East Lothian Council

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East Lothian Council

REPORT TO:	Members' Library Service
MEETING DATE:	
BY:	Executive Director for Council Resources
SUBJECT:	Budget Consultation 2024/25 – Initial Analysis

1 PURPOSE

1.1 To provide members with a summary of responses to the recent budget consultation exercise.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That Members note the summary of budget consultation responses at Appendix 1.

3 BACKGROUND

3.1 The 2024-25 Budget Consultation ran from 24 November to 4 January 2024, providing local residents with the opportunity to have their say on the services and priorities which matter the most to them.

3.2 This report provides an initial analysis of the quantitative information which has been produced from the survey responses. Analysis of the c900 comments submitted through survey responses is ongoing and will be shared with members once this work is complete.

4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The budget consultation responses should be used to inform members' considerations around decisions they will take as part of setting a balanced budget for 2024/25 onwards on 20 February 2024.

5 INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

5.1 Impact assessments will be conducted for budget proposals which are taken forward through the budget setting process.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Financial – no direct implications.

6.2 Personnel – no direct implications.

6.3 Other – no direct implications.

7 BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 None

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DATE	19 January 2024

APPENDIX 1 - Results of Budget Consultation Survey (December 2023)

472 responses (c. 0.5% of population over 16)

Breakdown of respondents

1. Breakdown by ward:

Ward breakdown of respondents' postcode shows Tranent, Wallyford, Macmerry was under-represented - 13% of total respondents compared to 20.6% of East Lothian residents; and Haddington was over-represented – 27% compared to 19% of East Lothian residents.

Ward	**No.**	**% of EL Total**	**Mid Year pop 2021**	**%**
Dunbar & East Linton	56	14.2%	15642	14.3%
Haddington & Lammermuir	107	27.1%	20079	18.3%
Musselburgh	75	19.0%	18826	17.2%
North Berwick Coastal	43	10.9%	14770	13.5%
Preston Seton Gosford	62	15.7%	17676	16.1%
Tranent, Wallyford & Macmerry	52	13.2%	22587	20.6%
East Lothian Total	**395**	**100.0%**	**109,580**	**100.0%**
Edinburgh	7			
West Lothian	1			
NA	69			
Total	**472**			

2. Breakdown by sex

Females over-represented:
- Females – 57.4%
- Males – 32.5%
- Non-Binary – 0.6%
- Preferred not to say – 9.3%

3. Breakdown by age

Working age population slightly over-represented, under 35s and over 65s were under-represented:
- Only 8% of respondents were under 35
- 55% were 35-54
- 14.5% were over 65

16-24	1.1
25-34	6.8
35-44	23.1
45-54	32.2
55-64	19.3
65-74	9.75
75+	4.7
N/A	3.2

4. Breakdown by working status

Unemployed and not working for other reasons were under-represented; people in full-time employment were over-represented.

Working – full time (35+ hrs)	49.8
Working – Part-time (16-34hrs)	19.3
Working – Part time (less than 16 hours)	1.5
Working – zero hours contract	0.4
Self-employed	5.1
Unemployed / Seeking work	0.4
Permanently retired from work	14.6
Full time parent or carer	1.5
Unable to work due to permanent sickness or disability	1.5
Student	0.6
Other	1.9
Prefer not to say/ not answered	3.4

5. Breakdown by household composition

Single Adult under 65 years	9.1
Single Adult over 65 years	2.3
Two adults both under 65	20.55
Two adults at least one aged over 65 years	13.1
Three adults all over 16 years	5.9
1-parent family with children, at least one under 16 years	3.8
2-parent family with children, at least one under 16 years	36.4

Other	5.5
Not answered	3.2

6. Breakdown by housing tenure

Homeowners were over-represented and social landlord tenants were under-represented.

Owned outright	36
Buying on mortgage	48.5
Rented from the council	4.2
Rented from housing association or other social landlord	1.9
Rented from private landlord	4.7
Shared ownership	0.85
Other	1
Not answered	2.75

7. Breakdown by income

People earning over the average wage/ salary were over-represented – 50% of respondents earn over £35,000 per year. Although it should be noted that 36% of respondents did not answer this question.

A. Under £999 per month/ Under £11,999 per year	2.1
B. £1,000 - £1,749 per month/ £12,000 - £20,999 per year	7.6
C. £1,750 - £2,916 per month/ £21,000 - £34,999 per year	14.2
D. £2,917 - £4,999 per month/ £35,000 - £59,999 per year	26.3
E. Over £5,000 per month/ Over £60,000 per year	23.7
Prefer not to say/ not answered	36.1

Results of questions

There was a clear differentiation on the level of importance attached to council objectives. 88% of respondents said that Grow our People is Very Important compared to only 41% who said Grow our Economy is Very Important, whilst 66% and 61% respectively said Grow our capacity and Grow our Communities (61%) are Very Important.

