



Bolton Council Budget Proposal

2024 - 2025

Report by Consultation & Engagement Team
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1. Background

In December 2023, Bolton Council's Cabinet approved proposals for the 2024/25 budget for consultation with residents, businesses, staff, partner organisations and other stakeholders. The proposals reflected the continuing financial challenges faced by the organisation, resulting in a £9.1 million budget gap.

Local authorities across the country are struggling due to increased demand for services and reduced income. Whilst Bolton Council will always try to protect the most vulnerable people in our society and meet the needs of our residents, the reality is that the organisation is now faced with making more reductions to services and increasing or introducing direct charges for the services we provide. This will include using £10 million of the Council's reserves and making the following £9.1 million cuts across the 5 Directorates:

- Adults and Housing: £4 million
- Children's Services: £1,021 million
- Public Health: £477,000
- Place: £862,000
- Chief Executive's and Corporate Services - £2,784 million

The ways we are proposing to make cuts and bring in more money are outlined across 7 themes. In addition, the Council are proposing to increase the Council Tax General Levy (2024/2025) by 2.99%, as well as increase contribution in the Adult Social Care Levy by 2%. This will result in a proposed rise in Council Tax of 4.99%.

Seven proposed themes:

- Increasing fees and charges for services
- Changing the way we deliver services
- Using our buildings more efficiently
- Increasing commercial income
- Reviewing and renewing contracts
- Staff costs and efficiencies
- Reviewing Council Tax for empty and second home discounts

As part of the review process residents and stakeholders were asked to reflect on the proposals to make £9.1 million of savings for the year 2024-2025, via a public consultation. Views from all stakeholders will be considered alongside other information to help the Council decide on the final budget options in February 2024. However, once detailed options have been drawn up, residents and stakeholders could expect to be engaged in further consultations.

2. Methodology

Between 5th December 2023 and 9th January 2024, the Council ran a public consultation, seeking to engage residents and stakeholders impacted by future funding cuts in sharing their reflections on a proposed reduction in Council budgets of £9.1 million.

During that period a comprehensive communication plan was implemented to raise awareness of the proposed budget cuts and areas that would see cuts to services as a result. Information was distributed to all stakeholders, including the Vision Partnership, elected members, trades unions, businesses, community groups, as well as residents across the borough. A press release was distributed to local print media and posters and hard copy surveys were distributed to all libraries across the borough. The consultation was also shared via E-View, a council consultation database. Documentation was made accessible on the Council's consultation webpage and social media was heavily utilised throughout the period to share key messages about the consultation. Partners, community leaders and Community Champions were also asked to cascade the consultation to their staff, service users and wider community networks. In addition, the Bolton Council workforce was presented with the consultation and key information in a staff briefing and subsequent direct emails and Frequently Asked Questions.

Participants were surveyed using a questionnaire tool made up of open and closed questions, providing respondents the opportunity to reflect and share their thoughts on the proposal. The questionnaire was made available both digitally and offline, with the survey and supporting documentation being accessible on the council's consultation web page, as well as in hard copy format on request.

*A copy of the questionnaire is included at the end of this document, located in Appendix A.

