

Appendix 3

Engagement Report for Business Planning and Budget 2025-26 Survey

Produced by the Policy and Insight Team

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Introduction

Background

Cambridgeshire County Council has a vision of creating a greener, fairer and more caring Cambridgeshire. To achieve this vision, the council aims to work with residents and partner organisations to make services responsive to the diversity of people and places in Cambridgeshire. Doing this effectively requires the council to be an evidence-led, listening organisation that is responsive to resident priorities. Like most councils across the country, the financial outlook for Cambridgeshire County Council is increasingly challenging, with pressures on budgets having increased significantly in recent years. Through business planning the council sets out how it will respond to the challenges and set a legal budget.

Between 04 November 2024 and 02 December 2024, the first phase of the council's engagement and consultation exercise was undertaken. Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC) engaged with residents to invite them to learn more about the business planning process and share this priority areas for council spending and views on council tax.

154 responses were received across the online and paper surveys. Respondents who indicated they didn't live in Cambridgeshire have been excluded from the following summaries, baring the question on location and the open comments, however any key differences will be noted alongside.

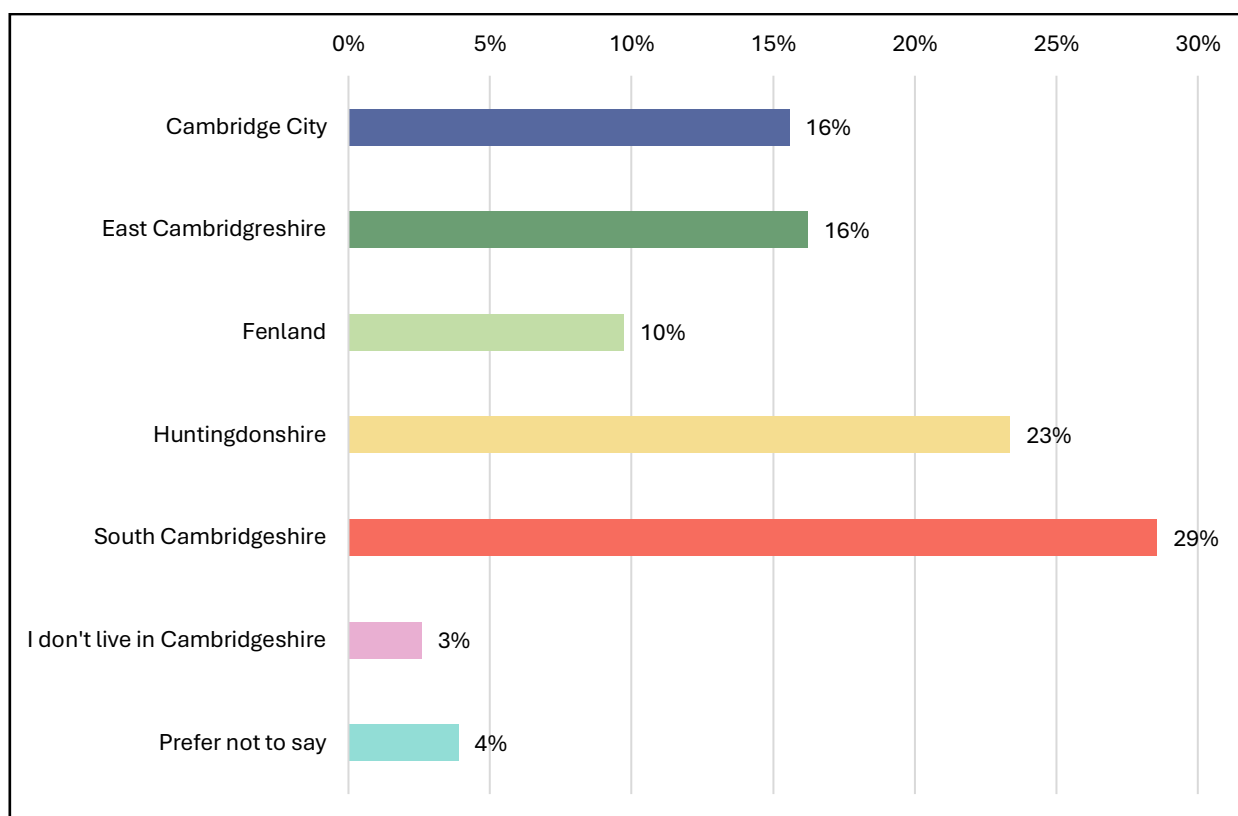
Demographics

Location

Respondents were asked which district of Cambridgeshire they lived in, 1 respondent skipped this question, for the purposes of this summary they have been included in the 'prefer not to say' category:

- 'South Cambridgeshire' had the highest number of respondents (29%) while Fenland had the lowest number of respondents (10%).

