

**Manchester City Council
Report for Information**

Report to: Resources and Governance Scrutiny Committee – 26 February 2024

Subject: 2024/2025 Budget Consultation Results

Report of: Deputy Chief Executive and City Treasurer
Head of Strategic Communications

Summary

A summary of the results of the 2024/2025 budget and council tax consultation.

Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to consider and comment on the results of the 2024/25 budget consultation and council tax consultation, detailed in the report.

Wards Affected: All

Environmental Impact Assessment - the impact of the issues addressed in this report on achieving the zero carbon target for the city	The Council's budget supports all the corporate priorities including the zero carbon target for the city.
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion - the impact of the issues addressed in this report in meeting our Public Sector Equality Duty and broader equality commitments	The Council's budget supports all residents. Different, protected or disadvantaged groups are considered as part of the budget consultation and budget setting process.

Manchester Strategy outcomes	Summary of how this report aligns to the OMS/Contribution to the Strategy
A thriving and sustainable city: supporting a diverse and distinctive economy that creates jobs and opportunities	The Council's budget, including the monies generated by council tax, supports the delivery of the Our Manchester Strategy outcomes and all of our Corporate Priorities.
A highly skilled city: world class and home-grown talent sustaining the city's economic success	

A progressive and equitable city: making a positive contribution by unlocking the potential of our communities	
A liveable and low carbon city: a destination of choice to live, visit, work	
A connected city: world class infrastructure and connectivity to drive growth	

Full details are in the body of the report, along with any implications for:

- Equal Opportunities Policy
- Risk Management
- Legal Considerations

Financial Consequences – Revenue

N/A

Financial Consequences – Capital

N/A

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Background documents (available for public inspection):

The following documents disclose important facts on which the report is based and have been relied upon in preparing the report. Copies of the background documents are available up to 4 years after the date of the meeting. If you would like a copy, please contact one of the contact officers above.

N/A

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Council consulted with residents on the budget savings options set out in the 2023/2024 budget consultation and a proposed 4.99% increase in council tax for the 2024/2025 financial year.
- 1.2 The consultation ran for an eight-week period from 31 October to 27 December 2023, seeking feedback from residents and businesses on:
 - A proposed 2.99% increase in council tax.
 - A proposed 2% Adult Social Care (ASC) precept.
- 1.3 This report provides the full results of the consultation, including a summary of coded free text responses and comments.
- 1.4 Demographic analysis and equality data can be found in the Appendices in section 6.0 and section 7.0.

2.0 Channels and engagement

- 2.1 Communications channels comprised an online questionnaire supported by web content, e-bulletins, and a social media campaign across a range of platforms using a mix of organic, boosted and paid-for posts, supported by digital content.
- 2.2 Responses were gathered via an online questionnaire on the Council's website and paper questionnaires that were available in libraries across the city. Paper copies of the consultation form were also issued to Councillors.
- 2.3 Activity was supported by proactive media releases and reactive media statements and inclusion in the Council's various e-bulletins and via internal staff channels.
- 2.4 Three standalone budget e-bulletins were issued during the consultation period. These performed highly, reaching an average of 28,500 recipients each time which resulted in 58,452 combined opens and 1,854 click throughs to the council tax consultation web pages.
- 2.5 The consultation was promoted widely on Council social media channels including Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, signposting residents to the online survey. Budget messages were posted organically across social media channels resulting in 949 combined click throughs to the consultation web pages, 36 retweets/shares, 65 likes and 71 comments.
- 2.6 To drive more responses from underrepresented groups, mobile adverts were targeted using geo-location data, ring fenced to Manchester wards with the highest density of people from Southern Asian, African/African-Caribbean and Chinese ethnic groups. This resulted in 220k impressions and 2,581 clicks through to website.

2.7 A total of 1,021 people completed the consultation survey, 1,010 via the online form and 11 residents returned paper forms.

2.8 A further 358 people partially completed the survey, without answering all questions or submitting their response. Most people who partially completed the survey completed all the budget questions but dropped off at the point of filling out the optional demographic questions. For future consultations, the optional nature of the demographic questions will be made clearer to encourage more complete responses.

3.0 Budget consultation

3.1 The consultation survey comprised four closed questions to understand levels of agreement/disagreement and three open text questions which allowed residents to express their views freely.

3.2 **Question 1a.** Do you agree or disagree that we should protect adult social care by increasing council tax by a precept of 2%?

3.3 **Question 1b.** Please share any comments on alternatives or the impacts of the 2% increase you think we should consider.

3.4 **Question 2a.** When we asked Manchester people what matters most to them, we listened, and we've used their priorities to help set our budget. Do you agree or disagree that we should continue to protect and invest in the services that residents told us matter most?

These are:

- Care and support for vulnerable people
- Action on family poverty and giving young people the best start in life
- Tackling homelessness and creating better housing
- Supporting people into jobs and training
- Keeping our roads in good shape and supporting walking and cycling
- Keeping our neighbourhoods clean, including tackling fly-tipping and litter
- Maintaining parks, leisure facilities and libraries to keep people active and happy
- Becoming a zero carbon city and improving air quality
- Addressing inequalities to improve life chances and celebrate diversity.

3.5 **Question 2b.** Please tick the priorities that are important to you.

- Care and support for vulnerable people
- Action on family poverty and giving young people the best start in life
- Tackling homelessness and creating better housing
- Supporting people into jobs and training
- Keeping our roads in good shape and supporting walking and cycling
- Keeping our neighbourhoods clean, including tackling fly-tipping and litter

- Maintaining parks, leisure facilities and libraries to keep people active and happy
- Becoming a zero carbon city and improving air quality
- Addressing inequalities to improve life chances and celebrate diversity

3.6 **Question 2c.** Do you agree or disagree that we should increase council tax by a further 2.99% to invest in services to support residents through the cost-of-living crisis and enable us to deliver the services that residents told us matter most?

3.7 **Question 3.** Please share any comments on alternatives or the impacts of the 2.99% increase you think we should consider.

3.8 **Question 4.** Please give any general views and comments on the proposed budget.