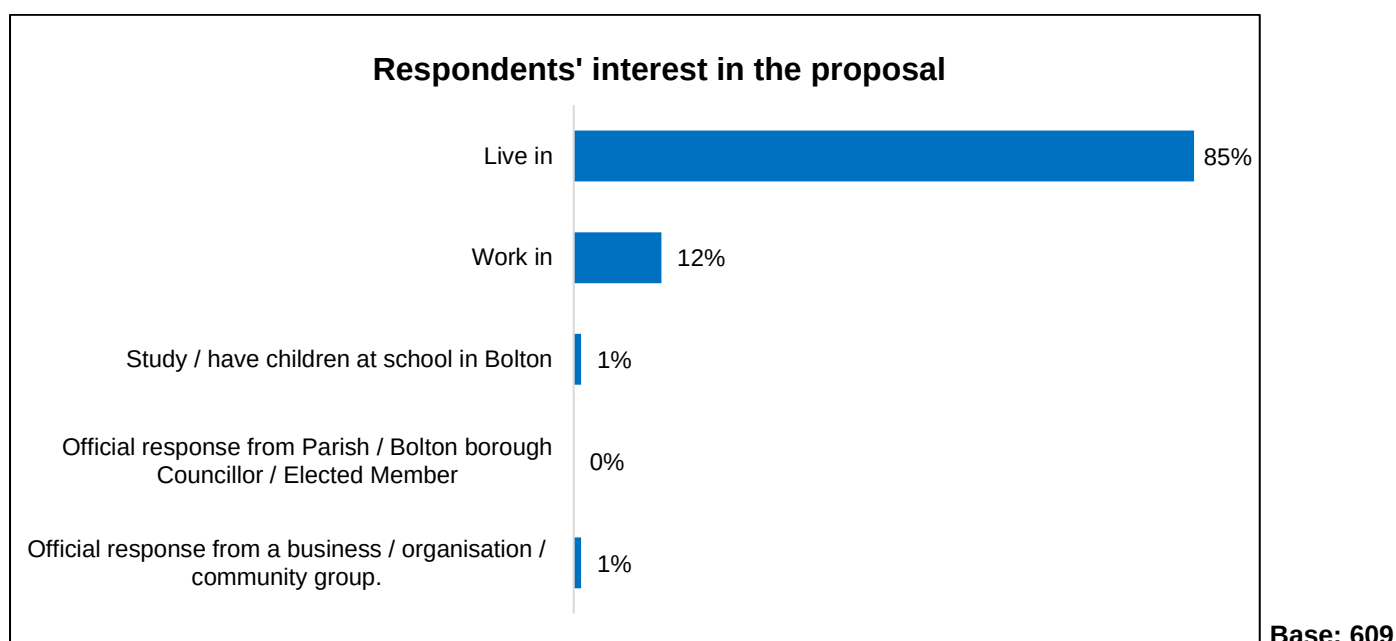
Analysis notes

- Results are presented in the questionnaire format with 'Don't know' type responses removed unless stated.
- Comments have been categorised where feasible. Unless otherwise stated, where categories received over 100 comments, those with 10 comments or more responses are shown. Categories may overlap and a comment from one respondent included in multiple categories. A sample of comments [verbatim] are included in the report. Comments may be abbreviated so that only the relevant extract is included. One comment may be coded into multiple categories, and each category may only cover a certain aspect of the comment, for example a respondent may have made both positive and negative comments about the same aspect.
- Base: unless otherwise stated the base is the number of respondents to a particular question.
- Data has been cleansed where appropriate, e.g. comments moved into existing responses.

3. Digital and paper-based survey responses

A total of 618 residents and stakeholders took part in the digital survey, outlining their reflections on the proposals to reduce Bolton Council's overall budget by £9.1 million. The majority (85%) of those taking part in the consultation are resident within the borough, with a further 12% commuting into Bolton for work. A small number of stakeholders (1%) stated their interest in the consultation was that they study or have children being educated in the borough. Those that responded in an official capacity are representative of Blackrod Town Council, Bolton Interfaith Council, Bolton Parent Carers, North Turton Parish Council and MSV Housing.

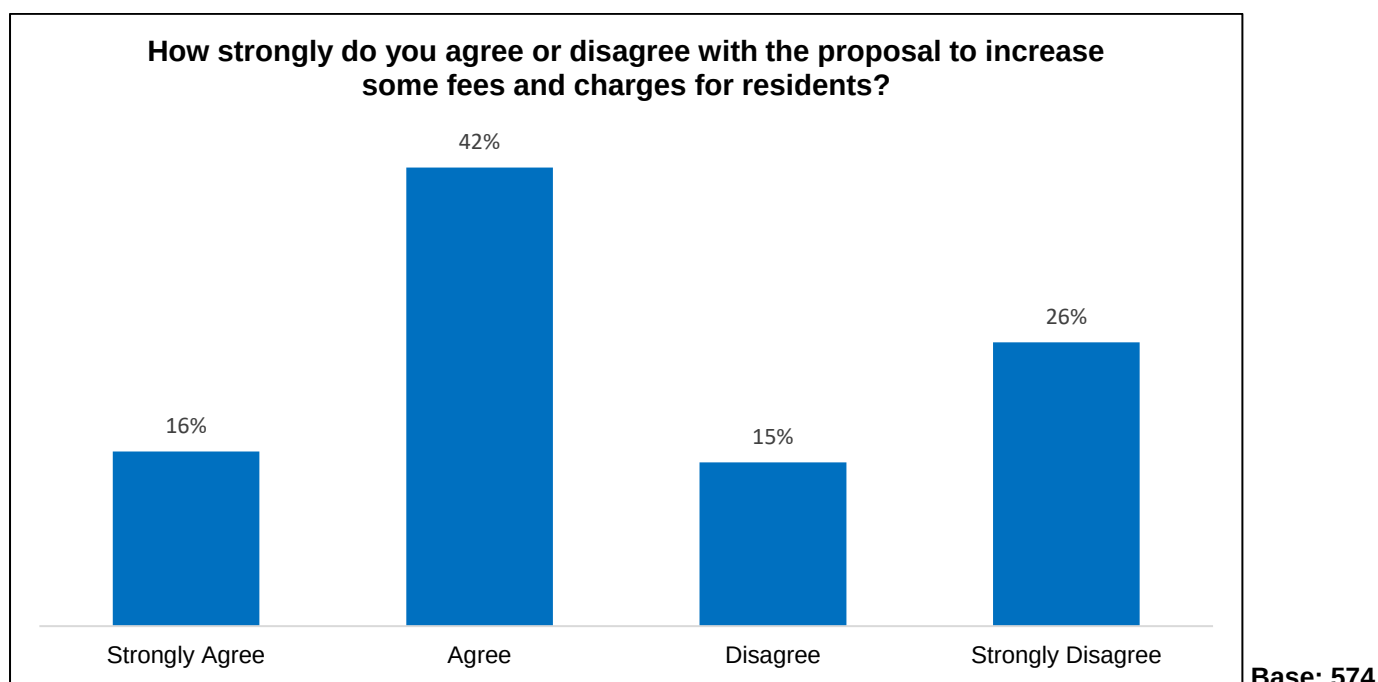
An official email response to the consultation was also received from Bolton Neighbourhood Watch. The response outlines their concern to the proposals. This is accessible to view in Appendix B.



