South Gloucestershire Council

Council budget 2026/27

Consultation report

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Executive Summary

This report presents the findings from South Gloucestershire Council's annual budget consultation for 2026-27. The consultation aimed to gather residents' views on proposed budget measures, service changes, and the overall financial strategy in response to ongoing fiscal pressures. Feedback was collected through a consultation survey and direct email responses, with 1,066 responses received from a diverse range of stakeholders.

The budget proposals

- **General sentiment:** Residents expressed a mix of understanding, frustration, and concern regarding the council's financial challenges and the necessity for difficult decisions, such as service cuts and tax increases.
- **Transparency and accountability:** There were calls for greater scrutiny, transparency, and accountability in council spending, contract management, and service delivery with requests for clearer objectives and benchmarking against other councils. Another common theme was disagreement with the council's spending priorities (though there remain gaps in understanding of what council tax money is spent on).
- **Council Tax increase (4.99%):**
    - **Impact:** While some residents accepted the need for the increase, a far higher proportion were unhappy. People highlighted (through the prism of their own personal experience) the financial strain it would cause. Those just above benefit thresholds were at greatest risk, but several people talked about not being able to afford anything more than the absolute basics.
    - **Fairness:** Concerns were raised about the fairness of above-inflation increases and the perceived poor value for money of Council Tax, with some advocating for reform of the tax system.
    - **Knock-on effects:** Respondents noted potential negative impacts, such as reduced spending in the local economy, increased debt, and mental health issues.
- **Service charges and fees:**
    - **Green waste collection:** The proposed increase to £75 per year was contentious, with 25 customers stating they would cancel their subscriptions and other people worrying about more fly-tipping, black bin disposal, or burning of waste.
    - **Community meals:** Few comments were received, but those who responded emphasised the importance of the service for vulnerable individuals and the broader benefits of social contact.

- **Approach to balancing finances:**
    - **Efficiency and prevention:** There was broad support for seeking efficiencies and investing in prevention to reduce long-term costs, though there was some scepticism about the lack of detail behind the proposals and question marks over the council's ability to deliver promised savings.
    - **Internal vs. external provision:** Though it was not specifically consulted on, residents indicated their strong preference for in-house service delivery over outsourcing, with concerns about cost, quality, and accountability in private provision.
- **Cuts to services:**
    - **General support for cuts:** A significant number of people agreed with the principle of halting non-essential services, preferring the council to concentrate on delivering 'core' services like maintenance of roads and rubbish collection.
    - **Customer support for HandyVan services:** Dozens of HandyVan customers completed the consultation specifically to ask that it be retained. They emphasise the value of being able to trust those coming into their homes - people would be willing to pay higher prices for this reassurance.
    - **Commercial services to schools:** Recognising the funding situation for South Gloucestershire schools, some people were concerned about anything which could increase costs to schools.
    - **Cuts to services which support the council's wider work:** Some people were concerned about cuts to services which potentially act against the council's priorities or could result in increased costs to the organisation.
    - **Means-testing:** Some people asked if means-testing could be introduced for non-core services to ensure support is targeted at those most in need.
- **Ideas for improvement:** Suggestions included better contract management, increased partnership working, investment in technology, and more community engagement and volunteering.

Feedback on services

- **Perceived decline in services:** Across most metrics residents were more likely to report a decline than an improvement. Over two-thirds of respondents believed the cost of services had worsened.
- **Demographic differences:**
    - **Younger people:** Those under 40 were significantly more likely to perceive a decline in service quality and value for money.
    - **Vulnerable groups:** People living in lower banded properties reported greater negative impacts.

- **Service-specific feedback:**
    - **Decline of my local environment:** People are unhappy with the condition of roads and cleanliness of streets. Feedback on parks and open spaces was more mixed, but there was worse feedback from groups most likely to use parks.
    - **Support for vulnerable people:** Concerns were raised about the adequacy and timeliness of support for vulnerable groups. People in lower banded properties were especially worried.
    - **Community cohesion and crime:** There has been a marked decline over the last year in perceptions of community cohesion (48.6% felt this had got worse in this survey compared with 37.5% of people last year). People are also concerned about the response to crime and anti-social behaviour.
    - **Planning and development:** A majority of respondents felt that planning services had deteriorated, particularly regarding the management of local development and the South Gloucestershire Local Plan.
- **Trust and engagement:** A recurring theme was scepticism about whether resident feedback would influence decisions, with some feeling that choices had already been made.

Conclusion

- Significant impact of Council Tax increases (combined with wider cost of living pressures) for those just about managing. People on fixed incomes are also worried.
- Growing frustration that most of the pain is being pushed onto residents through above inflationary Council Tax increases.
- Not a long-term approach – more fundamental changes needed.
- Growing disillusionment/anger about declines in local environment, exacerbated by lack of understanding about what Council Tax pays for.

"I understand the logic in asking for 4.99% given the ridiculous funding model but this has to be balanced with how much of the population have to be destitute before we recognise that asking for more isn't an option any longer."

Background to the consultation

Purpose of the consultation

The council consults with local taxpayers about its budget and spending priorities each year. We undertake a thorough consultation to engage with and listen to as many local people as possible to provide reliable and robust evidence to help inform decision making.

The questions asked through the consultation this year were slightly different than in previous budget consultations.

The council faces ongoing, structural financial challenges, which means that it must make unpopular decisions, including cutting services and raising taxes, to continue to balance its budget.

The consultation seeks to be clear and transparent with residents. We explain the council's financial position and set out what approaches we are recommending having completed a thorough review of what we do, how we work, and how we raise money.

Through a series of 'open text' questions, we sought broader, more qualitative feedback about the potential impact of changes, and ideas about how we could mitigate downsides of these tough choices.

The purpose of this consultation was to:

- Inform residents and other interested stakeholders about the proposed council budget and the financial pressures facing the council,
- Provide appropriate information to explain the proposals for reducing spend and generating income. Outline the drivers and rationale behind them,
- Gain a fuller understanding of the likely impact for communities, service users and other stakeholders of the proposals,
- Identify alternative solutions and ideas concerning the council's spending and savings plan,
- Provide decision makers with analysis to assist them in making informed decisions about the council's budget and savings plan.

Methodology and response

Feedback was collected via an online and paper copy survey, which was open from Monday, 27 October 2025 until Sunday, 21 December 2025. The consultation was widely promoted via social media and council newsletters. We also hosted in-person events where council officers and councillors were on hand to answer questions and direct people to the survey.

There were 1,066 responses from residents, town and parish councillors and those representing voluntary and community organisations. This includes 324 responses

from the Viewpoint citizen's panel. In addition, we have received written representation from the Equalities Voice group.

Fewer people participated in this consultation than in previous years.

Background information

To help people provide an informed response, detailed information was made available, including:

- Information on the council's current financial position, its sources of income and costs.
- A breakdown of what Council Tax is spent on.
- Budget income and savings options.
- Details of the proposals for Council Tax levels in 2026-27.

However, several people commented throughout the survey that insufficient detail had been provided to allow full and detailed feedback. In parts, the consultation sought views on the high-level approaches the council is taking or is proposing to take to help it deliver services within its limited budgets.

For some proposals, for example, the new approach for the community meals service, further engagement with the public will allow people to provide considered feedback on specific changes.

"This report provides so little detail, I find it impossible to make informed decisions."

Instructions detailed how people could participate in the consultation and contact details were provided for questions and clarifications.

Copies of this information were available from the dedicated consultation website.

Caveats to the findings

The results of this consultation are not statistically representative of the views of South Gloucestershire residents due to the nature of the consultation methodology used. There were the following skews in the survey sample:

- Much higher proportion of older people,
- Far more men than women,
- More responses from white ethnic groups.

Accepting the limitations related to these over- and under-representations, the level of response, information gathered, and views obtained provide a useful indicator of wider opinion and any important issues that need to be considered.

Due to the software used and the different response options open to respondents, it was possible for people to submit more than one response. This was monitored

during the consultation period. Whilst there are similarities in the narratives of some responses, there is no evidence of individuals submitting multiple responses.

Any obvious duplicate comments, personal information and comments that can identify individuals, have been removed from the comments analysis. Percentages used in this report have been rounded and may not add up to exactly 100%.

Comments

Due to the large number of comments made as part of this consultation process, comments have been grouped by theme for inclusion in this output report. Full details can be found in the appendices.

Findings

Approaches to balancing finances

Through the consultation, the council sought feedback on different approaches to managing finances – this includes both initiatives which are already happening and new proposals. Specific measures were set out under the following headings:

- Reviewing internal costs,
- Finding the most efficient way to achieve the best outcomes,
- Investing in prevention to improve outcomes and reduce need for the most expensive support,
- Raising money fairly,
- Stopping, cutting back and prioritising services and support.

Feedback has been categorised and analysed in the same way.

Reviewing internal costs

Review of enabling functions to identify efficiencies and phase out old, inefficient technology systems

The council plans to conduct a comprehensive review of all the enabling functions of the organisation (finance, HR, IT, communications etc.) to identify opportunities to reduce duplication and create efficiencies. At the same time, it will seek to identify and phase out old, inefficient technology systems and ensure that our technical infrastructure is efficient and effective.

These changes are unlikely to have any significant impact for residents - other than reducing the cost of running the organisation - and so respondents were not provided with an opportunity to comment on them.

Finding the most efficient way to achieve the best outcomes

There is general agreement amongst consultation respondents with the principle of seeking efficiencies, albeit with polarised views about why this is required.

Over recent years there has been considerable media coverage of the financial challenges facing local authorities – and of future pressures stemming from the rapidly growing costs of caring for our ageing population. Some people recognise the difficult choices which are required. Others remain somewhat sceptical - and some are quite angry - about how they believe the council spends (and in some people's opinion wastes) money.

There are calls for greater scrutiny and accountability in spending, contract management, and service delivery and greater transparency about measuring performance. For example, some people want the council to set more measurable objectives and benchmark the outcomes it is achieving against other councils and organisations to ensure performance and value for money.

"I do not object to the council spending on these areas - so long as funding is carefully spent and there is accountability."

"SGC urgently needs to change its culture - from not my responsibility/have a meeting/consultation or other time-wasting excuse to becoming a – 'I will get it sorted' organisation."

The main point made by those concerned about inefficiencies relate to spending on what they see as the wrong priorities (this is considered later in the report). A full list of respondents' ideas is provided later in the report.

Improving local provision of specialist services

The focus of this proposal is to reduce the costs to take children and young people with SEND to and from school. This would be achieved by increasing local education provision in mainstream schools and expanding the early years and post 16 offer.

There was very little opposition to the overall principle, with people recognising the benefits of increasing local specialist provision for young people, for families, and for the taxpayer.

There were several responses from families of young people with SEND, including those whose children attended schools some distance from home. Their priority is to send their child to the school which is best placed to meet their needs and with inadequate local provision, they had little choice over where their child went to school. There was sympathy for this position from some people who aren't directly impacted.

"The ability to choose the appropriate school is important for parents/carers for children with SEN. To take that away would be morally wrong. These children are entitled to an education in a setting that can support them and maximise their potential."

However, this was not a unanimous position, and comments reflect a tension between people wanting to ensure every child receives appropriate support and the priority to reduce spending. 18 people felt families should pay at least part of the transport costs (especially if they weren't sending their child to the nearest school),

and that there should be stricter assessment of need. There were comments throughout the survey from people concerned about money being spent on a minority of people, or a perception of people abusing the system. In this instance, some respondents believed families already received financial support which they felt should be used to pay for transport, whilst others believed there were young people who did not need specialist transport provision.

"Definitely need to look into reasons why some families elect to access services away from their locality. While I sympathise with those families with SEND children, it is first and foremost their responsibility to care for their offspring to the fullest extent of their resources before shifting the load onto others."

Some respondents questioned whether the council was delivering transport as efficiently as it could. Part of the rationale for increasing local SEND school provision is that an exercise has already taken place to reduce the costs of home to school transport by finding efficiencies in route planning and sharing vehicles and journeys.

Increasing provision in mainstream schools

Views were more mixed about increasing provision in mainstream schools. Six people supported integrating SEND pupils into mainstream schools with proper support. Seven others argue that mainstream settings are often ill-equipped to provide specialist support and trying to integrate children with very different needs can be detrimental to both SEND and non-SEND pupils.

What was less contentious amongst parents and carers of children with SEND (and some within the education system) was that the local school system currently lacks the resources, expertise, and capacity to support SEND pupils effectively. Several of this group talked more broadly about support for young people with SEND, calling for new investment to pay for more specialist staff, better training for teachers, and reduced waiting times for assessments and EHCPs (Education, Health and Care Plans).

Broader comments about support for young people with SEND

Five people queried why costs of supporting young people with special educational needs had increased so substantially. Others felt that the council needed to be stricter in its assessments of need.

Two people discussed the costs of privately run schools specialising in support for young people with additional needs and questioned whether the taxpayer was getting good value for money.

Ensuring we're paying the fair cost of care/Comparing the costs of direct provision of care versus commissioning to external providers

There are a few different strands to the priority to ensure a fair cost of care:

- Paying staff a fair wage,
- Ensuring that where it makes sense for private sector organisations to deliver services, paying a fair price to ensure a competitive market, and
- Securing best value for money for the taxpayer.

In terms of who respondents would like to deliver services, there is a clear preference for in-sourcing. In-house council-run care is considered cheaper and more accountable. Where care must be commissioned, people support provision from not-for-profit organisations, with considerable scepticism about outsourcing to profit-driven companies, who are seen as expensive and lower quality.

Two people advocate for greater involvement from families in care for relatives – potentially with greater financial assistance.

There are several comments from recipients of care and their families about the support they are receiving. Three people mention services feeling disjointed, with long delays for assessment of need. Some believe that workers have insufficient time with them to carry out the tasks that are required, and high staff turnover reduces consistency of care.

Council staff completing the consultation highlight opportunities to deliver services more efficiently – comments have been passed to relevant council managers for investigation.

Focusing our flood prevention work in the areas of highest risk

47 people commented on the proposals to focus the council's flood prevention work on the highest risk areas. Those people who commented on this wanted the council to increase its overall spend on prevention. Only six people thought the focused approach was the best way forward, a much higher number wanted a broader increase in spending, including six who believed that the focused approach risked increasing costs to the council over the long term in dealing with bigger issues.

13 people felt the most effective option open to the council to reduce flooding risk was to reduce or halt building and development in South Gloucestershire. Eight people talked about other ways to slow water runoff and minimise and mitigate flood risks.

"I strongly object to reducing gully clearing in "lower risk" areas. This is not efficiency; it is deferred cost. Neglecting drainage leads to potholes and flooding, which compromises safety and costs the taxpayer much more to repair in the long run."

Partnering with a charitable or not for profit organisation to run Grimsbury Farm

Work is underway to identify and appoint a third-party organisation to manage Grimsbury Farm. In valuing Grimsbury Farm, respondents who commented on this proposal generally endorsed the view that given the wider financial backdrop facing the council, it is not something that the council can keep subsidising. 25 people agreed with the approach of finding another organisation to manage it, and a further 17 people felt it should be sold or the land re-purposed to support other council priorities. Nine people asked the council to maintain stewardship of the farm, including some who were happy to pay to visit to subsidise costs.

Increasing our buying power to secure better terms and prices

17 people supported the idea of the council teaming up with other councils or partners to increase buying power and secure better prices. Bulk purchasing was seen as especially valuable for larger contracts and spend items. A couple of people were more sceptical, believing that consortium buying regularly fails to deliver promised savings. Others advised caution to avoid being burdened with other authorities' debts or losing control over service quality.

The council has found over several previous budget consultations significant reticence amongst the public for outsourcing council services. Most resident comments about purchasing related to outsourcing and again the strong preference was for services to be provided directly by the council rather than outsourced to private companies. They argue that in-house provision leads to better value for money, higher efficiency, and improved service quality.

Investing in prevention to improve outcomes and reduce need for the most expensive support

Rapidly increasing demand for social care is one of the of the main reasons why councils up and down the country face financial difficulty. South Gloucestershire Council is looking at options to reduce the number of people needing the most expensive support and outlined some of these approaches in the consultation for feedback from local people.

At a general level, people recognised the value of investing in early support to prevent worse outcomes for individuals. 69 people advocated for investing time and money into measures which could mitigate negative outcomes for individuals, whilst 11 respondents were more sceptical about the efficacy of early intervention. Several people commented on the specific proposals; again, far more people supported than opposed these types of approach.

"I fully support efforts investing in prevention - if only this approach could be adopted for all problems. For example, correct pricing of healthy food that assists in optimising mental and physical health, using the polluter pays principle."

In advocating for these approaches, people wanted reassurance that the council had done its sums in evaluating the short- and longer-term costs and benefits of individual measures.

People highlighted issues with individuals and families sometimes not coming forward for help at the earliest opportunity, either because of stigma, or simply because they aren't aware of what support is available. They wanted better signposting.

Some of those who were less convinced questioned whether the longer-term benefits could be evidenced. Other felt the proposals were too interventionist, interfering with individual choice. Three people believed that with so much change and short-term decision-making, it would be impossible to pursue the proposals long enough to deliver benefits.

> **"In the current financial climate this can come across more as a luxury and a level of public intervention in private lives that we simply can't afford."**
>
> **"With goalposts constantly changing, especially funding-wise, it is hard to see that solid progress will be maintained even with the best of intentions."**

Helping people age independently and well

Consultation respondents supported the council's assumption that for most people, continuing to live independently in their own home is the best option. However, throughout the survey, a few people questioned the council's commitment to this approach given some of the other budget proposals, like stopping the HandyVan service and increasing cost of community meals.

Respondents recognised the scale of the challenge, and the need for different organisations within health and social care to work together with individuals and their families to find the best approach for individual people.

> **"To help people age well, you need to work with the health services. A lot of chronic conditions that cause disability in old age are caused by poor lifestyle such as lack of exercise, mental stimulation and poor diet."**

Three people mentioned the council's role in ensuring new housing is designed in a way to support older people and those with disabilities.

Increasing provision of extra care housing, supported living and similar accommodation

Relatively few people commented on the proposals related to extra care housing and supported living. Those who did recognised the value of shared housing in providing an environment where individuals' needs could be best supported more cost-effectively. Shared accommodation was also seen as positive in countering issues related to loneliness. A couple of people wanted more shared housing to support people with different needs, for example mental health or learning disabilities.

> **"Increasing the provision of extra care housing would be vastly beneficial - the impact of community living/ living in a more social setting has a host of health benefits."**

One person proposed a symbiotic model whereby young people who might not be able to afford their own homes could live with older people and those with additional needs to support each other.

Identifying opportunities to better support people with dementia

Respondents with first-hand experience provided several answers to how the council and its partners could better support people with dementia. In general, people felt the services provided were invaluable – if you could access them. However, several respondents shared personal experiences of struggling to find out what support is available and then accessing it – especially after a dementia diagnosis or hospital discharge.

People wanted the care and support to allow family members with dementia to remain at home for as long as possible but expressed concern about cuts to dementia services and the general lack of carers in the area, leading to delays in hospital discharge and increased pressure on families.

The closure of dementia cafés and day centres was lamented, with respondents noting the importance of these services for social interaction and support. There was a call for more community-based activities and gatherings tailored to people with memory problems, as these help maintain engagement and reduce isolation.

Finally, a handful of respondents asked that carers of people with dementia should be better supported.

Taking a longer-term view with the children and young people we support so we can better plan future service need

No-one made a specific comment about the proposal to use the information that we have about the needs of young people to model future support requirements.

Helping every child have the best start in life

The focus of this proposal was to increase our work with families of babies, toddlers and young children who display clear signs of delayed development. In identifying and addressing issues early before they become significant problems, the council believes it can improve long term outcomes.

Amongst people who commented on this recommendation, there was a consensus on the value of early intervention, emphasising the importance of identifying genuine cognitive needs rather than attributing issues to poor parenting (though some respondents did attribute the rise in issues to what they deemed as negligence on the part of mothers and fathers).

"Identifying needs in younger children and putting in support earlier can only be a good thing. Too many children only having diagnoses by the time they are in KS2 or secondary, often meaning they do not access school adequately."

Respondents agreed that this early investment was good value, reducing more significant future issues and costs. A handful of respondents made specific reference to the Sure Start scheme and reinvigorating children's centres, which they felt made it easier for families to access universal services and helped the council and other agencies identify families who need additional support. Parenting classes and toddler groups also play an important role.

Generally, people felt significant additional resources needed to be put into the system, and the different organisations and processes needed to be more joined-up. Several families with children with special education needs and disabilities highlighted the issues and delays getting an assessment and EHCP (education, health and care plan). There were also calls for better signposting to support.

Better signposting to support young people in secondary school who have autism, neurodiversity, or other social communication needs

Only 12 people commented on this proposal, all of whom supported the approach. Amongst this group, there is recognition that neurodiversity is an issue for many young people and that currently it can be challenging for schools to offer best support to individuals with different needs – especially when they don't have specialist expertise. People commented more broadly on the mental health of young people and the need for more resource. Some people wondered whether similar support was also needed in primary schools.

Keeping kids out of care

Relatively few people commented on the measures the council is proposing to help children and young people at risk of being moved into care. However, those who did, provided detailed feedback, emphasising that this should be a priority for the council, requiring significantly increased resourcing.

There is strong support for genuine, pre-emptive work with families rather than a culture of parent-blame and excessive form-filling. Early help models, including reinvigorating children's centres (e.g. Sure Start), are seen as crucial for supporting families before issues escalate. However, feedback from the consultation is that services are overwhelmed, so any new initiatives must ensure adequate workforce and referral pathways.

