



Budget Conversation 2022-23 Findings Report

November 2021

Corporate Research, Data and Innovation Team

Old Viewforth

Stirling

FK8 2ET

research@stirling.gov.uk

Report Summary

A Budget Conversation survey was recently carried out by Stirling Council to gain the opinions of people who work, study and reside in the Stirling Council area as well as representatives from community groups and organisations. The survey ran for six weeks from Monday 20th September to Monday the 1st November 2021 and received 533 responses.

Respondents

- The largest percentage of responses to the budget survey were from Stirling Council residents with 91% (485 of a total 533 respondents), a further 14 respondents work in Stirling, 18 respondents study in Stirling but reside elsewhere and eight respondents were from representatives of community groups or organisations.

Valuing and prioritising services

- Respondents were asked to choose up to five Council Services they **valued the most**. The top five rated were Waste Services (386 responses), Education (308), Roads (297), Land Services (166) and Adult Social Care (165).
- When respondents were then asked to choose up to five services the **Council should prioritise**, the top five were Waste Services (350 responses), Education (318) Roads (273), Adult Social Care (205) and Children, Young People & Families (191).

How services are delivered

- Respondents were also asked their agreement with three statements about how the Council could change service provision on a scale of 0-10 (with 0 indicating strongly disagree and 10 indicating strongly agree):
 1. The Council reduces or even stops delivering some services to protect other services – 44% disagreed, 18% neither disagreed nor agreed, and 38% agreed (480 respondents).
 2. The Council reviews service standards, even if this means that to continue the service, service levels are reduced, and delivery times increased – 40% disagreed, 21% neither disagreed nor agreed, and 39% agreed (475 respondents).
 3. The Council reviews charges for services, even if this means having to introduce or increase some charges to allow services to continue – 40% disagreed, 21% neither disagreed nor agreed, and 39% agreed (475 respondents).
- The results showed a balance between those who agreed and those who disagreed with the statements.

Council savings

- When respondents were asked about the best way to meet increasing costs, nearly three-quarters (71%) chose 'doing things differently, such as through digital technology' as their **first** choice. Just under half (45%) chose 'generating more income/charging more for services' as their **second** choice and more than half (57%) indicated for their **third** choice 'reducing spending on services' was the best way to meet increasing costs.

Reducing spending

- Respondents were asked about their preference regards council spending, two-thirds of respondents (67%) said they would prefer to reduce spending on certain areas, around a quarter (26%) thought that services should remain the same and only 6% thought that spending should be reduced across **all** services by the same proportion. From the 284 respondents who chose the option to reduce spending on certain areas, the areas that were highlighted most were Licencing (taxis/alcohol) with 164 respondents, Planning & Building Services with 111 respondents, Culture, Tourism & Leisure with 110 respondents and Registrars with 109 respondents.

Generating more income

- Regarding covering the costs of services, just over a third of respondents (36%) agree there should be increased charges whereas a slightly higher proportion (39%) disagree.
- 29% of respondents are in favour of introducing new charges for services that are currently free, whereas just under half (47%) disagree.

- 41% of respondents agree that charges should remain the same with around a fifth (19%) disagreeing.
- Almost three-quarters of respondents (72%) are **not** in favour of the Council increasing charges across **all** services, only 12% agree with this option.
- There were 227 responses to the question regarding further ideas on how Stirling Council could generate more income. Respondents provided comments on investment and savings as well as income generation. There were 51 comments regarding efficiencies within Stirling Council, 48 comments on reducing services that are seen as being insignificant and 47 comments on the introduction, increase and enforcement of fees and charges.

Doing things differently

- Around two-thirds of respondents (69%) agree that the Council should change the way it delivers services to make them more cost-effective, only 14% of respondents disagree.

Council Tax

- More than half of respondents (54%) support an increase in Council Tax in order to protect services whilst over a third (36%) do **not** support an increase.
- From the respondents who supported a council tax increase nearly half (47%) opted for an increase of less than 2%. The other options supported were: increase of 2-3% (18%), increase of 3-4% (10%), increase of above 4% (15%), and don't know (10%).

Comments from respondents: Most important issues facing Stirling Council area

- From the 375 respondents who commented on the most important issues facing the Stirling Council area today, the highest numbers came from comments on waste services (84 comments), management and leadership (53), roads and bridges (45), climate change (43) and Education (41).

Contents

Report Summary	2
Background and Methodology	5
Respondent Demographics	6
Valuing and Prioritising Services	7
How Services are Delivered	9
Council Savings	10
Reducing Spending	10
Generating More Income	12
Income Generating Ideas	13
Doing Things Differently	13
Council Tax	14
Most important issues facing the Stirling council area	15

List of Figures

<i>Figure 1: Which of the following best describes you:</i>	6
<i>Table 1: Demographic of Respondents</i>	6
<i>Figure 2: Where respondents live</i>	7
<i>Figure 3: Which Council services do you value the most?</i>	7
<i>Figure 4: Which services you think the Council should prioritise?</i>	8
<i>Figure 5: How much do you agree or disagree with the following three statements about how the Council could change service provision?.....</i>	9
<i>Figure 6: What do you think is the best way to meet increasing costs? Number of responses ranked for 1st, 2nd and 3rd choice</i>	10
<i>Figure 7: Regarding Council's spending, would you prefer to reduce spending across all services by the same proportion or on certain areas?</i>	10
<i>Figure 8: Which of the following services do you think the Council should reduce spending on?</i>	11
<i>Figure 9: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following regarding covering the costs of services:</i>	12
<i>Figure 10: Do you agree or disagree that the Council should increase charges across all services?</i>	12
<i>Figure 11: Further ideas on how Stirling Council could generate more income</i>	13
<i>Figure 12: Do you agree or disagree the Council should change the way it delivers services to make them more cost-effective</i>	13
<i>Figure 13: Would you support an increase in Council Tax in order to protect services?</i>	14
<i>Figure 14: Which of the following Council Tax increases you would support most:</i>	14
<i>Figure 15: What would you say is the most important issue facing the Stirling Council area today and why?</i>	15

Background and Methodology

BACKGROUND

In March 2022, Stirling Council will consider its financial plans for the 2022-23 budget.

The Member-led Budget Advisory Group agreed to hold a formal public engagement process to inform the budget-setting process and development of final options presented to Council for consideration in 2022.

The aim of the 2021 *Budget Conversation* is to support a transparent and inclusive budget-setting process by:

- Involving those who live, work and study in Stirling in setting the priorities of the Council;
- Asking for the public's views on high-level values and priorities, savings and income; and
- Summarising the public response and feeding this back through Council channels including the engagement and feedback findings in the Budget Paper for Council.

This report summarises the findings of the Budget Conversation survey held from September to November 2021, which was conducted mainly as an online survey.

METHODOLOGY

An online survey was conducted over a six-week period from 20 September to 1 November 2021. The Council's **Engage Stirling** platform was the digital portal for the survey.

The aim of the survey was to collect the public's views on what they value in terms of council services, what they think the Council should prioritise, and what they think about different savings and income generation options for the Council for the 2022-23 budget year.

Paper copies of consultation materials and various other alternative formats was made available at libraries and Council contact outlets.

A copy of the questionnaire is appended to this report.