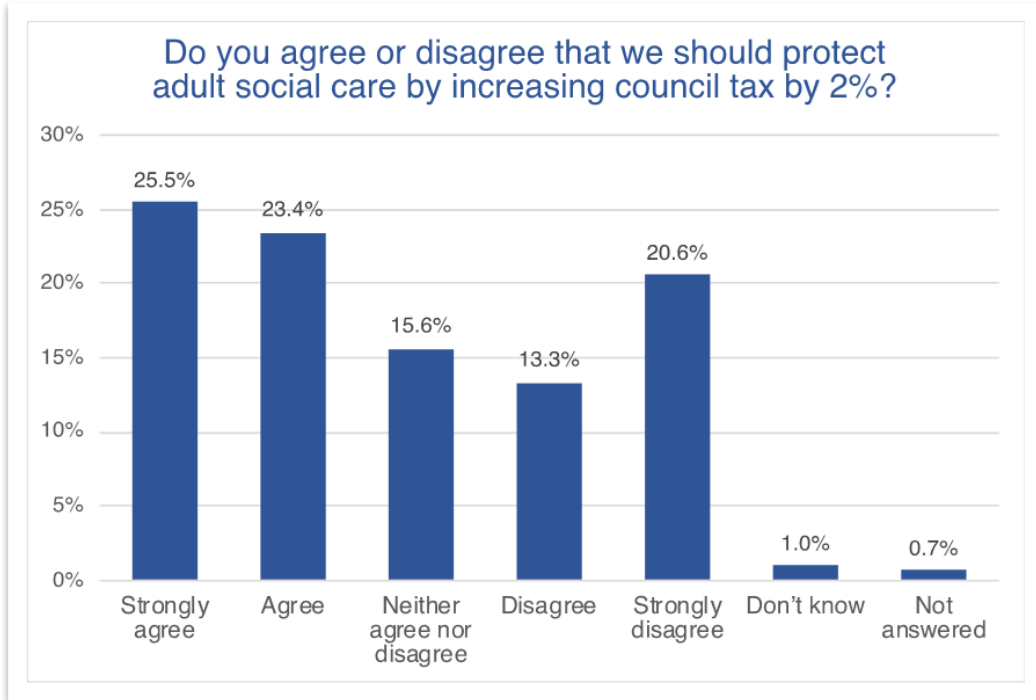
4.0 Consultation survey analysis

4.1 **Question 1a - Do you agree or disagree that we should protect adult social care by increasing council tax by a precept of 2%?**

4.2 In question 1a, members of the public were asked in a closed question whether they 'agree or disagree' that we should protect adult social care by increasing council tax by 2%.

4.3 Overall, the consultation generated 1,021 responses. Of these, 49% agree or strongly agree that adult social care should be protected by increasing council tax by 2%. This compares to 34% of respondents who disagree or strongly disagree with the suggestion. Finally, 17% are undecided or say they don't know.

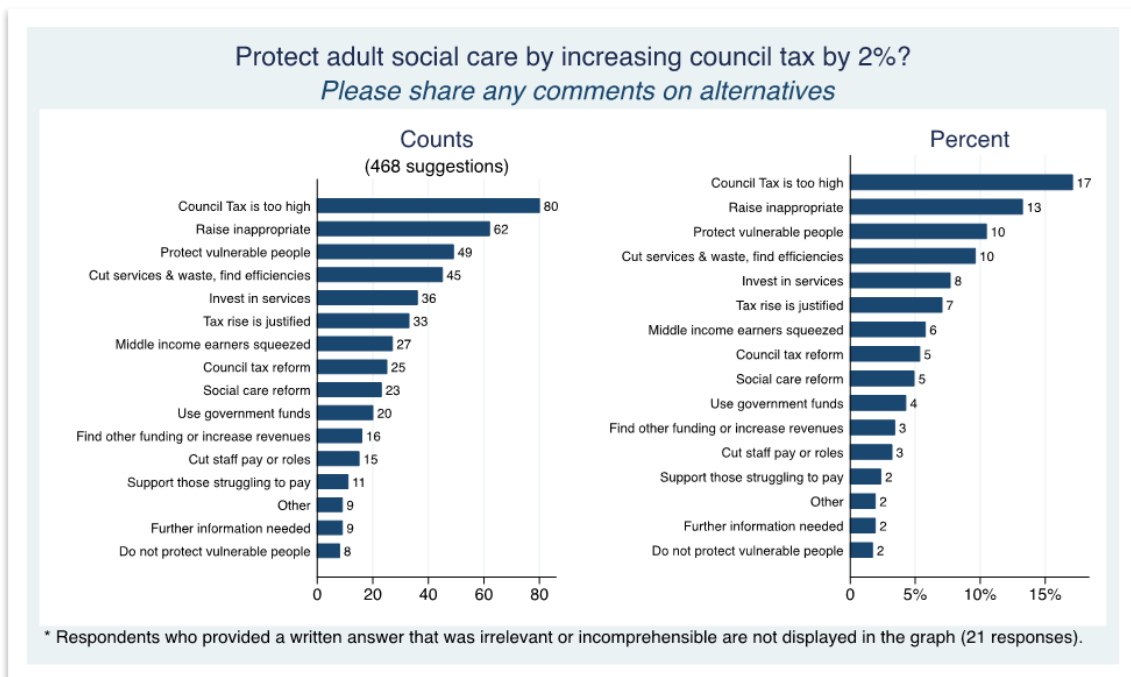
Graph 1 – Levels of agreement and disagreement with the 2% increase to protect adult social care



4.4 Question 1b. Please share any comments on alternatives or the impacts of the 2% increase you think we should consider.

4.5 When asked to share additional comments or alternatives to the proposed increase, 346 respondents provided such a comment about the proposed 2% increase. Based on these answers 489 suggestions were extracted and are displayed in Graph 2.

Graph 2 – Coded responses expressing views pertaining to the proposed increase to council tax of 2%

