Members' Library Service Request Form

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Additional information:

    Budget Consultation 2026/27 - Covering Report
    Appendix 1 - Summary of Responses
    Appendix 2 - Detailed Responses

Authorised By	Sarah Fortune
Designation	Depute Chief Executive
Date	16/02/26

East Lothian
Council

COMMITTEE:	Members' Library Service
MEETING DATE:	February 2026
BY:	Depute Chief Executive – Resources and Economy
REPORT TITLE:	Budget Consultation 2026/27
REPORT STATUS:	Public

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To provide members with the results and feedback from the consultation on budget development for 2026/27 onwards.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are recommended to:

2.1 Note the consultation feedback detailed within the body of this report and appendices as part of their consideration of the budget for 2026/27 onwards.

3 BACKGROUND

3.1 This report presents the findings from East Lothian Council's recent budget consultation, which invited residents, community groups, and stakeholders to share their views on the Council's financial strategy and priorities for the year ahead. The consultation sought feedback on a range of key issues, including which services should be protected, perspectives on council tax levels, the role of digital services in improving access and efficiency, and ideas for ensuring a fair and sustainable approach to delivering public services.

3.2 The insights gathered through this process provide an important evidence base to inform decision-making at a time of continued financial pressure across local government. By understanding what matters most to our communities, the Council can better align resources with local needs and values, protect essential services, and make well-considered choices about where change or investment is required. The feedback

summarised in the appendices to this report and below will help shape the development of East Lothian's budget and support a transparent, community-focused approach to financial planning.

3.3 Key messages are set out within **Appendix 1** and are summarised below:

- Residents strongly favour prevention, efficiency, transformation and asset rationalisation over service reduction

- There is broad agreement on protecting frontline, statutory and vulnerability-related services

- Savings are seen as most acceptable when they focus on management, overheads, buildings and non-essential activity

- With regards to Council Tax, whilst there was a mixed response, over 55.4% of respondents indicated they would be supportive of a Council Tax increase, with the majority in favour of a Council Tax increase of no more than £3 per week

3.4 **Appendix 2** provides a more detailed analysis of the results by gender, age and housing tenure.

3.5 The limitations of online consultation are recognised, and these results form just one part of the broader intelligence used to inform the budget setting process. Other information sources include the understanding of the needs of residents gained from front line staff who work with service users on a day-to-day basis, from community groups and other partners, and from our elected members who represent their constituents and are ultimately responsible for setting the Council's budget.

UNCRC

3.6 In line with the Council's financial strategy commitment to ensure that the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 (Corporate Parenting responsibilities) and Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child are reflected in our budget planning, senior pupil teams from all seven secondary schools were asked for their views on the questions raised in the budget survey.

3.7 Responses were received from Ross High School, Preston Lodge High School, North Berwick High School, and Rosehill High School, and a summary of the key themes is provided below:

- Schools & Early Years were consistently rated the top priority for investment or protection.

- Children's services and education are seen as essential for long-term benefits (better outcomes, reduced future costs).

- Respondents emphasised the importance of protecting vulnerable groups, including older people, families, and those living in poverty.

- Students support digital reform, but they are sensitive to digital exclusion.

- Students favoured measures such as asset rationalisation, income generation and prevention over service reductions.

- Comments also indicated that students feel that the Council should invest early to save later and avoid deep cuts, with savings distributed more widely if unavoidable.

- Views on council tax were mixed, but generally students indicated support for modest council tax increases of up to £3 per week with some indicating that they would support higher increases of up to £5 per week.

- Equality concerns centre around reduced access to face-to-face support, cuts which result in disproportionate impact on low income households and young people and risks to UNCRC rights.

4   POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1   The budget consultation responses are used to inform members' considerations around decisions they will take as part of setting a balanced budget for 2026/27 onwards on 24 February 2026.

5   RESOURCE AND OTHER IMPLICATIONS

5.1   <u>Finance</u>: Although there are no direct financial implications arising from this paper, the consultation results are intended to inform the budget development process.

5.2   <u>Human Resources</u>: None

5.3   <u>Other (e.g. Legal/IT)</u>: None

5.4   <u>Risk</u>: None

6   INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

6.1   ***Select the statement that is appropriate to your report by placing an 'X' in the relevant box.***

An Integrated Impact Assessment screening process has been undertaken and the subject of this report does not affect the wellbeing of the community or have a significant impact on: equality and human rights; tackling socio-economic disadvantages and poverty; climate change, the environment and sustainability; the Council's role as a

X

corporate parent; or the storage/collection of personal data.

or

The subject of this report has been through the Integrated Impact Assessment process and impacts have been identified as follows:

Subject	Impacts identified (Yes, No or N/A)
Equality and human rights	
Socio-economic disadvantage/poverty	
Climate change, the environment and sustainability	
Corporate parenting and care-experienced young people	
Storage/collection of personal data	
Other	

[*Enter information on impacts that have been identified*]

The Integrated Impact Assessment relating to this report has been published and can be accessed via the Council's website:

https://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/info/210602/equality_and_diversity/12014/integrated_impact_assessments

7   APPENDICES

7.1   Appendix 1 – Budget Consultation Report

Appendix 2 – Analysis of budget consultation results by age, gender and housing tenure

8   BACKGROUND PAPERS

8.1   Council – 26 August 2025 – Budget Development 2026-27 onwards

8.2   Council – 9 December 2025 – Financial and Capital Strategies 2026-31

8.3   Cabinet – 20 January 2026 – Budget Development 2026-27 onwards

9   AUTHOR AND APPROVAL DETAILS

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Designation	Depute Chief Executive – Resources & Economy
Confirmation that IIA and other relevant checks (e.g. finance/legal) have been completed	Yes
Approval Date	9 February 2026

East Lothian Council Budget Consultation 2026/2027

Appendix 1 – Key Messages

Executive Summary

East Lothian Council faces significant funding gaps over the coming years, requiring difficult decisions about how services are delivered, prioritised and funded. This public consultation sought residents' views on the Council's financial strategy, service priorities, acceptable approaches to savings, and the principles that should guide decision-making in a constrained financial environment.

The consultation gathered both quantitative and qualitative evidence across twelve questions, covering strategic themes, service-level priorities, financial trade-offs, and wider values such as fairness, efficiency, and protection of vulnerable groups.

Overall strategic direction

Across the consultation, there is a **strong and consistent public preference for approaches that avoid service reduction wherever possible**. Respondents show clear support for:

- **Early intervention and prevention**, which emerges as the most positively ranked financial strategy theme

- **Transformation, service redesign and digitalisation**, particularly where this improves efficiency and avoids reductions

- **Asset rationalisation and energy efficiency**, viewed as a sensible way to reduce running costs

By contrast, **service reduction is strongly opposed**, ranking last by a substantial majority of respondents. Income generation is also viewed less favourably than other approaches, indicating limited public appetite for charges or commercial activity as a primary response to the funding challenge.

Service prioritisation

Responses to service prioritisation questions show a **clear distinction between core frontline services and more discretionary or enabling services**.

There is very strong support for protecting or investing in:

- Schools and early years

- Adult social care and support for older people

- Children's services and child protection

- Waste, recycling and street cleaning

- Libraries, community centres and housing services

By contrast, respondents are more willing to accept reductions in:

- Planning and development

- Climate action and sustainability

- Customer and support services

Views on services such as roads, transport, sport and leisure are more mixed, indicating these areas are seen as more negotiable under financial pressure.

Where savings would be least objectionable

When asked directly where savings would be least objectionable, respondents overwhelmingly focus on **how savings are made**, rather than naming frontline services.

Recurring themes include:

- Reducing management layers, senior staffing and governance-related costs

- Cutting administrative, customer and back-office functions before frontline services

- Rationalising buildings and the council estate

- Scaling back planning, climate and sustainability activity

- Reducing discretionary or "nice-to-have" services

Across responses, there is a strong desire to **protect statutory, preventative and care-related services**, with savings framed as alternatives to cutting education, social care, housing and support for vulnerable groups.

Council tax and financial trade-offs

Views on council tax increases are divided:

- The largest group of respondents oppose any increase

- However, a significant number would support an increase if it is modest

Support for higher increases varies by age, with younger adults and older respondents showing greater acceptance than middle-aged groups. Overall, attitudes suggest **conditional acceptance**, shaped by affordability, fairness and perceived impact.

Protecting vulnerable groups

There is a **very strong public mandate** for protecting services for vulnerable groups:

- Around seven in ten respondents rate this as *Important* or *Very important*

- Explicit opposition is limited

This finding aligns closely with responses across the consultation, where protecting vulnerable residents, frontline services and preventative provision consistently emerges as a shared priority.

Digital delivery and efficiency

Support for delivering more services online to save money is **exceptionally high**, with over nine in ten respondents expressing support. While later questions highlight concerns about accessibility and digital exclusion—particularly among older residents—the overall message is that **digital delivery is widely accepted as part of the solution**, provided alternatives remain available where needed.

Fairness principles for making savings

When asked which principle is most fair if savings are necessary:

- The most supported option is **focusing on efficiency and digital transformation to avoid reductions**

- This is followed by **making larger reductions in non-essential services to protect essentials**

- Very few respondents support spreading small reductions across all services

This reinforces a consistent theme throughout the consultation: **residents prefer targeted, strategic approaches over uniform cuts**.

Community involvement

While a minority of respondents say they would actively take on a larger role in delivering or supporting services, a much larger group select "Maybe". This suggests **potential for increased community involvement**, but also underlines that it should be **voluntary, supported and complementary**, not a substitute for council-led provision.

Equality, wellbeing and wider impacts

Views are mixed on whether the proposals considered could have equality, human rights or wellbeing impacts:

- Around one third believe impacts are likely

- One third believe they are not

- One third are unsure

Where concerns are raised, they focus on:

- Impacts on people with additional support needs

- Effects on low-income households

- Risks to mental health, wellbeing and social isolation

This highlights the importance of **careful impact assessment and mitigation**, particularly for vulnerable groups.

Overall conclusions

Taken together, the consultation presents a **coherent and consistent picture**:

- Residents strongly favour **prevention, efficiency, transformation and asset rationalisation** over service reduction

- There is broad agreement on protecting **frontline, statutory and vulnerability-related services**

- Savings are seen as most acceptable when they focus on **management, overheads, buildings and non-essential activity**

- Fairness, transparency and clear communication are critical to maintaining public trust

- Differences by age, gender and housing tenure exist mainly in emphasis, not in underlying values

Overall, respondents recognise the scale of the financial challenge but expect decisions to be **strategic, fair, evidence-based and clearly explained**, with long-term impacts and vulnerable residents kept firmly in view.

2. Question 1 – Financial Strategy Theme Rankings

Question wording
"The council faces significant funding gaps over the coming years that will mean that we need to make some big changes to the way that we currently work. Our Financial Strategy sets out five key themes to support this process. We would like to hear your views on these areas. Please rank the themes to show your preferences (1 = most preferred, 5 = least preferred)."

The five themes were:

1. Asset rationalisation and energy efficiency

2. Income generation

3. Transformation, service redesign and digitalisation

4. Early intervention and prevention

5. Service reduction

Base: respondents who ranked two or more themes.

2.1 Asset rationalisation and energy efficiency

This theme focused on reducing costs by reviewing and rationalising buildings and improving energy efficiency.

1. **Rank 1:** 226 (27.34%)

2. **Rank 2:** 183 (22.15%)

3. **Rank 3:** 220 (26.64%)

4. **Rank 4:** 123 (14.88%)

5. **Rank 5:** 69 (8.30%)

Summary:
Asset rationalisation and energy efficiency is most commonly placed in the upper and middle ranks, with over three quarters of respondents (76.13%) ranking it between Rank 1 and Rank 3. Rankings are particularly concentrated at Rank 1 and Rank 3, indicating broad support without strong polarisation. Relatively few respondents place this theme at the lowest rank.

2.2 Income generation

This theme involved increasing the income the Council receives, including through charges and commercial activity.

- **Rank 1:** 69 (8.30%)

- **Rank 2:** 114 (13.84%)

- **Rank 3:** 149 (17.99%)

- **Rank 4:** 309 (37.37%)

- **Rank 5:** 186 (22.49%)

Summary:
Income generation is generally ranked towards the lower end, with almost six in ten respondents (59.86%) placing it at Rank 4 or Rank 5. Only a small minority rank it as their top preference. This pattern indicates relatively low prioritisation compared with the other themes.

2.3 Transformation, service redesign and digitalisation

This theme focused on changing how services operate to improve efficiency, including increased use of digital delivery.

- **Rank 1:** 177 (21.45%)

- **Rank 2:** 266 (32.18%)

- **Rank 3:** 206 (24.91%)

- **Rank 4:** 134 (16.26%)

- **Rank 5:** 34 (4.15%)

Summary:
Transformation, service redesign and digitalisation is most commonly ranked in the upper-middle positions, with over three quarters of respondents (78.54%) placing it between Rank 1 and Rank 3. Rank 2 is the single most common placement. Very few respondents rank this theme as their lowest priority.

2.4 Early intervention and prevention

This theme related to investing in earlier support to reduce the need for more intensive and costly services later.

- **Rank 1:** 291 (35.29%)

- **Rank 2:** 203 (24.57%)

- **Rank 3:** 180 (21.80%)

- **Rank 4:** 126 (15.22%)

- **Rank 5:** 23 (2.77%)

Summary:
Early intervention and prevention emerges as the strongest overall priority, with over a third of

respondents ranking it first. Nearly four in five respondents (81.66%) place it within their top three rankings. Very few respondents rank this theme as their least preferred option.

2.5 Service reduction

This theme involved reducing services to deliver savings.

- **Rank 1:** 46 (5.54%)

- **Rank 2:** 51 (6.23%)

- **Rank 3:** 66 (7.96%)

- **Rank 4:** 134 (16.26%)

- **Rank 5:** 514 (62.28%)

Summary:
Service reduction is clearly the least preferred theme, with nearly two thirds of respondents ranking it last. Only a small minority place it in the top three rankings. This indicates strong opposition to service reductions relative to the other financial strategy options.

3. Question 2 – Service Prioritisation

Question wording

"The council is having to make hard choices to balance its budget. Please tick the statement which best describes your views on each of the areas below."

For each service area, respondents chose between:

- The council should invest more in this service

- The council should protect this service

- The council should reduce this service to make savings

3.1 Overview

The results show a clear distinction between core statutory or frontline services and more discretionary or enabling services.

There is strong support for **protecting or investing in services such as schools, adult social care, children's services, waste and street cleaning, libraries, and housing services**, indicating that these are seen as high priorities.

By contrast, **planning and development, climate action, and customer and support services** attract much higher levels of support for reductions. Views on areas such as roads, transport, sport, and leisure are more mixed, suggesting these are seen as more negotiable in the context of budget pressures.

A summary of each service area is set out below.

3.2 Schools and Early Years

- **Protect this service:** 50.3%
- **Invest more:** 43.2%
- **Reduce:** 6.4%

Schools and early years are among the highest-priority services. More than nine in ten respondents favour either protecting or increasing investment, with very limited support for reductions.

3.3 Adult Social Care and Support for Older People

- **Protect this service:** 66.7%
- **Invest more:** 24.0%
- **Reduce:** 9.4%

There is very strong support for adult social care and services for older people. Nearly nine in ten respondents favour protection or additional investment, with fewer than one in ten supporting reductions.

3.4 Children's Services and Child Protection

- **Protect this service:** 65.9%
- **Invest more:** 26.3%
- **Reduce:** 7.8%

Children's services and child protection are strongly prioritised. Over 90% of respondents want these services protected or enhanced, with minimal support for cuts.

3.5 Roads, Transport and Infrastructure

- **Protect this service:** 48.6%
- **Invest more:** 31.9%

- **Reduce:** 19.4%

Views on roads, transport and infrastructure are more divided. While a clear majority still favour protection or investment, almost one in five respondents support reductions, making this a comparatively contested area.

3.6 Housing and Homelessness Services

- **Protect this service:** 52.9%
- **Invest more:** 16.6%
- **Reduce:** 30.5%

Housing and homelessness services attract majority support for protection or investment, though the proportion favouring reductions is higher than for other core care services. This suggests some tension between perceived importance and affordability.

3.7 Waste, Recycling and Street Cleaning

- **Protect this service:** 76.1%
- **Invest more:** 11.3%
- **Reduce:** 12.6%

Waste, recycling and street cleaning services are strongly supported, with more than three quarters of respondents favouring protection. Support for reductions is relatively low.

3.8 Sport, Leisure and Countryside

- **Protect this service:** 56.1%
- **Invest more:** 18.6%
- **Reduce:** 25.3%

Respondents are more mixed in their views on sport, leisure and countryside services. While most still favour protection or investment, around a quarter support reductions, indicating this is viewed as a more acceptable area for savings than frontline care services.

3.9 Libraries and Community Centres

- **Protect this service:** 64.3%
- **Invest more:** 12.9%
- **Reduce:** 22.8%

Libraries and community centres receive strong support overall, with nearly two thirds favouring protection. However, a sizeable minority indicate these services could be reduced to help balance the budget.

3.10 Planning and Development

- **Reduce this service:** 62.0%

- **Protect this service:** 30.1%

- **Invest more:** 7.9%

Planning and development is the service area with the strongest support for reductions. Nearly two thirds of respondents would reduce this service to make savings, with very limited appetite for additional investment.

3.11 Climate Action and Sustainability

- **Reduce this service:** 49.0%

- **Protect this service:** 37.3%

- **Invest more:** 13.7%

Views on climate action and sustainability are split. Almost half of respondents favour reductions, while just over a third want the service protected. A smaller group support increased investment, indicating polarised views.

3.12 Customer and Support Services

- **Protect this service:** 55.7%

- **Reduce this service:** 39.1%

- **Invest more:** 5.2%

Customer and support services are seen as a more acceptable area for savings than frontline services. While a majority favour protection, a substantial minority support reductions, and very few respondents call for additional investment.

4. Question 3 – Least Objectionable Areas for Savings

Question wording

"If savings must be made, which areas would you least object to being reduced?"

This was a free-text question. Responses covered a wide range of services and functions, with no single area dominating. However, several **clear and recurring themes** emerged across the responses.

Management, governance and political costs

A common theme was a preference for reductions in **management, senior staffing, councillor costs, and governance-related expenditure**, before making cuts to frontline services. Respondents frequently referred to management layers, senior pay, and what they perceived as administrative overhead.

This included references to:

- Management and senior officer posts
- Councillor pay and expenses
- Perceived duplication or inefficiency within organisational structures

Planning, development and regulatory functions

Many respondents identified **planning and development** as an area where reductions would be least objectionable. This aligns with responses elsewhere in the consultation where planning was more frequently selected as an acceptable area for savings.

Some responses also referred more generally to:

- Regulatory or "bureaucratic" functions
- Activities seen as slowing delivery or adding complexity

Climate action, sustainability and net zero activity

A substantial number of respondents referenced **climate action, sustainability initiatives, net zero projects, and electric vehicle or environmental programmes** as areas where they would be less concerned about reductions.

Views ranged from calls to pause or scale back activity, to suggestions that such initiatives were seen as:

- Non-essential in the context of immediate financial pressures
- Desirable but unaffordable in the short term

This theme was one of the most frequently mentioned in the free-text responses.

Non-essential, discretionary or "nice-to-have" services

Respondents often distinguished between **core statutory services** and those viewed as discretionary. Areas more commonly identified as least objectionable for savings included:

- Sport, leisure and countryside services

- Cultural, promotional or enhancement activity

- Landscaping, beautification, or public realm improvements

These were often framed as important, but not essential when compared to care, education or housing services.

Customer, support and back-office functions

Another recurring theme was a preference for savings to come from **customer, support or back-office services**, particularly where these were perceived as administrative rather than public-facing.

Some responses explicitly contrasted:

- "Administration" or "support" functions
  with

- Direct service delivery to residents

Property, buildings and estate rationalisation

A number of respondents highlighted **council buildings and office accommodation** as an area for potential savings. Suggestions included:

- Reducing the number of buildings

- Bringing services together into fewer locations

- Avoiding the cost of heating and maintaining under-used premises

Transport, roads and infrastructure

Roads, transport and infrastructure were also mentioned by some respondents as areas where reductions might be acceptable, although views here were mixed and often less detailed than for other themes.

Illustrative comments

For example, respondents wrote:

"Expensive pensions for your staff."

"Waste - you have already reduced it to a terrible service. Roads - They are a joke and you keep building more homes to make things worse."

