nationally 25% are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied compared to 39% in Shropshire.

Survey respondents were also asked 'To what extent do you agree or disagree that Shropshire Council provides value for money?' Figure 31 contains the summary response and compares it to the national data set. Nationally 39% of residents believe that their local council provides value for money, in Shropshire the proportion is 13%

(nationally 33% disagree/strongly disagree their local council provides value for money, in Shropshire the proportion is 41%).



The last question used by Shropshire Council to benchmark within the budget consultation was ‘To what extent do you think Shropshire Council acts on the concerns of local residents?’. Of all 3 questions within the set this one highlighted the greater difference to the national average. Nationally 53% feel their council acts on the concerns of residents either a great deal or a fair amount. In Shropshire the proportion is 18%. Comments throughout the budget consultation and in previous consultations and surveys often refer to residents not feeling listened to or not knowing what happened as a result of previous feedback. 48% of Shropshire Council residents feel that the concerns of local residents are not acted on very much at all or not at all compared to 43% nationally: this result, expressing dissatisfaction, is much more similar. The difference in results for this question is also that many Shropshire Council residents didn’t give an opinion and may not feel they know the answer to the question.



The next question within the budget consultation survey asked for satisfaction with different areas of service, using the national benchmarking question. It read ‘How

satisfied or dissatisfied are you overall with the council's...' and listed each service area. The overall result for Shropshire Council is shown in Figure 33a.

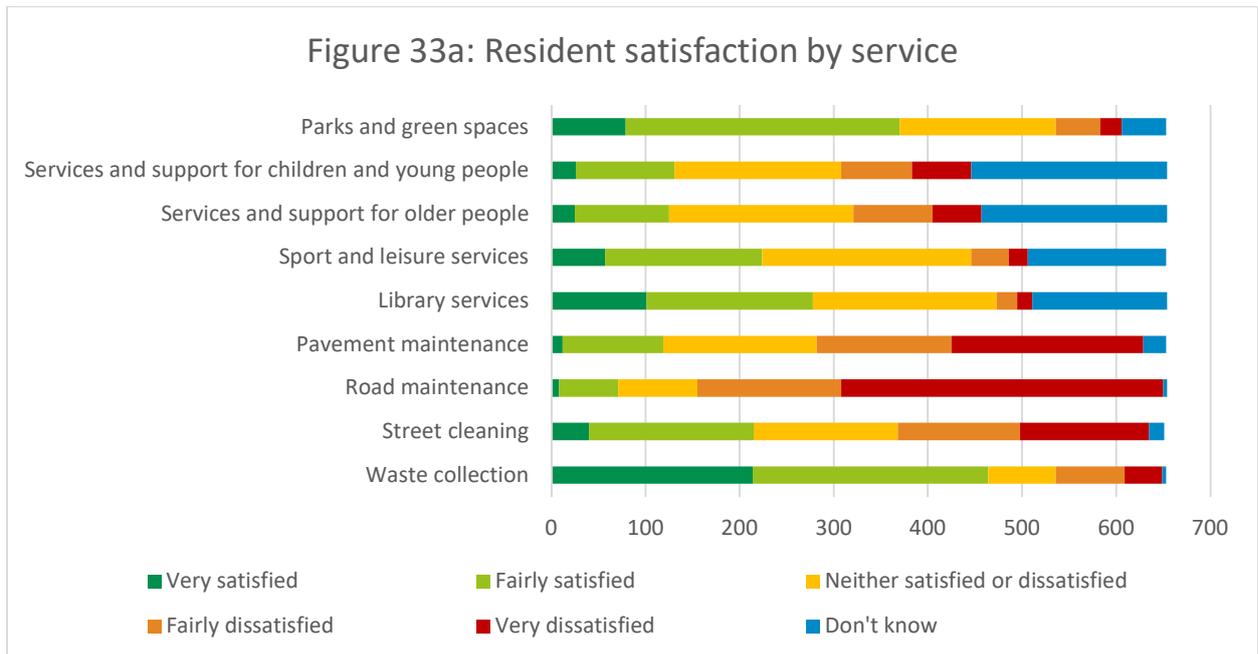
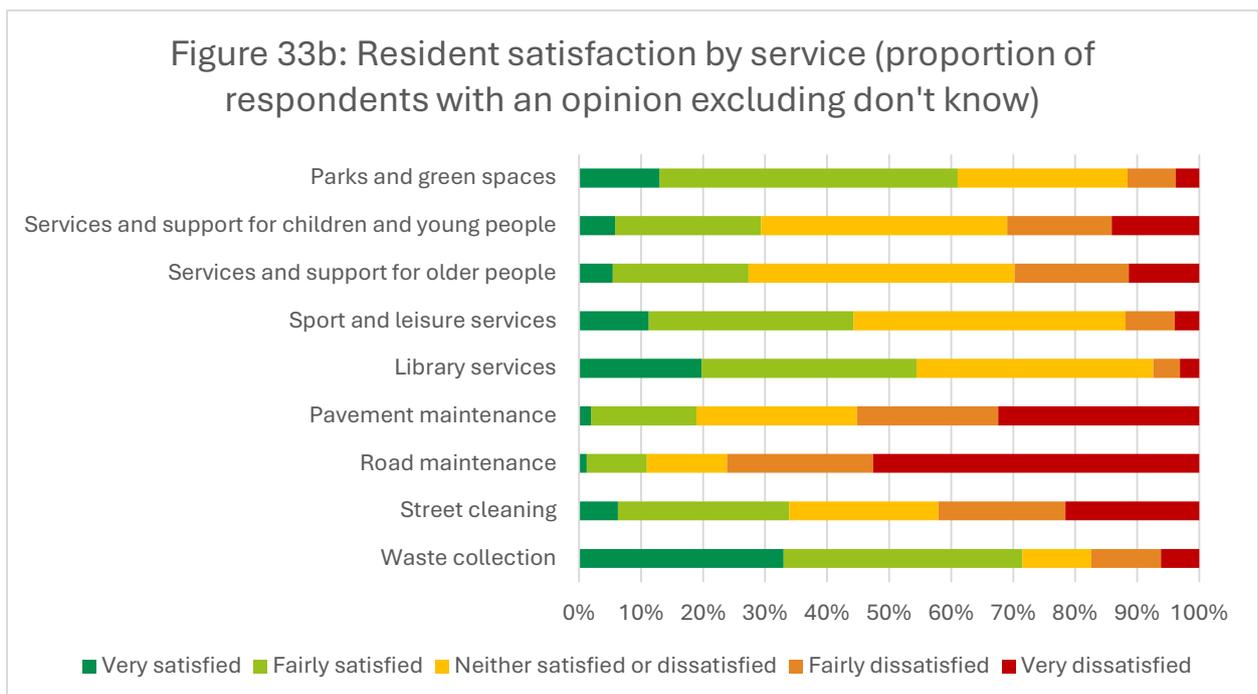
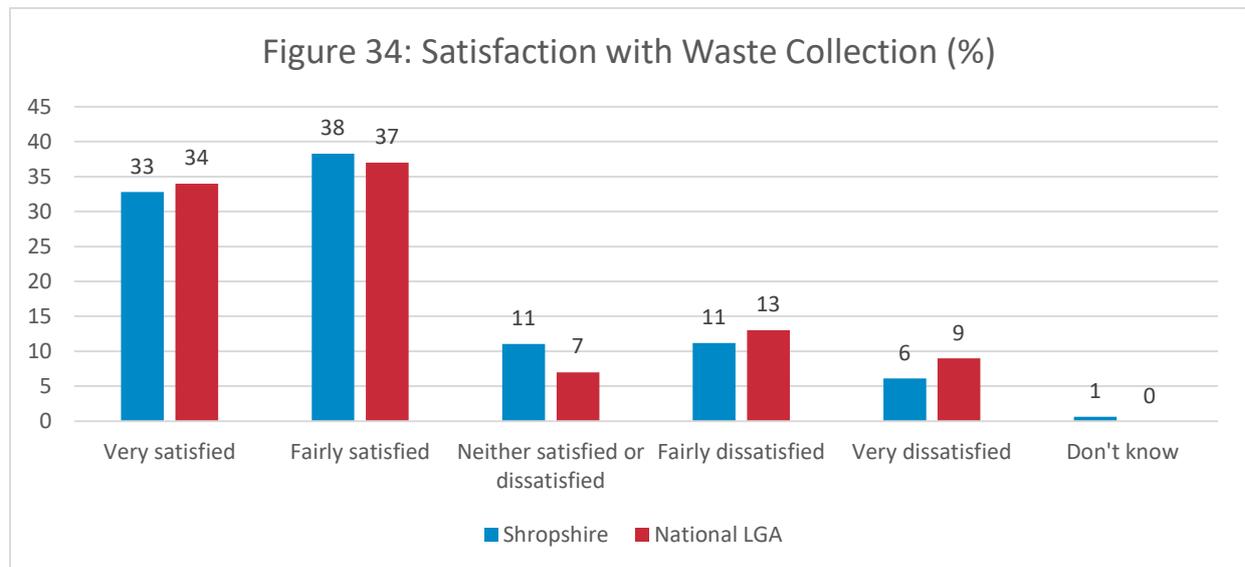