4. Increase fees and charges for residents

All stakeholders were asked to consider whether the Council should consider charging for some of its non-statutory services that are currently financed by the organisation, whilst increasing the fees for some services that are charged for. One area that the organisation is proposing to introduce fees, is free school transport, for children with Special Educational Needs. Currently, pupils aged up to 19 get to school college or nursery free of charge. Whilst we have a legal duty to provide this for those aged 5-16, the Council are considering implementing tiered and/or means tested transport charges for pupils who are under five or over sixteen years old.

Of the 574 respondents answering this question, 58% agreed in principle to the Council increasing some fees and charges to the services delivered, whilst 41% disagreed with the proposal.



Of the 239 respondents that disagree with the proposal, 161 chose to comment further. These comments could be allocated into four themes shown in the table below.

Please tell us why you disagree with the proposal to increase some fees and charges for residents		
Rank	Category	No. of respondents
a.	Pay too much / shouldn't increase charges / charge	133
b.	Affects vulnerable / deprived / prospects	94
c.	Suggestions	27
d.	Need more information / consultation	8

a. Pay too much / shouldn't increase charges / charge

133 respondents raised a number of main concerns, particularly around affordability. Any rises, no matter how small, would be unaffordable and push people who are already struggling into financial crisis. Respondents also felt that residents are already paying too much for services, either directly or via Council Tax. Some respondents felt that any money raised would not be spent wisely.

- *“Residents already pay too much for a limited and substandard service”.*
- *“We pay enough in council tax as it is”.*
- *“Would increase the burden onto already struggling families”.*
- *“Services are not being offered efficiently as previous years and there are no such proposals to say it will improve with charging residents extra!”*
- *“Working class already under a lot of stress due to inflation”.*
- *“People cannot afford this!”*
- *“Cost of living is already too high and people are struggling they will be extremely stretched”.*
- *“People are already struggling financially- it’s not fair to make it worse”.*
- *“We are being asked to pay more in council tax, and you are reducing services at the same time so it’s not good value for our money, and it’s already a lot of money”.*
- *“All monies collected for residents must be spent on residents”.*
- *“Can not afford to pay current Bill’s, let alone an increase. This is pushing people into homelessness!”*
- *“Charging a large increase and then cutting back on services for the community that you are supposed to support is terrible”.*
- *“Where are we expected to find extra money to pay extra as budgets stretched to the limits”.*
- *“So many people are struggling financially this just seems unfair”.*
- *“Council Tax is high enough already and should more than cover the basic services we are paying for and in a lot of cases not getting currently”.*
- *“We pay enough as it is and definitely don’t get value for money”.*

b. Affects vulnerable / deprived / prospects

94 respondents stated that the proposed charges would primarily affect the most vulnerable and deprived in our borough. Concerns were raised that children with additional needs were being targeted, and this could affect families in a number of ways. An additional burden could be placed on parents who would be anxious about their children using public transport and may need to accompany them to school in one way or another, which could reduce their chances of paid employment.