Over the course of the 6-week period, the Council published a range of Communications assets to encourage engagement, including press releases, social media posts, social media videos and posters with QR codes issued to libraries and targeted localities.

The communications plan achieved its objectives by helping to record our highest engagement in recent years. Initial findings suggest engaging social media content which provides information at the point of reading, rather than directing to another platform, garners the best response rate. Comprehensive analysis is underway to draw fuller conclusions and establish learning points from this campaign for next year's engagement.

Respondent Demographics

Around 533 participants responded to the survey with 99% of respondents completing the survey online via the councils Engagement Platform.

The minimum recommended sample size to have a high confidence level in the results is 383 for the Stirling Council adult population of 79,000. The 533 responses to the Budget Consultation is also comparable with the 2019 Scottish Household Survey where a representative sample of 520 Stirling Council residents completed the survey.

Respondents were initially asked to indicate in which capacity they were taking part in the survey. Most respondents put their main classification as being a Stirling Council resident with 91% (485 respondents), with the remaining respondents either, working or studying in Stirling or representing a community group or organisation (See Figure1). Respondents were asked additional questions relating to their location, age and sex in order to make sure that responses were representative of the Stirling Council area resident demographics.

Figure 1: Which of the following best describes you:

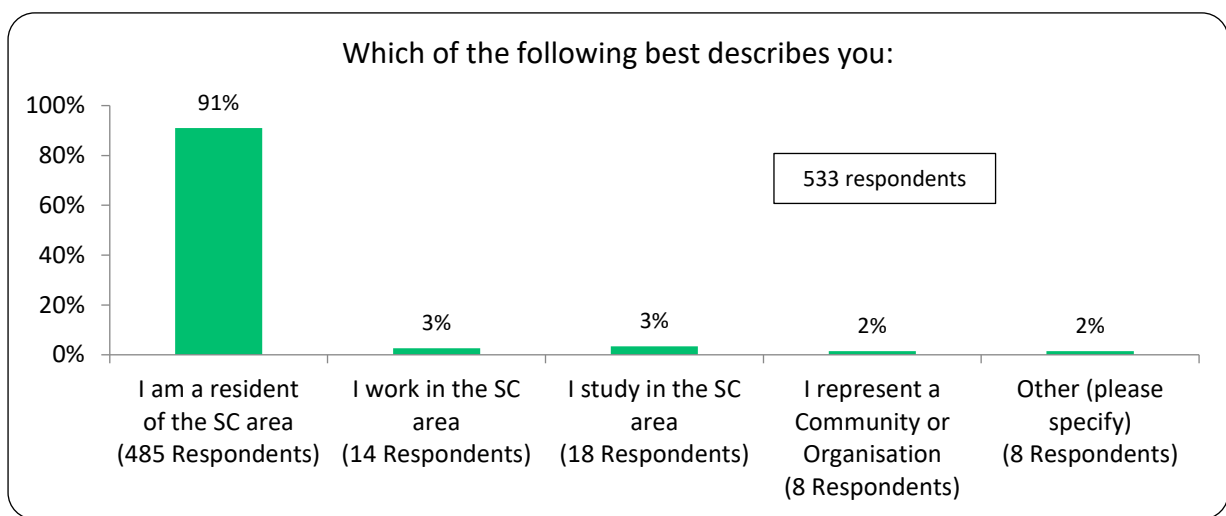


Table 1 below shows the comparison of demographics from the responses to the Budget Conversation survey and the latest demographic profile of the Stirling Council area from National Records of Scotland (NRS).

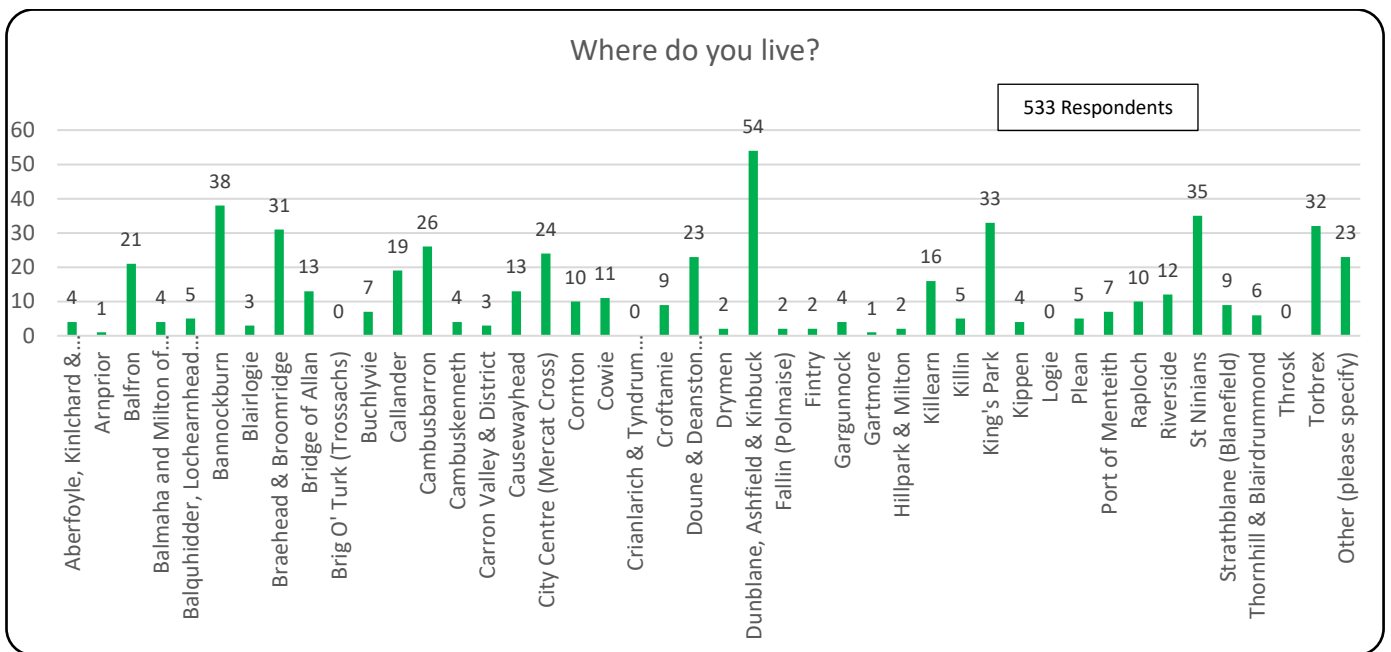
From the 383 survey respondents who stated their age band, the lowest and highest age groupings differ from NRS's age profile of the Stirling Council area. The comparison of data for sex and area are comparable with the NRS profile of the Stirling Council area.

Table 1: Demographic of Respondents

		Stirling Council Area Population 2020 Mid-year Estimate	2022/23 Budget Conversation Response (November 2021)
Age			
Source: NRS 2021	16-24	13%	2%
	25-34	13%	9%
	35-44	11%	25%
	45-54	14%	23%
	55-64	14%	20%
	65-74	11%	15%
	75+	9%	3%
Sex			
Source: NRS 2021	Male	48%	47%
	Female	52%	53%
Area			
Source: NRS 2021	Rural	33%	39%
	Urban	67%	61%

Figure 2 shows where respondents to the survey reside within the Stirling Council area, there were 533 responses in total with 510 from Stirling residents. Areas including Dunblane (54, 10%), Bannockburn (38, 7%) and St Ninians (35, 7%), contributed the most responses reflecting the high population of these community council areas.