Additionally, people believe that thresholds for support are too high, meaning families often receive help too late.

Stability is important and people ask for more support for adoptive families and foster carers.

> **"Please give more support to adoptive families (many adopted children end up back in care). We have been told there's no money for our complex children, but if they ended up in care it would cost far more. "**

Other requests include:

- Consistent social worker support to help build trust with young people.
- Better signposting and a more joined-up system for parents of autistic children.
- More support in specialist schools for those with high-level needs.
- Council-run residential homes for children who cannot safely return to their families.
- Working with GPs, hospitals, and other partners (e.g. using trigger medical incidents to identify those at risk) is recommended to reduce incidents leading to care or hospital admissions.
- Mentoring for young people to reduce placement breakdowns and support family stability.

People recognise all this additional support would be costly, and there are questions about where to start and how to afford all the necessary improvements, especially given competing demands.

Reducing homelessness and helping people build back their lives

Seven people provided feedback on the proposals to reduce homelessness. People commenting recognised the complexity of the issue – both its cause and possible resolutions. Respondents recognised the importance of more stable, longer-term housing as the first step towards helping people build back their lives and agreed that the council should focus resources on finding viable options to provide homeless people with greater security. One person talked about a Catch-22 situation of people in temporary accommodation losing eligibility for support if they secured work, which therefore disincentivised efforts to find a job.

"The public sector (should) be a provider of proper accommodation. Work with private partners to build proper decent homes to get the homeless out of temporary and high-cost accommodation."

Raising money fairly

The council needs to raise more money to help balance its budget. People were asked what impact four proposals might have for them:

- Increasing Council Tax by 4.99%.
- Increasing the cost of the green waste subscription service to £75 per year.
- Increasing the price of our community meals service to help cover the operating costs.
- Removing 'Special Expenses' to ensuring all South Gloucestershire's towns and parishes are fairly funded.

Increasing Council Tax by 4.99%

Central Government allocates funding to South Gloucestershire Council on the assumption that Council Tax will increase by 4.99%. The council's financial modelling makes this same assumption that taxes must increase by 4.99% to allow the organisation to continue to deliver services it is legally required to offer. Consultation respondents were asked what impact a 4.99% rise might have for them.

Financial impacts

In analysing comments, the report's author sought to differentiate between levels of impact:

- No/little impact
- Small impact – will reduce spending in other areas
- Major impact – will struggle to afford basics like food and energy

105 people told us that an increase of 4.99% would have very little impact for them, 189 said that they would have less money and would have to reduce their spending on other things, whilst 85 thought they couldn't afford the increase.

42 people told us they received some form of financial support (e.g. Income support, housing benefit, Universal Credit, pension credit). 16 people from within this group (or 38%) were categorised within the *major impact* group. By contrast, 8% of those who don't receive financial support said that an increase of this level would cause them significant financial difficulties.

Quotes from respondents show the extent of the difficulties some people could face. Through their consultation response, one person asked for advice as they could no longer afford to pay their Council Tax.

"I struggle to pay council tax as it is, so will it be a case of food, heating or council tax - I can't pay it all."

"It will make every month more of a struggle to manage bills and make us use food banks even more."

"More debt, we can't afford to pay now. My husband works two jobs. We eat once a day, including our teenagers."

"It will push us to breaking point, I feel punished for being in employment. As a working nurse, I should not have to be accessing food banks and local charities to feed my family."

Different groups of people made the case that increased Council Tax would be especially difficult for people like them – these included people who are just above the benefits thresholds, pensioners, working people, single person households, younger people and single parents.

"I have no problem with an increase of 4.99%, however there are a number of people who are just over the amount to receive pension credit and will struggle."

Some people considered the knock-on impacts of such a rise.

- 19 people said that if they had to pay more Council Tax, it would mean they had less to spend with local businesses.
- Seven people thought that they would need to sell their house and/or move to a different area.
- Four people said that it would worsen inequalities, whilst seven thought that the council would end up paying out more to support those who were pushed further into debt.
- Two people talked about the impacts that these increases, combined with wider financial difficulties were having for their mental health.
- One person said that they (and potentially other people in the same position) would no longer be able to afford to continue their role as an informal carer.

People asked that the council step up its support for those who would be hardest hit.

"The disabled and other non- or low-paid workers will be impacted more, and I hope will get assistance to cope."

Recognising that Council Tax has risen by 4.99% for several years in a row, seven people commented that above inflationary increases were not sustainable over the longer term, and there is growing frustration that standards of living are declining.

"I understand the logic in asking for 4.99% given the ridiculous funding model but this has to be balanced with how much of the population have to be destitute before we recognise that asking for more isn't an option any longer."

"I'm sick and tired of losing more and more of my hard earned money. I'm working 50 hours a week and I can't afford anything nice, apart from paying my bills."

"My wife and I do not qualify (just) for any form of financial support. We now have to eke out our incomes very carefully. We cannot afford any luxuries like holidays or eating out any more, we are just servicing all the costs.

I do not like to look to any future where we will be unable to service the costs of living in our home. I'm aware that social costs are always increasing, but there will come a time when we will have to say NO, we can't pay. Then what will council do? Retirement is a burden I'm not enjoying because I'm worrying."

Fairness of a 4.99% increase

In their responses, people typically commented on either the affordability or the fairness of the rise.

99 people said that it was unfair for Council tax to rise at a higher rate than inflation, their wages or pension increases. 91 people considered the tax poor value for money.

Comparing commentary with feedback provided in previous years, there was a noticeable increase in the number of people who believe that others are abusing the system or that 'undeserving' people were benefiting from support. 26 people mentioned this in response to being asked about the impact of an increase in Council Tax but there were many more similar comments throughout the survey feedback.

"Councils have made it too easy for some families to get benefits, instead of just helping ones in greater need."

"You give benefits and free accomodation away to illegal unvetted *** or lazy people with big families they can't afford."**

22 people commented that it was time to reform the Council Tax system, or to revalue the house prices which tax bands are decided upon. Different people wanted different changes.

16 people agreed with the principle that those who can afford to, should contribute more, and three people wanted to create another higher tax band to reflect the most expensive homes in South Gloucestershire. By contrast, eight people thought the tax system was too progressive, and five people highlighted the potential issue of older people being stuck living in larger properties and paying a higher rate of Council Tax with lower annual incomes.

Others wanted increased funding from Central Government, or for local government to be given more local tax-raising powers.

"Continually increasing Council Tax every year is not a solution, it's a sticking plaster to a long running issue of central government reducing funding for local authorities. A local council should not be self-financing, its simply not possible. You are there to provide a social safety net and keep local society functioning.

This council should be making more noise about this and making more demands for central government funding. You should also be making more noise about government solving issues like poverty which ultimately is the root cause of so many of the costs for this council and many others like it."

Other perceived inequities included:

- Single person discount should be higher/lower/abolished,
- Students/people living in HMOs should pay more,
- Why is Council Tax in South Gloucestershire higher than in other areas?
- Traveller community should make a larger contribution.

The value for money of Council Tax

91 people commented on the value for money of Council Tax, expressing the view that they are 'paying more and getting less'. Typically, these comments mentioned potholes in roads and/or reduced frequency of black bin collections - some of the most visible services the council provides. Indeed, the feedback from this and

previous years' budget consultations is that people feel the condition of roads has deteriorated markedly over recent years.

> **"I already pay £2400 to have our bins emptied! Only other thing we use are the roads, and they are in an appalling condition."**

However, some of these comments reflect an incomplete understanding of what taxes pay for. The council continues to share information about how much of its budget the council must spend supporting the most vulnerable people in society, and how this amount has grown so rapidly in recent years. This was front and centre of the messaging within this consultation.

For some, it was a case of the council spending money on the wrong priorities. The range of issues which are important to different people (and the diametrically opposed stances different people take on issues like tackling poverty and inequalities, reducing environmental damage and mitigating the effects of changing climate) demonstrates how difficult a job decision-makers have in agreeing priorities. For every person who wanted the council to put more focus on environmental concerns or nature, there were others who felt money that was spent in this area was being wasted.

With major roadwork schemes ongoing throughout the year, several people queried the money being spent on cycle lane schemes. For purposes of clarity, these projects are funded by Central Government and can only be spent on these types of schemes; they therefore do not impact the budget available in South Gloucestershire for other council services.

Support for the increase

Very few people welcome tax increases. However, a significant proportion of respondents supported the increase and/or understood the need for it. 80 people endorsed this increase, and a further 41 said that they were happy with a 4.99% increase if it was necessary to maintain services.

> **"I feel we need to increase (Council Tax) to provide the services we ask for. Those in need of support do not pay the full increase and therefore the remainder of us should see this as an investment for everyone's future."**

Increasing fees and charges for services

The main proposal here was to increase the annual fee for green waste collections from £63 to £75.

Increasing this charge is always contentious. In previous budget consultations when the council has asked about support for the change, customers have voiced their

concerns about rises (in the consultation for the 2025/26 council budget, 38% of people supported the increases, 44.5% were opposed).

Through this consultation, the council has not asked about support or opposition for measures where the public cannot influence change. The council believes increasing costs for non-essential services like green bin collection is necessary to help prioritise services supporting the most vulnerable in society. Respondents could provide feedback on the increase through commentary.

Paying for green waste collection

17 people said they were unhappy with this above inflationary price increase and 15 said that the service was now too expensive. 25 people said they have either already cancelled or else plan to cancel their subscription as a result.

"You have simply priced yourself out of the market for green bins - very silly move."

A fee has been charged for this service for several years now, but eight people did not accept that they should have to pay more on top of their Council Tax. Six people supported the increase.

"Where people have the ability to pay the full cost of the service or goods then they should do that. Increasing the cost of green bins and the community meals service is a sensible thing to do and will help the council balance the books."

A couple of people questioned why the costs of providing the service were so high and seven people asked whether the council could reduce its costs if the service only ran through the spring and summer months or if collections were less frequent.

Three people disagreed with the service being subsidised for low-income households.

Impact of the increase

In voicing their concerns, people talked about potential impacts. They felt increasing costs would discourage people from having their green waste collected by the council, and they would instead find less positive ways of disposing of it:

- Fly-tipping,
- Putting it in black bins,
- Taking it to the tip, or
- Burning it.

"I strongly object to the increased green bin charges, which I regard as antithetical to the environmental objectives under which the council claims to operate. Does it really want more people driving their cars to the tips or setting bonfires in their gardens?"

They argued this would reduce the council's income (fewer subscriptions) and add to costs (more black bin/recycling centre waste to manage). Eight people believed it acts against the council's wider priorities to increase the proportion of waste being recycled and could deter people from gardening and maintaining green spaces, which in turn could reduce wider social benefits like keeping people active, reducing flooding risks, and providing habitats for wildlife.

In previous consultations, we have seen that disabled people are more likely to be opposed to these price increases (in the 2025/26 survey, 15.8% more disabled people opposed than supported a similar level of increase). Three people mentioned that this increase would be especially difficult for older people and those who find it harder to get to the tip.

People suggested opportunities to reduce the costs of the service or raise additional funding from it, for example by:

- Reducing/stopping winter collections,
- Reducing frequency of collections,
- Identifying people who have stopped paying but are still putting out waste for collection.

Increasing the price of our community meals service to help cover the operating costs

There were only four comments regarding the proposed price increases for the community meals service. One person agreed, saying the current price was unrealistic and the service needed to cover its costs.

A couple of others talked about the importance of the service to their relatives – not only to have cooked meals, but also the human contact. A professor from Bristol University, who has been studying the impact of meals on Wheels services across the UK provided a lengthy response, which is provided in full in the appendices. This response also highlighted the broader benefits of the service in delivering better outcomes for vulnerable individuals.

Ensuring all South Gloucestershire's towns and parishes are fairly funded

Only one member of the public commented on the proposal to find an alternative model for Special Expenses paid to Town and Parish Councils. The councils were provided with additional supporting information to help them understand the

implications of the alternative funding arrangements. However, in their responses, several of the councils commented that the current proposals lack sufficient detail, particularly with regards individual financial implications, and that further guidance is required as part of a separate, wider conversation/consultation with both councils and residents.

Whilst some councils see potential benefits from greater local control and accountability, several others believe that removing special expenses would likely result in higher overall costs for residents, with some predicting significant rises in precepts and council tax.

Respondents believed that the impacts would vary for different councils, reflecting the different size and scale of the organisations. Smaller councils felt they would be most impacted:

- With few staff and limited administrative capacity, they might struggle to manage new responsibilities, especially asset maintenance and contract management.
- They have lower tax bases, which could lead to unequal service levels.
- They would face inefficiencies and higher costs without centralised service delivery.

"We are a very small council and have no buildings or maintenance equipment. The chances of us being able to get a value-for-money contract for such a small area are very low."

Councils want assurances that any assets transferred (e.g. bus shelters, open spaces) will be in good condition, and that adequate funding or reserves will be provided to cover future maintenance or necessary repairs. One council wanted clarification about what would happen if they refused asset transfers.

Councils welcome the early guidance on this proposal and the time allocated to consider the individual implications. To ensure a smooth transition, some would like a phased implementation, with support, guidance, and clear communication with residents.

Stopping, cutting back and prioritising services and support

Through the consultation, the council sought feedback on proposals to scale back some services. The focus of these cuts was intended to be on 'non-essential' services to prioritise services it is legally required to provide and those that support the most vulnerable people.

56 people felt this was a sensible approach, with 30 believing the council needed to focus on core services, halting “nice-to-have” services. 13 reluctantly agreed that there were few alternative options to cuts, but some asked that any savings delivered should result in lower council tax increases.

“The budget needs to be fair, and in today’s world where money is scarce, the essential and basic requirements should be priority.”

However, despite the grudging acceptance of difficult choices, residents’ feedback reflects a strong desire to protect services for the most vulnerable, with concerns about the quality and accessibility of private alternatives. Also, whilst there is general agreement about the high-level principle of cuts, as highlighted in the sections below, when people are asked about specific reductions, there is sometimes greater reluctance.

In their response to the consultation (included in full in the appendices), the Equalities Voice group highlighted potential disproportionate negative impacts of cuts for certain groups. Dozens of residents echoed these concerns that the elderly, disabled, and vulnerable could be left worse off. Services like pest control, HandyVan, and social care are seen as important for these groups, and their reduction could lead to increased hardship, isolation, and health risks, potentially putting more pressure - and costs - on other council and health services.

Where the option is paying for a private sector provider, people cite concerns about higher costs, lower quality, and lack of accountability compared to council-run services – in these instances, some would prefer prices to be increased rather than services cut. Others question the level of savings achievable from these changes given the scale of the financial challenge.

As is evident throughout the consultation, some comments reflect perceived wasteful spending on non-essential or “vanity” projects, with some residents questioning whether the council has done enough to improve efficiency, reduce bureaucracy, and explore alternative ways to generate income before resorting to service cuts.

People urge careful consideration of the broader impacts of cuts, both social and financial, and advocate for transparency and fairness in decision-making.

Ensuring people are receiving care which is proportionate to their needs

Generally, those people who comment on this proposal agree with it. 21 people approve of efforts to review care packages more frequently to help ensure support is proportionate to actual needs. Some believe there are certain scenarios where care packages should only ever be temporary. Regular, in-person reviews are preferred over telephone assessments to better understand changing needs.

"This approach aligns with our focus on helping individuals build and maintain their independence; supporting people during periods of crisis and then helping them get back to their normal ways of life."

However, a couple of council staff who responded suggest additional resources could be required to manage the increasing number of reviews. Others would like care workers and service users to be involved in decisions about scaling back services. The Equalities Voice group wanted more detail about how this would be conducted to ensure it didn't undermine dignity, wellbeing, or safety.

Several comments highlight the need for financial assessments as well as needs assessments, believing there are people receiving support who shouldn't be eligible. Suggestions include considering personal assets (like property) in care funding decisions and ensuring benefits like Attendance Allowance are factored into financial assessments.

Other people are sceptical about the motives behind this proposal, believing that it is simply an excuse to reduce support from those who need it. This could lead to worsening health and increased strain on individuals and families, resulting in higher long-term costs if individuals' conditions deteriorate due to insufficient support.

In reducing the costs of service provision, respondents highlight the potential role of technology and encourage the council to work in partnership with charities and third sector organisations like Age UK.

Consider options to stop subsidising the HandyVan service

Lots of people - both customers and staff delivering the service - completed the consultation specifically to provide feedback about the proposal to stop subsidising the HandyVan service. One respondent collected over 80 signatures asking the council to re-think its plans (provided in appendices at the end).

The key value to customers is being able to trust the people coming into their homes to complete repair work. Approximately 20 people say they are willing to pay more for the peace of mind that they get knowing that the people completing repairs are vetted and they won't be scammed.

"My aunt and uncle are in their 80s and have used the HandyVan Service on a number of occasions. They do not use the service because of the subsidies. They value the service because they know they are in safe hands and won't be ripped off."

A common theme was that halting the service acts against the council's priority to help older people live independently for longer. Working alongside the OT service (and sometimes completing work that that team do not have expertise to do)

respondents believe that cutting the service would be a false economy, limiting the work of other council teams and resulting in more accidents, hospital admissions, and the need for more expensive social care and ultimately higher long-term costs for the council and other public services.

> **"You cannot say you are focusing on reducing care home costs/social care budgets but then considering taking away the HandyVan Service, this completely contradicts the council's intentions."**

However, against a backdrop of significant financial challenges, several people question whether HandyVan is a 'core' council service. 14 people felt the service should not be subsidised, others questioned why it is subsidised for all over-60s and 15 people believed that if the service were to continue, it should be means-tested and offer targeted support to those on benefits or facing financial need.

> **"Why were we subsidising the HandyVan in the first place? Please tell me it was means tested."**

As with pest control services, some comments indicate a lack of awareness about the service, suggesting better advertising and outreach could increase uptake and help generate additional income. Others mention difficulties booking the service or uncertainty about eligibility.

Trust is the key benefit of the service and if it is to be withdrawn, 13 people ask that in its place is a well promoted council accreditation scheme for local vetted firms, allowing vulnerable people to get their repairs done with confidence. Others wonder if the council could do more to encourage neighbours and communities to volunteer time and expertise to complete the smaller jobs that the service provides. A couple of people asked whether the expertise could be folded into the OT service.

Consider options for our pest control service

The proposal to review the viability of the pest control service was also widely commented on, though there were fewer comments from customers and more from council staff.

Comments suggest some people overestimated the scale of the team's work. 33 people were worried about the prospect of major public health issues, including possible rat infestations if the service were halted. People are especially concerned in the context of the forthcoming reduction of black bin collections to once every three weeks. The council's team carries out important work – including controlling pests on some public land and properties - but it is unlikely that these consequences would come to a bear if the council stopped providing pest control services on a commercial basis.

"The proposal…. risks creating serious public health, environmental and financial consequences. Pest infestations such as rats, mice, cockroaches, and bedbugs are not merely an inconvenience, they are public health hazards."

That is not to say that there wouldn't be negative implications and some people believe that outsourcing this capability would hamper the council's ability to fulfil its statutory duties and would prove more expensive.

"The Pest Control Service section are invaluable to Environmental Health. Their work is symbiotic in protecting the public from ill health and disease."

Four people noted the range of private companies providing the same service and do not feel it is the council's role to compete with the private sector, especially if the service is not profitable.

Eight people didn't think the service should be subsidised, but seven wanted the service to continue on a means-tested basis for low-income households, who may not be able to afford private services. In this context, the council's service is seen as fair and trustworthy.

"Relying solely on private pest control companies risks creating inequality, with low-income households unable to access timely or affordable help."

As with the HandyVan service, if the service is stopped, some people asked for some kind of licensing or vetting scheme to allow people to choose between reputable private providers.

A member of staff provides a lengthy response to the consultation, suggesting an alternative way forward for the service.

Review the business case for delivering services on a commercial basis to schools

Respondents worry about the financing of local schools – one person highlights that South Gloucestershire's schools receive the lowest financial backing of any in the country. Against this backdrop, people are wary of any measure which could have financial implications for schools, and some - including a headteacher of a local school - believe that if the council stops providing these services, schools will have to pay more to source them independently, resulting in no real savings across the 'system' and making school operations harder.

There is also concern about the potential impact on important but non-statutory services, such as road safety.

"As a headteacher in South Glos, I just want to make clear that stopping services for schools means schools have to pay more so there's effectively no gain – the problem is being placed somewhere else and making schools' jobs harder, impacting on educational standards we are able to provide."

Three people believe this change may be part of creeping privatisation of the education system.

Efficiency ideas from members of the public

People suggested where they thought there were opportunities for the council to work more efficiently and reduce costs. Themes/ideas included:

Internal vs. external provision

- Increase internal provision of services rather than outsourcing, to improve value for money and control.
- Limit use of private contractors.
- Bring services such as care homes and refuse collection back in-house for greater efficiency.

Contract management & procurement

- Employ professional buyers and negotiate harder on contracts to avoid long-term cost increases.
- Improve contract management skills and capacity to ensure value for money and hold contractors accountable.
- Consider collaborative contracts with suppliers/providers for better oversight and accountability.
- Constantly review costs and contracts, especially those with automatic annual increases.
- Monitor performance of commissioned services and introduce "customer whistle-blowing" facilities for feedback.
- Use term contracts for highway maintenance, as done by other local authorities.
- Use government framework contracts.

Partnerships & shared services

- Partner with other local authorities for joint purchasing and shared contracts to increase buying power and reduce costs.