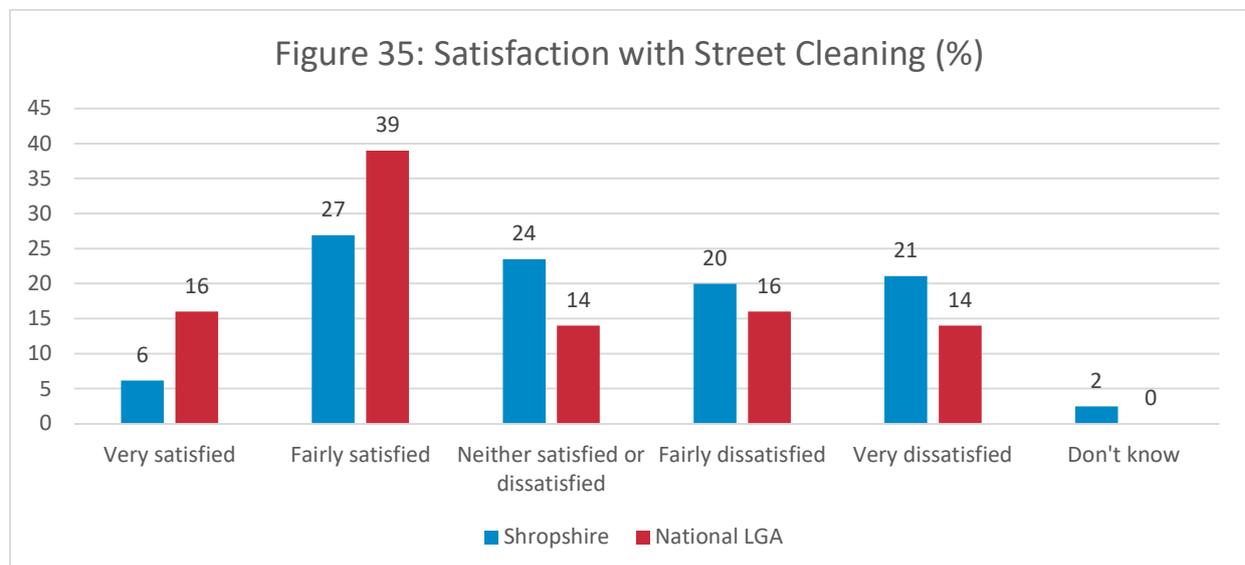
Figure 33 shows that the greatest levels of satisfaction locally are with waste collection, parks and green spaces, library services and leisure services. This is influenced by the fact that most people receive these services. The blue sections of the chart show that many people don't have a few on social care because they are not recipients of the service. If we remove the 'don't know' responses and make each a percentage of 100 of service theme responses we see a slightly different view of the results in Figure 33b. Levels of dissatisfaction are greatest for road maintenance, pavement maintenance, and street cleaning. Overall waste collection, parks and green spaces, library services and leisure services have the greatest levels of satisfaction and less dissatisfaction.



Considering each of the services separately we can compare the local data to the national LGA dataset. Satisfaction with waste services is very similar to the national average as seen in Figure 34.



When we consider street cleaning (Figure 35) we see more variance within the local and national data. In Shropshire Council's area 33% of residents are fairly satisfied or very satisfied with street cleaning compared to 55% nationally. When considering dissatisfaction we can see that 41% of Shropshire Council's residents are fairly dissatisfied or very dissatisfied compared to 30% nationally.



In the same way as street cleaning the results for road maintenance (Figure 36) are a similar pattern but with increased dissatisfaction. In Shropshire Council's area 11% are fairly satisfied or very satisfied compared to 33% nationally. When we look at levels of dissatisfaction we can see that a significant proportion (76%) of Shropshire Council's residents are fairly dissatisfied or very dissatisfied compared to 53% nationally. Nationally dissatisfaction is greatest within road maintenance compared to all other services measured within the benchmarking dataset but in Shropshire the response is more extreme and above the national average. This may reflect the way this service has been resourced over recent years.

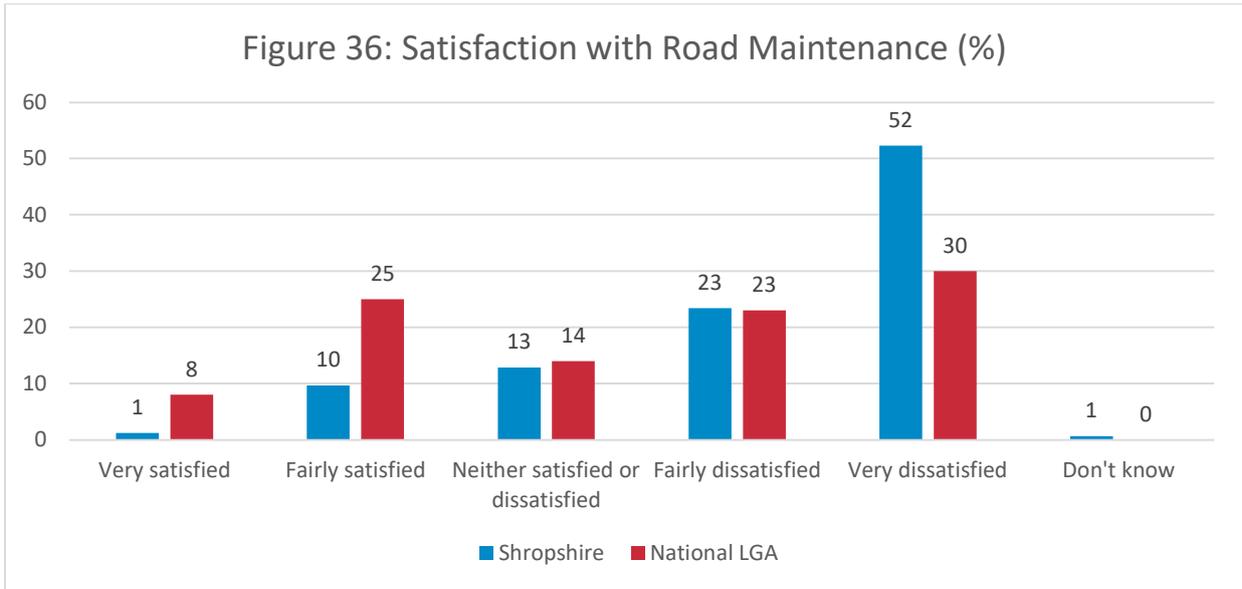
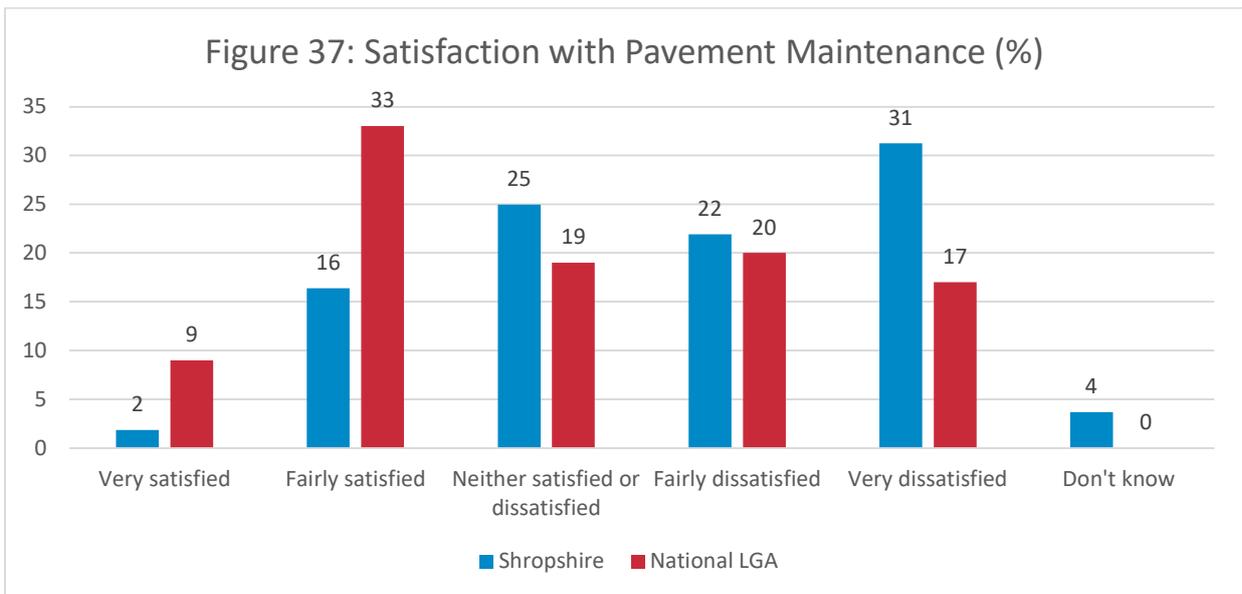


