South Gloucestershire Council

Delivering for you

Council budget Consultation report

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Executive Summary

This report explains the findings of the council's annual consultation with local taxpayers and other key stakeholders regarding its budget and spending priorities. The consultation aimed to engage with as many people as possible with the issues around the council's ongoing financial challenges and gather reliable evidence to inform decision-making. The report summarises the feedback provided by 1,869 people.

Key Findings

Support for a new procurement and purchasing savings target

- 82.7% of respondents agreed with this proposal.
- Value for money considered a better measure for any target/s as it also incorporates quality.
- People living in lower Council Tax banded properties and people with a disability were less supportive of the proposal than other groups.
- To secure better terms, people suggested we could open tenders to more suppliers, join up procurement with other organisations and be more robust in negotiations around price.
- People think the council needs to be better at monitoring performance of suppliers and more proactive in acting on underperformance.

Strong support for a property review

People also gave strong support to a comprehensive property review, welcoming steps made in renting out office space.

- Clear preference to rent rather than sell property for long term financial benefit and to cover potential future need.
- Council should take steps to maximise occupancy and consolidate office space.
- At the same time, it must maintain a visible presence in the community.
- Has homeworking made the council a more remote and less responsive organisation?

Endorsement for approach of investing in property to house individuals with complex needs

- Good support for further expansion of the council’s programme to provide dedicated housing facilities to reduce need for residential placements.
- People with complex needs better supported with local, in-house provision.
- Will it deliver long-term financial benefits?

Invest in improving online reporting options but don’t forget about those who could be digitally excluded

Most respondents welcomed investment in online reporting systems to allow more people to contact us and complete processes online.

- Online more convenient for most.

- Current council systems and processes considered unwieldy and unreliable.
- Offline channels must be kept for those who need or prefer to speak to a council officer. Lower income groups, older people and those with a disability are less positive about the proposal.
- How much will this cost? Will you deliver promised benefits?
- Differing views on the potential benefits of AI.

Mockingbird and reablement seem like good initiatives

- People generally support investment in Mockingbird.
- Positive feedback on reablement.
- Priority to ensure the approaches are adequately resourced.

Priority is better maintenance of local facilities - whoever is responsible for it

- Local facilities very important to local people.
- Cutting investment a false economy, creating vicious circles and negative consequences.
- Need to agree most appropriate responsibility/funding model.
- Is this simply shifting costs to another level of government (town and parish councils) who can then raise their element of council tax to cover the costs?
- Only a temporary solution - a more fundamental review of responsibilities and funding is needed.
- Alternative suggestions about how local facilities could be delivered and paid for.

Social care funding is a more complex issue

- Priority that funding should not be cut (and recognition that it *can't* be cut).
- Welcome effort to share information and align services locally.
- Need a more complete review of social care alongside wider NHS reform.

Support for council's current approach to outsourcing

78.6% of people agreed with the council's approach to not outsource services unless there is a clear financial benefit to doing so.

- Outsourcing was more costly over the longer term because private companies need to deliver profits and returns to shareholders.
- Keeping services in-house offers greater control meaning services can be delivered more reliably.
- Can council learn from efficiencies private companies bring?
- Analysis of all factors and costs to decide whether outsourcing is the right approach in each instance.

Lower increases in Council Tax preferred

The lowest increase (3.99%) was more popular/less unpopular with local people. The default option of 4.99% assumed in council financial planning was supported by 33.5% of people and opposed by 54.7%

- Concern about affordability – exacerbate financial concerns for the poorest.

- Some recognition of the financial challenges facing councils. This increase is the price to pay to prevent cuts to services.
- Above inflationary increases not a long-term solution.
- Substantial numbers of people felt the Council Tax system needed reform.
- Misunderstanding of the role of local government – comments about ‘what I get for my money’ and ‘value for money’ of Council Tax.
- Responses differed amongst different groups:
    - People living in lower tax band homes more opposed to higher increases
    - Older respondents more likely to support higher increases in Council Tax
    - People with a disability less likely to support increases in Council Tax
    - Minority Ethnic Groups are significantly more likely to oppose the proposed 4.99% increase.

Mixed opinions on increasing charges for green bin collections

- Those objecting were mostly concerned that the fee had gone up by so much last year.
- Some people were more likely to oppose the increases:
    - People living in lower council tax band properties,
    - People with a disability,
    - Men.
- Could lead people to find less-positive ways of disposing of green waste.

Different views on cutting financial support to the voluntary, charity and community sector

- People found it difficult to provide informed feedback.
- The council should conduct individual cost/benefit analysis for each partner arrangement to ensure funding is being used effectively.

Perception of the value for money of services has declined, but otherwise the council has managed reduced funding fairly well

- Majority view in most cases was that there had been no change to service provision over the last five years.
- However, people much more likely to report declining performance than improvements.
- Over two thirds of survey respondents believed ‘cost of services’ had got worse.
- Disabled people, people in the White British ethnic group and carers were much more likely to provide more negative feedback about how service provision has changed.
- 87% of respondents felt the condition of roads and paths had got worse.
- People also think it has got harder to get around, there are more issues with crime and anti-social behaviour, streets are less clean, and development hasn’t been effectively planned.

People took the opportunity to discuss the issues which are important to them

- Different priorities for spending.

- Ongoing themes and issues: black bin collections, car parking charges, Thornbury etc.
- Comments about council efficiency and staff.
- Consideration of new model of responsibilities and funding.
- Blaming others for issues.

Background to the consultation

Purpose of the consultation

The council has a duty to consult 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.

Given the ongoing, structural financial challenges the council faces, this consultation exercise also sought to explain the council's financial position and set out the approaches we already follow to balance income and outgoings. A series of 'open text' questions were asked to seek broader, more qualitative feedback.

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,
- Engage, seek views and gather opinion on the options and proposals for the council's budget and services,
- Gain a fuller understanding of the likely impact for communities, service users and other stakeholders,
- 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 Wednesday, 13 November 2024 until Wednesday, 8 January 2025. The consultation was widely promoted via social media and council newsletters, and a mailout to 5,000 households across all wards of South Gloucestershire. 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 1,869 responses from residents, town and parish councillors and those representing voluntary and community organisations. This includes over 560 responses from the Viewpoint citizen's panel. This was a similar response rate to last year's consultation. In addition, we have received written representation from the Equalities Voice group.

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 options for Council Tax levels in 2024-25.

However, several people commented throughout the survey that insufficient detail had been provided to allow full and detailed feedback. In large part, 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 example, the consultation sought views on the council's overall approach to outsourcing rather than asking whether it should outsource specific services.

As and when the council proposes more specific changes, we would consult on those changes separately with appropriate information provided to allow for considered feedback.

"You haven't made concrete proposals. You've offered a range of alternatives and asked for an opinion on them."

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 fully 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,
- Fewer non-White British people than in our local population,
- Fewer LGBTQ+ respondents than in our local population.

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 and from the analysis conducted, there is no evidence of this having been abused by 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:

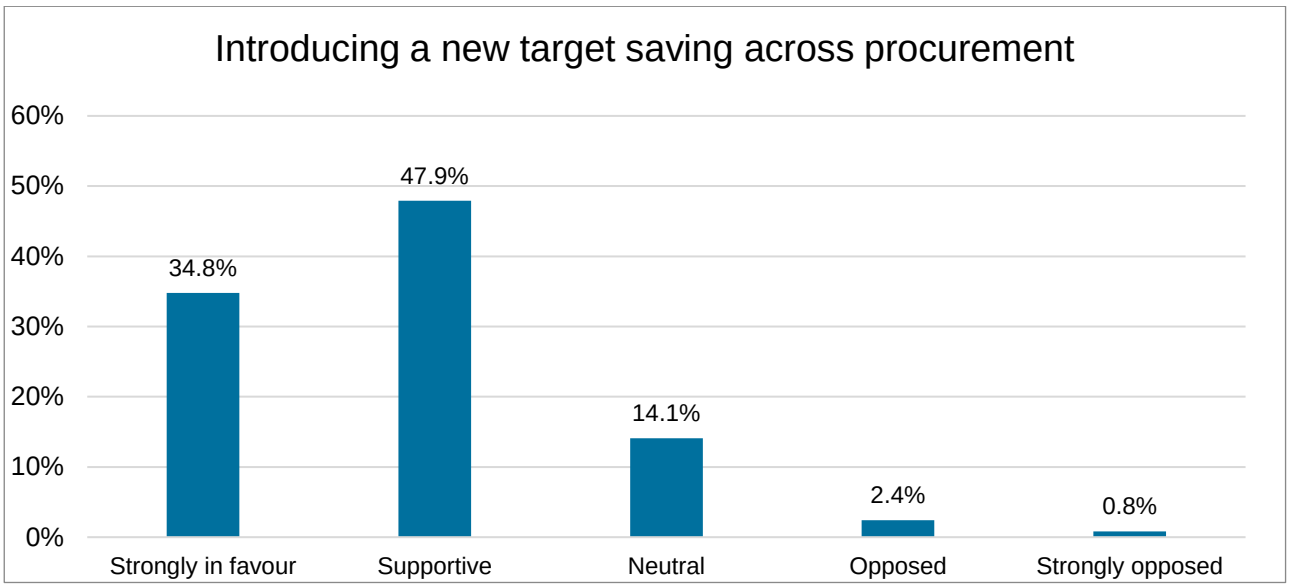
- Reviewing internal costs,
- Finding more efficient ways of working,
- Managing responsibility for delivering and paying for services,
- Outsourcing,
- Generating additional income,
- Stopping, cutting back and prioritising services and support.

Feedback has been categorised and analysed in the same way.

Reviewing internal costs

Setting a new target saving across all major procurement and purchasing

The council works hard to ensure we get the best value when spending money on goods and services. On an ongoing basis we review contracts and costs to make sure we are continuing to secure the lowest prices and best value for money. This proposal strengthens our existing approach by instigating a more formal, comprehensive review, setting a target to reduce spend on big-ticket items by 2028/29.



This was an uncontroversial proposal, supported by 82.7% of respondents. The only caveat to this support people offered was that in setting a target saving, up-front costs should not be the only criteria on which to choose suppliers. Quality is important and value for money should be the criteria on which suppliers and services are assessed. Social value add was another metric to consider.

Whilst very few people across any group are opposed to this change, a slightly lower proportion of lower income groups were supportive. 29.3% of people who live in Council Tax A and B banded properties and 33.3% of those who receive support through the Council Tax Reduction Scheme were neutral rather than supportive. Also, disabled people (77.7%) and women (81.1%) were less likely to support this than those who aren't disabled (85.8%) and male respondents (85.8%).

"This is good in practice as long as you don't place "cost" above "quality" as the main driver.

Contracts should include penalties for poor performance, delivery or quality and incentivise the supplier to deliver innovative ways to "do more with less" and deliver annualised cost savings over a multi-year contract, whilst maintaining or improving quality/delivery.

Simply squeezing suppliers on cost is a self-defeating waste of time."

Members of the public were keen to ensure the council was securing good value for money and offered thoughts on procurement best practice. Suggestions included:

- Taking a more evidence/data-led approach; benchmarking and considering whole life costs in procurement decisions,
- Opening tenders to more suppliers, encouraging smaller and local organisations to bid for tenders,
- Being more robust in negotiations,
- Joining up procurement with other organisations to secure better terms,

- Setting quality targets for suppliers,
- Ensuring performance is measured and underperformance acted upon,
- Reviewing contracts more regularly,
- Using government procurement frameworks.

Some residents felt that the council needed to take action to reduce unnecessary spending by:

- Better controlling individual staff spend,
- Considering opportunities for cost avoidance through use of technology,
- Cutting back on consultancy spend.

As well as the potential quality concerns mentioned above, those who were more sceptical about this approach doubted whether savings were achievable. Some pointed out that it would be difficult to reduce costs against a backdrop of rising costs for suppliers. Others questioned how much the review exercise itself would cost.

Another consideration was the potential impacts of introducing targets. Respondents wanted realistic targets to prevent perverse outcomes. Setting targets too high could incentivise achieving short term cost targets at the expense of longer-term benefits to the council and taxpayer.

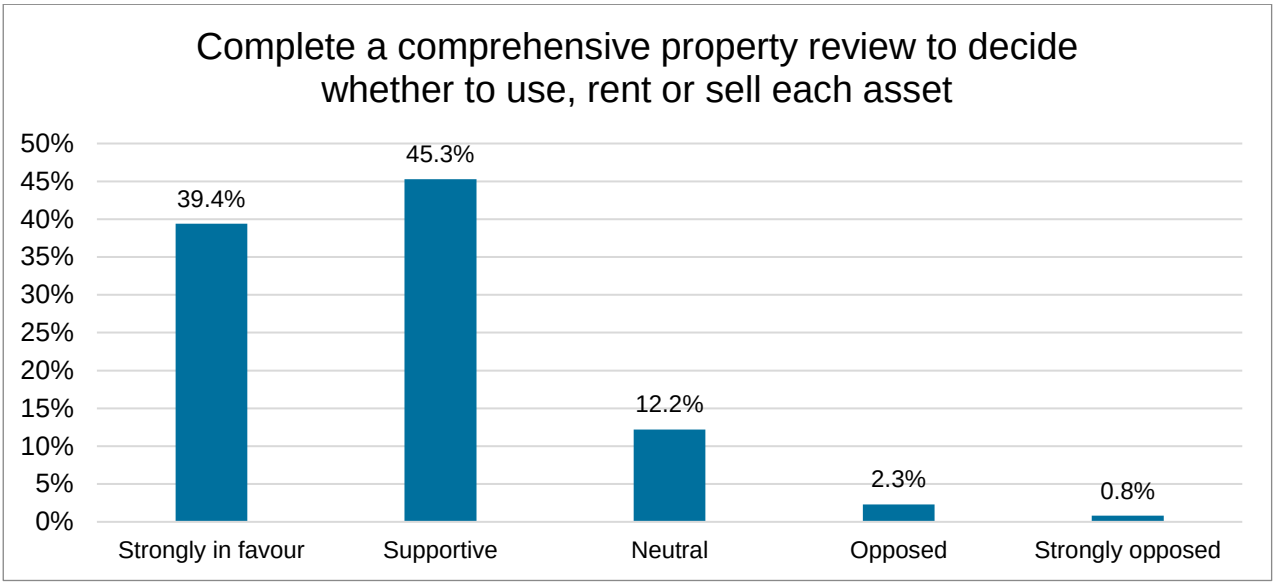
> **“Target setting can be dangerous leading to perverse outcomes and a deterioration in real service whilst appearing to "improve" things on paper!”**

In general, feedback was presented constructively. However, as was the case throughout the survey, some people made unevidenced assumptions about failings in the council’s performance and abilities.

Complete a comprehensive property review to decide whether to use, rent or sell each asset

We know from feedback gathered in previous consultations that people are very supportive of the council making best use of its property. The council has always considered such cost saving measures first because they allow us to reduce costs and/or generate income without harming service delivery. In the consultation background information, we highlighted recent progress. The consultation sought views on a more formal review of all property and land assets to decide whether we should use, rent or sell each.

The proposal was widely supported. Many people commented that this kind of review should be happening already.



In supporting the review, people expressed a clear preference for renting over selling property. Selling was seen as a short-term measure, which cut off rental income and meant there was no backup plan should the council need more space in the future.

"If you sell you will have a short-term gain which will eventually be whittled away leaving you without cash or assets. At least by retaining the assets you can command rental income, but also use them as collateral if a short-term loan is required."

Many people saw this proposal as a referendum on homeworking. Feedback was evenly split between those who welcomed the flexibility, cost savings and environmental benefits homeworking could deliver and those sceptical about the productivity and work ethic of council employees working remotely. Several council staff expressed their views – either for or against home-working, which generally reflected their personal preference. Whilst this feedback is important and the council must ensure genuine staff wellbeing concerns are addressed, the priority must be to consider what property the council needs to allow it to deliver its work most effectively and efficiently.

Respondents prioritised maximising occupancy and consolidating office space as a means of cutting costs. In doing so, they recognised that having a visible presence in the community is important to delivering services effectively and asked that in reviewing property, appropriate customer facing premises were retained.

"If you have office space that isn't used, rent or sell smaller places and make larger offices a hub for all services."

Other suggestions of ways to reduce spend, generate income or maximise potential of council buildings and property included:

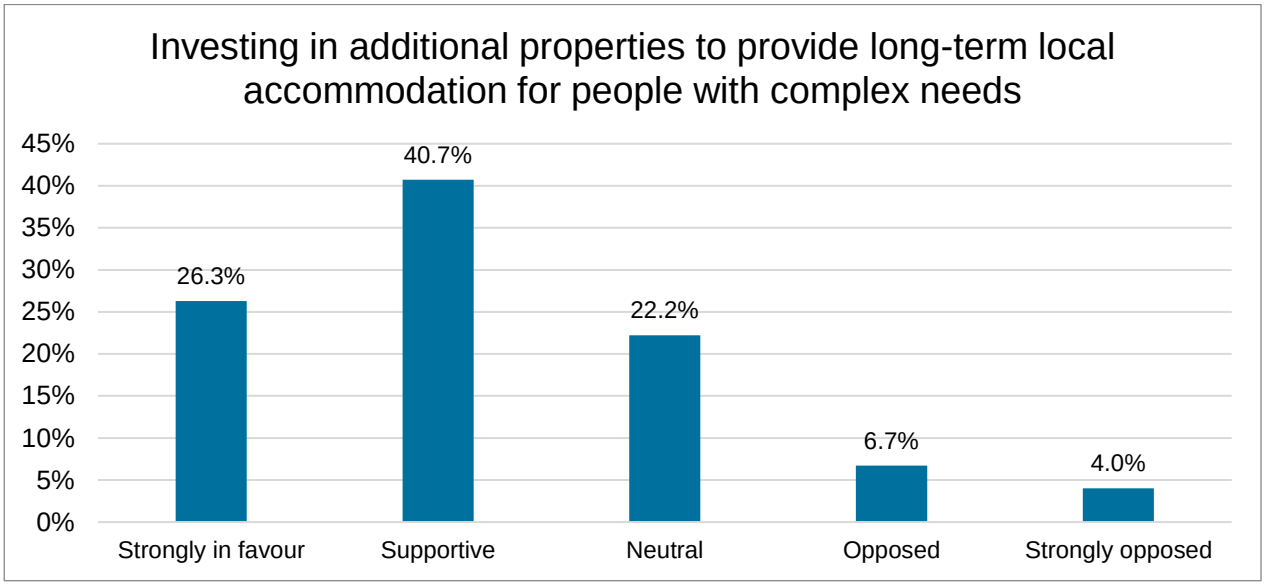
- Renting out buildings not in use,
- Share properties with partner organisations,
- Letting community groups use council buildings,

- Selling buildings with high maintenance costs,
- Improving energy efficiency of council buildings,
- Installing solar panels on all council buildings/land,
- Turning off lights and reducing heating,
- Retaining green spaces owned by the council for environmental benefit.

A few respondents advocated the council taking a more expansive approach, buying more property and land either to generate long-term income or for social benefit, for example by bringing brownfield sites back into active use. Others questioned recent purchases, asking when the taxpayer might see a return on investments.

Investing in additional properties to provide long-term local accommodation for people with complex needs

Through the consultation we sought to raise awareness and seek views on current projects to purchase properties to use as specialist facilities to house people with especially complex needs. Such schemes have proven beneficial in other parts of the country, offering better support for individuals at lower cost than the alternative of expensive residential placements. Although the council is very early on this journey, we are optimistic about the potential of this approach and sought public feedback as we look to expand this programme.



The approach was generally supported. Respondents were optimistic that having council staff delivering support would afford better care, with a stronger focus on achieving the best long-term outcomes for individuals. One of the benefits the council has identified for those receiving support is that it allows them to live closer to the places and people they know. Survey respondents pointed out wider benefits of this local provision in creating jobs. Two respondents reported first-hand positive experiences with similar schemes operated by Mencap.

However, it should be noted that support for this measure was slightly lower amongst survey respondents who have caring responsibilities – 54.3% of carers supported the proposal, compared with 70.5% of people who don't have these responsibilities. The homes are intended as an alternative to residential care placements. They aim to support

people with the most significant and complex issues, who do not have families who can fully meet their needs. Therefore, the greater scepticism amongst this group is perhaps more related to a preference for money to be spent supporting them and those they care for, as opposed to concern about this particular means of supporting people with complex needs.

"The acquisition of property should be made by central/local government with the assets retained under their control to prevent the private sector large property portfolio entrepreneurs from overcharging the public sector and not focusing on "positive outcomes".

Engage local SME businesses and partners to support the delivery of the associated services."

Those who were more sceptical or worried about the up-front costs of purchasing properties wanted reassurance that evidence showed this would be a cheaper way of delivering the same or better results. People asked that this exercise be conducted as part of the property review to see if existing properties could be repurposed to reduce costs and minimise financial risks.

Other practical considerations people had included:

- Challenge of recruiting and retaining staff to ensure consistency of care,
- Ongoing maintenance costs of property,
- Size of property required/number of people housed to deliver economies of scale,
- Potential objections of people who live near homes.

Others opposed the proposals on ideological grounds. Several people didn't think the taxpayer should be supporting people they deemed 'undeserving' and felt individuals or their families should pick up the bill for social care. Even if South Gloucestershire Council was to disregard the moral justification for social care support, the Care Act places a legal obligation on the council to provide this support.

Comments expressed in response to this proposal and throughout the survey show an incomplete - and sometimes discriminatory - understanding of the social care system. Public education would be helpful explaining:

- What social care is and when it is appropriate,
- Who is eligible for social care,
- The rationale for public funded social care.

