

Consultation results: Borough of Queenscliffe 2023–24 budget

Thanks to an increased certainty in financial planning in the wake of pandemic restrictions, the Borough of Queenscliffe again chose to conduct an extended budget consultation, mirroring the engagement undertaken in 2019. Across four weeks in October and November 2022, a total of 211 respondents took part in an online survey that highlighted the priorities of the public and revealed important insights about our community's priorities for the next financial year.

This report outlines trends and themes from the feedback received, alongside individual examples of participant comments. The detail in this report will be reviewed by Councillors and officers throughout the organisation, both to shape the direction of the 2023–24 Borough of Queenscliffe Budget and to gain a better understanding of community priorities.

The success of an initiative such as this is predicated on the enthusiasm of the community for whom it intends to serve. Council thanks everyone who took part for giving their thoughts and time to this engagement. Your voice is helping us create a better Borough.

Results summary

Respondents on average wanted Council to spend more on **assets, facilities and public spaces**, as well as **environment and waste**. Notable project suggestions included installing more footpaths, upgrading public toilets, planting more trees and protecting our coastline.

Statutory planning and local laws was the only category in which participants suggested Council slightly reduce expenditure. Overall, respondents were happy with Council's spend and direction in **arts and libraries**, and supported spending slightly more on **tourism and business support**, where improvements to caravan parks attracted the greatest attention.

Respondents continued to share Council's commitment to a balanced budget. In identifying revenue sources, most responses wanted Council to seek government grants where additional revenues were required. A significant majority also wanted Council to reinvest savings in other projects instead of reducing the size of rate increases.

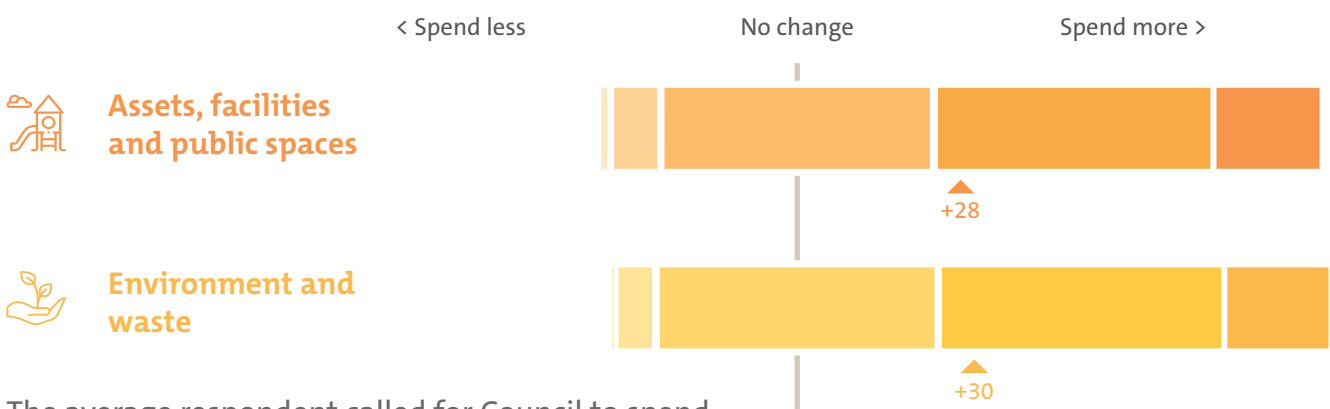
Further detailed results data and sample comments can be found throughout this document.



Funding priorities

Participants were asked whether Council should spend more or less on each budget category, including whether Council should spend “a little” or “a lot” more or less. All of these scores were then averaged to understand which categories respondents felt Council should spend more or less on, and how strongly they felt this way.

The below chart shows the distribution of responses by category. Each category shows respondent answers from “spend a lot less” on the left, to “spend a lot more” on the right, with the average value marked by an arrow underneath the bar.



The average respondent called for Council to spend more on the above two categories, with overall figures showing a majority support for an increase.



While the average respondent was happy with no change, overall figures trended towards spending slightly less on statutory planning.