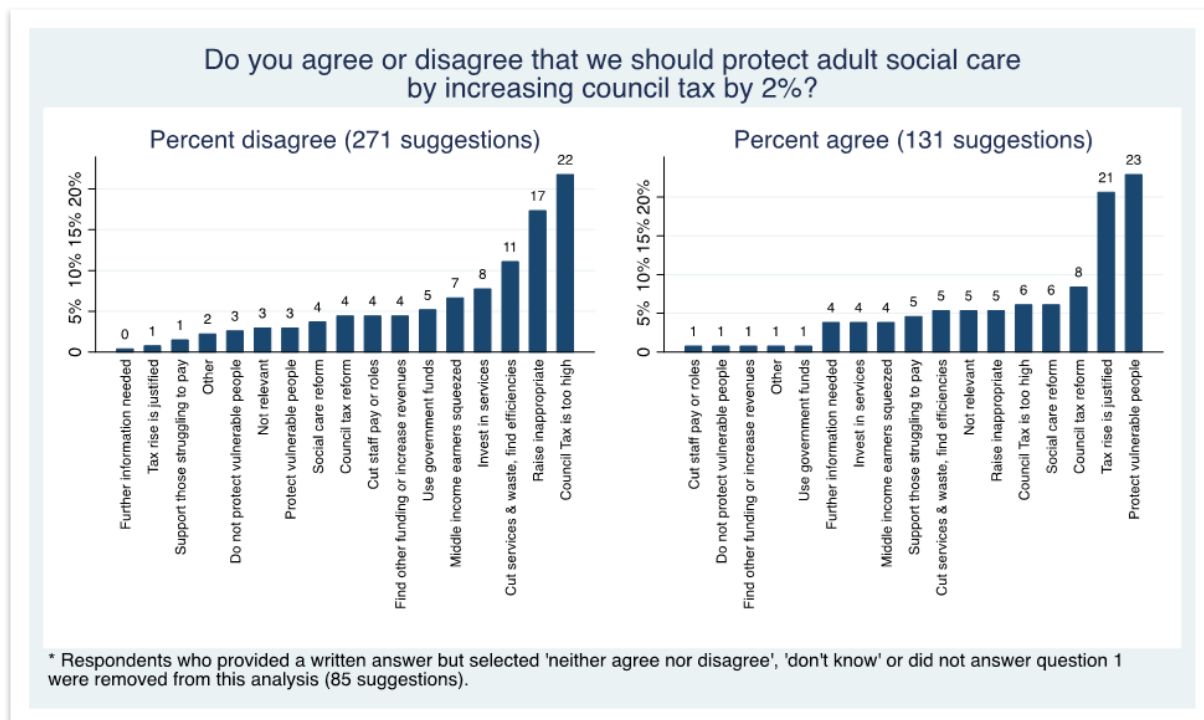


4.6 Graph 2 shows that:

- The most prominent suggestion across all open-ended responses was the **perception that council tax was too high**, not affordable or that it already increases every year (17% of respondents; 80 suggestions).
- 13% of respondents (62 suggestions) expressed that it would be inappropriate to increase council tax by 2% given the **current cost-of-living crisis**, with concerns about the rising cost of energy bills and other household expenses while wages were not rising in line with inflation particularly highlighted.
- 10% (45 suggestions) argued that the council should **cut investment in areas** or should generally reduce inefficiency and wasteful spending (without specifying what this means).
- 8% (36 suggestions) **complained of poor council services** and the **need for greater investment in services** such as waste collection and road repairs, as they did not feel they were getting value for money from their existing council tax.
- 6% (27 suggestions) expressed **concern that middle income earners were being 'squeezed'**; specifically, that those who work (or receive pensions) and are not eligible for benefits would struggle with the increase.
- 5% respondents (25 suggestions) **called for council tax to be reformed**, such as a review of council tax bandings, and a further 5% (23 suggestions) **demanded for social care reform**.
- Instead of raising council tax, 4% (20 suggestions) **called for the council to use government funds**.
- It should be noted that 10% (49 suggestions) did **agree that protecting vulnerable people was worthwhile**, but not all agreed that raising council tax was the answer. 7% (33 suggestions) **felt that a tax rise was justified**.
- Other suggestions were provided but with lower frequency. There were also a number of responses which were not relevant (21 responses).

4.7 Graph 3 displays the suggestions by whether respondents agreed or disagreed that we should protect adult social care by increasing council tax by 2%. Overall, 33% (131 suggestions) were given by individuals who were in favour of the proposal.

Graph 3 – Responses split by whether they agreed or disagreed with the proposal to increase council tax by 2% to protect adult social care.



4.8 Of those respondents who **agreed** with the proposal, the following suggestions were made (131 suggestions):

- 23% (30 suggestions) specifically **mentioned that vulnerable people should be protected** while 21% (27 suggestions) restated their **agreement**.
- 8% (11 suggestions) **called for council tax to be reformed** such as a review of council tax bandings, and 6% (8 suggestions) **wanted social care reform**.
- While agreeing with the proposal in the closed questions, 6% (8 suggestions) **felt that council tax was too high**, not affordable, or already increases every year.
- A further 5% (7 suggestions) expressed concerns that it was **inappropriate to raise council tax given the current cost-of-living crisis**, notably the rise in energy bills and other household expenses while wages were not rising in line with inflation.
- Rather than increase council tax, 5% (7 suggestions) **wanted the council to cut investment in services** or reduce inefficiency and waste more generally (without specifying).
- 5% (6 suggestions) **called for support for those struggling to pay council tax**. Meanwhile, 4% (5 suggestions) expressed **concern that middle income earners were being 'squeezed'**; specifically, that those who work and are not eligible for benefits would struggle with the increase.
- 4% (5 suggestions) **complained of poor council services** and the need for **greater investment in services** such as waste collection and road repairs, as they did not feel they were getting value for money from their existing council tax.
- 4% (5 suggestions) stated that they **needed further information to justify the proposed increase to council tax**.

- Graph 3 displays additional answers that drew fewer responses and there were also a number of responses which were not relevant.