"Why do others get help, yet we have to pay for it?"

Broader points were expressed about the funding model for social care. Several people mentioned the need for a longer-term funding solution from central government. Others recognised the links with the health care system and asked whether this approach could or should be adopted in partnership with the NHS.

"Social care costs aren't going away; the government needs to address the issue. Social care is broken due to the mismatch between untenable demand and insufficient funding."

Finally, a handful of people asked if greater investment in and focus on preventative support could reduce the need for such expensive support. A model based around better resourced and supported foster carers was offered as an alternative approach to residential placements for young people.

"Whilst supportive, I would like to understand what the medium to long term care approach will look like to support. Will there be provision to reduce the demand on complex need support? Can we be more open on why this seems to be ever increasing?"

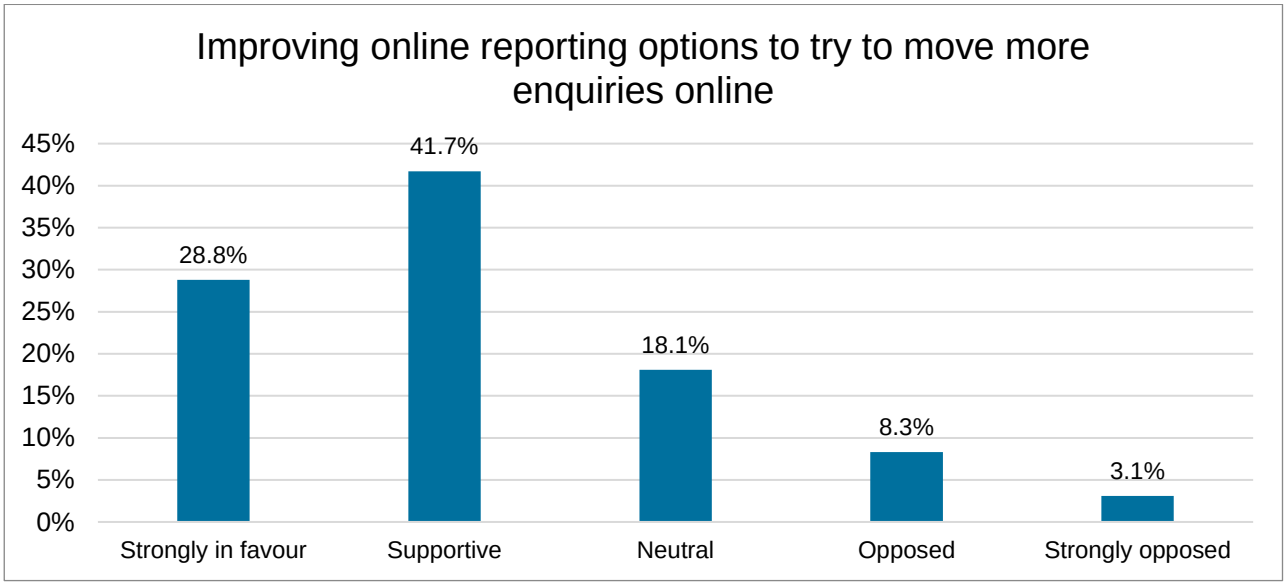
Finding more efficient ways of working

Improving online reporting options to try to move more enquiries online

This proposal is another where the council was seeking public support to expand work which is already underway. Specifically, we wanted feedback on proposals to:

- Invest in better technology to allow more people to contact us and complete straightforward processes online, and to
- Continue broader investigations into new technology, seeking out opportunities to reduce administrative tasks.

These plans were cautiously supported by most respondents.

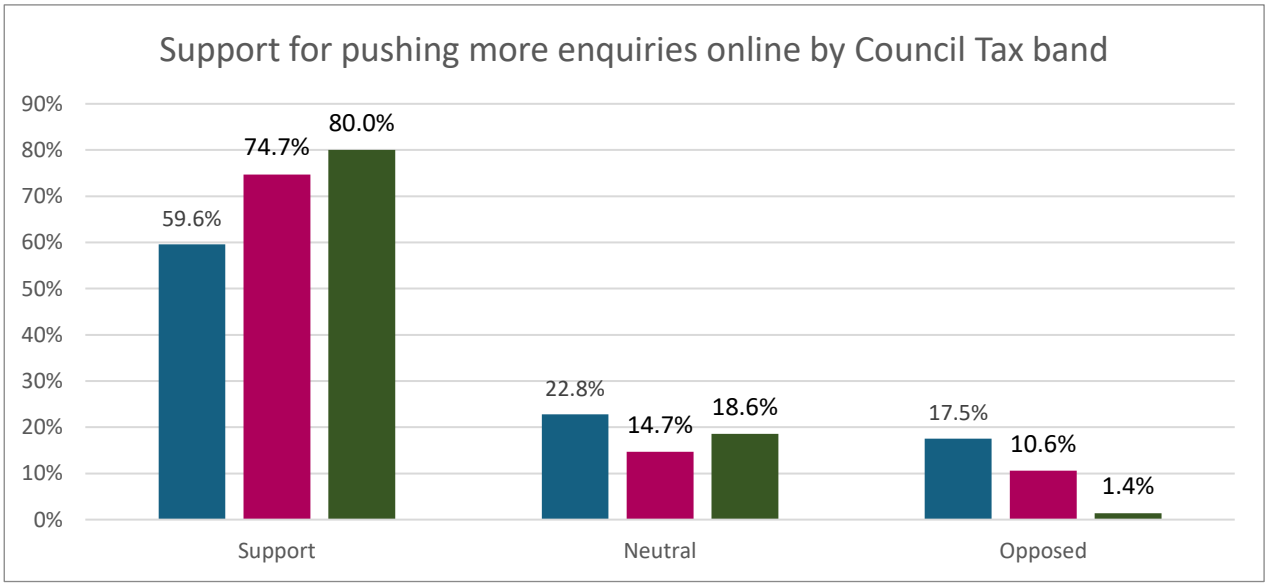


Whilst positive about the overall principles, respondents were concerned that people should not be digitally excluded from accessing support from the council. Additionally, people felt it was important to be able to speak to a person when trying to discuss complex enquiries.

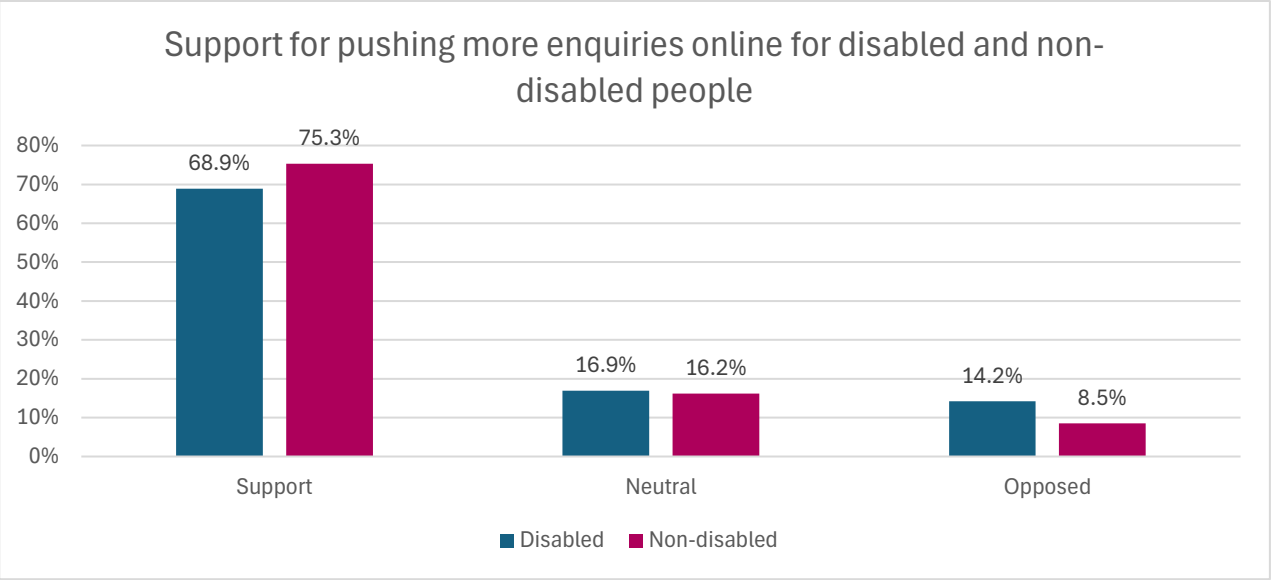
People aged over 60 were significantly less likely to support this change. The majority of this group (69.5%) endorsed the proposal, but this was lower than the figure for people aged under 40 (82.1%) and those aged between 40 and 59 (77.8%). Older people were more likely to be neutral than oppose the change and it is noteworthy from the comments that respondents talk primarily about *other people* being digitally excluded rather than themselves.

The age groups who are least supportive are those aged older than 80 and those between 60 and 69. A possible hypothesis explaining lack of support amongst these two groups might be that people aged over 80 are less likely to have used technology during their working lives and those aged 60-69 may be children of this group, who are concerned about having to support elderly parents who cannot use technology.

However, the data suggests that affordability is the most important factor in determining potential digital exclusion issues. Respondents in the lowest tax bands (A&B) provided the least positive feedback of any group and were significantly more likely to oppose this change than people in higher value homes. For this group, online access may not be affordable and therefore being able to talk directly to council officers is essential.



Accessibility concerns could also be an issue for disabled people. They were significantly more likely to oppose this change than non-disabled people. 14.2% of disabled people expressed a concern.



It is apparent from the responses that the supporting information should have been clearer that allowing more people to complete straightforward processes online, does not mean removing the option for people to speak to someone in person or over the phone. The council has obligations to ensure all segments of the community can access services, especially those with disabilities and additional needs.

"Don't forget Deaf and Hard of Hearing people; some may embrace technology, and it works well for them; others would still prefer face-to-face with a BSL interpreter."

Accepting the above caveats, comments showed that many people are used to, and often find it more convenient, to engage online. However, there was more scepticism about use of AI. People thought the benefits of AI are currently unproven and concerns were raised about the potential for AI to introduce or propagate equality biases.

People are nervous about the costs of technology (both upfront investment and ongoing maintenance). Several mentioned over-running IT projects at other organisations and, having had poor experience using the council's current online reporting forms, worry that the council doesn't have sufficient expertise to deliver technology projects effectively. People question whether new online systems will be any more effective or user friendly and whether the council will achieve the promised efficiencies and savings.

"Public sector IT projects are notoriously unsuccessful. Please proceed with extreme caution, only investing in projects with a compelling business case and clearly defined benefits and timeline.

Ensure contractors deliver with stringent targets and performance penalties."

People suggested steps to reduce risks:

- Plan and resource projects properly,

- Invest in digital skills across the council,
- Carefully manage the project, implementing strong controls over procurement and delivery,
- Buy off-the-shelf solutions rather than designing bespoke,
- Involve staff and service-users in the design of the technology,
- Rigorously test and trial new systems before launching,
- Partner with other public sector organisations to identify the right technologies and share the costs,
- Outsource the IT function to take advantage of external expertise and realise benefits.

"We've invested heavily in AI at my workplace and found efficiencies quickly. It might be worth investing in putting some of your employees through digital apprenticeships using the levy and allowing them to learn and suggest new ways of using data to make decisions and be more efficient."

"How old is the council's IT estate? Does it offer value for money? Could it be outsourced or a shared service with another council to deliver better value for money."

A handful of people felt the council should go further in exploiting technology. Moving more customer services online opens up future options to build a large language model, which could enable common enquiries to be fully automated.

Other than the cost issues, the main area of concern was about the council becoming more remote and unresponsive. To counter this, people suggested holding drop-ins at libraries and other council buildings where members of the public could ask questions and report concerns. Recognising the digital exclusion issue, some respondents felt the council should play a bigger role in offering online training.

A couple of people expressed concerns about online security and one person was worried about potential job losses.

Reducing demand for 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. As well as reducing costs, the council is also considering steps to reduce the number of people needing the most expensive support. Through the consultation, we sought feedback on two of these: Mockingbird and Reablement.

Mockingbird involves giving additional support to foster carers and connecting individual carers into local 'constellations', providing opportunities for families to meet up, to share expertise and experience and spread the load of caring for young people with complex and challenging needs.

We have so far established two groups and have seen benefits for young people, foster carers and for the council. The key benefit is greater stability for young people, which means fewer young people being separated from the people and places they know and placed in expensive residential care. There were only a few comments about this approach. Most comments were supportive, though a couple of respondents wanted confirmation that foster carers were getting the support, backup and resources they need to help young people with the most challenging needs.

Reablement involves increasing support for older people following a stay in hospital. People will typically be cared for in a dedicated setting focused on ongoing care and physiotherapy and re-teaching skills to allow them to remain independent. Evidence suggests that this type of support helps prevent accidents and reduces the number of people who require much more expensive hospital or social care support because they can no longer live independently after a stay in hospital.

Those who commented generally supported greater investment in reablement. It is important that this approach is adequately resourced; a couple of people reported less-positive experiences where the correct support wasn't in place. Other considerations and suggestions relating to reablement and adult social care included:

- Make use of community assets,
- Need to invest in staff training,
- Deliver in partnership health colleagues,
- Also consider the potential of Assistive Technology in improving independence.

"Reablement is a great way of supporting people to be independent. It should be properly resourced and not run as a health model as it should look at a person's health and physical needs to support their emotional and social needs.

You need to consider community resources and how they fit with the reablement approach."

"While expanding initiatives that reduce demand for expensive services is commendable, the council should ensure rigorous cost-benefit analyses are conducted to avoid overinvestment in programmes without measurable long-term savings."

Managing responsibility for delivering and paying for services

The council cannot deliver its priorities on its own. We are reliant on partner organisations in the public, voluntary and charity sectors to work together to improve outcomes for local people. This proposal involved continuing ongoing discussions about which organisations are best placed to deliver services and how the costs of delivering those services can be best shared.

- Talk to Town & Parish Councils and the wider voluntary sector to find the most efficient way to maintain local facilities like public conveniences, playing fields and other open spaces.
- Continue discussions with health partners to ensure we are working efficiently in partnership and agree how everyone can pay their share for the increasing costs of health and social care.

Maintaining local facilities

Feedback in response to these proposals was wide-ranging. What came across strongly from feedback was how important these facilities are to local people.

An article in the local media focused on the prospect of public toilets being closed. This article prompted many comments about the importance of having toilets in public spaces for those with medical conditions. Almost 30 people suggested an alternative funding/delivery model. People thought passing on responsibility might leave facilities underfunded and left in a poor state of repair. Instead, they asked if a more efficient use of money was to open dialogues with pubs, cafes, libraries and other businesses and community buildings which already have well-maintained toilet facilities for their customers. People wondered if these businesses and public buildings could be subsidised to allow non-customers to use their facilities, therefore creating a network of local toilets which local government is not responsible for maintaining.

A couple of people suggested a pay as you go charging model for public conveniences. It is unlikely that any location in South Gloucestershire has the footfall to make this model viable.

Beyond public conveniences, there was broader recognition of the value of local facilities like open spaces and community buildings. People felt they help build a sense of community and pride in a place, providing spaces for people to come together, to enjoy nature and to exercise, bringing wellbeing benefits. Whoever and however it was paid for, for most people, the priority was that these should be invested in. Unfortunately, some respondents believed facilities in their towns and villages were already in a poor state of repair. This lack of investment was considered a false economy, creating vicious circles and negative consequences. including:

- Fewer people go out to walk/exercise *leading to* poorer health *leading to* higher spend on health and social care *leading to* less money to spend on community facilities.
- Less pride in the area *resulting in* higher levels of littering and vandalism *deterring* volunteers getting involved in their community *leading to* even lower pride in place.

"Be wary of false economies.

Leaving areas run-down draws antisocial behaviour and apparent cost savings can rapidly lead to far more costly damage.

Failing to maintain outdoor play and exercise facilities discourages more active lifestyles and will increase healthcare burdens. While you may not feel this on your budget immediately, you will when overall govt. spending must be adjusted.

Vice versa: Investing in things like warm spaces reduces need on fuel allowances, freeing national funds, and reduce loneliness related problems."

The proposal was to discuss with town and parish councils how maintenance costs should be shared. Those sceptical of the proposal felt that the intention was simply to shift the costs on to another level of government (town and parish councils) who can then raise their element of council tax, indirectly passing the costs onto local taxpayers. This group would only accept this change if adequate funding to deliver services was transferred with the responsibility.

"Town and parish councils often do not have the financial resources to take on additional sites and services unless they raise funds through the precept which at the end of the day means more tax for local residents."

Several people felt that this was only a temporary solution, and a more fundamental review of responsibilities and funding was needed. Some questioned the need for both local government and town/parish councils and felt it would be more transparent if the most local public bodies were abolished, so residents were clear where responsibilities lay and who they needed to contact for support. This point was particularly fervently argued by a couple of respondents who live in recently parished areas.

"Why do we need local, town and parish councils? You should be dismantling all this expensive bureaucracy and centralising everything as much as possible. Far too many levels of management and cost."

Several alternative suggestions were made with regards to how local facilities could be delivered and paid for, and how costs could be reduced:

- Housing developers pay more through Section 106 funding (and South Gloucestershire Council must spend this money),
- Seek corporate funding:
    - Social value contributions as part of tender negotiations,
    - Sponsorship of facilities by local companies.
- Facilities (particularly sports fields) paid for by groups who use them,
- Involve environmental action groups in caring for local areas,

- Considering income-generating opportunities for open spaces,
- Reduce mowing frequency for open spaces to deliver biodiversity benefits.

Whose responsibility should it be?

Arguments were made for and against responsibility being transferred to town and parish councils. Those supporting this change felt town councils understood their areas best and could better prioritise what was important to residents.

Others felt some local councils didn't have capacity to deliver maintenance themselves and this would end up with South Gloucestershire Council still delivering services with taxpayers paying more because of additional administration costs. People also thought transferring responsibility to more local levels would increase costs as smaller organisations wouldn't have the same economies of scale and more money would need to be spent on specialist equipment.

"The focus should be on streamlining operations and avoiding overlapping responsibilities. By exploring more efficient models for maintaining local facilities, the council could reduce costs while ensuring these services are preserved."

Another group took the standpoint that delivering local facilities is what local government is for. Several felt the council had set the wrong priorities (including spending too much on social care) and/or asked what their council tax was paying for.

Volunteers

Respondents considered the merits of volunteers or community groups playing a bigger role. Most thought a partnership approach with volunteers playing a greater role was positive. However, others felt volunteers may not have the time, expertise or access to equipment. The principle of local ownership was supported and a couple of people asked about allocating specific council staff responsibility for their own 'patch' of South Gloucestershire to maintain and / or to build connection with the community and better understand their priorities. A couple of people suggested the council could be doing more to leverage volunteer hours offered by some large employers.

"People volunteer to make a difference, not to enable the council to cut back on services. Volunteer numbers are down as people find it harder to make ends meet and have less time as they are often supporting families and loved ones."

Managing the costs of social care

The cost of social care dwarfs what is spent on local facilities. There were, however, far fewer comments considering how these rapidly increasing costs could be best managed. The most frequently cited point raised was that funding for social care should not be cut.

Nine people agreed that the council should step up local discussions with health partners about costs in South Gloucestershire. Six people talked about the opportunities to deliver better support if there was closer alignment between health and social care by for

example setting up data sharing agreements. Another ten said that what was required was a complete review of social care to be considered alongside wider NHS reform.

"Experience shows attempts to define what is a health and what is a social care responsibility will be a waste of time. Better would be pooling resources for community care and running a joint service."

"The system is such a mess that until it is reformed by central government it is never going to work effectively."

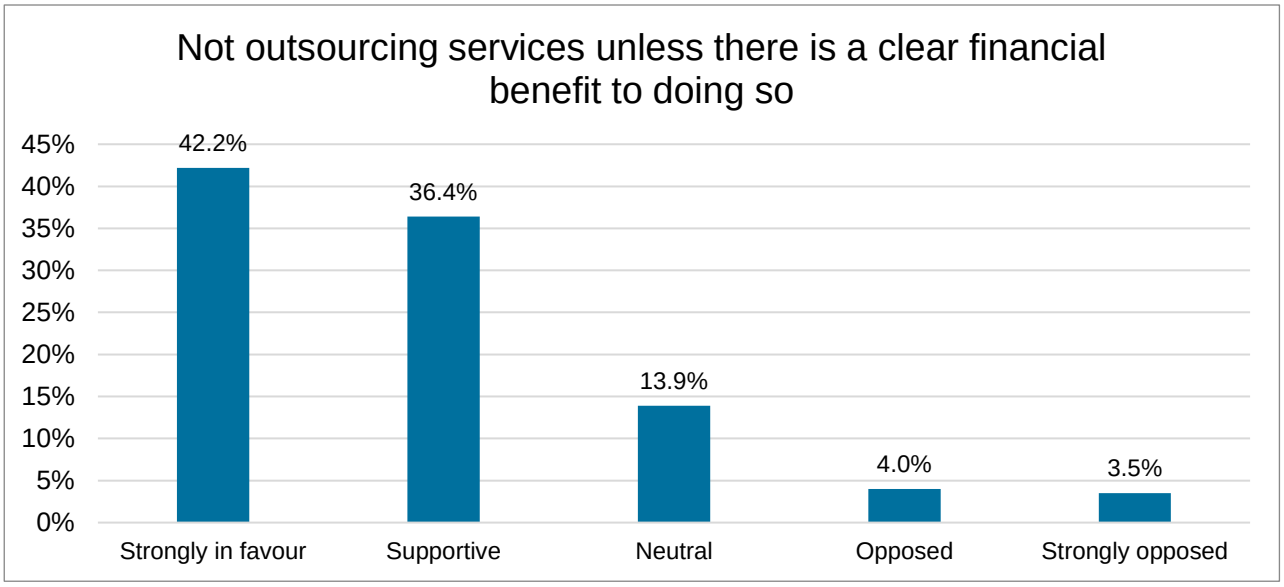
Some people felt the council was providing too much support or had set the bar too low to access support and that families should pick up more of the burden. Others were opposed to the self-funding model and believed the council should pay care costs for everyone, even if families could afford it.