- Pool resources locally and regionally and learn from best practices in other councils.
- Consider working with charitable or not-for-profit organisations to deliver services more efficiently.
- Encourage collaboration among charities to avoid duplication and improve service delivery.

Prevention & long-term planning

- Prioritise prevention and invest in long-term solutions rather than short-term cost savings.
- Plan for demographic changes, such as an ageing population, to avoid future financial strain.
- Invest in universal services and early intervention to reduce future demand for expensive statutory services.

Staffing & organisational structure

- Reduce bureaucracy and streamline processes to save time and money.
- Review staff workloads and ensure all teams are working efficiently.
- Reduce the number of managers and high-level positions.
- Reduce staff salaries and pension contributions, especially for senior staff.
- Recruit and retain skilled staff, especially in care and social work, by offering competitive pay.

Community engagement & volunteering

- Recruit volunteers where appropriate to support council services.
- Support community-based initiatives.

Technology & process improvements

- Invest in better technology and open-source software to reduce licensing costs.
- Streamline administrative processes and improve information sharing between teams.
- Consult staff on ways to make processes more efficient and time-saving.

Financial management & cost control

- Focus spending on statutory/core services and cut non-essential or “vanity” projects.
- Consider selling or transferring non-core assets (e.g., Grimsbury Farm) to reduce financial burden.

- Share budget spend transparently for each core service.
- Cut councillor expenses.

Feedback on services

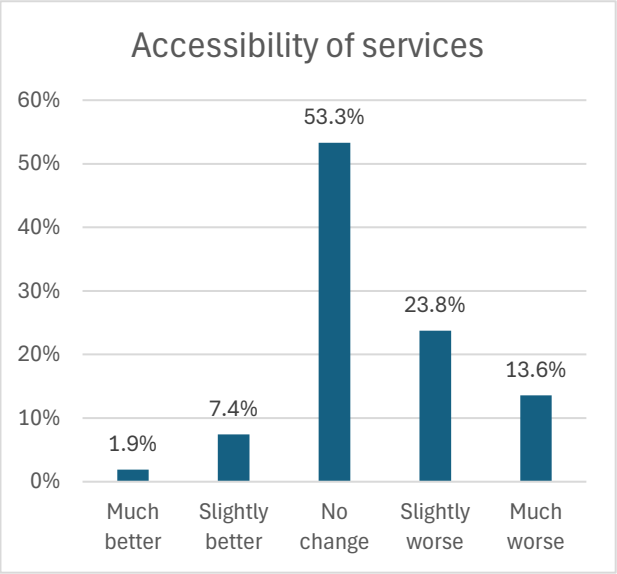
Since 2010, the council has delivered cuts and savings of over £90m. Wherever possible, we've tried to do this in ways which improve our efficiency, minimising the impact on our residents and service users.

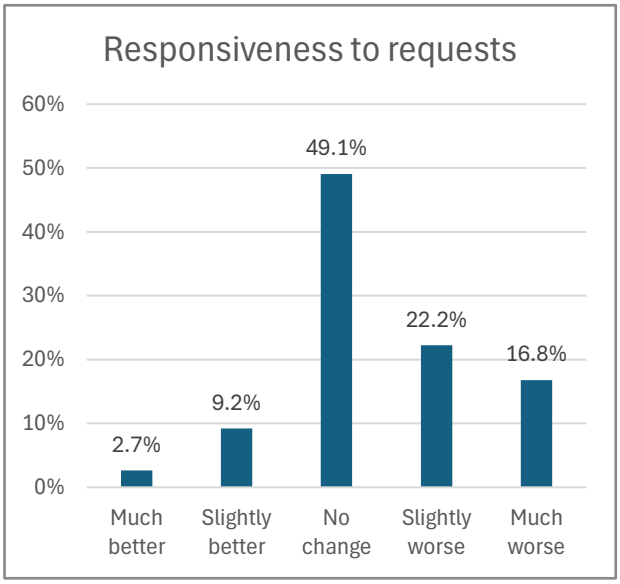
However, the scale of the cuts has meant that we haven't always been able to maintain service delivery to the same level. We were keen to understand from local people what the impact has been for them.

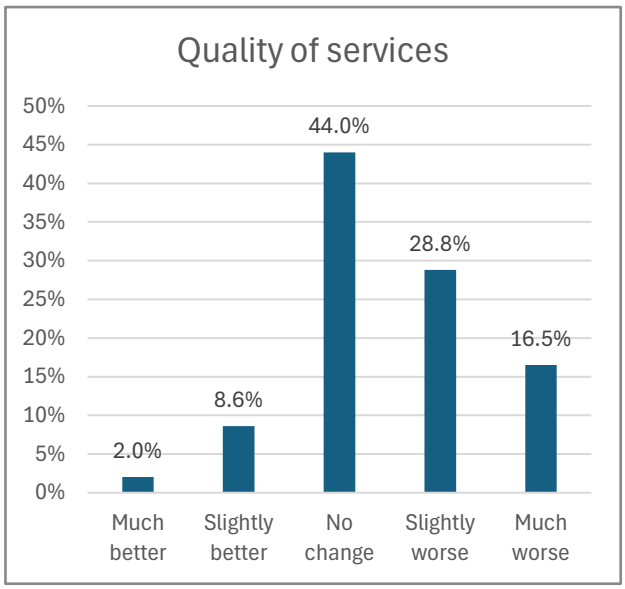
How the council delivers services

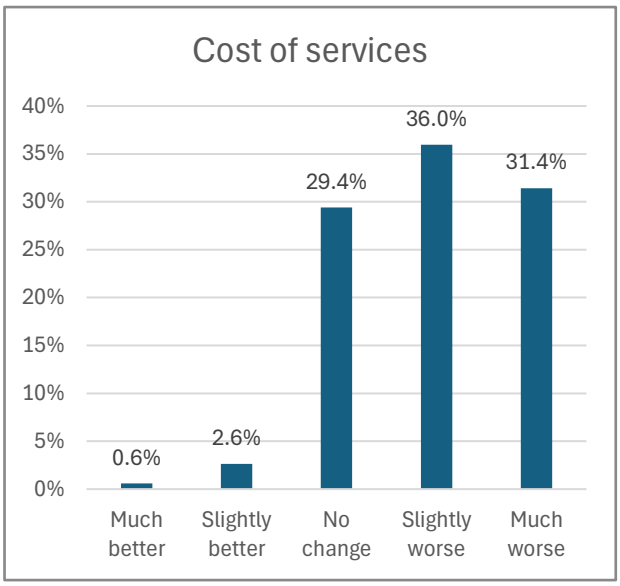
We used four metrics to evaluate residents' perceptions of how the council delivers services:

- Availability of services,
- Responsiveness to requests,
- Quality of services, and
- Cost of services.









The majority view across three of the four performance metrics was that there had been no change. However, very few people thought that things had improved across any of the four measures, and people were much more likely to report declining performance.

Variable	Proportion who thought this had improved		Proportion who thought this had got worse		Net improvement (deterioration)	
	2026/27	2025/26	2026/27	2025/26	2026/27	2025/26
Availability of services	9.4%	10.1%	37.3%	34.0%	(28.0%)	(23.9%)
Responsiveness to requests	11.9%	11.3%	39.1%	33.6%	(27.2%)	(22.3%)
Quality of services	10.6%	11.5%	45.3%	39.6%	(34.7%)	(28.1%)
Cost of services	3.2%	4.9%	67.4%	63.1%	(64.2%)	(58.2%)

As the table above shows, feedback has also declined over the last year (2026/27 budget consultation figures).

Over two thirds of survey respondents believed that the cost of services had got worse, which further illustrates the comments in the survey about perceptions of declining ‘value for money’.

In last year’s survey, disabled people were significantly more likely to provide feedback that the council’s responsiveness, and the cost and quality of services had got worse. This is not the case with this data, but this is because the feedback of non-disabled respondents has declined, rather than disabled people providing more positive responses.

The group whose feedback has declined most are younger people. Those aged under 40 are significantly more likely than older people to think that the quality of services has got worse and are also more likely to believe the council is now less

responsive to requests, services are harder to access and that the costs of services are higher.

	Availability of services			Responsiveness to requests			Cost of services			Quality of services		
	Age group			Age group			Age group			Age group		
	Under 40	40-59	60 and over	Under 40	40-59	60 and over	Under 40	40-59	60 and over	Under 40	40-59	60 and over
Better	4.9%	8.5%	9.5%	8.3%	10.2%	11.8%	3.2%	2.8%	3.0%	8.2%	9.1%	11.7%
No change	52.5%	50.8%	57.3%	45.0%	50.3%	51.8%	24.2%	30.2%	33.2%	34.4%	45.7%	45.7%
Worse	42.6%	40.7%	33.2%	46.7%	39.5%	36.4%	72.6%	67.0%	63.9%	57.4%	45.1%	42.7%

More likely than alternative option/s	Confidence level	Less likely than alternative option/s
x.x%	No significant difference	x.x%
y.y%	Low confidence significant difference	y.y%
z.z%	High confidence significant difference	z.z%

People who told us they either received or were in the process of applying for any form of financial support were significantly more likely to think that council support had improved. The following table shows the proportion of people who believed there had been a recent improvement.

	Receiving financial support	Others
Accessibility of services	16.7%	8.6%
Responsiveness to requests	25.0%	11.0%
Quality of services	22.2%	9.8%
Cost of services	13.9%	2.6%

Feedback on delivering outcomes

More detailed feedback was captured about the outcomes the council is trying to deliver for local people.

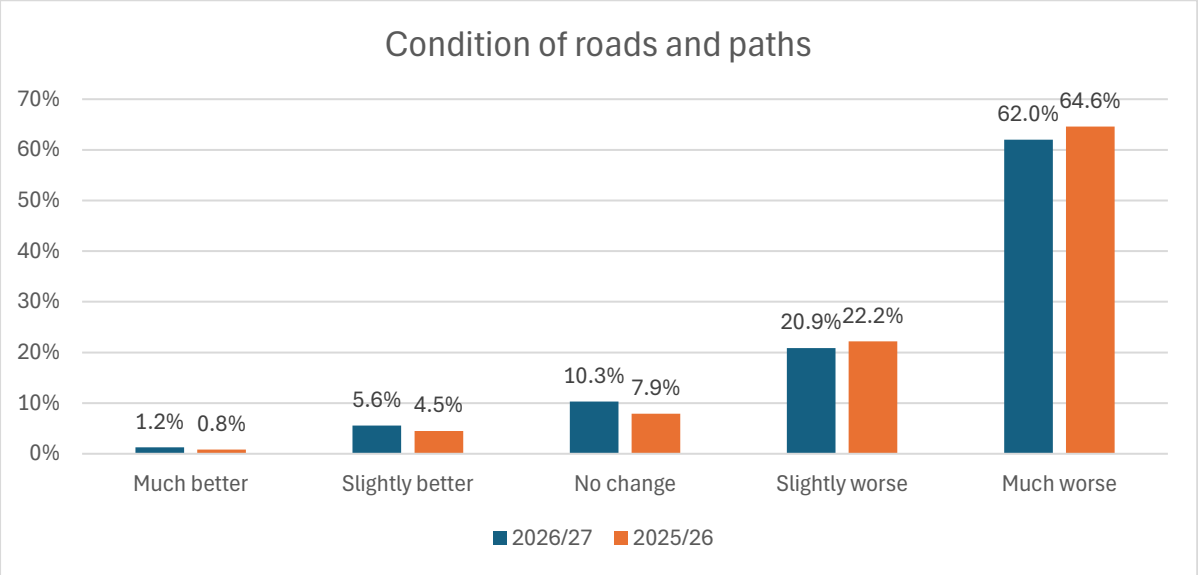
In general, feedback on delivery of outcomes follows a similar pattern to the trends highlighted above. The highest proportion of respondents thought there had been no change for most aspects of local life. However, for each measure, there are far more people who think things have got worse than the number who report improvements.

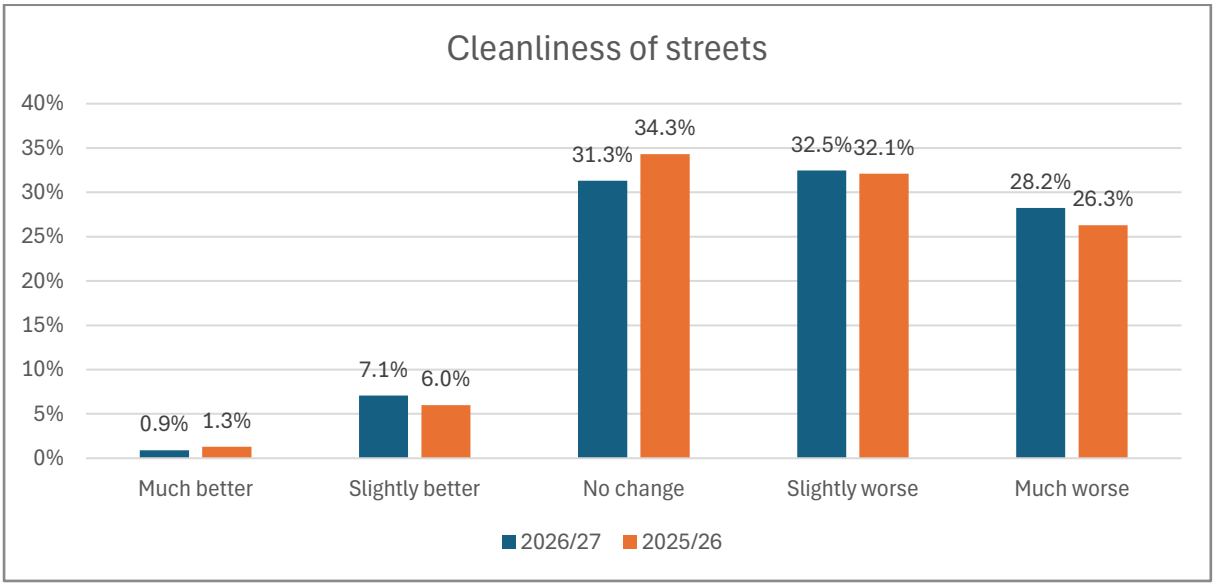
Across multiple metrics, younger people (those aged under 40) were consistently more likely to say things have got worse. A higher proportion of people living in A and B banded properties believed there had been declines.

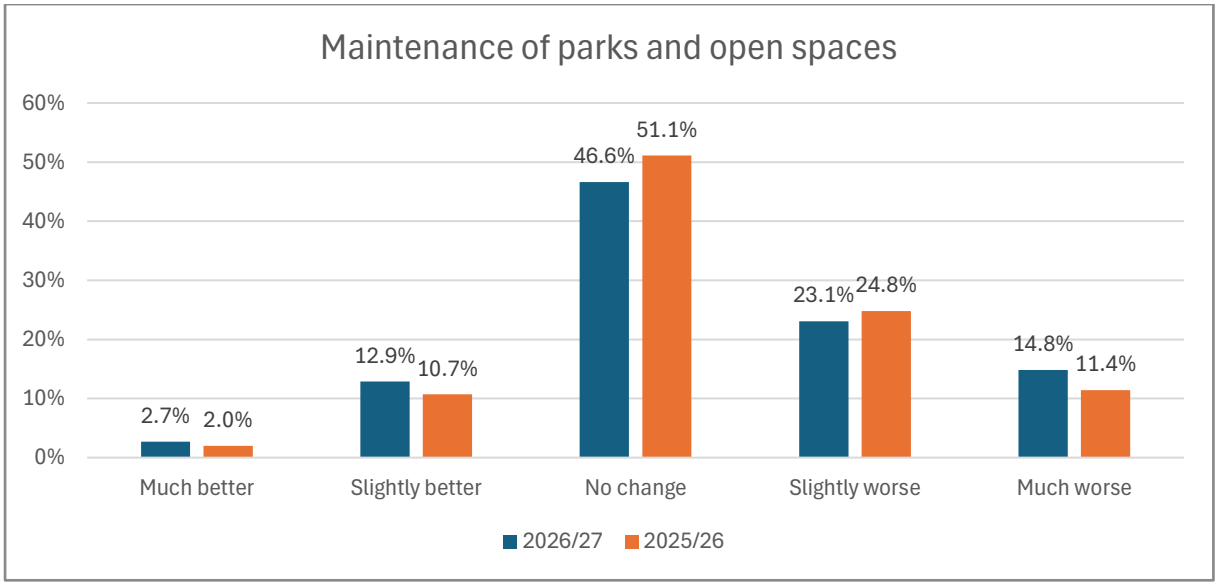
It should be noted that a reasonable number of respondents said that standards had deteriorated across every metric they scored. For some of this group this may be their perspective on each service, but others may be reporting more general dis-satisfaction with the council.

Local environment

On metrics related to maintenance of the local environment, there is a notable difference between feedback on streets, and for parks and open spaces.





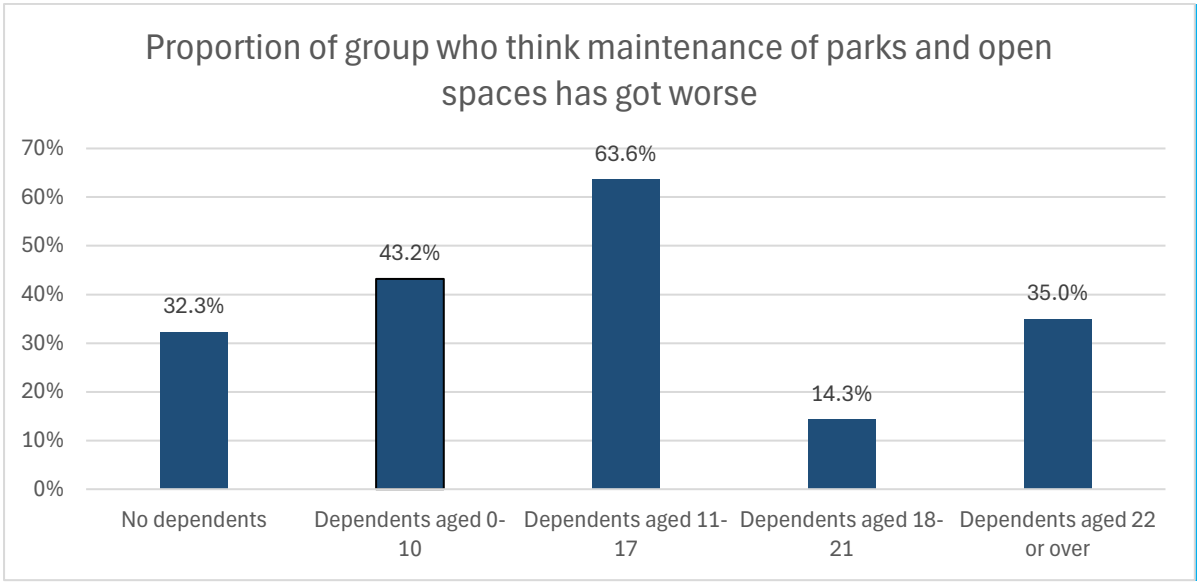


Note: For ease of analysis, across all graphs, 'Not applicable' responses have been excluded.

For some questions, for example children's social care, most people will not have experience of this service, and it therefore follows that 'not applicable' accounted for a large proportion of responses.

82.9% of respondents felt road and path conditions have deteriorated over the last five years and 60.7% felt that cleanliness of streets had got worse.

Feedback on maintenance of parks and open spaces was more positive. However, there is significant difference in opinion between different groups. Most noteworthy is the difference in feedback from people who have dependents.