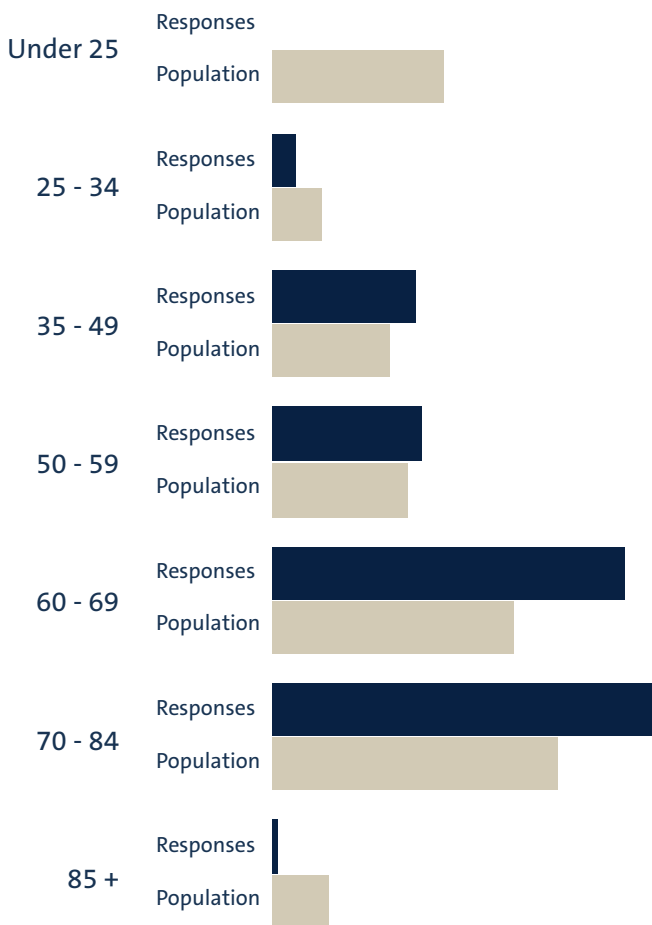
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Demographic results

Responses to the survey were also tracked across two demographic metrics – the age of respondents, and whether respondents resided in the Borough full-time, part-time, or as a visitor.

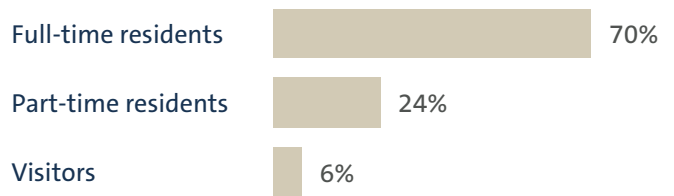
Responses by age vs. Borough population

Respondents’ ages, much like the Borough’s population, generally followed a linear upwards trend. Perhaps unsurprisingly, older generations were slightly overrepresented and younger generations were significantly underrepresented, and hence some caution should be exercised in accepting these responses as reflective of the entire cohort.



Responses by residency

Full-time residents represented a majority of responses – higher than the proportion of ratepayers.



Response variation by age

Responses tended to vary in extremes based on generation gaps. Some examples include:

- Respondents under the age of 50 felt passionately about the environment, calling for – on average – twice the amount of spending in this category versus any other.
- Meanwhile, respondents over the age of 70 prioritised assets, facilities and public spaces over the next highest category by a ratio of more than 2 to 1.
- Similarly, respondents under 50 called for – on average – more than twice as many cuts to the statutory planning and local laws budget as those over 70.

Response variation by residency

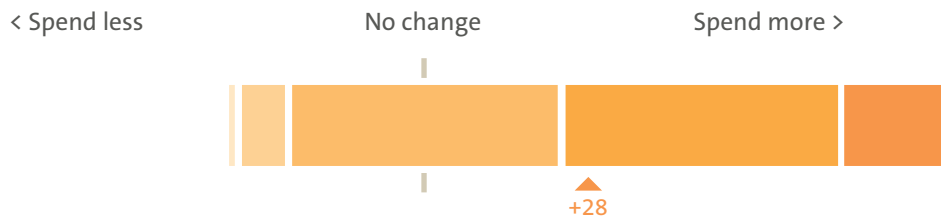
When sorted into responses from full-time residents compared to part-time residents and visitors, a few trends also emerge:

- Full-time residents prioritised greater spending on the environment compared to part-time residents and visitors.
- Part-time residents and visitors were more supportive of greater spending on arts and libraries than full-time residents.



Assets, facilities and public spaces

Respondents overall felt that Council should spend more on its assets, facilities and public spaces. Measured on a scale from -100 (unanimous agreement to spend a lot less) to 100 (unanimous agreement to spend a lot more) responses in this category averaged +28. This tells Council that respondents think this category should be a priority for the next budget.