Figure 37 displays the data available for satisfaction with pavement maintenance. In Shropshire 18% feel very satisfied or fairly satisfied compared to 42% nationally. Locally 53% are fairly dissatisfied or very dissatisfied compared to 37% nationally.



Library services was one of the areas explored for feedback within the budget consultation, so it is interesting to see how local feeling compares to the national benchmarking dataset from the LGA. Figure 38 reflects the data in Figures 33a and 33b which highlight that there are higher levels of satisfaction with library services compared to other services in Shropshire and the results are similar to the national averages. In Shropshire Council’s area 43% feel very satisfied or fairly satisfied compared to 60% nationally. Locally 6% are fairly dissatisfied or very dissatisfied compared to 12% nationally. So despite levels of dissatisfaction being very low, the levels of satisfaction are good but not as good as those seen nationally, here more people don’t have an opinion or don’t know.

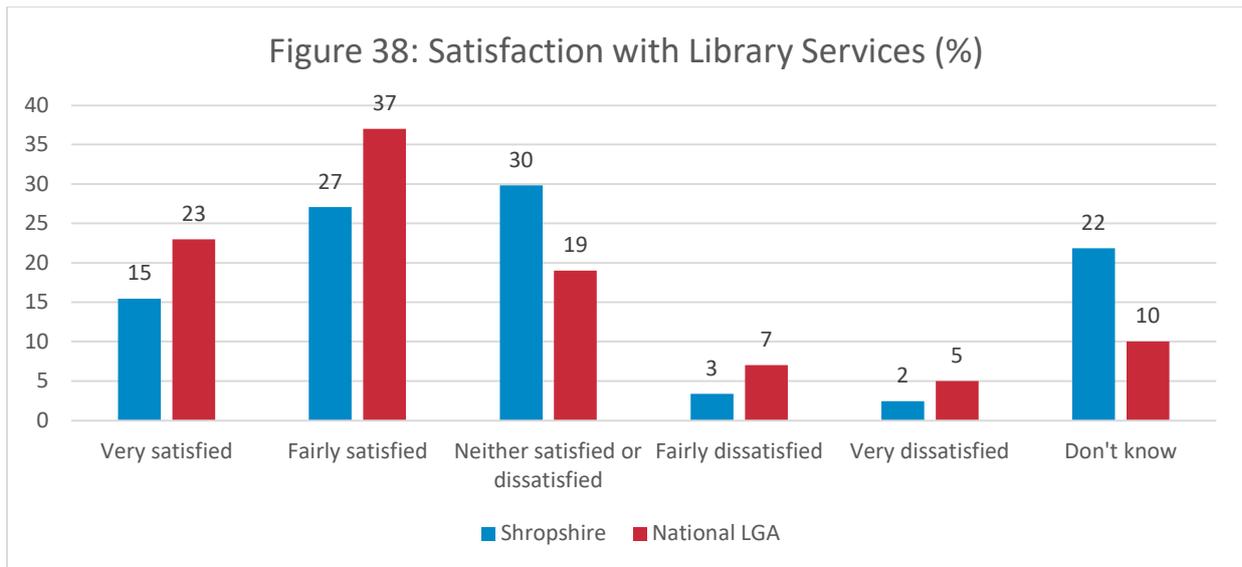
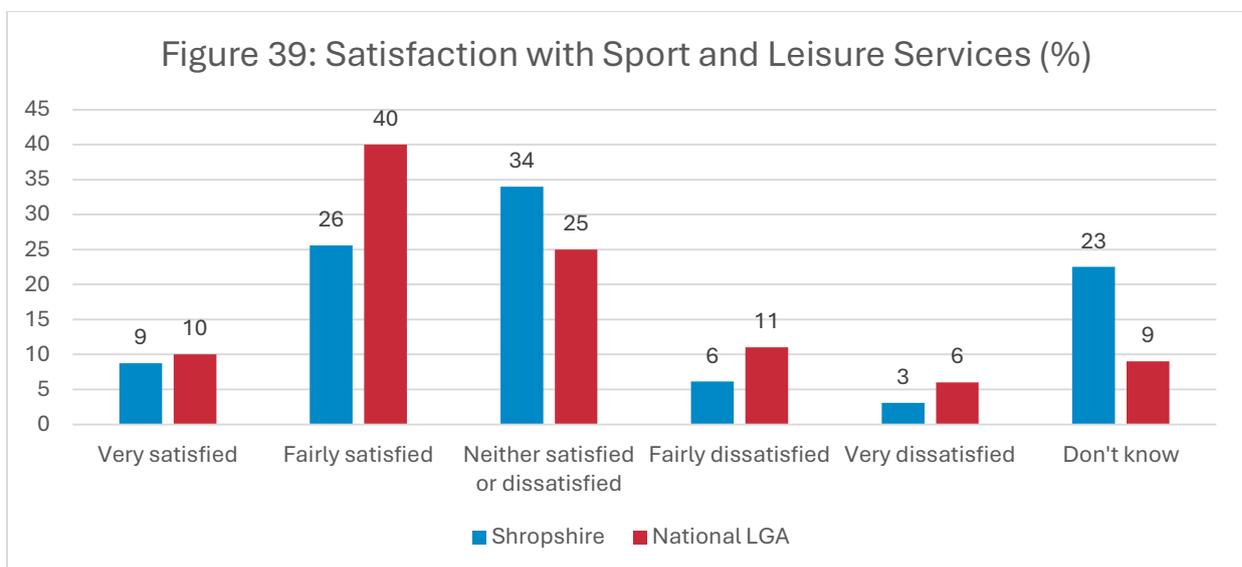


Figure 39 displays the results for sport and leisure services. The proportions are not dissimilar to library services and we can see that locally 35% are very satisfied or fairly satisfied with sport and leisure services compared to 50% nationally. In Shropshire Council's area 9% describe their satisfaction as fairly dissatisfied or very dissatisfied compared to 17% nationally. The lower levels of dissatisfaction in Shropshire are a positive result in terms of performance even with fewer people satisfied (perception of the council as a whole may be influencing that total).



Figures 40 and 41 display the results for social care services, or more generally support for older people, and children and young people. When considering services and support for older people 19% of residents in Shropshire Council's area are very satisfied or fairly satisfied and the national average is 38%. When considering dissatisfaction (very dissatisfied or fairly dissatisfied) the Shropshire total is 21% compared to 18% nationally.