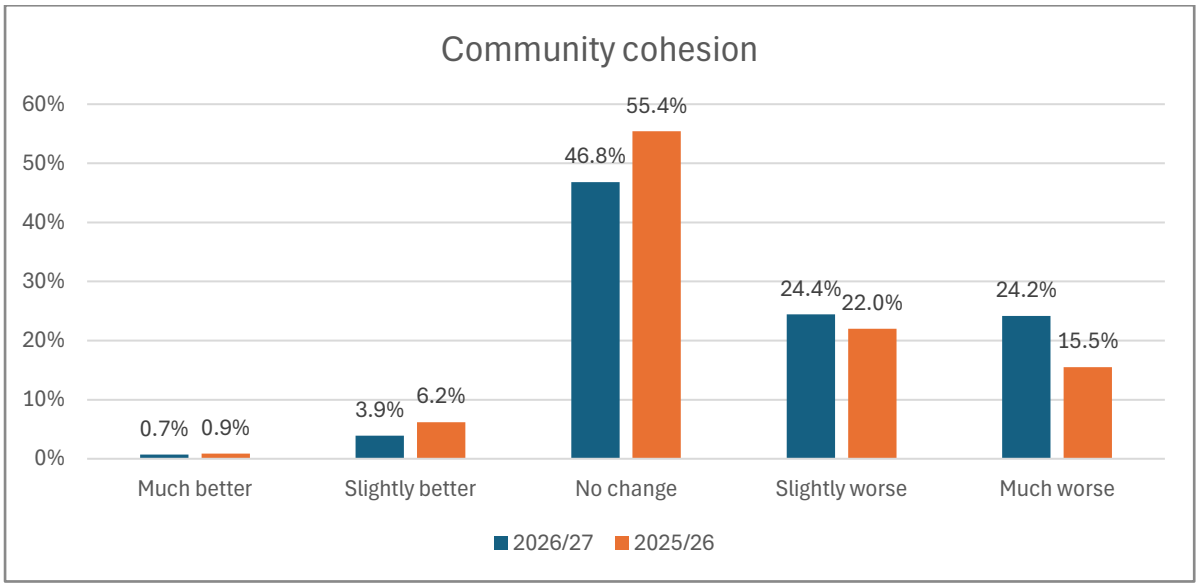
Note: Colour of bars indicates statistical significance of differences as per the table above

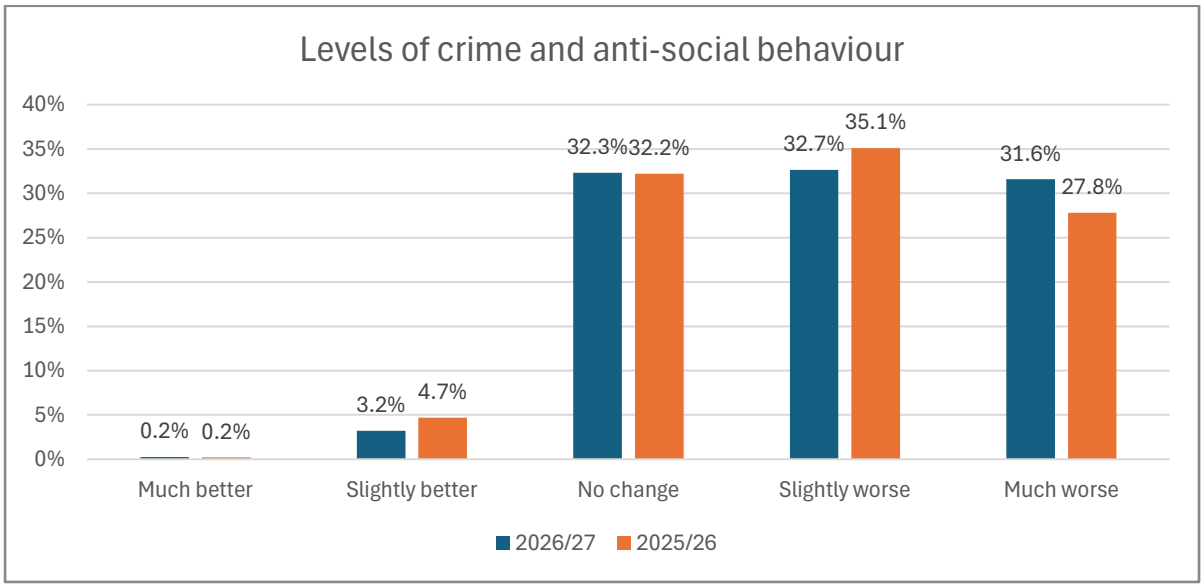
The groups who are the most likely users of parks, people with children and young people are much more likely to think standards have declined. The most negative responses come from those with dependents aged 11-17, which echoes wider feedback the council receives about the lack of facilities for teenagers.

Other groups who are significantly more likely to note a decline in parks and open spaces include BAME respondents and those aged 40-59 (who are disproportionately more likely to have dependents aged 11-17). Older people are more likely than other groups to think there has been an improvement.

All groups provide more consistent feedback about the condition of roads and paths and cleanliness of streets.

Community cohesion and crime



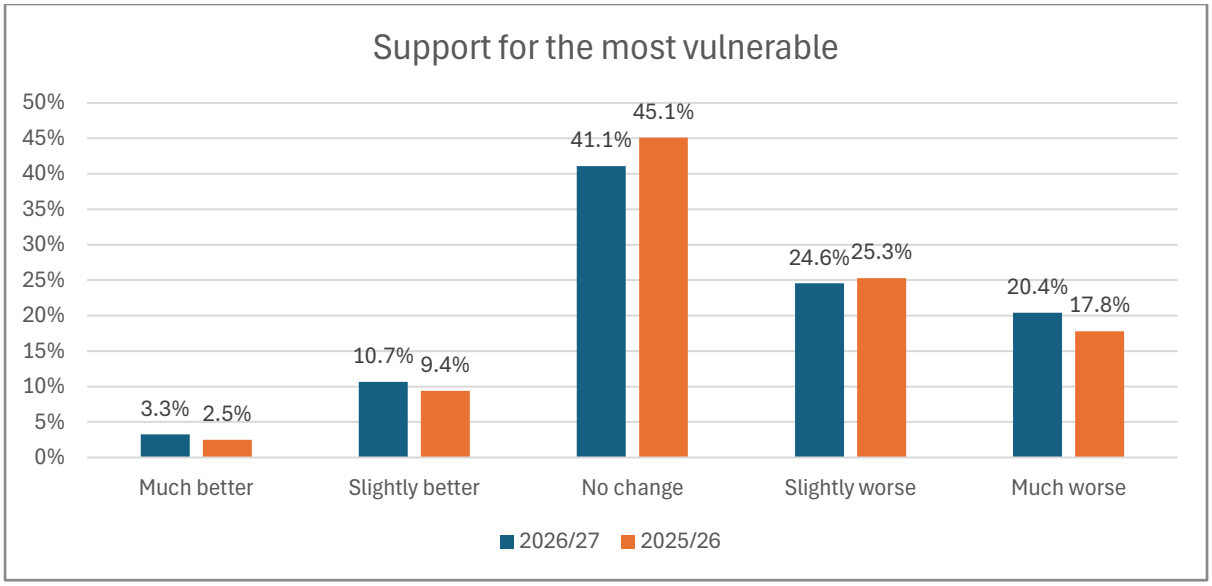


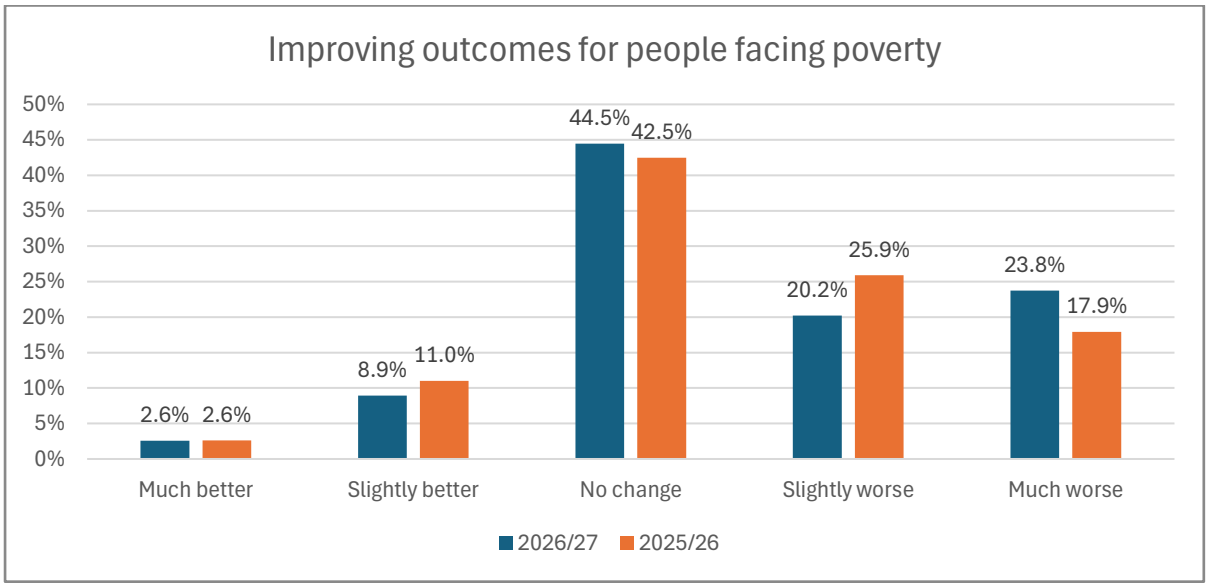
Feedback on community cohesion has declined markedly over the last year. There are no specific comments to explain why people might have provided less positive feedback, but younger people are significantly more likely to believe that community cohesion has got worse.

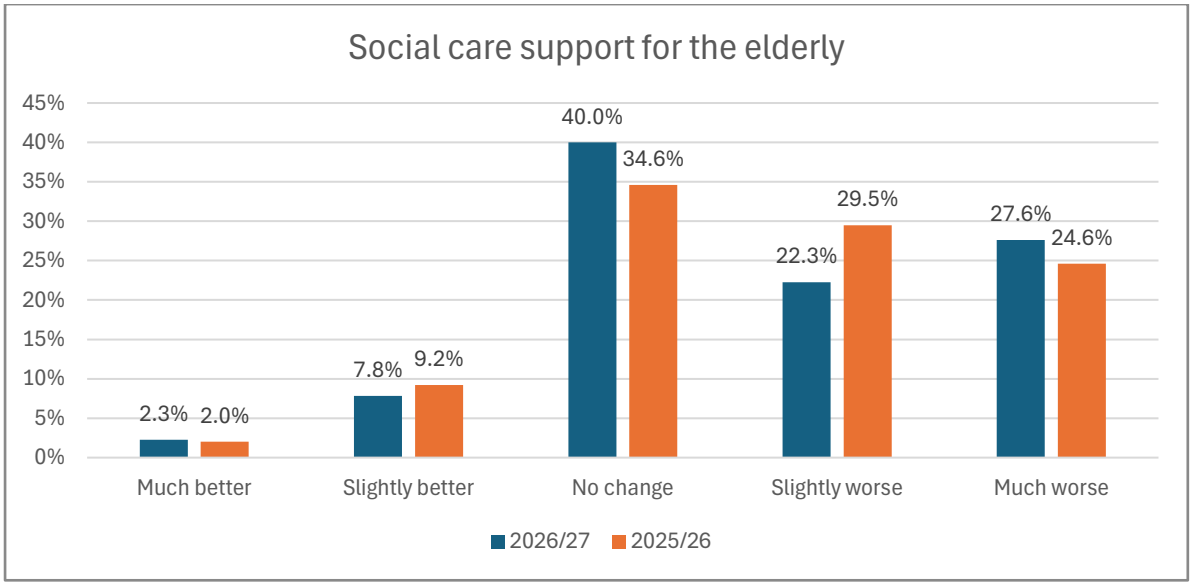
There has also been a year-on-year increase in the proportion of people who think that levels of crime and anti-social behaviour have got much worse. There are no significant differences in the opinions of different demographic groups.

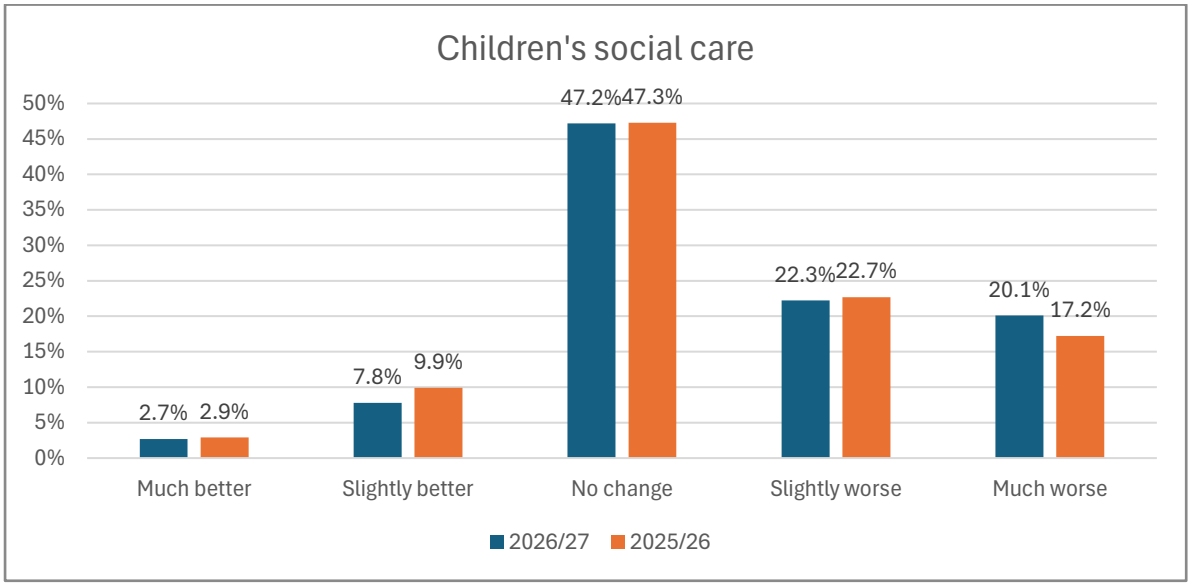
Support for the vulnerable

The feedback graphs for metrics related to support for vulnerable people all look similar with the highest proportion of respondents believing there has been little change over the last five years, but more people saying things have got worse than those who pointed to improvements.









Amongst the general population, a very small proportion receive social care support from the council. A far higher proportion of people answered these questions, including those related to feedback on social care support for the elderly and children's social care. Therefore, it is likely that some of this feedback relates to people's perceptions of the support that the council should be providing - and who should be supported - rather than their direct experience as recipients of services.

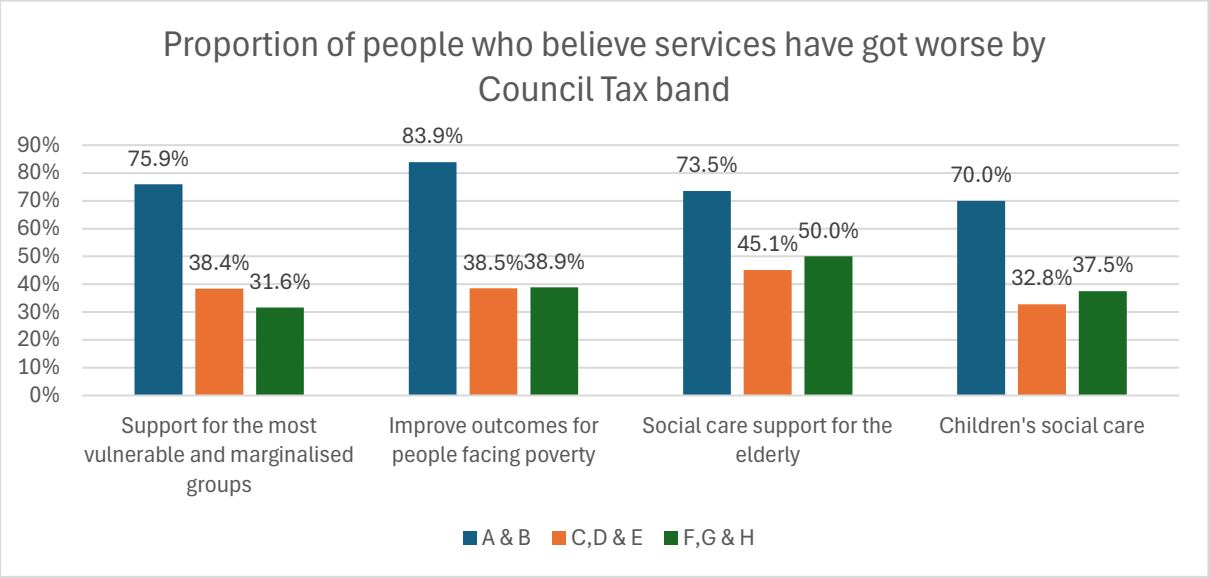
There are substantive differences in the feedback of different groups.

- Younger respondents are significantly more likely to think support has got worse (across all four of the above metrics).
- People living in properties with the lowest rated Council Tax bands (A and B) believe support has got worse (across all four metrics).
- Disabled people are less likely to believe that support has got worse.
- Respondents of BAME ethnic group are significantly more likely than white British people to think that support for the most vulnerable and marginalised people in society has got worse over the last five years.

- People in receipt of financial support are less likely to think support has got worse.

The responses of people living in higher and lower banded properties

The most significant differences are between people living in properties with different Council Tax bandings (properties banded A and B are the lowest value, F, G & H are highest value properties).



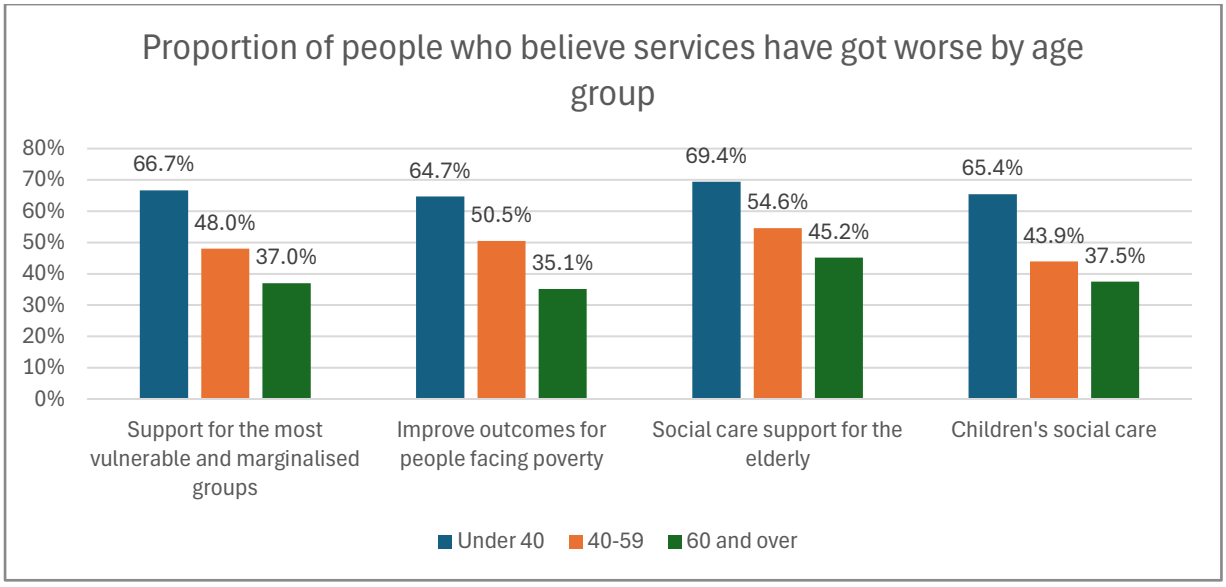
83.9% of people living in properties rated in the lowest bands for Council Tax believe that outcomes are getting worse for those facing poverty, (higher than the 51.9% of people who receive financial support who noted deterioration).

The group who don't quite meet the threshold for support believe they have been the worst impacted by the council's recent spending restrictions.

"I do not qualify for any benefits and would find 4.99% challenging. There are families who work hard but do not qualify for benefits and will struggle with this level of increase. People who are just above UC thresholds are the greatest losers."

Responses of different age groups

As stated above, people aged under 40 were statistically significantly more likely to believe support has got worse across all four metrics, and the feedback of those aged 40 to 59 was also less positive.



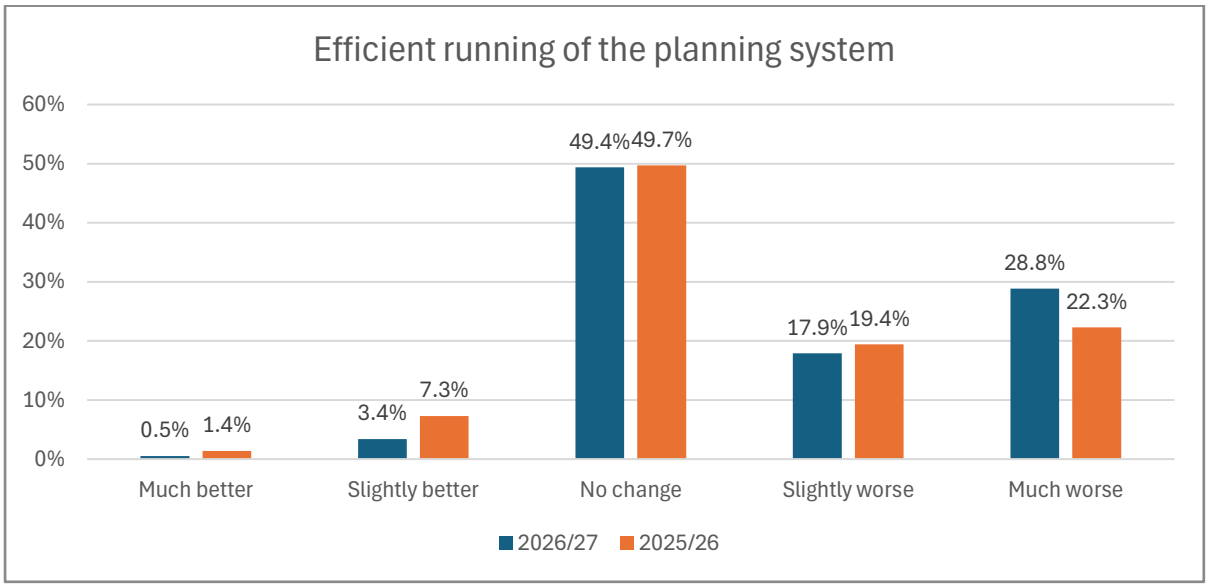
Social care support for the elderly

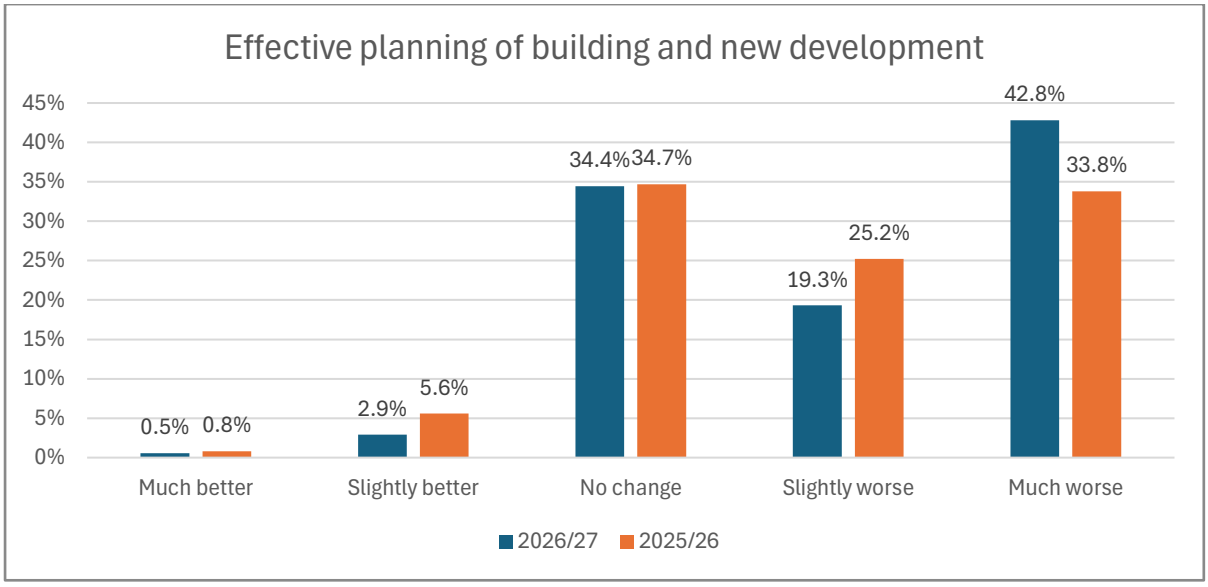
Across the survey, only a couple of people commented specifically on the state of adult social care services in South Gloucestershire (other than giving views on who should and shouldn't be eligible), so it is difficult to validate if standards have declined, and it is hard to pinpoint any aspect of the service which needs to improve.