Respondents provided a wide and varied list of suggestions in the assets, facilities and public spaces category. Your five most popular suggestions were:



Some of the things we heard from you:

"Playgrounds in Queenscliff need upgrading to provide more challenging activities for children."

"Install showers at beaches in Queenscliff like those in Pt Lonsdale e.g. Maytone and at front beach."

"Improvements and maintaining garden beds with road roundabouts and verge corners at intersections."

"Implement an 'app' where the public can upload photographs/reports of facilities that need to be attended asap."

"Keep toilet facilities constantly cleaned and updated."

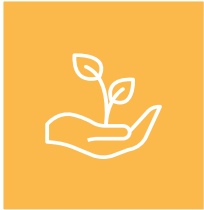
"Establishing an additional dogs off leash area that isn't beach facing."

"Maintaining footpaths, boardwalk and maybe a crossing and footpath on Fellows Road."

"I would suggest an urban forest strategy that sets canopy coverage targets to inform tree planting."

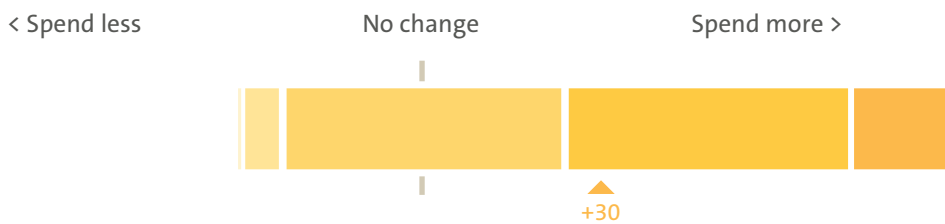
Comparison to previous budget survey:



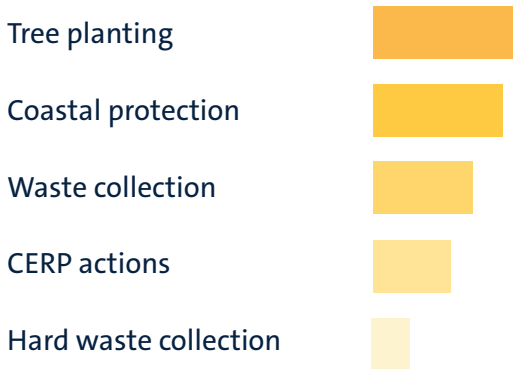


Environment and waste

Of all the categories, environment and waste had the highest number of respondents calling for spending increases, with an average score of +30 on the previous scale. This tells us that residents put a high priority on environmental and waste projects, with more than 92% of respondents calling for Council to spend either the same or more on this category in the next budget.



Respondents emphasised the importance of tree planting and protecting our coastline, while valuing waste collection and reduction. The most popular projects suggested were:



Some of the things we heard from you:

"A dedicated CERP community information wall in Wirrng Wirrng - providing updates and tracking information on the CERP as well as information and resources for the community."

"Cleaning and maintaining our green areas needs more attention. Overgrown vegetation leaves the Borough looking unkept."

"Very pleased that the council has refined our rubbish collection and provided the new green system. Please continue also with your environmental protection plans."

"Add twice year hard rubbish collection or a booked service option."

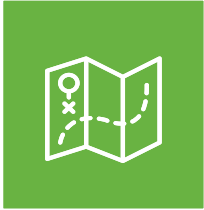
"Major weeding along coastal strip throughout Borough... Planting has been good post storm but more trees and replanting in bush areas is needed."

"Coastline erosion is an area that will need more attention."

"Manage tree sizes on private properties."

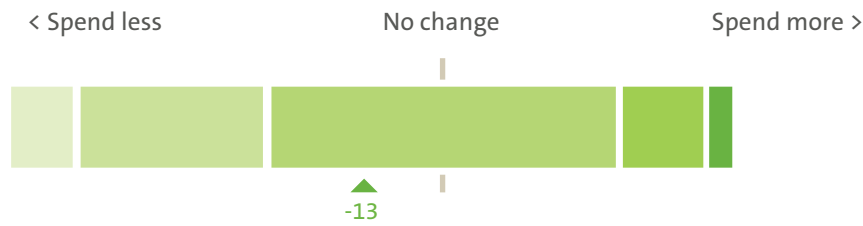
Comparison to previous budget survey:










Statutory planning and local laws

Statutory planning and local laws was the only category in which the overall response was to spend slightly less. While almost half of respondents were happy with the current spend, those who did call for a decrease felt more strongly about budget cuts in this category compared to any other, with suggestions to repurpose this funding proving popular throughout.