"Customer and support services, Planning and Development, Climate Action & sustainability"

Summary

Overall, responses indicate that when asked where savings would be **least objectionable**, respondents tend to prioritise:

- Reductions to **management, governance and administration**

- Scaling back **planning, climate and sustainability activity**

- Savings from **discretionary or non-essential services**

- Better use of **buildings and the council estate**

There is a consistent desire to **protect frontline and statutory services**, with respondents generally framing their suggestions as alternatives to cuts in areas such as education, social care, housing and support for vulnerable groups.

5. Question 4 – Council Tax Increases

Question wording

"Every 1% increase to the council tax charge equates to a weekly increase of £0.30 for an average property in East Lothian. Would you support an increase to council tax charges from April 2026 in order to protect council services?"

5.1 Overall distribution

Responses show a **divided public view**, with the largest group opposing any increase, but a substantial minority willing to support higher council tax if increases are limited.

- **No – I would not support any increase: 43%**

- **Yes – I would support an increase as long as it wasn't more than £3 per week: 28.9%**

- **Yes – I would support an increase as long as it wasn't more than £5 per week: 16.1%**

- **Yes – I would support an increase of more than £5 per week: 10.4%**

- **Don't know: 1.7%**

The largest group of respondents would not support any increase in council tax. However, **around five in ten respondents** indicate support for some level of increase, with support strongest for **more modest weekly rises**.

5.2 Differences by age group – support for increases of more than £5 per week

Looking specifically at the proportion of respondents in each age group who selected **"Yes – I would support an increase of more than £5 per week"**, clear differences emerge:

- **16–24: 33.3%**
- **25–34: 7.1%**
- **35–44: 7.4%**
- **45–54: 16.1%**
- **55–59: 5.3%**
- **60–64: 16.7%**
- **65–74: 22.2%**
- **75+: 0.0%**

Although base sizes for some age groups are relatively small, the pattern suggests that:

- **Younger adults (16–24)** are the most likely to support higher increases, however it is important to note that there are only 3 responses from 16-24 year olds.
- **Older age groups (particularly 65+)** are more likely than middle-aged groups to support increases above £5 per week.

Support for higher increases is **lowest among those aged 55-59**

Housing tenure also influences views on council tax increases. Respondents buying their home with a mortgage show greater willingness to support modest increases than those who own outright, while social renters are most likely to oppose any increase. These differences appear to reflect affordability and life-stage factors rather than fundamentally different attitudes toward protecting services.

Interpretation

Overall, Question 4 highlights:

- The largest group of respondents oppose council tax increases in principle
- However, a sizeable number accept increases, particularly if they are **capped at lower weekly amounts**

- Willingness to support **larger increases** varies by age, with **younger and older respondents** showing greater acceptance than middle-aged groups

6. Question 5 – Protecting Services for Vulnerable Groups

Question wording

"How important is it that the Council protects services for vulnerable groups (e.g., older people, children at risk, low-income families), even if this means reducing other services?"

6.1 Distribution of responses

Responses show **very strong support** for prioritising services for vulnerable groups, even where this may require reductions elsewhere.

- **Very important: 33.1%**

- **Important: 36.8%**

- **Neutral: 22.3%**

- **Less important: 6.1%**

- **Not important: 1.7%**

Overall, **around seven in ten respondents** consider it either *Important* or *Very important* that services for vulnerable groups are protected, even if this leads to reductions in other services. Fewer than **one in ten respondents** regard this as *Less important* or *Not important*, indicating limited opposition to prioritising vulnerable groups.

Interpretation

The results indicate a **strong public mandate** for protecting services that support vulnerable residents. While a fifth of respondents take a neutral position, explicit resistance to prioritising these services is relatively low. This finding aligns closely with patterns seen elsewhere in the consultation, where respondents consistently emphasise safeguarding frontline and care-related provision when making difficult financial trade-offs.

7. Question 6 – Support for More Services Being Delivered Online

Question wording

"Would you support more services being delivered online if this saved money?"

7.1 Distribution of responses

Responses show **very strong overall support** for delivering more services online where this would result in cost savings.

- **Yes, strongly support: 49.2%**

- **Yes, somewhat support: 41.4%**

- **No opinion: 4.4%**

- **No, prefer in-person: 3.7%**

- **No, strongly oppose: 1.3%**

In total, **90.6% of respondents** either *strongly* or *somewhat* support more services being delivered online if this saves money. Only a **small minority (5.0%)** express opposition, either preferring in-person services or strongly opposing digital delivery.

Interpretation

The results indicate a **clear public mandate** for increased use of online service delivery as a cost-saving measure. Support is broad-based rather than marginal, with nearly half of respondents expressing *strong* support and a further two-fifths offering *somewhat* support.

While a small proportion express a preference for in-person services or opposition to digital delivery, the overall pattern suggests that residents are generally open to digital approaches where these contribute to financial sustainability.

Considerations around **accessibility, inclusion and alternative channels** are explored in later questions of the consultation, rather than through qualitative responses to this question.

8. Question 7 – Suggestions for Making Services More Efficient or Cost-Effective

Question wording

"What suggestions do you have for making council services more efficient or cost-effective?"

This was a **free-text question**, generating a wide range of responses. While individual suggestions varied, there was a **high level of consistency** in the types of changes respondents felt would improve efficiency or reduce costs.

Key themes emerging from responses

The main themes identified in the responses were:

- **Reducing management and organisational overheads**
  Many respondents suggested reducing senior management roles, management layers,

or perceived duplication within organisational structures. There was a strong view that efficiency savings should be found within the organisation before impacting frontline delivery.

- **Rationalising and better utilising buildings and assets**
Respondents frequently highlighted under-used buildings and estate costs, suggesting co-location of services, sharing buildings with partners, and reducing energy and maintenance expenditure.

- **Improving procurement, commissioning and contract management**
A common theme was the need to review contracts, consultancy spend and external commissioning arrangements to ensure better value for money and reduce unnecessary costs.

- **Streamlining processes and increasing use of digital tools**
Many responses emphasised simplifying processes, reducing bureaucracy, and using digital systems more effectively—particularly for routine transactions and administrative tasks—while avoiding unnecessary complexity.

- **Prioritising statutory and high-impact services**
Respondents often stressed the importance of focusing limited resources on statutory duties and services with the greatest social impact, rather than lower-priority or discretionary activities.

Illustrative comments

Comments provided by respondents reflect these themes. For example:

"Reduce number of executive leadership roles and governance overheads. Outsource services such as call centres."

"Sell off the underused and decaying buildings."

"Review upper tier management. Perhaps restructure of staff at service managers and upwards is required. Reduce the number of the highest paid jobs first.

Interpretation

Overall, responses to Question 7 indicate that residents are **highly engaged with how efficiency savings are achieved**, not just whether savings are made. There is a strong expectation that the Council should:

- Demonstrate efficiency within its own operations

- Reduce overheads and duplication before reducing services

- Use assets, contracts and digital tools more effectively

This reinforces themes seen elsewhere in the consultation, particularly the strong preference for **organisational and efficiency-based savings** over reductions to frontline or preventative services.

9. Question 8 – Most Fair Principle if Savings Are Necessary

Question wording:
"If savings are necessary, which principle do you think is most fair?"

Response options:

- Everyone experiences a small reduction in services

- Larger reductions in non-essential services to protect essentials

- Focus on efficiency and digital transformation to avoid reductions

- Increase charges/fees for certain services instead of reducing them

9.1 Distribution of responses

- **Focus on efficiency and digital transformation to avoid reductions: 48.5%**

- **Larger reductions in non-essential services to protect essentials: 26.4%**

- **Increase charges/fees for certain services instead of reducing them: 16.6%**

- **Everyone experiences a small reduction in services: 8.5%**

The most commonly supported principle was a focus on **efficiency and digital transformation**, selected by just under half of respondents. This indicates a strong preference for avoiding service reductions altogether by improving how services are delivered.

The second most supported approach was making **larger reductions in non-essential services in order to protect essential services**, reflecting a clear preference for targeted rather than universal cuts.

A smaller but notable proportion of respondents favoured **increasing charges or fees for certain services** instead of reducing services, suggesting some willingness to consider alternative funding mechanisms.

Very few respondents supported an **across-the-board small reduction in services for everyone**, reinforcing a consistent theme throughout the consultation that residents prefer strategic, prioritised approaches to savings rather than uniform service reductions.

10. Question 9 – Community Involvement in Delivering or Supporting Services

Question wording:
"Would you or your community group be interested in playing a larger role in delivering or supporting local services (e.g., volunteering, partnerships)?"

10.1 Distribution of responses

Based on valid responses:

- **Yes:** 19.4%

- **Maybe:** 44.4%

- **No:** 36.3%

A small number of respondents did not answer this question and are excluded from the percentages above.

Just under one in five respondents indicated that they would be willing to play a larger role in delivering or supporting local services. A further **44.4%** selected *"Maybe"*, suggesting a substantial group who could potentially become involved depending on the nature of the role, expectations, and level of support provided.

However, over a third of respondents stated that they would **not** be interested in increased involvement. This indicates that while there is scope to expand community participation, it should be viewed as a **complement to Council-led services rather than a replacement**, and any approaches to community involvement would need to be flexible, well-supported, and voluntary.

11. Question 10 – Future Financial Priorities

Question wording:
"Looking beyond 2026–27, what do you think should be the Council's top financial priority?"

This was a free-text question. Responses show a strong emphasis on **long-term, preventative investment**, with respondents prioritising areas that reduce future demand, protect vulnerable residents, and maintain core public assets.

Key themes emerging from responses

Prevention and early intervention
Prevention and early intervention is a **prominent recurring theme** in responses. Many respondents emphasise investing earlier to reduce future demand and avoid higher costs later, including references to early years, children and family support, and wellbeing-related services.

Supporting vulnerable people
A large proportion of responses focused on protecting and supporting:

- Older people

- People with disabilities or long-term conditions

- Low-income households
  This theme often overlapped with concerns about social care capacity, cost-of-living pressures, and safeguarding those most affected by service reductions.

Addressing poverty and inequality

Many respondents explicitly identified poverty reduction as a core financial priority, including:

- Tackling fuel poverty

- Supporting households facing food insecurity

- Reducing inequality between communities
  This was often framed as a structural issue requiring sustained investment rather than short-term fixes.

Maintaining essential infrastructure and core services

Respondents highlighted the importance of maintaining:

- Roads and transport infrastructure

- Schools and educational buildings

- Social care and community facilities
  There was concern that underinvestment in maintenance would lead to higher costs and poorer outcomes in the future.

Environmental sustainability and climate resilience

A notable number of respondents identified environmental priorities, including:

- Climate action and adaptation

- Energy efficiency

- Sustainable infrastructure
  These responses often linked environmental investment to long-term financial resilience and cost avoidance.

Illustrative comment

"Schools and early years. Those who have ASN are not being supported properly in school."

Summary interpretation

Overall, Question 10 responses show that residents think about future financial priorities in **long-term, strategic terms**, rather than short-term savings. The emphasis is on:

- Preventing harm

- Reducing future demand on services

- Protecting those most at risk

- Maintaining assets that underpin service delivery

This reinforces themes seen elsewhere in the consultation, particularly strong support for prevention, protection of vulnerable groups, and investment that reduces long-term costs.

12. Question 11 – Equality, Human Rights and Wellbeing Impacts

Question wording:
"Do you think there would be any equality, human rights, or wellbeing impacts arising from the areas considered in this consultation?"

12.1 Distribution of responses

- **Yes:** 31.5%

- **No:** 34.2%

- **Don't know:** 34.2%

Views are mixed. Around one third of respondents believe there would be equality, human rights or wellbeing impacts arising from the proposals considered, while a similar proportion believe there would not. A further third were unsure, suggesting a degree of uncertainty or concern about how potential impacts might materialise in practice.

12.2 Themes from qualitative comments

Where respondents answered "Yes" and provided additional detail, a number of consistent themes emerged.

Common concerns included:

- **Impacts on people with additional support needs (ASN)**, particularly if services are reduced or eligibility is tightened.

- **Disproportionate effects on low-income households**, including families already struggling with the cost of living.

- **Negative impacts on mental health and wellbeing**, especially where service reductions could increase stress, anxiety or isolation.

- **Increased isolation and reduced community connection**, particularly if local, preventative or community-based services are reduced.

Illustrative comments included:

- *"Stop wasting money and be honest about where it is going."*

- *"We are being asked to pay more and more while services decline year on year."*

- *"There is no fat left to cut – only bone."*

Responses to Question 12 reflect a **wide range of views and emotional responses**, rather than a single, unified perspective.

Many comments express **strong concern about fairness and the impact of budget decisions on vulnerable people**, alongside frustration about declining services and rising costs.

Respondents frequently raise issues of transparency, trust and value for money, with some questioning whether further efficiencies are realistically achievable.

A significant number of comments also reflect **anger or resignation**, including criticism of political leadership, national funding arrangements and repeated consultation without visible improvement. Some respondents argue for greater investment or higher taxation, while others strongly oppose this, highlighting the **contrasting and sometimes conflicting expectations** held by the public.

Overall, Question 12 illustrates the **depth of feeling and diversity of opinion** surrounding the council's financial position, rather than consensus around specific solutions. These responses underline the importance of clear communication, impact mitigation and openness about the constraints facing the council.

13. Question 12 – Other Comment Themes

Question wording:
"Do you have any other comments or ideas you would like to share about the council's budget?"

This was a free-text question and attracted a wide range of responses. While individual comments covered many different issues, several recurring themes emerged across the dataset.

Key themes

Frustration with the financial context
Many respondents expressed frustration about the need for ongoing savings and the broader funding environment in which the Council is operating. Comments frequently acknowledged that difficult decisions are unavoidable, while also conveying concern about the cumulative impact of repeated budget pressures.

Transparency and communication
A common theme was the desire for clearer communication about how budget decisions are made, how money is allocated, and how savings proposals are developed. Respondents often called for a greater transparency around priorities, trade-offs, and the rationale behind decisions.

Protection of local and accessible services
Concerns were raised about the potential loss of locally accessible services, particularly those that people rely on regularly or that contribute to community cohesion. Respondents stressed the importance of considering the real-world impacts of changes on everyday access to services.

Fairness and impact on vulnerable groups
Many comments emphasised fairness, with respondents urging the Council to ensure that budget decisions do not disproportionately affect those least able to cope with reduced services or increased costs. This included references to low-income households, older people, disabled people, and families facing financial pressure.

Role of national funding and advocacy

Some respondents argued that the scale of the financial challenge cannot be addressed locally alone, and called on the Council to continue lobbying for improved national funding settlements. These comments often framed local budget pressures as part of a wider structural issue affecting councils across Scotland.

Overall interpretation

Question 12 reinforces themes seen elsewhere in the consultation. While respondents recognise the reality of financial constraints, there is a strong expectation that decisions should be transparent, fair, and guided by an understanding of their impact on communities and vulnerable groups. The comments underline the importance of clear communication and maintaining trust as difficult choices are made.

14. Questions 13–18 – Equalities Monitoring

Questions 13–18 collected equalities monitoring information on postcode, gender, age, working status, household composition and housing tenure. These data were used primarily to understand the profile of respondents and, in some cases (such as Question 4), to review how views varied by demographic group.

The detailed distributions of these equalities variables are not reproduced in full here, but they underpin the age and gender breakdowns referenced in earlier sections.

15. Conclusion

The Budget Consultation 2026–27 provides a rich picture of public priorities at a time of financial constraint. The evidence from 854 responses can be summarised as follows:

- **Strategic approach** – Residents clearly prefer strategies based on **prevention, transformation and making better use of assets** over reducing services.

- **Service priorities** – Core frontline services – particularly schools and early years, adult and children's social care, housing and homelessness, and waste and recycling – are seen as the highest priorities for protection or investment.

- **Where savings might be made** – Planning and development and customer/support services are most commonly identified as areas where reductions would be least objectionable, alongside management and administrative overheads and under-used buildings.

- **Council tax and fairness** – While a majority are opposed to any council tax increase, a sizeable minority accept moderate increases to protect services. When asked about fairness, respondents favour focusing on **efficiency and digital transformation** and on protecting essential services over across-the-board cuts.

- **Digital services** – There is strong support for expanding digital delivery where this can save money, but respondents are clear that this must not exclude those who cannot easily access online services.

- **Vulnerable groups and equality** – Protecting services for vulnerable people is seen as highly important, and many respondents are concerned about the potential equality and wellbeing impacts of reductions.

Taken together, the findings indicate that residents want the Council to:

- Prioritise **early intervention and prevention**.

- Make **services more efficient**, including through digital transformation and better use of buildings.

- Avoid reducing frontline services where possible, particularly those serving vulnerable groups.

- Use any unavoidable service reductions and income measures in a way that is **targeted, fair and transparent**.

East Lothian Council Budget Consultation 2026/2027

Appendix 2 – Detailed Summary Results

Question 1 – Financial Strategy Theme Rankings (by Age)

Question wording

"The council faces significant funding gaps over the coming years that will mean that we need to make some big changes to the way that we currently work. Our Financial Strategy sets out five key themes to support this process. We would like to hear your views on these areas. Please rank the themes to show your preferences (1 = most preferred, 5 = least preferred)."

Method note

The analytical base for this section includes respondents who provided **two or more ranked responses** and a **valid age response**. Percentages are calculated **within each age group**, counts are shown alongside percentages, and results should be interpreted with caution where base sizes are small. Respondents were not required to rank all themes, so row totals may not sum to 100%.

Total not answered: 55

Theme 1 – Asset rationalisation and energy efficiency

Age group	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Rank 4	Rank 5
16–24 (n=6)	3 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (50.0%)
25–34 (n=71)	11 (16.0%)	14 (20.0%)	31 (44.0%)	11 (16.0%)	3 (4.0%)
35–44 (n=263)	57 (21.7%)	77 (29.3%)	74 (28.3%)	31 (12.0%)	23 (8.7%)
45–54 (n=177)	51 (29.0%)	34 (19.4%)	49 (27.4%)	29 (16.1%)	11 (6.5%)
55–59 (n=54)	11 (21.1%)	11 (21.1%)	9 (15.8%)	14 (26.3%)	6 (10.5%)
60–64 (n=51)	11 (22.2%)	14 (27.8%)	14 (27.8%)	11 (22.2%)	0 (0.0%)
65–74 (n=77)	26 (33.3%)	9 (11.1%)	26 (33.3%)	11 (14.8%)	6 (7.4%)
75+ (n=29)	11 (40.0%)	3 (10.0%)	3 (10.0%)	3 (10.0%)	9 (30.0%)
Prefer not to say (n=71)	26 (36.0%)	17 (24.0%)	11 (16.0%)	9 (12.0%)	9 (12.0%)

Across most age groups, this theme tends to be placed in the middle of rankings, with Rank 2 or Rank 3 most common for respondents aged 25–64. Older respondents are more likely to rank this theme highly, with 33.3% of those aged 65–74 and 40.0% of those aged 75+ placing it at Rank 1. Rankings among respondents aged 16–24 and those who preferred not to state their age are more polarised, though these patterns should be interpreted with caution due to small base sizes.

Theme 2 – Income generation

Age group	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Rank 4	Rank 5
16–24 (n=6)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	6 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)
25–34 (n=71)	3 (4.0%)	11 (16.0%)	9 (12.0%)	37 (52.0%)	11 (16.0%)
35–44 (n=263)	17 (6.5%)	51 (19.6%)	40 (15.2%)	103 (39.1%)	51 (19.6%)
45–54 (n=177)	20 (11.3%)	23 (12.9%)	37 (21.0%)	63 (35.5%)	34 (19.4%)
55–59 (n=54)	3 (5.3%)	0 (0.0%)	17 (31.6%)	26 (47.4%)	9 (15.8%)
60–64 (n=51)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	6 (11.1%)	17 (33.3%)	29 (55.6%)
65–74 (n=77)	9 (11.1%)	11 (14.8%)	14 (18.5%)	23 (29.6%)	20 (25.9%)
75+ (n=29)	6 (20.0%)	0 (0.0%)	9 (30.0%)	11 (40.0%)	3 (10.0%)
Prefer not to say (n=71)	9 (12.0%)	11 (16.0%)	11 (16.0%)	20 (28.0%)	20 (28.0%)

Income generation is generally ranked towards the lower end across most age groups, with Rank 4 or Rank 5 most common for respondents aged 25–74. Older working-age and retired respondents show particularly low prioritisation, with over half of those aged 60–64 placing this theme at Rank 5. Younger respondents and those who preferred not to state their age show more mixed patterns, though these results should be interpreted cautiously given small base sizes.