Figure 2: Where respondents live



Valuing and Prioritising Services

Figure 3 shows respondents' most valued services. Of the 533 respondents the top five rated were:

1. Waste Services (72%, 386 responses);
2. Education (58%, 308 responses);
3. Roads (56%, 297 responses);
4. Land Services (31%, 166 responses); and
5. Adult Social Care (31%, 165 responses).

Figure 3: Which Council services do you value the most?

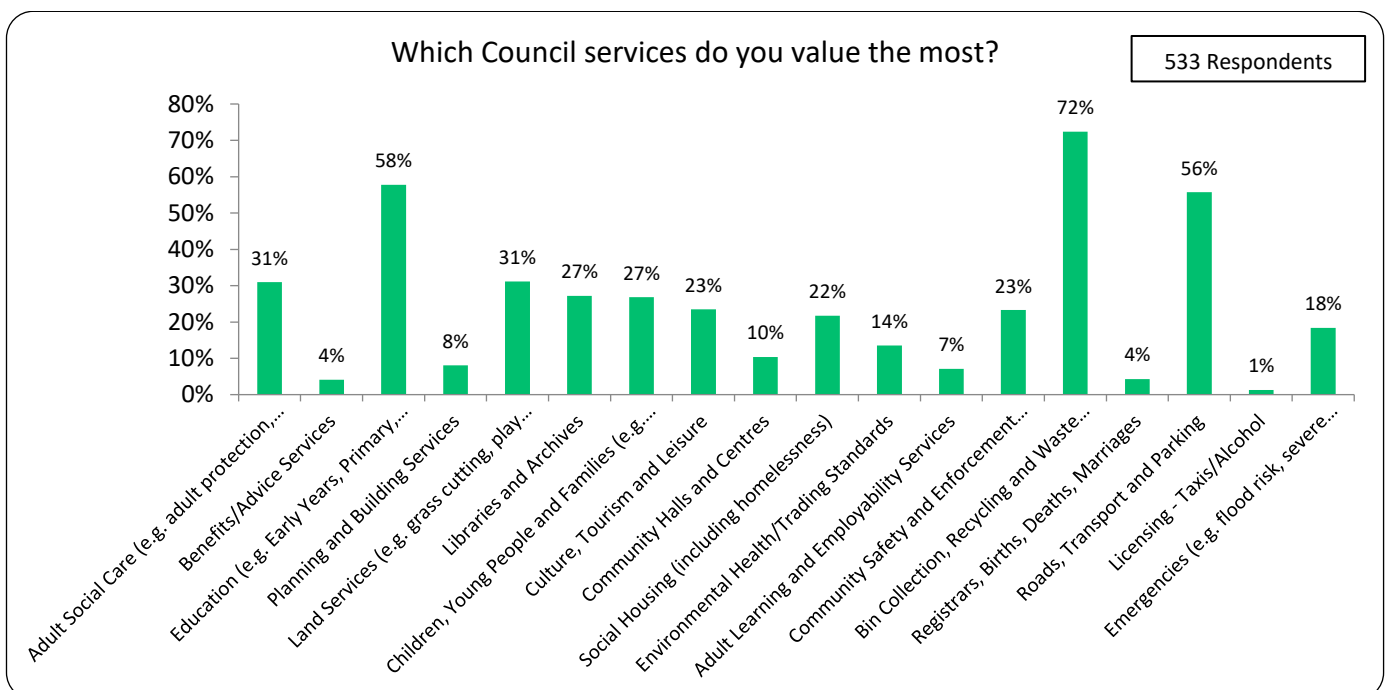
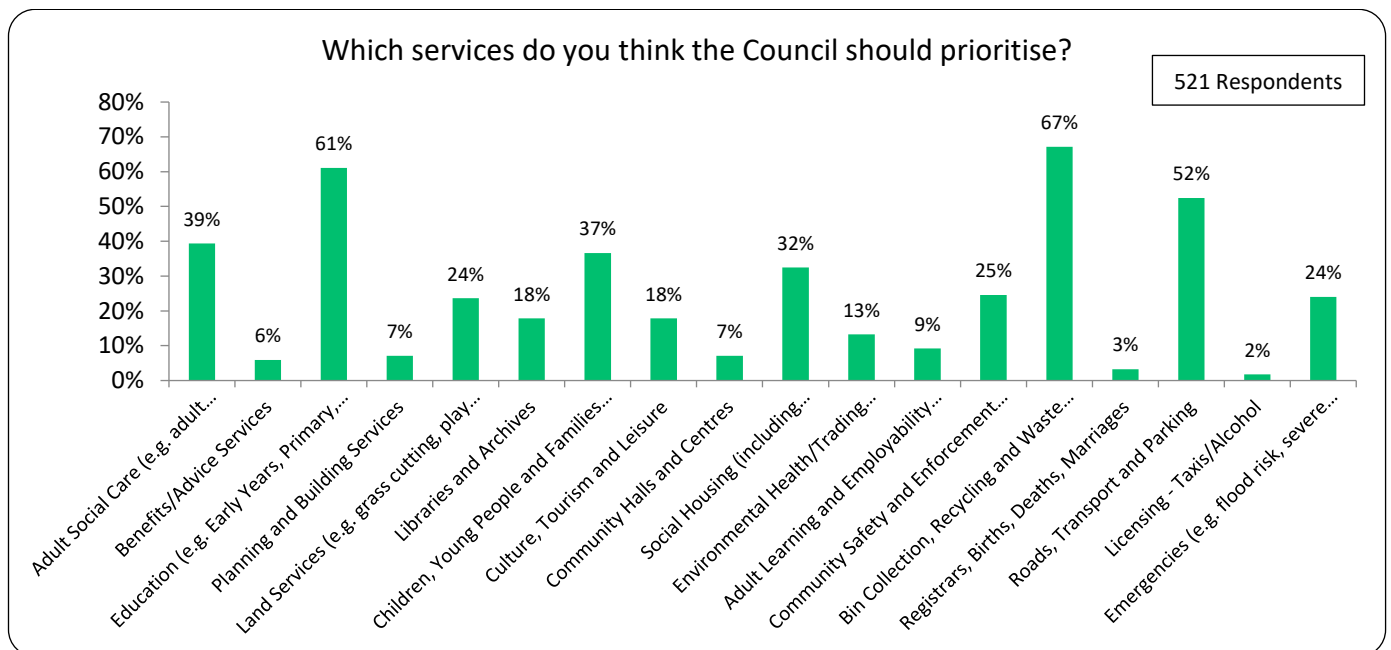


Figure 4 below illustrates the services respondents said the **Council should prioritise**. The top five were:

1. Waste Services (67%, 350 responses);
2. Education (61%, 318 responses);
3. Roads (52%, 273 responses);
4. Adult Social Care (39%, 205 responses); and
5. Children, Young People & Families (37%, 191 responses).

Figure 4: Which services you think the Council should prioritise?