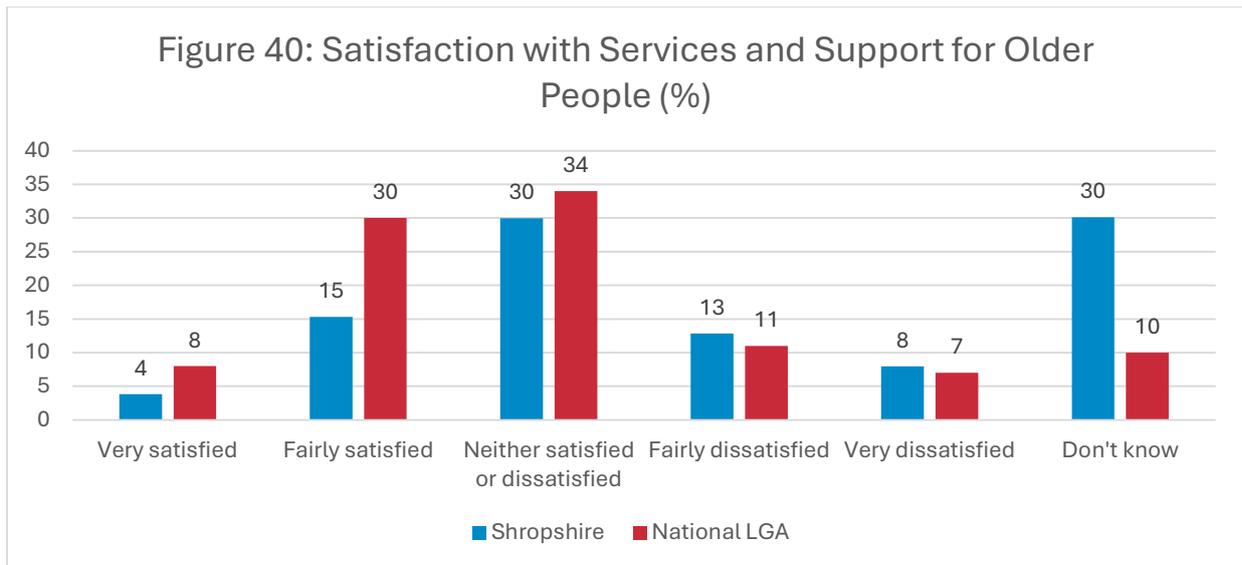


Figure 41 below presents the results for children and young people’s support and services. 20% of respondents/residents in Shropshire Council’s budget consultation reported feeling very satisfied or fairly satisfied with services and support for children and young people compared to 38% being satisfied within the national LGA dataset. When we consider levels of dissatisfaction, we see that 21% of those in Shropshire are fairly dissatisfied or very dissatisfied compared to a similar total nationally at 19%. In Shropshire we have more people who don’t know.

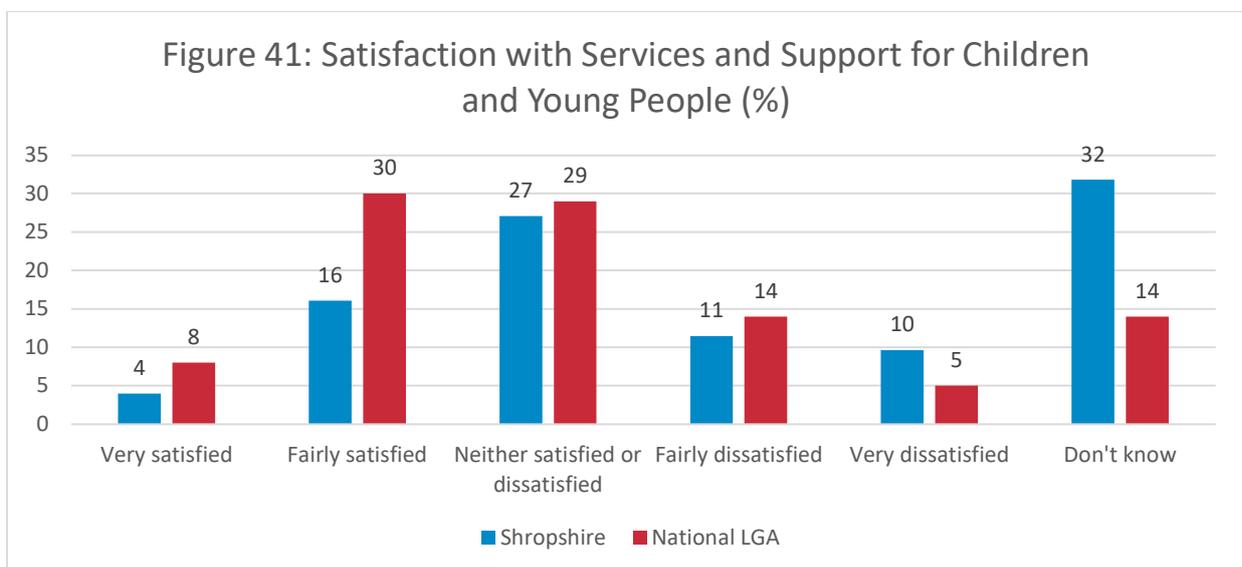
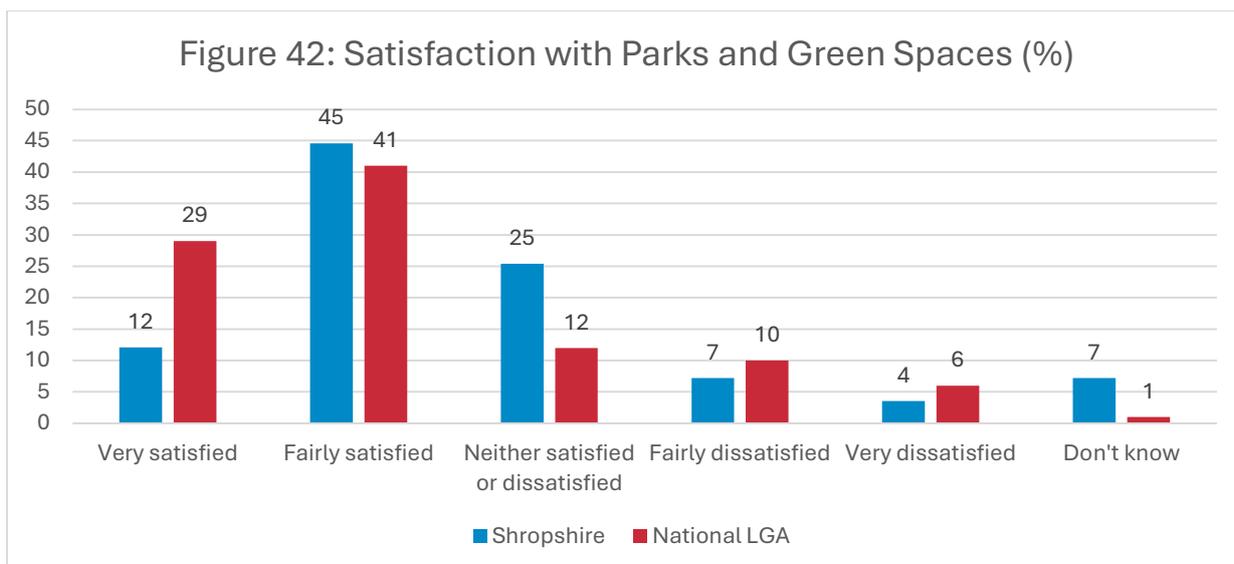


Figure 42 displays the last set of service data within the benchmarking set for parks and green spaces. 57% of people in Shropshire are very satisfied or fairly satisfied with parks and green spaces compared to 70% within the LGA national dataset. Fewer people are dissatisfied locally (11% compared to 16% nationally).

There are many more national benchmarking questions but those selected for use within the budget consultation provide an overall indication of how Shropshire Council’s resident satisfaction compares to councils elsewhere.



A final open comment question was included within the resident satisfaction section of the budget consultation. Survey respondents were asked ‘What one thing could the council do that would improve your satisfaction with the services you have received?’ Table 9 below displays the summary of the responses. There were 341 comments in total, and a few people listed more than one thing within their response.