Planning

Two planning related metrics were included.

1. The experience of people who had used the planning service, for example putting in an application to make a change to their home.
2. How policy was being implemented to manage local development.





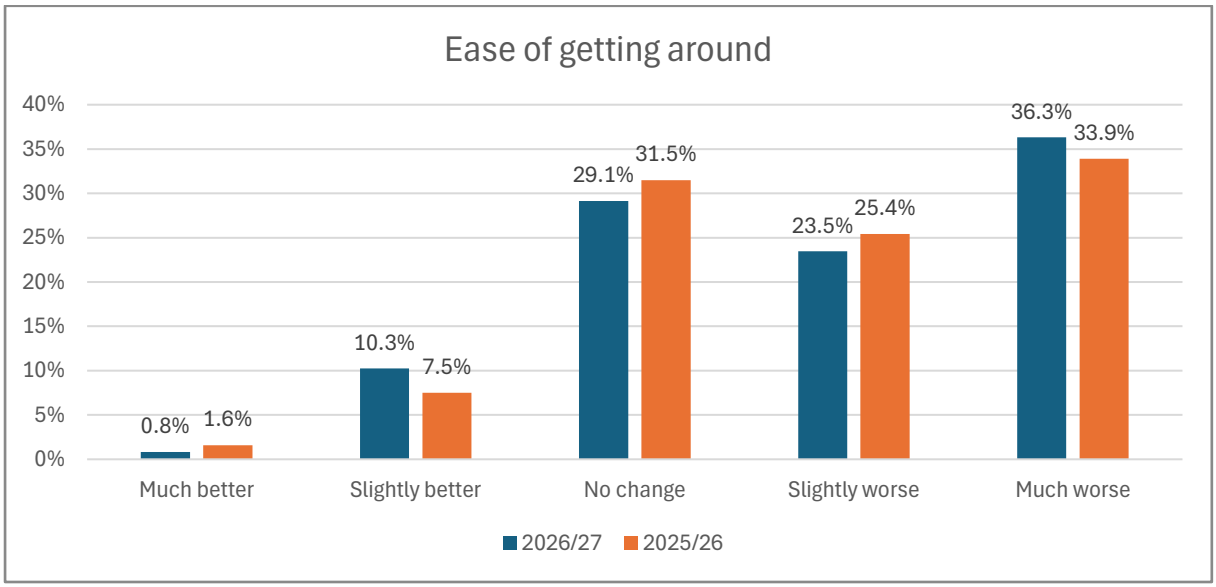
Half of people responding felt little had changed, whilst 46.7% believed the service had got worse. There was a fairly substantial jump in the proportion of people who felt the service had got much worse.

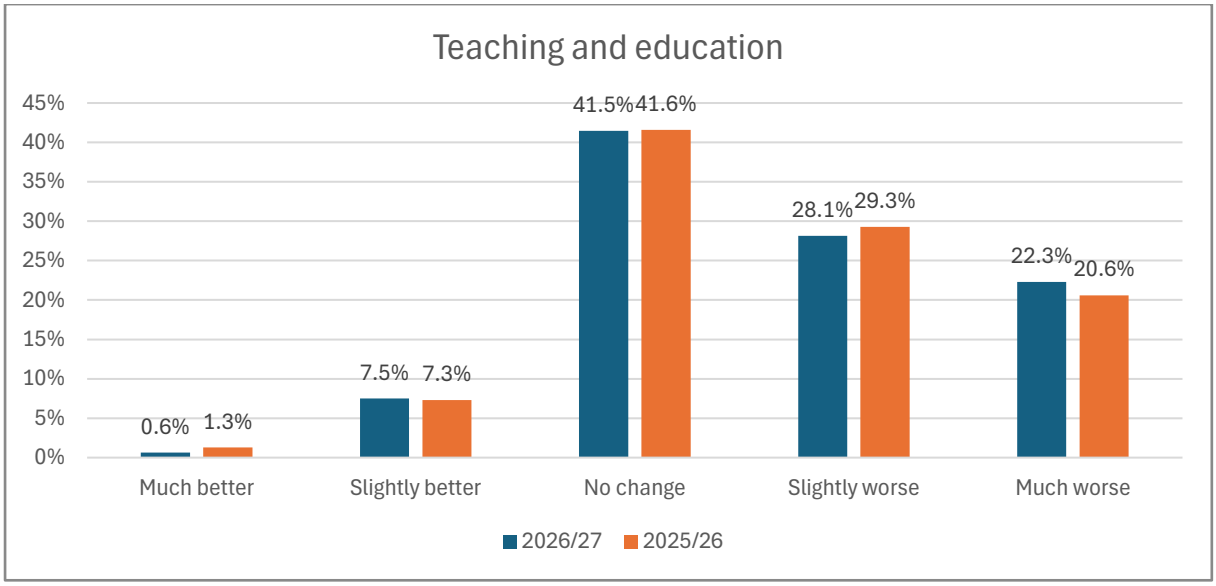
There was more negative feedback about the approach to planning development in South Gloucestershire. 42.8% believed this had got much worse, which may reflect sentiment about aspects of the South Gloucestershire Local Plan which defines where significant new development for the region will be located.

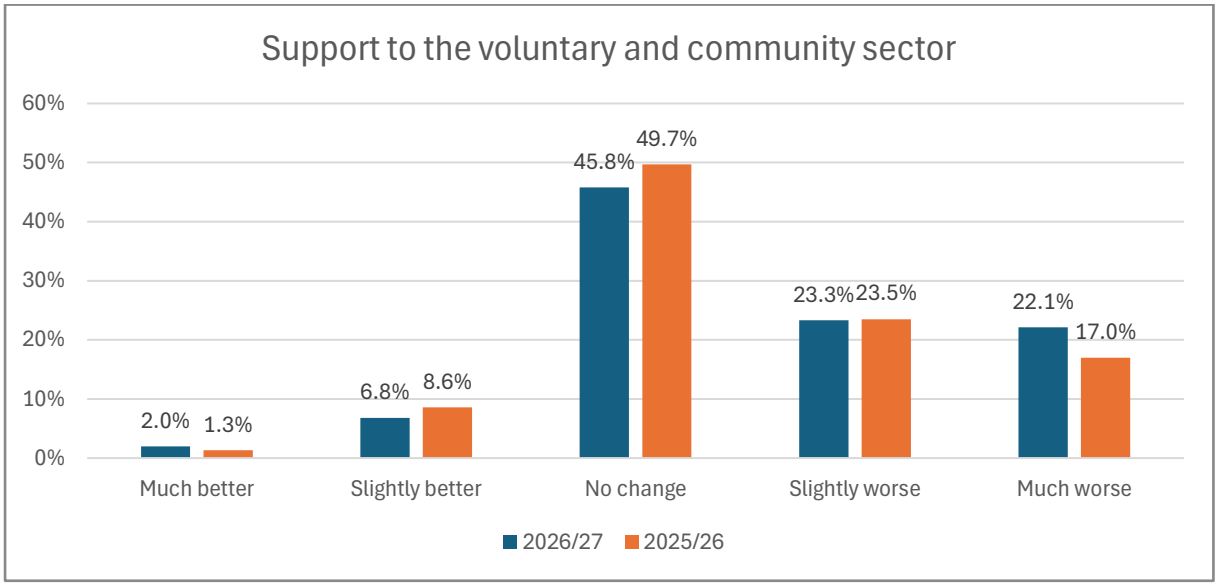
Women and people without caring responsibility are significantly more likely to believe the planning service has got worse, but it is difficult to surmise why either group might have particular concerns.

Other services and outcomes

The survey also sought feedback on the ease of getting around, standards in teaching and education and the support the council offers to the voluntary sector.



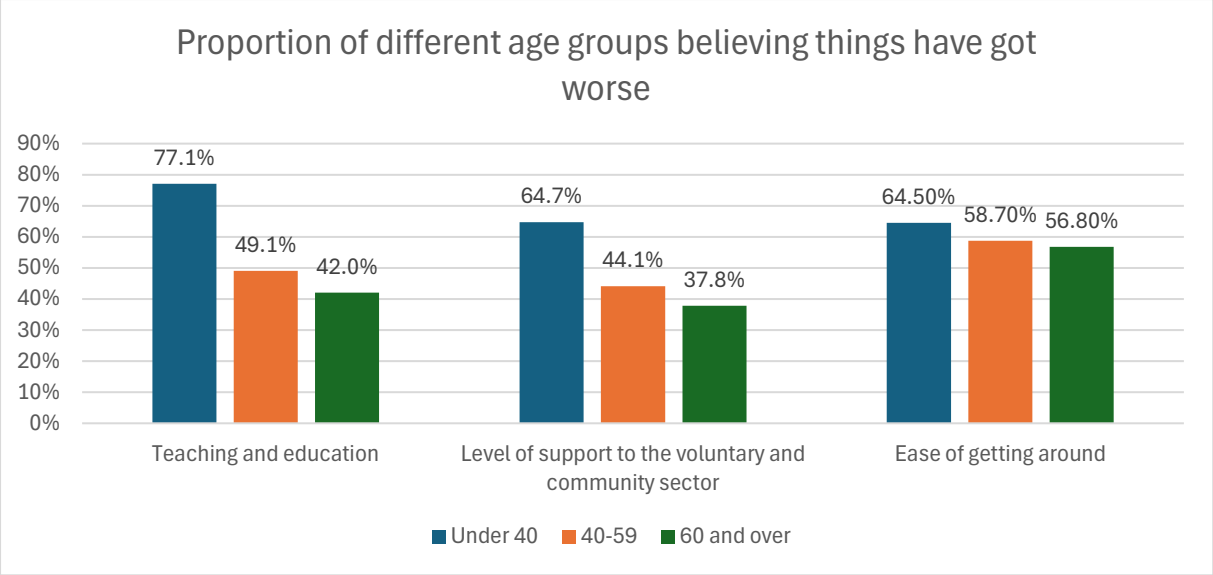




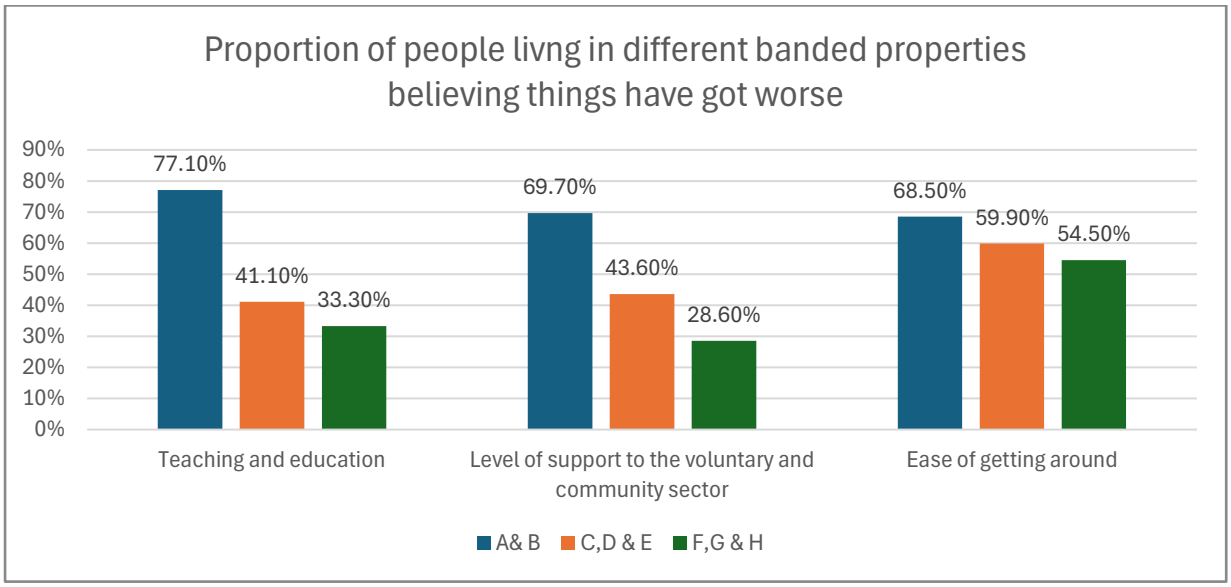
Respondents to this survey felt that over the last five years, it had got harder to get around. Commentary suggests this is related to a combination of inadequate public transport provision and poor road maintenance.

The feedback across these three measures was generally quite similar to in previous years, although there was a jump in the proportion of people who felt support to the voluntary and community sector had got much worse.

Younger people and those living in band A and B Council Tax properties were statistically significantly more likely to think teaching standards and support to the voluntary sector had got worse. As highlighted previously, these groups provided worse feedback across most measures.



Note: Differences in feedback for 'Ease of getting around' are not statistically significant



Note: Differences in feedback for 'Ease of getting around' are not statistically significant

Other significant differences included:

- Women were significantly more likely than men to think teaching standards have declined (56.6% for women, compared with 45.0% of men).
- People who do not have a disability were more likely to think it had got harder to get around than those who disabled (44.0% disabled compared with 61.3% for people without a disability).
- Those who don't have caring responsibilities were significantly more likely to believe that it had got harder to get around (45.8% for carers compared to 67.4% for those who don't have these responsibilities).
- People who receive financial support were significantly more likely than those who don't to think that the voluntary sector was now better supported (31.0%

for financial support recipients compared with 7.4% for those who don't receive benefits).

Other comments and feedback

The consultation around the budget is the biggest engagement activity South Gloucestershire Council conducts each year. This exercise was deliberately designed to raise awareness of the challenges facing the council and seek out views about the best way forward given the likely ongoing pressures. Giving people more freedom to discuss their concerns and priorities resulted in a wide range of issues being raised.

Ongoing themes and issues

The council has made some difficult decisions over the last couple of years. Decisions like introducing car parking, reducing the frequency of black bin collections and setting out where new housing development should be placed via the new South Gloucestershire Local Plan have been contentious and there are several comments from people disgruntled about changes.

Tackling inequalities as a core budget principle

In their response to the consultation, the Equalities Voice group asked that tackling inequality remain a core principle within budget decision-making and the way in which budgets are spent. The group believes that fostering a culture that embeds equality as a fundamental and ever-present consideration doesn't necessarily increase costs, and in fact could help reduce longer term demand on statutory services.

Listening to residents

Several people expressed concern that comments provided through the consultation would not be listened to or acted upon.

Through the consultation, the council has set out which decisions can and can't be influenced. This report will be shared with decision-makers to help guide them through extremely difficult choices. It will be published in full, giving respondents the chance to see what others have said.

Appendices

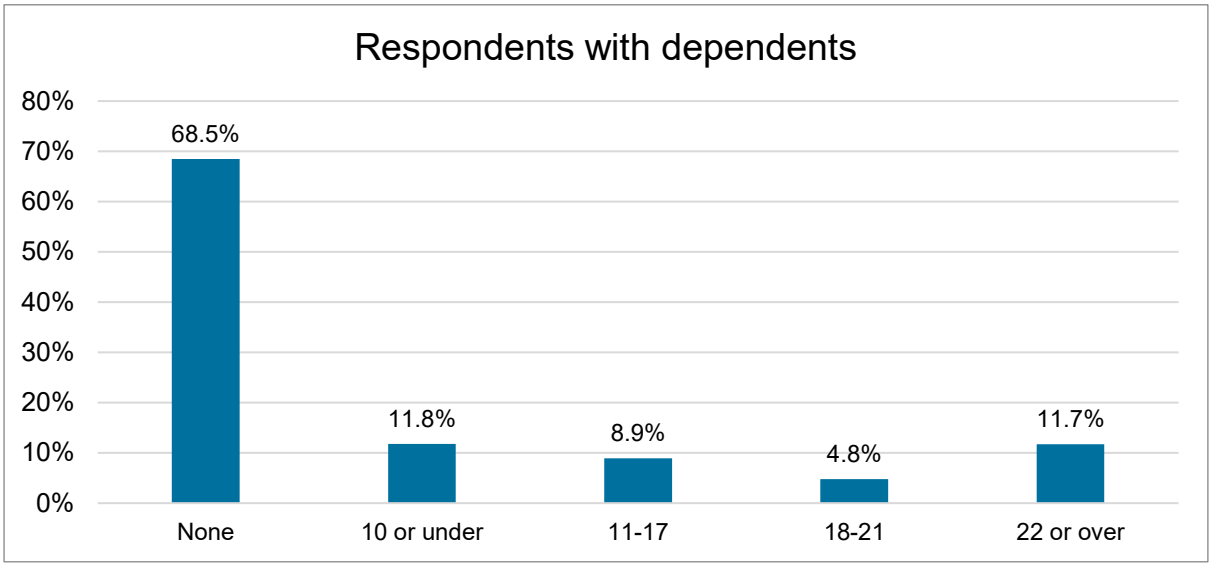
Appendix 1: Consultation respondents

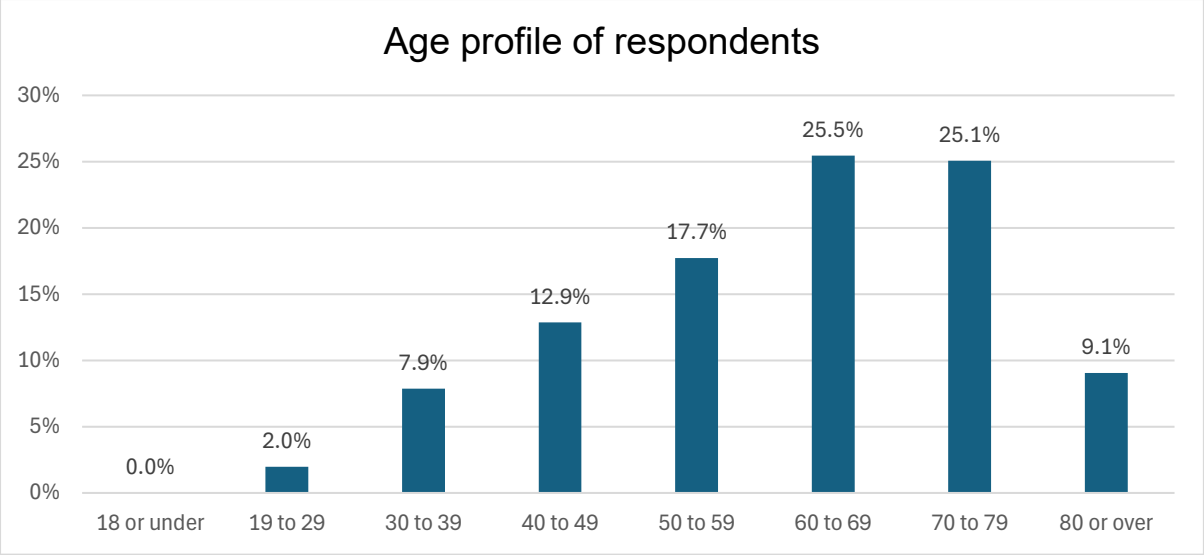
The below graphs show the demographic breakdown of the people who responded to the consultation. The survey sample is not representative of the population of South Gloucestershire:

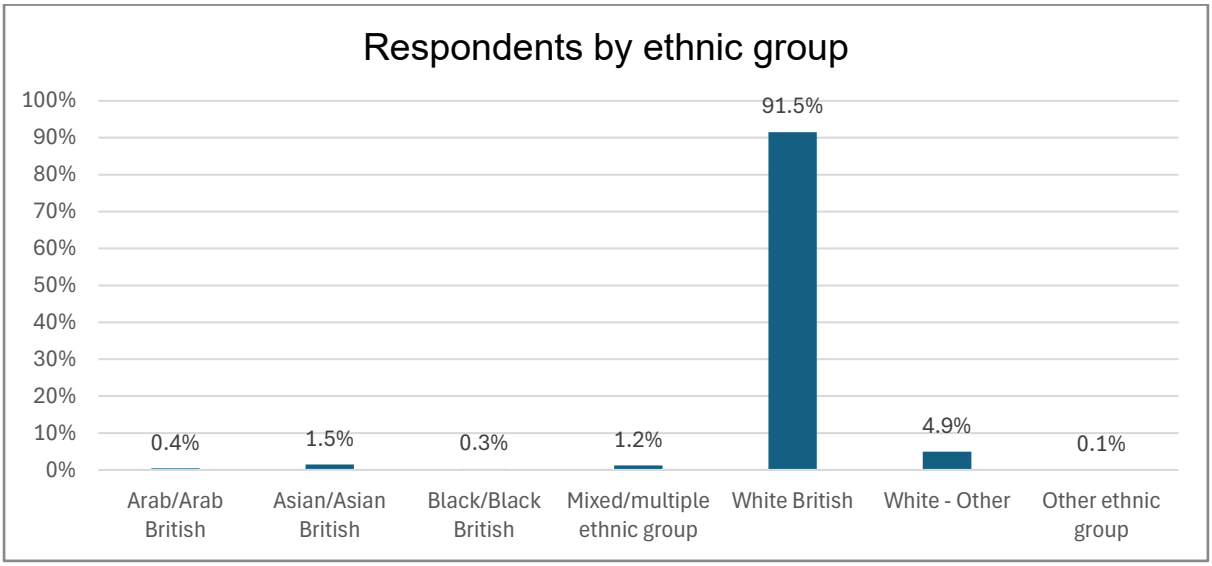
- Much higher proportion of older people,
- Far more men than women,
- More responses from white ethnic groups.