Theme 3 – Transformation, service redesign and digitalisation

Age group	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Rank 4	Rank 5
16–24 (n=6)	3 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
25–34 (n=71)	3 (4.0%)	31 (44.0%)	20 (28.0%)	14 (20.0%)	3 (4.0%)

Age group	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Rank 4	Rank 5
35–44 (n=263)	66 (25.0%)	69 (26.1%)	74 (28.3%)	40 (15.2%)	14 (5.4%)
45–54 (n=177)	34 (19.4%)	46 (25.8%)	51 (29.0%)	34 (19.4%)	11 (6.5%)
55–59 (n=54)	20 (36.8%)	26 (47.4%)	6 (10.5%)	3 (5.3%)	0 (0.0%)
60–64 (n=51)	23 (44.4%)	17 (33.3%)	6 (11.1%)	6 (11.1%)	0 (0.0%)
65–74 (n=77)	9 (11.1%)	37 (48.1%)	14 (18.5%)	14 (18.5%)	3 (3.7%)
75+ (n=29)	3 (10.0%)	11 (40.0%)	11 (40.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (10.0%)
Prefer not to say (n=71)	17 (24.0%)	20 (28.0%)	17 (24.0%)	11 (16.0%)	0 (0.0%)

Support for transformation and digitalisation is strongest among respondents aged 55–64, with a majority in both age groups ranking it first or second. Respondents aged 25–54 tend to place this theme in the middle of their rankings, most commonly at Rank 2 or Rank 3, indicating broad but less concentrated support. Older respondents and those who preferred not to state their age show a more even spread across the higher and middle ranks, with very few placing this theme last.

Theme 4 – Early intervention and prevention

Age group	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Rank 4	Rank 5
16–24 (n=6)	0 (0.0%)	6 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
25–34 (n=71)	49 (68.0%)	9 (12.0%)	9 (12.0%)	0 (0.0%)	6 (8.0%)
35–44 (n=263)	106 (40.2%)	51 (19.6%)	57 (21.7%)	46 (17.4%)	3 (1.1%)
45–54 (n=177)	66 (37.1%)	57 (32.3%)	23 (12.9%)	26 (14.5%)	6 (3.2%)
55–59 (n=54)	17 (31.6%)	11 (21.1%)	20 (36.8%)	6 (10.5%)	0 (0.0%)
60–64 (n=51)	11 (22.2%)	17 (33.3%)	14 (27.8%)	9 (16.7%)	0 (0.0%)
65–74 (n=77)	26 (33.3%)	20 (25.9%)	14 (18.5%)	17 (22.2%)	0 (0.0%)
75+ (n=29)	3 (10.0%)	11 (40.0%)	6 (20.0%)	6 (20.0%)	3 (10.0%)
Prefer not to say (n=71)	14 (20.0%)	14 (20.0%)	29 (40.0%)	9 (12.0%)	6 (8.0%)

Early intervention and prevention is a clear priority for most working-age respondents, particularly those aged 25–54, where around four in ten or more rank it as their top choice. Support remains strong across older age groups, with very few respondents aged 25–74 placing this theme at the lowest rank. Respondents who preferred not to state their age show a more even spread across the top three ranks, indicating broad but less concentrated support.

Theme 5 – Service reduction

Age group	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Rank 4	Rank 5
16–24 (n=6)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (50.0%)
25–34 (n=71)	6 (8.0%)	6 (8.0%)	3 (4.0%)	9 (12.0%)	49 (68.0%)
35–44 (n=263)	17 (6.5%)	14 (5.4%)	17 (6.5%)	43 (16.3%)	171 (65.2%)
45–54 (n=177)	6 (3.2%)	14 (8.1%)	17 (9.7%)	26 (14.5%)	114 (64.5%)
55–59 (n=54)	3 (5.3%)	3 (5.3%)	3 (5.3%)	6 (10.5%)	40 (73.7%)
60–64 (n=51)	3 (5.6%)	3 (5.6%)	11 (22.2%)	9 (16.7%)	23 (44.4%)
65–74 (n=77)	6 (7.4%)	0 (0.0%)	9 (11.1%)	11 (14.8%)	49 (63.0%)
75+ (n=29)	3 (10.0%)	3 (10.0%)	0 (0.0%)	9 (30.0%)	11 (40.0%)
Prefer not to say (n=71)	0 (0.0%)	9 (12.0%)	0 (0.0%)	23 (32.0%)	37 (52.0%)

Service reduction is consistently the least preferred option across almost all age groups, with a clear majority of respondents aged 25–59 placing it at Rank 5. Opposition is particularly strong among those aged 35–44, 45-54 and 55–59, where around two thirds or more rank this theme last. While older respondents and those who preferred not to state their age show slightly more dispersion across the lower ranks, service reduction remains the least favoured theme overall.

Question 1 Summary

- **Early intervention and prevention** emerges as the strongest priority across most age groups, particularly among respondents aged **25–54**, where around four in ten or more rank it first, and very few place it last across ages 25–74.

- **Transformation, service redesign and digitalisation** attracts broad support, especially among those aged **55–64**, where a majority rank it first or second, while respondents aged **25–54** most commonly place it mid-ranking.

- **Asset rationalisation and energy efficiency** is generally positioned in the middle of rankings across working-age groups, but is more likely to be ranked highly by respondents aged **65+**.
- **Income generation** is typically ranked towards the lower end across most age groups, with Rank 4 or 5 most common among respondents aged **25–74**, and particularly low prioritisation among those aged **60–64**.
- **Service reduction** is consistently the least preferred option across almost all age groups, with clear majorities of respondents aged **25–59** placing it at Rank 5.

Question 2

Question wording

"The council is having to make hard choices to balance its budget. Please tick the statement which best describes your views on each of these areas."

For each service area, respondents selected one of the following:

- **The council should invest more in this service**
- **The council should protect this service**
- **The council should reduce this service to make savings**

2.1 Overall pattern across age groups

Across all age groups, broad patterns in service priorities are evident, although the balance between investment, protection and reduction varies by age and service area.

Across every age category:

- **Frontline and care-related services are most commonly identified for protection or investment.**
- **Non-frontline and organisational services are more frequently identified as areas where reductions would be acceptable.**

There is no age group in which the overall ordering of priorities differs substantially from the consultation-wide picture.

2.2 Services most strongly protected across all ages

Across all age groups, the following services are consistently prioritised for protection or investment:

- **Adult Social Care and support for older people**

- **Children's Services and Child Protection**

- **Schools and early years**

- **Housing and Homelessness Services**

- **Waste, Recycling and Street Cleaning**

Support for protecting these services is strong and widespread at every age, although with some variations in the balance between investment, protection and reduction by age.

2.3 Services more commonly identified for reduction

Across all age groups, respondents are more willing to consider reductions in:

- **Planning and Development**

- **Customer and support services**

- **Climate Action and Sustainability**

- **Sport, Leisure and Countryside**

- **Libraries and Community Centres**

While the strength of preference varies slightly by age, the relative ordering of these services is consistent.

2.4 Age-related differences in emphasis (not direction)

Where age-related differences appear, they relate to emphasis rather than direction:

- **Younger respondents** are slightly more inclined to support investment in some services, although this pattern is not consistent across all services.

- **Older respondents** place marginally greater emphasis on protecting existing provision, particularly services linked to care, accessibility and daily needs.

However, these differences do not alter the overall pattern of priorities and do not suggest fundamentally different views between age groups.

Key interpretation point

Question 2 shows strong cross-generational alignment in how service priorities are understood. Age influences the *strength* of preference between investment and protection in some areas, but does not change which services are regarded as essential or which are seen as more acceptable for reduction.

Question 3

"If savings must be made, which areas would you least object to being reduced?"

Thematic analysis by age group

Overview (all ages)

Across all age groups, respondents tended to focus less on naming specific frontline services and more on **how savings should be achieved**. Several themes recur consistently across the age range:

- Reducing **management, senior leadership and administrative overheads**

- Rationalising or closing **under-used buildings and estates**

- Cutting **non-essential or discretionary services** ahead of core provision

- Improving **efficiency and value for money** before reducing services

- Protecting **frontline, preventative and care-related services**

While these themes are present in every age group, the **strength of emphasis and framing** varies by age.

Age 16–24

Dominant themes

Very few respondents aged 16–24 provided a free-text response to this question.
Where a response was given, it referred to **climate-related activity**. Given the extremely small number of responses, no broader conclusions can be drawn for this age group.

Age 25–34

Dominant themes

Responses from those aged 25–34 focused primarily on **reductions to management, senior leadership, and administrative costs**, alongside references to **planning and regulatory processes**. A number of respondents expressed concern about perceived inefficiencies and bureaucracy, suggesting that savings should be sought in these areas rather than through reductions to frontline services.

There were also some references to **climate and sustainability activity**, particularly where this was perceived as less immediately essential when compared with core services. Overall, respondents in this age group tended to frame savings in terms of reducing overheads and non-frontline expenditure.

Age 35–44

Dominant themes

Respondents aged 35–44 commonly highlighted management structures, councillor costs, and senior staffing as areas where savings could be made. There were also repeated references to planning, regulatory, and compliance functions, often framed as overly bureaucratic or resource-intensive.

Some respondents also pointed to discretionary services, such as leisure or cultural provision, as preferable areas for reduction when compared with statutory or care-related services.

Age 45–54

In this age group, responses frequently focused on reducing expenditure on senior management, administration, and back-office functions. There were also references to consultancy and external contracts, with respondents questioning the value for money of such spending.

A number of comments suggested that savings should be achieved through improved efficiency rather than service cuts, including streamlining internal processes and reducing duplication.

Age 55–59

Respondents aged 55–59 most often identified management costs, councillor expenses, and internal bureaucracy as areas where savings could be made. Planning and regulatory services were also mentioned, particularly where these were seen as slowing decision-making or increasing costs unnecessarily.

There were occasional references to climate and sustainability initiatives, with some respondents suggesting these should be deprioritised in favour of protecting core services.

Age 60–64

Responses from those aged 60-64 and over commonly emphasised protecting frontline and care services, while identifying administration, management, and council overheads as preferable areas for reduction. Some respondents also mentioned consultancy spending and non-essential projects as suitable targets for savings.

Overall, this age group tended to frame savings in terms of reducing perceived inefficiency rather than reducing direct service provision.

Age 65–74

Dominant themes

Strong consensus around:

- Reducing planning, administration and support services

- Avoiding cuts to social care, health and community support

- Willingness to accept reductions in leisure-type services

Age 75+

Dominant themes

- Very strong emphasis on protecting:

  - Adult social care

  - Community-based support

- Clear acceptance of reductions in:

  - Administrative

  - Planning

  - Support services

Typical framing

Responses in this group were typically direct and practical, drawing a sharp distinction between services that **directly help people** and those perceived as organisational or managerial. There was little appetite for reducing care-related services, even if this required deeper cuts elsewhere.

Prefer not to say (age)

Dominant themes

Responses from this group broadly mirror those of the older age bands:

- Support for reducing management and support services

- Protection of frontline and care-related provision

Given the small base size, no strong age-specific conclusions are drawn.

Cross-age comparison summary

Across age groups:

- **Management, administration and overheads** are the most consistently identified areas for savings.

- **Frontline services**, particularly social care, children's services and housing-related support, are widely protected.

- Younger respondents place greater emphasis on **prevention and long-term impact**. Although base group size of 16-24 is small (3).

- Older respondents show greater acceptance of reductions in **non-frontline and discretionary services**.

- There is broad agreement that **efficiency and rationalisation should come before service cuts**.

Key point for interpretation

While there are differences in emphasis by age, responses to Question 3 show a **high degree of cross-generational alignment**. Age influences how firmly respondents draw boundaries around particular services, rather than producing fundamentally different views about where savings should, and should not, fall.

Question 4

Council Tax Increases – Age Breakdown

Question wording

"Every 1% increase to the council tax charge equates to a weekly increase of £0.30 for an average property in East Lothian. Would you support an increase to council tax charges from April 2026 in order to protect council services?"

Response options

- Yes – support an increase up to £3 per week

- Yes – support an increase up to £5 per week

- Yes – support an increase of more than £5 per week

- No – would not support any increase

- Don't know

Question 4 – Full age breakdown

Age group	No increase	Yes ≤£3/wk	Yes ≤£5/wk	Yes >£5/wk	Don't know	Base (n)
16–24	33.3%	0.0%	33.3%	33.3%	0.0%	9
25–34	39.3%	39.3%	10.7%	7.1%	3.6%	80
35–44	37.9%	33.7%	17.9%	7.4%	3.2%	271
45–54	40.3%	27.4%	16.1%	16.1%	0.0%	177
55–59	47.4%	21.1%	26.3%	5.3%	0.0%	54
60–64	55.6%	16.7%	5.6%	16.7%	5.6%	51
65–74	22.2%	25.9%	29.6%	22.2%	0.0%	77
75+	50.0%	30.0%	20.0%	0.0%	0.0%	29
Prefer not to say	73.1%	19.2%	3.8%	3.8%	0.0%	74

Total not answered: 32

Age-based interpretation

1. Overall willingness to support any increase

Support for some level of council tax increase varies by age, but the pattern is not a simple "younger vs older" divide.

- Respondents aged **16–24** show relatively high support for an increase (though the base is very small, **n=3**).

- Respondents aged **25–59** are more evenly split, with **"No increase"** the single most common response across most of these groups (and is tied for most common among 25-34).

- Among older respondents, views differ: those aged **60–64** and **75+** show higher opposition to any increase, while respondents aged **65–74** are notably more supportive of some increase.

2. Tolerance for higher increases

Support for increases above £5 per week is highest among:

- **16–24 (33.3%)**

- **65–74 (22.2%)**
  It is lowest among **25–44 (around 7%)** and lowest overall among **55–59 (5.3%)**.

3. Opposition to any increase

Opposition to any increase is highest among those respondents who preferred not to state their age in the **60–64** and **75+** age groups, and is also substantial across most **25–59** groups.

However, opposition is much lower among respondents aged **65–74**, where fewer than a quarter selected "No increase".

4. "Don't know" responses

Don't know" responses are low across all age groups (**0–6%**), suggesting uncertainty is not a major driver of age-related differences.

Question 5

Importance of Protecting Services for Vulnerable Groups – Age Breakdown

Question wording

"How important is it that the Council protects services for vulnerable groups (e.g., older people, children at risk, low-income families), even if this means reducing other services?"

Response options

- Very important

- Important

- Neutral

- Less important

- Not important

Question 5 – Full age breakdown

Age group	Very important n (%)	Important n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Less important n (%)	Not important n (%)	Base (n)
16–24	0 (0.0%)	6 (66.7%)	3 (33.3%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	9
25–34	23 (29.6%)	34 (44.4%)	11 (14.8%)	6 (7.4%)	3 (3.7%)	77
35–44	109 (40.4%)	77 (28.7%)	66 (24.5%)	14 (5.3%)	3 (1.1%)	269
45–54	69 (38.7%)	69 (38.7%)	29 (16.1%)	6 (3.2%)	6 (3.2%)	177
55–59	17 (31.6%)	23 (42.1%)	14 (26.3%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	54
60–64	17 (33.3%)	14 (27.8%)	14 (27.8%)	3 (5.6%)	3 (5.6%)	51
65–74	26 (33.3%)	34 (44.4%)	14 (18.5%)	3 (3.7%)	0 (0.0%)	77
75+	6 (20.0%)	11 (40.0%)	9 (30.0%)	3 (10.0%)	0 (0.0%)	29
Prefer not to say	9 (11.5%)	31 (42.3%)	23 (30.8%)	11 (15.4%)	0 (0.0%)	74

Total not answered: 37

Age-based interpretation

Across all age groups, responses were strongly positive, with the majority in every age category rating the issue as either *Very important* or *Important*. The highest combined *Very important* or *Important* responses are seen among some mid-to-older age groups (for example, 45–54 at 77.4% and 65–74 at 77.7%), though no age group exceeds four-fifths on this measure. Younger age groups also showed clear majority support, although with a greater spread across response categories.

Neutral responses were present across all age with proportions varying by age. This suggests a degree of uncertainty or ambivalence among some respondents rather than outright opposition.

Negative responses (*Less important* or *Not important*) remained a minority view in all age groups, although they were slightly higher among those aged 25–34, 60–64, and respondents who preferred not to state their age. Overall, the age profile indicates broad agreement on the importance of the issue, with differences primarily reflecting varying levels of certainty rather than fundamental disagreement.

Question 6

Support for Delivering More Services Online – Age Breakdown

Question wording

"Would you support more services being delivered online if this saved money?"

Response options

- Yes, strongly support

- Yes, somewhat support

- No opinion

- No, prefer in-person

- No, strongly oppose

Question 6 – Full age breakdown

Age group	Yes – strongly support n (%)	Yes – somewhat support n (%)	No opinion n (%)	No – prefer in-person n (%)	No – strongly oppose n (%)	Base (n)
16–24	6 (66.7%)	3 (33.3%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	9
25–34	37 (46.4%)	29 (35.7%)	6 (7.1%)	3 (3.6%)	6 (7.1%)	80
35–44	131 (48.4%)	126 (46.3%)	11 (4.2%)	3 (1.1%)	0 (0.0%)	271
45–54	80 (45.2%)	80 (45.2%)	3 (1.6%)	14 (8.1%)	0 (0.0%)	177
55–59	37 (68.4%)	14 (26.3%)	3 (5.3%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	54
60–64	26 (50.0%)	20 (38.9%)	0 (0.0%)	6 (11.1%)	0 (0.0%)	51
65–74	43 (55.6%)	26 (33.3%)	6 (7.4%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (3.7%)	77
75+	0 (0.0%)	20 (70.0%)	3 (10.0%)	3 (10.0%)	3 (10.0%)	29
Prefer not to say	46 (61.5%)	26 (34.6%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (3.8%)	0 (0.0%)	74

Total not answered: 32

Age-based interpretation

1. Overall support for online delivery

Support for delivering more services online (strongly + somewhat) is high across all age groups, but the pattern is not a steady decline with age. The highest combined support is observed among respondents aged **16-24 (100%, very small base) 35–44 (94.7%), 55–59 (94.7%)**, and those who **preferred not to state their age (96.1%)**. The lowest combined support is among those aged **75+ (70.0%)**, though this group has a small base (**n=10**).

2. Opposition to online delivery

Opposition (prefer in-person + strongly oppose) remains low for most age groups, but is higher among respondents aged **75+ (20.0%)** and **60–64 (11.1%)**, and is also present among **25–34 (10.7%)**. Most other age groups show opposition below 10%.

3. Neutral or uncertain responses

"No opinion" responses are generally low across all age groups, ranging from **0.0% to 10.0%**, with the highest level of uncertainty among those aged **75+ (10.0%)** (small base).

Question 7

"What suggestions do you have for making council services more efficient or cost-effective?"

Thematic analysis by age group

Overview (all ages)

Across all age groups, responses focus primarily on **how services are delivered and organised**, rather than on reducing specific frontline services. Common themes include:

- Reducing management layers and organisational overheads
- Rationalising or better utilising buildings and assets
- Improving efficiency through digital processes, often alongside calls for safeguards
- Reducing duplication and inefficiency across services
- Improving procurement, commissioning and contract management
- Protecting frontline delivery while seeking savings elsewhere

These themes recur across the dataset, although **the number of responses varies substantially by age group**, and differences in emphasis should be interpreted in light of very small base sizes for some ages.

Age 16–24

Dominant theme

- Support for digital self-service and online processes

Typical framing

Only a very small number of respondents in this age group. The single response received focused on improving online self-service and digital reporting systems as a means of increasing efficiency.

Given the extremely limited base size, no broader conclusions can be drawn about priorities or concerns for this age group beyond this specific point.

Age 25–34

Dominant themes

- Digitalisation and automation of routine tasks

- Reducing duplication across council departments

- Better use of data and joined-up working

Typical framing

This group often combined enthusiasm for digital solutions with a strong **value-for-money** perspective. Common references included:

- Online forms and self-service options

- Streamlining back-office functions

- Reducing bureaucracy and repetitive processes

Some respondents acknowledged the need to **retain support for those unable to access online services**, but this was not a dominant concern.

Age 35–44

Dominant themes

- Protecting frontline services while cutting inefficiency

- Reducing management layers and "bureaucracy"

- Better planning to avoid reactive or short-term spending

Typical framing

Many responses in this group explicitly distinguished between:

- Staff delivering services directly to residents, and

- Organisational or administrative functions

There was concern that poorly designed efficiency measures could be **counterproductive**, leading to higher costs later if preventative or frontline services were undermined.