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important	Don't know/ No response
Grow our People	88.35%	9.3%	1.7%	0.6%
Grow our Capacity	65.9%	28%	4%	2.1%
Grow our Communities	60.6%	31.6%	6.1%	1.7%
Grow our Economy	40.9%	47%	9.75%	2.3%

Respondents were asked to rank in order of preference the five key themes set out in the financial strategy to support the council meeting its financial challenges. (Ranking them from 1 = most preferred, 6 = least preferred, so the most preferred had the lowest ranking/ score and the least preferred was given the highest ranking/ score.)

Averaging out the total score allocated to each theme shows roughly the same level of support for Early intervention and prevention (2.45), Asset rationalisation (2.68) and Income generation (2.79); less support for Transformation, service redesign and digitalisation (3.23). Service reduction (4.36) had by far the lowest level of support.

From most to least preferred	1	2	3	4	5	D/K	Av
Early intervention and prevention	35.8	19.3	18	17.2	6.4	3.4	2.45
Asset rationalisation and energy efficiency	20.8	26.5	25.4	19.5	4.9	3	2.68
Income generation	18.6	26.5	23.3	22	6.1	3.4	2.79
Transformation, service redesign and digitalisation	12.7	19.5	22.7	27.3	14.2	3.6	3.23
Service reduction	9.1	5.3	7.2	10.2	64.6	3.6	4.36

Respondents were asked to consider a range of options for potential savings and to tick the statement which best describes their views – 'the council should reduce this service to make savings' or 'the council should increase council tax or other charges to protect this service'.

The five options for which there was least support for service reduction as opposed to increasing Council Tax to protect the service were:

- Investing in services for vulnerable children
- Maintaining existing staffing levels within schools
- Tackling anti-social behaviour and working to improve community safety
- Supporting older people, e.g. care at home and care homes
- Investing the road network and street lighting

The five options for which there was most support to reduce the service were:

- Maintaining home to school transport
- Supporting cultural activities like the arts and museums
- Investing in staff training and development
- Supporting tourism and the visitor economy
- Providing discounts for empty business premises

Support for reducing the service to make savings or in creasing Council Tax to protect the service

	Reduce the service to make savings	Increase Council Tax to protect this service	Not answered
Investing in services for vulnerable children	15.9	77.1	7
Maintaining existing staffing levels within schools	18.4	75.85	5.7
Tackling anti-social behaviour and working to improve community safety	21.4	71.4	7.2
Supporting older people, e.g. care at home and care homes	22	72	5.9
Investing the road network and street lighting	24.6	68.4	7
Supporting young people to gain employment, training or access further education	25.4	69.1	5.5

Supporting the provision of sports and leisure facilities	27.3	65	7.6
Investing in the school estate	31.1	61.65	7.2
Maximising collection of council tax and housing rents	34.3	56.8	8.9
Maintaining public open spaces	35.4	56.8	7.8
Maintaining library buildings	39.2	53.2	7.6
Providing protective services including food safety, trading standards and environmental protection	42.6	49.4	8
Supporting the local economy and regeneration	43.6	50.2	6.1
Employability, education and training for adults	45.1	48.3	6.5
Early learning and childcare, e.g. nurseries and 1140 funded childcare hours for 3 and 4 year olds	46.4	46.6	7
Providing free instrumental music tuition	46.6	47	6.4
Providing financial advice and support to residents	47.25	44.3	8.5
Maintaining and improving customer service	50.85	39.2	10
Universal free school meals	51.9	42.6	5.5
Funding community organisations	56.1	36.9	7
Maintaining home to school transport	57.8	35.6	6.6
Supporting cultural activities like the arts and museums	59.75	32.6	7.6

Investing in staff training and development	60	32.4	7.6
Supporting tourism and the visitor economy	71.4	22.9	6.7
Providing discounts for empty business premises	75	18.2	6.8

Respondents were asked to provide views on different levels of Councill Tax increase to protect council services.

Almost as many respondents would support an increase of over £5 a week (20%) as do not support any increase in Council Tax (23%).

72% would support an increase of up to £3 per week (options 1, 2 & 3)

40% would support an increase of up to £5 a week (options 2 & 3)

1	Yes – I would support an increase as long as it wasn't more than £3 per week	31.6
2	Yes – I would support an increase as long as it wasn't more than £5 per week	20.6
3	Yes – I would support an increase of more than £5 per week	19.7
4	No – I would not support any increase	23.1
5	Don't know	5.1

Results by sex of respondents
57% of respondents (271) were female and only 32.5% (154) were male. (Just over 9% did not answer this question.)

The following analysis provides a sex based analysis of the results of the budget consultation, comparing the responses made by female and male respondents.

There were some differences in responses to the question about the level of importance attached to council objectives. Females were more likely to rate Grow our People, Capacity and Communities as Very Important, whereas Males were more likely to rate Grow our Economy as Very Important, although a higher proportion of males (13.6%) compared to females (6.4%) said Grow our Economy is Not Important.