How Services are Delivered

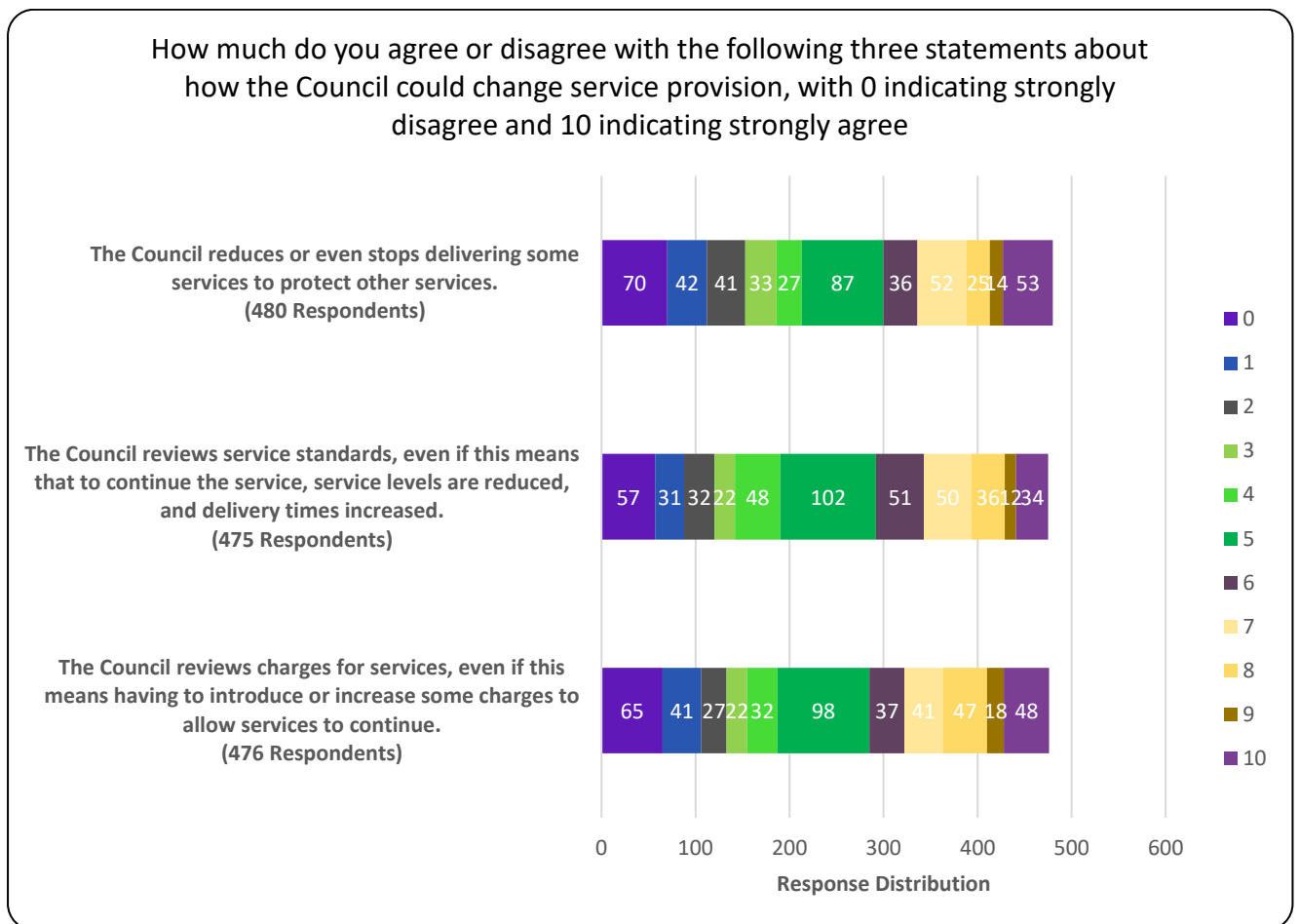
Respondents were asked to rate their agreement or disagreement with three statements about how the Council could change service provision, with 0 indicating strongly disagree and 10 indicating strongly agree.

Figure 5 below shows the distribution of the responses for each statement:

- The Council reduces or even stops delivering some services to protect other services – 44% disagreed, 18% neither disagreed or agreed, and 38% agreed (480 respondents)
- The Council reviews service standards, even if this means that to continue the service, service levels are reduced, and delivery times increased – 40% disagreed, 21% neither disagreed nor agreed, and 39% agreed (475 respondents).
- The Council reviews charges for services, even if this means having to introduce or increase some charges to allow services to continue – 40% disagreed, 21% neither disagreed nor agreed, and 39% agreed (476 respondents).

These results showed a balance between those who agreed and those who disagreed with the statements.

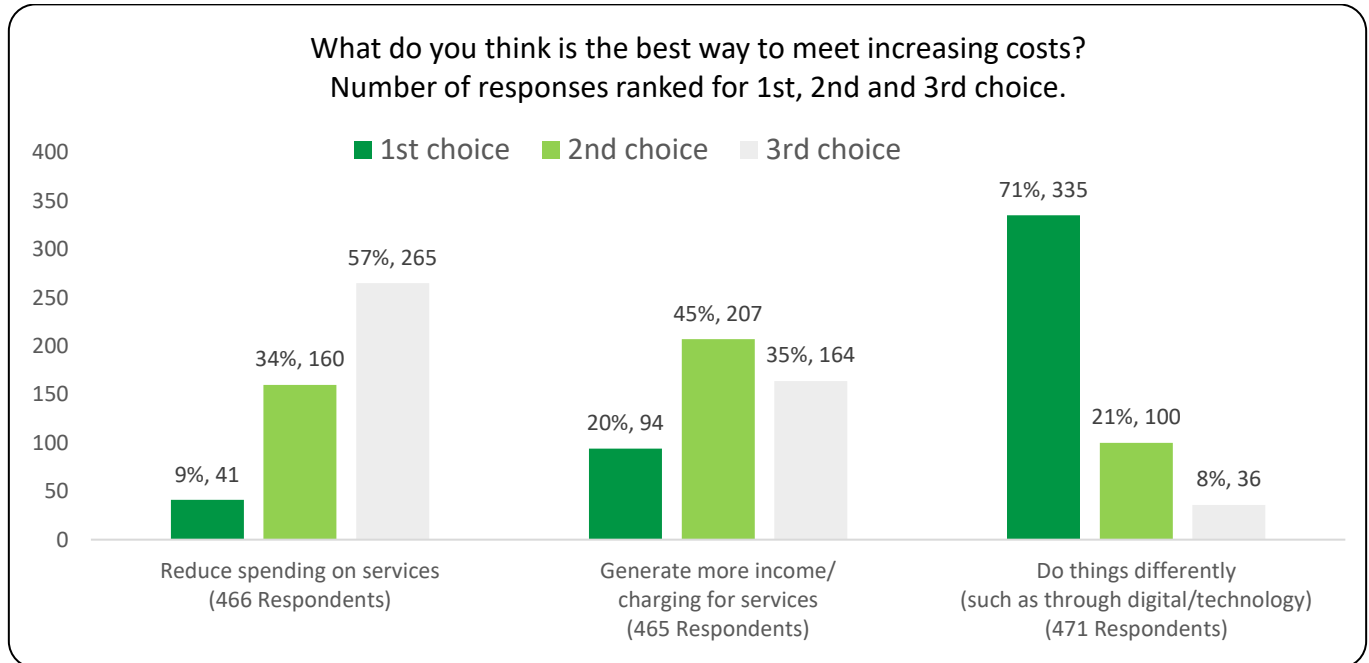
Figure 5: How much do you agree or disagree with the following three statements about how the Council could change service provision?