It was felt that school attendance may fall, and young people could be deterred from going to college, affecting their future prospects and increasing their disadvantages. A number of respondents pointed out that children who attended special schools may live some distance from the most suitable provision available and therefore did not have the choice to walk as other children had.

- *"Shouldn't have to pay for transport as they haven't been able to choose a local school in walking distance".*
- *"If children have to travel to a school that can meet their needs as their local schools school cannot, it's hugely unfair to expect their families to fund additional travel".*
- *"Bolton Council should support those with special education needs. Failure to do so may impact on parents abilities to retain employment".*
- *"Children and young adults, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, shouldn't have any more reason to be discouraged to take on education. This could amplify the differences in education and career skills for those who come from a financially privileged background or not".*
- *"Some families will struggle to pay and those hoping to go on to further education will be adversely affected".*
- *"Majority of Families of send children have had to sacrifice work to care for the children/young adult. Having to ask them to pay for a service due to their child's disability is another burden".*
- *"For me personally for a child who uses this transport is a lifesaver".*
- *"For many parents this is a lifeline and a chance for them to relax and reduce their carer stress safe in the knowledge that their child will not need to navigate their own way to school. While I understand the need to save funds, asking vulnerable young adults to travel via public transport places them at increased risk of accident or incident and will further add to carer stress and breakdown".*
- *"The travel arrangements help them stay in a routine and provide a relief for the family".*
- *"Because parents and families of children with additional needs often have other increased costs. To charge for trave on top of that may mean people cannot get their child to school. Meaning they can't go to work".*
- *"Alot of children with vulnerable needs and disabilities come from deprived areas of Bolton, cutting back on these services or charging could have a massive negative impact on these children in getting the education they deserve".*
- *"Poorer households will end up missing out on education and the gap will widen further".*
- *"I have a child with additional needs. It is not easy for parents in this situation as I know. Why should the most vulnerable suffer? Children with additional needs cost more to care so all free help is welcome".*
- *"Special Educational Needs speaks for itself. These young people are already disadvantaged and therefore need every assisitance to progress in their preparation for adult hood and if possible future careers".*
- *"Under 5s rarely have the access to benefits that young adults do so to charge them would maybe be seen to cause hardship to those families".*
- *"Kids don't wake up and choose to have special needs. This is basically discrimination".*
- *"It is important to recognise that for children and young people with SEND, the need for them to access suitable education settings starts early than 5 and lasts longer than 16".*

c. Suggestions

27 respondents made alternative suggestions to the proposal, mainly in general terms which were repeated under subsequent questions. These included reducing staffing cost, reviewing / making cuts to other services, recovering debts and preventing fraud and corruption.

- *"How about organising supervised bike runs to school or safer streets so they can walk to school and back, might help cut down on obesity. Provide free transport only in the winter if needed".*
- *"Should not put up fees, should be encouraging young people to use public transport."*
- *"I agree with it being chargeable for over 16's who are receipt of their own benefits/income, however not for under 5's".*
- *"If you're going to charge and expect financial assessments to be completed this will more than likely come out at a NIL charge anyway but cause further administration costs meaning it's a waste of resources anyway on an assessments team that are already under a lot of stress."*
- *"Family situation should be assessed before making an increase".*
- *"Private taxis are a bit of an overkill and maybe they should be looked at."*
- *"Look at alternative of asking carers and parents that can provide transport to do so, this should reduce numbers requiring transport allowing for those with no option to continue to receive this help."*
- *"A small charge should be in place but nit if parents with big families are in need of the service then it could be granted as donations".*
- *"I disagree with this proposal because the government and the Bolton Council are waisting money on this instead of giving funding to mental health charities like Band Mental Health family action and all other charity organisations and charity shops".*