4.9 Of those respondents who **disagreed** with the proposal, the following suggestions (n=271) were made:

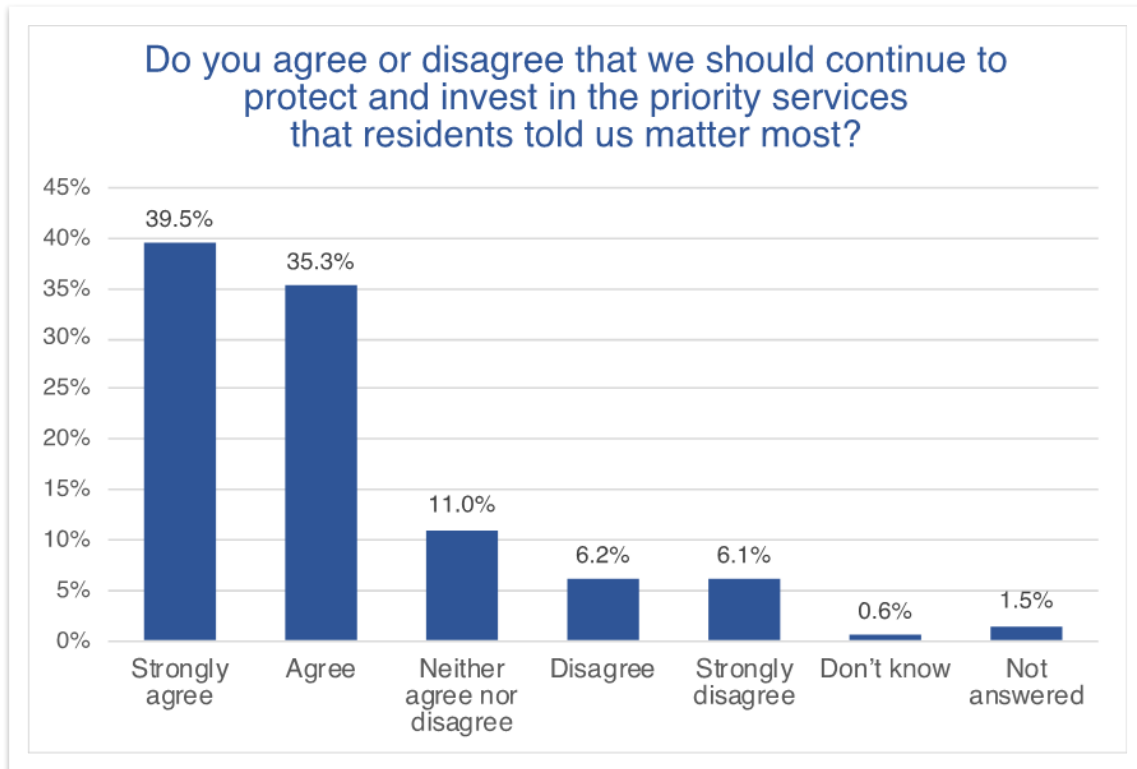
- 22% (59 suggestions) **stated that council tax was too high**, not affordable, or already increases every year.
- 17% (47 suggestions) commented that it was **inappropriate to increase council tax given the current cost-of-living crisis**, notably the rise in energy bills and other household expenses while wages were not rising in line with inflation.
- 11% (30 suggestions) argued that the **council should cut investment in areas** or should generally reduce inefficiency and wasteful spending (without specifying).
- 8% (21 suggestions) **complained of poor council services** and the need for **greater investment in services** such as waste collection and road repairs, as they did not feel they were getting value for money from their existing council tax.
- 7% (18 suggestions) expressed **concern that middle income earners were being 'squeezed'**; specifically, that those who work and are not eligible for benefits would struggle with the increase.
- Rather than increase council tax, 5% (14 suggestions) **called for the council to use government funds**. Alternatively, 4% (12 suggestions) stated that the council should **find other funding or increase revenues** by other means. 4% (12 suggestions) also called for the council to **cut staff roles or pay**.
- 4% (12 suggestions) **called for council tax to be reformed** such as a review of council tax bandings, and 4% (10 suggestions) wanted **social care reform**.
- Graph 3 also displays additional answers that drew fewer responses and there were also a number of responses which were not relevant.

4.10 Question 2a When we asked Manchester people what matters most to them, we listened, and we've used their priorities to help set our budget. Do you agree or disagree that we should continue to protect and invest in the services that residents told us matter most?

4.11 Residents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed that services that matter most to them should be protected and invested in. In asking this question the consultation reminded residents of the services that past consultations indicated mattered most.

4.12 The vast majority of respondents (75%) agree or strongly agree with the suggestion to protect and invest in services. 12% are undecided or don't know and a further 12% disagree or strongly disagree.

Graph 4 – Levels of agreement and disagreement with the need to protect services that matter most to residents



4.13 Question 2b. Please tick the priorities that are important to you.

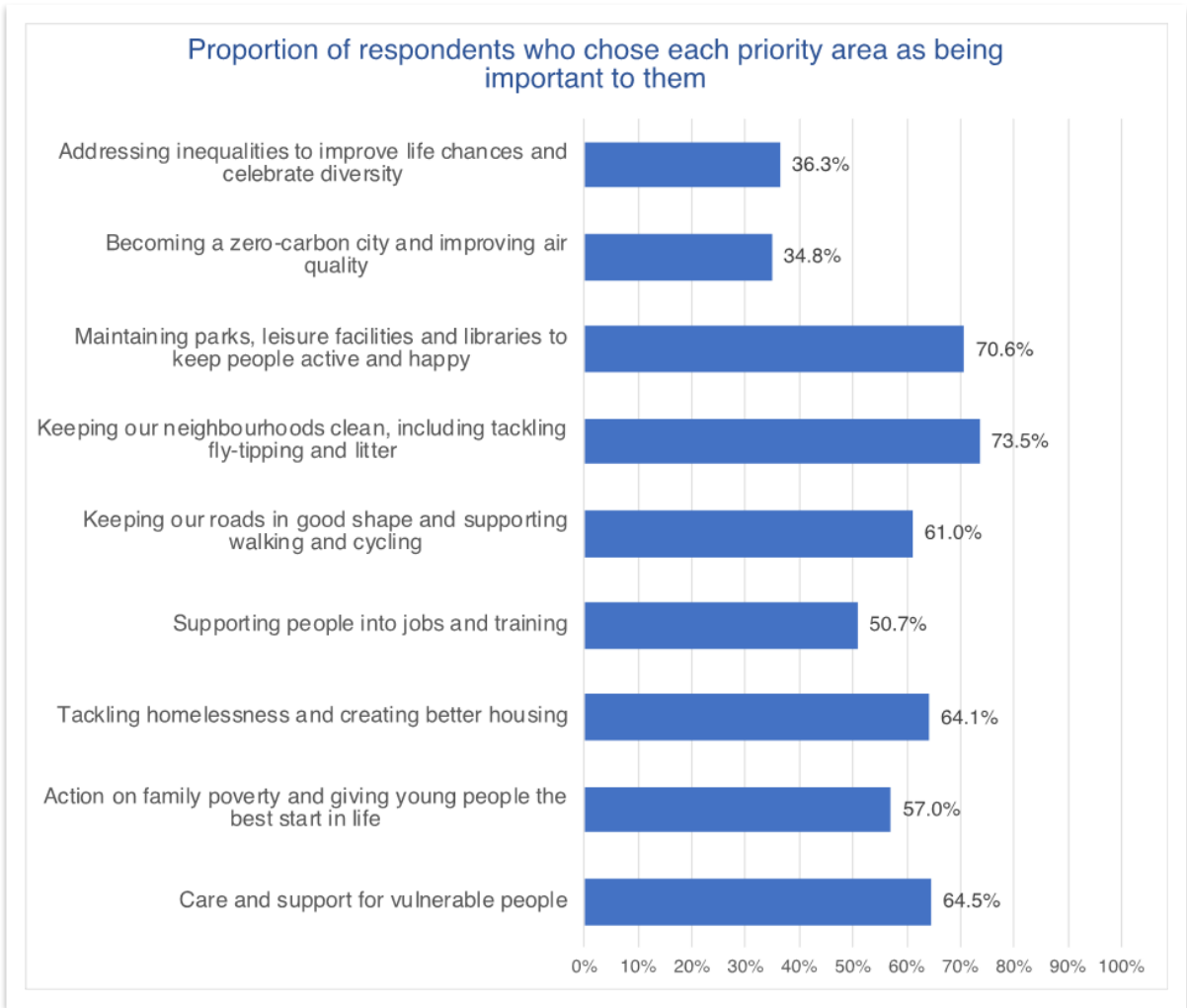
4.14 Residents were also asked to indicate which priority areas are important to them. Overall, among the issues that were selected by a higher number of respondents were:

- litter, cleanliness and fly-tipping (74%)
- parks, leisure, and libraries (71%)
- care for vulnerable people (65%)
- tackling homelessness and creating better housing (64%).

4.15 At the opposite end of the spectrum, the issues seen as least important were:

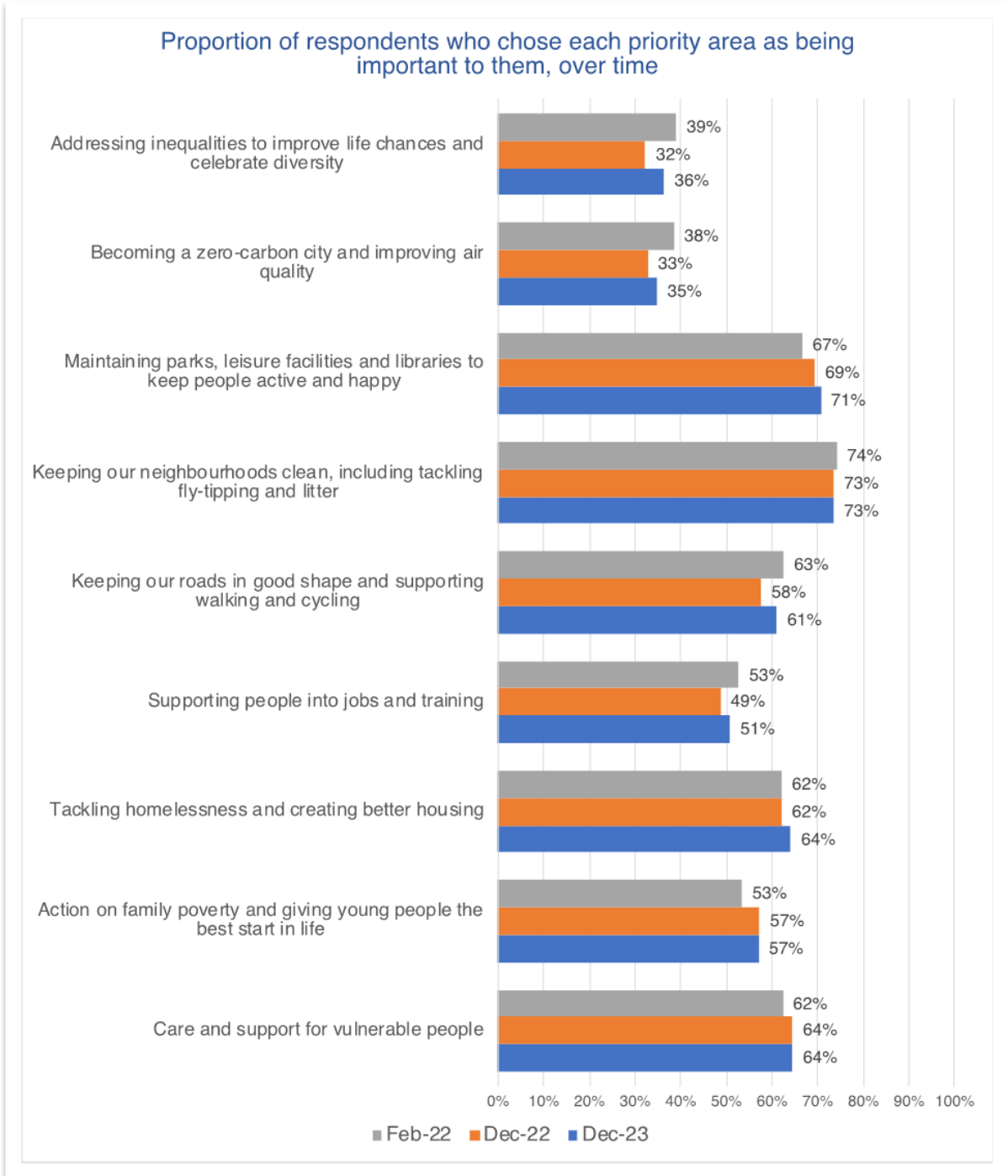
- tackling inequalities (36%)
- becoming a zero carbon city (35%).

Graph 5a – Importance of suggested priority areas



4.16 Looking back at responses to question 2a in previous budget consultations and comparing the ranking of priority areas over time, the results suggest minimal changes in ranking in the two years between the end of 2021 and 2023.