Figure 1: Location



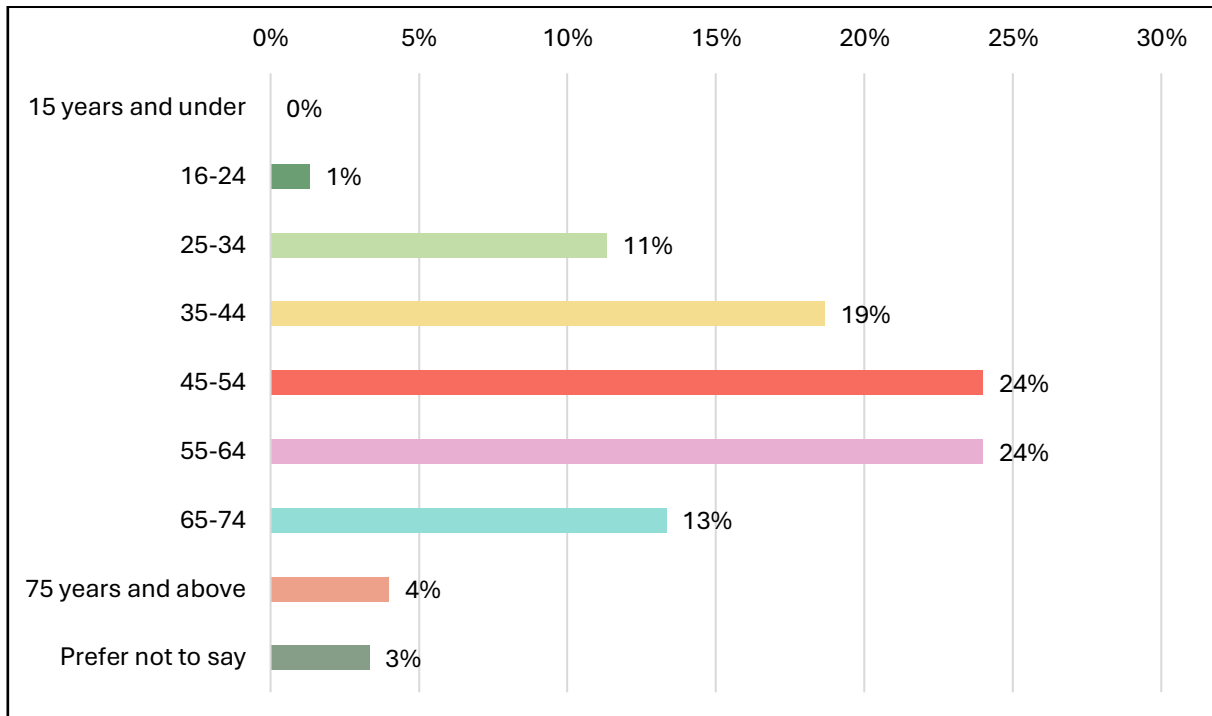
Respondents who indicated they didn't live in Cambridgeshire have been excluded from the following summaries, however any key differences will be noted alongside.

Age

Respondents were asked which age group they belonged to:

- Age groups '45-54' and '55-64' had the highest number of respondents (24% each) while age group '16-24' had the lowest number of respondents (1%), with no respondents indicating they were aged '15 years and under'.