Also of note is that 13.6% of males said that Grow our Communities is Not Important compared to only 1.9% of females.

		very important	somewhat important	not important
Grow our People	**Female**	91.9%	7.1%	1.1%
	Male	83.8%	13.0%	2.6%
Grow our Capacity	**Female**	70.1%	25.7%	2.2%
	Male	59.1%	32.5%	7.8%
Grow our Communities	**Female**	63.6%	33.5%	1.9%
	Male	57.1%	28.6%	13.6%
Grow our Economy	**Female**	40.1%	52.1%	6.4%
	Male	47.4%	37.7%	13.6%

There were some marked differences in relation to preferences for the five key financial strategy themes. 30.5% of males compared to 15.5% of females said that Asset Rationalisation was their most preferred option. 43% of females said that Early Intervention and Prevention was their most preferred option, compared to 24.2% of males. However, there was very little difference in preference for Income Generation, Transformation or Service Reduction.

	Most preferred option (Ranked 1 of 5)			**Least preferred option (Ranked 5 of 5)**	
	Females	**Males**		**Females**	**Males**
Early intervention and prevention	**43.0%**	**24.2%**	**Early intervention and prevention**	**4.5%**	**10.1%**
Asset rationalisation and energy efficiency	**15.5%**	**30.5%**	**Asset rationalisation and energy efficiency**	**7.2%**	**2.6%**
Income generation	**20.9%**	**19.9%**	**Income generation**	**3.8%**	**9.3%**
Transformation, service redesign and digitalisation	**12.6%**	**14.6%**	**Transformation, service redesign and digitalisation**	**17.2%**	**10.6%**
Service reduction	**11.4%**	**8.4%**	**Service reduction**	**67.3%**	**66.4%**

There was relatively little difference in views on the possible options for meeting the funding gap.

On most of the options females were more likely to support increasing Council Tax to protect the service than reducing the service to make savings, but not by a significant amount.

The options where there was a more than 5% difference between female and male respondents are highlighted in the table below.

Support for reducing the service to make savings

	Reduce the service to make savings		Increase Council Tax to protect this service	
	M	F	M	F
Investing in services for vulnerable children	19.3	15.5	80.7	84.5
Maintaining existing staffing levels within schools	24.5	13.7	75.5	86.3
Tackling anti-social behaviour and working to improve community safety	23.3	22.2	76.7	77.8
Supporting older people, e.g. care at home and care homes	23.1	21.3	76.9	78.7
Investing the road network and street lighting	25.5	25.7	74.5	74.3
Supporting young people to gain employment, training or access further education	30.9	22.4	69.1	77.6
Supporting the provision of sports and leisure facilities	32.4	25.4	67.6	74.6
Investing in the school estate	34.7	31.5	65.3	68.5
Maximising collection of council tax and housing rents	28.8	42.9	71.2	57.1
Maintaining public open spaces	35.2	38.2	64.8	61.8
Maintaining library buildings	49.0	36.3	51.0	63.4
Providing protective services including food safety, trading standards and environmental protection	38.8	50.6	61.2	49.4

Supporting the local economy and regeneration	43.0	47.6	57.0	52.4
Employability, education and training for adults	50.7	45.6	49.3	54.4
Early learning and childcare, e.g. nurseries and 1140 funded childcare hours for 3 and 4 year olds	43.4	53.6	56.6	46.4
Providing free instrumental music tuition	50.4	48.6	50.0	51.4
Providing financial advice and support to residents	50.7	51.6	49.3	48.4
Maintaining and improving customer service	45.1	62.0	54.9	38.0
Universal free school meals	23.3	22.2	76.7	77.8
Funding community organisations	62.2	58.3	37.8	41.7
Maintaining home to school transport	63.8	59.5	36.2	40.5
Supporting cultural activities like the arts and museums	63.4	62.5	35.6	37.5
Investing in staff training and development	55.7	69.1	44.3	30.9
Supporting tourism and the visitor economy	71.6	77.3	28.4	22.7
Providing discounts for empty business premises	78.6	79.2	28.4	22.7

Almost as many male and female respondents said they would want no increase in Council Rax (23.2% and 22.1% respectively). However, female respondents were significantly more likely to support an increase of only up to £3 a week (38.6%) than male respondents (21.4%). Male respondents were more likely to support an increase of more than £5 a week (29.2%) compared to female respondents (15.4%)

		All	Female	Male
1	Yes – I would support an increase as long as it wasn't more than £3 per week	31.6	38.6	21.4
2	Yes – I would support an increase as long as it wasn't more than £5 per week	20.6	25.3	18.4
3	Yes – I would support an increase of more than £5 per week	19.7	29.2	15.4
4	No – I would not support any increase	23.1	22.1	23.2