Table 9: How Shropshire Council could improve satisfaction with services

Theme	Count	%
Prioritisation of roads and transport	82	23
Retain / improve current levels of existing services	60	17
Improved communication / listen to local people	46	13
Improved /reduced management and effective staffing levels	44	12
Improved financial management by Shropshire Council	32	9
Prioritise spending on core services that benefit all / stop vanity project	22	6
Fair distribution of services across the county/ not in one area e.g. Shrewsbury	19	5
Prioritisation of education and children’s services	11	3
Prioritisation of Health and Social Care	8	2
Improved partnership working by Shropshire Council	10	3
Other	20	6
Total	354	100

Example comments

- *“Be more transparent with proposals that will impact heavily on local residents and ensure you carry out meaningful consultation, not tokenism.”*
- *“More ‘- we’re in this together- and treat us like intelligent people who have opinions but/and, have the skills to rise above every individual’s ‘lived experience’ and be able to see the bigger pictures for various services, interventions etc. You cannot meet every individual’s needs. You can be clearer about how you are trying to meet the needs of our communities as best you can - given the global, national issues etc. We need to know that you actually care!...”*
- *“Listen to our local councillors.”*
- *“Again, be more responsive when contacted.”*

- *“Have someone to whom a concerned person can speak instead of doing everything ‘on-line’.”*
- *“Much better communication between departments.”*
- *“Be better managed and work more efficiently and listen to residents and take a common sense approach.....not my recent experience in any way.”*
- *“Show that they lead by example. If we are to have services cut then they need to NOT get pay/allowance rises, they need to cut from the top and halt all payouts/bonuses for those leaving. Take care of the small things and leave big vanity projects we’ll alone....”*
- *“Stop allowing staff with knowledge to leave the authority.”*
- *“Cut all councillors’ allowances.”*
- *“Modernising and improving efficiency, cross department communications and joined up approaches to services.”*
- *“Streamline the services, resources and get those left back into the office. Working from home doesn’t work. Stop using agency workers that cost a fortune to do the work the council staff can do better. Start to employ your own staff at the right level i.e. youngsters and train for the future.”*
- *“Share out the money more fairly to other county towns, who have seen a great decline in essential services. e.g. basic infrastructure maintenance like drain cleaning. We thought a Unitary authority would be good for us in the long run - how wrong we were.*
- *“Roads have zero maintenance in my village until it becomes extremely hazardous and then the people have to come out to rectify it after doing an awful job to start with - wasted money. Libraries are poor. General maintenance of anywhere but Shrewsbury is appalling.”*
- *“Deal with the potholes and coordinate roadworks more effectively.”*
- *“Get rid of the green bin charge. Fix the potholes. Build the NWRR. Stop with the stupid projects.”*
- *“Food waste collection.”*
- *“Improve blue badge administration.”*
- *“Monitor projects and hold contractors and utilities providers to account for work involving roads and pavements which would improve the state of roads and pavements.”*
- *“Keep the streets cleaner. More rubbish bins in the town and they also need emptying more regularly.”*
- *“Keep the towns clean, attract footfall, which will drive economic prosperity.”*

As the examples show there are a wide range of different views and priorities expressed by survey respondents but top messages within the comments include calls to prioritise roads and transport, calls to retain or improve current levels of services, requests for improved resident engagement and demonstration that the council is listening to local people. There are many comments here, as elsewhere within the survey, suggesting a lack of confidence in the council and its management. There are calls for improved/reduced management and effective staffing levels and improved financial management. Many comments suggest people have a very low opinion of the efficiency of Shropshire Council and the previous section on resident satisfaction demonstrated some concerns compared to national benchmarking.

The next and final main section of this report considers overall feedback on the budget consultation from the survey responses; it also importantly considers and brings together the responses to the budget consultation that were presented in email and letter format.

13 Other Feedback

Shropshire Council’s budget consultation for 2026/27 welcomed feedback by email and letter in addition to the online survey. There were 31 responses by email or letter in total. This section provides the analysis of the response. Many of these were very overarching in nature and only small numbers referred to specific services. Council Tax was a very dominant theme followed by comments on the Council’s general management and budget approach. Table 10 displays the feedback by theme. Example comments are included for each theme mentioned to illustrate the feedback received.

Table 10: Analysis of themes within written consultation responses

Theme	Count	%
Online service provision	0	0
Savings approaches	3	10
Council Tax	22	71
Leisure Services	0	0
Library Services	3	10
Museum Services	0	0
Partnerships	0	0
Social Care	2	6
Capital Programme	0	0
Resident Satisfaction	3	10
Council Management	10	32
Budget Approach	8	26
Total written responses = 31		

Example comments – Savings Approaches

- *“You asked for our views on the council’s plans for saving money. I watched the TV program on Britain’s potholes, and it included a piece on Blackpool’s innovative approach to fixing potholes (Project Amber). If you haven’t already done so, you should check it out. They begin by using an AI system to inspect road surfaces. With our rural road network, imagine how much cheaper it would be to inspect the roads using AI and high-definition imagery and satellite images. They mentioned that work that previously cost them £1.5m per year now costs them £0.5m per year. As a result of proactive maintenance, council compensation payouts have fallen by 50% in one year. It really is an impressive system with everyone benefiting.”*
- *“SC could save a lot of money by not cutting the verges and all the grass in the parks every six weeks. Instead, they can make these spaces into meadows which need cutting (with the arisings collected) once a year. Where short grass is needed for sight lines on verges and for playing fields, etc the grass will still need to be cut more frequently. However, areas which have moved to the meadow regime are saving money and creating wildlife habitats at the same time - see, for example, Plymouth.”*

Example comments – Council Tax

- *“I think, like with many things in life, it is not about how much council tax you charge, it is about the customers perception of value for money.”*
- *“As a resident of Market Drayton I oppose the suggestion as raising Council Tax for 2026/2027 as the cost of living crisis is making it hard for us all to make ends meet. We*

cannot afford to pay anymore! Plus Market Drayton residents NEVER benefit from any financial infrastructure investment on any level, Shrewsbury & Oswestry take all the funding....we are very much the forgotten town.”

- *“It’s absolutely preposterous that an increase in council tax for Shropshire has even been considered. We are hit with huge increases in council taxes each year, last year being the biggest and it’s absolutely disgusting how our money is being wasted. The biggest example is the absolute joke that is the new traffic system in Shrewsbury town centre, do us residents need to say anymore? Millions of pounds of hard-earned money that is taxed, upon taxed, upon even more tax and for what? The only thing our council tax is worth paying for is to help towards local schools, investing in the new generation! Even then teachers, head teachers and other school staff get paid eye watering amounts of money to only work 9 months of the year... Maybe if councillors and other members of council paid positions that benefit from fantastic pay rises each year, refuse to take a pay rise due to their already over inflated wages and pensions, you could even begin to consider asking for more council tax money. Until that day comes, no council tax increases because it’s already a joke. I’m sure you won’t listen to your residents and will do as you please either way, just like all councils normally do.”*
- *“I am totally against raising the council tax above 5 per cent. It is already too high for the services we get. I am fully aware that the police and other vital services need funding, but social care should get more funding from the government. What really annoys me is that the council tax bands are so unfair, it needs a thorough overhaul also I would be interested to know how many people are in debt for council tax and what the council does to address this. The council tax for our area is already one of the highest in the country so no I am not in favour of any higher increases.”*
- *“Further to your item in the Shrewsbury Chronicle dated December 18th, asking for Residents’ feedback on whether they would be willing to pay more Council Tax..... NO WAY and let me tell you why! I am not willing to pay for fiscal irresponsibility and the perpetuation of planning incompetence. I am not willing to pay more to a Council which has for many years spent money on hairbrained schemes almost too numerous to mention.”*
- *“The council tax system is flawed, unfair and is not fit for purpose. It cannot go on being fixed on a guess of what an agent thinks it is worth. The tax should be affordable for everyone. Shropshire council are now penalising people who have worked, paid their tax, kept within their own means, planned their lives so that they don’t need help only to find that you are doing the opposite and are being used as cash cows. You are now at the stage of taxing people out of their own homes.”*
- *“... I am not against a one-off council tax levy to settle the current debt, subject to a number of provisos: It must be a one-off levy and not create a precedent or baseline amount to be raised each year. The increase should be based on income, not property value, to allow for the asset poor. Any revaluation of housing for council tax purposes must take into account not just the purchase/sale price/size but also the consumption of council amenities. A house without street lighting, local transport, schools, libraries, hospitals, activities centres, etc., should not pay the same as those living close to full council amenities and able to benefit from council-funded cultural events, etc. The Council must put its house in order and not exceed its financial means in the future, irrespective of potential Government grants or other payments. The Council must put in place proper forward financial planning and long-term budgeting given its past lack of forethought.”*
- *“I see from The Chronicle that you are canvassing views on increases in Council Tax. I am in favour of increased support for the most needy in our county and in favour of increased support for the arts and social fabric. It follows that I support increases in Council Tax, providing they are progressive, and to that end I am strongly in favour of banding revision. I am fully aware that, as a result, I am one of those who will pay more tax”.*

