

Budget Consultation 2020-2021

Introduction

As part of the budget setting process for 2020-2021 the Council ran a budget consultation exercise which sought the views of residents in relation to increasing the level of Council Tax by up to 1.99%. St Helens, like other Councils with social care responsibility could also apply an adult social care precept of 2%, in recognition of the increased demand for care services. This brought the possible overall Council Tax increase to 3.99% for 2020-2021. The consultation was promoted on the front page of the Council website, and also a social media campaign was conducted through Facebook and Twitter. The Council also sought the views of residents on what services they would like the Council to prioritise next year using a service prioritisation simulator.

The consultation and the service prioritisation simulator ran up the 12th February 2020. The number of responses received was less than in the previous two years, with 36 responses received in relation to the level of Council Tax and 22 responses were made in relation to service prioritisation.

Key Findings

In regard to the potential for increasing Council Tax by up to 1.99%, 72% of respondents disagreed with an increase in Council Tax. 14% supported an increase whilst 14% did not express their views. In regard to the 2% Adult Social Care Precept, 64% did not agree with its application, 6% were in support and 30% did not express a view.

The service prioritisation simulator allowed residents to identify from a basket 15 service areas that covered the range of Council's Services, those services that they considered to be a priority for future years and/ or those they did not consider to be a priority. Residents ranked services on a scale from -10 (low priority) to +10 (high priority).

The following table provides a summary of the responses received through the website.

Table 1:

Service Area	No. of Responses - Prioritise	No of Responses - No Change	No of Responses De-Prioritise	Average Scale
Adult Social Care and Health	14	6	2	4.73
Community Safety	13	9	0	4.18
Children's Social Care	13	7	2	3.77
Street Cleansing	13	7	2	3.68
Education	11	10	1	3.41
Parks and Open Spaces	12	6	4	2.32
Waste Collection and Recycling	10	9	3	2.14
Public Health	8	10	4	1.36
Libraries and Art	8	9	5	0.73
Environmental Health and Trading Standards	7	11	4	0.55
Leisure	5	9	8	-0.27
Highways, Roads and Transport Services	7	8	7	-0.50
Planning and Development	4	11	7	-1.64
Private Housing Initiatives	5	8	9	-1.64
Democratic Representation and Management Services	3	9	10	-2.41

In addition, the information has been presented pictorially at Appendix 1, and provides further analysis in relation to the rankings. For example, 14 respondents viewed Adult Social Care and Health as a priority and the average score of those responses was 8.0.

To summarise the findings in Table 1 and Appendix 1:

- Overall, respondents supported the prioritisation of Social Care Services to Adults and Children;
- In regard to Education Services respondents were generally split between prioritising the service or no change. The scores ranged from -3 to +10. Only one response considered Education Services to be a low priority.
- Of the fourteen responses prioritising Adult Social Care and Health, nine considered this to be a very high priority and scored the service 10. Likewise, of the thirteen responses prioritising Children's Social Care, eight scored the service 10.
- In relation to Community Safety respondents viewed this as a very high priority with no respondent viewing this as a low priority. The scores ranged from +2 to +10, with the average score of 7.1.
- Overall, respondents viewed Environmental Services such as Street Cleansing, Waste Collection / Recycling, and Parks and Open Spaces as a high priority.
- The majority of respondents considered Democratic Representation and Management Services to be a low priority or no change in priority. However, of the three responses that prioritised the service the average score was 9.7.

Some respondents provided commentary in their responses, and the main areas of feedback are detailed below:

- Increase in Council Tax is small and will allow for continuation of services;
- Accept the increase to council tax but object to any reduction in refuse collection;
- Council tax is too high;
- The affordability of council tax increases for some residents;
- New approaches such as a people's and business scrutiny group to enable residents and businesses to oversee decisions being made;
- Reduce services or outsource services;
- Reduce the number of Senior Managers and salaries; and
- Inefficient management of budgets.

The following are some specific comments in relation to the application of a 2% Adult Social Care Precept:

- Social care costs seem to be spiralling and, until Government help you out with this, I agree to a 2% increase;
- This should be fully funded by central government - I along with millions of others pay my fair share taxes but are asked to pay again. I agree it should be properly funded but disagree I should pick up a shortfall due to the council not acquiring the correct funds and using them responsibly. Again, I see it as a tax on residents for inadequacies in the council;
- People have received really good support when they have got older, so this seems like a sensible idea;
- I strongly disagree. You have increased the precept in previous years, and I would challenge the Council to manage its budget and have zero precept; and
- No, it needs to be funded from a different pot.