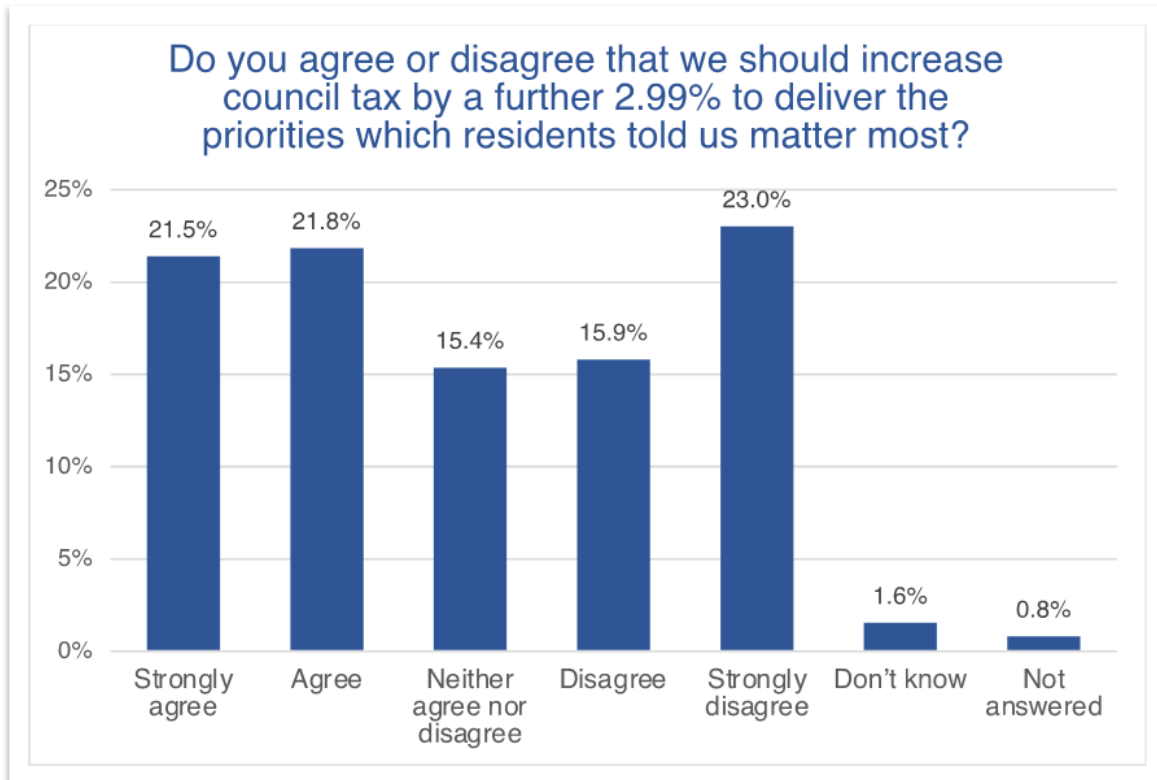
Graph 5b – Importance of suggested priority areas, over time



4.17 Question 2c. Do you agree or disagree that we should increase council tax by a further 2.99% to invest in services to support residents through the cost-of-living crisis and enable us to deliver the services that residents told us matter most?

4.18 Out of the 1,021 responses generated by the consultation, 39% disagree or strongly disagree that the council tax should be increased by a further 2.99% to continue to invest in services. This compares to 43% who agree or strongly agree with this suggestion. 17% were undecided or say they don't know.

Graph 6 – Levels of agreement and disagreement with the need to increase council tax to protect services that matter most to residents

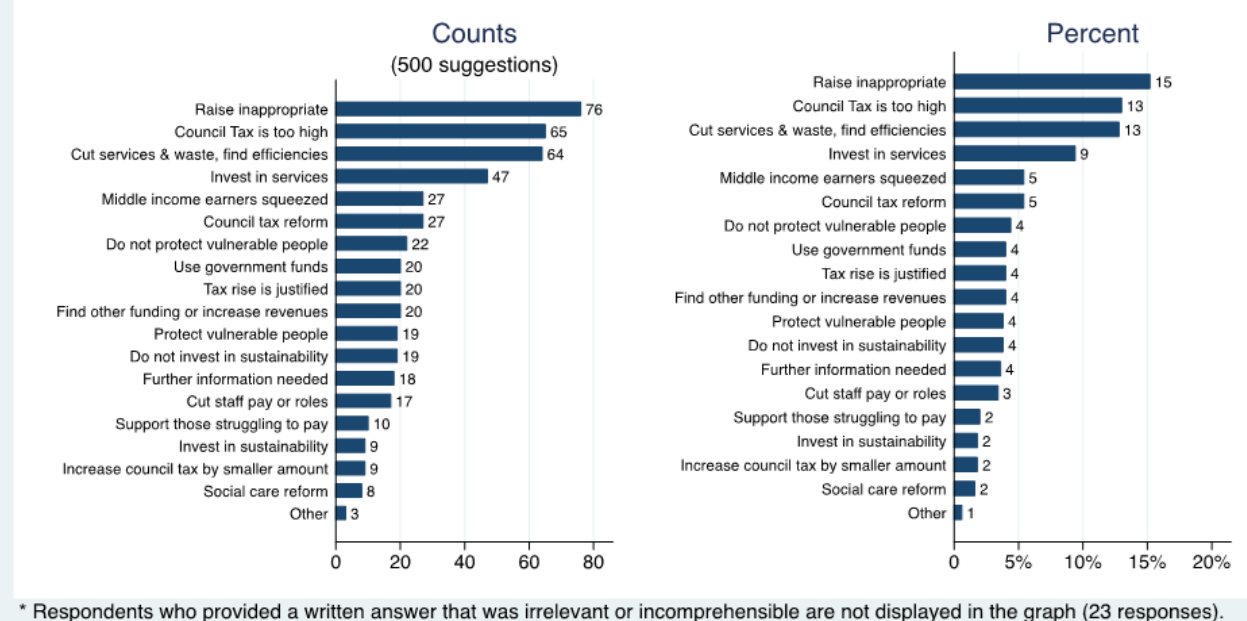


4.19 Question 3. Please share any comments on alternatives or the impacts of the 2.99% increase you think we should consider.

4.20 In addition to indicating whether they agreed or not with this proposal, 396 respondents also provided an answer to the open-ended question asking for comments about the suggestion to increase council tax by a further 2.99%. Based on these answers we extracted 523 suggestions.