"People who need social care should fund it themselves. This generation have had their entire lives to plan for their needs in old age."

Approach to outsourcing

No new measures were proposed in this area. The consultation provided an opportunity to check in with local opinion to ensure people continue to support the council's approach of not outsourcing services unless there is a clear financial benefit to doing so.

Feedback from local people showed strong support for this approach, with 78.6% in favour and only 7.5% preferring the council change tack.



The overwhelming majority of people preferred services to be kept in house, feeling that outsourcing was more costly over the longer term because private companies need to deliver profits and returns to shareholders. Outsourcing was also considered more

expensive as it meant two levels of management (outsourcer and council) monitoring performance. Attracting good calibre staff on competitive salaries was seen as the best way forward.

"The profit and service motives are not always in opposition - but very often they are."

"Outsourcing moves the work not the accountability, so you end up double paying at junior and middle management layers."

Women were more supportive than men of the proposed approach to outsourcing decisions. 84.3% of women agreed, compared with 77.8% of men.

Other benefits of keeping services in-house which respondents raised included:

- Council can deliver services more reliably,
- Keeping things in-house provides greater control over services,
- Council staff care more about delivering a better service,
- Council delivering services provides local jobs and wider social benefits,
- Outsourcing can lead to lost knowledge.

Those who favoured outsourcing thought:

- The council is inefficient – private companies are better run,
- Outsourcing pushes risks onto private companies,
- Private companies are more accountable for results.

A handful of people thought that part of the council's motivation for keeping services in-house was to protect the jobs of its staff.

Several people asked what analysis was conducted to decide whether outsourcing was the right approach. Quality of service and value for money was considered a better measure than cost alone. People stressed the importance of considering all factors and costs; respondents with expertise in this area pointed out that often organisations did not factor in the internal costs of procurement and managing suppliers. Equally, those advocating external provision wanted reassurance that cost/benefit analysis considered the full costs of employing council staff, including pensions.

Guidance was offered in terms of which services were more appropriate for outsourcing – typically those requiring specialist expertise or equipment, rather than labour intensive processes. Respondents highlighted that they'd like to see lower spend on external consultants.

"There are times when the private sector can be far more efficient - very specialist work for example. However, I strongly support the Council keeping what it currently does in-house. Letting more and more be outsourced leads to de-skilling, and there is no way back from that."

If services were outsourced, people felt local companies should be preferred and social value provision should be another consideration in choosing suppliers. The key concern though was that there should be clear, enforceable performance targets in place, with regular reviews throughout the term of the contract. The example of the strikes by Suez staff providing bin collections was given as an example of what can go wrong without adequate controls in place.

Whilst advocating in-house provision, people thought the council could learn from outsourcing providers, who were considered lean, efficient and agile.

Finally, it is clear from responses that there is considerable experience amongst survey respondents in procurement and outsourcing. There may be opportunities for the council to tap into this expertise.

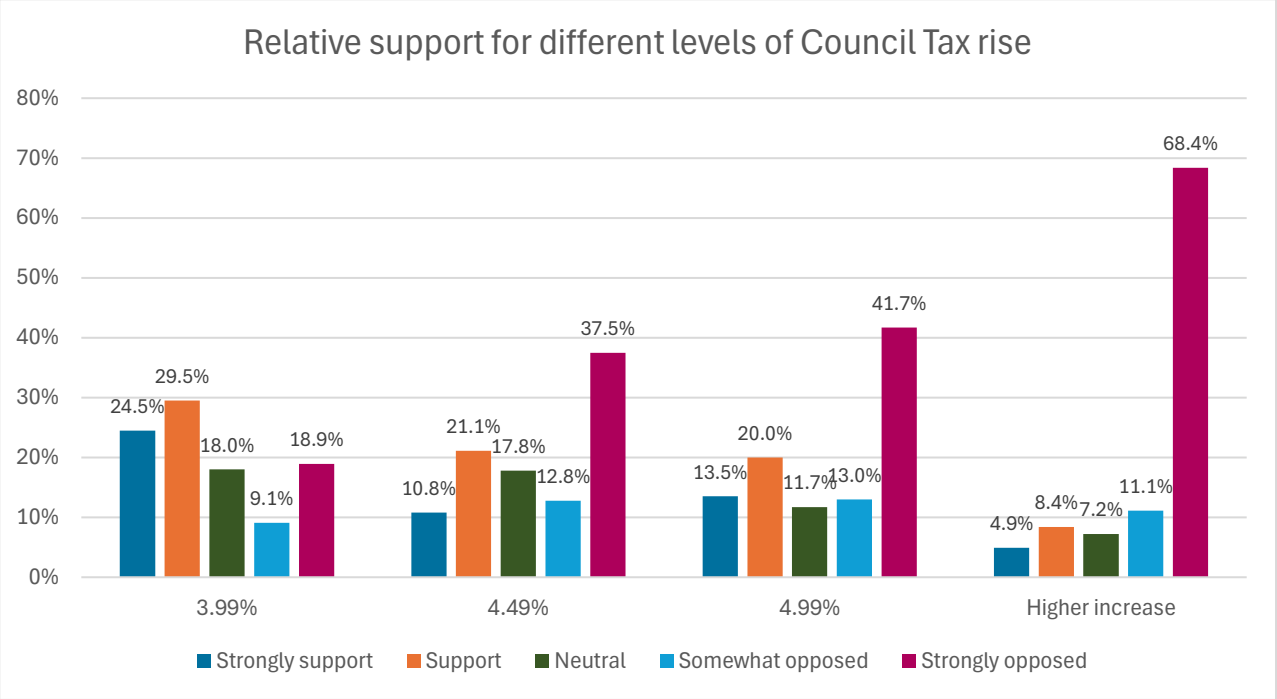
"There are many individuals in the community who have private industry experience of delivering service value in many sectors - have you considered asking for help from the community in the form of volunteers to have a closer review of your outsourcing decisions?"

Generating additional income

Views on different levels of Council Tax increase

The consultation asked for feedback on four options for Council Tax increases: 3.99%, 4.49%, 4.99% and a higher increase*. The consultation presented a preferred option of 4.99% - the same increase that has been implemented for several years. However, unlike in consultations in previous years, the spread of options was set much narrower. This range of options reflects the realistic choices open to the council - any increase below 3.99% would mean the council could not deliver a legal, balanced budget without cutting services, including support to vulnerable people.

* An increase of above 4.99% would require a local referendum



The lowest increases were more popular/less unpopular with local people. The option for the lowest increase of 3.99% was supported by over half (54%) of respondents. However, even this was too high for many people, who strongly opposed each of the proposed increases and commented that an above inflationary increase was either unjustified or unaffordable to local people. The levels of support were similar for increases of 4.49% and 4.99%, which suggests that many respondents supported a 3.99% increase simply because it was the lowest option available.

Whilst a third of people accepted the 4.99% increase that has been assumed in the council's financial modelling, 41.7% of respondents strongly opposed it.

More so than in previous years, opposition to tax increases was based on affordability rather than ideological concerns. In the commentary box which went alongside this question, 158 people mentioned that an increase at this level could result in people struggling financially. 72 people objected to tax rises when services were being cut and 65 raised value-for-money concerns.

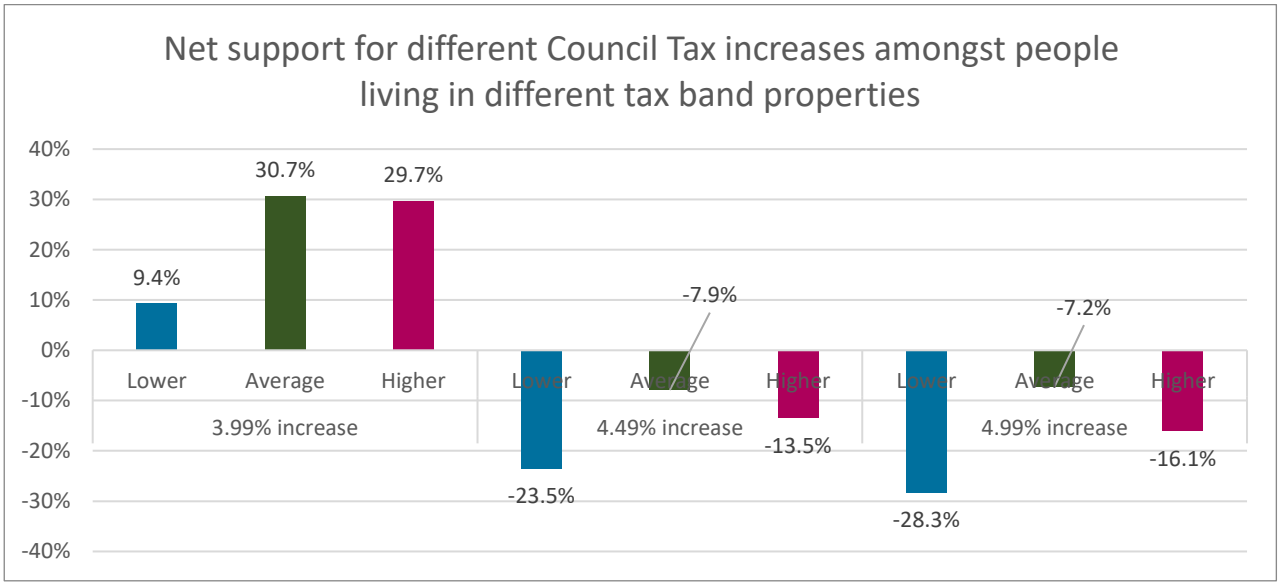
"Council tax is now many people's largest monthly bill. It's already too high in many cases."

The consultation included an option for higher increases than the 4.99% cap currently permitted without a local referendum. This was the least popular of the suggested increases and some respondents commented that holding a referendum would be a waste of money.

Those supporting the Council Tax increases recognised the financial challenges councils face and accepted this increase as the price to pay to prevent cuts to services. However, with affordability already a concern for many people, respondents felt above inflationary increases in Council Tax could not be considered a long-term solution. Linked to this, one

person asked whether the adult social care precept was still ‘temporary’ or if this is now a permanent addition to tax.

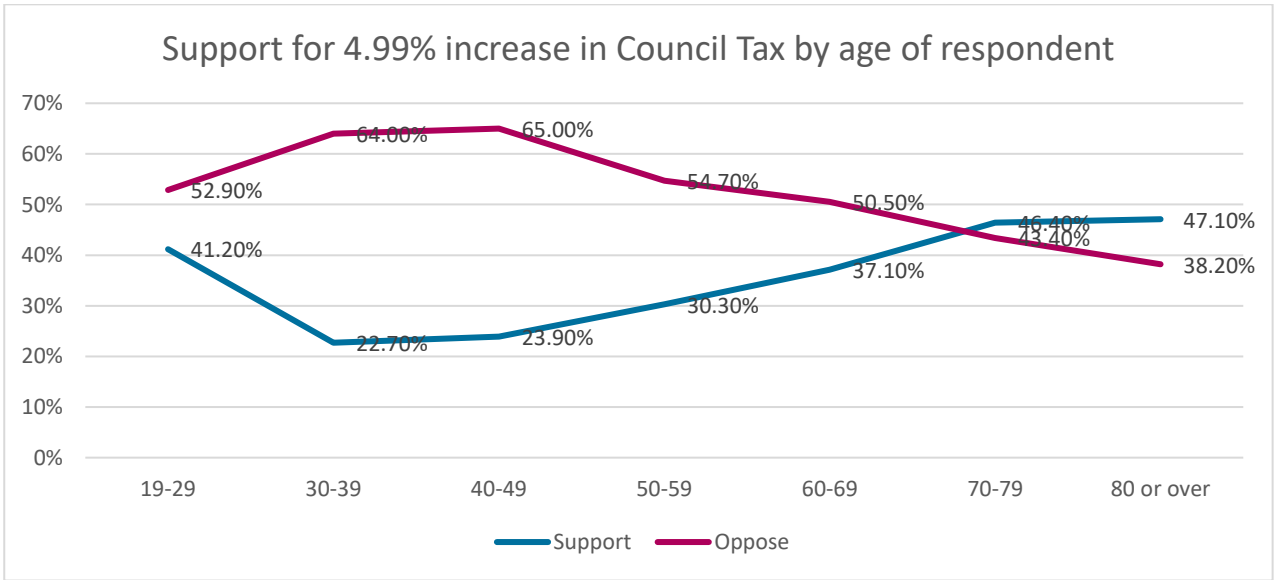
Data comparing the responses of people who live in houses with different tax bands provides evidence that affordability is a concern. For this analysis, lower value properties are those in tax bands A and B, average is C to E and higher is F-H.



Looking at the responses of those living in lower tax band properties first, there is lower net support for each of the options for increases. Sentiment is more negative for the higher increases, with negative 28.3% net support for an increase of 4.99%.

The figures for the highest tax bands are also interesting. Affordability is unlikely to be such a concern for this group of respondents, yet they are much less likely than the average council taxpayer to support higher increases. This group strongly favours the lowest level of increase.

People who receive additional support through the Council Tax Reduction Scheme are less likely to support the increase of 4.99%, though there are too few respondents in this position to prove this difference with any statistical confidence.

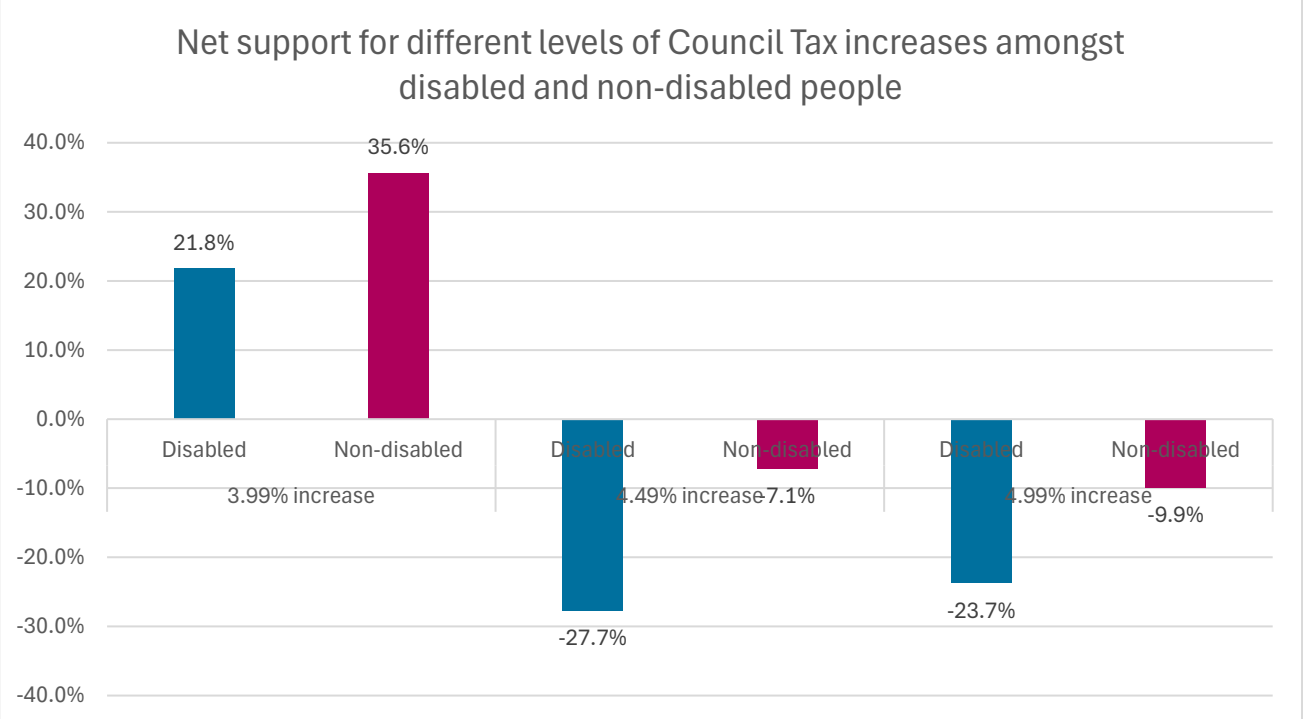


Plotting the different responses by the age of respondents shows a fascinating trend. There are very few respondents aged 19-29, so we have low confidence in these data points. However, for the age groups where we have more comprehensive data, there is a clear and statistically significant pattern whereby the older a respondent is, the more likely they are to support the increase in Council Tax. This could be because in South Gloucestershire older people are comparatively wealthier and less likely to have concerns about affordability of Council Tax, or perhaps it is linked to older people being more likely to be recipients of council services like adult social care, which accounts for almost half of all day-to-day council spending.

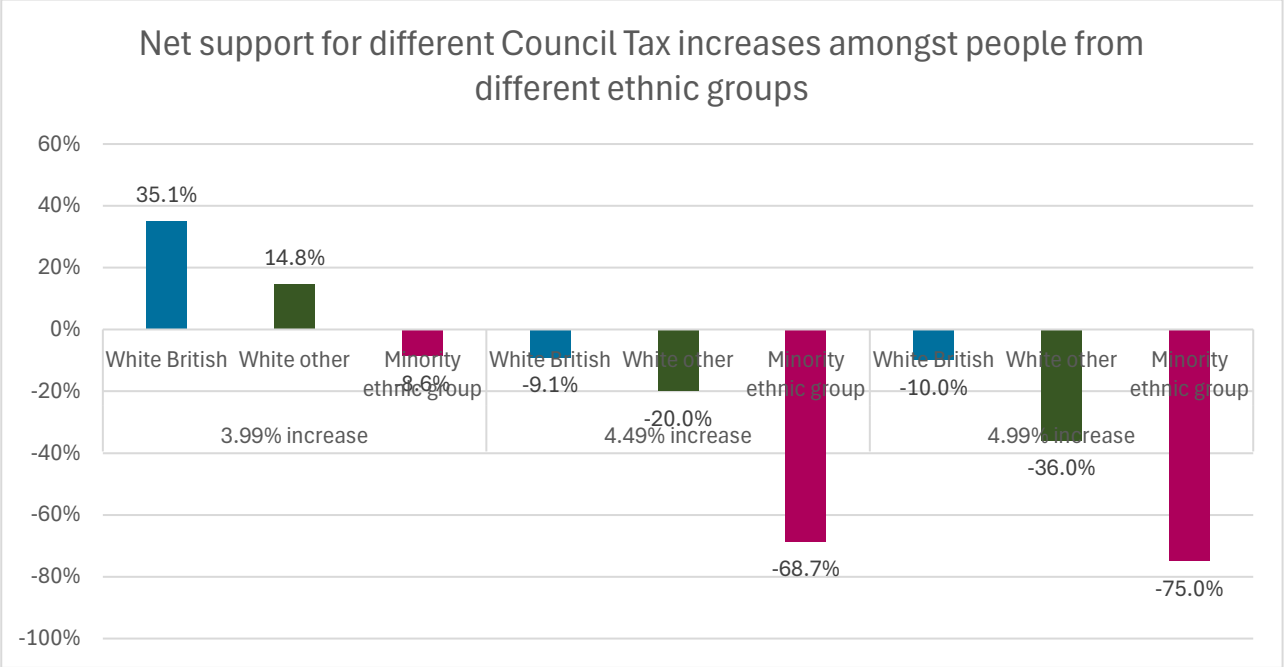
People with dependents are more likely to oppose the proposed increase. Without further analysis of this group, it is difficult to infer whether this is related to affordability concerns due to the cost of looking after dependents. People with dependents are less likely to be in the older age groups which we have seen are more likely to be supportive.

There are also differences in the responses of people with different employment statuses. Retired people are more likely than working people to support the increase. Again, it is difficult from the data available to determine whether this difference is driven by their employment status or if age is the key factor. There is a more clear-cut trend with people in the 'other' employment status group, which includes the long-term sick and disabled, students, unemployed people and those looking after their home or family. This group are significantly less likely to support the increases, and it is likely that affordability is the key factor.

Disabled people are statistically significantly less likely to support increases in Council Tax. The difference in the responses between disabled and non-disabled people are most pronounced (and statistically significant) for increases of 4.49% and 4.99%. Again, this is likely linked to affordability issues as disabled people are more likely to suffer financial hardship.



People who are not White British are also significantly less likely to support increases in Council Tax. This is especially the case for people within the Minority Ethnic Group category; 81.3% of whom are opposed to the 4.99% increase in Council Tax which has been proposed as the default option.



Finally, people with experience in the armed forces are less likely to support the 4.99% increase, though respondent numbers are too low to prove this with any level of confidence.

"I would be more supportive if the medium to long term strategy was clearer. There is little conversation to support reducing dependency on services.

At what point do you think continual increases can be sustainable?"

Substantial numbers of people felt the Council Tax system needed reform – mostly a re-evaluation of bandings. Others wanted increased funding from Central Government, or for local government to be given more local tax-raising powers.