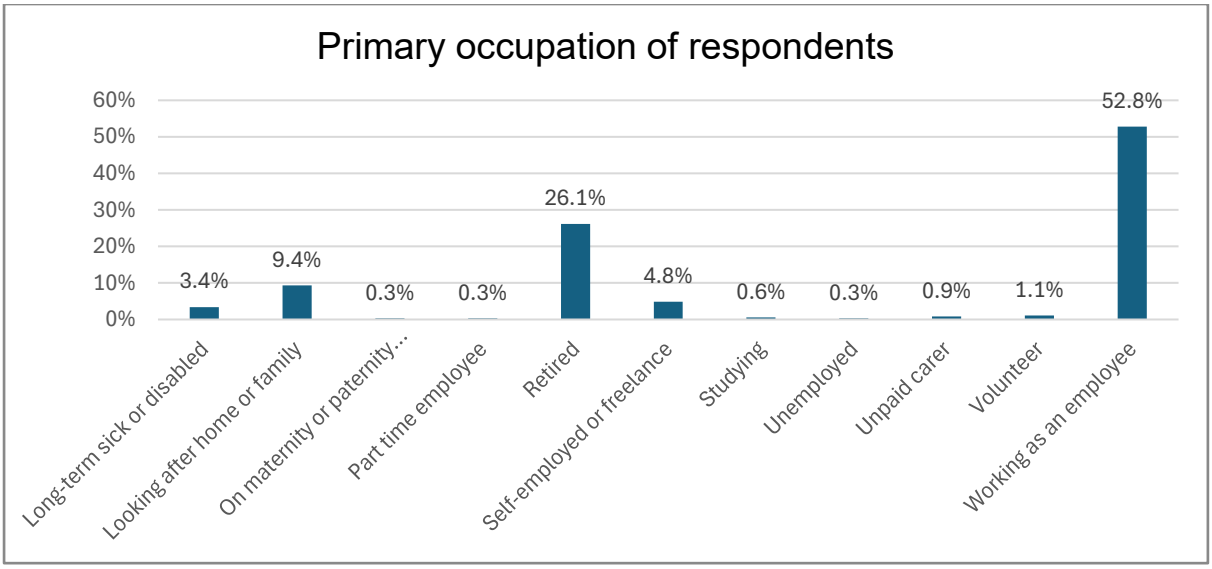
The low number of responses from people from minority ethnic groups, LGBTQ+ communities and people with experience in the armed forces makes it very difficult to prove assumptions, differences and trends related to demographic characteristics with statistical confidence.

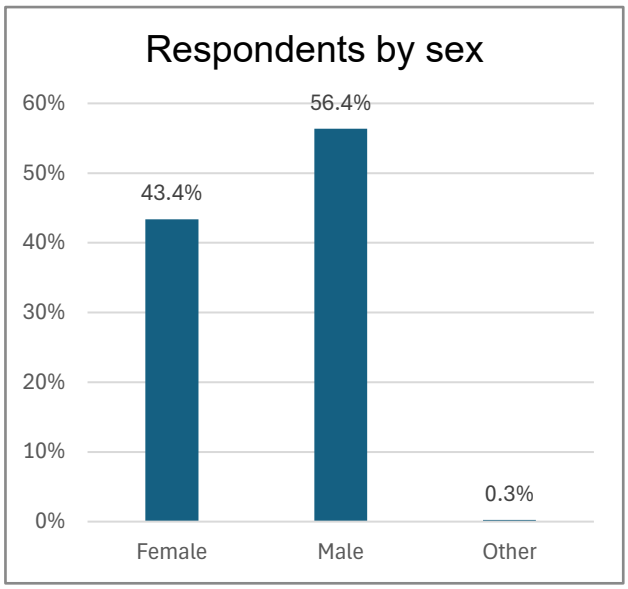
For consistency, percentages have been calculated on the proportion of people who provided information. Respondents who completed the survey via the Viewpoint panel were not asked to provide some personal information and therefore data is incomplete for: sexual orientation, employment status, council tax band, dependents, caring responsibilities and armed forces.

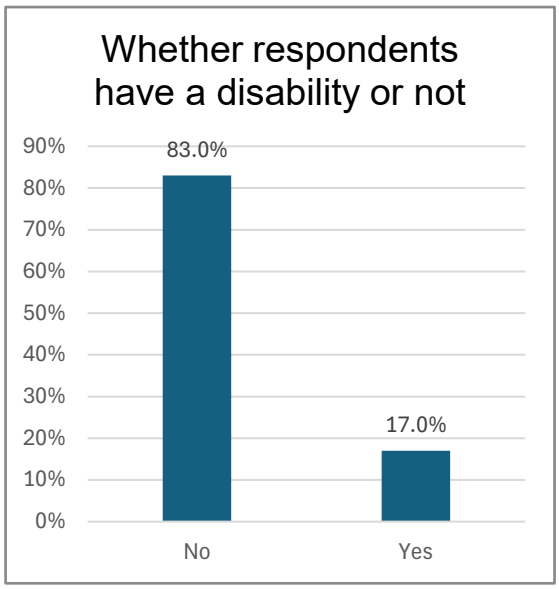


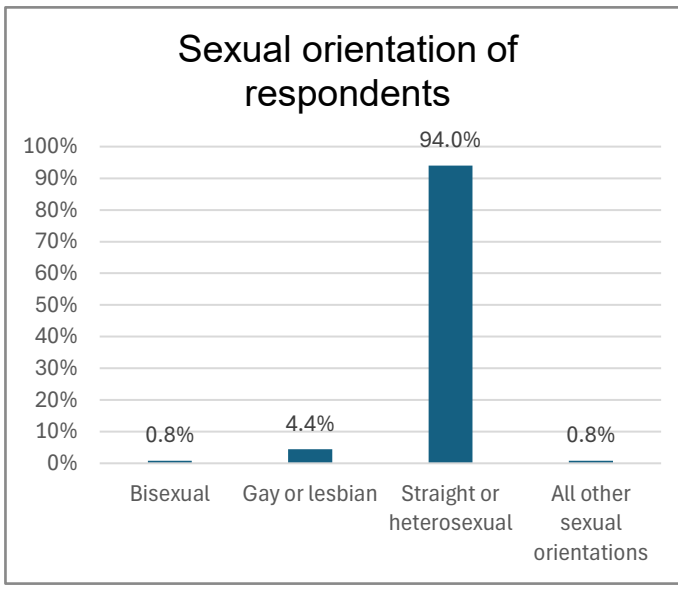

Age profile of respondents
30%
25%
20%
15%
10%
5%
0%
0.0%
2.0%
7.9%
12.9%
17.7%
25.5%
25.1%
9.1%
18 or under
19 to 29
30 to 39
40 to 49
50 to 59
60 to 69
70 to 79
80 or over

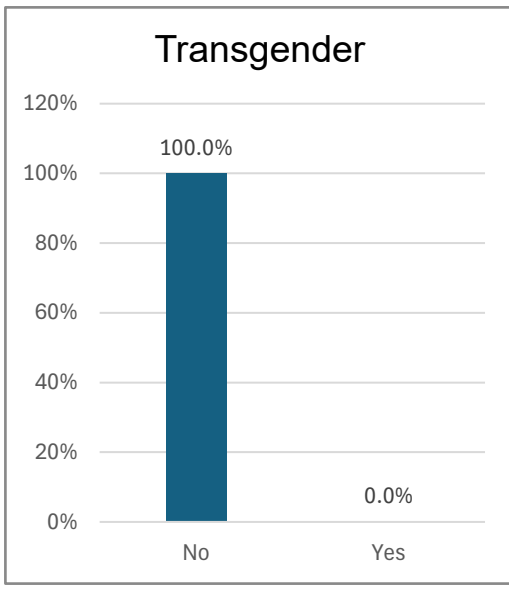

Respondents by ethnic group
100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
0.4%
1.5%
0.3%
1.2%
91.5%
4.9%
0.1%
Arab/Arab British
Asian/Asian British
Black/Black British
Mixed/multiple ethnic group
White British
White - Other
Other ethnic group

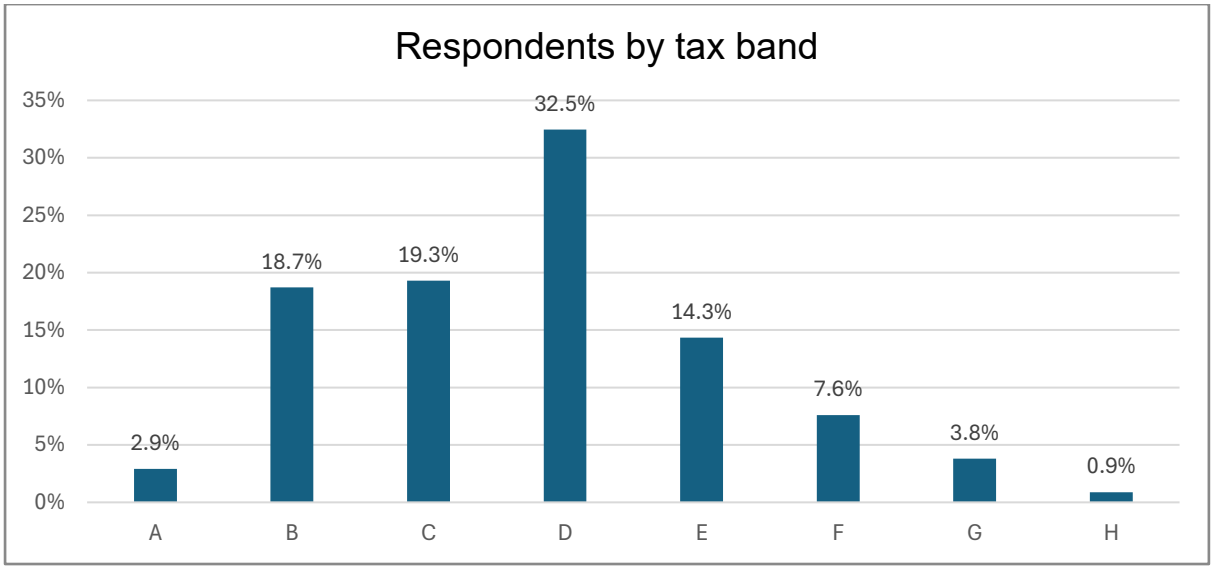

Primary occupation of respondents
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
3.4%
9.4%
0.3%
0.3%
26.1%
4.8%
0.6%
0.3%
0.9%
1.1%
52.8%
Long-term sick or disabled
Looking after home or family
On maternity or paternity...
Part time employee
Retired
Self-employed or freelance
Studying
Unemployed
Unpaid carer
Volunteer
Working as an employee

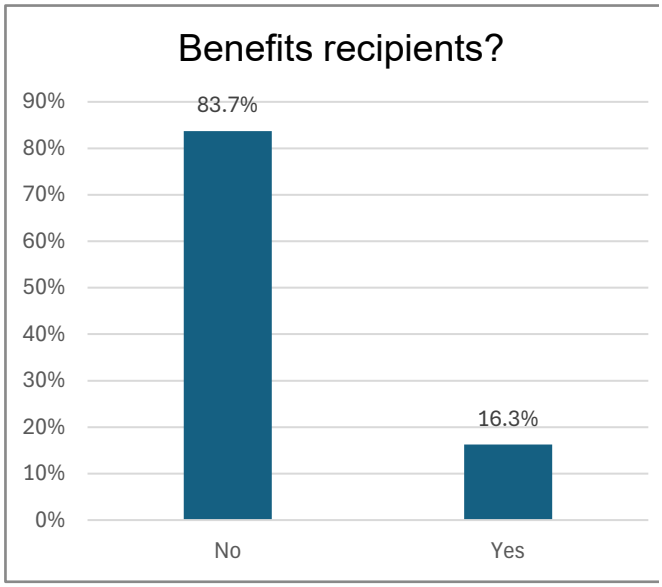

Respondents by sex
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
43.4%
56.4%
0.3%
Female
Male
Other

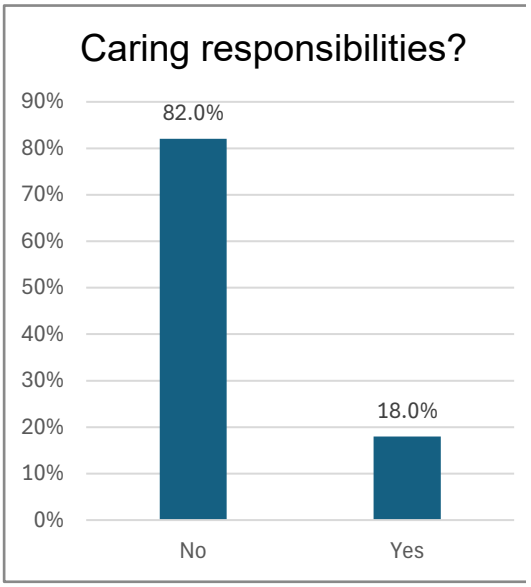

Whether respondents have a disability or not
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
83.0%
17.0%
No
Yes

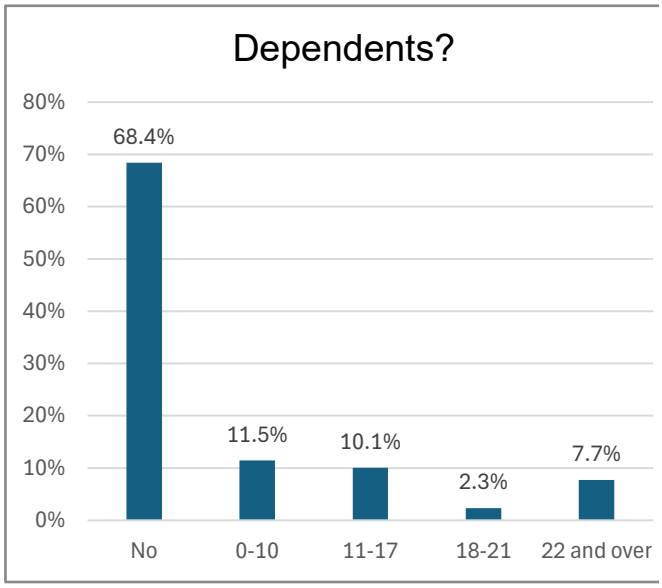

Sexual orientation of respondents
100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
0.8%
4.4%
94.0%
0.8%
Bisexual
Gay or lesbian
Straight or heterosexual
All other sexual orientations

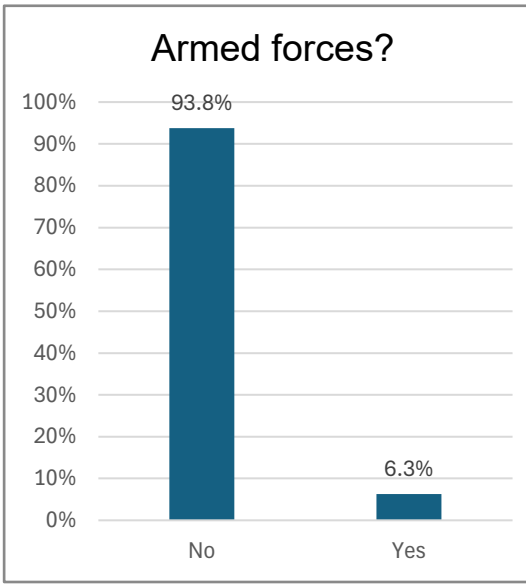

Transgender
120%
100%
80%
60%
40%
20%
0%
100.0%
0.0%
No
Yes


Respondents by tax band
35%
30%
25%
20%
15%
10%
5%
0%
2.9%
18.7%
19.3%
32.5%
14.3%
7.6%
3.8%
0.9%
A
B
C
D
E
F
G
H


Benefits recipients?
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
83.7%
16.3%
No
Yes


Caring responsibilities?
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
82.0%
18.0%
No
Yes


Dependents?
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
68.4%
11.5%
10.1%
2.3%
7.7%
No
0-10
11-17
18-21
22 and over


Armed forces?
100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
93.8%
6.3%
No
Yes

Appendix 2: Summary of comments

Individual comments have been grouped to allow for analysis of common themes. The below tables show approximately how many responses were received making each comment (it is not possible to provide exact numbers of people making each individual comment because people offered similar feedback across multiple questions). Weighting of comments has been represented in the analysis within the main report.

Finding the most efficient way to achieve the best outcomes

Overall approach

Theme	Number of comments
General support	51-75
Only deliver services you have to provide	6-10
Benchmarking/How does SGC compare?	6-10
Understand long term challenges	1-5
Won't help	1-5

Value for money

Theme	Number of comments
Support focus on efficiency	6-10
Concern about people who abuse system	6-10
Not efficient/more opportunities to save money	6-10
Receiving less for my Council Tax	6-10
Focus on most expensive services	1-5
Council underperforming	1-5
Increase scrutiny/accountability	1-5

Home to school transport for young people with SEND

Theme	Number of comments
Need more spending in local specialist school provision	21-30
Families should pay/stricter assessment of need	11-20
SEND not in mainstream schools	6-10
Parents must send children to local school	6-10
Support SEND in mainstream schools	6-10
Challenges/complexity delivering adequate SEND provision in mainstream setting	1-5
Support family choice of school	1-5
Delays in needs assessment/EHCP	1-5
Efficiencies in transport routes	1-5
Long term (lifetime) approach to all SEND support	1-5
Reduce legal costs around EHCP provision	1-5
Lifetime grant to parents for SEND transport	1-5
Doesn't understand approach	1-5

Where does funding come from to increase local provision	1-5

Other comments about spending on SEND

Theme	Number of comments
Stricter assessment of need	6-10
Why has SEN spending increased/reduce spending	1-5
Indiivdual case SEN support	1-5
Link between SEND and home circumstances	1-5
Opposed to/Not getting value for money from private SEND schools	1-5
Money not fairly allocated	1-5
Need more 1-1 support	1-5
Being paid for by central government	1-5
Poor treatment of SEN Tas	1-5
Increase long term support - transition to adulthood	1-5

Social care

Theme	Number of comments
In house to improve service/avoid profiteering	11-20
Ensure paying fair cost of care	1-5
In favour of supported housing model	1-5
Services disjointed	1-5
Family to provide care	1-5
Carers don't have enough time with people - travel	1-5
Increase support	1-5
Increase low level prevention to reduce long term need	1-5
Why are costs increasing?	1-5
High turnover of staff reducing quality of service	1-5
Use non-CQC provider	1-5
New system to judge eligibility	1-5
Partnership model with private sector	1-5
Concern about increasing costs to suppliers	1-5
Opposed to cuts to SG residential care homes	1-5

Grimsbury Farm

Theme	Number of comments
Support approach	21-30
Close it/sell it	11-20
Like it, keep it	1-5
Introduce charges	1-5
Grimsbury Farm special needs	1-5

Flooding

Theme	Number of comments

Increase spend	21-30
Reduce flooding risk with new development/private driveways	11-20
Idea to reduce flooding	6-10
Support focus on high risk areas	6-10
Preventative schedule to reduce higher costs	6-10
Push cost onto those living in flood prone areas	1-5
Team is already under-resourced	1-5

Procurement

Theme	Number of comments
In-source services/opposed to outsourcing	11-20
Deliver services with other councils/partners	11-20
Contract mgt/price charged by suppliers	11-20
Cheapest not always best	1-5
Difficulty managing performance of contractors	1-5
Outsource suppport functions	1-5
Involve service users in commissioning process	1-5
Support outsourcing model	1-5
Outsource highway maintenance on long term contract	1-5
Council shouldn't be commissioning on individuals' behalf	1-5
Can't just push responsibility onto charity	1-5
Don't have internal expertise	1-5
Use govt framework contracts	1-5
Opposed to consortium buying	1-5
Want consortium buying	1-5
Companies charge higher to councils/public sector	1-5

Ideas

Theme	Number of comments
Increase use of volunteers/community support	6-10
Staff efficiency/cost savings ideas	1-5
Increase technology/digital investment	1-5
Reduce senior mgt roles	1-5
Look to private sector for ideas	1-5
People receiving care to report on quality	1-5
Reduce bad debt by individuals commissioning	1-5
Stop accepting cheques	1-5
Reduce spend on communications	1-5
Use open-source software	1-5
Increase focus on prevention	1-5
Reduce consultancy spend	1-5
Abolish T&PC	1-5
Reduce grass cutting	1-5
Raise money from pension fund	1-5