Council Savings

Respondents were asked about the best way to meet increasing costs. As shown in Figure 6 nearly three-quarters of respondents 71% (335) chose 'doing things differently, such as through digital technology' as their **first** choice, 45% (207 respondents) chose 'generating more income and charging more for services' as their **second** choice and 57% (265 respondents) indicated for their **third** choice that 'reducing spending on services' was the best way to meet increasing costs'.

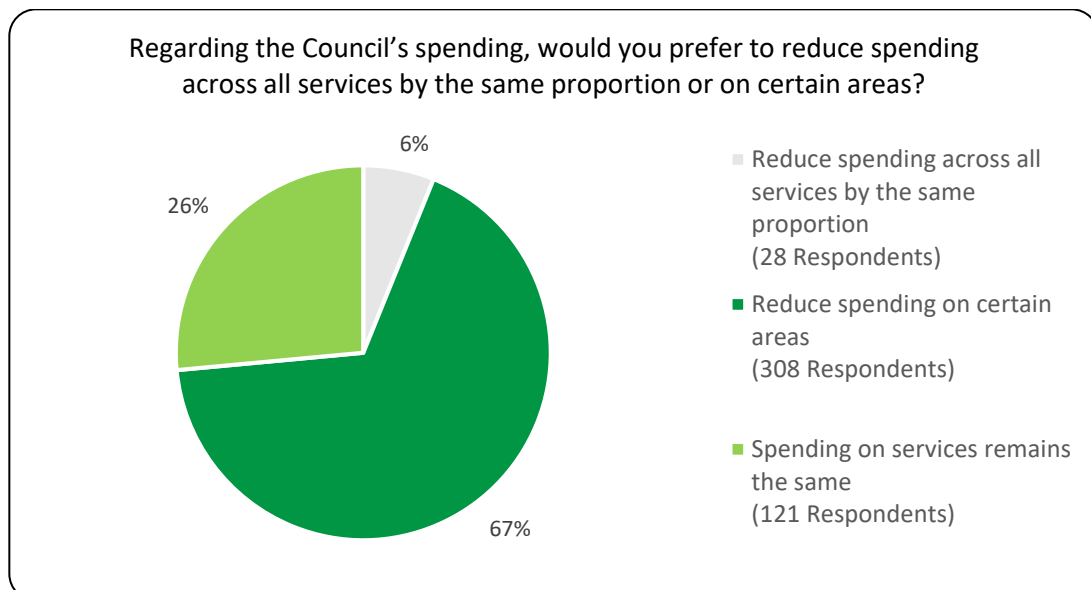
Figure 6: What do you think is the best way to meet increasing costs? Number of responses ranked for 1st, 2nd and 3rd choice



Reducing Spending

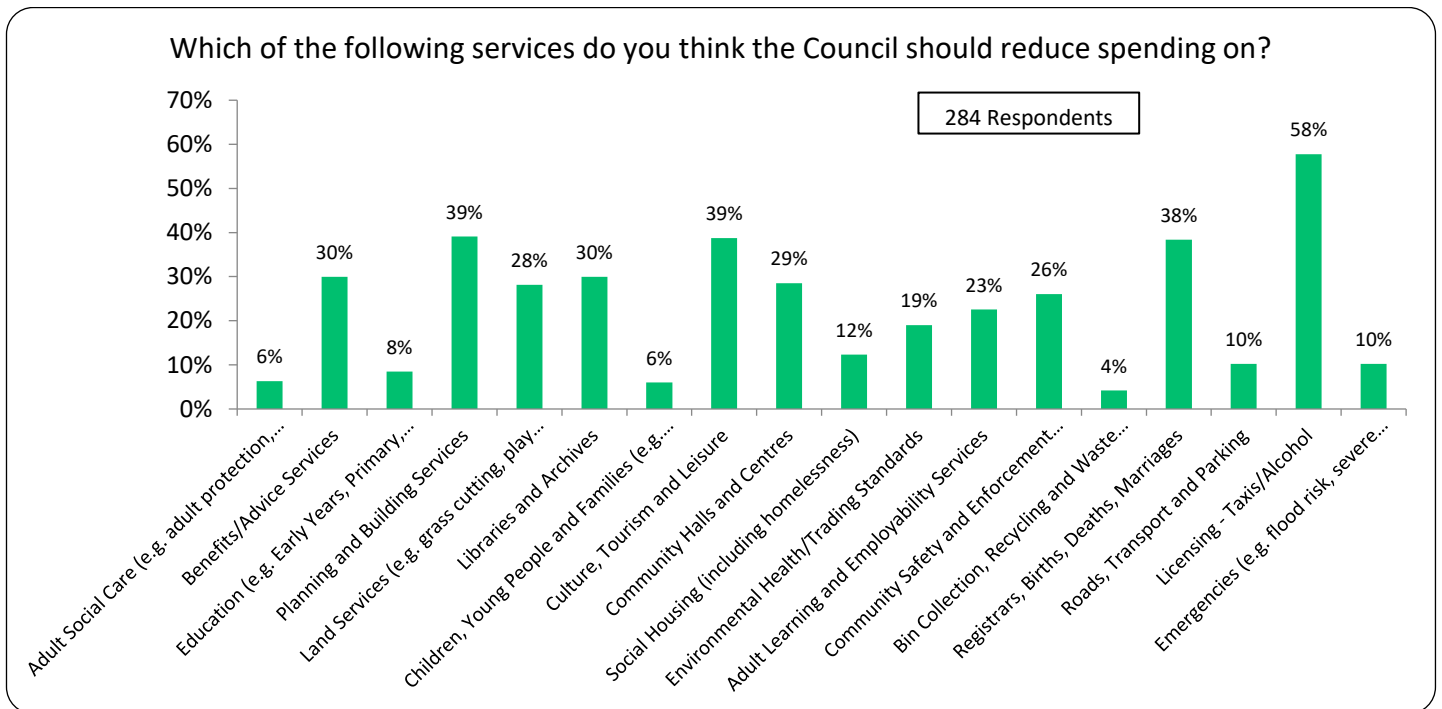
When respondents were asked about their preference regards council spending, two-thirds of the 457 respondents 67% (308) said they would prefer to reduce spending on certain areas, 27% (121 respondents) thought that services should remain the same and only 6% (28 respondents) thought that spending should be reduced across all services by the same proportion.

Figure 7: Regarding the Council's spending, would you prefer to reduce spending across all services by the same proportion or on certain areas?



From the respondents who chose the option to reduce spending on certain areas 284 also answered the question asking which services the council should reduce spending on. The areas that were highlighted most were licensing (taxi/alcohol) with 164 respondents (58%), planning and building services with 111 respondents (39%), culture, tourism & leisure with 110 respondents (39%), and the Registrar’s service with 109 respondents (38%).