"I think raising local taxes to meet local costs is rational. It would be even more rational if this equation was progressive i.e. council tax is collected from those who can most afford it. Can the council press the government for a revaluation of tax bands?"

Many people commented on the value for money of Council Tax. Often, this reflects a lack of awareness of what taxes pay for or a misunderstanding of the role of local government. Some people didn't understand how with increasing numbers of houses (and therefore more households paying Council Tax) why taxes needed to increase.

"Better communication of why council tax is above inflation every year, yet services are often being cut. Where is the money going? Is it waste? Or corruption?"

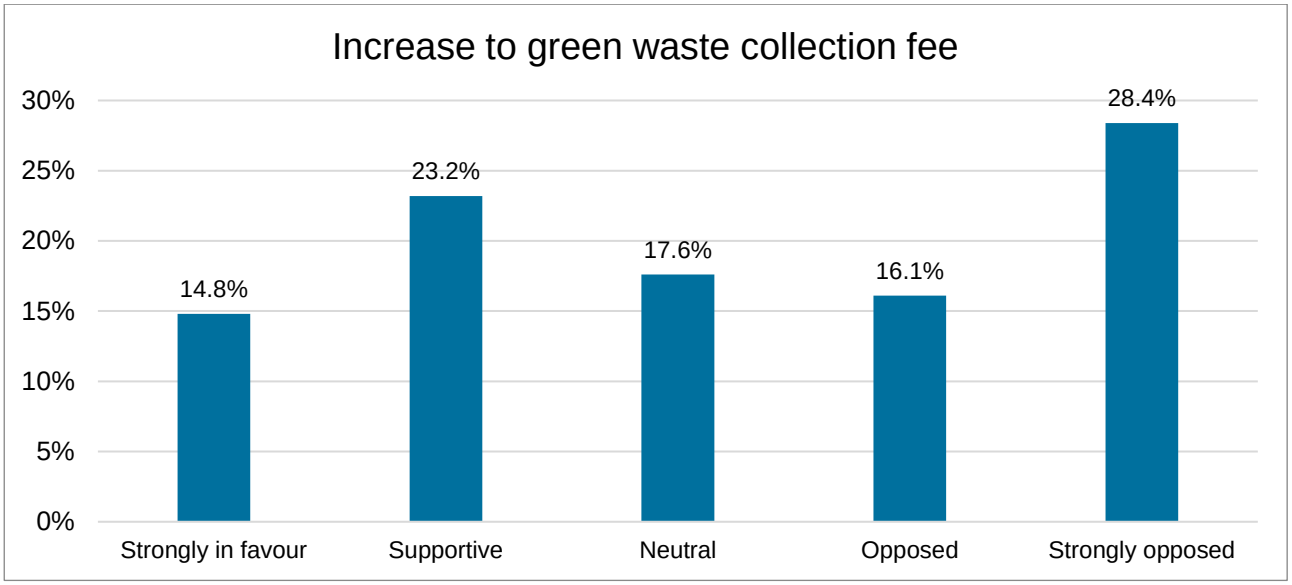
Additionally, some people expressed (not always constructively) their objection to the state's role in addressing issues like tackling inequalities. Several people asked why they should have to pay for others (including immigrants/anyone not from South Gloucestershire, students, gypsy travellers, cyclists), or for particular causes (for example addressing inequalities, reducing environmental damage and mitigating the effects of changing climate).

Respondents suggested preferences for how Council Tax increases could be avoided. Many of the below options are already being enacted and/or have been considered through this consultation:

- Be more efficient,
- Reduce spending,
- Increase charges for non-discretionary services e.g. green bin collections,
- Better collection of debt/Council Tax arrears,
- Outsourcing,
- Sell/rent council offices,
- Merge with town/parish councils.

Increasing charges for green bin collections

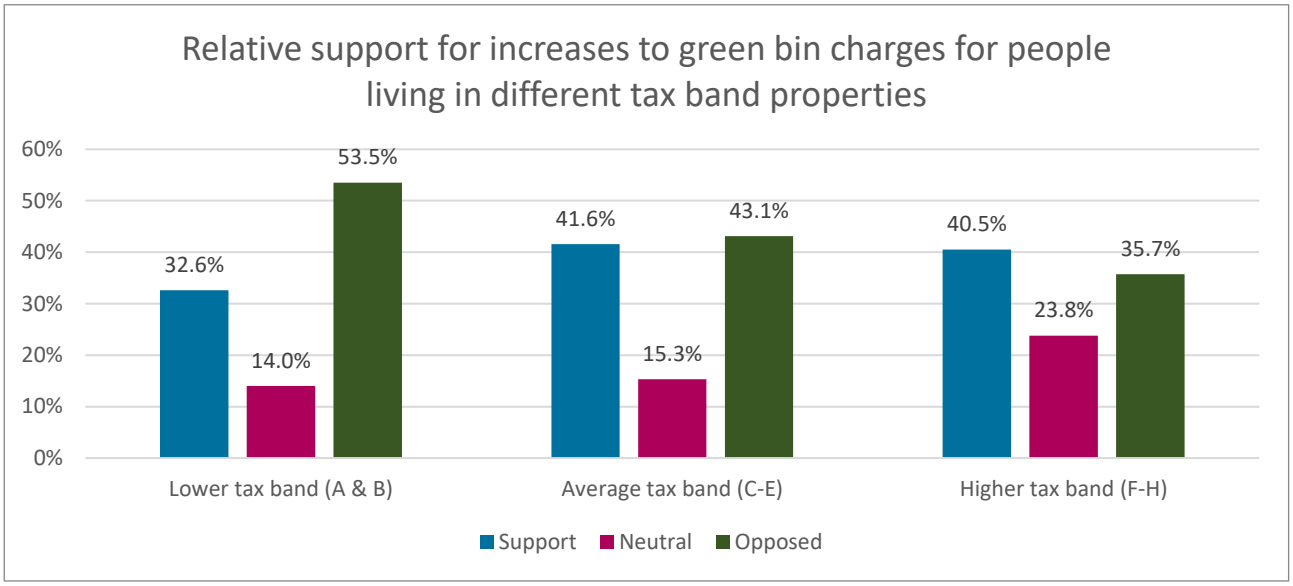
Views on increases to green bin collections are split. Whilst over a third (38%) of people supported the increases, a slightly larger proportion (44.5%) were opposed.



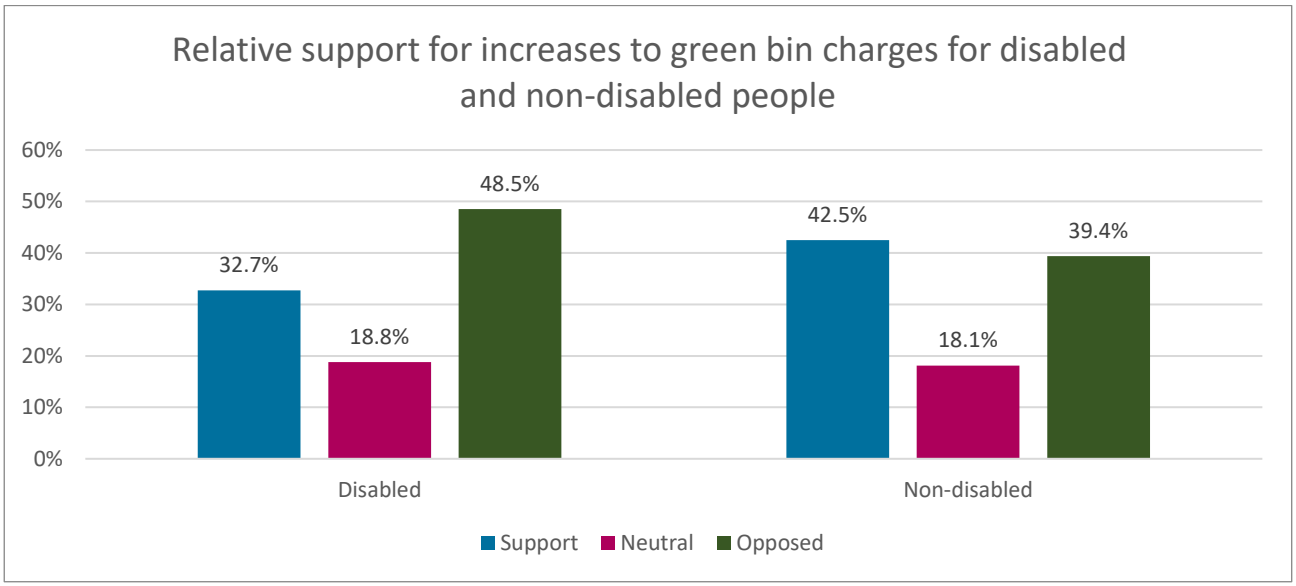
People's main objection was that the fee had gone up by so much last year. With this further increase, those taking out subscriptions felt the annual costs were now too expensive.

Affordability may be an issue for some. Service subscribers are those residents with gardens, who are proportionately more likely to be middle to higher income wage earners. However, this does not mean that 'low income' residents will not be affected.

Although there are too few responses to prove this hypothesis with confidence, the statistics indicate that people living in lower council tax band properties are more opposed to the increases than people living in higher council tax band properties.



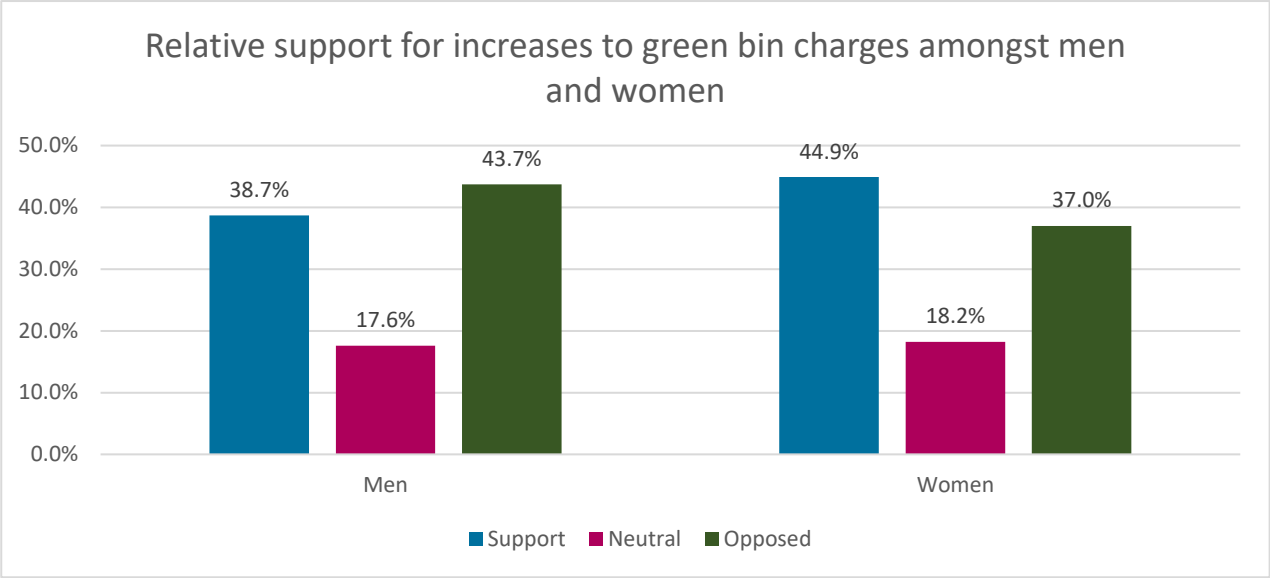
There is a more statistically significant difference between the responses of disabled and non-disabled people. Net support for the increase is 3.1% for those without a disability, but disabled people are more likely to be opposed – the comparative net figure for this group is minus 15.8%.



A handful of people asked that the council introduce subsidised collections for lower income households and disabled people. They pointed out that the collection service is the only option some groups have to dispose of green waste responsibly. Lower income people are less likely to own a private vehicle and disabled people may have other challenges taking green waste to a Sort It recycling centre.

The data shows with some statistical significance that women are more likely to be supportive of the increase in the green bin charges than men are. It is difficult to surmise

why this might be – perhaps men are more likely to be gardeners than women in South Gloucestershire.



"Increasing to £70 is a huge hike and many are on the breadline already. There will be an increase in fly tipping or neglected gardens."

Some people didn't feel the increased charge was justified and some rejected the claim that this increase brought fees into line with what is charged elsewhere. Several people questioned why the costs of providing the service were so high, particularly as these costs could be partly offset by income generated from producing compost.

A fee has been charged for this service for several years now, but some people still do not accept that they should have to pay more on top of their Council Tax.

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 would find less positive ways of disposing of it:

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

This would reduce the council's income (fewer subscriptions) and add to costs (more black bin/recycling centre waste to manage). It was also seen to act against the council's wider priorities to increase the proportion of waste being recycled and could deter people from gardening (which has wider social benefits in keeping people active) or encourage people to remove green spaces if they couldn't afford to maintain them any longer.

"I would like to understand your rationale. Do you expect more fly tipping? Do you want garden owners to concrete over gardens and increase flood exposure? What is the strategy?"

"Many older people love their gardens which keeps them healthy and increases their wellbeing, keeping the stress and worry of modern life at bay."

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 to once every three weeks,
- Identifying people who have stopped paying but are still putting out waste for collection,
- Introducing a tiered service with higher charges for larger gardens and lower for those who need less frequent collections.

Others advocated incentivising composting as an alternative – either home composting or community composting schemes.

A handful of people thought charging for green waste collections was back to front. They advocated introducing charges for collection of black bin waste to incentivise recycling, composting and more responsible ways of managing waste. A couple of people suggested charging for visits to the Sort It centre.

"You have it backwards. You should lobby the government to change the law to allow you to charge for black bin collection. This way the resident will pay for what they use."

Ensuring we are collecting all that we are owed

Through the consultation, the council set out plans to improve efficiency and effectiveness of its debt collection processes. Very few people commented on this proposal. Those who did, agreed that this should be a priority.

Stopping, cutting back and prioritising services and support

No direct cuts to services were put forward for public consultation at this time. However, it was proposed to open discussions with partner organisations regarding the funding the council currently provides them to work towards joint priorities.

Most people responding to this question recognised the important work that voluntary, charity and community sector (VCSE) organisations do, specifically highlighting the work they do to support vulnerable groups. At the same time, there were concerns from some respondents that these organisations tend to focus on minority interests and that money would be better spent supporting the widest demographic of people.

Feedback from the Equalities Voice partnership, which represents many of the main VCSE organisations the council works with spoke of the extra value that these organisations can provide in leveraging additional funds to support joint priorities. However, some survey respondents felt that keeping budgets in-house affords better control over spend and that delivering services in-house supports better outcomes.

Several people highlighted the financial challenges facing this sector. Others felt that these organisations must become financially independent.

Of the people who commented, most supported an approach whereby the council conducted individual cost/benefit analysis for each partner arrangement to ensure funding was being used effectively.

Across a few questions in the survey, people commented that it was difficult to provide informed feedback without further detail. This was especially the case for this proposal. Commercial arrangements meant only high-level information could be shared as part of the consultation. The next steps would be to discuss any changes with individual organisations and, where appropriate, running separate engagement/consultation.

Feedback on services

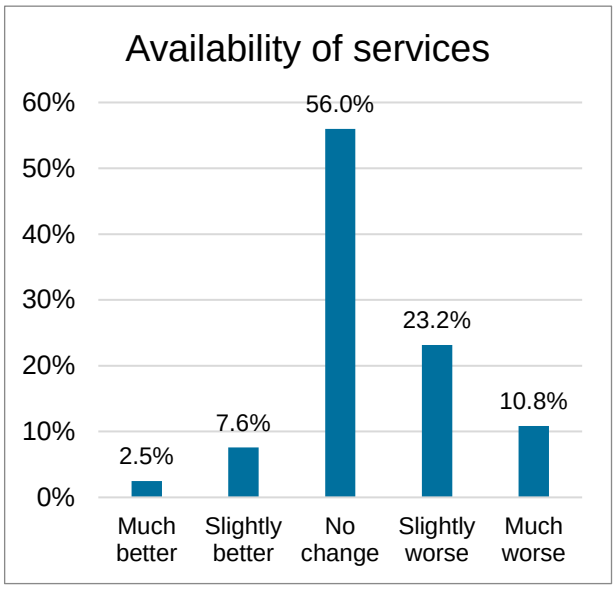
Since 2010, the council has delivered cuts and savings of over £100m. Wherever possible, we've tried to do this in ways which improve our efficiency, minimising the impact on our residents and service users.

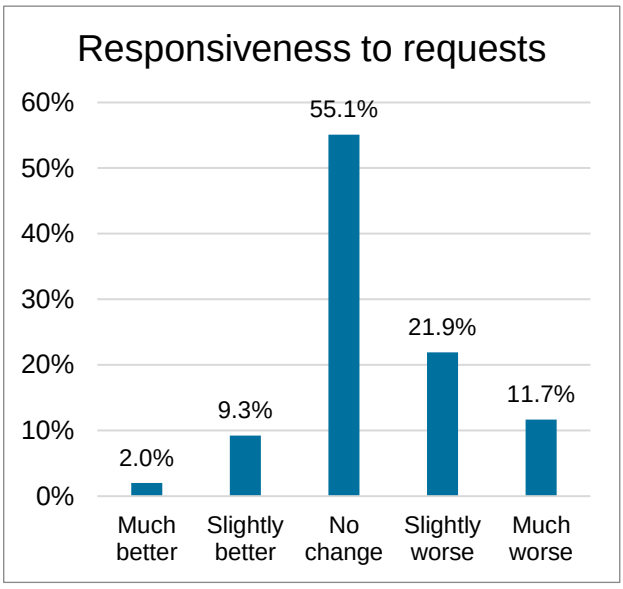
However, the scale of the cuts has meant that we haven't always been able to maintain service delivery to the same level. We were keen to understand from local people what the impact has been for them.

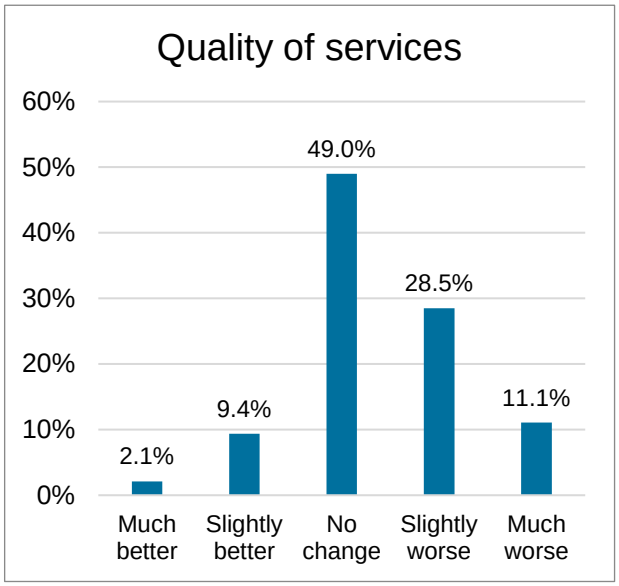
How the council delivers services

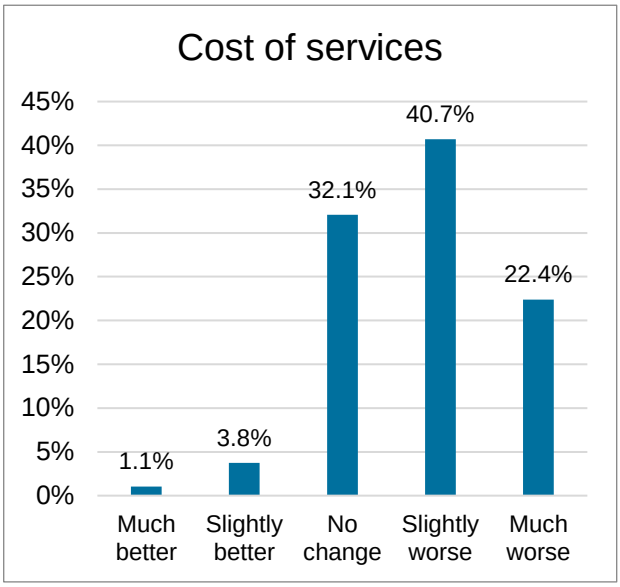
We used four metrics to evaluate residents' perceptions of how the council delivers services:

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







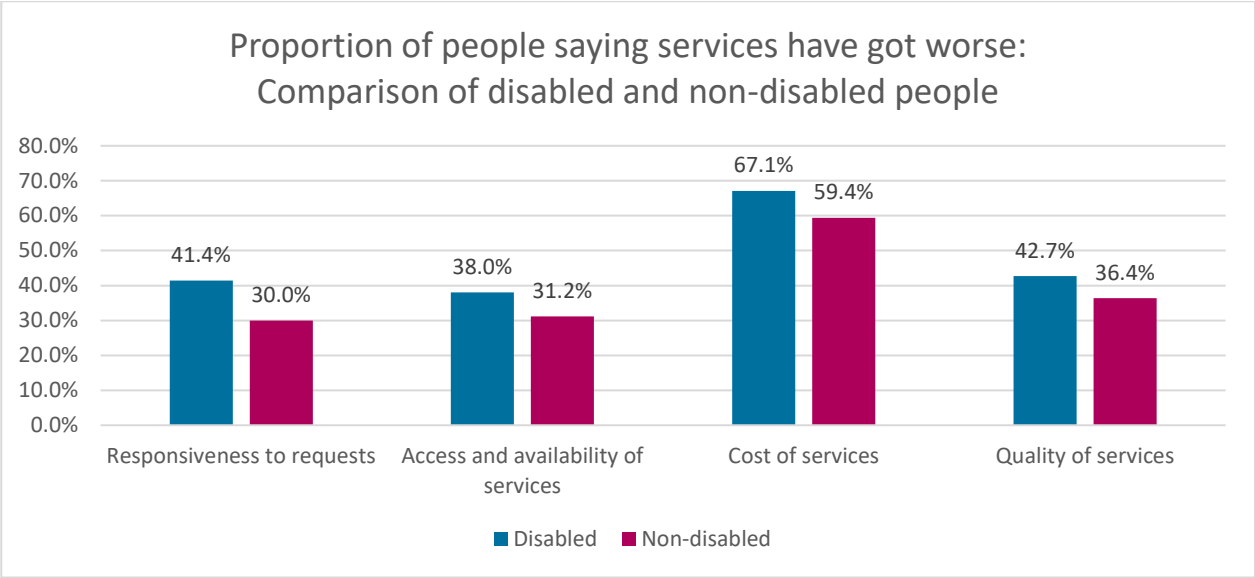


For three of the four performance metrics, the majority view was that there had been no change. In saying that, across all four of the measures, people were much more likely to report declining performance rather than improvements.