Investing in prevention to improve outcomes and reduce need for the most expensive support

Overall approach

Theme	Number of comments
Support	51-75
Sceptical	11-20
Benefit from a national approach	1-5
Limit application	1-5
Trial first	1-5
Needs more public education	1-5

Extra Care housing

Theme	Number of comments
Support approach	11-20
Concern about adequate staffing	1-5
Need more of it for different needs	1-5

Ageing independently

Theme	Number of comments
Support approach	6-10
New housing to be disability friendly	1-5
Improve management of care homes	1-5
Bigger role for families	1-5
No regular check-ins	1-5
Need more OT staff	1-5
Landlords who won't make adaptations	1-5
Relies on joined up approach with health	1-5
Focus on healthy lifestyles	1-5
Work with charity partners	1-5
Vetting of providers of services to support people live independently	1-5

Dementia support

Theme	Number of comments
Not enough support to keep individuals out of residential care	11-20
Better signposting to support	1-5
Quality of ASC not good	1-5
Not enough staff in residential settings	1-5
Support for day care centres	1-5
Better information on discharge from hospital	1-5
Need more day care services	1-5
Challenging needs which can't always be delivered within EC housing	1-5

Best start in life

Theme	Number of comments
Support approach	6-10
Parents need to take more responsibility	6-10
Better parental training	1-5

Homelessness

Theme	Number of comments
Support approach	6-10
Approach doesn't go far enough	1-5
Focus on local people first	1-5

Support for secondary school students

Theme	Number of comments
Support approach	6-10
Focus on neurodiversity/mental health	1-5
Also need more support at primary school	1-5
Focus on most vulnerable families	1-5

Kids in care

Theme	Number of comments
More support/resources needed	11-20
More support for adoptive families	1-5
Sometimes care is the right option	1-5
Also consider care leavers	1-5

Spending on SEND

Theme	Number of comments
Concern about SEN support/early assessment	6-10
Too many people accessing support	1-5
Not enough resources	1-5
Why has SEN spending increased	1-5

Ideas

Theme	Number of comments
Partner with organisations like Age UK	6-10
Encouraging healthier lifestyles as part of prevention	6-10
Build more council houses as part of solution	1-5
Community transport could add value	1-5

Similar model to health visitors for older people	1-5
Need regularl reviews to ensure care still appropriate	1-5
Direct payments need to be more flexible	1-5
Increase mentor capacity	1-5
Co-locate social workers,OTs and front door	1-5

Raising money fairly

Impact of Council Tax increase

Theme	Number of comments
Have less money/Reduce my spending	176-200
Not much impact	101-125
Rise above inflation/wage/pension increases	76-100
I don't benefit/Poor value for money	76-100
Struggle financially	76-100
Support/understand need	76-100
Needed to maintain services	41-50
Concern about 'undeserving' people/those abusing system	21-30
Impact for pensioners	21-30
Reduced spnding in local businesses	11-20
Impact for working people	11-20
Agree that those who can afford to contribute more	11-20
Impact for single person households	6-10
Unfair that wealthier/people with large properties pay more	6-10
Increase likelihood of people selling house/moving away	6-10
Concern about longer term impacts with ongoing increases	6-10
Increase costs to council supporting more struggling people	6-10
Worsen inequalities	1-5
Impact mental health	1-5
Impact for single parents	1-5
Impact for younger people	1-5
Look at other options	1-5
Reduced informal care (need to work)	1-5

Other comments related to Council Tax

Theme	Number of comments
Time to revalue houses/reform CT	21-30
Increase single person household discount	6-10
Older people in large houses paying more	1-5
Ensure suppot for those who are struggling	1-5
Want higher increases for higher tax bands/creation of new higher bands	1-5
Students/HMOs to pay/pay more	1-5
Concern about costs of parish precept	1-5
Don't understand why South Glos CT is higher	1-5
Concern amongst non-adopted estates	1-5
New approach based on affordability	1-5

Single person discount phased out	1-5
Spread costs over 12 months not 10 payments	1-5
Traveller community to contribute	1-5

Comments about council financial management

Theme	Number of comments
Improve efficiency/reduce waste	21-30
Cut staff numbers	6-10
Need to restructure taxes/economics	6-10
Lobby central government	1-5
Reduce pensions	1-5
Reduce senior salaries	1-5
Collect debt	1-5
New homes should mean increases in revenue	1-5
Stop outsourcing	1-5
Increase volunteering/community involvement	1-5
Scrap T&PC	1-5
Reduce wages	1-5
Sell assets	1-5
Sell council offices	1-5
Fundraising to generate income	1-5
Hire out libraries as working space	1-5
Shared services	1-5

Increase in green waste collection subscriptions

Theme	Number of comments
Have cancelled/will cancel subscription	21-30
Concern about potential fly-tipping	21-30
Above inflationary price increases/unhappy with price rise	11-20
Too expensive	11-20
Discourages recycling	11-20
Unfair/shouldn't have to pay for this	6-10
Will use black bin	6-10
Discourages people from keeping their property tidy/keeping a lawn	6-10
6 monthly subscription/less frequent collections	6-10
Support	6-10
Shouldn't have a subsidy	1-5
Frustrated by lost income during IT switchover	1-5
Hits pensioners who can't get to tip	1-5
Concern about people not paying but receiving service	1-5
More expensive than other councils	1-5
Prefer a pay as you use model	1-5
Important service	1-5
Happy if it is in line with charges in other areas	1-5
Unhappy with service	1-5

Cheaper than other councils	1-5
How much have the increases raised?	1-5

Special expenses

Theme	Number of comments
Won't deliver cost saving	1-5
Inefficient for smaller T&PC to deliver services	1-51

Note: Responses from Town and Parish Councils related to Special expenses appear in appendix 3.

Stopping, cutting back and prioritising services and support

Overall

Theme	Number of comments
Approach seems sensible	51-75
No impact for me	51-75
Need to focus on core services/deliver value for money	31-40
Reluctant acceptance of lack of alternative options	11-20
Never used these services	6-10
Put pressure on/add costs to other services/works against Prevention strategy	6-10
Will negatively impact older people/ the most vulnerable	6-10
Not commercial enough	6-10
Need to push back against austerity measures	1-5
Agree with not competing on price with private companies	1-5
Don't like outsourcing	1-5
Support focus on most vulnerable	1-5
Outsource or stop	1-5
Won't save much money	1-5
These are essential services/find other things to cut	1-5
Increase prices so they cover costs	1-5
Negative impact not worth minimal saving	1-5
Is there sufficient private sector provision	1-5
Can't trust commercial alternatives / not as good value for money	1-5
All services should be means tested	1-5
Concern about costs of outsourcing	1-5
Share cuts across the organisation	1-5
Impacts on young and elderly	1-5

HandyVan

Theme	Number of comments
Trusted provider	41-50
Supports vulnerable people/Works against council's preventative priorities	31-40
Happy customer - cheaper/provide a good service	21-30
Agree to cuts	11-20

You should be charging more	11-20
Should be means tested	11-20
Shouldn't be subsidising this	11-20
Evaluate and publicise private sector alternatives	11-20
Against losing/ scaling back handyvan	11-20
Didn’t know it existed	11-20
Not a good service	6-10
Won't deliver significant savings	1-5
Support the work of other teams	1-5
Needs to be more commercial	1-5
Scheme to encourage local people to help within their community	1-5
Completes work that OT service can't offer	1-5
Concerned about people losing jobs	1-5
Merge capability with OT service	1-5
Team provide work experience opportunities for young people	1-5
Encourage support from community	1-5

Pest control

Theme	Number of comments
Concern about rat infestation/public health implications	31-40
Agree to cuts	11-20
Disagree with cuts	11-20
Keep and charge more	6-10
Shouldn't be subsidising this service	6-10
Private contractors more expensive	6-10
Happy customer	6-10
Maintain service for low income households	6-10
Trusted provider	6-10
Increase costs to the council	6-10
Didn’t know service existed	1-5
Supports the work of other teams	1-5
Private alternatives	1-5
Licence/promote reputable companies	1-5
Support vulnerable people	1-5
Expensive/poor service	1-5
Concerned about people losing jobs	1-5
Service is a legal requirement	1-5
Service hasn't been properly advertised/supported	1-5

Evaluation of social care support

Theme	Number of comments
Agree	21-30
People who need support will become ineligible	1-5
Concern about impact on quality of support	1-5
Concern about providers over-charging/not delivering	1-5

Support prevention/rehabilitation	1-5
Need to take into account all assets of and benefits received by care recipients	1-5
Evaluating need will take resources	1-5
Will cost more over the long term	1-5
Potential use of technology to reduce need	1-5
Set cap on social care support	1-5
Practitioners involved in decisions	1-5
Difficult/frustrating for staff to have to say 'no'	1-5

Review of commercial services provided to schools

Theme	Number of comments
Agree	11-20
Adds costs/concern about impact for schools	6-10
SG schools already the worst funded/concern about funding for schools	6-10
Disagree	6-10
Concern about creeping privatisation	1-5
Schools to join up for procurement	1-5
Also look at approach to maintenance	1-5
Ask for feedback from schools	1-5

Home to school transport

Theme	Number of comments
Review approach - be more efficient	1-5
Parents should be paying	1-5

Community meals

Theme	Number of comments
Provides an important service	1-5
Need to cover costs	1-5
Only benefits a small number of people	1-5
Opposed	1-5

Other comments

Priorities/role of the council

Theme	Number of comments
Concern about 'scroungers'/people abusing the system/not worthy of support	21-30
Don't want cycle lane projects	11-20
Spend less on woke/green/vanity projects	11-20
Focus on core services	11-20
Support focus on most vulnerable/tackling poverty	6-10

Importance of bus services	6-10
Focus on keeping areas tidy	1-5
Schools	1-5
Prioritise support for elderly	1-5
Tackling ASB	1-5
Need more focus on public health/prevention	1-5
Improve road surfaces	1-5
Increase staffing in social care	1-5
Prioritise veterans	1-5
Support investment in environment	1-5
Need more focus on children/young people	1-5
Carers need more support	1-5
Support at ages 0-4	1-5
Council shouldn't interfere in people's lives	1-5
Need to be more activist	1-5
Financial implications of Science Park	1-5
Want a lifetime cap on support for individuals	1-5
Increase mental health support	1-5
Increase support for carers	1-5
Opposed to cuts to community service providers	1-5
Don't cut library service	1-5
Importance of youth work as part of preventative approach	1-5
All services are important	1-5
More support for young people with SEND	1-5
More funding to poorer areas	1-5
Public should decide whether services should be provided	1-5

Value for money

Theme	Number of comments
Taxpayers paying more and getting less	21-30
Perception of money wasted/more cuts possible	11-20
Austerity/lack of forward planning	6-10
Want more detail about where money is being spent	1-5
More houses should mean more council tax?	1-5
Comparison to other councils	1-5
Wealthy are paying too much	1-5
Return savings to residents in lower council tax increases	1-5
Rebalance contributions to those who benefit from council services	1-5

Savings/income suggestions

Theme	Number of comments
Need to work more efficiently	11-20
Review staff salaries and pensions	11-20
Concern about central government funding/Lobby government	6-10
Staff work harder/Return to office working	6-10

Need to cut jobs	1-5
Abolish town and parish councils	1-5
Wasted money	1-5
Increase use of volunteers	1-5
Richest need to pay more	1-5
Reduce accommodation costs	1-5
Don't cut services/capacity/jobs	1-5
Chase up debt	1-5
Reduce grass cutting	1-5
Increase use of day care centres to minimise social care need	1-5
More fines	1-5
Renting out buildings	1-5
European model of waste collection	1-5
Need to plan ahead for ongoing increasing costs	1-5
What is happening to old Kingswood library site?	1-5
Concern about use of consultants	1-5
Private care companies overcharging	1-5
Income generating services need to be run more commercially	1-5
Tourist tax	1-5
Use financial reserves	1-5
Time to increase more than 4.99%	1-5
Concern about highly paid contractors	1-5
Potential of AI	1-5
Use external expertise	1-5
Poor budgeting/financial mgt	1-5
Make greater use of apprenticeships	1-5
Disband WECA	1-5
Community work orders	1-5
Important role of charities and third sector	1-5
Culture change required	1-5

Frequently commented on topics

Theme	Number of comments
Comments about roadworks/roads etc.	21-30
Comment about illegal migrants	11-20
Parking charges have reduced footfall/haven't generated income	11-20
Reduced bin collections	6-10
	6-10
Thornbury High St	6-10
Area in decline	6-10
Concern about housing development	1-5
Opposed to HMOs	1-5
Alveston Hill cycle lane	1-5
Concern about police	1-5
Opposed to reduction in frequency of black bin collections	1-5
Opposed to Sort it booking	1-5

Bring in 3-week black bin collections now	1-5
Cyclists to pay road tax	1-5
Incentivise building on brownfield sites	1-5
Bus timetable changes	1-5
Want a new bus route	1-5
Should charge for black bin waste	1-5
Concern about taking down flags	1-5

Feedback on council services

Theme	Number of comments
Concern about social care support	6-10
Positive feedback	1-5
Services suffer with sole focus on cutting costs	1-5
Make it easier to find out about support available	1-5
Issue with customer service	1-5
Too much focus on form-filling to access support	1-5
Concern about lack of support for families living with someone with dementia	1-5
General negative feedback on council	1-5
Impact of cuts on services	1-5
Concern about children social care	1-5
Poor personal experience	1-5
Individual issues with dementia services	1-5
Likes green bus service	1-5
Councillors do a good job	1-5
Mention of other services	1-5
Appreciate social care support	1-5
Social workers need greater recognition	1-5

Consultation and engagement

Theme	Number of comments
Concern about consultation process/lack of transparency	21-30
Concern about wording: fairness/moral	1-5
Need more information to make a judgment	1-5
Recognise difficult decisions	1-5
Need to better communicate the challenges	1-5
Consultation not promoted enough	1-5

Other comments

Theme	Number of comments
Grimsbury farm plant based	1-5
Importance of tackling hate crime	1-5
Wrong type of housing being built	1-5
Parents not paying maintenance fees	1-5
Difficult to recruit to council with lower wages than private sector	1-5

Lack of community	1-5
More flexibility in direct payments	1-5
More transparent about IT costs	1-5
Don't like design of cycle schemes	1-5
Roads on new build estates need to be adopted by the council	1-5
Need to get better at integration on new-builds	1-5

Appendix 3: Written representations

Letter received by email from South Gloucestershire Equalities Voice

South Gloucestershire Equalities Voice

19th December 2025 Dear colleagues,

Revenue and Capital Budget Consultation (2026/27): Equalities Voice Response

Many thanks for attending the South Gloucestershire Equalities Voice Manager's Support Group meeting on 19th November.

As you know, the group was set up 4-years ago with the specific intention to support managers and teams from across the council in the identification of actions that can be taken to tackle inequalities across South Gloucestershire. You will be aware that the work of the group has been extremely successful, and we look forward to continuing this critical work.

Our discussions on 19th November focussed on the council's Revenue and Capital Budget for 2026/27 and we are writing as a group, South Gloucestershire Equalities Voice, to set out our key points of feedback as follows:

Tackling Inequalities as a Core Budget Principle

We recognise the scale of the financial challenge facing the Council. However, we strongly believe that tackling inequality must remain a core principle within budget decision-making and the way in which budgets are spent. As we have previously stated, fostering a culture that embeds equality as a fundamental and ever-present consideration is cost neutral, improves service effectiveness, and reduces longerterm demand on statutory services.

We acknowledge progress made through the Council's Tackling Inequalities Plan 2024–28 and welcomed the publication of the recent Annual Report. However, we remain concerned that for some communities there continues to be an absence of sufficient data, targeted action, capacity and planning of spend. Without robust equality monitoring and analysis, budgets risk being spent on "the general population" rather than those facing the greatest disadvantage, limiting both social impact and financial value.

Equality Impacts of Specific Budget Proposals

We wish to highlight our concerns in relation to several proposals set out in the consultation papers:

• **Community Meals price increase:** Increasing charges for community meals will disproportionately affect older and disabled residents, many of whom are already experiencing severe cost-of-living pressures. We ask how mitigation, concessions, or links to financial support will be put in place to avoid increased isolation, malnutrition, and declining health.

• **HandyVan service reduction in subsidy:** The HandyVan service plays a vital preventative role in helping older and disabled people remain safe and independent in their homes. It is also a trusted service that protects residents from rogue traders. Reductions risk higher downstream costs through increased falls, hospital admissions, safeguarding concerns, and loss of independence.

• **Pest control service:** For low-income households, disabled residents, and people living in poor-quality housing, pest control is a public health intervention rather than a discretionary service. Reductions may exacerbate health inequalities and disproportionately affect already vulnerable residents.

• **Adult Social Care cohort reviews and "scaling back" support:** We seek clarity on how cohort reviews will ensure that reductions in care do not undermine dignity, wellbeing, or safety. Language around "scaling back" support causes concern, particularly where people's independence is constrained by cognitive, mental health, or environmental factors.

• **Prevention and early intervention (Adults and Children's Services):** We strongly support preventative approaches but stress that they must be inclusive and targeted. There remains limited public understanding of social care pathways, particularly among marginalised communities, which risks unequal access to preventative services.

• **Children, young people and families:** Proposals focused on reducing demand and supporting families must recognise diverse needs. LGBTQ+ young people, minority ethnic children, and those with SEND are often overlooked when generalised assumptions are applied, leading to poorer outcomes for these groups.

• **Homelessness and temporary accommodation:** While we welcome a focus on prevention, we emphasise the need to address hidden homelessness, particularly among LGBTQ+ young people, who are often not identified through mainstream approaches.

Education and Targeted Support

We remain deeply concerned about the loss of targeted support for LGBTQ+ and minority ethnic pupils following the removal of specific roles previously funded through Covid recovery budgets. While funding streams may have ended, the inequalities have not.

Council data continues to demonstrate disproportionate outcomes in attainment, exclusions, and wellbeing for these groups. The current Disadvantaged Strategy

does not adequately reflect intersectional disadvantage and risks masking (and ultimately increasing) persistent inequality. The recent Ofsted and CQC findings regarding inconsistent experiences for children and young people with SEND further underline the need for targeted responses – which is relevant across all characteristics.

Community Cohesion, Hate Crime and Statutory Duties

Hate crime continues to rise locally, while funding and visible action are reducing. The Council has a statutory duty under the Equality Act 2010 to foster good relations. We recommend that the Council reviews whether current budgets are being used in the most effective way to meet this duty and to support community cohesion.

We are also concerned about limited senior officer presence at key community events, which affects visibility, trust, and understanding of lived experience.

Data, Lived Experience and the JSNA

The absence of an equalities-focused summary within the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) remains a significant concern. Without this, strategic planning and commissioning lack a clear evidence base on inequality. We continue to advocate for combining quantitative data with lived experience insight. The recent LGBTQ+ research report is a positive example, but this approach must become standard practice across the Council.

Social Value and Procurement

We believe the Council's Social Value framework could make a significantly greater contribution to tackling inequalities if it were explicitly aligned to the objectives of the Tackling Inequalities Plan. This represents an opportunity to achieve greater impact without additional expenditure.

Use of the Equalities Voice Managers' Support Group

With feedback from council officers attending the Equalities Voice Managers' Support Group being 100% positive. We repeat our recommendation from last year that attendance and follow-up actions are actively encouraged by senior leadership to maximise the impact.

Conclusion

We recognise that progress has been made, but we urge the Council not to drop the baton. Budget pressures must not result in the erosion of preventative and equalityfocused work that ultimately saves money and improves outcomes.

We ask the Council to:

• Strengthen equality analysis within budget decision-making

• Ensure appropriate mitigation where proposals disproportionately impact

protected groups

• Reinvest in targeted capacity where inequalities are well evidenced which specifically includes lived experience insight

Embed lived experience and equalities data into strategic planning

South Gloucestershire Equalities Voice remains committed to working constructively with the Council to ensure that financial decisions support fairness, inclusion, and long-term sustainability.

South Gloucestershire Equalities Voice (on behalf of partner organisations)

Age UK South Gloucestershire https://www.ageuk.org.uk/southgloucestershire/ CVS South Gloucestershire https://cvs-sg.org.uk

Southern Brooks Community Partnerships https://southernbrooks.org.uk

South Gloucestershire Disability Equality Network https://www.sgden.org.uk South Gloucestershire Race Equality Network https://southglosracenetwork.co.uk

Stand Against Racism & Inequality (S.A.R.I.) https://saricharity.org.uk The Diversity Trust CIC https://www.diversitytrust.org.uk

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Email from Professor Angeliki Papadaki, Professor of Public Health Nutrition at the University of Bristol

Dear South Gloucestershire Budget Consultation team,

I am not a resident of South Gloucestershire (I live in Bristol), but I came across your budget consultation via an article in the Bristol Post, which outlined the Council services currently under review. I am writing to express my strong support for the Community Meals service (Meals on Wheels) that your authority provides.

I am a Professor at the University of Bristol, and for the past five years I have been researching and documenting the value and impact of Meals on Wheels services across the UK. South Gloucestershire is now one of the very few local authorities in England still delivering this service in-house. Rather than scaling it back, other councils should be looking to you as a leading example to follow.

In 2024, we launched the **Meals on Wheels UK** website to support national visibility and data on this essential service. Through our interactive map, it is clear that South Gloucestershire has no other provider offering hot, freshly prepared meals with face-to-face contact. The only alternatives are national companies supplying frozen meals, without any social or safeguarding role.