Figure 2: Age group



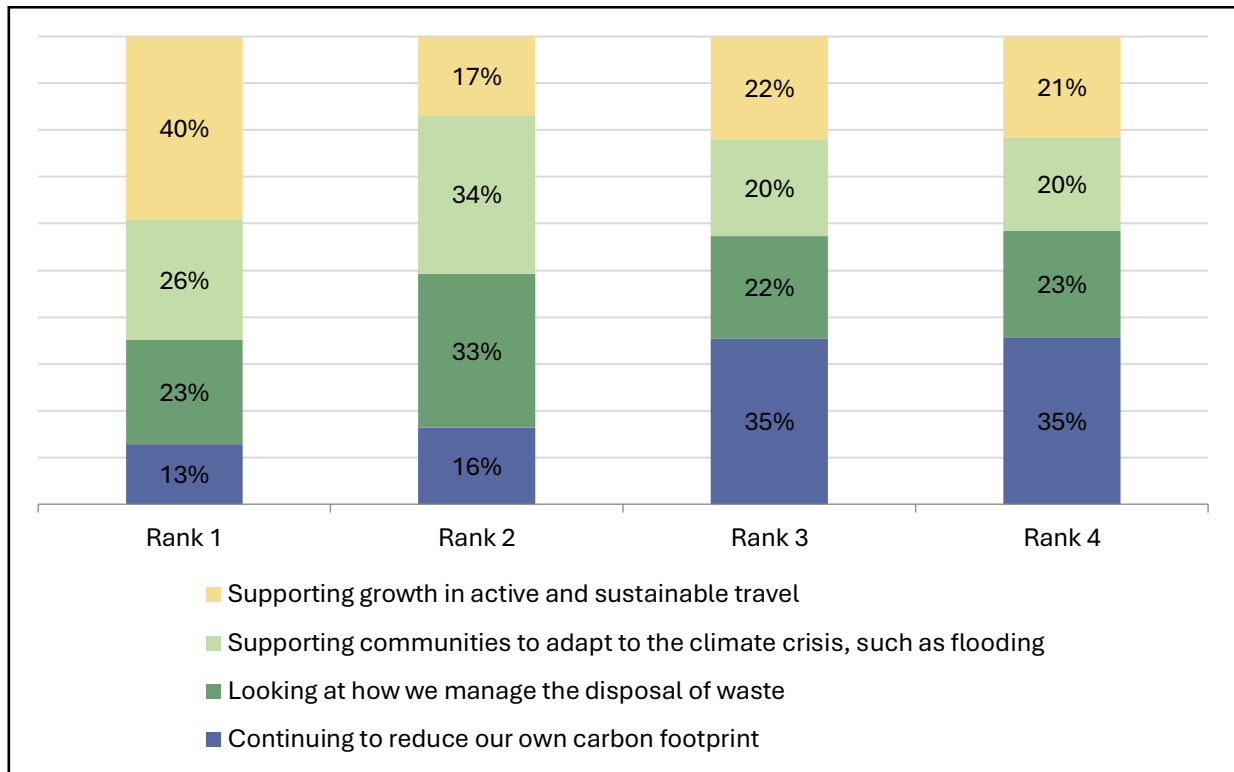
Response to the engagement

Question 1: “Greener: From 2018-19 to 2023-24, we reduced the council’s direct carbon emissions (from our assets and the actions we take as an organisation) by 42%, with 25 council building heating systems decarbonised. We plan to achieve net zero direct emissions by 2030. Considering the current position the council is in and the limited resources available, please order the following statements from highest (number 1) to lowest (number 4) priority, based on what you believe we should do to support our vision of a Greener Cambridgeshire.”

149 respondents answered this question. Respondents were asked to rank four statements in order of priority, with number 1 being the highest priority and number 4 being the lowest priority.

- Two fifths of respondents (40%) ranked ‘Supporting growth in active and sustainable travel’ as number 1.
- Just over a third of respondents (34%) ranked ‘Supporting communities to adapt to the climate crisis, such as flooding’ as number 2, with just over a quarter (26%) ranking it number 1.
- A third of respondents (33%) ranked ‘Looking at how we manage the disposal of waste’ as number 2. Under a quarter of respondents ranked it rank 1 (23%), under a quarter ranked it rank 3 (22%), and under a quarter ranked it rank 4 (23%).
- Over a third of respondents (35%) ranked ‘Continuing to reduce our own carbon footprint’ as number 3 or number 4.