d. Need more information / consultation

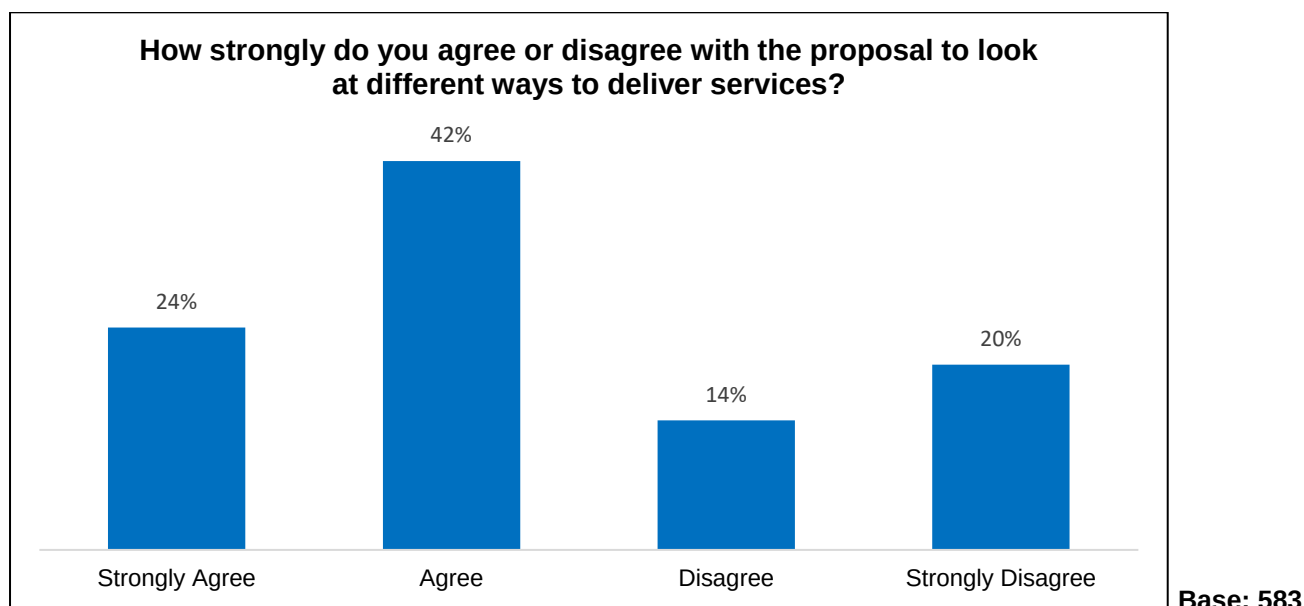
8 respondents felt that they would need additional details of what is being proposed around increasing fees and charges for residents.

- *"It would be useful to know if other providers offer these services and whether it is a duplication of resources".*
- *"How are you going to means test this? How do you know what a families outgoings are with a special needs child".*
- *"Very unclear to what is being proposed, why would under fives need free transport ??? they do not go to school."*
- *"This needs to be fully reviewed and state on what basis it will be means tested".*
- *"We recognise that if this principle is approved, cabinet would still go to public consultation. We ask that it is noted that we are asking the cabinet to ensure it is a full and thorough consultation with SEND families. We ask that this consultation is not just run online and that all parents that may be affected at some point are targeted directly to be able to respond to the consultation. In particular we are mindful of families who have English as an additional language and those that may not find accessing a consultation easy".*
- *"It depends on what this tiered system would look like, and on the needs of the individual."*

5. Changing the way we deliver services

Residents and stakeholders were asked to reflect on the proposal to look at different ways the Council could deliver services to save money. Suggestions include dimming and trimming street lighting; rescheduling household paper / cardboard [beige] bin collections to be emptied monthly, instead of fortnightly; reviewing social and welfare care and support, particularly offering alternative housing and social support; reviewing how we deliver Early Help to children and families; reviewing how we support residents in crisis, by looking to support people through the government Household Support Fund, rather than Local Welfare Support; review traditional services, like the libraries; and review the services delivered by the Mayor.

583 responses were received, outlining that 66% of stakeholders agree that the Council should look at alternative ways to deliver services to save money. Just over one-third of respondents (34%) disagreed.



Of the 34% that disagreed with the proposal, 163 respondents commented further, outlining the challenges of the proposal to service delivery. These responses have been categorised into 9 distinct themes, outlined in the table below.

Please tell us why you disagree with the proposal to look at different ways to deliver services		
Rank	Category	No. of respondents
a.	Bin collections	88
b.	Street lighting	81
c.	Targeting the vulnerable	40
d.	Mayoral duties	36
e.	Libraries	30
f.	General Agree / Disagree / Question too broad	30
g.	Welfare funding	16
h.	Alternative solutions	15

a. Bin collections

Concerns were raised by residents who disagree with the proposal to move to a monthly household paper / cardboard collection. Comments specifically focused on the different methods of collection, with those having a refuse sack and limited storage space being adversely impacted by the proposal. Families were also seen to be adversely impacted, especially those without transport that may struggle accessing recycling centres. Further comments focus on the cumulative impacts, such as fly tipping and a reduction

in recycling and increase in general waste. Some respondents raised concerns about the increased levels of cardboard packaging being produced by supermarkets and the rise in online deliveries. These stakeholders thought that it would be counterproductive to introduce the proposal and called for alternative reviews in waste collection. Several comments were received that agreed with the proposal.