Age 45–54

Dominant themes

- Rationalising buildings and estates

- Reducing duplication between council and partner organisations

- Reviewing senior management structures

Typical framing

Responses tended to be **pragmatic in tone**, acknowledging the scale of the financial challenge. Efficiency was framed as:

- Making "tough but sensible choices"

- Avoiding waste

- Ensuring taxpayers' money is used effectively

There was less emphasis on innovation or expansion, and more on **consolidation and discipline**.

Age 55–59

Dominant themes

- Improving efficiency in staffing and working practices

- Better use of digital and online systems

- Asset and building rationalisation

Typical framing

Responses from this age group reflect a **mixed set of views** on how efficiency could be improved. Suggestions include reviewing staffing structures and working arrangements, making better use of digital systems, and reducing costs associated with buildings and assets.

While some responses reference management and organisational efficiency, these views are **not uniform across the group**, and should be interpreted as part of a broader emphasis on

improving value for money rather than a singular focus on senior management or consultancy costs.

Age 60–64

Dominant themes

- Better asset management and building rationalisation
- Simplifying organisational structures
- Avoiding duplication across services

Typical framing

This group often framed efficiency in terms of **financial sustainability**, including:

- Living within available resources
- Avoiding long-term commitments that cannot be funded
- Making better use of existing assets

Digital solutions were generally supported, but with **greater caution** than among younger respondents.

Age 65–74

Dominant themes

- Cutting administration rather than services
- Improving coordination between services
- Protecting access for those less able to use digital systems

Typical framing

Responses frequently balanced efficiency with **fairness**. Common themes included:

- Support for online services, provided alternatives remain
- Emphasis on protecting vulnerable residents
- Explicit concern about digital exclusion

This group often referenced the needs of **older people and those with limited digital access**.

Age 75+

Dominant themes

- Reducing organisational inefficiency and overheads

- Focusing resources on essential services

- General concerns about value for money

Typical framing

Responses from respondents aged 75 and over tend to be **practical and direct**, often emphasising the need to reduce inefficiency and focus spending on services that provide clear benefit. Comments commonly refer to organisational costs or activities seen as non-essential.

There are **few explicit references** within this age group to digital access or exclusion in the responses provided. As a result, views on digital delivery should be interpreted cautiously and not assumed to be a dominant concern for this group based on this question alone.

Prefer not to say (age)

Dominant themes

Responses broadly mirror those of older age groups:

- Reducing management and overheads

- Improving efficiency before cutting services

- Retaining non-digital access routes

Due to the small base size, no distinct age-specific conclusions are drawn.

Cross-age comparison summary

Across age groups, there is broad agreement that efficiency savings should focus on **organisational and operational change rather than reductions to frontline services**. Reducing overheads, improving asset use, and streamlining processes recur throughout responses, while digital approaches are commonly mentioned as part of the solution.

Differences by age relate mainly to **emphasis and framing**, and in some cases reflect **very small numbers of responses**, rather than clearly distinct or opposing views between age groups.

Key interpretation point

Question 7 shows **remarkable alignment across age groups** on the principle of improving efficiency. Differences by age relate primarily to **implementation and safeguards**, not to the underlying objective of making council services more cost-effective.

Question 8

Fairness Principles for Making Savings – Age Breakdown

Question wording:
"If savings are necessary, which principle do you think is most fair?"

Response options:

1. Everyone experiences a small reduction in services

2. Larger reductions in non-essential services to protect essentials

3. Focus on efficiency and digital transformation to avoid reductions

4. Increase charges/fees for certain services instead of reducing them

Question 8 – Full age breakdown

Age group	Small reductions for everyone n (%)	Larger cuts to non-essential services n (%)	Greater use of efficiency and digital approaches n (%)	Increase charges or fees n (%)	Base (n)
16–24	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	9 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	9
25–34	6 (7.1%)	26 (32.1%)	34 (42.9%)	14 (17.9%)	80
35–44	20 (7.4%)	54 (20.2%)	140 (52.1%)	54 (20.2%)	269
45–54	17 (9.7%)	51 (29.0%)	86 (48.4%)	23 (12.9%)	177
55–59	0 (0.0%)	14 (26.3%)	29 (52.6%)	11 (21.1%)	54
60–64	6 (11.1%)	17 (33.3%)	26 (50.0%)	3 (5.6%)	51
65–74	6 (7.4%)	29 (37.0%)	29 (37.0%)	14 (18.5%)	77
75+	6 (20.0%)	11 (40.0%)	9 (30.0%)	3 (10.0%)	29
Prefer not to say	9 (11.5%)	17 (23.1%)	40 (53.8%)	9 (11.5%)	74

Total not answered: 34

Age-based interpretation

Views on what constitutes a fair approach to making savings vary by age group, though several common patterns emerge. Across most age groups, **focus on efficiency and digital transformation to avoid reductions** is the most frequently selected option, the main exception is respondents aged **75+** where **larger reductions in non-essential services to protect essentials** is the most selected option **(40%)**, compared with 30.0% selecting efficiency/digital. Among residents aged **65-74**, efficiency/digital is **joint highest** (37%) tied with larger cuts to non-essentials (37%).

Support for **larger cuts to non-essential services** is more evenly distributed across age groups, typically accounting for around **20-40%** of responses, with no consistent age-related trend. In contrast, **small reductions across all services** attract relatively low support across most age groups, though this option is more frequently selected by respondents aged **75 and over (20.0%)** than by any other age group.

Support for **increasing charges or fees** remains a minority position across all age groups, ranging from **0.0% to 21.1%**, with no clear age-based pattern. Overall, the findings suggest that while preferences differ in emphasis, efficiency and transformation are consistently viewed as the fairest approach across all ages.

4. Small reductions for everyone

Support for spreading reductions across all services:

- Is **low among younger respondents**,

- Remains a minority view (7.4% among those aged 65–74 and 20.0% among those aged 75+).

5. Increasing charges or fees

- Support for increasing charges/fees is a minority view in every age group, ranging from 0.0% (16-24) and 5.6% (60-64), up to 21.1% (55-59).

Question 9

Interest in Playing a Larger Role in Delivering or Supporting Local Services – Age Breakdown

Question wording:
"Would you or your community group be interested in playing a larger role in delivering or supporting local services (e.g., volunteering, partnerships)?"

Response options:
Yes
Maybe
No

Age group	Yes n (%)	Maybe n (%)	No n (%)	Base (n)
16–24	0 (0.0%)	6 (66.7%)	3 (33.3%)	9
25–34	11 (14.8%)	43 (55.6%)	23 (29.6%)	77
35–44	51 (19.4%)	126 (47.3%)	89 (33.3%)	266
45–54	37 (21.0%)	77 (43.5%)	63 (35.5%)	177
55–59	9 (15.8%)	20 (36.8%)	26 (47.4%)	54
60–64	11 (22.2%)	20 (38.9%)	20 (38.9%)	51
65–74	23 (30.8%)	29 (38.5%)	23 (30.8%)	74
75+	9 (30.0%)	9 (30.0%)	11 (40.0%)	29
Prefer not to say	9 (12.0%)	17 (24.0%)	46 (64.0%)	71

Total not answered: 46

Age-based interpretation

Views on this question differed noticeably by age group, although in most cases responses were split across *Yes*, *Maybe*, and *No*. Among younger respondents aged 16–24, no respondents selected *Yes*, with most choosing *Maybe* and the remainder selecting *No*, suggesting uncertainty rather than firm support or opposition.

Support for *Yes* responses was higher among some older age groups. However, even in these groups, *Maybe* and *No* responses together continued to account for a substantial proportion of answers.

Across most age groups, *Maybe* was the most common or joint-most common response, indicating that many respondents were open to the proposal but had reservations. Overall, the age analysis shows that firm support was limited, with cautious or undecided views prevalent across much of the age spectrum.

Younger respondents show openness, but data is limited
The **16–24** base is extremely small, so results for this group should be treated with caution.

Question 10

"Looking beyond 2026–27, what do you think should be the Council's top financial priority?"
Thematic analysis by age group

Overview (all ages)

Across all age groups, responses focus on **long-term sustainability rather than short-term fixes**. The most common cross-cutting themes across the dataset are:

- Long-term financial sustainability and stability

- Protecting essential and statutory services

- Investing in prevention to reduce future demand and costs

- Managing growth pressures (including population change, housing, and infrastructure)

- Improving efficiency and value for money

These themes recur across the age spectrum. Differences between age groups relate mainly to **emphasis and framing**, rather than fundamentally different priorities.

Age 16–24

Dominant themes

- Investment in future-facing services

- Prevention and early intervention

- Environmental sustainability and climate action

Typical framing
Younger respondents frequently framed priorities in terms of *long-term consequences* and intergenerational fairness. Responses often emphasised investing early to avoid greater costs later, alongside concern about environmental sustainability and preparing the council for future challenges.

Age 25–34

Dominant themes

- Long-term financial planning

- Managing growth and rising service demand

- Investment in housing, education, and transport

Typical framing

This group commonly linked financial priorities to affordability and quality of life. Responses frequently referenced pressures associated with population growth, including housing availability, childcare, schools, and transport infrastructure. There was a strong emphasis on avoiding short-term decisions that could undermine long-term resilience.

Age 35–44

Dominant themes

- Protecting children's services and education

- Preventative spending

- Maintaining service quality under financial pressure

Typical framing

Many responses were framed through family-related concerns. There was frequent emphasis on prevention as a way to manage demand over time, alongside concern that cuts to early support or education would create higher costs in the future.

Age 45–54

Dominant themes

- Financial sustainability

- Protecting essential services

- Value for money and accountability

Typical framing

Responses in this age group tended to be pragmatic, recognising financial constraints while stressing the importance of prioritisation and avoiding waste. There was less emphasis on expansion and more focus on maintaining existing services in a sustainable way.

Age 55–59

Dominant themes

- Long-term affordability of services

- Protection of health and care-related provision

- Living within available resources

Typical framing

Respondents often framed priorities in terms of realism and restraint, emphasising the need to

focus spending where it is most needed and to avoid commitments that could not be sustained in the long term.

Age 60–64

Dominant themes

- Financial resilience

- Maintaining core services

- Managing demographic change

Typical framing
This group frequently referenced the ageing population and rising demand for care and support. Long-term planning and financial stability were seen as essential to protecting services in the future.

Age 65–74

Dominant themes

- Protecting adult social care and health-related services

- Long-term financial sustainability

- Fairness for vulnerable residents

Typical framing
Responses often reflected anticipated future reliance on services, with strong emphasis on safeguarding care provision and ensuring that those least able to cope are protected, even if other areas face constraint.

Age 75+

Dominant themes

- Safeguarding essential care and support services

- Financial prudence and stability

- Protection of vulnerable groups

Typical framing
This group tended to emphasise reliability, accessibility, and stability. Responses focused on ensuring that core services, particularly care, remain dependable and adequately funded, with little appetite for financial risk or major structural change.

Prefer not to say (age)

Dominant themes

- Long-term financial sustainability

- Protection of essential services

- Value for money

Due to the small base size, no distinct age-specific conclusions are drawn from this group.

Cross-age comparison summary (Question 10)

Across all age groups:

- **Financial sustainability** is the most consistently cited long-term priority.

- **Protecting essential and frontline services** is a shared concern across generations.

- Younger respondents place greater emphasis on:

    - Prevention

    - Future investment

    - Environmental sustainability

- Older respondents focus more on:

    - Stability

    - Care services

    - Prudence and affordability

Overall, Question 10 reinforces a strong consensus that the Council should plan for the long term, balance growth and demand, and avoid decisions that simply defer problems into future years.

Question 11

Perceived Equality, Human Rights or Wellbeing Impacts – Age Breakdown

Question wording:
"Do you think there would be any equality, human rights, or wellbeing impacts arising from the areas considered in this consultation?"

Response options:

- Yes

- No

- Don't know

Question 11 – Full age breakdown

Age group	Yes n (%)	No n (%)	Don't know n (%)	Base (n)
16–24	0 (0.0%)	3 (33.3%)	6 (66.7%)	9
25–34	23 (28.6%)	20 (25.0%)	37 (46.4%)	80
35–44	91 (34.0%)	83 (30.9%)	94 (35.1%)	269
45–54	60 (35.0%)	63 (36.7%)	49 (28.3%)	171
55–59	14 (29.4%)	20 (41.2%)	14 (29.4%)	49
60–64	17 (33.3%)	17 (33.3%)	17 (33.3%)	51
65–74	26 (33.3%)	23 (29.6%)	29 (37.0%)	77
75+	9 (30.0%)	14 (50.0%)	6 (20.0%)	29
Prefer not to say	20 (26.9%)	31 (42.3%)	23 (30.8%)	74
Not Answered	3 (11.1%)	11 (44.4%)	11 (44.4%)	26

Total not answered: 19

Age-based interpretation

Across age groups, responses show no single dominant view, with "Yes", "No" and "Don't know" all attracting substantial proportions in most age categories.

Among respondents aged 25–74, around one quarter to one third typically believe that equality, human rights or wellbeing impacts are likely. At the same time, similar proportions in these age groups believe that impacts are unlikely, while a further third express uncertainty.

Younger respondents aged 16–24 (very small base) are more likely to answer "Don't know", suggesting uncertainty rather than a clear position. Older respondents aged 75+ show a higher proportion answering "No", although uncertainty remains present in this group as well.

Overall, age does not produce a strong or linear pattern in views on impacts. Differences between age groups are modest and suggest variation in confidence and judgement rather than fundamentally different perspectives.

Question 12

"Do you have any other comments or ideas you would like to share about the council's budget?"
Thematic analysis by age group

Overview (all ages)

Question 12 generated a broad range of reflective and often strongly felt comments. Across all age groups, respondents used this question to reinforce themes raised elsewhere in the consultation rather than introduce entirely new issues. Common cross-cutting themes include:

- Fairness and transparency in budget decision-making

- Strong support for protecting frontline and statutory services

- Frustration with the scale and repetition of budget pressures

- Skepticism about management costs and organisational efficiency

- Recognition that difficult and unpopular choices are unavoidable

Many responses added personal context, emotional emphasis, or broader reflections on the funding environment, rather than commenting on specific budget lines.

Age 16–24

Dominant themes

- Intergenerational fairness

- Long-term consequences of short-term decisions

- Climate and environmental responsibility

Typical framing
Younger respondents often framed their comments around future impact and values. There was concern that repeated short-term savings could undermine long-term outcomes for younger generations, particularly in relation to education, climate action, and opportunity. Comments tended to focus on principles and direction of travel rather than operational detail.

Age 25–34

Dominant themes

- Value for money and accountability

- Transparency around spending decisions

- Planning for growth and future demand

Typical framing
Responses in this group frequently questioned how resources are currently allocated and called for clearer explanations of why particular choices are necessary. There was conditional acceptance of difficult decisions, provided they were well explained and clearly linked to long-term planning rather than short-term fixes.

Age 35–44

Dominant themes

- Protection of services for children and families

- Prevention to avoid higher future costs

- Cumulative pressure on household finances

Typical framing
Many respondents linked budget decisions directly to family life, education, and access to support services. There was concern that incremental cuts over time could erode service quality and increase pressure on families, even where individual decisions appear small or justified in isolation.

Age 45–54

Dominant themes

- Pragmatism about financial constraints

- Need for prioritisation and evidence-based decisions

- Frustration with perceived inefficiency

Typical framing
Responses often balanced realism with concern. Many acknowledged that funding pressures are unavoidable, while expressing frustration about waste, duplication, or inefficiency. There was a strong emphasis on prioritising essential services and making difficult decisions transparently.

Age 55–59

Dominant themes

- Protecting health and care services

- Affordability and council tax pressures

- Management accountability and overheads

Typical framing
Affordability featured more strongly in this group, with respondents often referencing fixed or limited incomes. There were repeated calls to reduce management and overheads before cutting services, and concern about shifting financial pressure onto residents.

Age 60–64

Dominant themes

- Financial sustainability and realism

- Fairness for older residents

- Transparency in long-term planning

Typical framing
This group often stressed the importance of honest communication about what can realistically be afforded. There was concern about service changes affecting independence and wellbeing, alongside a desire for stability and predictability rather than frequent restructuring or reform.

Age 65–74

Dominant themes

- Protection of adult social care and community support

- Digital exclusion and accessibility

- Equity for vulnerable residents

Typical framing
Responses frequently reflected anticipated future reliance on council services. There was support for efficiency and change in principle, but only where safeguards are in place to protect access for those less able to use digital or self-service models.

Age 75+

Dominant themes

- Access to essential services

- Simplicity and clarity

- Protecting the most vulnerable

Typical framing

Comments were often direct and practical, focusing on day-to-day impact. There was strong resistance to changes perceived as impersonal, overly complex, or likely to reduce face-to-face access. Maintaining independence and reliable support was a central concern.

Prefer not to say (age)

Dominant themes

- Fairness and transparency

- Protection of essential services

- Caution about digital-only approaches

Due to the small base size, no distinct age-specific conclusions are drawn. Responses broadly align with themes seen in older age groups.

Cross-age comparison summary (Question 12)

Across all age groups:

- There is strong demand for fair, transparent, and well-explained decision-making

- Protecting essential and frontline services is a consistent priority

- Respondents want impacts on vulnerable residents to be explicitly considered

Differences by age are primarily in emphasis:

- **Younger respondents** focus on long-term consequences, intergenerational fairness, and environmental responsibility

- **Older respondents** emphasise accessibility, affordability, and reliability of services

Overall, Question 12 reinforces earlier findings: while views differ on implementation and emphasis, there is broad cross-generational agreement on underlying values and expectations.

Appendix 2 – Gender

Financial Strategy Theme Rankings – Gender Breakdown

Question wording

"The council faces significant funding gaps over the coming years that will mean that we need to make some big changes to the way that we currently work. Our Financial Strategy sets out five key themes to support this process. We would like to hear your views on these areas. Please rank the themes to show your preferences (1 = most preferred, 5 = least preferred)."

Method note

The analytical base for this section includes respondents who **ranked two or more themes** and provided a **valid gender response**. Percentages are calculated **within each gender group**, counts are shown alongside percentages, and percentages are rounded to one decimal place. Respondents were not required to rank all themes, so row totals may not sum to 100%, and findings for groups with very small base sizes should be interpreted with caution.

Theme 1 – Asset rationalisation and energy efficiency

Gender	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Rank 4	Rank 5
Female (n=474)	106 (22.3%)	117 (24.7%)	134 (28.3%)	71 (15.1%)	40 (8.4%)
Male (n=254)	77 (30.3%)	54 (21.3%)	66 (25.8%)	37 (14.6%)	20 (7.9%)
Other (n=6)	6 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Prefer not to say (n=69)	23 (33.3%)	9 (12.5%)	17 (25.0%)	11 (16.7%)	9 (12.5%)

Support for this theme is relatively strong across genders, with male respondents more likely than female respondents to rank it as their top priority (30.3% vs 22.3%). Females are more likely to place it in the middle of their rankings, particularly at Rank 3 (28.3%), suggesting broader but less strongly polarised support. Responses from the "Other" and "Prefer not to say" groups show high apparent support, but these patterns should be interpreted with caution due to small base sizes.

Theme 2 – Income generation

Gender	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Rank 4	Rank 5
Female (n=474)	31 (6.6%)	57 (12.0%)	86 (18.1%)	209 (44.0%)	91 (19.3%)
Male (n=254)	26 (10.1%)	37 (14.6%)	46 (18.0%)	80 (31.5%)	66 (25.8%)
Other (n=6)	0 (0.0%)	3 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (50.0%)
Prefer not to say (n=69)	9 (12.5%)	11 (16.7%)	11 (16.7%)	20 (29.2%)	17 (25.0%)

Income generation tends to be ranked lower overall, particularly among female respondents, with 63.3% placing it in Rank 4 or 5 compared with 57.3% of male respondents. Male respondents are slightly more likely to rank this theme as their top priority (10.1% vs 6.6%), though differences at the higher ranks are relatively modest. As with other themes, results for the "Other" and "Prefer not to say" groups should be treated cautiously due to small base sizes.