Figure 3: Ranking of Greener priorities

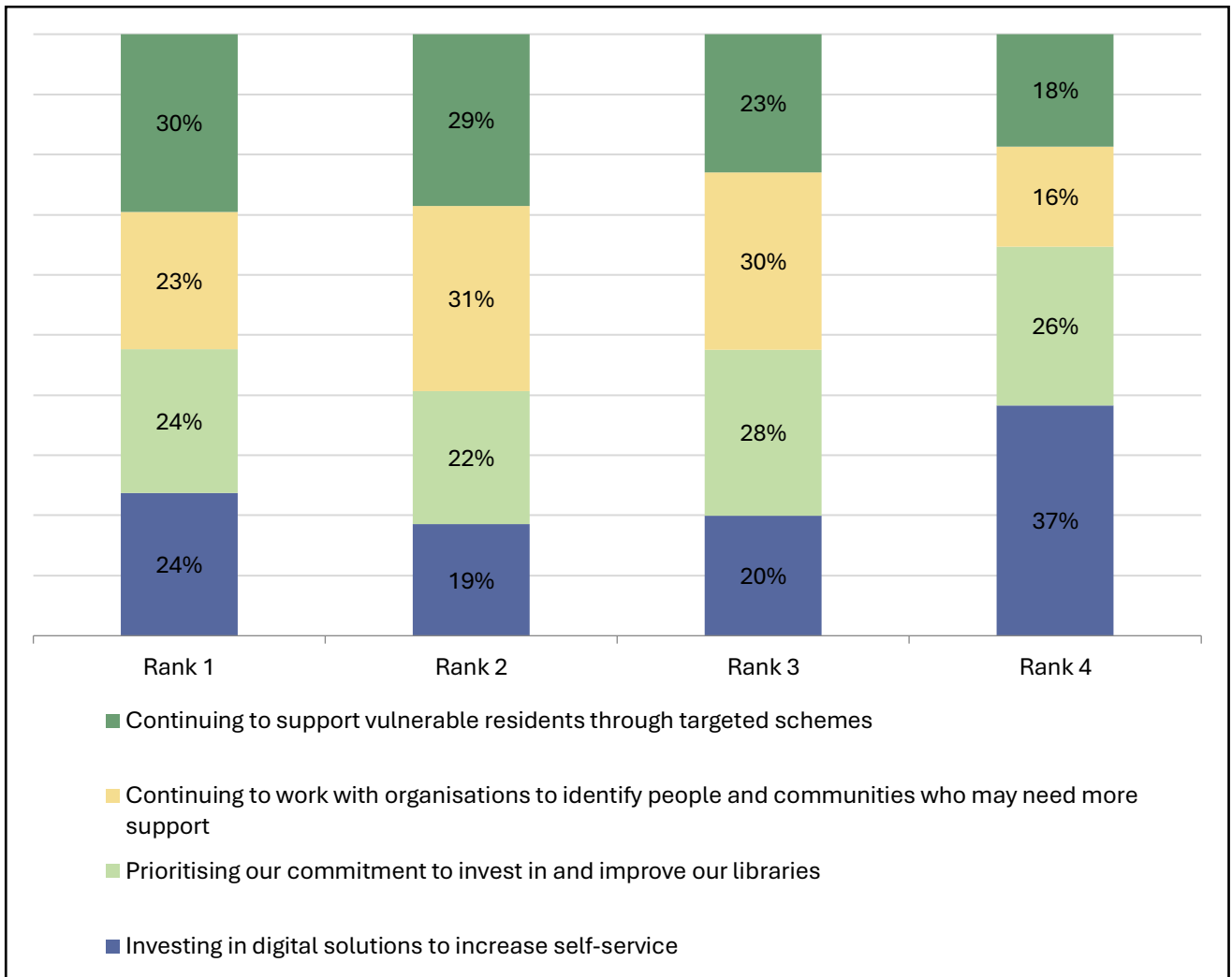


Question 2: “Fairer: Cambridgeshire has one of the fastest growing populations in the country, but the funding to support services residents rely on is not growing as quickly. This means we have to work hard to ensure our services reach those who need them. Please order the following statements from highest (number 1) to lowest (number 4) priority, based on what you believe we should do to ensure equitable access to services for residents across the county, to support our vision of a Fairer Cambridgeshire.”

145 respondents answered this question. Respondents were asked to rank four statements in order of priority, with number 1 being the highest priority and number 4 being the lowest priority.

- More respondents ranked ‘Continuing to support vulnerable residents through targeted schemes such as our Holiday Vouchers to give children access to food during school holidays’ as number 1 (30%) than the other statements, however, a similar number ranked this statement as number 2.
- More respondents ranked ‘Continuing to work with organisations to identify people and communities who may need more support - like the Cambridgeshire Countywide High Harms Board, bringing together local partners to coordinate responses to priority issues like drugs and violence’ as number 2 (31%) than the other statements, however, a similar number ranked this statement as number 3.
- Over a quarter of respondents (28%) ranked ‘Prioritising our commitment to invest in and improve our libraries, making them more accessible and suitable to deliver a broader range of council services in the heart of our communities’ as number 3, however, a similar number ranked this statement as number 4.
- Over a third of respondents (37%) ranked ‘Investing in digital solutions to increase self-service and support residents to access information and advice in a more timely way while also reducing our operating costs’ as number 4.