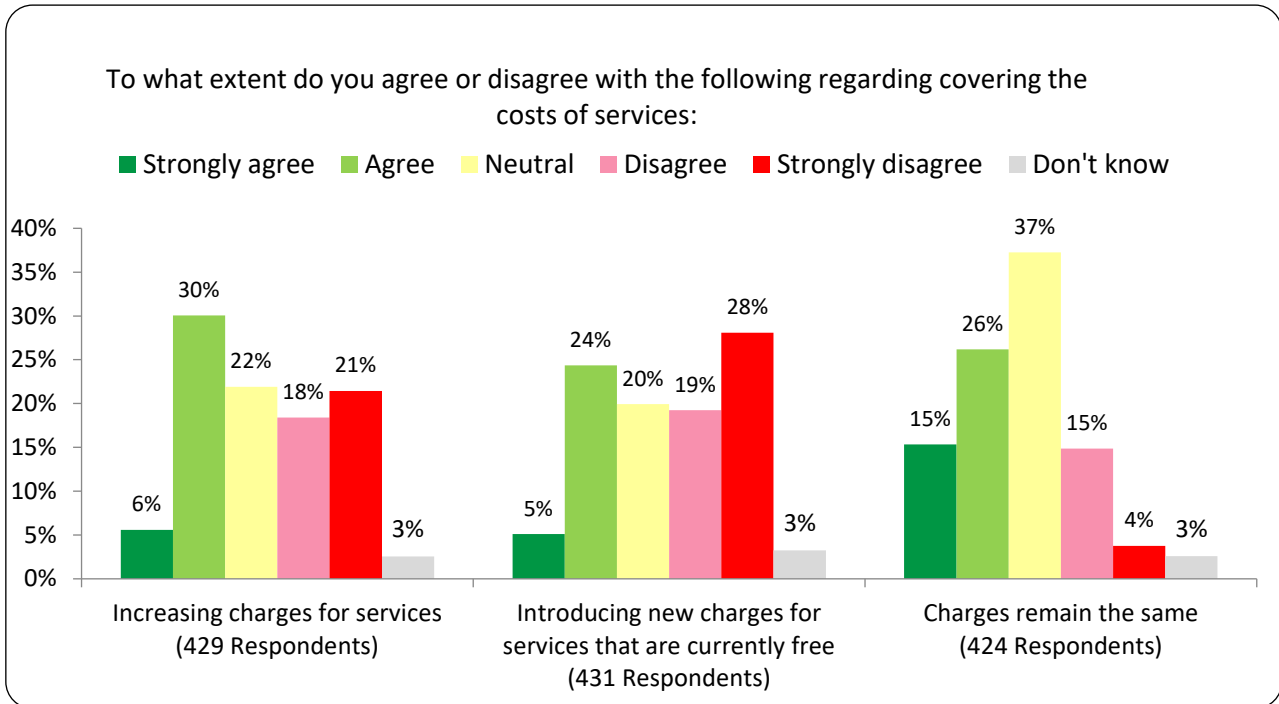
Figure 8: Which of the following services do you think the Council should reduce spending on?



Generating More Income

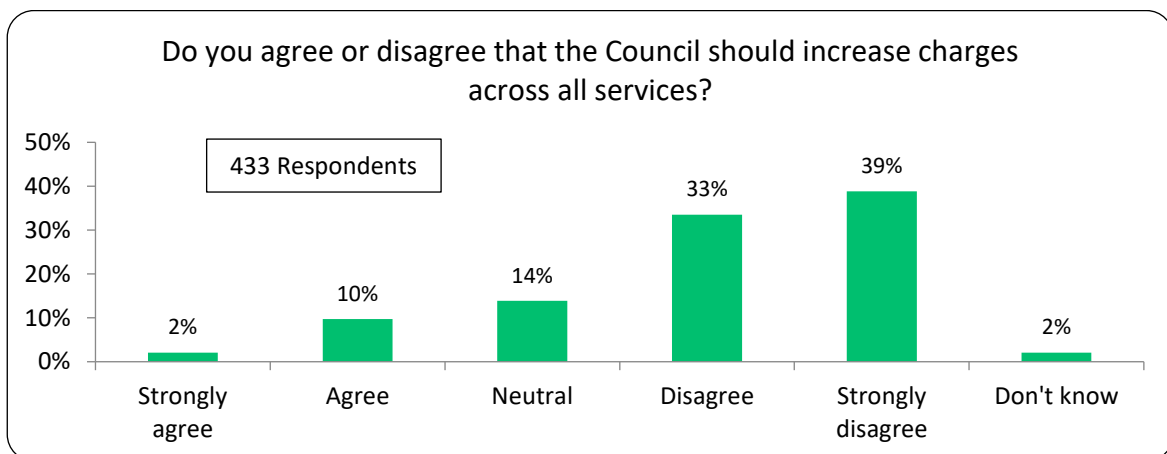
When respondents were asked their thoughts regarding covering the costs of services, 36% (153 respondents) either agreed or strongly agreed and 39% (171 respondents) either disagreed or strongly disagreed that charges to services should be increased. 29% (127 respondents) agreed or strongly agreed and 47% (204 respondents) disagreed or strongly disagreed that new charges should be introduced for services that are currently free. 41% (176 respondents) agreed or strongly agreed and 19% (79 respondents) disagreed or strongly disagreed that current charges should remain unchanged.

Figure 9: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following regarding covering the costs of services:



Respondents were asked for their thoughts on the Council increasing charges across all services, from the 433 respondents nearly three-quarters (72%, 313 respondents) disagreed or strongly disagreed with this option and only 12% (51 respondents) agreed or strongly agreed.

Figure10: Do you agree or disagree that the Council should increase charges across all services?



Income Generating Ideas

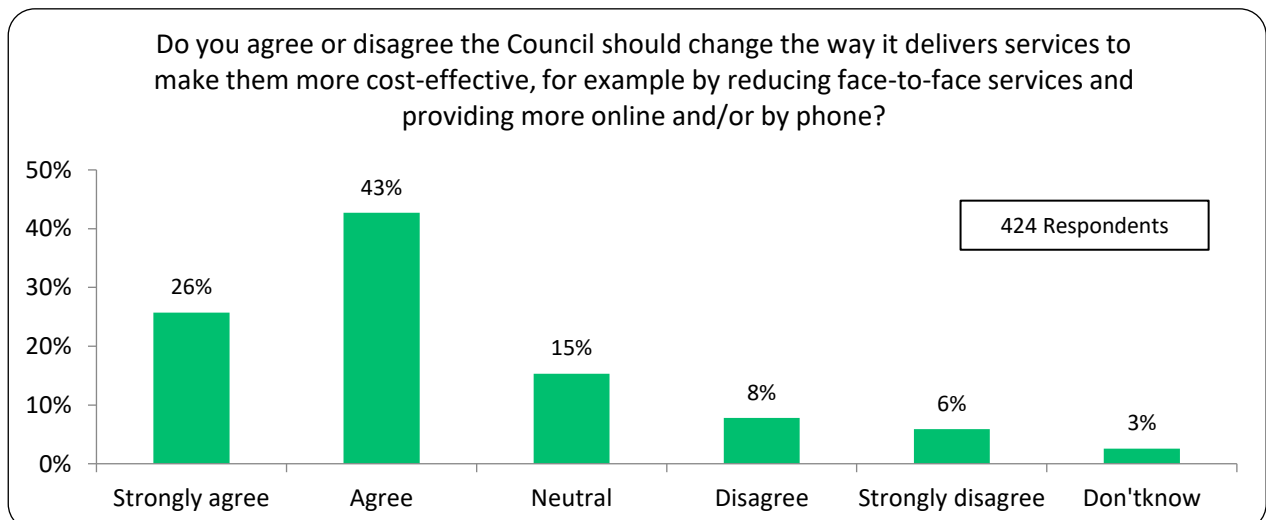
There were 227 responses to the open question for further ideas on how Stirling Council could generate more income. Many comments were about efficiency and savings, reducing services and payments, and introducing fines and charges. Comments relating to generating more income included:

- *“Sell all the vacant Council properties - empty offices and underused Community Centres.”*
- *“There are so many properties in the town centre which could be let, even an empty hotel in King Street, this could be organised similarly to CodeBase. The empty shops in the Centre could be used as pop up shops for community groups, crafts, children’s’ play areas.”*
- *“Generate more income through offering paid services to customers, house clearing, land clearing, cleaning and catering for events.”*
- *“By offering more services the Community need such as meals on wheels, offering services externally such as grass cutting for external bodies, Stirling Council have the equipment and the manpower? House clearances, land clearances, cleaning, catering to external companies or those holding events.”*
- *“Change council tax bands, this needs a complete review across the council area. All residents should have to pay something towards council services.”*
- *“Tax the more wealthy more in the area, the council tax bill vs income for people in Bridge of Allan and Torbex for example could be more based on income than archaic system of using very old house value. Tax more people who have multiple homes in the area.”*

Doing Things Differently

As is shown in Figure 12, over two-thirds of respondents 69% (290 respondents) either agreed or strongly agreed that the Council should change the way it delivers services to make them more cost-effective, only 14% of respondents (58) either disagreed or strongly disagreed.

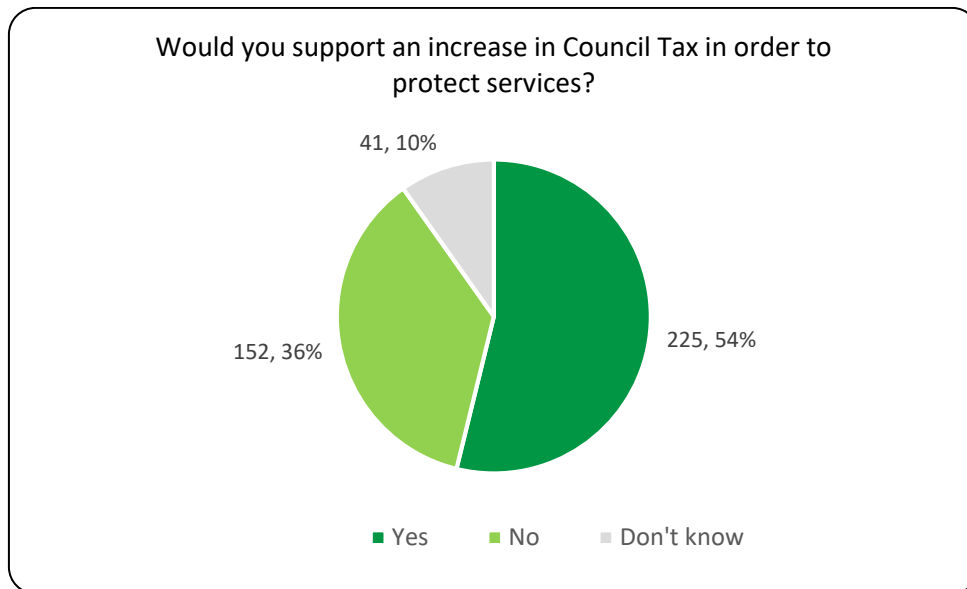
Figure 12: Do you agree or disagree the Council should change the way it delivers services to make them more cost-effective?



Council Tax

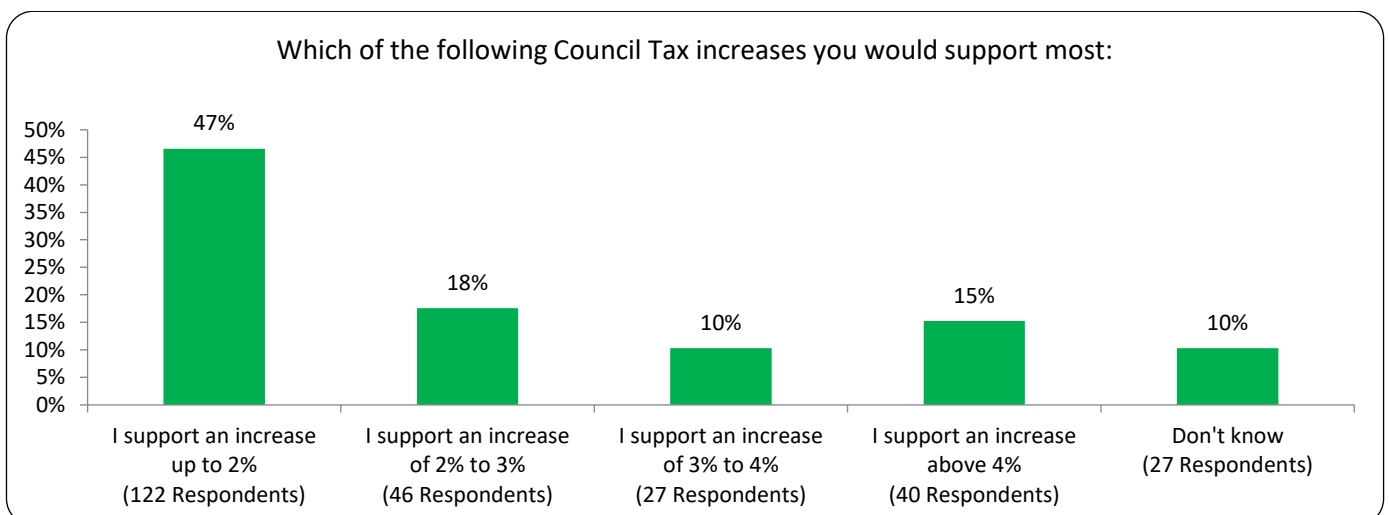
Figure 13 illustrates that more than half of respondents (54%) supported an increase in Council tax in order to protect services. In contrast more than a third (36%) were unsupportive. With further analysis of the responses for males and females there is very little difference with both having over 50% of respondents in support of an increase. All age groups had a majority of respondents supporting an increase apart from the 75+ age group with a majority who supported a decrease and the under 16 age group who had a majority of “don’t knows” however both of these age categories had very few responses.

Figure 13: Would you support an increase in Council Tax in order to protect services?



From the respondents who supported a council tax increase, nearly half 47% (122 respondents) opted for an increase of less than 2%. Figure 14 shows the split of responses from respondents to this question. From further analysis of the responses, there were 54% (74) of respondents in support for an increase of less than 2% for females, for males this dropped to 34% (35 respondents). A higher percentage of males opted to support higher increases in council tax than females. Age had little impact on responses to the question.