Variable	Proportion who thought this had improved	Proportion who thought this had got worse	Net improvement (deterioration)
Availability of services	10.1%	34.0%	(23.9%)
Responsiveness to requests	11.3%	33.6%	(22.3%)
Quality of services	11.5%	39.6%	(28.1%)
Cost of services	4.9%	63.1%	(58.2%)

Feedback on the cost of services stands out. Almost two thirds of survey respondents believed that the cost of services had got worse, (between a third and 40% of respondents felt other aspects of service delivery had deteriorated over this same period). This is likely a reflection of recent increases to Council Tax - and of course the proposal which respondents were providing feedback on in this survey - to increase Council Tax by a further 4.99% for the upcoming financial year. The increases have driven perceptions of declining ‘value for money’. Most people use very few council services, and many don’t have a good understanding of what taxes pay for.

Disabled people were much more likely to provide feedback that things have got worse, with notable differences in feedback about responsiveness to requests.



Younger people were comparatively more positive. Those aged under 40 were significantly more likely than other age groups to report that services had become more accessible and had improved in quality. However, this was a very low bar to rise above and as with other groups, a higher proportion of younger people thought things had deteriorated than those who noted improvements.

	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	16.7%	10.4%	8.6%	14.8%	11.3%	11.0%	4.4%	4.0%	4.9%	16.7%	8.8%	12.0%
No change	42.2%	55.5%	58.4%	58.0%	55.0%	54.2%	32.2%	28.4%	35.6%	40.0%	48.5%	50.7%
Worse	41.1%	34.1%	33.0%	27.3%	33.6%	34.8%	63.3%	67.6%	59.5%	43.3%	42.7%	37.3%

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%

The only other difference between different demographic groups which can be demonstrated with confidence relates to the feedback provided by men and women regarding the quality of services. Men are much less positive than women; 41.2% of men felt services had declined over the last five years, compared with 32.6% of women.

Feedback on delivering outcomes

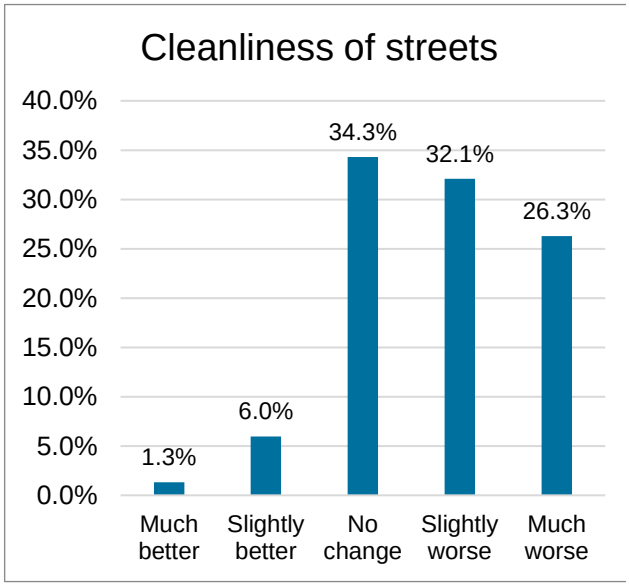
More detailed feedback was captured about the outcomes the council is trying to deliver for local people.

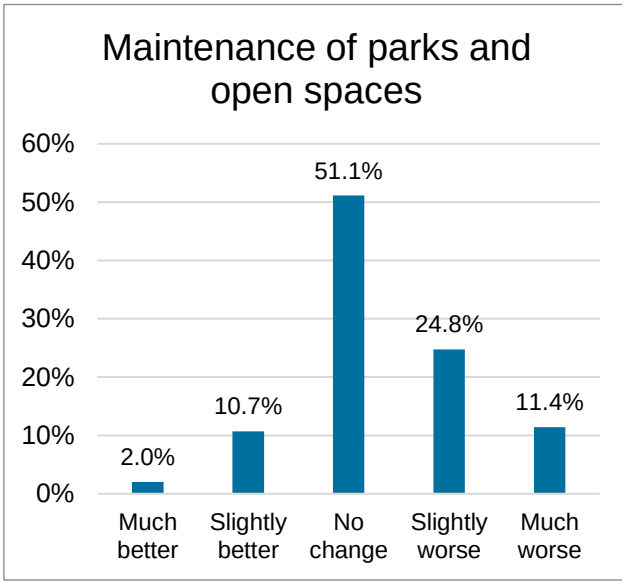
In general, feedback on delivery of outcomes follows a similar pattern to the trends highlighted above. ‘No change’ attracted the highest proportion of responses for most aspects of local life. However, for each measure, there are far more people who think things have got worse than the number who report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

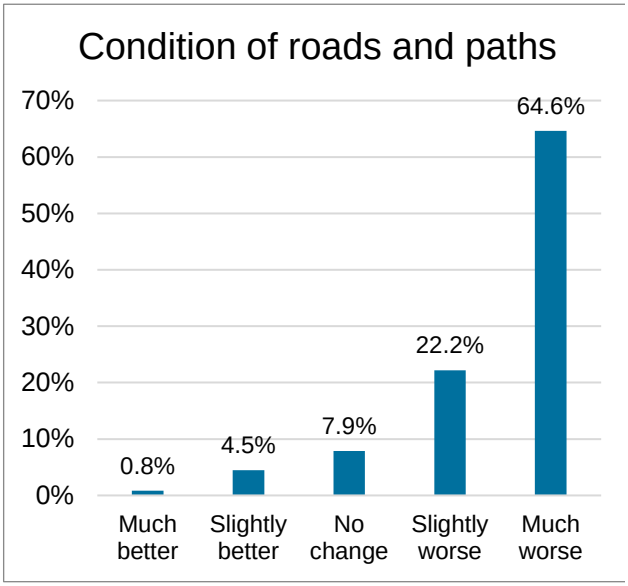
Across multiple metrics, there are patterns showing groups which are most and least satisfied with how the council is delivering on its priority outcomes. Disabled people, people in the White British ethnic group and carers are consistently more likely to say things have got worse. Whilst no individual group provides feedback that things have improved over the last five years, military veterans and members of the armed forces provide significantly less negative feedback than others.

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 most responses.

86.8% of respondents felt road and path conditions have deteriorated over the last five years and over half (58.4%) felt that cleanliness of streets had got worse.

Feedback on maintenance of parks and open spaces was much more positive. People with dependents under the age of 18 (most likely to be the primary users of these facilities) are significantly likelier to think maintenance of parks and other open spaces has improved.

Every demographic group believe roads and paths have deteriorated over the last five years. However, the data indicates that this is a much more important issue to some groups than others. Older age groups, men and people of White British ethnicity provide more negative feedback than younger people, women and other Minority Ethnic groups.

This pattern is replicated when people are asked about the cleanliness of streets. Those aged over 60 are significantly more likely than other age groups to think the situation has got worse. Likewise, men provide less positive feedback than women. And people of White British ethnicity are less likely to think things have improved and more likely to report declining standards compared with other minority ethnic groups.

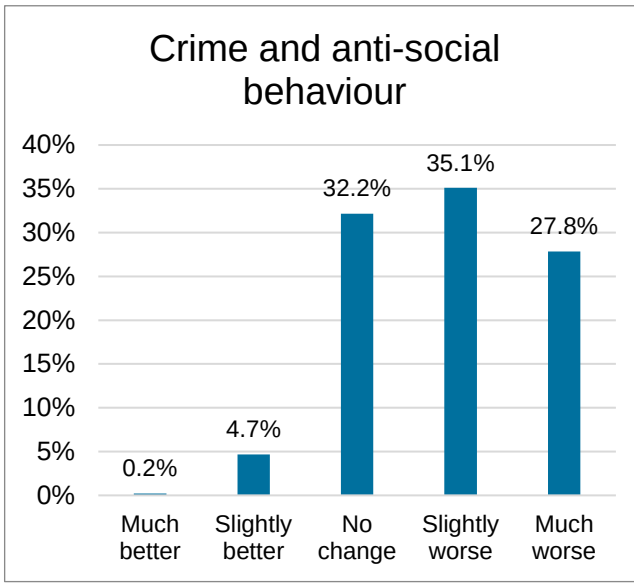
It is clear, that there is a group, with similar demographic characteristics who believe their 'place' has got worse. In their comments many talk about wanting the council to focus on what they see as the basics: collecting rubbish, fixing potholes, addressing drainage issues and reducing congestion.

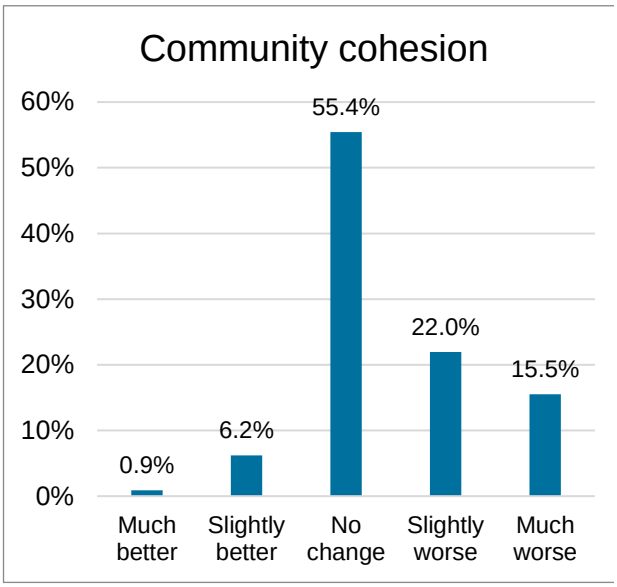
"Reduce recycling collections to every two weeks. Continue black bin collections every two weeks. Concentrate on basic issues like waste collection, street cleaning and road repairs. Stop all other "events" such as the annual show, celebrating Ukraine and celebrating Black Lives Matter."

Community cohesion and crime

Whilst respondents believe community cohesion has remined stable, crime and anti-social behaviour are considered to have got worse over the past five years. This

feedback indicating people think crime has become a bigger problem has been picked up across many surveys, local and national. This isn't always borne out by the data – in some cases, *perception* of crime is the real issue.





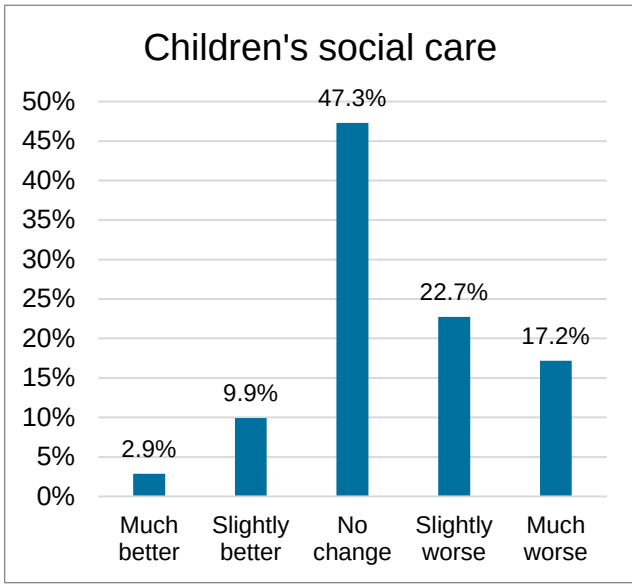
There are quite stark differences in feedback provided by different groups. Taking cohesion first. Men, people aged under 40, and disabled people are significantly more likely to think their community is less cohesive than it was five years ago, whilst a higher proportion of people from Minority Ethnic Groups think things have improved.

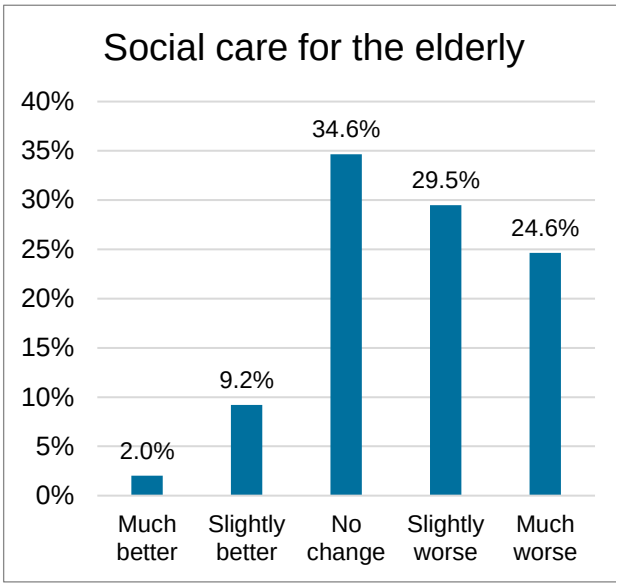
The same trends are seen with regards to crime and anti-social behaviour, although the differences are less marked. It would be interesting to compare these trends with the data showing which groups are most likely to be a victim of crime.

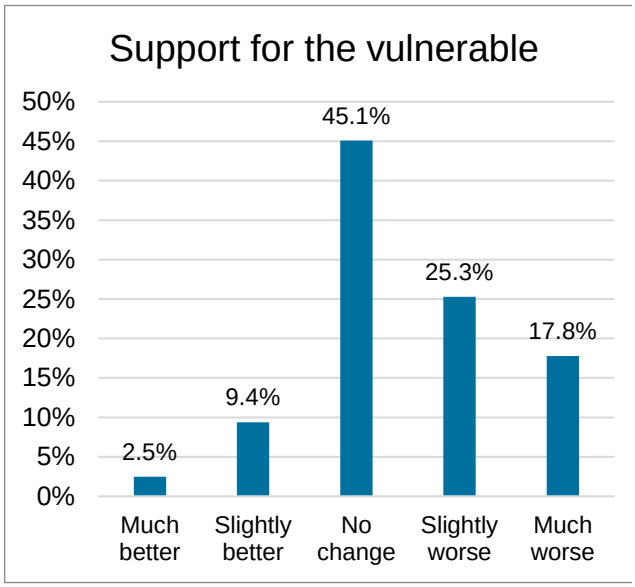
"Services shouldn't be cut. We're already seeing difficulties with some young people's behaviours. Lack of support in changing this makes everyone feel (less) safe going out."

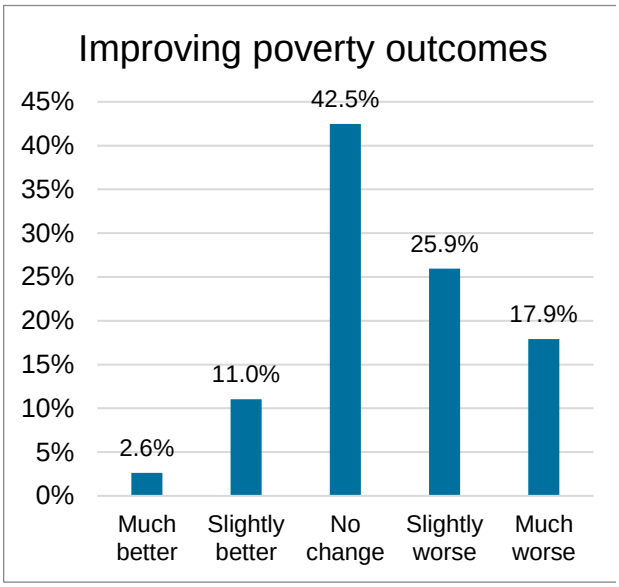
Support for the vulnerable

There is a familiar pattern in the graphs comparing feedback related to how the council supports the vulnerable. Again, whilst the highest proportion of respondents marked the 'no change' option, more people said things had got worse than those who pointed to improvements.



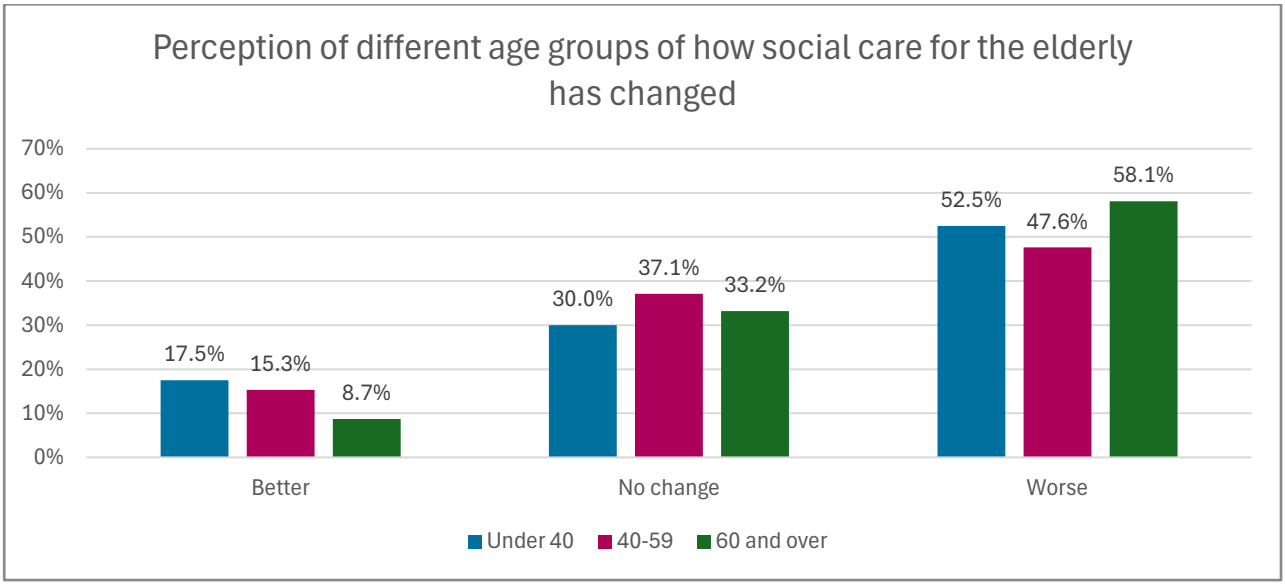


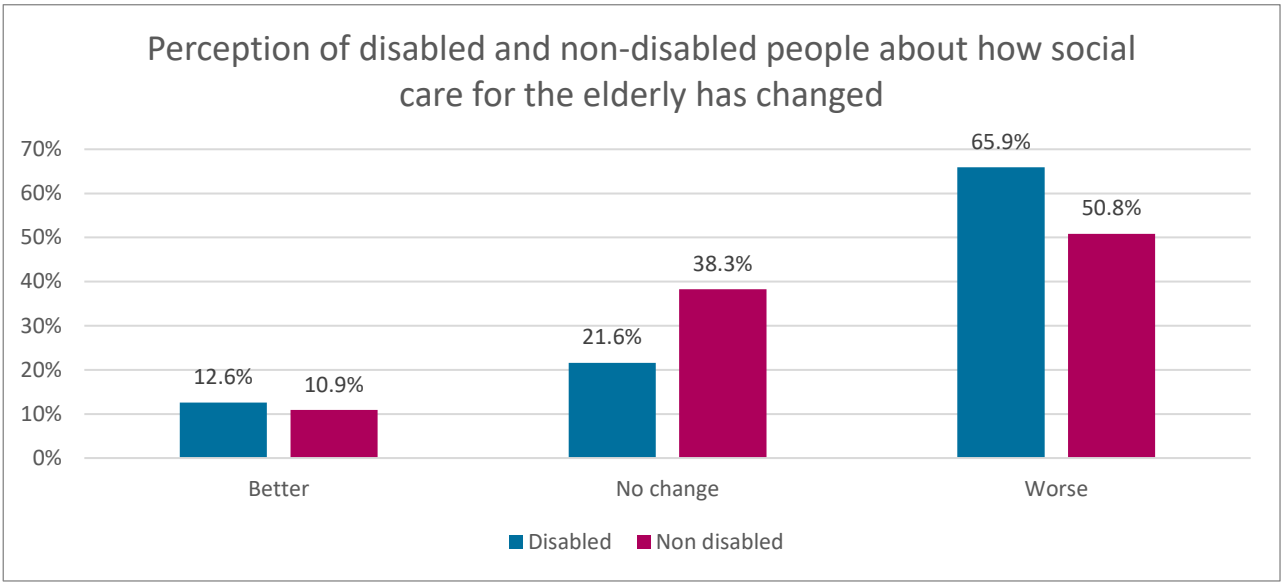




Most people don't need social care. Yet, 45% of respondents provided feedback on children's social care and just under 60% rated social care for the elderly. As with crime, it is likely that some of the feedback above is based on perceptions rather than actual experience of receiving support. There may also have been respondents who selected the 'no change' option rather than 'not applicable' where they didn't have direct experience of the service.