Figure 4: Ranking of Fairer priorities

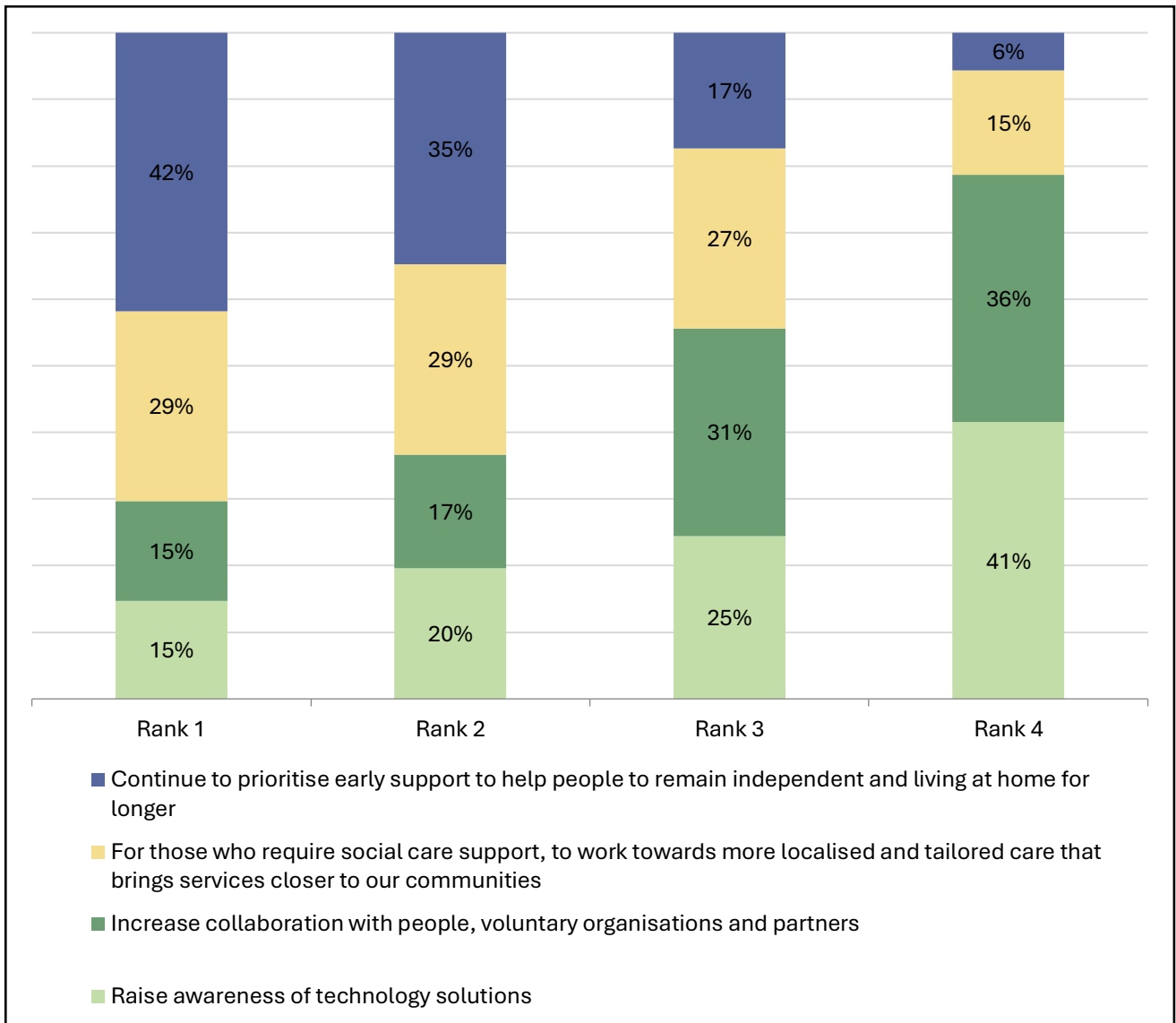


Question 3: “More Caring: One of our ambitions is for people to enjoy healthy, safe and independent lives through timely support that is most suited to their needs. While the demand for Adult Social Care services is increasing, the council needs to support residents, within an ongoing limited budget. Please order the following statements from highest (number 1) to lowest (number 4) priority, based on what you believe we should do to support our vision of a More Caring Cambridgeshire.”

143 respondents answered this question. Respondents were asked to rank four statements in order of priority, with number 1 being the highest priority and number 4 being the lowest priority.

- Over two fifths of respondents (42%) ranked ‘Continue to prioritise early support to help people to remain independent and living at home for longer’ as number 1, however, over a third (35%) ranked it as number 2.
- Over a quarter of respondents (29%) ranked ‘For those who require social care support, to work towards more localised and tailored care that brings services closer to our communities, so that people get the support that best meets their need through better coordinated services’ as number 1, however, a similar number ranked this statement as number 2 or number 3.
- Over a third of respondents (36%) ranked ‘Increase collaboration with people, voluntary organisations and partners to better understand our communities and work with them to address health inequalities’ as number 4, however, under a third (31%) ranked it number 3.
- Over two fifths of respondents (41%) ranked ‘Raise awareness of technology solutions, for example medication prompts and fall detectors through high quality information, advice and guidance that supports people to maximise their independence’ as number 4, with a quarter (25%) ranking it number 3.