Impact to protected groups

- *"As we have a paper sack (no room for a bin), we need a fortnightly collection, otherwise we could end up putting recycling in general waste."*
- *"Disagree with emptying household paper / cardboard once a month. Family with young children and nappies already struggle with the grey bin, reducing recycling collection would worsen the issue."*
- *"As a family of 4 (Two young children and two adults) we actively look to recycle wherever possible. It is likely we would overfill these bins each month, meaning we would be more likely to fill the black bin more."*
- *"As a disabled person I receive a large amount of prescription medical equipment every month. It all comes in an enormous amount of cardboard packaging. My beige bin is full every fortnight. There's no way a monthly collection would be enough."*

Increase in fly tipping & disposing recycling into general waste

- *"A monthly paper collect is a bad idea as it will increase fly tipping from less responsible households or those without transport to visit a tip. Once the recycling bin is full paper will just get put into the grey bin and will not be recycled."*
- *"If I can't fit the cardboard and paper into my beige bin I would need to use the small grey bin which the council would have to pay to dispose of. Please leave the recycling bins alone"*
- *"My beige bin is always full to the top after 2 weeks!"*
- *"Reducing services such as recycling collections will simply lead to less recycling, more fly tipping, more burning waste"*
- *"Bolton is riddled with rubbish on the streets. Once a month collection will make it worse."*
- *"Either more cardboard and paper bins will need to be provided which would incur an additional cost or cardboard will begin to pile up on streets."*

Alternative solutions

- *"If recycling is to be reduced to monthly, alternative provision needs to be made for increased hours at local recycling centres to allow residents flexibility to remove waste cardboard and green waste themselves."*
- *"I would prefer a monthly green bin collection through winter and keep the fortnightly cardboard - we find we have more cardboard through the year as manufacturers move towards more sustainable packaging. We'd prefer more regular green bin collection through summer."*
- *"Why can't we as an alternative reduce our green bins to monthly between October to March (as less garden waste then) and reduce our burgundy bin to monthly?"*
- *"You should review services but cutting paper recycling is not acceptable as it will increase litter and reduce recycling rates. Green waste and red bin collections are more suited to 4 weekly collection not paper."*
- *"If the cardboard bins are emptied once a month, could they be changed to 2 weekly over the Christmas period?"*

Increase in cardboard production

- *"Don't understand why the beige bin is targeted at being reduced when more and more people are purchasing online and have more cardboard"*
- *"The entire country is being encouraged to recycle and to make changes to combat climate change and global warming. Most packaging is now cardboard to assist with this."*

General agreement

- *"I do however agree with the propels to reduce the bin collections or the beige bin and the red bin should be considered in this too".*
- *"I agree with the bins proposal."*

b. Street lighting

The consultation's [Frequently Asked Questions](#) on street lighting, outline that streetlamps across Bolton are lit at 100% of the lamps capacity. The Council proposal is to reduce this to 70% across 37,000 streetlamps between 9pm and dawn, with safe levels of illumination being maintained. Town Centre locations and areas with issues of community safety will remain lit at full illumination, with no dimming.

81 comments were received by residents and stakeholders who are concerned by the proposal to dim and trim street lighting across the borough, with particular reference to community safety; the rise in anti-social behaviour; and there being a health and safety risk to those that have disabilities or are visually impaired. Some residents agreed with the proposal if it was safe to implement.