Graph 7 – Coded responses expressing views pertaining to the proposed increases by a further 2.99% to deliver the priorities which matter most to residents

Should council tax be increased by a further 2.99% to deliver residents' priorities?
Please share any comments on alternatives we should consider



4.21 Graph 7 shows that:

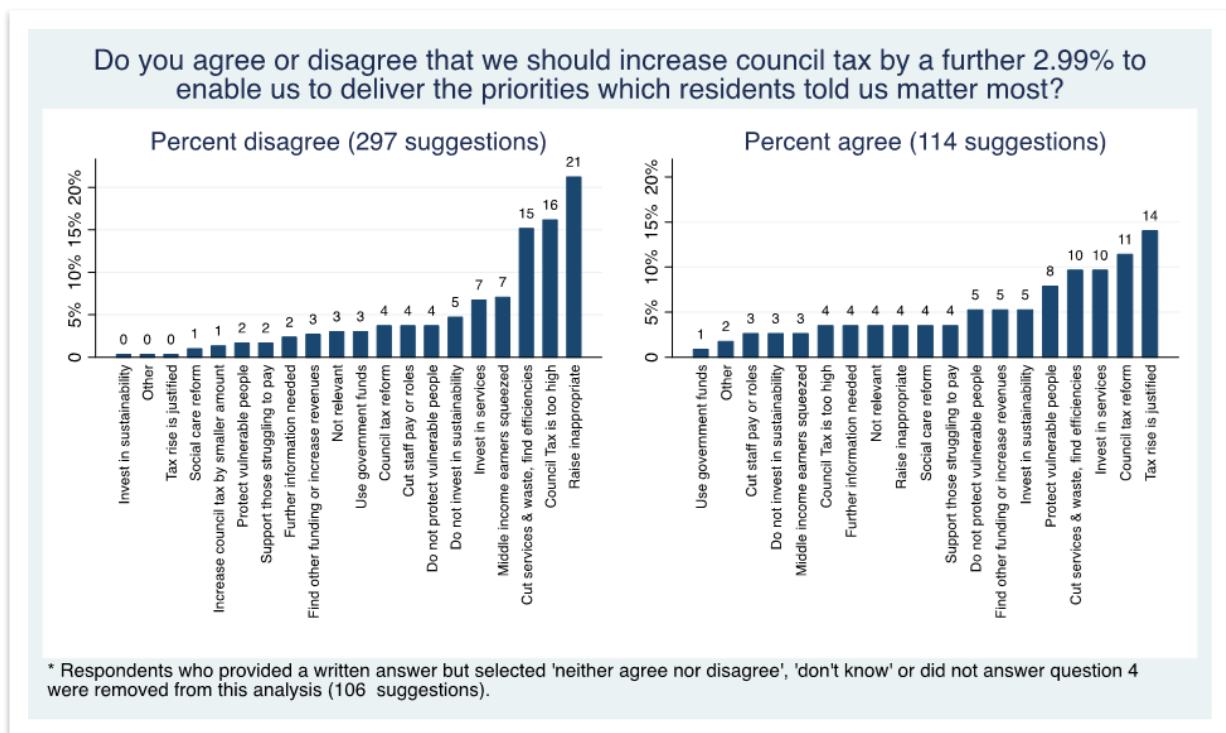
- The most prominent suggestion across all open-ended responses was the perception that it would be **inappropriate to increase council tax by a further 2.99% given the current cost-of-living crisis** (15% respondents, 76 suggestions), with particular concerns about the rising cost of energy bills and other household expenses while wages were not rising in line with inflation.
- Closely followed was the **perception that council tax was too high**, not affordable, or already increases every year (13% respondents, 65 suggestions).
- Instead of raising council tax, 13% (64 suggestions) argued that the **council should cut investment in areas** or should generally reduce inefficiency and wasteful spending. 4% (19 suggestions) wanted the council **cut investment in sustainability**, such as sustainable transport options. Moreover, 3% (17 suggestions) mentioned the need to **cut staff numbers or staff pay** within the 'Council' (this could refer to either MCC or GMCA).
- 9% (47 suggestions) **complained of poor council services** and the need for **greater investment in services** such as waste collection and road repairs as they did not feel they were getting value for money from their existing council tax.
- 5% (27 suggestions) expressed **concern that middle income earners were being 'squeezed'**; specifically, that those who work and are not eligible for benefits would struggle with the increase.
- 5% (27 suggestions) **called for council tax to be reformed** such as a review of council tax bandings, while a further 4% (22 suggestions) did not **want the council to protect vulnerable people**, often with reference to

specific groups of vulnerable people such as migrants or those who claim welfare benefits.

- Rather than increase council tax, 4% (20 suggestions) **called for the council to use government funds**. Alternatively, 4% (20 suggestions) stated that the **council should find other funding or increase revenues** by other means.
- 4% (20 suggestions) **felt that the tax rise was justified**, and that the **council should protect vulnerable people** (4%, 19 suggestions).
- 4% (18 suggestions) stated that they **needed further information to justify the proposed increase to council tax**.
- Other suggestions were provided but with lower frequency and there were also a number of responses which were not relevant.

4.22 Overall, 28% (n=114) of suggestions were given by individuals who were in favour of the proposal

Graph 8 – Responses split by whether respondents agreed or disagreed with the proposal to increase council tax by a further 2.99% to continue to invest in services



4.23 Of those respondents who **agreed** with the proposal, the following suggestions (n=114) were made:

- 14% (16 suggestions) restated their **agreement** that the council tax rise is justified.
- However, 11% (13 suggestions) **called for council tax to be reformed** such as a review of council tax bandings, while 10% (11 suggestions) **complained of poor council services** and the **need for greater investment in services** such as waste collection and road repairs, as they

did not feel they were getting value for money from their existing council tax.

- 10% (11 suggestions) advised that the **council should cut investment in services** or reduce inefficiency and waste more generally. Alternatively, the **council should find other funding or increase revenue in another way** (5%, 6 suggestions).
- 8% (9 suggestions) **wanted the council to protect vulnerable people** and 5% (6 suggestions) wanted the council to **invest in sustainability**, such as green spaces or sustainable transport options.
- Meanwhile, while agreeing with the proposal, 5% (6 suggestions) **did not want the council to protect vulnerable people**, often with reference to specific groups of vulnerable people such as migrants or those who claim welfare benefits. 4% (4 suggestions) also **called for social care reform**.
- In addition, while agreeing with the proposal, a further 4% (4 suggestions) **called for support for those struggling** to pay council tax.
- While agreeing with the proposal in the closed questions, 4% (4 suggestions) expressed concerns that it was **inappropriate to raise council tax given the current cost-of-living crisis**, notably the rise in energy bills and other household expenses while wages were not rising in line with inflation.
- 4% respondents (4 suggestions) **felt that council tax was too high**, not affordable, or already increases every year.
- 4% (4 suggestions) stated that they **needed further information to justify the proposed increase to council tax**.
- Graph 8 displays additional answers that drew fewer responses and there were also a number of responses which were not relevant.