Figure 5: Ranking of More Caring priorities

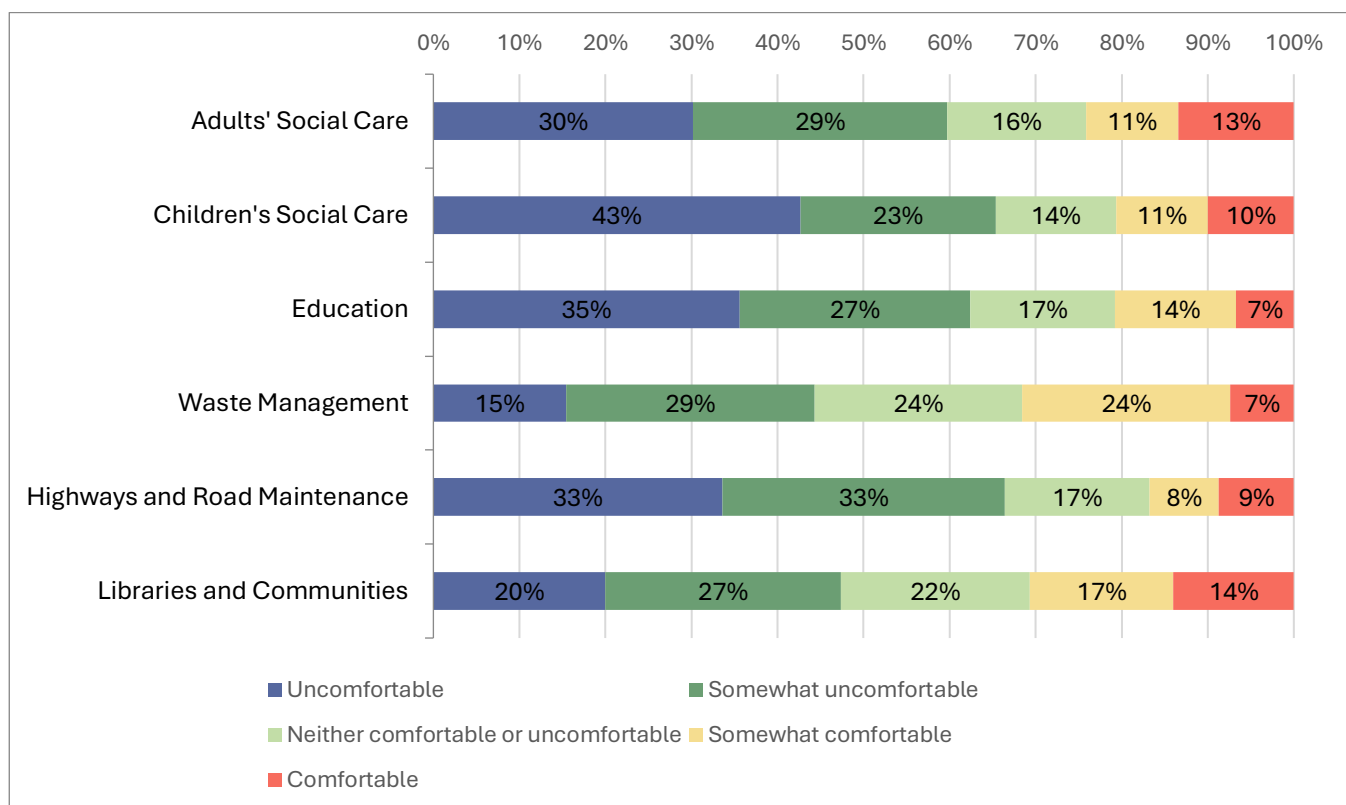


Question 4: “Imagine you are setting Cambridgeshire County Council's budget. For each major service area, please indicate the degree to which you would be comfortable with a spending reduction.”

150 respondents answered this question.

- The majority of respondents were ‘somewhat uncomfortable’/‘uncomfortable’ with a spending reduction in ‘Highways and Roads Maintenance’ (66%), ‘Children’s Social Care’ (65%), ‘Education’ (62%), and ‘Adults’ Social Care’ (59%).
- Under half of respondents (47%) were ‘somewhat uncomfortable’/‘uncomfortable’ with a spending reduction in ‘Libraries and Communities’.
 - Under a third of respondents (31%) were ‘somewhat comfortable’/‘comfortable’.
- Over two fifths of respondents (44%) were ‘somewhat uncomfortable’/‘uncomfortable’ with a spending reduction in ‘Waste Management’.
 - Under a third of respondents (31%) were ‘somewhat comfortable’/‘comfortable’.