Concern for residents and protected groups

- *"Find on some already poorly lit roads - due to dimmer or less frequent lighting, that cyclists and e-scooter riders are hard to see. Would need campaign to promote visibility and safety."*
- *"The current streetlights do not provide enough illumination on my street currently and I don't feel safe it walking alone."*
- *"Decreasing street light lighting is a serious safety risk. As a female, I certainly would not feel safe."*
- *"I have to walk more to save on petrol costs and as a lone female I dont agree with that."*
- *"The LED lights do not generate enough brightness as it stands and then to dim this will create potential hazards for the public such as car accidents, falls"*
- *"I would not feel safe with dimmed or no street lighting as i work shifts and finish work in the early hours."*
- *"As a pedestrian, unless i drape myself in a fully reflective coat, in winter, I can't be seen so I am concerned for my safety."*
- *"Are discriminating against those who already have visual impairments and require lights to help them navigate?"*

Anti-social behaviour & safety

- *"Turning off & dinning street lights could increase crime such as assaults, burglary & ASB."*
- *"Street lighting helps prevent crime."*
- *"Street Lights need to be open for security reasons otherwise theft and accidents will increase"*
- *"More muggings, street crime, burglaries, car crashes.....the streets are too dark as it is now. Totally irresponsible!!!!"*
- *"Bolton seems to be blighted with crime and anti-social behaviour, putting the town into darkness is purely kicking the can down the road, causing more issues with crime, more accidents and less people willing to walk or use public transport."*

General agreement

- *"Agree with reducing the level of lighting, providing a thorough test has been undertaken to ensure safety of residents who will be impacted by this change and not just a cost cutting budget analysis."*
- *"Agree with turning down street lights but not turning them off concerns for safety."*
- *"I strongly agree with the lighting being dimmed."*
- *"I believe reducing lighting on major roads would be acceptable from 10pm to 4am when traffic is lightest and few people are out walking. Residential streetlights are a safety measure but could be dimmed slightly dependant on the area."*

c. Targeting the vulnerable

40 stakeholders outlined their concerns that the proposal targeted residents of Bolton who were the most vulnerable in our society. Specific reference was made to the proposal for Early Help, with some residents highlighting that the service area had already seen significant delivery challenges, and the proposal will just delay problems which other services will have to pick up. Others raised concerns around the impact to Adult Social Care.

Early Help

- *"Early Help is vital this is something worthy of more funding not less, without Early Help some families will slip into crisis situations that could end tragically."*
- *"Again the vulnerable are targeted!!! It took ages to get early help for my child & it hasn't helped other than get him an EYCHP!"*
- *"I assure you early help does not help to prevent issues becoming worse. Every avenue I turn to for support there is a brick wall. Early help does absolutely nothing!"*
- *"Strongly disagree with any reduction or alteration to provision for Early Help that will impact struggling families, as this just compounds a recurring cycle of social need later down the line, deferring costs to other departments that will have to pick up the budgetary burden as issues worsen for families requiring help."*
- *"Early help models are needed by families. A reduction in this service will only shift the financial burden further down the line when it will be more expensive to deal with."*
- *"I do not want to see what are essentially statutory services such as early help being handed over to the private sector, council services are well run, high quality, governed and regulated."*
- *"Please don't cut early help process, I'm a primary teacher and safeguarding lead and we have an absolute crisis on our hands with chn with SEND, mental health and behav issues. There is not enough resources put into preventative measures to support families and young children already and we honestly have a looming crisis in a few years with the level of SEND and SEMH issues rising so sharply. Need long term investment"*
- *"There is not enough support already for early help and I feel that needs reviewing"*

Adult social care and vulnerable groups

- *"Some people would still need care for those who need additional support. Especially those with elderly spouses, where taking care of them at home is only more problematic."*
- *"Need to be very cautious in cutting services to the vulnerable who are usually in the poorest groups in the community."*
- *"I have seen many adult services taken over by the private sector and it is often at a detriment to the users."*
- *"Unfair to cut the services of elderly and adults with disabilities as these services are essential to vulnerable people and much needed"*
- *"Social care and food banks are necessary due to the poor wages that are being paid."*
- *"I feel safeguarding for people in Bolton is going to slip, when costs could be cut elsewhere."*
- *"Yet again changes to social care will have a disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable people - which will put pressures on other public services, making a negligible saving."*

d. Mayoral duties

35 comments were received that agreed with the proposal to reduce expenditure from the Mayor's services. Some called for the proposal to go further and review whether expenditure for a mayor was a priority in the current climate.

- *"Though the Mayor of Bolton is a historically and culturally significant role, in practice it offers very little in the way of actual value compared to the spend when the Council is faced with ever increasing difficulties in providing the most basic of necessary services."*
- *"Agree with cutting Mayoral duties."*
- *"Agree with Mayoral reduction in events."*
- *"What is the point of a mayor, how much would be saved by just forgetting the role?"*
- *"Sack the mayor off he's too expensive"*
- *"I believe most people would not be bothered if the Mayor attended any functions or events ever again."*
- *"I agree with the mayoral stuff, waste of money."*
- *"I have to agree with the mayoral duties and transport provided. In this day and age these are a complete waste of expense that could be better put to use elsewhere."*

e. Libraries

30 comments were received from residents who were concerned by the proposal to review libraries. Residents had particular concerns with libraries moving to a community or privatised model of delivery, as it could result in a reduced service, with a lack of quality that could impact protected groups, including younger, older and poorer residents.