The planning category attracted fewer project suggestions than other categories, however respondents provided feedback on the following suggestions:

Heritage protection	
Built form consistency	
Inappropriate development	
Planning processes	
Bylaws enforcement	

Comparison to previous budget survey:



Some of the things we heard from you:

"Clarify planning rules in relation to solar panels on heritage buildings and face the fact that the risks to BoQ from adverse climate change is a greater priority than some of the heritage listed buildings."

"Tighter local laws and enforcement to prevent our streets from becoming an extension of the boat ramp trailer parking."

"Redevelopment of the main street of Queenscliff to become a genuine main street of modern standards whilst maintaining its heritage."

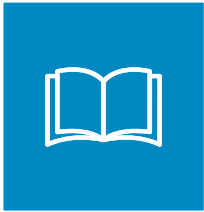
"Managing land development keeping in mind the CERP at all times, and using this plan to inform and guide planning decisions."

"No three storey buildings."

"Introduce a heritage committee to advise on development."

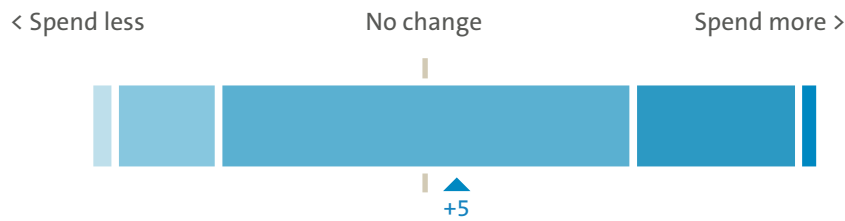
"Stronger controls over small subdivided blocks."

"Council needs to improve and reduce this expenditure."

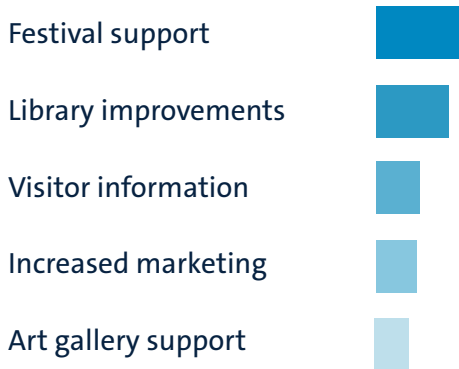


Arts and libraries

Respondents tended to feel that Council’s funding for arts and libraries was where it needed to be, with more than 55% indicating they would like to maintain the current amount of spending. Of those who deviated from the norm, a slightly greater percentage of respondents wanted to spend “a little more” as opposed to those supporting a decrease.



Respondents were largely satisfied with Council's current offerings in this area and encouraged maintaining the status quo. Of specific suggestions, the most popular were:



Comparison to previous budget survey:



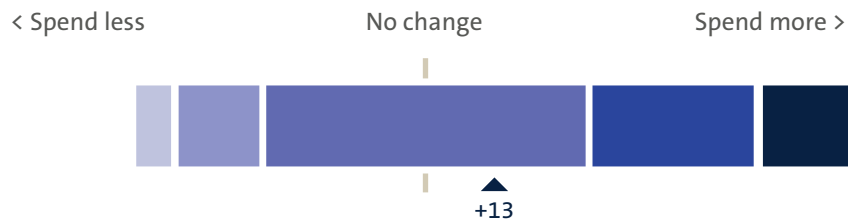
Some of the things we heard from you:

- "Like the new Hub. Thank you! Great to increase exhibits and keep new ones coming. Including more about Indigenous history."*
- "Equipping library with range of computers & other e-tech, especially as some residents do not have internet access or know-how."*
- "All good at present."*
- "Moving the library collection towards digital assets. Continue to expand reach of Visitor Centre. Focus marketing on the principal features of the Borough."*
- "None - I think there could be some savings here - less tourism attraction and festivals would be a relief for the permanent residents over the summer period."*
- "No further required. New library is perfect."*
- "Current work on festivals and attractions to the Borough is really good and should be supported to grow further, activation of the QC town hall is a great example of the success here."*