Figure 6: Comfort with spending reductions

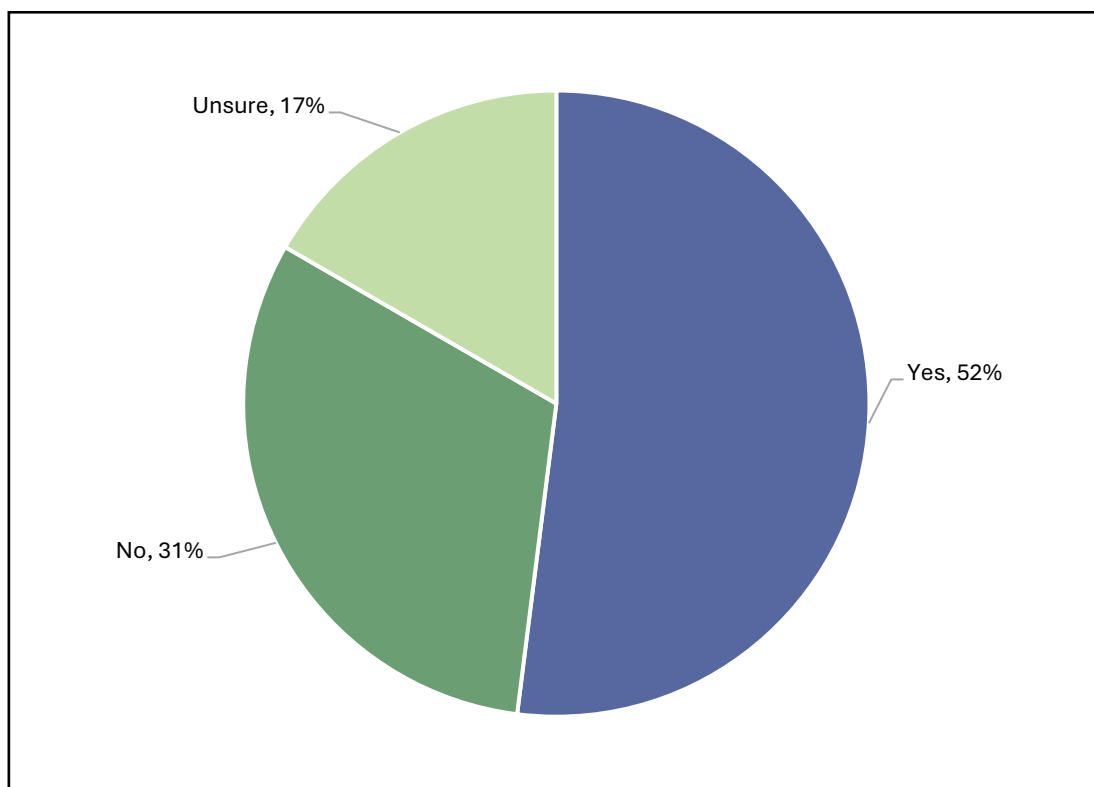


Question 5: “The maximum amount we are allowed to increase Council Tax (without requiring a referendum) is 4.99%, which includes the Adult Social Care precept. For every 1% that we increase Council Tax, we can increase our income by £4 million. Would you support an increase in Council Tax of up to 4.99% to maintain or improve essential services such as social care or highways and roads maintenance?”

150 respondents answered this question.

- Over half of respondents (52%) indicated that, ‘yes’ they would support an increase in Council Tax of up to 4.99%, with around a third indicating they would not support an increase.

Figure 7: Support for Council Tax increase



Question 6: “If you have any further comments on how we should prioritise and plan our services for the future, please leave your comments here. We ask you not to identify yourself or anyone else within your answer.”

67 respondents left comments on this question. The main themes were:

- Spending and staffing review:
 - Most of the respondents who discussed this theme felt there should be a review of Cambridgeshire County Council’s spending, staffing, and how departments are organised. These respondents felt there were inefficiencies present in how systems work and how things are funded, that better collaboration could result in savings, and that there could be savings in staff costs, particularly at more senior levels.
 - A few of the respondents who discussed this theme felt there needed to be a reduction in the number of local government organisations and partnerships, such as the Greater Cambridge Partnership, as they felt they were unnecessary and wasteful.

- Highways and road maintenance:
 - Some of the respondents who discussed this theme felt that money shouldn’t be spent on particular larger projects as they felt it would be a waste.
 - While there was no consensus on any particular project those mentioned included Mill Road bridge, the A141 improvements, Park & Ride sites, and the guided bus to Cambourne.
 - Some of the respondents who discussed this theme felt that more should be spent on active travel, and to a lesser extent public transport, either because improvements were needed (flatter paths, pavement maintenance, routes to new areas) or because they felt there would be long-term benefits to the environment, by reducing carbon emissions from modal shift, or to public health.
 - A few of the respondents who discussed this theme felt spending should focus on road maintenance.
 - A few of the respondents who discussed this theme felt there should be a congestion charge, which they felt would help pay for public transport and active travel improvements.

- Population resilience:
 - Most of the respondents who discussed this theme felt there needed to be more long-term plans for adults’ and children’s social care that reduces the

need for things like residential care (which was felt to only financially benefit private providers), helped residents stay independent for longer and worked as preventative support. Some of the suggestions included things like healthy eating initiatives and encouraging exercise through recreational areas or active travel.