Theme 3 – Transformation, service redesign and digitalisation

Gender	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Rank 4	Rank 5
Female (n=474)	80 (16.9%)	177 (37.3%)	129 (27.1%)	69 (14.5%)	17 (3.6%)
Male (n=254)	74 (29.2%)	63 (24.7%)	57 (22.5%)	43 (16.9%)	17 (6.7%)
Other (n=6)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (50.0%)	3 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Prefer not to say (n=69)	23 (33.3%)	20 (29.2%)	14 (20.8%)	9 (12.5%)	0 (0.0%)

Theme 3 – Transformation, service redesign and digitalisation

Male respondents are notably more likely than female respondents to rank this theme as their top priority (29.2% vs 16.9%). Female respondents are most likely to place it at Rank 2 (37.3%), indicating relatively strong but less emphatic support. Rankings among those who preferred not to state their gender are more evenly spread across the higher ranks, while results for the "Other" group should be interpreted with caution due to the very small base size.

Theme 4 – Early intervention and prevention

Gender	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Rank 4	Rank 5
Female (n=474)	223 (47.0%)	91 (19.3%)	91 (19.3%)	54 (11.4%)	14 (3.0%)
Male (n=254)	54 (21.3%)	83 (32.6%)	60 (23.6%)	51 (20.2%)	6 (2.2%)
Other (n=6)	0 (0.0%)	3 (50.0%)	3 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Prefer not to say (n=69)	14 (20.8%)	20 (29.2%)	20 (29.2%)	11 (16.7%)	3 (4.2%)

Early intervention and prevention is the strongest priority among female respondents, with almost half (47.0%) ranking it first, compared with 21.3% of male respondents. Male respondents are more likely to place this theme at Rank 2 or Rank 3, suggesting broader support but less concentration at the top rank. Patterns among respondents who preferred not to state their gender are more evenly distributed, while findings for the "Other" group should be treated with caution due to the very small base size.

Theme 5 – Service reduction

Gender	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Rank 4	Rank 5
Female (n=474)	23 (4.8%)	26 (5.4%)	34 (7.2%)	71 (15.1%)	311 (65.7%)
Male (n=254)	20 (7.9%)	17 (6.7%)	26 (10.1%)	43 (16.9%)	146 (57.3%)
Other (n=6)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (50.0%)	3 (50.0%)
Prefer not to say (n=69)	0 (0.0%)	9 (12.5%)	3 (4.2%)	17 (25.0%)	40 (58.3%)

Service reduction is consistently ranked as the least preferred option across all gender groups, with around two thirds of female respondents (65.7%) and over half of male respondents (57.3%) placing it at Rank 5. Very few respondents of any gender rank this theme highly, indicating limited support for service reductions relative to the other strategic options. This pattern is also evident among respondents who preferred not to state their gender, while results for the "Other" group should be interpreted cautiously due to the very small base size.

Summary

- **Early intervention and prevention** is the strongest priority overall, particularly among **female respondents**, almost half of whom rank it first (47.0%), while male respondents are more likely to place it at Rank 2 or 3 rather than as their top priority.

- **Transformation, service redesign and digitalisation** attracts broad support across genders, with **male respondents** notably more likely than females to rank it first (29.2% vs 16.9%), while females most commonly place it at Rank 2.

- **Asset rationalisation and energy efficiency** shows relatively strong support across genders, though **male respondents** are more likely than females to rank it as their top priority, while females tend to place it in the middle of their rankings.

- **Income generation** is generally ranked towards the lower end by both genders, particularly among **female respondents**, with over six in ten placing it at Rank 4 or 5.

- **Service reduction** is consistently the least preferred option across all gender groups, with clear majorities of both **female (65.7%) and male (57.3%) respondents** ranking it last.

Question 2 – Service Prioritisation

Question wording

"The council is having to make hard choices to balance its budget. Please tick the statement which best describes your views on each of the areas below."

For each service area, respondents chose between:

- The council should invest more in this service

- The council should protect this service

- The council should reduce this service to make savings

Service 1: Schools and early years

Gender	Invest more n (%)	Protect n (%)	Reduce n (%)
Female	243 (50.0%)	223 (45.9%)	20 (4.1%)
Male	86 (33.0%)	154 (59.3%)	20 (7.7%)
Other	3 (50.0%)	3 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Prefer not to say	23 (32.0%)	43 (60.0%)	6 (8.0%)

Across all gender groups, **Schools and early years are clearly prioritised for protection or investment,** with very small proportions in any category favouring reductions. Female respondents are more evenly split between investing more (50.0%) and protecting the service (45.9%), while male respondents place greater emphasis on protection (59.3%) than on additional investment (33.0%). Responses from the smaller categories follow the same overall pattern, although figures for "Other" and "Not answered" should be interpreted with caution due to their very small base sizes.

Service 2: Adult Social Care and Support for Older People

Gender	Invest more n (%)	Protect n (%)	Reduce n (%)
Female	274 (56.5%)	194 (40.0%)	17 (3.5%)
Male	103 (39.6%)	143 (54.9%)	14 (5.5%)
Other	3 (50.0%)	3 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Prefer not to say	23 (32.0%)	43 (60.0%)	6 (8.0%)

Across all gender groups, **Adult Social Care and Support for Older People is overwhelmingly prioritised for protection or increased investment**, with very small proportions in any category supporting reductions. Female respondents show a stronger tendency towards investing more in this service (56.5%), while male respondents are more likely to prioritise protecting existing provision (54.9%). Responses from the smaller gender categories follow the same overall direction, reinforcing the view that adult social care is regarded as a core service across genders, although figures for these groups should be treated cautiously due to small base sizes.

Service 3: Children's Services and Child Protection

Gender	Invest more n (%)	Protect n (%)	Reduce n (%)
Female	269 (55.3%)	197 (40.6%)	20 (4.1%)
Male	97 (37.4%)	149 (57.1%)	14 (5.5%)
Other	3 (50.0%)	3 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Prefer not to say	23 (32.0%)	43 (60.0%)	6 (8.0%)

Across all gender groups, **Children's Services and Child Protection are strongly prioritised for protection or increased investment**, with only very small minorities in any group supporting reductions. Female respondents are more likely to favour investing more in these services (55.3%), whereas male respondents more commonly prioritise protecting current provision (57.1%). Responses from the smaller gender categories align with this overall pattern, reinforcing the view that children's services are widely regarded as essential across genders, while noting that results for these groups are based on very small numbers.

Service 4: Roads, Transport and Infrastructure

Gender	Invest more n (%)	Protect n (%)	Reduce n (%)
Female	257 (52.9%)	197 (40.6%)	31 (6.5%)
Male	114 (44.0%)	123 (47.3%)	23 (8.8%)
Other	3 (50.0%)	3 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Prefer not to say	29 (40.0%)	37 (52.0%)	6 (8.0%)

Across all gender groups, **Roads, Transport and Infrastructure are predominantly prioritised for protection or additional investment**, with relatively small proportions in each category supporting reductions. Female respondents are more inclined to support further investment (52.9%), while male respondents are more evenly split between investment (44.0%) and protection (47.3%). Responses from the smaller gender categories follow the same overall direction, indicating broad cross-gender agreement on the importance of maintaining or enhancing transport and infrastructure services, while noting that results for these groups are based on small base sizes.

Service 5: Housing and Homelessness Services

Gender	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
Female	174 (35.9%)	257 (52.9%)	54 (11.2%)
Male	63 (24.2%)	151 (58.2%)	46 (17.6%)
Other	3 (50.0%)	3 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Prefer not to say	20 (28.0%)	43 (60.0%)	9 (12.0%)

Across all gender groups, **Housing and Homelessness Services are primarily prioritised for protection or investment**, with a clear majority in each main gender category favouring maintaining or strengthening provision. Female respondents show a higher level of support for investment (35.9%) compared with male respondents (24.2%), while males are more likely to prioritise protecting existing services (58.2%). Although some willingness to consider reductions is evident—particularly among male respondents—the overall pattern indicates that housing and homelessness services are regarded as a core priority across genders, with findings for smaller categories needing cautious interpretation due to limited base sizes.

Service 6: Waste, Recycling and Street Cleaning

Gender	Invest more n (%)	Protect n (%)	Reduce n (%)
Female	149 (30.6%)	286 (58.8%)	51 (10.6%)
Male	51 (19.8%)	154 (59.3%)	54 (20.9%)
Other	3 (50.0%)	3 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Prefer not to say	17 (24.0%)	43 (60.0%)	11 (16.0%)

Across all gender groups, **Waste, Recycling and Street Cleaning are most commonly prioritised for protection**, with smaller proportions favouring additional investment and a minority supporting reductions. Female respondents are more likely than male respondents to support investing more in this service (30.6% compared with 19.8%), while male respondents show a higher willingness to consider reductions (20.9%). Responses from the smaller gender categories follow the same general pattern, reinforcing the view that waste and street cleaning services are widely seen as important to maintain, although results for these groups should be interpreted cautiously due to small base sizes.

Service 7: Sport, Leisure and Countryside

Gender	Invest more n (%)	Protect n (%)	Reduce n (%)
Female	100 (20.6%)	200 (41.2%)	186 (38.2%)
Male	29 (11.0%)	111 (42.9%)	120 (46.2%)
Other	0 (0.0%)	3 (50.0%)	3 (50.0%)
Prefer not to say	11 (16.0%)	23 (32.0%)	37 (52.0%)

Across all gender groups, **Sport, Leisure and Countryside services attract a more mixed set of views**, with substantial proportions in every category willing to consider reductions alongside protection or investment. Female respondents are more evenly split between protection (41.2%) and reduction (38.2%), while male respondents show a stronger inclination towards reduction (46.2%) than towards additional investment (11.0%). Although smaller gender categories broadly reflect this pattern, the figures indicate that sport and leisure services are seen as more discretionary than core frontline services, with notable variation in emphasis by gender.

Service 8: Libraries and Community Centres

Gender	Invest more n (%)	Protect n (%)	Reduce n (%)
Female	103 (21.2%)	214 (44.1%)	169 (34.7%)
Male	29 (11.0%)	111 (42.9%)	120 (46.2%)
Other	0 (0.0%)	3 (50.0%)	3 (50.0%)
Prefer not to say	11 (16.0%)	23 (32.0%)	37 (52.0%)

Across all gender groups, **Libraries and Community Centres receive a more divided set of responses**, with protection remaining the most common preference but sizeable minorities in each group willing to consider reductions. Female respondents are more likely than male respondents to support investment or protection combined (65.3% compared with 53.9%), while male respondents show a greater willingness to support reductions (46.2%). Responses from the smaller gender categories follow a similar overall pattern, indicating that these services are viewed as less essential than frontline provision but still valued by a substantial proportion of respondents.

Service 9: Planning and Development

Gender	Invest more n (%)	Protect n (%)	Reduce n (%)
Female	51 (10.6%)	157 (32.4%)	277 (57.1%)
Male	17 (6.6%)	71 (27.5%)	171 (65.9%)
Other	0 (0.0%)	3 (50.0%)	3 (50.0%)
Prefer not to say	9 (12.0%)	23 (32.0%)	40 (56.0%)

Across all gender groups, **Planning and Development is most commonly identified as an area where reductions would be acceptable**, with a clear majority of respondents in each main gender category favouring this option. Male respondents show the strongest inclination towards reduction (65.9%), while female respondents also predominantly support reductions (57.1%), alongside a smaller proportion favouring protection. Very few respondents in any gender group support increased investment in this service, reinforcing its position as one of the lowest-priority areas relative to other services considered in the consultation.

Service 10: Climate Action and Sustainability

Gender	Invest more n (%)	Protect n (%)	Reduce n (%)
Female	143 (29.4%)	183 (37.6%)	160 (32.9%)
Male	31 (12.1%)	94 (36.3%)	134 (51.6%)
Other	3 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (50.0%)
Prefer not to say	14 (20.0%)	26 (36.0%)	31 (44.0%)

Across all gender groups, **views on Climate Action and Sustainability are more divided than for core frontline services,** with no single response option attracting a clear majority in most groups. Female respondents are relatively evenly split between protection (37.6%) and reduction (32.9%), with a substantial minority supporting additional investment (29.4%), while male respondents are more likely to favour reductions (51.6%) than protection or investment. Responses from the smaller gender categories broadly reflect this mixed pattern, indicating that climate action is an area where priorities vary more noticeably by gender than for many other services.

Service 11: Customer and support services

Gender	Invest more n (%)	Protect n (%)	Reduce n (%)
Female	49 (10.0%)	134 (27.6%)	303 (62.4%)
Male	17 (6.6%)	66 (25.3%)	177 (68.1%)
Other	0 (0.0%)	3 (50.0%)	3 (50.0%)
Prefer not to say	6 (8.0%)	23 (32.0%)	43 (60.0%)

Across all gender groups, **Customer and support services are most commonly identified as an area where reductions would be acceptable**, with clear majorities of both female (62.4%) and male (68.1%) respondents favouring this option. Very small proportions in any gender group support increased investment, and around a quarter to a third prioritise protection, reinforcing the view that these services are regarded as lower priority than frontline provision. Responses from the smaller gender categories follow the same overall direction, though should be interpreted cautiously due to limited base sizes.

Key finding

Gender does **not materially shape** which areas respondents consider acceptable for savings.

Differences between male and female respondents are primarily in **language and framing**, not in substance:

- Male respondents more often use organisational and structural language

- Female respondents more often emphasise impact, fairness and service users

However, the **underlying priorities align closely**.

Interpretation note

Responses to Question 3 reinforce earlier findings that:

- Public acceptance of savings is **conditional on where cuts fall**

- Respondents draw a clear distinction between:

    - *"The organisation"*, and

    - *"The services people rely on"*

This distinction is **consistent across genders**, reinforcing the conclusion that views on acceptable savings are shaped more by shared values than by gender differences.

Question 4

Council Tax Increases – Gender Breakdown

Question wording

"Every 1% increase to the council tax charge equates to a weekly increase of £0.30 for an average property in East Lothian. Would you support an increase to council tax charges from April 2026 in order to protect council services?"

Response options

- Yes – support an increase up to £3 per week

- Yes – support an increase up to £5 per week

- Yes – support an increase of more than £5 per week

- No – would not support any increase

- Don't know

Question 4 – Full gender breakdown

Gender	≤ £3 /wk n (%)	≤ £5 /wk n (%)	> £5 /wk n (%)	No increase n (%)	Don't know n (%)	Base (n)
Male	66 (25.3%)	54 (20.9%)	49 (18.7%)	91 (35.2%)	0 (0.0%)	260
Female	157 (32.2%)	74 (15.2%)	37 (7.6%)	206 (42.1%)	14 (2.9%)	489
Other	0 (0.0%)	3 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)	6
Prefer not to say	11 (16.0%)	6 (8.0%)	3 (4.0%)	51 (72.0%)	0 (0.0%)	71

Total not answered: 28

Gender-based interpretation

1. Overall support for any increase

Male and female respondents show **very similar overall patterns with "No increase" the single most common response in each group. However, a majority in both groups support some level of increase (Male:64.9%; Female 55.0%), most commonly in lower weekly amounts**.

There is **no meaningful gender divide** in overall willingness to support an increase.

2. Level of acceptable increase

Tolerance for higher increases is low across all genders:

- **18.7% of males** support an increase of more than £5 per week.

- **7.6% of females** support an increase of more than £5 per week.

3. Opposition to increases

Opposition to any increase is:

- **35.2% among male respondents**

- **42.1% among female respondents**

Summary conclusion

Attitudes toward council tax increases are **fairly consistent across genders**.
There are **no meaningful differences** in:

- Overall support for increases

- Acceptable levels of increase

- Opposition to increases

- Levels of uncertainty

Views on council tax appear to be shaped far more by **age and life stage** than by gender.

Question 5

Importance of Protecting Services for Vulnerable Groups – Gender Breakdown

Question wording

"How important is it that the Council protects services for vulnerable groups (e.g., older people, children at risk, low-income families), even if this means reducing other services?"

Response options

- Very important

- Important

- Neutral

- Less important

- Not important

Question 5 – Full gender breakdown

Gender	Very important n (%)	Important n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Less important n (%)	Not important n (%)	Base (n)
Female	209 (43.2%)	149 (30.8%)	100 (20.7%)	20 (4.1%)	6 (1.2%)	483
Male	54 (20.9%)	120 (46.2%)	60 (23.1%)	17 (6.6%)	9 (3.3%)	260
Other	6 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	6
Prefer not to say	6 (8.0%)	34 (48.0%)	23 (32.0%)	9 (12.0%)	0 (0.0%)	71

Total not answered: 34

Gender-based interpretation

- Among female respondents, 74.0% rate protecting services as very important or important, with a relatively high proportion (43.2%) selecting "very important".

- Male respondents also show strong support, with 67.1% selecting either "very important" or "important", although they are more likely than female respondents to select "important" rather than "very important".

- Responses from those selecting "Other" are uniformly positive, although the base is extremely small (n=2).

- Respondents who preferred not to state their gender show a wider spread of views, but a majority (56.0%) still rate protecting services as important or very important.

Summary conclusion (Question 5 by gender)

The importance of protecting services for vulnerable groups shows **broad cross-gender consensus**, with **majorities of male and female respondents** rating thei as "very important" or "important". **However, the balance between "very important" and "important" varies by gender**, and the "prefer not to say" group shows a wider spread of views.

Question 6

Support for Delivering More Services Online – Gender Breakdown

Question wording

"Would you support more services being delivered online if this saved money?"

Response options

- Yes, strongly support

- Yes, somewhat support

- No opinion

- No, prefer in-person

- No, strongly oppose

Question 6 – Full gender breakdown

Gender	Yes – strongly support n (%)	Yes – somewhat support n (%)	No opinion n (%)	No – prefer in-person n (%)	No – strongly oppose n (%)	Base (n)
Female	220 (45.0%)	214 (43.9%)	23 (4.7%)	26 (5.3%)	6 (1.2%)	489
Male	140 (53.8%)	106 (40.7%)	6 (2.2%)	6 (2.2%)	3 (1.1%)	260
Other	0 (0.0%)	6 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	6
Prefer not to say	49 (68.0%)	17 (24.0%)	3 (4.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (4.0%)	71

Total not answered: 34

Gender-based interpretation

1. Overall support for online delivery

Support for delivering more services online (strongly + somewhat) is very high among both male and female respondents, though levels are not identical. Combined support is **94.5%** among **male** respondents and **88.9%** among **female** respondents.

2. Opposition to online delivery

Opposition (prefer in-person + strongly oppose) is low overall, but is higher among female respondents (**6.4%**) than male respondents (**3.3%**).

3. Neutral or uncertain responses

"No opinion" responses are low for both male (**2.2%**) and female (**4.7%**) respondents. Findings for the "Other" category should be treated with caution due to the very small base (**n=2**).

Summary conclusion (Question 6 by gender)

Attitudes toward delivering more services online are **highly consistent across genders**. Support is strong, opposition is limited, and uncertainty is low. As with earlier questions in the consultation, **gender does not function as a significant differentiating factor** in shaping views on digital service delivery.

Question 7

"What suggestions do you have for making council services more efficient or cost-effective?"

Thematic analysis by gender

Overview (all genders)

Across all gender categories, responses to Question 7 focus primarily on **organisational and operational efficiency**, rather than on reducing frontline services. Common themes include reducing overheads, improving asset use, streamlining processes, and making better use of digital systems. Differences between gender groups relate mainly to **language and emphasis**, rather than to substantively different priorities.

Male respondents

Dominant themes

- Organisational and management efficiency

- Reduction of perceived overheads

- Asset and estate rationalisation

- Improving value for money

Typical framing

Responses from male respondents frequently focus on **structural and organisational efficiency**, including references to management layers, working practices, and the cost of maintaining buildings or internal processes. Suggestions are often framed in system-level terms, emphasising the need to improve value for money and reduce inefficiency before considering impacts on services.

Female respondents

Dominant themes

- Protecting frontline services while improving efficiency

- Streamlining administrative processes

- Better coordination and use of resources

- Digital tools for routine tasks

Typical framing

Female respondents commonly frame efficiency in terms of **service impact and outcomes**, alongside organisational considerations. Responses often emphasise the importance of reducing inefficiency and duplication while safeguarding access to services and minimising negative effects on residents and communities.

Other gender identity

Dominant themes

- Organisational efficiency

- Reduction of non-essential or discretionary activity

Typical framing

Very few responses were received from respondents identifying as another gender. Where comments were provided, they align closely with the broader dataset, focusing on organisational efficiency and the reduction of activity perceived as non-essential. Due to the extremely small base size, **no standalone conclusions are drawn**.

Prefer not to say

Dominant themes

- Reducing bureaucracy and overheads

- Improving efficiency before service reduction

Typical framing

Responses from those who preferred not to state their gender broadly reflect themes seen elsewhere, emphasising efficiency and cost-effectiveness while seeking to avoid reductions to frontline services. Given the limited number of responses, these findings should be interpreted cautiously.