Example comments – Library Services

- *“I very much appreciate the mobile library service. I was very glad of the mobile library when I couldn't drive for health reasons. I live in Church Preen and the supply of fresh books and the friendly face of the librarian [name removed] made a big difference to me. I admire her skill and courage in getting her library vehicle over our potholed roads. Although the mobile library is not officially any kind of welfare service, it does provide a link to people who are isolated. If the internet went down in an emergency situation, it is a system already in place which could pass on information. Please don't let it go.”*
- *“Mobile library. A tempting area for adjustment which should be avoided as in rural Shropshire the library is not just books but more of a lifeline.”*
- *“One Service I greatly value is the library service: an essential social & cultural service, also providing an absolutely essential local support network & employing generally excellent, committed staff. Must be protected at all costs across the county. Fail on this and the Council will totally lose trust.”*

Example comments – Social Care

- *“I am unsure how the Government comes up with the allocation for social services, but this is clearly an uncontrollable expense and I know from previously published information that it is inadequate.”*
- *“The ageing of the population across the country and particularly in rural areas has been predicted since the 1970s and was, indeed, reflected by the Government in the rise in pensionable age. The need to provide for that population should therefore have been taken into account in planning the Council's social care budgets long ago.”*

Example comments – Resident Satisfaction

- *“Apart from the bins emptied fortnightly, mine are hardly ever full and I don't pay for a garden bin, can those who still have them, get them collected and recycled to someone who needs them instead of the Council purchasing new ones. I can't say what else I have from paying the Council Tax - never see Police personnel, never see a decent stretch of road in Oswestry without potholes. Oswestry town empty shops are increasing; Cross Street looks dreadful where it once was a thriving street.”*
- *“Also, I'm under no illusion that this consultation is purely a box ticking exercise, as the decision will undoubtedly be made in favour of the increase. But myself and I suspect many others won't take this change without protest.”*
- *“Specific Services: my household receives virtually no services direct from the Council. We have to pay £56 to have our green bins emptied which is both an outrage and an additional tax. Many services that we used regularly in the past such as pest control (very important for those of us living in rural areas) are no longer available/no longer covered by the Council Tax. And the appalling state of the roads and lanes in Shropshire is not getting any better. The lane outside our house [name removed] had some repair work done during the summer but it is already starting to break up in places because 'patching' is not a long term solution & the councils continue to allow huge agricultural trucks to use lanes which were not designed to cope with them.”*

Example comments – Council Management

- *“I appreciate that the Council is in debt and must pay its bills, despite its clear poor management over many years. Indeed, the need for radical change was obvious from 2022 when the council began heavily drawing down on its reserves without any expectation of recovery from local resources such as council tax and was critical by 2024 when it received Exceptional Financial Support, which seems barely to have touched the sides.”*
- *“The answer is NO. My reasons are in the past few years decisions have been made behind closed doors without consultation. Ie the shopping centre in Shrewsbury. Shrewsbury Council has been run unprofessionally making huge losses. Most work is now outsourced to*

contractors. Where have all your maintenance people gone?? Services have disappeared and it's left to volunteers to pick up the pieces. I am one of those people. Why should we pay for your mistakes? It's about time you looked at your pay structure! Why do we need a CEO on an extortionate wage?"

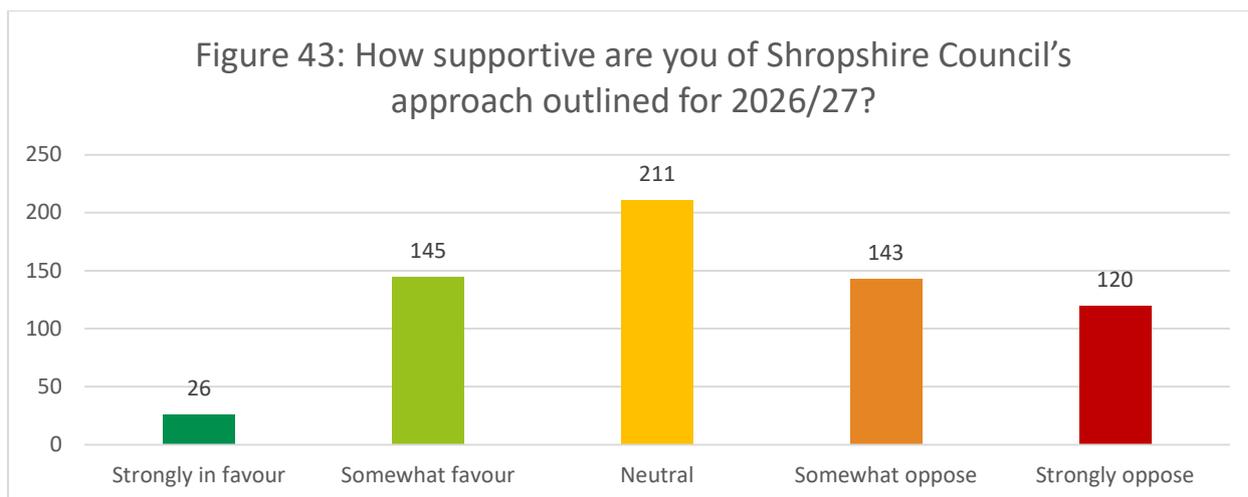
- *"If I (or anyone else) frittered money away like this, knowing that I could simply "milk" residents for more, I would be sacked. We already have disproportionately higher Council Tax than for example Westminster. Rather than paying more to SCC, we as Residents should be seeking a Vote of No Confidence and demanding accountability for the countless errors which have been made and continue to be made, together with a promise that we are being listened to and that such mistakes WILL NOT be made in future. I AND OTHERS FEEL ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!"*

Example comments – Budget Approach

- *"I appreciate that the Council is under significant financial pressure and that difficult decisions are unavoidable. However, it is very difficult to engage meaningfully with this consultation without clearer and more comparable financial information. At present, residents are being asked what matters most, without being shown how current spending compares with previous years, what outcomes have been achieved for that spending, or where costs have increased or services have failed to improve despite higher expenditure. Without clear year-on-year comparisons, service-level breakdowns, and explanations of what will realistically need to be reduced or stopped to balance the 2026/27 budget, the process risks feeling less like consultation and more like asking residents to endorse decisions already made."*
- *"A priority for the council should also include recovering owed tax which I believe runs to millions of £'s it's a no brainer."*
- *"...Please reduce this spending by efficiencies before you take any more money from us your working customers. Also the rise in Town Council bills to cover work which SC should be doing is another hit to the working taxpayer. It is "double taxation " by the back door and very unfair and rather sneaky."*

The strength of feeling expressed within the comments on all themes is evident. People feel very strongly about the importance of protecting services such as the mobile library but feel even more strongly that they should not be asked to pay more council tax to protect service because they predominantly express the view that budget challenges are a result of financial mismanagement by Shropshire Council and/or an unfair council tax system. A small number of people express a willingness to pay more (3 of the 31).

The last 3 questions within the budget consultation survey provided a similar opportunity to provide more overall feedback. One question read 'Overall, on a scale of strongly favour to strongly oppose, how supportive are you of Shropshire Council's approach outlined for 2026/27?' Figure 43 displays the response. 18.6% are strongly in favour or somewhat in favour of the approaches set out within the budget consultation, 22.9% are neutral (many commented they were not clear of the council's approach) and 28.5% are against.



To understand this further and to provide the opportunity for any suggestions or alternative approaches, a supplementary question read 'Please share your ideas for how we might make further savings or provide any alternative suggestions for the future'.

Table 11 displays the feedback by theme. There were a lot of different types of comments for this more open question. There were 250 actual comments and 334 main points within those comments. Example comments are included to illustrate the feedback received.