More than half of all respondents said that social care for the elderly was 'slightly' or 'much' worse than five years earlier. And the groups who are most likely to be recipients (those aged over 60 and disabled people) were more likely to state that services had got worse than younger and non-disabled people.





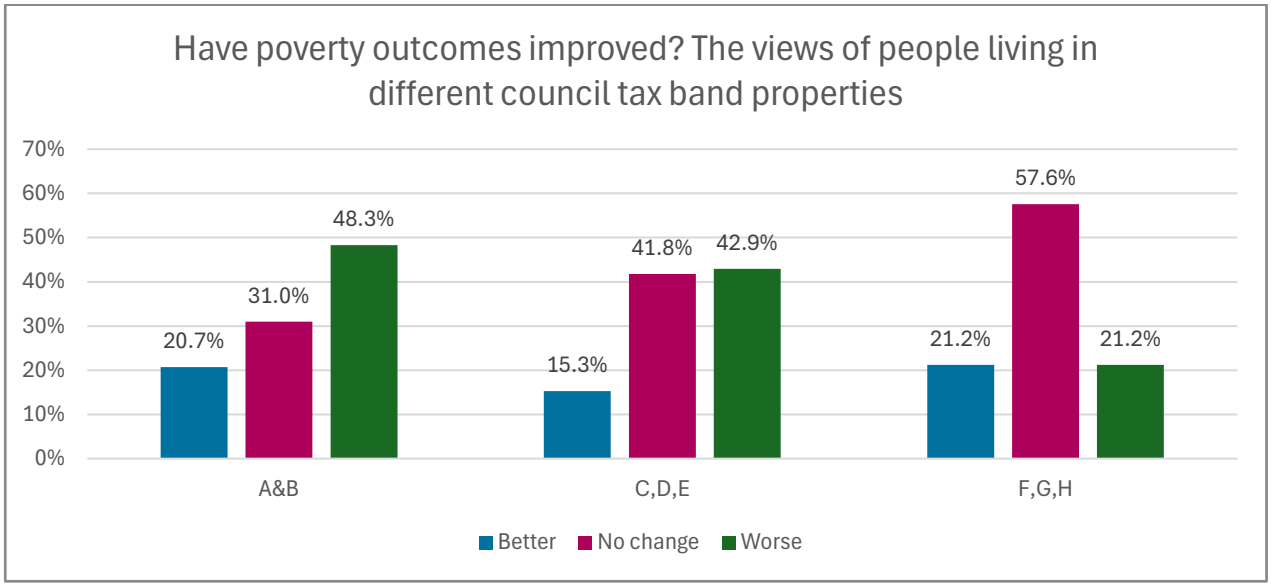
Across the survey, no-one commented specifically on the state of adult social care services in South Gloucestershire (other than giving views on who should and shouldn't be eligible), so it is difficult to validate if standards have declined, and it is hard to pinpoint any aspect of the service which needs to improve.

Feedback from different groups about how the vulnerable in society are supported was more mixed. This perhaps reflects a different understanding of who is being referred to when talking about 'vulnerable' people. Again, disabled people were significantly more likely than those who aren't disabled to believe support for the vulnerable has got worse. Additionally, younger people and the LGBTQ+ community were more likely to believe vulnerable people were less well supported now.

People with military experience expressed completely different feedback, with a higher proportion of people within this community thinking there had been an improvement than the number reporting worse support.

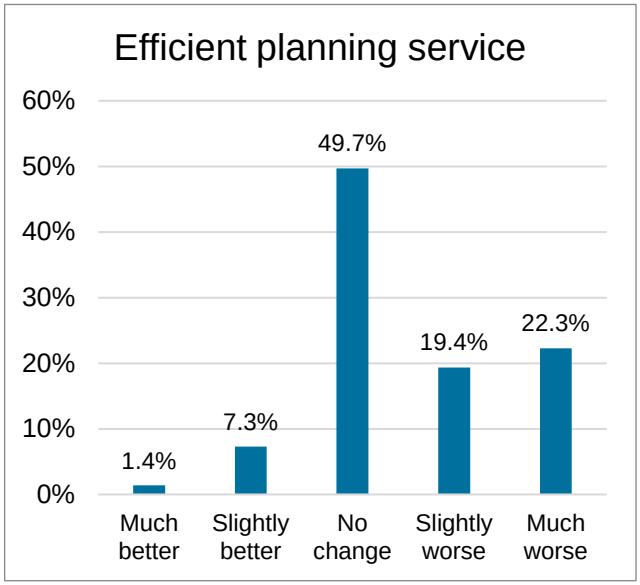
Perceptions of poverty were interesting. A higher proportion of people felt this outcome had improved than for any other metric measured. However, this is still the minority view and 43.8% of people felt things had got worse.

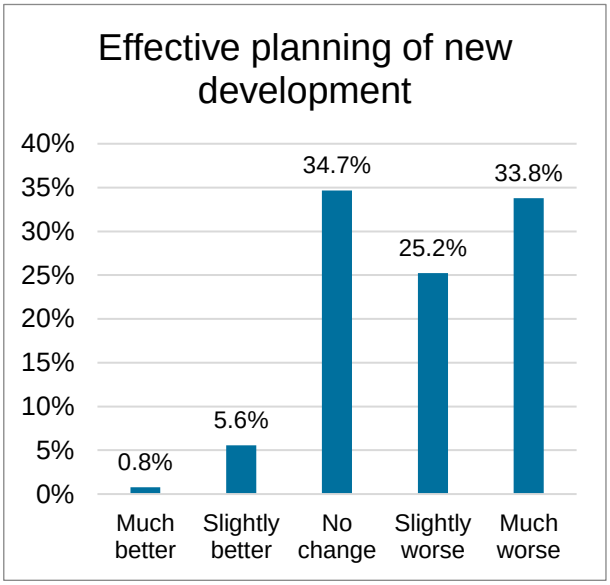
There is a marked difference in feedback between those most likely to be living in poverty and those who are more comfortable (the best measure we have in this survey is the tax band of the property people live in). 48.3% of respondents who live in A and B tax band properties felt poverty outcomes had declined, whilst only 21.2% of those living in the highest council tax band properties believed life had become harder for those living in poverty. Likewise, most disabled people and members of the LGBTQ+ community felt outcomes for people living in poverty had declined in recent years.



Planning

Two planning related metrics were included. Firstly, we were interested in the experience of people who had used the planning service, for example putting in an application to make a change to their home. We were also keen to find out how people thought policy was being implemented to plan local development.





It is unlikely that as many people who provided feedback on the planning service had direct experience submitting an application. Half of people felt little had changed, whilst just over 40% believed the service had got worse.

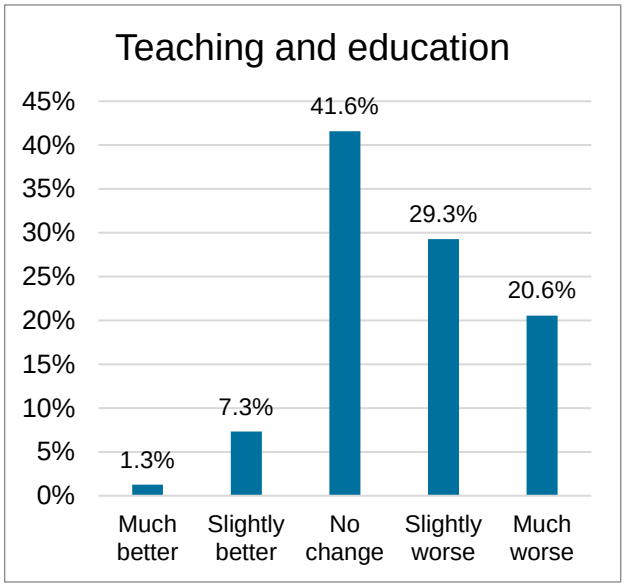
There was more negative feedback about the approach to planning development in South Gloucestershire, which reflects wider commentary expressing dissatisfaction with the level of housebuilding without supporting infrastructure.

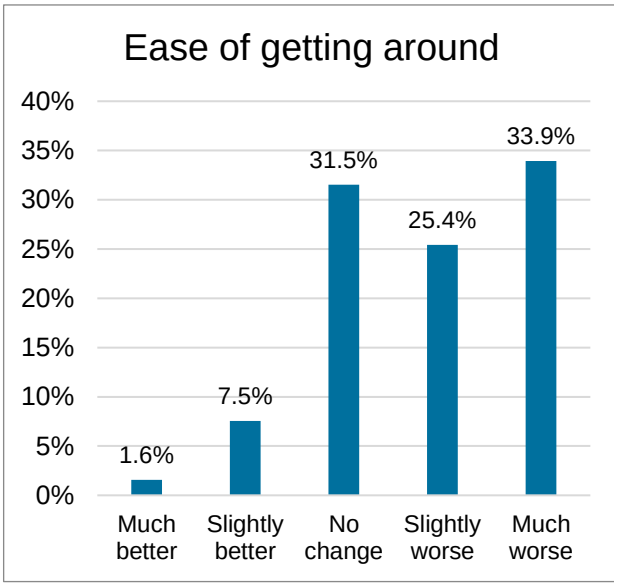
"New housing estates are not being built alongside sufficient schools, doctors, dentists etc. I am very worried about how far my daughter will have to travel to secondary school. Doctors and dentists are practically impossible to access."

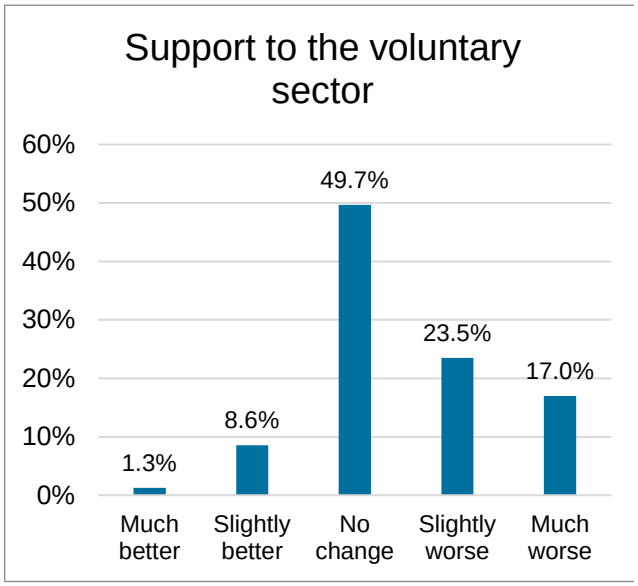
People living in Thornbury were significantly more likely to report that planning of development had got much worse over the last five years. This is likely in response to the scale of new development in and around the town. People with experience in the armed forces are less likely to think this has got worse – this group were consistent in providing more positive feedback than any other segment.

Men and carers are more likely to believe the planning service has got worse, though it isn't clear why these groups might have concerns.

Other services and outcomes







Respondents to this survey felt that standards in teaching and education had declined. A fraction under half of everyone who responded said that this had got worse over the last five years.

Women, people of White British ethnicity and the LGBTQ+ community were all more likely to point to declining standards. It is hard to explain why these groups' feedback might be different. There wasn't a great deal of evidence from the commentary to explain this view, although a handful of people expressed concern about how young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities were supported through the school system.

"Pupils requiring specialist interventions are being left in mainstream schools with little or no specialist support. They are not coping. Some are disrupting learning regularly and teachers are struggling to balance their individual needs with those of the rest of the class."

"My husband is a chair of governors for a local primary school. (There is a) Lack of funding for special needs pupils and a shortage of places for new children coming into the area."

There was also negative feedback about how easy people found getting around. Commentary suggests this is related to a combination of inadequate public transport provision and poor road maintenance. Disabled people were significantly more likely than non-disabled people to report that this had become more difficult over the last five years.

"Traffic in north Bristol is awful and getting worse. Public transport is unreliable and often late due to the awful traffic."

"I rely on public transport. It's now incredibly difficult to get places."

Most people providing feedback on support for the voluntary sector felt there had been no change. Disabled people, those of White British ethnicity and people aged under 40 were more likely than non-disabled, other ethnicities and older people to state things had got worse.

The average member of the public may not have a good understanding of the voluntary and charity sector, so there are perhaps better ways of measuring this.

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 charges to park in car parks owned by South Gloucestershire Council, reducing the frequency of black bin collections to once every three weeks and introducing a booking system to visit Sort It Centres have been subject to their own extensive consultations. Similarly, there is an ongoing consultation process around the new South Gloucestershire Local Plan, through which residents can comment about issues relating to development.

Likewise, there were several comments about national issues like the removal of the Winter Fuel Allowance (a decision taken by Central Government) and local issues like the closure of the M4 overbridge (which is the responsibility of the UK Highways Agency). People who live in Thornbury were over-represented amongst consultation respondents and there were several comments about long-running themes like the proposals for the new health centre, the pedestrianisation of the high street and the level of housing development.

Priorities for spending

Many respondents made the case through the consultation for more - or less - money to be spent on specific priorities.

The range of issues which are important to different people - and the diametrically opposed stances different people take on some issues - 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. Whilst the most mentioned priority was support for the most vulnerable people in society, several others bemoaned handouts to the ‘undeserving’ and money spent on social care and equality and diversity.

Priorities for more support (sorted by number of responses)	The council should be spending less money on (sorted by number of responses)
Focus on local places/basics	Cycle schemes (funding for these schemes does not come from South Gloucestershire Council)
Better support for vulnerable & disabled people	Handouts to 'undeserving'
Fix roads	Equality and diversity
Better/new bus services	Discretionary services
Diagnosis and education for young people with Special Education Needs and Disabilities	Climate initiatives
Reduce pavement parking	Wrong infrastructure projects
Decent schools	Traffic calming schemes
More development/focus on job creation	Rural public transport
Invest in youth facilities	Social care
Environmental priorities	Young people with special educational needs and disabilities
Supporting high streets	Liveable neighbourhoods
Assisted living developments	
Better support for foster carers	
Safe affordable housing	
Maintaining green areas	
Clearing rubbish	
Focus on rural populations	
Better support for carers	
Best start for children	
Prevent food poverty	
Increase policing	
More money for cycle schemes	
Support for the homeless	

Potential savings and income

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

- Introducing tighter controls over spending,
- Being more commercial,
- Better coordination between teams and organisations,
- Breaking down barriers to new ways of working,
- Reducing spend on consultancies,
- Cutting spend on lighting, heating and energy,

- Reducing paper documentation.

People also expressed concern about the efficiency of the council and its councillors and staff. In very few instances was evidence provided to support assumptions, but suggestions were made to cut staff numbers, remove layers of management, reduce staff pay, benefits and pensions and limit councillor expenses.

Potential sources of new/additional sources of income included:

- Sell council services/expertise,
- Greater investment in green energy projects,
- Increasing fines for anti-social behaviour/parking,
- Charging for more discretionary services,
- Partnerships with business,
- Increasing business rates.

Responsibilities and funding

Under this heading were several comments about services and local government being underfunded. People felt a different model was needed to agree who should take responsibility for different services, especially funding for social care. A couple of people advocated for developers to pay more into the pot.

Spending on the 'undeserving'

There were comments throughout the survey suggesting that too much money was being spent on minority issues and groups. Some people argued there was a need for greater 'personal responsibility'. Others felt individuals were exploiting the system. Groups who were singled out multiple times included immigrants, parents, cyclists, people on benefits and students. This may highlight a need for clarification around the benefits of tackling inequalities.

Listening to residents

The council is regularly accused of not listening to local people and people commented through this consultation that they didn't think it mattered what they said that their comments were not read and that decisions have already been made.

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.

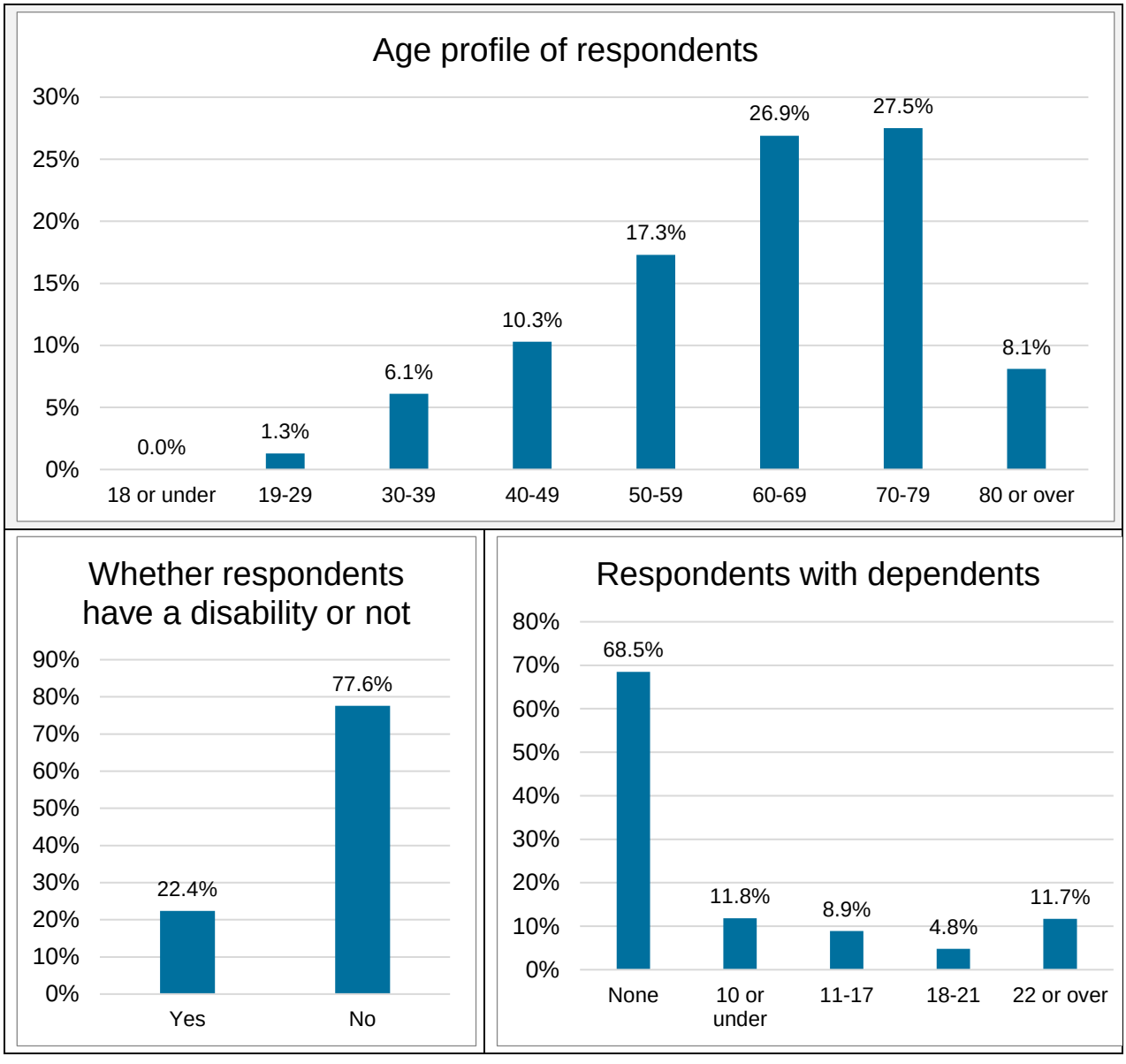
Appendices

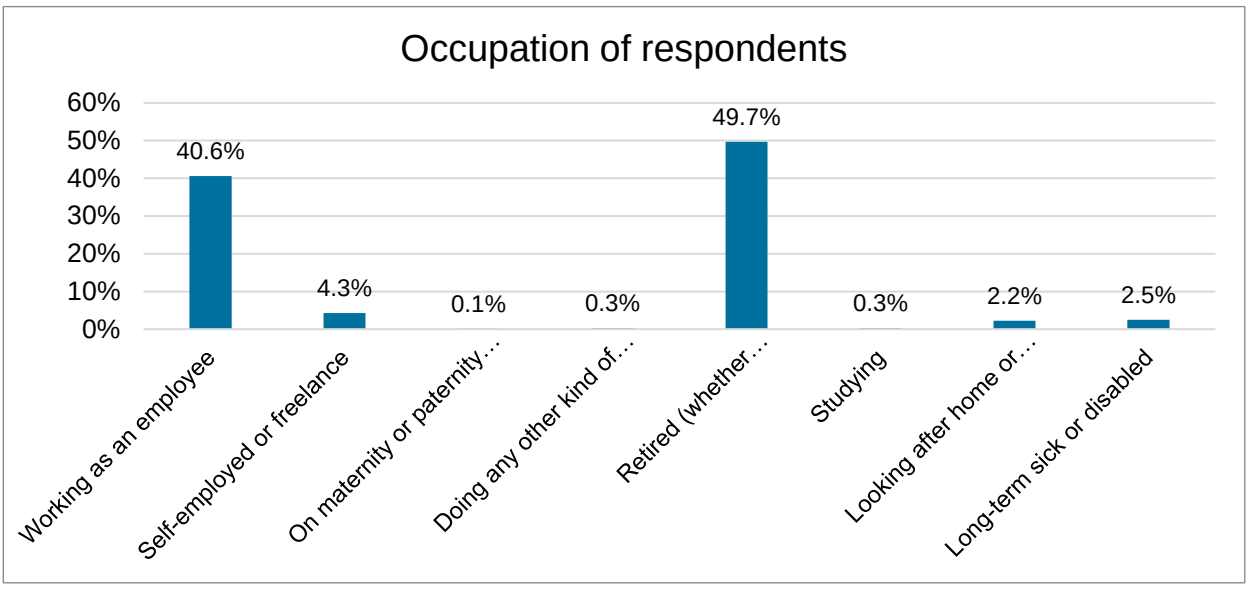
Appendix 1: Consultation respondents

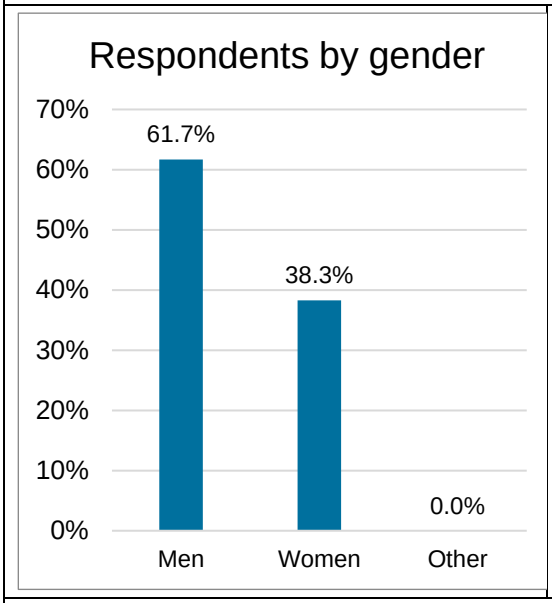
The below graphs show the demographic breakdown of the people who responded to the consultation. The survey sample is not representative of the population of South Gloucestershire:

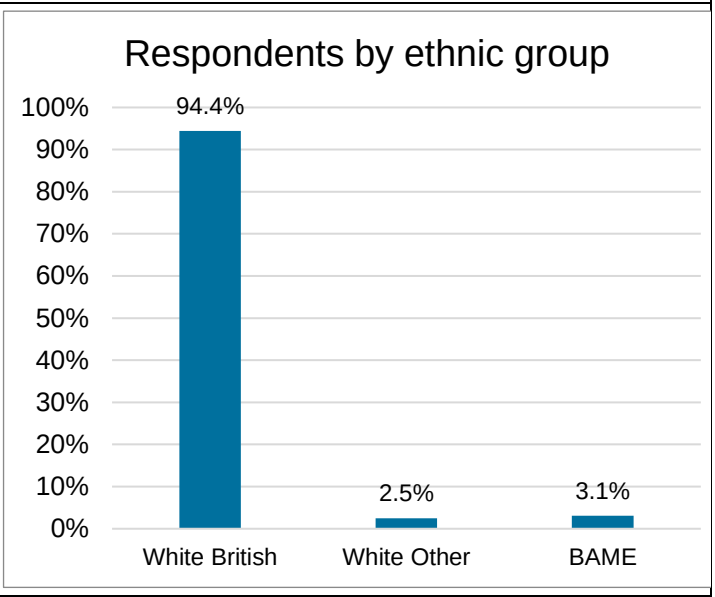
- Much higher proportion of older people
- Far more men
- Fewer non white British people than in our local population
- Fewer non heterosexual respondents than in our local population

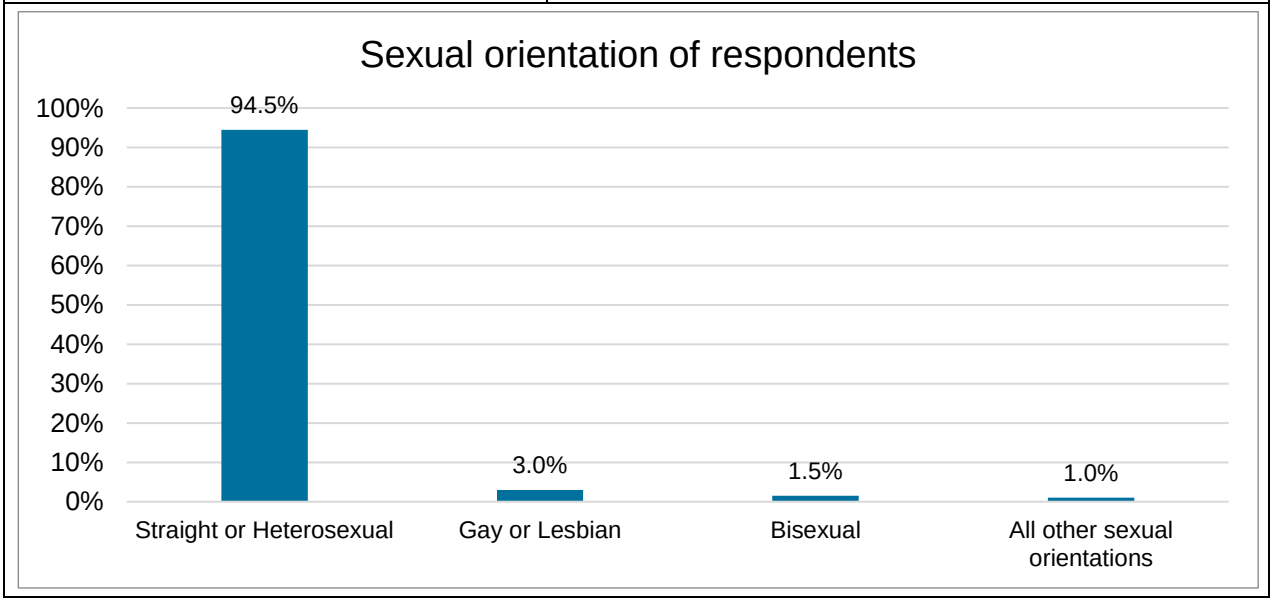
For consistency, percentages have been calculated on the proportion of people who provided information. For some demographic measures there are very high proportions of people who chose not to disclose information.

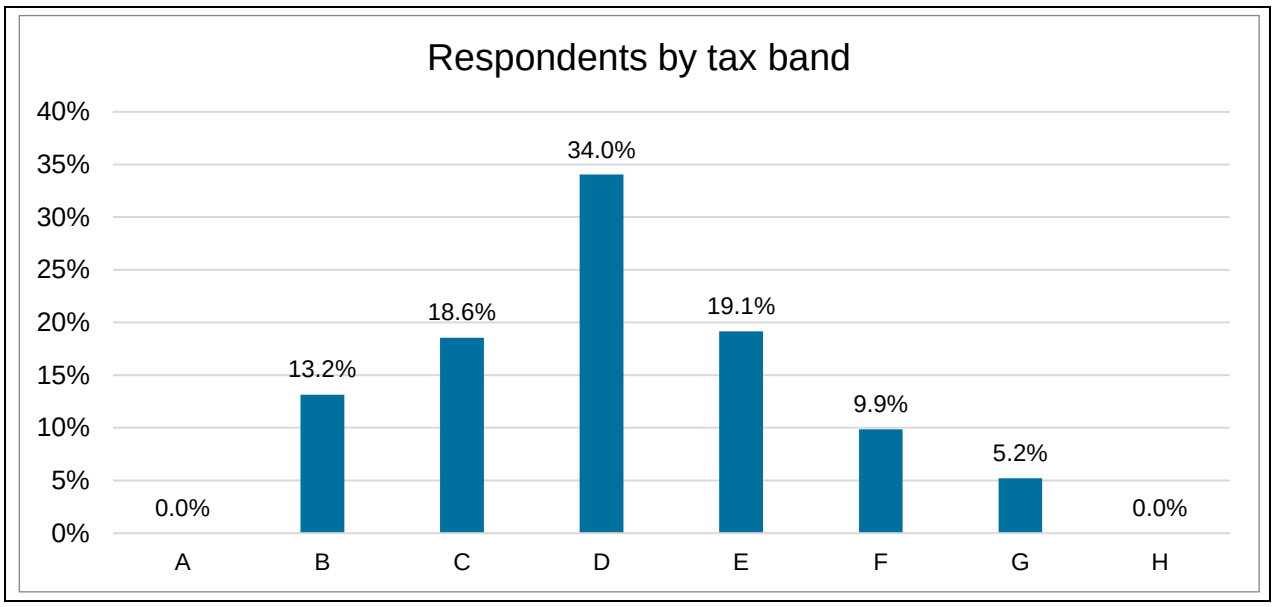



Occupation of respondents
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
40.6%
4.3%
0.1%
0.3%
49.7%
0.3%
2.2%
2.5%
Working as an employee
Self-employed or freelance
On maternity or paternity…
Doing any other kind of…
Retired (whether…
Studying
Looking after home or…
Long-term sick or disabled


Respondents by gender
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
61.7%
38.3%
0.0%
Men
Women
Other


Respondents by ethnic group
100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
94.4%
2.5%
3.1%
White British
White Other
BAME


Sexual orientation of respondents
100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
94.5%
3.0%
1.5%
1.0%
Straight or Heterosexual
Gay or Lesbian
Bisexual
All other sexual orientations



Appendix 2: Summary of comments

Individual comments have been grouped to allow for analysis of common themes. The below tables show the number of responses by theme. Weighting of comments has been represented in the analysis within the main report.

Procurement

Approach	General agreement/should be happening already	105
	Review contracts regularly	22
	Focus on high spend areas	4
Cost versus quality	Also consider value/quality	57
	Greater use of benchmarking	3
	Also consider social value add	5
	Don't reduce service levels	11
Choice of suppliers	Reduce use of external suppliers	3
	Increase use of external suppliers where internal alternative is inefficient	1
	Open up procurement to more suppliers	5
	Allow smaller, local suppliers	11
	Reduce DEI requirements	1
Cost controls	Cut back on discretionary services/reduce spend on unnecessary priorities	6
	Highlighting specific issues/concerns	5
	Consider whole life costs in procurement	11
	Consider need for purchase first	5
	Also consider cost avoidance using tech etc.	3
	Better control individual staff spend	3
	Need independent review	1
	Need to extend life of expensive assets	1
Procurement	Council needs to be more robust in negotiations	10
	Follow best practice from private sector	8

	Need to better monitor performance of suppliers	16
	Use data/take evidence-based approach	4
	Support long term contracts/relationships	1
	Join up purchasing/procurement	5
	Use government frameworks	1
Delivering savings	Difficult to reduce costs in current environment with increasing costs for suppliers	2
	Won't deliver savings	8
	Cut back on 'consultancy'	11
	Reviews of approach are inefficient/costly	4
Targets	Target should be realistic	3
	Targets can drive unintended perverse consequences	7
	Set target by department	1
	Set more stringent targets	5
Other	Need to cut service provision	2
	General discontent	7
	Insufficient detail to provide informed feedback	21
	Check for corruption	1

Property review

Approach	General agreement	103
	Want an annual review	4
	Needs expertise - Council doesn't have a good track record in this	4
	Owning property to support industry is state aid	1
	Buy more properties for commercial returns	1
Working from home	Support working from home	36
	Opposed to home working	37
	Balance between home-working to reduce costs and productivity	32
	Better support for staff working from home	5
	WFH means more space to sell/rent	24
	Unsure whether will save money from home-working	1
	Staff need interaction	12
	Reduces environmental cost of commuting	3
	Ask staff what they want (WFH)	1
Sell versus rent	Consider long term: Prioritise retaining property - generally increases in value	51
	Consider longer term leases	1
	Sell off unused office space	8
	Investigate profiteering private sector rent seekers	1
	Cost benefit analysis of deteriorating properties - improve or sell	3
	Support rental - ensure it is competitive	10
	Sell unused property before they fall into disrepair	3
	Sell then lease back	2
Office estate	Still need customer facing premises	19
	Close smaller offices, consolidate into hub	17

	Ensure working environment is healthy	5
	Ensure working environment is set up for productive working	3
	Cut spend on offices - should be functional and nothing more	1
	Improve energy efficiency of council buildings/turn off lights	4
	Increase community use of council buildings and property (and vice versa)	5
	Buildings not being used optimally	2
	Share properties with partners/aligned organisations	7
	Outsource/reduce headcount so need less office space	8
	Staff opposed to office moves	2
	Ensure capacity to meet long term needs	18
	Ensure buildings are fit for purpose	3
	Convert to coworking space and rent out desks	2
Other	Insufficient detail to provide informed feedback	10
	General discontent	1
	Property in poor state of repair	1
	Turn off lights/reduce heating to save costs	5
	Overspending on property renovations	2
	Residents own the buildings not council	1
	Question/suggestion about specific council building	10
	No more savings to make	1
	Use libraries as office space	1
	When will we see a return on investment on property?	1
	Sell Park & Ride	2
	Retain green spaces owned by council for environmental benefit	1
	Staff should clean their own desks/office area	1
	Bring brownfield sites into use	1

Housing for people with complex needs

Approach	General agreement	132
	Does data support this approach?	17
	As long as it does deliver savings	45
	Works elsewhere	2
	Also consider community supported living	1
Agree	Will support better service delivery/outcomes for individuals	23
	Expand this approach across more services/groups/geographies e.g. dementia	5
	Do this in partnership with health	2
	Potential wider benefit - brings empty properties back into use, more local jobs	4
	So long as it does improve care for individuals	8
	Concern about cost of residential placements	9
	Could free up other resources (carers/school placements)	1
	This whole area needs better resourcing	1
Opposed	Concerned about cost overrun/ongoing maintenance costs	21
	Concern about cost of delivering support	7
	Support provided in community	1
	Best use of money? Want savings now, not more spending	14

	Private sector can deliver better quality care	2
	General	3
Considerations	Scheme needs to be well-managed	11
	Review existing buildings before buying new	23
	Ensure large enough/close together to deliver economies of scale	3
	Need to ensure property is well maintained	4
	Challenge to find and retain appropriate staff	3
	Consistency of staff to improve outcomes	1
	Use own staff rather than care providers	1
	Query about cost benefit of rent versus buy	1
	Long term funding required (from Central Govt/NHS)	14
	Potential objections of people who live in area	1
	Will only deliver over long term	2
	Local organisations to provide support	1
	Need to ensure providing genuinely long-term wrap-around support	3
	Work with non-profit organisations	1
	Taxpayers paying for this	1
Focus on prevention	General	2
	Should be providing more support to families to prevent need	6
	Should focus more support on foster carers as an alternative	2
	Need to consider why demand is continually increasing	1
Who gets support	'Undeserving' getting support	23
	Should only be for individuals from South Glos	5
	Individual responsibility - make families pay	12
	Focus on few means less support for the many	19
	Those receiving support should pay	4
	Bar for support is set too low - reduce care packages	1
	Concern about who gets housing	1
	Prioritise veterans	2
	Too many people have complex needs/needs to be reviewed regularly	3
Other	Expand rent to buy schemes	1
	Use development grant funding/require developers to deliver	4
	Insufficient detail to provide informed feedback	28
	General discontent	2
	Misunderstood the approach	7
	Greater need due to winter fuel payment/council tax	1
	Public owns the buildings	1

Online reporting, Mockingbird and reablement

General	Support	78
	Opposed	1
Supportive	If it delivers improved customer experience	18
	More efficient/saves money	48

	Make it easier to access services which generate income	1
	Online more convenient	20
	Works elsewhere	4
	Broader opportunities to use data - develop a LLM using customer responses	4
	Reduce in-person support to encourage switch to online	1
Opposed	Concern about use of AI	8
	Shouldn't be introduced just for staff convenience	1
	Worse experience	17
	Upfront costs and savings may not materialise	5
	Council more remote	9
	Council staff lose job	2
	Security concerns	2
Sceptical	Will it be cheaper	6
	Will you deliver as much in savings as you think?	10
	Will it be better	18
	Will it be user friendly	21
	If data supports	1
	AI is unproven - will the technology work/be reliable?	41
	Concern about effective delivery/cost overruns	15
	Creates more work for staff	1
	Trial first/report after	18
	Doesn't work elsewhere	10
Considerations	Must be human alternative without long wait (concern about digital exclusion)	303
	Online training in community	10
	Upskill OSS staff to resolve other issues	1
	OSS drop-in at libraries	3
	Join up with other public sector to identify best options and buy software	14
	Buy from local SME businesses	1
	AI introduces/propagates equality biases	2
	Expand online options to more services	3
	Need to be able to speak to a person for complex enquiries	23
	Listen to staff, not consultants	2
	Need to be well planned and resourced	9
	Use off the shelf - not design bespoke	2
	Key will be linking up with services	5
	Need strong controls over projects, procurement and spend	9
	Must retain One Stop Shops/libraries	6
	Need people to be working together to maximise benefit	1
	How will you choose providers/solution?	1
	Adopt best practice from private sector	3
	Need option for people who have disabilities preventing easy use	4
	Could increase keyboard warriors	1
	Invest in digital skills to make the most of it	6
	Staff need to be open to change	1

	Needs to be promoted to increase use	1
	Live chat	3
	Email	1
	App	1
Feedback on customer services	Need better response mechanism/feedback to enquiries	20
	Unresponsive/can't speak to someone	10
	Current systems don't work	28
	Positive experience with customer services team/automated bill paying	2
	Online reporting works already - no improvements needed	2
	Forms/processes too cumbersome/clunky	5
Reablement	Support	15
	Don't currently have people/resources needed	2
	Invest in training	1
	Use community assets	1
	Consider full needs of individual	2
	Won't deliver assumed benefits	1
	Poor experience elsewhere	2
	Dedicated provision in care homes	1
Mockingbird	Support	7
	Could be just passing the buck to foster carers	2
	Bad personal experience of support	1
Assistive Tech.	Support	4
	Needs more investment	3
	In partnership with health	1
Other	General discontent	5
	Reduce senior headcount as fewer staff doing work	1
	Staff commenting on Dynamics 365	2
	Need more information	7
	Internal feedback on admin	1
	Want an online public forum	1
	Cost/benefit analysis needed	5
	Remaining at home may not be best solution for all	1
	Outsource IT	1

Allocation of funding/responsibility

General	General agreement	44
	Generally opposed	5
Approach/responsibility	Simply shifting responsibility	52
	Residents taxed twice	34
	Want a different approach based on local ownership by council staff	3
	The council is responsible for this	24
	Use S106 money for this type of work	1
	Support for collaboration/Partnership delivers better results	18

	Services paid for directly by local people (similar to green bins)	7
	Involve environmental action groups in caring for natural spaces	1
	Increase investment in community facilities in rural areas	2
	Partners better placed to deliver services	1
	Identify which organisation/team best suited to deliver to avoid duplication/so residents know who to contact	20
	Volunteers/community ownership model (with guidance/support from Council)	61
	Use volunteer days through work	2
	Pay communities to maintain	3
	Seek corporate support/sponsorship for services	7
	Completely new model of responsibilities/funding	18
	Abolish parish councils/merge responsibilities	16
Value of facilities	Priority to keep facilities in use for all	57
	Consider full benefits of open spaces and facilities	43
	Parks/paly areas important in priority neighbourhoods/built up areas	4
	Build sense of community/pride in place	18
	Less support for leisure/active lifestyles	2
	More support for sport facilities/prevention of ill health	6
	Value of children's centres, family hubs	2
	Must retain support for facilities used by people who are most vulnerable	2
Public toilets		
	Need model to keep toilets open - charging/ network of cafes/pubs with financial support	29
	Already too few/poorly maintained	10
	Public toilets needed - older people/those with medical conditions	65
Financial considerations	What does Council Tax pay for?	10
	Cost/benefit approach for each facility	6
	No further reduction in funding for these services	18
	TPC/Voluntary sector organisations also struggling	9
	Ensure Parish councils/voluntary sector receive sufficient funding	18
	Reduce parish council precepts	2
	Consider income-generating options for open spaces	3
	Council delivering poor value for money to T&PC	1
Practicalities	Do local communities have sufficient capability/interest?	26
	T&PC/volunteers know their area better	9
	T&PCs need sufficient involvement/notice	14
	Demonstrate how views of partners have been considered	1
	Potential increased costs due to managing enquiries	1
	Mowing less often brings environmental benefits	6
	Reduce use of expensive consultants	1
	Different capabilities across T&PC to deliver services	6
	Can cut back spending on maintenance	1
	Needs further investigation to define practicalities	1
	Increased burden on unpaid T&P councillors	1
	T&P councillors don't understand residents' needs. Aren't representative	2
	Need proper consultation with residents	18
	Ensure safety net for vulnerable	1

Impacts	Higher cost delivery as fewer economies of scale, inefficiencies in additional admin	19
	Leads to decline in facilities/increasing fees	16
	A short sighted approach - leads to longer term costs	31
	Public facilities already inadequate/poorly maintained	11
	Reducing focus acts against other priorities (wellbeing, vandalism etc.)	39
	Too much money spent in rural areas	1
Health responsibilities	Don't reduce overall expenditure	17
	Improve conditions for carers	1
	Needs closer alignment between health and social care across areas - data sharing	8
	Issue with too many different providers/responsibilities	4
	Stop funding - it's a bottomless pit	2
	Complete review with health in light of wider NHS review	12
	Support better sharing of costs	11
	Fairer allocation of support	2
	Against self-funding - council should pay all	3
	Providing too much support	6
	Personal budgets for social care	1
	Families responsible for social care/increase fees	9
	More support for families	1
	Can't reduce demand because of demographic trends	5
	Framework to agree responsibilities	1
	Feedback on care provided by council/partners	3
Other	Insufficient detail to provide informed feedback	8
	Concern about specific provider	1
	General discontent	9
	Misunderstanding	5
	Support if it reduces Council Tax	2
	More focus on prevention - improving health understanding	6
	Wrong priorities	23
	Council staff paid too much	1
	Reduce funding for social care to spend on community facilities/environment	12
	Increase focus on social care - less on environment	4
	Council doesn't provide value for money	2
	Combined One Stop Shop/customer services	1
	Issue with private arrangements for new estates	4
	Few options	0
	Use full data from consultations	1
	Get unwell/unemployed/offenders to do it	3
	Positive feedback	1
	Better support more experienced social workers	1