4.24 Of those respondents who **disagreed** with the proposal, the following suggestions (n=297) were made:

- 21% (63 suggestions) perceived that it was **inappropriate to increase council tax given the current cost-of-living crisis**, notably the rise in energy bills and other household expenses while wages were not rising in line with inflation.
- 16% (48 suggestions) **commented that council tax was too high**, not affordable, or already increases every year.
- Closely related to this, 15% (45 suggestions) **stated the council should cut investment in services or reduce inefficiency and wasteful spending** more generally (without specifying). 4% (11 suggestions) stated that the council should **cut staff roles or pay**.
- 7% (21 suggestions) expressed **concern that middle income earners were being 'squeezed'**; specifically, that those who work and are not eligible for benefits would struggle with the increase.
- 7% (20 suggestions) **complained of poor council services** and the need **for greater investment in services** such as waste collection and road repairs.
- 5% (14 suggestions) **wanted the council cut investment in sustainability**, such as green spaces or sustainable transport options.

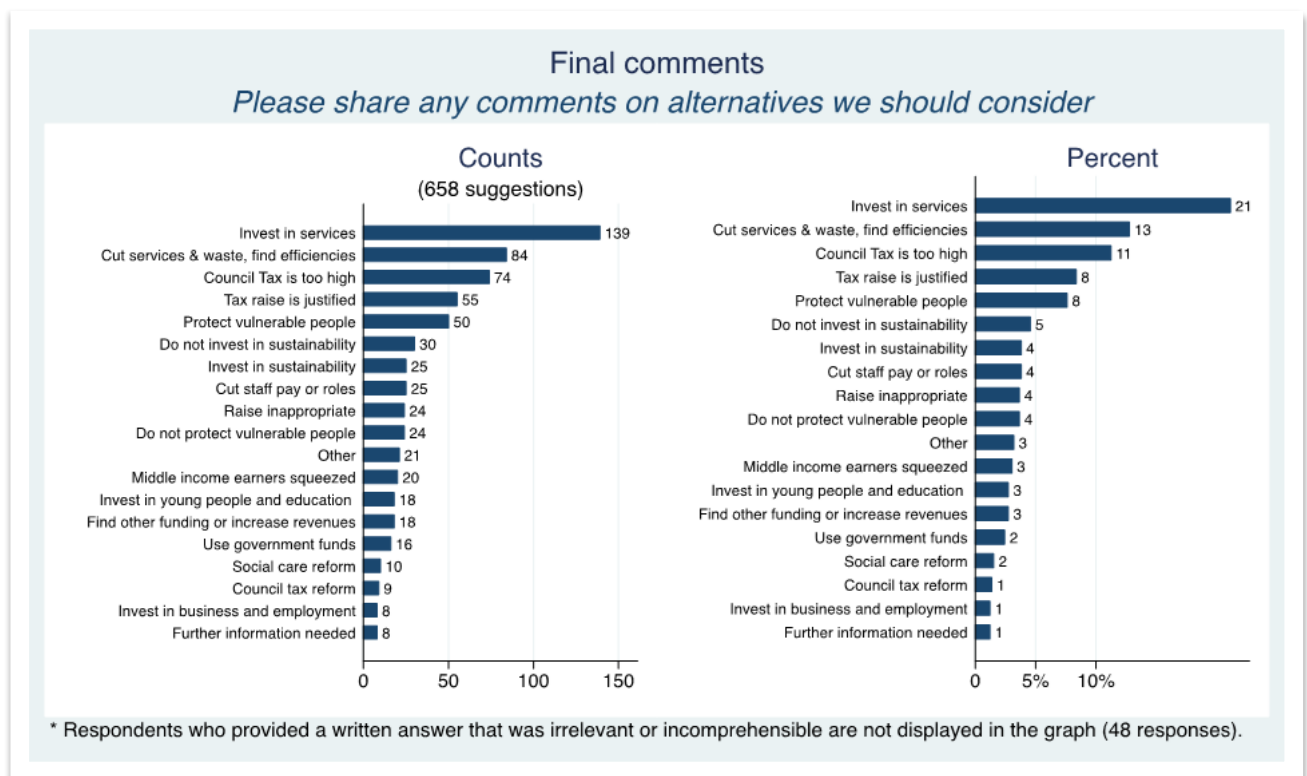
- 4% (11 suggestions) **did not want the council to protect vulnerable people**, often with reference to specific groups of vulnerable people such as migrants or those who claim welfare benefits.
- 4% of respondents (11 suggestions) who **called for council tax to be reformed** such as a review of council tax bandings.
- Graph 8 displays additional answers that drew fewer responses and there were also a number of responses which were not relevant.

4.25 Question 4. Please give any general views and comments on the proposed budget.

4.26 The consultation also provided the opportunity for respondents to provide any further comments or general views they had pertaining to the proposed budget.

4.27 Out of the 1,021 responses generated by the consultation, 514 respondents provided such a comment. Based on these answers we extracted 706 suggestions.

Graph 9 – Coded responses expressing general views pertaining to the proposed budget



4.28 Graph 9 shows that:

- The most prominent suggestion across all open-ended responses was the perception that residents **received poor council services** and the **need for greater investment in services** such as waste collection and road repairs as they did not feel they were getting value for money from their existing council tax (21%, 139 suggestions). 4% (25 suggestions) **wanted**

the council to invest in sustainability, such as green spaces or sustainable transport options.

- Meanwhile, instead of raising council tax, 13% (84 suggestions) argued that the **council should cut investment in areas** or should generally reduce inefficiency and wasteful spending (without specifying). 5% (30 suggestions) **wanted the council to cut investment in sustainability**, such as sustainable transport options. 4% (25 suggestions) also called for the **council to cut staff roles or pay** (this could refer to MCC and/or GMCA).
- 11% respondents (74 suggestions) **perceived that council tax was too high**, not affordable, or already increases every year.
- 8% (55 suggestions) **felt that the tax rise was justified** and 8% (50 suggestions) **wanted the council to protect vulnerable people**.
- There was a perception that it would be **inappropriate to increase council tax by a further 2.99% given the current cost-of-living crisis** (4%, 24 suggestions), with particular concerns about the rising cost of energy bills and other household expenses while wages were not rising in line with inflation.
- 4% (24 suggestions) **did not** want the **council to protect vulnerable people**, often with reference to specific groups of vulnerable people such as migrants or those who claim welfare benefits.
- Other suggestions were provided but with lower frequency and there were also a number of responses which were not relevant.

5.0 Recommendations

- 5.1 The Committee is recommended to consider and comment on the results of the 2024/25 budget consultation and council tax consultation, detailed in the report.

6.0 Appendices

Appendix 1 – Demographic Analysis
Appendix 2 – Equality Data