Table 11: Alternative suggestions and ideas for future savings

Theme	Count	%
Address inefficiency/ maximise efficiency/ improve public perception	38	11
Don't outsource/ don't use consultants/ value for money	35	10
Capital comments including Shirehall, buildings, developments	32	10
Focus on workforce changes e.g. reduce pay/pensions, reduce stress	30	9
Review management layers and effectiveness	28	8
Unclear on savings approach/ direction	15	4
Reconsider number of councillors/expenses	12	4
Consider good practice/ partnerships/ business models	13	4
Suggestions - Community-led, Town and Parish Councils, volunteering	24	7
Suggestions - Social Care	20	6
Suggestions - Highways	10	3
Suggestions - Waste	7	2
Suggestions - Libraries	5	1
Suggestions - Climate Change	5	1
Suggestions - Economy and employment	11	3
Don't increase costs to the taxpayer	8	2
Delivery statutory services only	10	3
Other comments	31	9
Total	334	100

Example comments

- *"I don't really know what your approach is as yet. Other ideas: Reduce the amount of grass cutting/maintenance, reduce the payoffs and large wages for staff. You are better having more good staff who are not stressed in their jobs than fewer higher paid staff who are over stressed anyway! Invest in the environment, don't sanction concreting it over. If people are happy with their surroundings they will be happier and healthier people. Stop this ruination of our countryside. It costs you in the end because the demands in other services rapidly increases!"*
- *"Not really sure what your approach is you seem to have no preferences just a list of possible options."*
- *"Spend less money on reviews and investigations into projects. Change the council and the people running it."*
- *"Speed of decision making is diabolical. Too many departments working in silos. And a feeling that there are too many people attempting to change one lightbulb."*
- *"Just use common sense and stop wasting tax payers money on stupid ideas for example the new road layout by the railway station."*
- *"Don't get rid of all discretionary services just to save money. These services provide the things residents of Shropshire enjoy doing. Please explore all options for continuing with these services, even if they're delivered by other organisations."*
- *"Create a can-do culture within the council. Create a culture where your staff feel valued for the good work they do-catch them being good. Many are well paid already. It is not always about pure economic reward."*
- *"Hard to climb back from the waste of previous years. Focus on real efficiency of employees which does not necessarily mean cutting jobs but making sure that just enough and the right people are in the right departments and jobs."*
- *"Invest in what you've got and the people you've got delivering it. You have committed hardworking officers who are doing their absolute best under unbearable pressure and still trying to keep their communities at the forefront of their delivery."*
- *"Tackle road maintenance by adopting the Blackpool model. Stop wasting money on cutting the grass on verges and parks every six weeks - transform them to meadows (where safety and usage permit) and cut and collect the grass once a year."*
- *"Streamline waste collection, recycling does need to be split in to so many different types. Many councils are able to operate so that they only make two collections waste and mixed recycling. If others can do it, why not Shropshire Council? This would reduce the number of visits required, cutting costs, and providing a much easier system for your residents."*
- *"Possibly reduce bin collections to 3 weekly instead of current 2 weekly. Stop all library functions. Better manage contractors & hold them to account when they do not do a good job example when pothole filling. If it's not done well hold back payments."*
- *"Bear down on runaway social care costs."*
- *"Make sure the council is not getting ripped off with external contracts. Focus on statutory services delivery protecting public health. Cut non-essential services or start charging until the financial situation improves. Raise Council Tax. Stop waste on political vanity projects. Redesign Adult and Children's Social care from top to bottom, to work smart and to budget - it is currently a black hole of waste."*
- *"Impalement policy to get Community Benefit funds for all renewable projects in Shropshire including Biomass, Wind, Solar and BESS- this would help communities take services off SC and a funding stream."*
- *"Reduce the amount of higher up officials and reinvest back into towns and services."*
- *"Work closer with Ludlow Town Council to see if you can hand over services and money to local parishioners - see if they can deliver services with their existing teams and volunteers - engaging local residents might be easier closer to home."*
- *"Make the area wealthy by increasing the number of high-tech companies who locate here. Increase manufacturing jobs in the area. Get most youngsters into quality apprenticeship jobs and away for the university industries' false promise of a degree then better paid work."*

- *“Invest capital funding in projects that will save the council money in the future such as building residential homes.”*
- *“Please stop spending hard-earned taxpayer money on consultancy fees for vanity projects and infrastructure projects that don’t go anywhere (e.g. gyratory debacle, NWRP). Stop speculating on property investment. Better use of the resources you have and provide a back-to-basics service where road maintenance, pavement maintenance, grass cutting, waste collection, schools and flood prevention are prioritised.”*
- *“Cut anything that is not a statutory service, sell assets which are not being used. Better use of technology.”*
- *“Borrowing money when you can’t stop spending will prove to be a disaster. Stop providing non-essential/statutory services/reduce consultants/stop using staff who live in parts of the country and who don’t care about people/services in Shropshire...”*
- *“Stop talking and provide action on cost saving. You say you have put actions in place but there is no reporting on what those actions are and what effect they have had or are having.”*

Suggestions included:

- Early involvement with the voluntary sector, towns and parish councils and improved partnership working rather than reducing services.
- More work to look at efficiency within the organisation.
- Review the allocation of staffing and pay levels of management/councillors.
- Work to ensure greater accountability of leadership.
- Look at good practice within other local authorities.
- Better joint working between departments.
- Ending use of consultants and bringing services in-house to reduce costs.
- Measures to reduce costs through energy efficiency and carbon reduction.
- Reducing waste e.g. food and energy waste.
- Making better use of assets such as libraries for other services.
- Opening facilities out of hours to increase use, e.g. leisure centres.
- More focus on roads, streets and the public environment to boost civic pride.
- More action to meet the needs of rural areas within the county.
- Improved resident engagement and acting on views with more devolved working at local level.
- Merging with other councils.
- Reducing new housing development that increases population size and needs.
- Increasing fees and charges for non-residents e.g. visitors.

The last question within the main body of the survey explained that Shropshire Council works to meet the Equalities Duty and consider social inclusion and health impacts within all policy and service changes. Comments were encouraged from anyone with feedback on how the budget proposals set out above could impact on different groups of people with different characteristics within the community.

There were 106 comments and the summary is shown in Table 12. Top themes included concerns about the impact of council tax increases and other costs on households or requests not to charge more for services, criticism that considering equalities is ‘wokeism’ and that diversity and equality considerations should be scrapped and request to focus not on specific needs but on meeting the needs of the general population/all. Where needs of specific characteristics were mentioned, they included

the needs of young people, older people, people with disabilities, people who are rurally isolated and people who may be digitally excluded or unable to use online services. Example comments help to illustrate this feedback further.

Table 12: Comments relating to impact on equalities, social inclusion and health

Theme	Count	%
Impact on household/personal finances/ don't charge more for services	17	14
Wokeism/ scrap consideration of diversity and equalities	14	12
Provide basic services for all/equal treatment	12	10
Needs of young people/ future education and employment	9	8
Focus on needs of people with disabilities	10	8
Rurally isolated and needs of rural communities	8	7
Digital exclusion concerns	7	6
Concerns for the elderly in Shropshire/aging population	6	5
Priority for most vulnerable/ those with greatest social care needs	5	4
Cannot to afford to meet all needs	3	3
Needs of unpaid carers	1	1
Other	26	22
Total	118	100

Example comments

- *“I think that many will be pushed beyond their means by a council tax hike. We already have huge inequality within Shropshire, and it's obvious that money talks. The poorest have got no chance, especially if you start taking away things like libraries, museums and sports facilities that enrich and enhance education for all.”*
- *“Raising taxes while cutting essential services will devastate the people of Shropshire. Families will be forced to pay more while receiving less support, leaving communities without the basic infrastructure they need—no new GP surgeries, no schools, and no investment in frontline care. At the same time, the council's negligence has allowed nonstop development that strips away public land and green spaces, eroding the character and environment of our towns and villages. Millions have been wasted on back-handed deals and sub-par projects, with only private contractors benefitting while residents see their quality of life decline....”*
- *“It's going to place some further into poverty whilst also reducing access to support and leisure activities that help wellbeing. The less people have the less they care about their communities.”*
- *“Don't just carry out tick box exercises for the woke agenda... If there's a real need for inclusion then it should be provided but many needs can be met by relaxing rules for neurodivergent people and accommodating individuals rather than groups.”*
- *“The Council should waste no more money on equality, diversity and inclusion measures, should stop worrying about climate change...and give up the daft idea that bicycles are a good way to get around our large and hilly county.”*
- *“The whole DEI and 'social inclusion' and 'health impact' is exactly what is wrong with Shropshire Council. This all needs to be scrapped, starting with repeal of all legislation relating to above, which date back to 1997.”*
- *“You cannot please all of the people all of the time. To return SCC to a sure financial footing difficult and unpopular decisions are going to be made. To put it simply if you have a budget of £1.00, it is impossible to spend £1.05 without going into debt! Use the 50 / 30 / 20 financial rule.”*