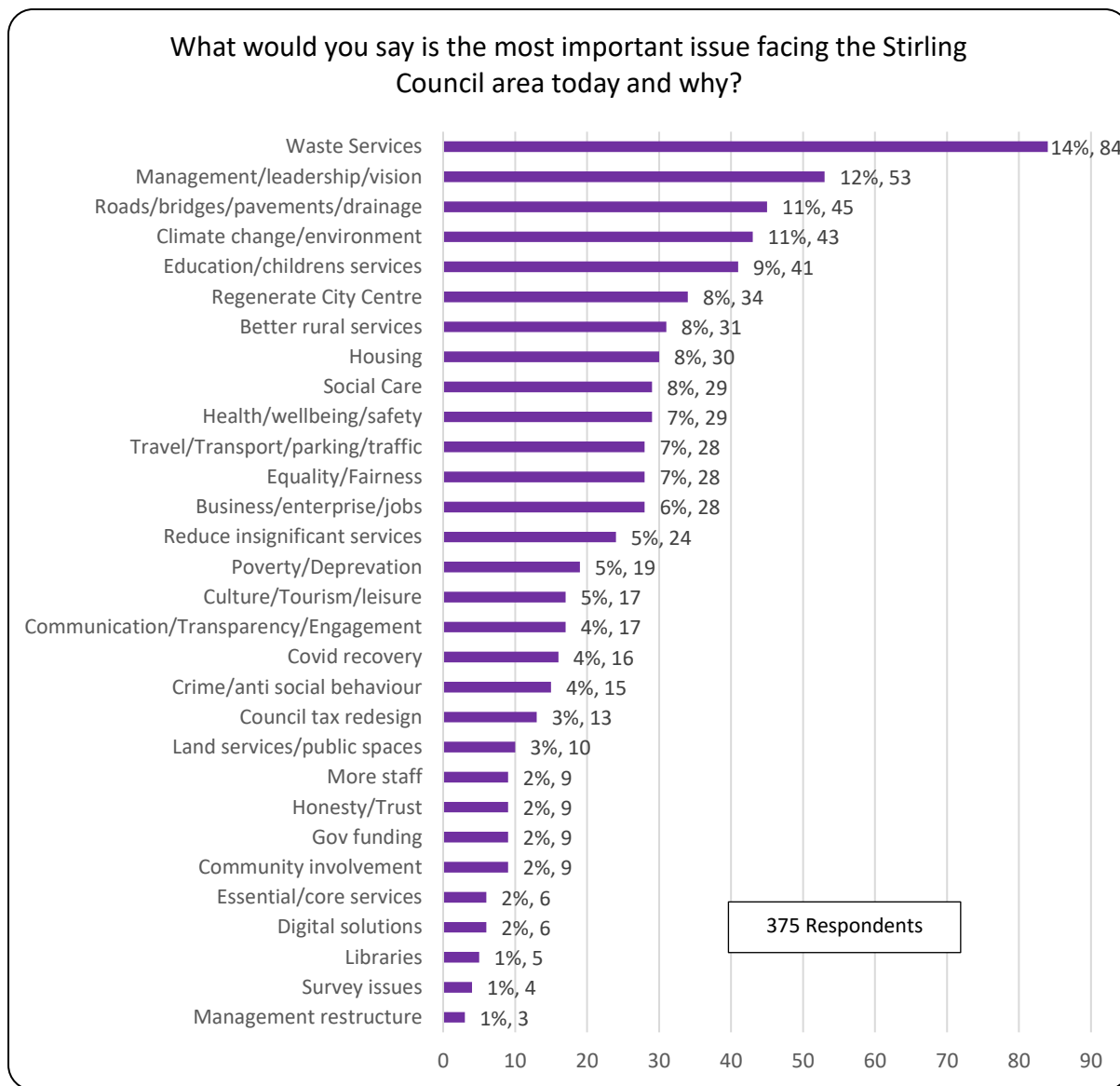
Figure 14: Which of the following Council Tax increases you would support most:



Most important issues facing the Stirling council area

There were 375 responses where people were asked for their views on what was the most important issue facing the Stirling Council area today and why. The top responses included Waste Services, Management & Leadership, Roads & Bridge Maintenance, Climate Change and Education.

Figure 15: What would you say is the most important issue facing the Stirling Council area today and why?



From the 375 respondents to this question, nearly one-quarter thought that the recent changes to Waste Services were an important issue:

“Fly tipping and rubbish lying around will become a huge issue as the bins are now emptied every 4 weeks. Would it not be better to empty every 3 weeks?”

“BINS! Total Shambles moving to once a month for the grey bins with NO PUBLIC CONSULTATION! The town will become more of a mess that it already is and people will just fly tip!”

“Bins - the change is a joke. The information provided to Councillors was presented as local data, but was in fact a national survey carried out in 2014/15 and used by Waste Scotland to compile a report in 2017. The use of this data and the way it was presented is dishonest. Nobody in the council can explain how cutting recycling uplifts encourages recycling. As a disabled person if I want to have an extra bin for medical waste it has to have a sticker on it, meaning all my neighbours now know that I am disabled. This is discrimination on the grounds of disability.”

Some comments were made about the Council’s management/leadership:

“Bad decision making and prioritisation. Too many decisions are made based on short term politically motivated priorities, rather than doing the right thing.”

“Lack of coherent economic development plan and vision of Stirling for the future to support essential services and make Stirling an attractive place to live and work.”

“Mis-spending. A better business mind to meet the needs of the community rather than amending what has always been delivered. Large pots of money frittered away.”

“The Council priority projects are not clear. Political infighting is holding back decisions. The Council should demonstrate clear and consistent leadership. Be clear about how universal and targeted services are being developed.”

Some respondents also commented on the need for more work to be carried out on roads, pavements and bridges:

“Collapsing bridges and the bad state of rural roads.”

“The fragility of the road network in our rural areas. The poor condition of the road network has led to collapses in bridges. The long term closure of these routes while they await repair not only impacts on the community and businesses but puts pressure on the alternative road routes. The size of Stirling's road network in relation to size of population means that the amount being invested in maintaining the roads is inadequate and the Council needs to be lobbying Central Government as this situation is unsustainable and impacts on any potential economic development for rural areas as well as the wellbeing of the rural community residents.”

“Roads and bridges are in an appalling condition and there are countless detours and an untold number of extra miles to travel and hence CO2 to burn as a result of negligent management over recent years. We are close to being completely stranded in Croftamie due to collapsing roads and bridges!”

Other issues for respondents included climate change and environment, education & children’s services and the regeneration of the city centre:

“Lack of focus on sustainable transport Lack of focus on making rural areas safe for vulnerable road users. Not truly adopting an approach for climate change i.e. moving focus away from parking and single person travel and adopting better bus/train links for rural areas. Poor planning for flooding risks especially those in older houses on road sides.”

“Lack of focus on enabling young people to ride or walk to school by making towns and villages safer to walk around.”

“Seeking to increase sources of green energy - reducing energy consumption in council buildings whilst increasing opportunities to provide green energy - pv units on schools, wind turbines etc.”

“The quality of education matters to me most, though I feel this is good currently, so it about protecting services to maintain this.”

“The schools support is a joke. No permanent contracts for support staff, not enough support staff with awful pay for how much they do, not enough funding so they need to fundraise and fight for additional hours for children with ASN. Fund this better, education is extremely important. These are state run, what is happening here?!”

“Regenerating the town centre after the huge reduction in retail space, which is not entirely down to the Covid 19 pandemic. There are beautiful historic buildings and spaces that can be made more of to attract visitors and locals. This will bring money in and an attractive, lively centre will put the bid for city of Culture on the front foot.”