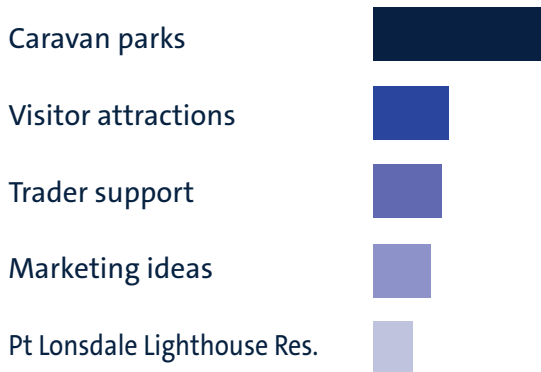


Tourism and businesses

Respondents overall were supportive of a slight increase in spending on tourism and business. Those who wanted more attention turned to the sector were committed in their response, with 14% of participants calling for Council to spend “a lot more” – just 1% less than the amount of people who called for similar increases in the more popular assets and environment categories.



Improvements to Council’s caravan parks and the overall choice of accommodation was a popular topic, followed by a range of suggestions that included:



Some of the things we heard from you:

“Solar and battery storage for the caravan parks. This would help meet our CERP targets as well as reduce ongoing electricity costs.”

“Promote the Borough as a heritage destination with 4 museums. More interpretive signage on buildings, parks, etc.”

“Council should offer incentives to business owners to increase the vibrancy of Hesse St... Work with landlords to offset rent costs so the empty shopfronts can be turned into functional and practical shops or community spaces.”

“Environmental tourism. You have the indigenous bushland and coast, make full use of it.”

“Sorry guys, but attracting more tourists is directly opposed to the interest of those with per infant or holiday properties. We pay the rates, but cannot use many of the facilities when the major tourist season is active.”

“The booking of caravan parks should be overhauled so the same people don't reserve spots year after year but the spots are thrown open every year.”

Comparison to previous budget survey:



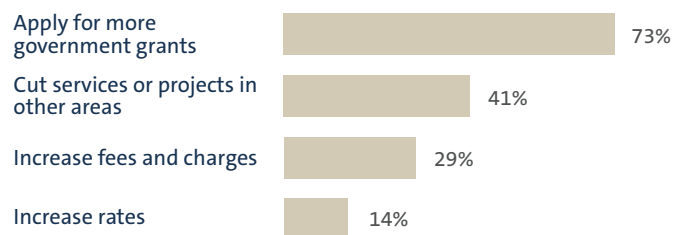
Balancing the budget

This consultation activity identified potential solutions to facilitate increases or decreases in spending. Participants who suggested increased spending were asked how Council should raise additional revenue to pay for increases, and participants who suggested spending cuts were asked how Council should reinvest the savings. Participants could select more than one option.

Paying for more spending

Respondents tended to want Council to find ways to pay for spending increases without increasing revenue measures. Most popular were applying for more government grants (73%) or rebalancing the budget by making compensatory cuts in other areas (41%).

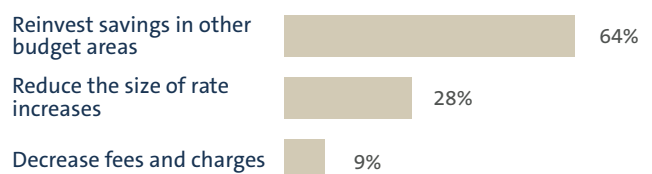
This tells us that while respondents want Council to increase spending in some areas, this should only occur if Council can fund these increases without raising additional revenues.



Reinvesting savings from cuts

When respondents suggested reducing expenditure on categories, projects or services, preference was given to reinvesting those savings in other areas of Council's budget (64%).

This tells us that respondents value particular projects and services highly, and want Council to use budget savings to invest further in these priority areas.



Key lessons

Respondents continue to value Council's balanced budget, and consistently looked for ways to pay for spending increases by finding savings in other areas of Council's budget.