- *“Stop talking about different people, diversity, inclusion, carbon footprints, green agendas. You do not have the budget or surplus or credibility to focus on these luxuries. Get basic services right for all residents, then you can have the luxury of focusing on these things with any surplus.”*
- *“Most of council services are targeted on centres of population. Rural communities are ignored.”*
- *“My children are young adults. They want to move out, buy their own homes. When costing out a monthly budget, the council tax is rapidly catching up to the monthly spend on a mortgage. How is that progression? Also, please consider that living in one of the more rural parts of Shropshire, we really feel like we get very little for our council tax as it is. Just remember that increasing our council tax to constantly spend the money solely in the biggest towns in our country feels very unjust.”*
- *“Aging is a protected characteristic. Spend time in a rural community to understand some of the difficulties the aging residents/population, face. Rurality requires attention. The council need to understand better why a rural community requires different support to a town...”*
- *“All people of all different groups should be treated equally.”*
- *“Shropshire has been targeting kids with disabilities for the past 5 years. SEND kids have been blamed for transport costs, for placement costs and there’s been a spike in the number being taken into care. There’s a lack of educational provision and the local offer is exceptionally poor. There’s been no EIA on the impact this adversarial approach Shropshire Council has taken to vulnerable children has had.”*
- *“Transport for education should be looked at and only provided if families cannot afford it. Increased use of volunteers and local community groups would also help, maybe even more apprenticeships for young people.”*
- *“Reduction in libraries and museums and archives services has a direct impact on equalities. All services support people into work and work-related activity through supporting people who are neurodivergent or with learning disabilities, delivering work experience and providing life-long learning access and opportunities that combat social isolation, depression and well-being. The appreciation of a sense of place, comes from an understanding of heritage and it is shown that regeneration such as at Flaxmill Maltings, has a profound impact on local pride and antisocial behaviour. Reducing facilities to showcase and explore heritage within the county reduces the ability to make the most of our assets. ...All things that make people and places happier and reducing pressure on social care.”*
- *“Local homes for local people. Make local people a priority with vacant council houses.”*

The question highlights some very mixed views and to a degree some of the comments suggest that the needs of minority groups are less important than meeting the needs of the masses. This feedback suggests that more work may be needed with the community to explain why equality, social inclusion and health impact assessment is so important.

The final section of the report provides a summary and seeks to draw some main conclusions from all the findings set out within this report and the budget consultation 2026/27.

14 Summary and Conclusion

Shropshire Council's Budget Consultation for 2026/27 gathered extensive public and stakeholder feedback on the council's financial challenges, priorities, and potential approaches to savings and income generation. The consultation generated 952 responses spanning online and paper surveys, emails and letters, with a broad geographic spread across the county and a respondent profile largely reflective of local demographics.

The budget consultation and background document clearly emphasised the scale of the financial pressures facing the council—rising demand, increased costs, historic underfunding, and the consequences of past decisions such as the council tax freeze. However, many participants strongly associated the council's current financial situation with perceived poor financial management, past “vanity projects,” and a lack of long-term planning. These perceptions strongly shaped attitudes to savings, charging, and council tax.

Online Services

Most respondents were confident using online services, though a minority still experienced barriers and called for telephone and face to face support. Satisfaction with online services was mixed, split almost evenly between positive and negative views. The most common feedback concerned usability, responsiveness, and the need for better access to staff for issues that cannot be resolved online. Many respondents emphasised that digital-first approaches risk excluding older or vulnerable people.

Savings Approaches

There was broad support for better use of capital funds, partnership working, using in-house expertise, reviewing contracts and procurement for value for money and providing early support to reduce demand. Conversely, there was strong opposition to reducing services to the legal minimum and charging more for discretionary services. Environmental measures (reducing carbon footprint) received moderate but more divided support.

Council Tax

Views on council tax were highly polarised 50% agreed with the proposed 4.99% increase; 46% disagreed. Support for increases above 4.99% was low. Comments conveyed strong distrust in the council's financial stewardship, with many arguing they already receive poor value for money. Those who supported increases often stressed they must result in visible improvements and be underpinned by better management.

Leisure Services

Most respondents wanted to avoid closures and maintain provision, emphasising the long-term health benefits of leisure facilities. Income generation, capital investment, and partnership models were preferred over cuts to services or buildings. However, some felt leisure services were non-essential luxuries compared with statutory services.

Library Services

Libraries were described as essential community assets, particularly in rural areas. Respondents supported increasing self-service options, expanding services to create

multi-use community hubs and generating income through events, hires, or memberships. They strongly opposed reductions in library buildings, stock, mobile libraries, or opening hours.

Museum Services

There was general acceptance of charging for exhibitions and building partnerships to sustain museum services. Respondents strongly opposed closures or reductions to education and events, highlighting museums' value for culture, learning, wellbeing, and tourism.

Partnership Working

Many supported more volunteering, community involvement, and partnership with the voluntary sector—while stressing the limits of volunteer capacity and the need for continued funding. There was significant concern about transferring services to the private sector, especially fears of asset loss and reduced quality. There was general agreement for working more closely with town and parish councils but some expressed concern about this leading to increases in precepts/council tax.

Social Care

All proposed approaches received strong support—particularly helping people stay in their homes, reablement and increased use of technology. Comments reflected concerns over provider costs, low wages, inefficiencies, and the need for preventative work. Respondents highlighted the complexity and fragility of the wider care system, emphasising that changes in one area can create risks elsewhere.

Capital Programme

Public preference for capital investment was clear with the highest priorities being roads and highways, public transport & park and ride and parks and rights of way. The lowest priorities for capital investment were seen as arts, culture, heritage buildings, library refurbishments and school site improvements. Comments again criticised past capital decisions and called for more equitable investment across the county.

Resident Satisfaction

Benchmarking against national LGA data revealed significantly lower satisfaction in Shropshire compared to national averages across most measures, especially overall satisfaction, value for money and confidence that the council acts on residents' concerns. Satisfaction was highest for waste collection, parks and green spaces, libraries and leisure services. Dissatisfaction was highest for road maintenance, pavement maintenance and street cleaning.

Other Feedback

Written consultation responses through email and letter amplified themes of:

- Distrust in council management
- Strong opposition to council tax increases
- Deep concern for rural inequality
- Frustration with service cuts and outsourcing
- Desire for more transparent financial information

Conclusion

The 2026/27 budget consultation highlights a community that simultaneously acknowledges the severity of the council's financial situation yet remains sceptical about the council's ability to manage resources effectively. Residents consistently call for:

- **Better financial management and leadership:** The strongest themes across the consultation reflect concern about inefficiency, past investment decisions, and a perceived lack of accountability and transparency.
- **Protection of key community services:** Libraries, leisure centres, museums, and mobile services, particularly in rural areas, are viewed as essential for wellbeing, inclusion, literacy, health, and community cohesion.
- **Prioritisation of core infrastructure:** Roads and transport are overwhelmingly seen as the most urgent areas for capital investment.
- **Improved communication and engagement:** Residents want clearer explanations of decision-making, better responsiveness, and evidence that their views shape outcomes.
- **Sensitivity to household financial pressures:** Concerns about affordability dominate views on council tax, fees, and charges, particularly against a backdrop of rising living costs.
- **A balanced approach to savings:** Residents support efficiency measures, income generation, partnerships, and preventative approaches, while opposing cuts that would damage long-term community wellbeing or local identity.

In summary, the consultation reflects a county that deeply values its local services but urgently wants to see stronger, more transparent, more accountable financial stewardship from the council. The feedback provides a rich and detailed evidence base to guide decision-making for the 2026/27 budget and in the future, highlighting both public priorities and areas where trust and confidence need to be rebuilt.

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Analysis and reporting by:
Feedback and Insight Team, Shropshire Council
Email: TellUs@shropshire.gov.uk

Lead Service: Finance, Enabling Services



Shropshire
Council