Approach to outsourcing

General	General agreement	93
	General opposition	9

Prefer outsourcing	Concern about council efficiency/Private sector is more efficient	48
	Outsourcer bears the risks	3
	Private sector is more accountable for results	14
	Council delivers poor outcomes with little accountability	7
	Are services kept in-house to protect jobs?	6
Keep in house	Council delivers services more reliably/more control/focus on outcomes	53
	Outsourcing costs more over long term - profits/shareholder returns and cost creep	116
	Loss of control	19
	Council delivering services provides jobs and wider social benefits	12
	Outsourcing leads to lost knowledge	17
Considerations with outsourcing	Ongoing review necessary	24
	Needs a full review considering all factors	28
	Consider full benefits including social value in procurement	15
	Need clear, enforceable performance targets for contractors	47
	Use local suppliers	2
	Consider quality as well as cost	26
	Consider costs of procurement and ongoing management of suppliers	23
	Learn from best practice	3
	Consider full costs of in-house provision	7
	Outsource better for non labour intensive services/specialist expertise	7
	Avoid cost plus contracts	1
	Outsource IT	2
Other	Concern about specific supplier	23
	Concern about spend on consultancy	8
	Merge provision with other authorities for some services where there are economies of scale	5
	Need to measure and monitor performance	25
	Insufficient detail to provide informed feedback	20
	Employing decent staff on decent salaries cheaper than outsourcing	5
	Adopt similar approach as outsourced companies do to reducing costs	7
	Use the homeless to collect rubbish	1

Increase to green bin subscription

General	Generally agree	68
	Disagree	34
Comments on costs	Should subsidise lower income households	4
	Shouldn't subsidise low income households	1
	Should be free	19
	Everyone should have to pay	4
	Too expensive	50
	Increased by too much last year/rate of increase too high	95
	Fees set to cover costs	11
	Keep at current level	9
	More expensive than neighbouring authorities	3

	Cheaper than other authorities	1
	Charge more for larger properties	1
	Ensure people with disabilities are supported	1
Impacts	Will encourage fly tipping/other disposal (e.g. black bin)	98
	Will deter people from taking out a subscription - will go to tip instead	36
	will encourage more bonfires	7
	Discourages gardening, which has positive benefits	6
	Should be incentivising green bin collections over tip visits	19
	People without vehicles can't access SIC	1
Comments about service	Want a collection every two weeks	8
	Reduce winter collections	30
	Reduce collections to every three weeks	4
	Check people who have cancelled subscription are not still getting the service	1
Save money elsewhere	Stop wasting money elsewhere	1
	Spend less on social care/welfare	2
	Charge for sort it centre	2
	Need to inform households of increase	1
	General	1
Other	Don't use the service/optional service, so increase	17
	Incentivise home-composting	7
	Make it easier for low-income people to dispose of green waste	2
	Need to find cheaper service solution	5
	Should have community compost facility	3
	Generate income from recycled materials/energy from waste	18
	Charge for black bin instead/as well as to encourage recycling	4
	Create tiered offering for different sized gardens	4
	Pay as you go as alternative	2
	Insufficient information about increasing costs	1
	New builds with maintenance fees exemption	1

Council tax increases

Options	Generally agree (4.99)	76
	Generally disagree (4.99)	92
	Council tax increases to track inflation	37
	Hold Council tax at current level	14
Reasons for view	People struggling financially	158
	Tax rises at a time when services are being cut	72
	What am I paying for/value for money concern	65
	Priority is better quality services	31
	Should be focused on social care	7
	Unsustainable over long term	6
Impacts	Poverty leads to health issues/increased costs to council	4
	Less money in pockets means less spent	1

Alternative savings	Sell council offices	5
	Increase charges for non-discretionary services	9
	Outsourcing	5
	Reduce spend	33
	Internal suggestion	38
	Deliver more efficiencies	90
	Merge with parish councils	1
Other	Change payments to monthly instead of 10 per year	5
	Misunderstanding of what council tax pays for	31
	Why should I pay for others	31
	Need more funding from Central Government	34
	Anti-student	8
	Anti-gypsy/traveller	6
	Council tax system needs reform	52
	Referendum a waste of money	8
	Increase in houses means increase in council tax	3
	More missed payments	1
	HMO residents to pay	1
	Council doesn't listen	2
	More local tax raising powers	1
	More progressive system	2
	Higher increases in some areas	1
	Remove 'temporary' social care precept	1
	Increase proportion of people who get low-income discount	2
	Need strategy to reduce spend	4

Funding to partner organisations

Funding for partners	Agree with proposals	140
	Disagree with proposals	38
	Discussion alongside cost/benefit analysis	79
	Concern about support for minority groups	7
	Needs separate consultation	22
	Voluntary sector/local organisation funding important	48
	Voluntary sector facing financial difficulties	10
	Improve funding for libraries/leisure centres/local community services	7
	Partner organisations need to be financially independent	26
	Prioritise support for vulnerable	31
	More control if paying directly for services	3
	Bring more costs to council over long run	3
	Partner organisations usually providing direct support to most vulnerable	11
	Focus on organisation supporting widest demographic of people - not specific segments	22
	Priority to reduce increases to council tax	7
Service cuts	Bring forward cuts to services	11
	Higher costs in the long run	13
	Don't want cuts to services	15

	A reduction in funding to local organisations will mean a decrease in the quality of services they provide	7
Wider financial position	Need to be better at managing finances	20
	Focus on delivering only essential services	17
	Administration has overspent	1
	Need more money from Central Govt	10
	Council running on empty and unable to deliver on what is not a statutory service	3
	Some services should be done in house and would provide better outcomes	4
Other	Want more information about govt funding	1
	Insufficient detail to provide informed feedback	33
	Politicians don't make difficult decisions	2
	Council staff are unproductive	2
	Encourage voluntary sector / partner organisations to carry out more local services in place of council	2
	Engage a broader range of people	7
	This should be happening now	4
	Better coordination of work	1

Other comments

Efficiencies and savings	Lights left on	2
	Continue focus on efficiencies first	23
	Need to be more commercial	6
	Tighter control over spending	6
	Reduce paper documentation	2
	Centralised waste collection	1
	Stop working 'how we've always done it'	1
	Greater use of volunteers	2
	Reduce consultancy spend	2
	Use free and open source software	1
	Better coordination between teams and organisations	4
	Better use of property	3
	Can’t make more savings	1
	Eliminate single person discount	1
Income	Sell council services/expertise	1
	Invest in green energy projects	1
	Increase fines for anti-social behaviour/parking etc.	2
	More speed cameras	2
	Charge students more	1
	Income from open spaces	1
	Charge for discretionary services	2
	Partnership with business	2
	Review of business rates	1
Staff	Replace annual pay increments with Performance Related Pay against defined targets.	0
	Reduce pension pots	6
	Performance related pay	1

	Reduce staff pay/benefits	12
	Reduce spend on agency workers	1
	Stop pay rises for councillors	2
	Improve staff performance/empower staff	11
	Reduce interim senior managers	2
	Hold management accountable	2
	Increase home-working	1
	Reduce home-working	1
	Use students for admin roles	1
	Cut staff numbers	20
	Cut management	20
	Cut overtime	1
Responsibility and funding	Funding for social care	2
	Children's services underfunded	1
	Council tax increases unsustainable	4
	Make most of funding from other sources	1
	Too little funding from govt	11
	Needs fully joined up approach	2
	Seek more funding from elderly	1
	Developers to pay more into the pot	2
More money on	Better support for vulnerable & disabled people	11
	Better/new bus service	8
	Assisted living developments	1
	Better support for foster carers - best and cheapest way of supporting vulnerable young people	1
	SEND diagnosis and education	5
	Safe affordable housing	1
	Focus on local places	16
	Reduce pavement parking	4
	Fix roads	9
	Maintaining green areas	1
	Clearing rubbish	1
	Focus on rural populations which have lost out	1
	Better support for carers	1
	Best start for children	1
	Decent schools	3
	Prevent food poverty	1
	More development/job creation	3
	More money on environmental priorities	3
	Increase policing	1
	Invest in youth facilities	3
	More money for cycle schemes	1
	Support for homeless	1
	Supporting high streets	2
Less money on	Wrong infrastructure projects	2
	Don't want traffic calming schemes	2

	Cut discretionary services	4
	Reduce spend on SEND	1
	Reduce spending on climate initiatives	3
	Social care	1
	Rural public transport	1
	Opposed to liveable neighbourhoods	1
	Ban e-bikes and scooters	1
	Less money on cycle schemes	9
	Reduce handouts to 'undeserving'	9
	Cut spend on diversity	9
State of services	Poor roads and paths	34
	Drainage issues	8
	Development without infrastructure	11
	Set minimum service targets	1
	More anti-social behaviour & crime	5
	Better litter collection	1
	Lack of policing	2
	Poor bus services/public transport	13
	Pet projects get lots of attention	1
	Insufficient placements for SEND children/difficult getting support	5
	Good maintenance of green spaces	1
	Poor maintenance of green spaces	1
	Difficult navigating social care system	1
	Good waste collection service	2
	Worse rubbish collection	2
	Increasing issues with children/families	2
	Too many roadworks	2
	Declining standards in education	6
	Increasing fees, worse services	10
	Good cycling lanes/facilities	1
	School catering worse	1
	Need brighter streetlighting	1
	Poor response to enquiries	1
	General decline	13
	Positive feedback	11
Blaming others	People 'not from around here'	10
	Families responsible for care for children	4
	Anti-woke - support the majority not the few	9
	Anti-cyclist	2
	Anti-electric car	1
	People on benefits	5
	Students	2
Suggestions	Greater involvement from/listen to residents	12
	Need to better educate residents	3
	Better promote volunteering	1
	Councillors to be more proactive	1

	Prevent rather than react - focus on long term fixes	2
	Join up health services/regionally	2
	Too much consultation	1
	Need to be more responsive	1
	Taken too long to recognise issues	1
Black bins and waste service	Don't reduce to three weekly	24
	Need bigger bins	2
	Causes fly-tipping/visits to tip/vermin	8
	Cut recycling service	1
	Supportive	8
	Rollout soft plastics collection	2
	Incentivise recycling/penalise waste	3
	Too many different bins	1
	Suez collect from public bins during rounds	2
	Don’t charge for tip visits	1
Car parking	Support	6
	Opposed (Thornbury)	10
	Opposed (general)	9
	Discourage trade/increase parking in residential areas	29
	Need more detail about the costs to administer	2
	Use ANPR to reduce costs	1
	Allocate spaces for local workers	1
Other hot topics	Opposed to Sort It booking system	3
	Thornbury	9
	M4 overbridge	2
	Opposed to building on green belt	1
	Thornbury Health Centre	1
	Opposed to removal of winter fuel payments	3
	Opposed to house building	1
Other	Concern about abuse of council staff	1
	Haven’t delivered enough savings	2
	Positive impact of volunteers/community efforts	1
	Issue with survey	4
	Specific issues highlighted	3
	Refuse takeaway planning permissions	2
	All services should be free	1
	Cycle schemes implemented poorly	1
	Concern about WECA mayor	1
	Concern about profiteering bus companies	1
	Reduce bus passes for blue badge holders	1
	Should be earning more form additional houses	3
	Insufficient housing for people with disability	1
	Personal independence budgets	1
	Ensure savings aren't simply shifting cots to other teams/organisations	1
	Learn from best practice elsewhere	1
	Targets not always helpful	1

	Pensioners worse off	1
	Feedback won't make a difference	6
	Dropped kerbs	1
	Benefits system needs overhaul	3
	Property fraud?	1
	Academy trusts leading to declines	1
	Reinstate community composting	1
	Issue with schooling	1
	Cycle tax, dog tax	1
	Unnecessary democratic roles	1
	Strain on services from migration	1
	End right to buy	1

Appendix 3: Written representations

Letter received by email from South Gloucestershire Equalities Voice

Dear All,

Re. Council Revenue and Capital Programme 2025/26 Consultation Response

Many thanks for attending the South Gloucestershire Equalities Voice Manager's Support Group meeting on 27th November.

As you know, the Group was set up 3-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 27th November focussed on the council's Revenue and Capital Budget proposals for 2025/26 and we are writing as a group, Equalities Voice, to set out our key points of feedback as follows:

Organisational Culture

The issue of organisational culture within the council was raised as a significant point during the meeting. In organisations where a positive equalities culture is fostered towards diverse communities, it is clear that organisational performance is enhanced – and this includes from a financial perspective.1 We appreciate and understand the financial position of the council, which was clearly covered during our meeting, especially in terms of decreases in funding and increases in costs over the past 10-years plus. We would note that the fostering of a culture that has a clear desire – as an ever-present fundamental principle - to meet the needs of all communities, and therefore improve performance, is cost neutral and would have a positive effect, especially in times of financial difficulty. A few examples of actions which we believe the council should consider include:

- Through the council's equalities work, we have seen a pleasing increase in community engagement work. The council has had a presence at significant

community events; however, we would urge attendance by senior officers at such events in order to ensure community visibility and develop clear understanding of the lived experience of our diverse communities, especially those communities who are at the brunt of the increases in inequalities such as increases in hate crime and levels of financial hardship across the district, negative health outcomes, and inequalities in educational attainment and experience.

- On the matter of hate incidents, we see a strong, public-facing response from the council regarding many issues, however, this is not replicated in regard to hate crimes and incidents. For example, Stand Against Racism & Inequality (SARI), have been advised that half of their current grant from South Gloucestershire Council from the Safer and Stronger Communities Strategic Partnership is likely to end on 31st March 2025. This is at a time when hate crime is on the rise and just after the worst Far Right violence we have seen in many of our lifetimes. This is also despite you investing £20,000 in a Hate Crime Needs Assessment which identified key recommendations which are hugely impeded by decisions this Programme is making and the intended cuts to current Hate Crime Services. This is a gap in need of rectification.
- In response to the racist rioting and unrest in August 2024, the council released a positive statement. Stand Against Racism & Inequality and the South Gloucestershire Race Equality Network (SGREN) designed actions in response and invited the council to participate in them – which it did. However, this appears to many to have been a short-term response – for example, how many council buildings and reception desks now display the 'You Are Welcome Here' logos? How many local businesses has the council spoken to, through its networks, to also display the logos and sign the commitment? Work to truly deliver on equality is hard work and should be persistent and daily. It is important to be persistent in order to avoid views of 'short-termism'.
- The South Gloucestershire Equalities Voice Manager's Support Group has now been running for 3-years and has received 100% satisfaction from council managers. The purpose of this group links directly to the council's equalities principles in that it supports the identification of proactive actions (which are very often cost neutral actions) that managers can take to tackle inequalities across their work. As some teams have been absent from these opportunities, we would encourage Executive Directors to ensure that their Service Directors and teams are taking advantage of this opportunity as this is a key approach which supports the council in the delivery of its Tackling Inequalities Plan objectives.

Financial and social value of tackling inequalities work

The potential for increased legal challenges related to equalities impacts is likely to grow, particularly in light of the ongoing financial pressures across the country and disproportionate cumulative effects these may have. We suggest that it would be valuable for the council to clearly articulate the financial and social benefits of its efforts to address inequalities. Embedding this perspective into decision-making processes, including budgetsetting, could not only strengthen the council's position in managing legal risks but also support more informed and effective decision-making overall. Regarding the consideration of impacts on our diverse communities within decision-making, it appears there may be an opportunity to ensure that these factors are

integrated earlier and more consistently in the development of proposals, as compared to last year's budget process. We recommend reviewing the current process and making adjustments as needed to enhance its effectiveness for future budget cycles.

In particular, we note that the Council has decided that it will not make cuts to its own services and budgets and has stated that it will wait and see what the Government does first, yet you have decided that you will need to make cuts to VCSE groups and to VCSE groups providing specific work to counteract inequality and disproportionate outcomes for communities with protected characteristics. Yet VCSE groups – including some of the partners on South Gloucestershire Equalities Voice Manager's Support Group – have already faced year on year cuts whilst having to increase salaries and cope with rising costs all round. Many are on their knees and have deficit budgets with very limited reserves to rely on. It is crucial that you reassess your budget for disproportionate impact on the VCSE organisations that are providing specialist services to the communities you most want to tackle inequalities for. Some of the cuts you are proposing will lead to a disproportionate increase in unfairness and inequality.

One example is the proposed cut to funding in Education, Children's Services, and the work of the Race and LGBTQ+ Task Forces, both a key aspect of the Tackling Inequalities Plan 2024-28. Which will affect not only the VCSE partners working with you on the Task Forces but will see a direct impact on the lives of vulnerable BAME and LGBTQ+ children and young people in local schools.

Further improvement on data management - voices of the diverse communities of South Gloucestershire

South Gloucestershire Equalities Voice currently has places on the Leaders Board, however, we wonder if this forum presents an adequate opportunity to bring the voice of our communities to the 'right places' and would value your advice.

We continue to see a lack of appropriate data collection across the council, for example, we see no data on smoking rates, mental health and wellbeing, NHS Health Checks (funded by the council) in respect of LGBTQ+ communities or faith communities as well as no intersectional analysis of this data. This severely limits the ability of the council to not only comply with its legal duties and responsibilities, but also to take effective decisions, and is a point that this group has raised on many occasions.

The JSNA for South Gloucestershire – now replaced by here: https://beta.southglos.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/health-services/jsna/ - has no summary showing health indicators from an equalities perspective. Instead, there are a very few 'spotlight briefings' that only consider a few themes and which have only cursory mentions of the different communities we know are particularly facing disproportionate access to health services and who have the most disproportionate outcomes. We ask that there is a specific and focused ED&I paper as part of the JSNA that our group inputs into and that is informed by the data you do have relevant to equalities. We believe that there has been a lack of opportunity for equalities voices to be heard as part of this JSNA development process.

There is no mention of Gypsy, Roma Traveller (GRT) communities anywhere we can see on this portal or if there is – it is not easy and obvious to find. South Gloucestershire is seen as an area which has particularly large GRT communities, has 2 public GRT sites

and many settled GRT families. GRT people face the worst outcomes of any other ethnic group in South Gloucestershire, but we cannot see how this is considered by this Programme nor by other relevant Council plans and strategies. We ask that you reconsider how you can demonstrate you are prioritising the needs of GRT people.

In addition to date, we would recommend that the council pays more attention to the lived experience of communities, ensuring that this combines with better data analysis to ensure more useful information and insights that can be used to influence improvements 'on the ground' for residents. We understand and support the Community Conversations work being delivered and would reiterate our point relating to the visibility of senior officers as part of this work.

Tackling Inequalities Plan 2024-28

As you know, South Gloucestershire Equalities Voice was involved in the development of the Tackling Inequalities Plan 2024-28. It clearly sets out the objectives that the council will take to meet the Council Plan aim of 'reducing inequalities'. We know that from the outset of the Plan's development, the council's intention has always been to consider progress being made against the Plan as a core component of its budget-setting process and decision-making. It is clear that proposals on the table for 2025/26, if pursued, will negatively impact the council's delivery of elements of the Tackling Inequalities Plan. We firmly believe that these objectives should be protected as part of budget-setting and decision-making. Framing the budget review as an ideal opportunity to centre the Tackling Inequalities Plan and therefore showcasing how seriously the council take this commitment.

The approaches to tackling inequalities should not just be addressing areas such as health inequalities; social inequalities underpin many of the areas that South Gloucestershire Council have been working to address with our support, but we still find that essential discussions around the impact of discrimination, exclusion, hate, and harmful rhetoric are missing.

The necessary approach for addressing the impacts of inequalities is to build services, policy, and decisions from the foundation of equality, diversity, equity, and inclusion. This foundation continues to be absent and excluded from planning and decision-making, embedding inequalities in the very services that are meant to help marginalised people. We not only see this in the consultation responses in the budget, but consistently in the failure to comprehensively monitor marginalised communities, particularly LGBTQ+ communities.

Equalities and protected characteristics are not an afterthought. They are the foundation of positive, progressive work, liberation from barriers and poor outcomes, and represent the good governance required in a progressive, inclusive society. We encourage South Gloucestershire Council to embrace this approach.

Cumulative impacts for diverse communities

It is clear that cuts have disproportionately negatively impacted Disabled people, people from minority ethnic groups, women, younger adults, LGBTQ+ people, and children & young people, all of whom are disproportionately more likely to be living in financial hardship. It is clear that the proposals for 2025/26 will add to this negative impact. We

believe that these disproportionate impacts should be recognised and these communities protected as part of budget-setting and decision-making.

We hope that these points provide assistance to the council and are taken in the context of their intention to provide clear and helpful input, as always.

Your sincerely,

Signed on behalf of the South Gloucestershire Equalities Voice Partnership:

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 Glos Disability Equality Network - https://www.sgden.org.uk South Glos Race Equality Network - https://southglosracenetwork.co.uk Stand Against Racism & Inequality (S.A.R.I.) - https://saricharity.org.uk The Diversity Trust - https://www.diversitytrust.org.uk