Your in-house Community Meals service is about far more than nutrition. It serves as a vital lifeline. The trained drivers do far more than deliver food - they identify risks such as deteriorating health, social isolation, and unsafe living conditions. This preventative role reduces hospital admissions, delays the need for costly social care interventions (e.g., the need to move into residential care), and enables residents with care and support needs to live independently for longer.

Cutting this service would not only risk harm to individuals - it would be a false economy. The short-term savings would likely be outweighed by longer-term costs in health and social care.

I would be happy to share our research findings with you directly. For now, I have attached an infographic highlighting the service's broader value, and I encourage you to consult our latest policy briefing here:

https://www.bristol.ac.uk/policybristol/policy-briefings/meals-on-wheels/

Thank you for your time and for continuing to support a service that plays such a vital role in local wellbeing.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Angeliki Papadaki

Professor of Public Health Nutrition

University of Bristol Enterprise Fellow 2025/2026

Emails received from representatives of local Town & Parish Councils

Bradley Stoke Town Council

To prevent double taxation, Town and Parish Councils have historically been notified of the amount imposed on their residents' Council Tax bills, rather than being required to directly levy charges for services already delivered. Bradley Stoke Town Council would wish to see this model continue.

At present, there is insufficient clarity regarding how special expenses being services and works currently undertaken by South Gloucestershire Council on behalf of Town and Parish Councils would be charged in the future. Without clear and detailed information, it is not possible for Bradley Stoke Town Council to undertake the necessary risk assessments, financial modelling, or due diligence required to make an informed response to this consultation.

As precept figures are published and clearly recorded on Council Tax bills, residents will inevitably focus on the headline increase. This could represent a 30-40% increase in the Town Council precept, without residents understanding that this reflects the withdrawal of special expenses rather than an increase in discretionary spending. This risks undermining the significant work undertaken by Bradley Stoke Town Council over the past three years to manage the precept responsibly and effectively.

Bradley Stoke Town Council is not in a position to take on responsibility for significant assets such as the Nature Reserve or wider open spaces. Furthermore, the Council requires clarification on precisely which land would be included under the

definitions of open spaces and open spaces acquired housing land. This is particularly important in light of previous errors made by South Gloucestershire Council in relation to land ownership, notably at Dewfalls Drive. Robust assurance regarding land ownership, liabilities, and title must be provided before any informed consideration could be given.

In addition, some functions or activities currently delivered under special expenses may be more appropriately and efficiently undertaken across a wider geographical footprint, covering several Town and Parish Councils. Economies of scale, such as those achieved through collective procurement, contract negotiation, and delivery (for example, in relation to bus stop provision and maintenance) may result in better value for money when delivered centrally rather than devolved to individual councils.

The Town Council is also not in a position to take on responsibility for the play area at Fennel Drive until all necessary repair and maintenance works have been completed to an appropriate and agreed standard.

Further clarification is also required regarding the implications for staff currently delivering services under special expenses. In particular, it is unclear whether TUPE arrangements would apply, and how such arrangements would operate where staff deliver services across multiple Town and Parish Councils.

The lack of clarity around staffing liabilities, employment responsibilities, and transitional arrangements presents a significant risk.

At this stage, Bradley Stoke Town Council requires further clarification across a number of areas and confirms that it is not in a financial or operational position to take on the items currently covered by special expenses for the 2027/28 financial year.

Charfield Parish Council

Charfield Parish Council are one of the councils that will be affected by this transition in future financial year. Members are pleased that S Glos Council are consulting now – as it gives some time to plan, and they are aware of recent pop-up sessions facilitated by S Glos Council that Clerk attended and reported on.

Although Charfield's Special Expenses aren't as much as some other areas – when you look at them as a proportion of the precept, they are nearly 60% (Precept for 25 – 26 was £62k and Special Expenses were over £37k).

Looking at the Q&A's sent out following the pop-up sessions – in particular – the two below:-

Will special expenses be removed from the Council tax bill and instead charged via the parish precept?

Yes, the proposal is to shift special expenses from the Council tax bill to the parish precept, though overall Council tax may still increase.

Will this change result in a reduction in Council tax for residents, offset by an increase in the parish precept?

The special expense will fall away from the Council tax, but the Council tax itself is expected to increase due to wider financial pressures.

…Ultimately residents are going to be paying more….a lot more – or they will lose services. Many Town and Parish Councils are already considering raising precepts because of costs going up – just one example the Localism Bill for year from SGC has gone up by over 7%, this will see them go up even more – along with Council Tax rises – it is going to make things tough for many residents.

Unlike S Glos Council – local towns and parishes often only have one staff member (usually part time) – that works from home – and no storage facilities. Transfer of assets is a big ask – and looking at villages surrounding Charfield – not many of them are affected by this transition – so making it harder to share resources and collaborate. Also, Charfield being on the Northern boundary of the authority – it often feels out on a limb on its own.

There is concern about closed church yard maintenance – as from a legal standing – the Parish Council declined to take on responsibility for the maintenance when asked by the PCC in the 1990s….There is an active volunteer group in Charfield that do a lot up at the closed Church Yard – and we would to bring them in on any conversations. We have tried to find a 'Closed Churchyard Protocol' on South Gloucestershire website – but can't….so don't have a 'standard' that S Glos work to….as we understand that in other local authority area's they provide a basic service (keeping area safe – doing what have to) and if local church or parish council want more they can buy back – pay for extra. The matter of who is responsible for maintenance of boundary wall is still outstanding….so there is a lot to discuss and consider (just on this one item).

Members don't have as many concerns over open space maintenance or play area's….as they have experience in those areas and know they can either buy back from S Glos as they do with Localism or use contractor of own choice.

The public conveniences make up a large part of the Special Expense bill – and the Parish Council is about to fund some work allowing facility (which is much needed) to remain open. (Automatic doors). The public conveniences are on land that belongs to memorial hall – which could make transfer of asset more complicated – and members would also want to know that they were in good working order and upkeep prior to transfer. Again – due to Charfields geographic location – it makes it difficult to share resources (such as cleaning of public toilets) with other parishes.

Members know that S Glos Council have got to do something – and wanted to respond to consultation at this early stage – so that their concerns – and area's that needed considering were in writing – and conversations could be started.

Westerleigh & Coalpit Heath Parish Council

Approach 4: Raising money fairly

- Ensuring all South Gloucestershire's towns and parishes are fairly funded.

The consultation does not make it clear whether bus shelters (which make up the majority of the parish special expenses charge) will be transferred to the Parish Council as assets (with associated liability) OR whether South Gloucestershire Council will retain ownership of the shelters and recharge the Council for their upkeep? **The Council's preference is not to transfer bus shelters as assets and for South Gloucestershire Council to retain ownership and liability.**

If asset transfer is South Gloucestershire Council's preferred option (for bus shelters and open space in the case of this Council), what happens if the Council refuses the asset transfer i.e. will bus shelters be removed, what will happen to open space?

The A432 Active Travel Project, funded by WECA, will relocate, upgrade and add bus shelters to the strategic A432 transport corridor over the next two – three years. This additional 'strategic' infrastructure is being imposed upon the parish using regional funding. There has been no direct Council input into decisions about the number, location or specification of these bus shelters. Assuming that an asset transfer model is NOT pursued and South Gloucestershire Council recharges the Council for them, the following questions arise.

(i)What are the ongoing additional maintenance costs associated with the A432 bus shelters that haven't been installed, moved or upgraded yet (i.e how much would special expenses increase by if they were being retained)?

(ii) Is there legacy funding from WECA allocated to ongoing maintenance of these bus shelters?

(iii) If so, how will this funding be allocated to the Council if/ when special expenses are transferred to the precept?

(iv) Can the Council refuse to take on the additional costs associated with these 'strategic' bus shelters, which have yet to be installed or upgraded at the time of consultation?

Aust Parish Council

I'm very concerned about the proposals to offload maintenance currently covered by special expenses onto parish councils. Aust PC has very limited special expenses, only a small area of Acquired Housing Land. I don't even know where this is within the parish. We are a very small council and have no buildings or maintenance equipment, so the only way we could cover such tasks would be by contracting out. The chances of us being able to get a value-for-money contract for such a small area are very low. Even if we combined with other parishes, the distance a contractor would have to travel between the various parishes is likely to make it untenable.

Plus, I am only employed for 5 hours per week and do not have capacity for setting up or managing contracts.

The only way it would be feasible for my council to take on this land would be if maintenance could be added to our existing localism contract at the usual SGC rates.

Response from Thornbury Town Council to SGC 26/27 Budget Consultation

Community Meals From a Town Council perspective, the proposed changes to Community Meals are concerning and appear to be counterintuitive with preventative aims of the wider Transformation Programme. We strongly encourage SGC to work in partnership with organisations such as Age UK and the wider voluntary and community sector to ensure that any changes do not have an adverse impact on residents or place additional pressure on local support networks.

Handy Van Service The Town Council is concerned that the proposed reduction or cessation of the Handy Van Service will have a greater negative impact on residents than the level of savings achieved within the budget. This service provides practical, preventative support that enables residents to remain safe in their homes.

Is the removal likely to increase demand on other services, including housing and adult social care. Again, the proposal does not appear to support the preventative principles of the Transformation Programme.

Flood Prevention The Town Council requests greater transparency and more area-specific information in relation to flood prevention. In particular, we seek clarity on the identification of high-risk flood areas within the unitary authority, including those within Thornbury specifically, the assessment of flood risk for Thornbury, the proportion of the flood prevention budget allocated to the town, and how flood risk mitigation is supported through other service budgets, such as routine drain and gully clearance.

Mentoring for Young People The Town Council is in support of increasing mentoring for young people and has observed an increase in demand for mentoring and early intervention support within our community. Preventative investment in mentoring aligns strongly with Thornbury Town Council's priorities.

Pest Control The Town Council believes that consideration should be given to concessions for residents on low incomes. Pest control is a public health matter as well as a private household issue. If services become unaffordable, there is a risk that infestations will go unreported and unmanaged, potentially leading to wider public health implications and increased long-term costs for the authority and local councils.

Special Expenses For residents within our town, changes to Special Expenses are likely to represent the most immediate and visible financial impact arising from the budget proposals. The Town Council is therefore concerned about the potential effect on the local precept should asset maintenance responsibilities be transferred.

We understand that SGC intends to consult specifically on this element and would strongly recommend that a phased approach be adopted, rather than including half of the proposal in the first year's budget. This should be supported by the sharing of all relevant details and clear communication, to allow parish and town councils to consider the implications and determine how they wish to respond to such a request.

Consultation Information and Engagement The Town Council would welcome greater transparency on income, including information on housing growth, the associated impact on council tax, and the benefits arising from increased commercial and economic activity. This level of clarity would support a more balanced understanding of the budget proposals and their local implications. In addition, in several of the areas on which we have commented, the provision of more detailed and localised information would have enabled the Town Council to provide a more informed, constructive, and valuable response to the consultation.

Siston Parish Council

We appreciate the opportunity to respond to South Gloucestershire Council's budget consultation for 2026–2027. In particular we wish to address the proposal concerning the future collection of special expenses by parish councils, and to outline the potential advantages and disadvantages of transferring this responsibility from the district council.

Pros of Passing Special Expenses to Parish Councils

• Enhanced Local Control: Parish councils are often closer to their constituents and better placed to understand and respond to local needs. Allowing them to set and collect special expenses could lead to more tailored and responsive service provision.

• Increased Accountability: Residents may find it easier to engage with and hold their local parish council accountable for spending decisions, as opposed to the larger district council.

• Potential for Greater Transparency: Parish councils can provide clearer breakdowns of how funds are spent on local amenities, potentially increasing residents' understanding and support for local taxation.

• Empowerment of Local Communities: Transferring this responsibility may foster a stronger sense of ownership and involvement within communities regarding the management and maintenance of local facilities.

• Equalise the Partnership: Parish Councils have an important role to play in communities; however, they are sometimes dictated to by the authority. A much more equitable relationship would be established if the local parishes are able to manage their own assets.

Cons of Passing Special Expenses to Parish Councils

• Variation in Administrative Capacity: Not all parish councils have the same resources or expertise. Smaller councils may struggle with the administrative burden of setting, collecting, and managing special expenses, leading to inconsistencies and potential inefficiencies.

• Risk of Inequity: There may be disparities between parishes in terms of financial capability, which could result in unequal service levels or tax burdens across the district.

• Potential for Confusion: Residents used to paying a single council tax bill could find the addition of separate parish charges confusing, especially if communication is not clear.

• Loss of Economies of Scale: South Gloucestershire Council may be able to deliver certain services more efficiently owing to its size and experience, and this could be lost if responsibilities are fragmented. Notwithstanding, individual councils may need to purchase or hire plant machinery and yards to put this machinery, which just the movement of special expenses will not support, pushing up the parish council precept significantly higher than in the past.

• Lack of Detail: Siston Parish Council would need more detail in order to agree to any movement of the special expenses, for example, can they choose to manage the common land as they see fit – rewilding 50% of the common land in some areas, or are we still at the mercy of what South Gloucestershire impose?

• Ownership: No detail has been provided on the assets and schedules to determine whether this transfer will become a legal transfer.

• Unemployment: Siston Parish Councillors are concerned that is parish councils decide to contract out the services held by South Gloucestershire Council, then this could potentially lead to loss of jobs for some employees at the authority.

• Expertise and knowledge: There is a concern that the assets, when determined, will come with a requirement of certain expertise or knowledge and not all councils have employees, apart from the clerk and therefore there will be additional costs for residents in terms of employing those expertise and councillors, who are not renumerated will need to take on additional hours of unpaid work, to meet the needs of the role in future. The role of a parish councillor will change from its current brief.

• Open and Honest: This part of the budget will have a large financial impact on residents to warrant a consultation of its own and it is hidden in a large consultation, where the more emotive sections will more readily catch people’s attention. The parish council feel there should have been more explicit communication. At the Your Voice meeting, when talking about the council’s budgeting gap, the opportunity to highlight this was being considered was not addressed.

Conclusion

While there are clear benefits to localising the collection of special expenses, careful consideration must be given to the readiness of parish councils to take on this role and to ensuring residents are fully informed of any changes. Adequate support and

guidance from South Gloucestershire Council will be essential to ensure a smooth transition, equitable service provision, and continued transparency for all communities involved.

Siston Parish Council feel there are too many questions that South Gloucestershire Council have not considered to effect such a massive change in special expenses and they have not considered the impacts to the parish councils and also that the large impact on residents financially will be big and warrants a wide campaign by South Gloucestershire Council to residents as a simple duty of care. It should be remembered by the authority that they need to explain such changes in layman's terms, so that the change and impacts to people's finances can be adequately understood by everyone.

Oldland Parish Council

Oldland Parish Council is of the view that insufficient consideration has been given to the Special Expenses element. It is not clearly explained within the budget documentation in a way that is accessible or understandable to residents, nor is the likely financial impact on them clearly set out.

The Parish Council considers that a separate and specific consultation should be undertaken with residents, clearly outlining the financial implications for them as council tax payers.

While it is understood that these costs would be incorporated into the Parish Council precept and offset against residents' Council Tax, it is unclear whether the corresponding Special Expenses charge would be reduced accordingly. At present, the Parish Council is unable to identify any clear financial benefit to residents.

Further detailed information would be required before the Parish Council could support any transfer of the Special Expenses element or consider the transfer of any associated assets.

Bitton Parish Council

Bitton Parish Council would like to respond to the budget consultation as follows:

Bitton Parish Council feel not enough consideration has been given to its residents when responding to this consultation. The Special Expenses element and its intention is not clearly stated within the budget documentation for understanding by our residents and the impact that it will have on them. An individual consultation should have taken place to residents laying out the financial implications to them as taxpayers.

Whilst this cost would then be added to the Parish Council precept and taken away from the residents Council Tax, would this element then be reduced? We are struggling to see where the resident would be benefitting.

Further detail would need to be provided to the Parish Council before it would agree to any movement of the special expenses element or whether they choose to take on any of the assets.

Pucklechurch Parish Council

Pucklechurch Parish Council is very concerned at the proposal to "withdraw special expenses for consistency so all services within a parish are funded solely through the parish precepts".

Proposed response

Worryingly this proposal has no supporting data and information to fully outline exactly what is being suggested by South Gloucestershire Council (SGC), a quick reference in the budget 26/27 consultation is not appropriate. For example is the proposal for town and parish councils to simply pay for the upkeep of SGC assets or is this in fact an asset transfer with ownership and all liabilities being passed to town and parish councils?

There appears no justifications to support why and how this proposal offers value for money to each affected parish and more importantly tax payers. On the face of it, it appears to be a measure to remove an expense for the SGC books and pass it to town and parish councils relying on the fact that town and parish councils are not currently capped in the amount of precept they can charge. Even if this proposal was shown to be cost neutral, the public do not understand the nuances of public sector finances and it has the potential to cause a back lash against town and parish councils and further damage the public's perception of our sector.

Without detailed information how can town and parish councils undertake the impact or risk assessments and due diligence necessary to make an informed decision? Whilst there may be exceptions, we do not believe many town and parish councils even understand how special expenses are calculated and what exactly the charges actually covers. All most of us know is that SGC has historically simply notified councils that an amount of special expenses will be imposed on their residents' council tax bill to prevent double taxation.

Importantly this proposal if implemented has the potential to discriminate against smaller and rural parish councils who have low tax bases and therefore highly limited opportunities to raise large sums of money. Furthermore it will add a disproportionate financial burden on these smaller councils beyond simply the special expenses costs. For example in Pucklechurch

- an initial transfer of £32,187 special expenses costs to the council would currently represent a precept rise of circa 22% BEFORE any increase is agreed by the council necessary to cover its approved budgetary requirements.
- as precept increases are published and recorded on the council tax bill, residents will simply see the headline increase of what could be a 30% or

40% or even more rise in their precept. The public will not understand there are savings from the withdrawal of special expenses and this has the potential to undermine all the hard work in improving community engagement and will likely generate damaging publicity from 'keyboard warriors' and encourage negative attitudes towards the parish council.

- many small and rural parish have very limited staffing resources, often a single part time clerk and certainly no inhouse ground maintenance staff, so additional responsibilities will mean more staff time, more external contracts and therefore more costs.
- assets such as bus shelters many well be aged which will impose further costs for future replacements.
- open spaces such as Pucklechurch's Millennium Green has circa 100 trees, many of which are adjacent to the main road or close to housing. Annual inspection and maintenance costs may well be unaffordable.
- What happens if the parish deems it cannot afford to take on an asset such as the above open space? Does this risk SGC selling off the asset to others or could it put the open space at risk of future development? Longer term consequences do not appear to have been fully considered.

Overall our sector needs more information and a proper detailed consultation/negotiation to be able to consider and clearly articulate all the unintended consequences arising from the proposal so an equitable solution can be found.

Tormarton Parish Council

Councillors would like to express their concerns regarding the transfer of special expenses to the town and parish councils to claim from residents, in order to allow South Gloucestershire Council to close the gap on its spending gap.

There are many unanswered questions on this matter, which are not detailed in the consultation and without that information being made publicly available, it is not possible for parish or town councils or the residents they represent to comment from a knowledgeable perspective.

The main concerns at this point are:

• Not all parish councils have the same resources or expertise. Smaller councils may struggle with the administrative burden of setting, collecting, and managing special expenses, leading to inconsistencies and potential inefficiencies.

• There may be disparities between parishes in terms of financial capability, which could result in unequal service levels or tax burdens across the district.

• South Gloucestershire Council may be able to deliver certain services more efficiently owing to its size and experience, and this could be lost if responsibilities

are fragmented. Notwithstanding, individual councils may need to purchase or hire plant machinery and yards to put this machinery, which just the movement of special expenses will not support, pushing up the parish council precept significantly higher than in the past.

Of most concern to Tormarton Parish Council is the fact that:

• No details have been provided on the assets this will involved and this has not been provided with the consultation to allow Tormarton Parish Councillors to evaluate whether the move of funds can be managed.

• There is a concern that the assets, when determined, will come with a requirement of certain expertise or knowledge and not all councils have employees, apart from the clerk and therefore there will be additional costs for residents in terms of employing those expertise and councillors, who are not renumerated will need to take on additional hours of unpaid work, to meet the needs of the role in future. The role of a parish councillor will change from its current brief.

• This part of the budget will have a large financial impact on residents to warrant a consultation of its own and it is hidden in a large consultation, where the more emotive sections will more readily catch people's attention. The parish council feel there should have been more explicit communication on this point. The opportunity to share this information at the Your Voice events was not utilised, so residents are being asked to respond something, that they can not be expected to understand.

Cromhall Parish Council

We are concerned about the potential impact on parishes, particularly smaller rural parishes, of the proposal to get rid of the special expenses system. Presumably this would mean that the relevant land & assets would be handed over to the parish/town councils? What provision would there be to make sure that assets were handed over in good order? It would be unreasonable to expect small parishes to take on potential liabilities at very short notice, meaning that the only way to secure a reserve against possible maintenance requirements would be to add the whole lot onto one year's precept.

For example, our parishioners currently pay special expenses for a bus shelter. We have reason to believe that the roof of the bus shelter contains asbestos and will require replacement soon. Our parishioners have been paying special expenses for this shelter over a number of years, with little or none of these accumulated funds having been spent on maintenance of the shelter. Will SGC ensure that the roof is replaced before it is handed over? Or commute a suitable proportion of the special expenses collected in recent years to provide a reserve to cover the work required?