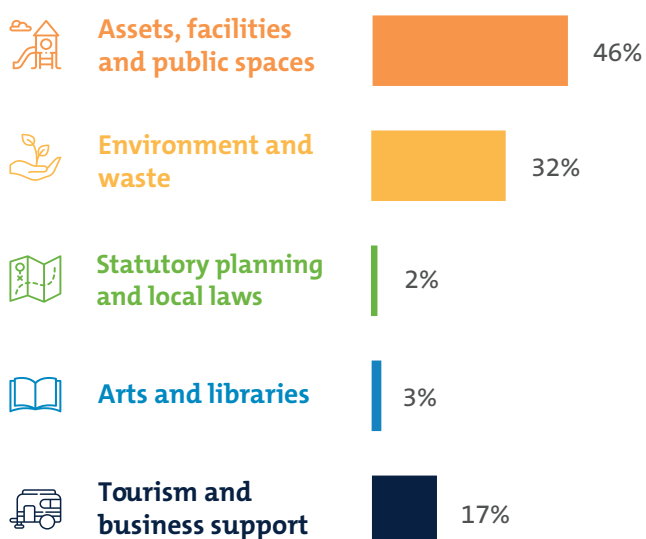
Where additional funds are required, respondents wanted Council to seek government grants before attempting to raise revenue directly through fees, charges and rates.

Final questions

At the end of the consultation, respondents were asked to nominate which single category should be Council's highest priority for next year's budget.

Assets, facilities and public spaces topped the list, followed by environment and waste. This result mirrors that of the 2020–21 budget survey; however, the margin between the two categories has more than doubled.

This indicates that supporters of the environment category feel stronger about budget increases yet number less of the overall cohort. Meanwhile, supporters of the assets category continue to grow in number, yet are less wedded to dramatic budget changes.



Respondents were also provided with the opportunity to provide ideas for future capital works projects, as well as further comments on the budget process overall. While no significant trends emerged in this section, comments made here have also been recorded and filed for further consideration.

Next steps

Council will use the information in this report to guide key decisions in preparing the 2023–24 Borough of Queenscliffe Budget. Initial work has already started, and a draft budget is expected to be released in April 2023.

Alongside the draft budget, Council will explain how feedback received in this consultation has been included in the budget. Residents and ratepayers will also have an opportunity to respond to the draft budget, as has happened as part of Council's previous budget consultation opportunities.

Participants who provided an email address will be notified directly as the project progresses, and will also be provided with the results in this document.

Council thanks everyone who took the time to take part in this budget consultation.

Methodology and footnotes

Consultation goal

The Borough of Queenscliffe continues to explore new and more effective ways to involve the community in decision-making processes. In particular, Council has sought opportunities for early-stage consultation with the community, in which projects and ideas are still being generated.

Following the success of this style of consultation in the development of the 2020–21 budget, Council again opted to utilise it to receive useful feedback about its priorities and goals, and implement that feedback into a broader strategic direction. Once again, the community has given considered and thoughtful responses in great numbers, which leaves Council well placed to produce another community-minded budget.

Tool selection

Council officers utilised the same online survey tool which was first shared in the 2020–21 budget consultation. By reprising an almost identical survey, with similar colours, graphics and text, it allowed residents to understand the consultation immediately. It has also prompted officers to undertake data comparison between the two surveys, as the similar format allows for such inquisition.

Officers again provided the opportunity for residents without internet access to complete the survey at the engagement desk located in the Town Hall. However, this option was not taken up by any participants.

Advertising

Council advertised this consultation broadly, including:

- Direct mail with rates notices and emails to all ratepayers
- Letterbox drops to residential letterboxes throughout the Borough
- Emailing recent consultation participants inviting them to take part
- Advertising in local newspapers and mayor's columns.

This advertising helped ensure Council gained a broad and representative range of views upon which to base strategic budgeting decisions.

Demographic balance

Communications officers continue to note the difficulty in engaging a proportional response from younger demographics in ongoing consultations. This was particularly evident in this year's budget consultation, where only 2% of responses were from people aged under 35, despite them representing almost 21% of the Borough population.

Due to a lack of resourcing, officers were unable to reprise the primary school engagement activity from the 2020–21 budget consultation, and this affected these trends.

Responses and quality control

Council received a total of 211 responses to its budget consultation. While this is down on the 332 responses received in the 2020–21 budget consultation, it should be noted that the last survey consisted of 241 responses, and therefore the decrease in responses between engagement tools is less significant. This can be attributed to a number of factors, including:

- Numerous other consultations were taking place concurrently
- A follow-up email was not used as an advertising tactic on this occasion
- The novelty factor of an extended budget consultation was no longer present.

Participants were notified at the beginning of the consultation activity that responses must be complete to be included in the final results. 177 respondents successfully completed all questions.

Responses removed from the reporting pool have been retained by Council for record-keeping purposes.