Cross-gender comparison summary

Across gender categories, there is **strong alignment** on the principle that efficiency savings should focus on organisational improvement rather than frontline service withdrawal. Differences between genders are primarily in framing and emphasis, not in underlying priorities. Gender does not emerge as a significant differentiating factor in views on how council services could be made more efficient or cost-effective.

Question 8

Fairness Principles for Making Savings – Gender Breakdown

Question wording:

"If savings are necessary, which principle do you think is most fair?"

Response options:

1. Everyone experiences a small reduction in services

2. Larger reductions in non-essential services to protect essentials

3. Focus on efficiency and digital transformation to avoid reductions

4. Increase charges/fees for certain services instead of reducing them

Question 8 – Full gender breakdown

Gender	Small reductions for everyone n (%)	Larger cuts to non-essential services n (%)	Greater use of efficiency and digital approaches n (%)	Increase charges or fees n (%)	Base (n)
Male	17 (6.6%)	66 (25.3%)	134 (51.6%)	43 (16.5%)	260
Female	43 (8.8%)	134 (27.6%)	234 (48.2%)	74 (15.3%)	486
Other	0 (0.0%)	3 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (50.0%)	6
Prefer not to say	9 (12.0%)	17 (24.0%)	34 (48.0%)	11 (16.0%)	71

Total not answered: 31

Gender-based interpretation

Among male respondents (n=91) and female respondents (n=170), differences in the distribution of responses are small (all option differences are within 3.4 percentage points). Results for **Other** (n=2) and **Prefer not to say** (n=25) should be interpreted with caution due to small sample size. Among male respondents, **51.6%** selected *making savings through efficiency, transformation and digital working*, compared with **48.2%** of female respondents. Support for **larger cuts to non-essential services** is similar between male and female respondents (**25.3%** of males and **27.6%** of females).

Support for **increasing charges or fees** remains a minority view among male and female respondents, though slightly higher among male respondents (**16.5%**) than female respondents (**15.3%**). The option of **small reductions across all services** attracts the lowest level of support overall, selected by **6.6%** of males and **8.8%** of females. Overall, the data indicate broadly

similar views across male and female respondents, with efficiency-led approaches clearly preferred.

Views of "other" and "prefer not to say" are outliers, but small sample sizes should be noted.

Question 9

Interest in Playing a Larger Role in Delivering or Supporting Local Services – Gender Breakdown

Question wording:

"Would you or your community group be interested in playing a larger role in delivering or supporting local services (e.g., volunteering, partnerships)?"

Response options:
Yes
Maybe
No

Question 9 – Full gender breakdown

Gender	Yes n (%)	Maybe n (%)	No n (%)	Base (n)
Male	43 (17.2%)	111 (44.8%)	94 (37.9%)	249
Female	94 (20.1%)	231 (49.4%)	143 (30.5%)	469
Other	6 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	6
Prefer not to say	11 (16.0%)	11 (16.0%)	49 (68.0%)	71

Total not answered: 59

Gender-based interpretation

- **Male and female respondents show broadly similar patterns**, with:
    - "Maybe" being the most common response in both groups.
    - A sizeable minority selecting "No".
    - A smaller proportion indicating a clear willingness ("Yes") to take on a larger role.

- **Female respondents are slightly more likely to answer "Maybe"** than male respondents, suggesting marginally higher conditional openness, but the overall pattern is consistent.

- **"Yes" responses remain a minority** across both male and female respondents, reinforcing that community involvement is seen as conditional rather than assumed.

- The **"Prefer not to say"** group shows a higher proportion selecting "No", though this group is relatively small.

Summary

- There is **no strong gender-based divergence** in attitudes toward playing a larger role in delivering or supporting local services.

- Across genders, responses cluster around:

    - Conditional openness ("Maybe")

    - Clear boundaries around willingness to participate

- This supports the interpretation from the main report that **community involvement has potential,** but should be approached as **voluntary and supplementary**, not as a substitute for council-delivered services.

Question 10

"Looking beyond 2026–27, what do you think should be the Council's top financial priority?"
Thematic analysis by gender

Overview (all genders)

Across all gender categories, responses concentrate on **long-term financial sustainability and service resilience**, rather than short-term savings. Recurrent themes across the dataset include:

- Financial sustainability and long-term stability

- Protection of core statutory and frontline services

- Preventative investment to reduce future demand

- Managing population growth and service pressures

- Efficiency and value for money

- Long-term planning over short-term cost cutting

These themes appear consistently across genders. Differences relate mainly to **how priorities are framed**, rather than to fundamentally different views about what matters.

Male respondents

Dominant themes

- Financial sustainability and long-term planning

- Efficiency and value for money

- Protection of essential services

- Managing demand pressures

- Prevention and early intervention

Framing characteristics
Responses from male respondents often use **system-level and financial language**, with frequent reference to:

- Budget sustainability

- Affordability over time

- Balancing demand and resources

- Long-term financial resilience

Priorities are commonly framed in terms of maintaining a stable and sustainable system capable of delivering services over the long term.

Female respondents

Dominant themes

- Protection of frontline services

- Prevention and early intervention

- Supporting vulnerable groups

- Long-term service sustainability

- Managing growth-related pressures

Framing characteristics
Female respondents more frequently frame priorities in terms of:

- Impact on service users

- Community outcomes

- Accessibility and continuity of services

Financial priorities are often linked to **social impact**, with emphasis on ensuring that financial decisions do not undermine support for those most in need.

Other gender identity

Dominant themes

- Financial stability

- Service protection

- Efficiency and value for money

Responses are consistent with broader themes seen across all genders.
The base size is insufficient for standalone interpretation.

Prefer not to say

Dominant themes

- Financial sustainability

- Protection of core services

- Long-term planning

Patterns align closely with those observed among older age groups in the age-based analysis.

Cross-gender comparison summary (Question 10)

Across all gender categories:

- **Financial sustainability** is the most consistently identified long-term priority.

- **Protection of essential and frontline services** appears across all groups.

- **Prevention and early intervention** recur throughout responses.

- Differences between genders are primarily in **language and framing**, not in priorities.

There is **no meaningful gender-based divergence** in views on future financial priorities.

Analytical note

Question 10 reinforces patterns seen throughout the consultation (Questions 1–9), where gender does not emerge as a structuring variable shaping financial priorities. Instead,

respondents across genders consistently emphasise long-term planning, sustainability, and protection of essential services.

Question 11

Perceived Equality, Human Rights or Wellbeing Impacts – Gender Breakdown

Question wording:
"Do you think there would be any equality, human rights, or wellbeing impacts arising from the areas considered in this consultation?"

Response options:

- Yes

- No

- Don't know

Question 11 – Full gender breakdown

Gender	Yes n (%)	No n (%)	Don't know n (%)	Base (n)
Female	189 (39.3%)	114 (23.8%)	177 (36.9%)	480
Male	54 (21.3%)	131 (51.7%)	69 (27.0%)	254
Prefer not to say	17 (24.0%)	31 (44.0%)	23 (32.0%)	71
Other	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	6 (100.0%)	6

Total not answered: 43

Gender-based interpretation

There are **clear differences in emphasis by gender**, although no gender group expresses a unanimous view.

Female respondents are more likely than male respondents to answer **"Yes"**, indicating greater recognition of potential equality, human rights or wellbeing impacts. Male respondents are more likely to answer **"No"**, suggesting a lower perceived likelihood of impacts within this group.

Across both male and female respondents, a substantial minority select **"Don't know"**, highlighting uncertainty as a significant feature of responses rather than a marginal position.

Responses from those who preferred not to state their gender show a higher proportion selection "no", similar to male respondents, though this group also includes a substantial "don't know" percentage (32.0%), while responses from the "Other" category should be interpreted with caution due to the very small base size.

Question 12

"Do you have any other comments or ideas you would like to share about the council's budget?"
Thematic analysis by gender

Overview (all genders)

Across all gender categories, responses to Question 12 concentrate on values, process, and trust rather than on proposing specific budget lines. Common themes recurring across the dataset include:

- Fairness and transparency in budget decision-making

- Strong emphasis on protecting frontline and statutory services

- Concerns about management structures, overheads, and efficiency

- Requests for clearer communication about financial pressures and constraints

- Recognition that difficult prioritisation decisions are unavoidable

- Emphasis on long-term sustainability rather than short-term fixes

Thematic content is highly consistent across gender categories. Differences are primarily in **framing and emphasis**, not in the substance of views expressed.

Male respondents

Dominant themes

- Organisational efficiency and cost control

- Management and administrative overheads

- Asset rationalisation and use of council buildings

- Procurement, commissioning, and contract management

- Reduction of non-essential or discretionary spending

Framing characteristics
Responses from male respondents frequently use organisational and structural language, focusing on:

- Governance arrangements

- Cost control mechanisms

- Efficiency systems and processes

- Corporate and managerial functions

Comments tend to frame efficiency and savings in terms of system design, operational structure, and resource allocation.

Female respondents

Dominant themes

- Protection of frontline and community-facing services

- Impact of budget decisions on service users

- Fairness and equity in decision-making

- Transparency and accountability

- Community and social outcomes

Framing characteristics
Responses more frequently reference:

- Social and human impact

- Communities and families

- Accessibility and continuity of services

- Implications for vulnerable populations

Efficiency is often discussed alongside service quality, fairness, and lived experience rather than purely in organisational terms.

Other gender identity

Dominant themes

- Organisational efficiency

- Service protection

- Financial sustainability

Responses align with broader dataset themes. Base size is insufficient for independent interpretation.

Prefer not to say

Dominant themes

- Fairness and transparency

- Protection of essential services

- Clear communication about financial decisions

Patterns broadly mirror those seen in older age groups in the age-based analysis.

Cross-gender comparison summary (Question 12)

Across all gender categories:

- Protection of frontline and essential services is a recurring priority

- Efficiency and overhead reduction are consistently emphasised

- Fairness, transparency, and accountability feature prominently

- Respondents want decisions to be clearly explained and justified

Differences between gender groups are **primarily in language and framing**, not in priorities or values. No significant gender-based divergence is present in the thematic content of responses.

Analytical note

Question 12 reinforces findings across Questions 1–11, where gender does not emerge as a structuring variable shaping attitudes or priorities. Instead, responses reflect shared concerns about fairness, service protection, and trust in decision-making, expressed through different rhetorical lenses rather than different underlying positions.

Appendix 3: Housing Tenure

Method note

The analytical base for this section includes respondents who **ranked two or more themes** and provided a **valid housing tenure response**. Percentages are calculated **within each housing tenure group**, with counts shown alongside percentages. Percentages are rounded to one decimal place, respondents were not required to rank all themes, and row totals may not sum to 100%.

Total not answered: 51

Theme 1 – Asset rationalisation and energy efficiency

Housing tenure	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Rank 4	Rank 5
Buying on mortgage (n=403)	94 (23.4%)	120 (29.8%)	120 (29.8%)	57 (14.2%)	31 (7.8%)
Owned outright (n=220)	46 (20.8%)	43 (19.5%)	43 (19.5%)	43 (19.5%)	20 (9.1%)
Rented from the council (n=54)	17 (31.6%)	20 (36.8%)	20 (36.8%)	6 (10.5%)	3 (5.3%)
Rented from private landlord (n=26)	9 (33.3%)	9 (33.3%)	9 (33.3%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Rented from housing association / social landlord (n=14)	0 (0.0%)	3 (20.0%)	3 (20.0%)	3 (20.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Shared ownership (n=9)	3 (33.3%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (33.3%)
Other (n=14)	6 (40.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (20.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (20.0%)
Prefer not to say (n=63)	6 (9.1%)	20 (31.8%)	20 (31.8%)	11 (18.2%)	9 (13.6%)

Across the larger tenure groups, this theme is generally **mid-ranked**, with respondents buying on a mortgage most commonly placing it at **Rank 2 or Rank 3** (both 29.8%). Respondents who **own their home outright most commonly rank this theme first** (20.8%), though views within this group are relatively evenly spread across the rankings. Among respondents renting from the council, the theme is most often placed at **Rank 2 or Rank 3** (both 36.8%), while patterns for smaller tenure groups should be interpreted with caution due to very small base sizes.

Theme 2 – Income generation

Housing tenure	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Rank 4	Rank 5
Buying on mortgage (n=403)	29 (7.1%)	69 (17.0%)	69 (17.0%)	149 (36.9%)	89 (22.0%)
Owned outright (n=220)	23 (10.4%)	14 (6.5%)	51 (23.4%)	77 (35.1%)	54 (24.7%)
Rented from the council (n=54)	3 (5.3%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (5.3%)	34 (63.2%)	14 (26.3%)
Rented from private landlord (n=26)	0 (0.0%)	3 (11.1%)	6 (22.2%)	11 (44.4%)	6 (22.2%)
Rented from housing association / social landlord (n=14)	0 (0.0%)	3 (20.0%)	3 (20.0%)	9 (60.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Shared ownership (n=9)	0 (0.0%)	3 (33.3%)	6 (66.7%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Other (n=14)	3 (20.0%)	6 (40.0%)	0 (0.0%)	6 (40.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Prefer not to say (n=63)	9 (13.6%)	11 (18.2%)	6 (9.1%)	23 (36.4%)	14 (22.7%)

Income generation is **clearly ranked towards the lower end** across the main tenure groups, with respondents buying on a mortgage and those owning outright most commonly placing it at **Rank 4** (36.9% and 35.1% respectively). This lower prioritisation is even more pronounced among respondents renting from the council or from a housing association/social landlord, where **around six in ten** place the theme at Rank 4. Rankings among smaller tenure groups are more dispersed and should be interpreted with caution due to very small base sizes.

Theme 3 – Transformation, service redesign and digitalisation

Housing tenure	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Rank 4	Rank 5
Buying on mortgage (n=403)	97 (24.1%)	123 (30.5%)	97 (24.1%)	66 (16.3%)	20 (5.0%)
Owned outright (n=220)	43 (19.5%)	86 (39.0%)	54 (24.7%)	29 (13.0%)	9 (3.9%)

Housing tenure	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Rank 4	Rank 5
Rented from the council (n=54)	11 (21.1%)	17 (31.6%)	17 (31.6%)	6 (10.5%)	3 (5.3%)
Rented from private landlord (n=26)	9 (33.3%)	9 (33.3%)	6 (22.2%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (11.1%)
Rented from housing association / social landlord (n=14)	0 (0.0%)	6 (40.0%)	6 (40.0%)	3 (20.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Shared ownership (n=9)	3 (33.3%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	6 (66.7%)	0 (0.0%)
Other (n=14)	0 (0.0%)	3 (20.0%)	9 (60.0%)	3 (20.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Prefer not to say (n=63)	14 (22.7%)	17 (27.3%)	14 (22.7%)	11 (18.2%)	0 (0.0%)

Across the main tenure groups, this theme tends to be **ranked relatively highly**, particularly among respondents buying on a mortgage and those owning outright, where Rank 2 is clearly the most common placement (30.5% and 39.0% respectively). Respondents renting from the council also show a concentration at the higher ranks, with Rank 2 and Rank 3 jointly most common (both 31.6%). Rankings among smaller tenure groups are more uneven and should be interpreted with caution due to very small base sizes.

Theme 4 – Early intervention and prevention

Housing tenure	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Rank 4	Rank 5
Buying on mortgage (n=403)	157 (39.0%)	89 (22.0%)	86 (21.3%)	60 (14.9%)	11 (2.8%)
Owned outright (n=220)	63 (28.6%)	63 (28.6%)	54 (24.7%)	34 (15.6%)	6 (2.6%)
Rented from the council (n=54)	31 (57.9%)	14 (26.3%)	3 (5.3%)	6 (10.5%)	0 (0.0%)
Rented from private landlord (n=26)	9 (33.3%)	6 (22.2%)	6 (22.2%)	6 (22.2%)	0 (0.0%)
Rented from housing association / social landlord (n=14)	6 (40.0%)	3 (20.0%)	3 (20.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (20.0%)
Shared ownership (n=9)	3 (33.3%)	3 (33.3%)	3 (33.3%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

Housing tenure	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Rank 4	Rank 5
Other (n=14)	6 (40.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (20.0%)	6 (40.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Prefer not to say (n=63)	17 (27.3%)	20 (31.8%)	17 (27.3%)	6 (9.1%)	3 (4.5%)

Early intervention and prevention is **clearly prioritised** across all main tenure groups, with respondents buying on a mortgage most commonly ranking it first (39.0%). Support is particularly strong among respondents renting from the council, where a clear majority place this theme at Rank 1 (57.9%). Respondents who own outright and those who preferred not to state their tenure show a more even spread across the top three ranks, while results for smaller tenure groups should be treated with caution due to small base sizes.

Theme 5 – Service reduction

Housing tenure	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Rank 4	Rank 5
Buying on mortgage (n=403)	17 (4.3%)	29 (7.1%)	31 (7.8%)	71 (17.7%)	251 (62.4%)
Owned outright (n=220)	23 (10.4%)	9 (3.9%)	17 (7.8%)	37 (16.9%)	131 (59.7%)
Rented from the council (n=54)	0 (0.0%)	3 (5.3%)	11 (21.1%)	3 (5.3%)	34 (63.2%)
Rented from private landlord (n=26)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	9 (33.3%)	17 (66.7%)
Rented from housing association / social landlord (n=14)	0 (0.0%)	3 (20.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	11 (80.0%)
Shared ownership (n=9)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (33.3%)	6 (66.7%)
Other (n=14)	3 (20.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	11 (80.0%)
Prefer not to say (n=63)	0 (0.0%)	9 (13.6%)	3 (4.5%)	11 (18.2%)	37 (59.1%)

Service reduction is **clearly the least preferred option** across all main housing tenure groups, with respondents buying on a mortgage and those owning outright most commonly ranking it last (62.4% and 59.7% respectively). This pattern is even more pronounced among respondents renting from the council and from private or social landlords, where around two thirds or more place the theme at Rank 5. While smaller tenure groups show some variation, service reduction

remains the lowest-priority theme across tenures, and results for these groups should be interpreted with caution due to small base sizes.

Summary

- **Early intervention and prevention** is consistently the highest-priority theme across all main housing tenure groups, most notably among respondents **renting from the council**, where a clear majority rank it first (57.9%), and among those **buying on a mortgage**, where it is most commonly ranked first (39.0%).

- **Transformation, service redesign and digitalisation** attracts relatively strong support across the larger tenure groups, particularly among respondents **buying on a mortgage** and those **owning outright**, where Rank 2 is the most common placement.

- **Asset rationalisation and energy efficiency** is generally mid-ranked across the larger tenure groups, with respondents **buying on a mortgage** most commonly placing it at Rank 2 or Rank 3, and those **renting from the council** most often placing it at Rank 2 or Rank 3.

- **Income generation** is typically ranked towards the lower end across the main tenure groups, with respondents **buying on a mortgage**, **owning outright**, and **renting from the council or social landlords** most commonly placing it at Rank 4.

- **Service reduction** is clearly the least preferred option across all main housing tenure groups, with clear majorities of respondents **buying on a mortgage**, **owning outright**, and **renting** placing it at Rank 5.

Question 2 – Service Prioritisation

Question wording

"The council is having to make hard choices to balance its budget. Please tick the statement which best describes your views on each of the areas below."

For each service area, respondents chose between:

- The council should invest more in this service

- The council should protect this service

- The council should reduce this service to make savings

Total not answered: 31

Schools and early years

Housing tenure	Invest more n (%)	Protect n (%)	Reduce n (%)	Base (n)
Buying on mortgage	146 (35.2%)	246 (59.3%)	23 (5.5%)	414
Owned outright	69 (30.8%)	137 (61.5%)	17 (7.7%)	223
Rented from the council	20 (36.8%)	34 (63.2%)	0 (0.0%)	54
Rented from private landlord	14 (50.0%)	14 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)	29
Rented from housing association / social landlord	3 (20.0%)	11 (80.0%)	0 (0.0%)	14
Shared ownership	3 (33.3%)	6 (66.7%)	0 (0.0%)	9
Other	6 (40.0%)	9 (60.0%)	0 (0.0%)	14
Prefer not to say	11 (17.4%)	51 (78.3%)	3 (4.3%)	66

Across all housing tenure groups, **protecting Schools and early years is the most common preference**, with clear majorities favouring protection among those buying on a mortgage, owning outright, renting from the council, and most smaller tenure groups. **Support for increased investment is also notable**, particularly among private renters (50.0%) and those buying on a mortgage (35.2%), while investment levels are lower among respondents who preferred not to say their tenure (17.4%). **Very few respondents in any tenure group support reductions**, with opposition to cuts strongest among social renters and shared ownership households, where no respondents selected reduction.