- Alternative income generation and savings:
 - Respondents who discussed this theme suggested ways of increasing income generation outside of Council Tax increases and ways of saving money. These include:
 - Increasing fines related to criminal activity.
 - Increasing taxes on tourism.
 - Sale of unused Council property.
 - Congestion charging, however, there were comments directly opposing this.
 - Increasing the initial costs of adding a dropped curb or making it a yearly fee.
 - Savings and efficiencies in staffing costs from a 4-day work week, such as South Cambridgeshire Council have been trialling, however, there were comments directly opposing this.
 - Stricter controls on social benefits.
 - Updating the Council Tax banding for those with higher property values.

Whilst the majority of comments related to services delivered or commissioned by Cambridgeshire County Council, a few comments related to partner organisations or other local government bodies. Comments about services for which CCC have direct responsibility will be considered in business planning processes however other comments will not. Where possible views will be shared with other local bodies.

Engagement and Analysis Methodology

Background

The engagement strategy for this stage of the Business Planning and Budget 2025-26 process was designed by Cambridgeshire County Council's Policy and Insight Team and Communications Team.

Engagement Strategy

Identification of the Audience

The engagement was open for anyone to contribute to. The key target audience was individual residents of Cambridgeshire.

Design of Engagement Materials

The engagement exercise was designed to share information with residents ahead of asking respondents for their views. It was identified that the audience for the engagement required detailed information upon which to base their responses. The supporting documentation was created to provide an overview of information related to business planning, budget and the vision and ambitions of the organisation. The questions were; ranking four Greener priorities, ranking four Fairer priorities, ranking four More Caring priorities, how comfortable they would be introducing a spending reduction across six key Council areas, and whether they supported an increase in Council Tax of up to 4.99%.

Design of Engagement Questions

The engagement questions were designed to be neutral and clear to understand. They were structured to enable people to comment on all the key areas of decision making. This was done in order to help respondents to understand and comment on CCC's approach and the local implications of this.

For the first half of the engagement survey there was a focus on questions relating to the vision of creating a Greener, Fairer, More Caring Cambridgeshire, comfortableness of spending reductions in key areas, and support for a Council Tax increase of up to 4.99%. Respondents also had the opportunity to explain why they had chosen particular options through the free text question. The second half of the survey focused on multiple choice questions relating to respondents' personal characteristics, allowing measurement of the impact of the Business and Budget 2025-26 on various groups, as outlined in more detail below.

The main tool for gathering comments was an online survey. Recognising that online engagement, whilst in theory available to all residents, could potentially exclude those without easy access to the internet, the survey was advertised online and via posters within council buildings and paper copies of the information document and survey were available on request.

The survey included the opportunity for a 'free text' response and the analysis approach taken has enabled an understanding of sentiment as well as the detailed points expressed.

Diversity and Protected Characteristics

Information was collected on age.

Analysis

The strategy for analysis of the engagement was as follows:

- The Policy and Insight team monitored the survey whilst it was open to identify any issues with the survey or barriers to completion.
- An initial quality assurance review of the data was conducted and a review with the engagement team carried out to identify any issues or changes that occurred during the engagement process.
- A set of frequencies was then produced and checks made against the total number of respondents for each question and the engagement overall. A sense check of the data was made at this point with issues such as checking for duplicate entries, data entry errors and other quality assurance activities taking place.
 - **Duplicate Entries.** Measures were in place to avoid analysing duplicated entries. The online survey software collects the timestamp of entries so patterns of deliberate duplicate entries can be spotted and countered.
 - **Partial Entries.** The system records all partial entries as well as those that went through to completion (respondent hit submit). These partial entries are reviewed separately and in a limited number of cases - where a substantial response has been made (as opposed to clicking through without answering) - these are added to the final set for analysis.
 - Within the analysis a search for any unusual patterns within the responses was carried out, such as duplicate or 'cut and paste' views being expressed on proposals.
- Closed questions (tick box answers) are then analysed using quantitative methods, and these are presented in the final report through charts, tables and descriptions of key numerical information.
- Free text questions were analysed using qualitative methods, namely through thematic analysis. Key themes are identified using specialist software and then responses tagged with these themes (multiple tags can be given to the same response). Totals of tagged themes are then created and sample quotes chosen for the final report that typify particular tagged themes.
- The final report is then produced to provide an objective view of the results of the engagement.

Quality Assurance

Data Integrity

- A visual check of the raw data shows no unusual patterns. There were no large blocks of identical answers submitted at a similar time.
- Date / time stamp of submissions showed no unusual patterns.
- Text analysis showed no submissions of copy/pasted text.