Adult Social Care and Support for Older People

Housing tenure	Invest more n (%)	Protect n (%)	Reduce n (%)	Base (n)
Buying on mortgage	177 (42.8%)	214 (51.7%)	23 (5.5%)	414
Owned outright	89 (39.7%)	120 (53.8%)	14 (6.4%)	223
Rented from the council	14 (26.3%)	37 (68.4%)	3 (5.3%)	54
Rented from private landlord	14 (50.0%)	14 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)	29
Rented from housing association / social landlord	3 (20.0%)	11 (80.0%)	0 (0.0%)	14

Housing tenure	Invest more n (%)	Protect n (%)	Reduce n (%)	Base (n)
Shared ownership	3 (33.3%)	6 (66.7%)	0 (0.0%)	9
Other	9 (60.0%)	6 (40.0%)	0 (0.0%)	14
Prefer not to say	9 (13.0%)	51 (78.3%)	6 (8.7%)	66

Across all housing tenure groups, **protecting Adult Social Care and Support for Older People is the most common preference**, with a majority in most tenures favouring protection, including those owning outright (53.8%) and renting from the council (68.4%). **Support for increased investment is also substantial**, particularly among private renters (50.0%) and those buying on a mortgage (42.8%), while investment support is notably lower among respondents who preferred not to say their tenure (13.0%). **Very small proportions in any tenure group support reductions**, with no respondents favouring cuts among private renters, housing association tenants, shared ownership households or those in the "Other" category.

Children's Services and Child Protection

Housing tenure	Invest more n (%)	Protect n (%)	Reduce n (%)	Base (n)
Buying on mortgage	163 (39.3%)	231 (55.9%)	20 (4.8%)	414
Owned outright	77 (34.6%)	131 (59.0%)	14 (6.4%)	223
Rented from the council	20 (36.8%)	34 (63.2%)	0 (0.0%)	54
Rented from private landlord	14 (50.0%)	14 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)	29
Rented from housing association / social landlord	3 (20.0%)	11 (80.0%)	0 (0.0%)	14
Shared ownership	3 (33.3%)	6 (66.7%)	0 (0.0%)	9
Other	9 (60.0%)	6 (40.0%)	0 (0.0%)	14
Prefer not to say	11 (17.4%)	51 (78.3%)	3 (4.3%)	66

Across all housing tenure groups, **protecting Children's Services and Child Protection is the most common preference**, with clear majorities favouring protection among those buying on a mortgage (55.9%), owning outright (59.0%) and renting from the council (63.2%). **Support for increased investment is also substantial**, particularly among private renters (50.0%) and those buying on a mortgage (39.3%), while investment support is lower among respondents who preferred not to say their tenure (17.4%). **Very few respondents in any tenure group**

support reductions, with no respondents favouring cuts among council tenants, private renters, housing association tenants, shared ownership households or those in the "Other" category.

Roads, Transport and Infrastructure

Housing tenure	Invest more n (%)	Protect n (%)	Reduce n (%)	Base (n)
Buying on mortgage	166 (40.0%)	226 (54.5%)	23 (5.5%)	414
Owned outright	83 (37.2%)	126 (56.4%)	14 (6.4%)	223
Rented from the council	17 (31.6%)	34 (63.2%)	3 (5.3%)	54
Rented from private landlord	14 (50.0%)	14 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)	29
Rented from housing association / social landlord	3 (20.0%)	11 (80.0%)	0 (0.0%)	14
Shared ownership	3 (33.3%)	6 (66.7%)	0 (0.0%)	9
Other	6 (40.0%)	9 (60.0%)	0 (0.0%)	14
Prefer not to say	11 (17.4%)	51 (78.3%)	3 (4.3%)	66

Across all housing tenure groups, **protecting Roads, Transport and Infrastructure is the most common preference**, with majorities favouring protection among those buying on a mortgage (54.5%), owning outright (56.4%) and renting from the council (63.2%). **Support for increased investment is also notable**, particularly among private renters (50.0%) and those buying on a mortgage (40.0%), while investment support is lower among respondents who preferred not to say their tenure (17.4%). **Support for reductions is consistently low across all tenures**, with no respondents favouring cuts among private renters, housing association tenants, shared ownership households or those in the "Other" category.

Housing and Homelessness Services

Housing tenure	Invest more n (%)	Protect n (%)	Reduce n (%)	Base (n)
Buying on mortgage	183 (44.1%)	209 (50.3%)	23 (5.5%)	414
Owned outright	94 (42.3%)	114 (51.3%)	14 (6.4%)	223

Housing tenure	Invest more n (%)	Protect n (%)	Reduce n (%)	Base (n)
Rented from the council	26 (47.4%)	29 (52.6%)	0 (0.0%)	54
Rented from private landlord	17 (60.0%)	11 (40.0%)	0 (0.0%)	29
Rented from housing association / social landlord	6 (40.0%)	9 (60.0%)	0 (0.0%)	14
Shared ownership	3 (33.3%)	6 (66.7%)	0 (0.0%)	9
Other	9 (60.0%)	6 (40.0%)	0 (0.0%)	14
Prefer not to say	14 (21.7%)	49 (73.9%)	3 (4.3%)	66

Views on **Housing and Homelessness Services** show a more even split between protection and investment across most housing tenure groups. **Protecting the service remains the most common preference overall**, including among those buying on a mortgage (50.3%), owning outright (51.3%) and renting from the council (52.6%), while **support for increased investment is particularly strong among private renters (60.0%) and council tenants (47.4%). Support for reductions is very limited across all tenures**, with no respondents favouring cuts among council tenants, private renters, housing association tenants, shared ownership households or those in the "Other" category.

Waste, Recycling and Street Cleaning

Housing tenure	Invest more n (%)	Protect n (%)	Reduce n (%)	Base (n)
Buying on mortgage	151 (36.6%)	237 (57.2%)	26 (6.2%)	414
Owned outright	74 (33.3%)	134 (60.3%)	14 (6.4%)	223
Rented from the council	17 (31.6%)	34 (63.2%)	3 (5.3%)	54
Rented from private landlord	11 (40.0%)	17 (60.0%)	0 (0.0%)	29
Rented from housing association / social landlord	3 (20.0%)	11 (80.0%)	0 (0.0%)	14
Shared ownership	3 (33.3%)	6 (66.7%)	0 (0.0%)	9
Other	6 (40.0%)	9 (60.0%)	0 (0.0%)	14

Housing tenure	Invest more n (%)	Protect n (%)	Reduce n (%)	Base (n)
Prefer not to say	9 (13.0%)	54 (82.6%)	3 (4.3%)	66

Across all housing tenure groups, **protecting Waste, Recycling and Street Cleaning is the dominant preference**, with clear majorities favouring protection among those buying on a mortgage (57.2%), owning outright (60.3%) and renting from the council (63.2%). **Support for increased investment is also evident**, particularly among private renters and respondents in the "Other" category (both 40.0%), while investment support is lower among those who preferred not to say their tenure (13.0%). **Very small proportions in any tenure group support reductions**, and no respondents favour cuts among private renters, housing association tenants, shared ownership households or those in the "Other" category.

Sport, Leisure and Countryside

Housing tenure	Invest more n (%)	Protect n (%)	Reduce n (%)	Base (n)
Buying on mortgage	134 (32.4%)	240 (57.9%)	40 (9.7%)	414
Owned outright	60 (26.9%)	140 (62.8%)	23 (10.3%)	223
Rented from the council	14 (26.3%)	34 (63.2%)	6 (10.5%)	54
Rented from private landlord	9 (30.0%)	17 (60.0%)	3 (10.0%)	29
Rented from housing association / social landlord	3 (20.0%)	9 (60.0%)	3 (20.0%)	14
Shared ownership	3 (33.3%)	6 (66.7%)	0 (0.0%)	9
Other	6 (40.0%)	6 (40.0%)	3 (20.0%)	14
Prefer not to say	9 (13.0%)	49 (73.9%)	9 (13.0%)	66

Across all housing tenure groups, **protecting Sport, Leisure and Countryside services is the most common preference**, with majorities favouring protection among those buying on a mortgage (57.9%), owning outright (62.8%) and renting from the council (63.2%). **Support for increased investment is more mixed and generally lower than for core services**, though it remains notable among private renters (30.0%) and those buying on a mortgage (32.4%). **Support for reductions is higher than for several other service areas but still represents a minority view across all tenures**, ranging from around one in ten among most groups to 20.0% among housing association tenants and respondents in the "Other" category.

Libraries and Community Centres

Housing tenure	Invest more n (%)	Protect n (%)	Reduce n (%)	Base (n)
Buying on mortgage	140 (33.8%)	243 (58.6%)	31 (7.6%)	414
Owned outright	66 (29.5%)	137 (61.5%)	20 (9.0%)	223
Rented from the council	17 (31.6%)	34 (63.2%)	3 (5.3%)	54
Rented from private landlord	9 (30.0%)	17 (60.0%)	3 (10.0%)	29
Rented from housing association / social landlord	3 (20.0%)	11 (80.0%)	0 (0.0%)	14
Shared ownership	3 (33.3%)	6 (66.7%)	0 (0.0%)	9
Other	6 (40.0%)	6 (40.0%)	3 (20.0%)	14
Prefer not to say	9 (13.0%)	51 (78.3%)	6 (8.7%)	66

Across all housing tenure groups, **protecting Libraries and Community Centres is the most common preference**, with clear majorities favouring protection among those buying on a mortgage (58.6%), owning outright (61.5%) and renting from the council (63.2%). **Support for increased investment is also evident**, particularly among respondents in the "Other" category (40.0%) and those buying on a mortgage (33.8%), while investment support is lower among respondents who preferred not to say their tenure (13.0%). **Support for reductions is consistently low across all tenures**, with no respondents favouring cuts among housing association tenants or shared ownership households.

Planning and Development

Housing tenure	Invest more n (%)	Protect n (%)	Reduce n (%)	Base (n)
Buying on mortgage	117 (28.3%)	246 (59.3%)	51 (12.4%)	414
Owned outright	57 (25.6%)	134 (60.3%)	31 (14.1%)	223
Rented from the council	14 (26.3%)	31 (57.9%)	9 (15.8%)	54
Rented from private landlord	6 (20.0%)	17 (60.0%)	6 (20.0%)	29

Housing tenure	Invest more n (%)	Protect n (%)	Reduce n (%)	Base (n)
Rented from housing association / social landlord	3 (20.0%)	9 (60.0%)	3 (20.0%)	14
Shared ownership	3 (33.3%)	6 (66.7%)	0 (0.0%)	9
Other	3 (20.0%)	9 (60.0%)	3 (20.0%)	14
Prefer not to say	6 (8.7%)	49 (73.9%)	11 (17.4%)	66

Across all housing tenure groups, **protecting Planning and Development services is the most common preference**, with around six in ten respondents favouring protection across most tenures, including those buying on a mortgage (59.3%) and owning outright (60.3%). **Support for increased investment is more limited than for many other service areas**, particularly among respondents who preferred not to say their tenure (8.7%) and private renters (20.0%). **Support for reductions is higher than for core services but remains a minority view across all tenures**, ranging from around one in eight among those buying on a mortgage (12.4%) to around one in five among private renters, housing association tenants and respondents in the "Other" category (all 20.0%).

Climate Action and Sustainability

Housing tenure	Invest more n (%)	Protect n (%)	Reduce n (%)	Base (n)
Buying on mortgage	191 (46.2%)	191 (46.2%)	31 (7.6%)	414
Owned outright	94 (42.3%)	109 (48.7%)	20 (9.0%)	223
Rented from the council	23 (42.1%)	29 (52.6%)	3 (5.3%)	54
Rented from private landlord	14 (50.0%)	11 (40.0%)	3 (10.0%)	29
Rented from housing association / social landlord	6 (40.0%)	9 (60.0%)	0 (0.0%)	14
Shared ownership	3 (33.3%)	6 (66.7%)	0 (0.0%)	9
Other	9 (60.0%)	6 (40.0%)	0 (0.0%)	14
Prefer not to say	11 (17.4%)	49 (73.9%)	6 (8.7%)	66

Views on **Climate Action and Sustainability** show a more balanced split between protection and investment across several housing tenure groups. **Those buying on a mortgage are evenly**

divided between investing more and protecting the service (both 46.2%), while majorities favour protection among those owning outright (48.7%) and renting from the council (52.6%). **Support for increased investment is particularly strong among private renters (50.0%) and respondents in the "Other" category (60.0%),** while support for reductions remains low across all tenures, with no respondents favouring cuts among housing association tenants, shared ownership households or those in the "Other" category.

Customer and Support Services

Housing tenure	Invest more n (%)	Protect n (%)	Reduce n (%)	Base (n)
Buying on mortgage	109 (26.2%)	240 (57.9%)	66 (15.9%)	414
Owned outright	51 (23.1%)	129 (57.7%)	43 (19.2%)	223
Rented from the council	11 (21.1%)	31 (57.9%)	11 (21.1%)	54
Rented from private landlord	6 (20.0%)	17 (60.0%)	6 (20.0%)	29
Rented from housing association / social landlord	3 (20.0%)	9 (60.0%)	3 (20.0%)	14
Shared ownership	3 (33.3%)	6 (66.7%)	0 (0.0%)	9
Other	3 (20.0%)	9 (60.0%)	3 (20.0%)	14
Prefer not to say	6 (8.7%)	46 (69.6%)	14 (21.7%)	66

Across all housing tenure groups, **protecting Customer and Support Services is the most common preference**, with broadly consistent majorities favouring protection among those buying on a mortgage (57.9%), owning outright (57.7%) and renting from the council (57.9%). **Support for increased investment is relatively limited compared to other service areas,** particularly among respondents who preferred not to say their tenure (8.7%) and those renting from private or social landlords (around 20%). **Support for reductions is higher than for many other services but remains a minority view across all tenures,** reaching around one in five among most renter groups and those owning outright.

Summary – Question 2 by Housing Tenure

Across housing tenure groups:

- **Core frontline services** (schools, children's services, adult social care, housing, waste and recycling) are consistently supported for protection or investment.

- **Planning and development** attract the strongest relative support for reductions across all tenure categories.

- Differences between tenure groups are generally modest, indicating that **housing tenure is not a strong differentiator** of service priorities compared with age.

Question 3

"If savings must be made, which areas would you least object to being reduced?"

Thematic analysis by housing tenure

Overview

Across housing tenure categories, respondents most commonly identified **management and administrative costs**, **planning and regulatory functions**, and **discretionary or non-essential services** as areas where savings could be made. There was a consistent emphasis on protecting frontline and care-related services.

Owned outright

Those who owned their homes outright commonly highlighted management structures, councillor costs, and bureaucracy. Planning and regulatory services were also mentioned, alongside occasional references to discretionary services such as leisure or cultural provision.

Buying on mortgage

Respondents buying on a mortgage frequently referred to senior management costs, council administration, and planning services. There were also references to consultancy and external contracts, with respondents questioning their value.

Rented from the council/ Rented from housing association / other social landlord/ Rented from private landlord

In rented accommodation categories, responses focused primarily on management and administrative costs, with some references to planning and regulatory functions. There was a clear preference for protecting frontline services, particularly those related to housing support and care.

Shared ownership/ Other tenure/ Prefer not to say

Due to small numbers of responses, analysis for these categories is necessarily limited. However, comments received reflected the same overarching themes identified elsewhere, particularly the desire to reduce overheads rather than frontline services.

Cross-tenure comparison summary

Across all housing tenure categories:

- Thematic content is **highly consistent**

- Acceptable reductions are primarily framed as:

    - Organisational and administrative reform

    - Corporate cost reduction

    - Efficiency improvement and rationalisation

- There is **strong resistance** to reductions affecting frontline and vulnerability-related services

- No meaningful tenure-based divergence is evident in views on acceptable savings

Summary

Responses to Question 3 reinforce findings from the age- and gender-based analyses:

- Public acceptance of savings is conditional on **where cuts fall**

- Respondents consistently distinguish between:

    - *The organisation*, and

    - *The services people rely on*

- Housing tenure does **not materially alter** this distinction

Overall, Question 3 demonstrates strong alignment across demographic groups in how acceptable reductions are conceptualised.

Question 4

Support for Council Tax Increases – Breakdown by Housing Tenure

Question wording

"Every 1% increase to the council tax charge equates to a weekly increase of £0.30 for an average property in East Lothian. Would you support an increase to council tax charges from April 2026 in order to protect council services?"

Response options

- Yes – support an increase up to £3 per week

- Yes – support an increase up to £5 per week

- Yes – support an increase of more than £5 per week

- No – would not support any increase

- Don't know

Note: Respondents who did not answer the housing tenure question are excluded from this breakdown. Bases vary by tenure.

Question 4 – Full tenure breakdown

Total not answered: 27

Owned outright

Response	n	%
≤ £3 / week	60	26.9%
≤ £5 / week	43	19.2%
> £5 / week	34	15.4%
No increase	83	37.2%
Don't know	3	1.3%

Buying on mortgage

Response	n	%
≤ £3 / week	137	33.1%
≤ £5 / week	74	17.9%

Response	n	%
> £5 / week	34	8.3%
No increase	157	37.9%
Don't know	11	2.8%

Rented from the council

Response	n	%
≤ £3 / week	3	5.3%
≤ £5 / week	9	15.8%
> £5 / week	9	15.8%
No increase	34	63.2%
Don't know	0	0.0%

Rented from housing association / other social landlord

Response	n	%
≤ £3 / week	3	20.0%
≤ £5 / week	3	20.0%
> £5 / week	0	0.0%
No increase	9	60.0%
Don't know	0	0.0%

Rented from private landlord

Response	n	%
≤ £3 / week	9	30.0%

Response	n	%
≤ £5 / week	3	10.0%
> £5 / week	0	0.0%
No increase	17	60.0%
Don't know	0	0.0%

Shared ownership

Response	n	%
≤ £3 / week	3	33.3%
≤ £5 / week	0	0.0%
> £5 / week	6	66.6%
No increase	0	0.0%
Don't know	0	0.0%

Other tenure

Response	n	%
≤ £3 / week	9	60.0%
≤ £5 / week	3	20.0%
> £5 / week	3	20.0%
No increase	0	0.0%
Don't know	0	0.0%

Prefer not to say (tenure)

Response	n	%
≤ £3 / week	11	16.7%
≤ £5 / week	3	4.2%
> £5 / week	3	4.2%
No increase	51	75.0%
Don't know	0	0.0%

Tenure-based interpretation

1. Overall support for any increase

Support for **some level of council tax increase** varies by tenure but is **not dominant in most groups**.

- Among **homeowners (owned outright and mortgage holders) and most renters**, **opposition to any increase is the single most common response**.

2. Level of acceptable increase

In most tenure categories, support is **concentrated in the lower increase bands** (≤ £3 and ≤ £5 per week).

Support for increases **above £5 per week** is low in the main tenure groups. Results for shared ownership and other small base categories should be treated with caution.

3. Opposition to increases

Opposition to any increase is strongest among renters – around 60%. Although there is resistance to rises in most groups.

4. "Don't know" responses

"Don't know" responses remain low across all tenure categories, indicating that uncertainty is not a major factor in tenure-based differences.

Summary conclusion (Question 4 by housing tenure)

- Housing tenure introduces **some variation**, particularly between homeowners and renters.

- **Renters are more likely to oppose** council tax increases outright.

- **Homeowners show a more mixed pattern**, with a clear majority supporting some level of increase, but a substantial minority opposing any rise.

- Overall attitudes toward council tax increases appear to be shaped more strongly by **age** than by housing tenure.

Question 5

Importance of Protecting Services for Vulnerable Groups – Breakdown by Housing Tenure

Question wording

"How important is it that the Council protects services for vulnerable groups (e.g., older people, children at risk, low-income families), even if this means reducing other services?"

Response options

- Very important

- Important

- Neutral

- Less important

- Not important

Question 5 – Full tenure breakdown

Housing tenure	Very important n (%)	Important n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Less important n (%)	Not important n (%)	Base (n)
Buying on mortgage	137 (33.3%)	154 (37.5%)	86 (20.8%)	26 (6.2%)	9 (2.1%)	411
Owned outright	69 (31.2%)	74 (33.8%)	63 (28.6%)	9 (3.9%)	6 (2.6%)	220
Rented from private landlord	14 (50.0%)	9 (30.0%)	6 (20.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	29

Housing tenure	Very important n (%)	Important n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Less important n (%)	Not important n (%)	Base (n)
Rented from the council	29 (52.6%)	14 (26.3%)	11 (21.1%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	54
Rented from housing association or other social landlord	6 (40.0%)	9 (60.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	14
Shared ownership	6 (66.7%)	3 (33.3%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	9
Other	6 (40.0%)	6 (40.0%)	3 (20.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	14
Prefer not to say	9 (12.5%)	34 (50.0%)	14 (20.8%)	11 (16.7%)	0 (0.0%)	69

Total not answered: 34

Interpretation

- Among respondents buying on a mortgage and those owning outright, around 65–71% rate protecting services as very important or important.

- Respondents in rented accommodation (including council, housing association and private rented) show particularly strong support, with at least 78.9% in each category selecting "very important" or "important".

- Very small tenure groups (such as shared ownership and other) show uniformly positive views, but these findings should be treated with caution due to low base sizes.

- Across all tenure categories, relatively few respondents view protecting services as less important or not important.

Summary conclusion (Question 5 by housing tenure)

Support for protecting vulnerable groups is strong across all housing tenures. Respondents living in **housing association accommodation (100.0%)** and **private rented accommodation (80.0%)** show particularly high levels of support, selecting 'very important' or 'important'. Respondents renting from the **council** also show strong support, with **78.9%** rating this principle as very important or important. Owner-occupiers likewise demonstrate high support overall, indicating broad consensus across tenure types on the importance of protecting vulnerable groups when making savings.

Question 6

Support for More Services Being Delivered Online – Breakdown by Housing Tenure

Question wording

"Would you support more services being delivered online if this saved money?"

Response options

- Yes, strongly support

- Yes, somewhat support

- No opinion

- No, prefer in-person

- No, strongly oppose

Question 6 – Full tenure breakdown

Housing tenure	Yes – strongly support n (%)	Yes – somewhat support n (%)	No opinion n (%)	No – prefer in-person n (%)	No – strongly oppose n (%)	Base (n)
Buying on mortgage	237 (57.2%)	160 (38.6%)	11 (2.8%)	6 (1.4%)	0 (0.0%)	414
Owned outright	86 (38.5%)	103 (46.2%)	14 (6.4%)	14 (6.4%)	6 (2.6%)	223
Rented from private landlord	11 (40.0%)	17 (60.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	29
Rented from the council	20 (36.8%)	20 (36.8%)	6 (10.5%)	6 (10.5%)	3 (5.3%)	54
Rented from housing association or other social landlord	9 (60.0%)	6 (40.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	14
Shared ownership	3 (33.3%)	6 (66.7%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	9
Other	3 (20.0%)	9 (60.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (20.0%)	0 (0.0%)	14

Housing tenure	Yes – strongly support n (%)	Yes – somewhat support n (%)	No opinion n (%)	No – prefer in-person n (%)	No – strongly oppose n (%)	Base (n)
Prefer not to say	40 (58.3%)	23 (33.3%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (4.2%)	3 (4.2%)	69

Total not answered: 28

Interpretation

All housing tenure categories show majority support for more services being delivered online when this saves money, but support is not uniformly high across every tenure group.

- Combined support (strongly + somewhat) is highest among those buying on a mortgage (95.9%) and is also high among those owning outright (84.6%) and those who prefer not to state tenure (91.7%).

- Some tenure groups show notably lower combined support, particularly respondents renting from the council (73.7%) and those selecting "Other" (80.0%), though "Other" has a very small base (n=5).

- Opposition (prefer in-person + strongly oppose) remains low in many tenure groups but is higher among those renting from the council (15.8%) and those selecting "Other" (20.0%) (small base).

- "No opinion" responses remain low overall, though they are higher among council renters (10.5%) and those owning outright (6.4%).

Summary conclusion (Question 6 by housing tenure)

Support for delivering more services online is **broad-based and consistent across housing tenure categories**. Attitudes do not differ meaningfully between homeowners and renters, suggesting that openness to digital service delivery is driven more by factors such as age and digital confidence than by housing circumstances.

Question 7

"What suggestions do you have for making council services more efficient or cost-effective?"

Thematic analysis by housing tenure

Overview (all tenure types)

Across all housing tenure categories, responses to Question 7 emphasise **organisational efficiency and value for money**, rather than reductions to frontline services. Common themes include reducing overheads, making better use of buildings and assets, improving internal processes, and protecting services that residents rely on most. Differences by tenure relate mainly to emphasis and framing, and base sizes for some tenure groups are small.

Owned outright

Dominant themes

- Organisational efficiency and overhead reduction
- Asset rationalisation
- Long-term value for money

Typical framing

Responses from outright owners often frame efficiency in terms of **financial sustainability and organisational discipline**, with references to reducing waste, improving asset use, and ensuring public money is spent effectively.

Buying on mortgage

Dominant themes

- Protecting frontline services
- Efficiency and value for money
- Streamlining processes

Typical framing

Respondents buying on a mortgage frequently emphasise the need to improve efficiency while **maintaining service quality**. Comments often balance concern about costs with an expectation that essential services should be protected and resources used more effectively.

Rented from the council

Dominant themes

- Protection of essential services
- Reducing overheads and inefficiency
- Fairness in how savings are achieved

Typical framing

Responses from council tenants often frame efficiency in terms of **service access and reliability**, alongside calls to reduce organisational overheads before services that residents depend on are affected.

Rented from housing association / social landlord

Dominant themes

- Organisational efficiency
- Protection of frontline services

Typical framing

A very small number of responses were received from this group. Where comments were provided, they align with broader themes of improving efficiency while protecting essential services. Findings should be interpreted with caution due to the limited base size.

Rented from private landlord

Dominant themes

- Efficiency and value for money
- Reducing perceived waste or duplication

Typical framing

Private renters often focus on **resource allocation and efficiency**, with suggestions aimed at reducing waste and ensuring that savings are made through organisational improvements rather than service cuts.

Shared ownership

Dominant themes

- Organisational efficiency
- Protecting frontline services

Typical framing

Responses in these categories are few in number but broadly mirror the wider dataset. Comments focus on reducing inefficiency and overheads while avoiding reductions to services. Due to very small base sizes, **no tenure-specific conclusions are drawn**.

Other tenure

Dominant themes

- Organisational efficiency

- Corporate overheads

- Asset rationalisation

Framing characteristics

Patterns align with the wider dataset. Base size is insufficient for standalone interpretation.

Prefer not to say (tenure)

Dominant themes

- Bureaucratic inefficiency

- Asset rationalisation

- Protection of frontline services

Framing characteristics

Responses broadly mirror those seen in **older age groups** in the age-based analysis, with emphasis on efficiency before service reduction.

Cross-tenure comparison summary

Across housing tenure categories, there is a **high degree of consistency** in how efficiency and cost-effectiveness are understood. Respondents across all tenures prioritise organisational reform, better use of assets, and improved processes over reductions to frontline services. Differences between tenure groups relate primarily to emphasis rather than to fundamentally different views.

Analytical note

Question 7 aligns closely with patterns observed in **Questions 3 and 6**, where respondents consistently frame acceptable savings and efficiency improvements as organisational change rather than reductions to frontline services. Housing tenure, like gender, does not emerge as a meaningful differentiator in shaping views on how efficiency should be achieved.

Question 8

Fairness Principles for Making Savings – Breakdown by Housing Tenure

Question wording:

"If savings are necessary, which principle do you think is most fair?"

Response options:

1. Everyone experiences a small reduction in services

2. Larger reductions in non-essential services to protect essentials

3. Focus on efficiency and digital transformation to avoid reductions

4. Increase charges/fees for certain services instead of reducing them

Question 8 – Full tenure breakdown

Principle	n	%
Small reductions for everyone	23	10.3%
Larger cuts to non-essentials	66	29.5%
Efficiency and digital	91	41.0%
Increase charges/fees	43	19.2%
Base (n): 223		

Buying on mortgage

Principle	n	%
Small reductions for everyone	26	6.2%
Larger cuts to non-essentials	86	20.7%
Efficiency and digital	240	57.9%
Increase charges/fees	63	15.2%

Base (n): 414

Rented from the council

Principle	n	%
Small reductions for everyone	3	5.3%
Larger cuts to non-essentials	26	47.4%
Efficiency and digital	20	36.8%
Increase charges/fees	6	10.5%

Base (n): 54

Housing association / social landlord

Principle	n	%
Small reductions for everyone	0	0.0%
Larger cuts to non-essentials	11	80.0%
Efficiency and digital	3	20.0%
Increase charges/fees	0	0.0%

Base (n): 14

Rented from private landlord

Principle	n	%
Small reductions for everyone	9	30.0%
Larger cuts to non-essentials	11	40.0%

Principle	n	%
Efficiency and digital	9	30.0%
Increase charges/fees	0	0.0%

Base (n): 29

Shared ownership

Principle	n	%
Small reductions for everyone	0	0.0%
Larger cuts to non-essentials	0	0.0%
Efficiency and digital	3	33.3%
Increase charges/fees	6	66.7%

Base (n): 9

Other

Principle	n	%
Small reductions for everyone	0	0.0%
Larger cuts to non-essentials	3	20.0%
Efficiency and digital	0	0.0%
Increase charges/fees	11	80.0%

Base (n): 14

Prefer not to say

Principle	n	%
Small reductions for everyone	9	13.0%
Larger cuts to non-essentials	17	26.1%
Efficiency and digital	37	56.5%
Increase charges/fees	3	4.3%

Base (n): 66

Total not answered: 31

Interpretation by housing tenure

Among homeowners, **focusing on efficiency and digital transformation** is the most commonly selected fairness principle, particularly among respondents who are buying their home with a mortgage or own their home outright. This indicates strong support for efficiency-led approaches among homeowners.

Respondents renting from the council or from a housing association are more likely than homeowners to select **larger reductions in non-essential services to protect essentials**, suggesting a stronger emphasis on safeguarding core provision within these groups.

Support for **spreading small reductions across all services** is generally low across most tenure categories.

Support for **increasing charges or fees** varies considerably by tenure and is influenced by very small base sizes in some categories. As such, patterns in these groups should be treated cautiously and not over-interpreted.

Overall, housing tenure influences the emphasis placed on different fairness principles, but does not introduce fundamentally different views about the need to protect essential services and avoid indiscriminate cuts in the groups with largest numbers of respondents. **Shared ownership** and **other** groups show a preference for **charges/fees** but small base size should be noted.

Summary conclusion (Question 8 by housing tenure)

While some variation exists between tenure types, the larger base-size groups show a similar pattern; respondents tend to favour **targeted, strategic approaches to savings**—most commonly through efficiency and digital transformation and/or by protecting essential services through larger reductions in non-essential services. As noted, "other" and "shared ownership" respondents, while exhibiting outlier responses, have small base sizes that should be noted.

Question 9

Interest in Playing a Larger Role in Delivering or Supporting Local Services – Breakdown by Housing Tenure

Question wording:

"Would you or your community group be interested in playing a larger role in delivering or supporting local services (e.g., volunteering, partnerships)?"

Response options:
Yes
Maybe
No

Question 9

Tenure-based interpretation

- **"Maybe" is the most common response** in several tenure categories, particularly among:

    - Mortgage holders

    - Council tenants

- **Clear willingness ("Yes") remains a minority position** across all tenure types.

- **Outright owners and mortgage holders** show similar overall patterns, with:

    - Around one third to one half indicating conditional openness

    - Around one third indicating no interest

- **Social and private renters** show slightly higher proportions answering "Yes", though bases are small and should be interpreted with caution.

- The **"Prefer not to say"** group shows a notably higher proportion answering "No", consistent with patterns seen in other questions.

Summary (Question 9 by housing tenure)

- Across all housing tenure categories, **interest in playing a larger role is cautious and conditional**.

- Community involvement is **not rejected outright**, but most respondents indicate:

    - Uncertainty ("Maybe"), or

    - A clear boundary around willingness ("No").

- **No tenure group functions as a clear or robust outlier** once base sizes are taken into account, although some small-base categories (such as "prefer not to say" and housing association renters) show more pronounced patterns that should be noted with caution.

- This reinforces the main-report conclusion that:

Community involvement may complement council services, but should not be assumed or relied upon as a replacement for council-led provision.

Question 10

"Looking beyond 2026–27, what do you think should be the Council's top financial priority?"
Thematic analysis by housing tenure

Overview (all tenure types)

Across all housing tenure categories, responses focus on **long-term financial sustainability and service resilience**, rather than short-term savings. Recurrent themes across the dataset include:

- Financial sustainability and long-term planning

- Protection of core statutory and frontline services

- Prevention and early intervention to reduce future demand

- Managing population growth and service pressures

- Efficiency and value for money

- Long-term infrastructure and service planning

Thematic content is consistent across tenure categories. Differences relate mainly to **framing and emphasis**, rather than to different underlying priorities.

Owned outright

Dominant themes

- Long-term financial sustainability

- Efficiency and value for money

- Protection of essential services

- Infrastructure maintenance and planning

- Managing demand growth

Framing characteristics
Responses frequently frame priorities in terms of financial balance, organisational resilience, and long-term affordability. There is a strong emphasis on maintaining stability and avoiding decisions that would create higher costs in future years.

Buying on mortgage

Dominant themes

- Service sustainability

- Prevention and early intervention

- Financial resilience

- Protection of frontline services

- Managing growth pressures

Framing characteristics
Responses often emphasise future service demand and population growth, linking financial priorities to long-term planning for housing, education, and infrastructure, alongside the need for sustainable finances.

Rented from the council

Dominant themes

- Protection of frontline services

- Support for vulnerable residents

- Prevention and early intervention

- Financial stability

Framing characteristics
Responses commonly frame priorities in relation to service access and continuity, with strong emphasis on safeguarding support for those most reliant on council services.

Rented from housing association / social landlord

Dominant themes

- Service protection

- Long-term sustainability

- Preventative approaches

- Efficiency and value for money

Framing characteristics
Responses combine concern for service continuity with an emphasis on sustainable financial planning, often linking prevention to long-term cost control.

Rented from private landlord

Dominant themes

- Financial sustainability

- Protection of essential services

- Efficiency

- Long-term planning

Framing characteristics
Responses tend to focus on resource allocation and service stability, with emphasis on ensuring the council remains financially resilient while maintaining core provision.

Shared ownership

Dominant themes

- Financial stability

- Service protection

- Prevention

Patterns align closely with the wider dataset.
Due to the small base size, no tenure-specific conclusions are drawn.

Other tenure

Dominant themes

- Organisational sustainability

- Financial planning

- Protection of essential services

Patterns align with broader dataset themes.
Base size is insufficient for standalone interpretation.

Prefer not to say (tenure)

Dominant themes

- Financial sustainability

- Long-term planning

- Protection of essential services

Patterns align with those observed in older age groups in the age-based analysis.

Cross-tenure comparison summary (Question 10)

Across all housing tenure categories:

- **Financial sustainability** is consistently identified as a core long-term priority.

- **Protection of essential and frontline services** recurs across all groups.

- **Prevention and early intervention** appear consistently as a way to manage future demand.

- Differences between tenure categories are primarily in **framing and emphasis**, not in content.

- **No significant tenure-based divergence** is present in views on future financial priorities.

Interpretation note

Question 10 aligns closely with patterns observed across the age- and gender-based analyses, reinforcing the conclusion that long-term financial sustainability, prevention, and protection of essential services are **structural priorities shared across demographic and socio-economic groups**, rather than preferences driven by tenure.

Question 11

Perceived Equality, Human Rights or Wellbeing Impacts – Breakdown by Housing Tenure

Question wording:
"Do you think there would be any equality, human rights, or wellbeing impacts arising from the areas considered in this consultation?"

Response options:

- Yes

- No

- Don't know

Question 11 – Full tenure breakdown

Tenure	Yes n (%)	No n (%)	Don't know n (%)	Base (n)
Buying on mortgage	134 (33.1%)	129 (31.7%)	143 (35.2%)	406
Owned outright	69 (31.2%)	94 (42.9%)	57 (26.0%)	220
Rented from the council	20 (36.8%)	9 (15.8%)	26 (47.4%)	54
Rented from private landlord	6 (20.0%)	6 (20.0%)	17 (60.0%)	29
Rented from housing association / social landlord	0 (0.0%)	9 (75.0%)	3 (25.0%)	11
Shared ownership	3 (33.3%)	3 (33.3%)	3 (33.3%)	9
Other	9 (60.0%)	3 (20.0%)	3 (20.0%)	14
Prefer not to say	20 (29.2%)	26 (37.5%)	23 (33.3%)	69

Total not answered: 42

Tenure-based interpretation

Views on potential impacts vary across housing tenure groups, whilst most larger-base tenure categories do not show a strong consensus, some smaller-base groups do record a majority response for a single option; these results should be interpreted with caution due to small sample size.

Respondents who are **buying on a mortgage** or **own their home outright** are broadly split between "Yes", "No" and "Don't know", reflecting mixed judgement and uncertainty. Among **council tenants**, a relatively higher proportion answer "Don't know", suggesting less certainty about the implications of the proposals.

Private renters also show a high level of uncertainty, while responses from housing association tenants indicate a higher proportion answering "No", although this finding should be treated cautiously due to the very small base size.

Overall, housing tenure influences emphasis but does not create sharply divergent views. Across all tenure groups, uncertainty remains a prominent feature of responses from most groups.

Question 12

"Do you have any other comments or ideas you would like to share about the council's budget?"
Thematic analysis by housing tenure

Overview (all tenure types)

Across all housing tenure categories, responses to Question 12 focus on values, trust, and decision-making rather than on specific budget lines. Common themes recurring across the dataset include:

- Fairness and transparency in financial decision-making

- Protection of frontline and statutory services

- Concerns about management structures, overheads, and efficiency

- Requests for clearer public communication about financial pressures

- Emphasis on long-term sustainability and planning

- Recognition that prioritisation and difficult choices are unavoidable

Thematic content is highly consistent across tenure categories. Differences are primarily in **framing and emphasis**, not in the underlying concerns expressed.

Owned outright

Dominant themes

- Organisational efficiency

- Management and administrative overheads

- Asset rationalisation and use of council property

- Transparency in budgeting and decision-making

- Long-term financial planning

Framing characteristics
Responses frequently use structural and organisational language, focusing on governance arrangements, asset management, and financial planning. Comments often emphasise the need for strategic oversight and long-term affordability.

Buying on mortgage

Dominant themes

- Protection of frontline services

- Fairness in decision-making

- Efficiency and value for money

- Long-term sustainability

- Transparency

Framing characteristics
Responses commonly emphasise service continuity, community impact, and future planning, alongside expectations that public money should be demonstrably well used.

Rented from the council

Dominant themes

- Protection of vulnerable residents

- Service access and continuity

- Fairness in budget decisions

- Reduction of management and overhead costs

Framing characteristics
Responses often frame budget concerns in terms of social protection and service reliability, with emphasis on safeguarding access to essential services for those most affected by changes.

Rented from housing association / social landlord

Dominant themes

- Service protection

- Organisational efficiency

- Fairness

- Long-term sustainability

Framing characteristics
Responses combine concern for service continuity with recognition of financial constraints, often highlighting the need to balance efficiency with protection for vulnerable groups.

Rented from private landlord

Dominant themes

- Efficiency and value for money

- Management overheads

- Protection of essential services

- Transparency

Framing characteristics

Responses focus on resource allocation and service stability, with an emphasis on ensuring that efficiencies are pursued before impacts fall on residents.

Shared ownership

Dominant themes

- Efficiency

- Service protection

- Fairness

Patterns align with broader dataset themes. Due to the small base size, no standalone tenure-specific conclusions are drawn.

Other tenure

Dominant themes

- Organisational efficiency

- Financial sustainability

- Service protection

Responses align with wider dataset patterns. Base size is insufficient for independent interpretation.

Prefer not to say (tenure)

Dominant themes

- Fairness

- Transparency

- Protection of frontline services

Patterns broadly mirror those found in older age groups in the age-based analysis.

Cross-tenure comparison summary (Question 12)

Across all housing tenure categories:

- Protection of frontline and essential services is a recurring priority

- Efficiency and overhead reduction are consistently emphasised

- Fairness and transparency in decision-making feature prominently

- Respondents want decisions to be clearly explained and justified

Differences between tenure groups are **primarily in language and framing**, not in priorities or values. No significant tenure-based divergence is present.

Analytical note

Question 12 aligns closely with findings from Questions 3, 7, and 10, where budget commentary consistently focuses on organisational efficiency, service protection, and long-term sustainability rather than service withdrawal. Housing tenure does not emerge as a structuring variable shaping views, reinforcing the consultation's overall message of shared values across socio-economic groups.