- *"Libraries already poorly funded and not open enough, do not reduce opening further as the children's groups at these centres are essential to communities."*
- *"Leave our libraries alone, they are essential as they are (esp in Blackrod)."*
- *"Moving some branch libraries to a community run model could be beneficial, but it would have to be offset by Council commitments to ensuring consistent, adequate and relevant support to the Central Library and key branches, to maintain a statutory service and allow for continued development towards current community need."*
- *"Who else would run a library service without wanting to make a profit from it? No control over what they would do with an important community based service which brings people together."*

- *"I am almost 80 with limited mobility but both the library and the social interaction with the staff and others are invaluable. Perhaps the premises would lend themselves to additional activities such as a banking hub."*
- *"Volunteer run libraries don't have the people with the knowledge to run them properly and nor do volunteers have any obligation to continue to run them."*
- *"They offer a caring place for the elderly to engage with others when they could spend a week isolated and alone."*
- *"The library services have evolved to work with the communities and i have seen some excellent ways they have diversified, this needs to be supported and continued."*
- *"Libraries are vital for mental and social well being".*
- *"The library service should be Council run regardless for any such cuts. this ensures that any money is always invested back into the service and it become accessible to all."*

f. General Agree / Disagree / Question too broad

30 responses provided general agreement or disagreement to the proposal to review Council services. However, some stakeholders felt that the question was too broad in order to make a fully informed response.

- *"Agree in part but strongly disagree with some of the proposals".*
- *"Agree with most of the suggestions".*
- *"Agree with some items on this proposal and disagree with others."*
- *"You've included too many items in one heading, then reducing to agree/disagree".*
- *"Because this is such a broad catch all question it's impossible to agree with it".*
- *"You are asking several questions in this one and it's unfair to group them altogether."*
- *"The proposed changes are pathetic and will only have a negative impact."*
- *"Your cutting a service which obviously has been an essential requirement, which means we as the tax payer will loose out, cut wastage not services."*

g. Welfare funding

16 comments were received that referred to welfare funding and the proposal to move away from using Local Welfare Funding and making use of the government Household Support Funding (HSF), to support residents most in need. Respondents were concerned by the proposal, with some outlining the dependency of whether central government would continue to fund HSF.

- *"Reassurance needed that moving crisis support to Central Government funding will be a sustainable offer."*
- *"Supposing the government doesn't provide adequate funding or has strict criteria our council doesn't agree with?"*
- *"You are proposing to use the Household Support Fund to replace Welfare Support, but recently the Leader of Bolton Council signed a letter to the Government to ask them not to stop the Household Support Fund - that doesn't make any sense! You know that this is going to make the lives of some of your most vulnerable residents worse."*
- *"I disagree with emergency support proposal as I feel relying on this Govenments commitments to look after the vulnerable is a bad idea, what happens if they cut that funding or even stop it? The poorest would be without support."*
- *"I do agree that the LWP scheme should be looked into but to offer more support to hard working families of Bolton and not just people in receipt of benefits."*
- *"Short term Government grants like HSF help but they only act as 'sticking plasters' to treat major structural issues."*

h. Alternative solutions

15 comments were received that offered a range of alternative solutions to making the £9.1m savings.

- *“Try selling off some of your admin centres that are underused & encourage more hybrid working.”*
- *“More efficiencies and commerciality are needed around use of public buildings.”*
- *“A potential support method is the use of social media apps or some ability to receive images, videos and documents safely to reduce staff hours in visits and travelling (which again reducing mileage claims).”*
- *“Collect equipment when people pass away, rather than buying new.”*
- *“Maybe invest in more auditing. The amount of cases these last few years were thousands, if not millions, have been fraudulents “handed out”, stolen, misused, earnt illegally, is getting beyond a joke.”*
- *“Why not look at ways of increasing revenue such as renting out council owned but unoccupied property at commercial rates, build wind farms on council owned land which would generate income, renegotiate recycling contracts to get a better return, etc.”*
- *“We need to look at how events like the food and drink festival and Turn the big light on increase spending in the town and bring in money to increase profits by the council”.*

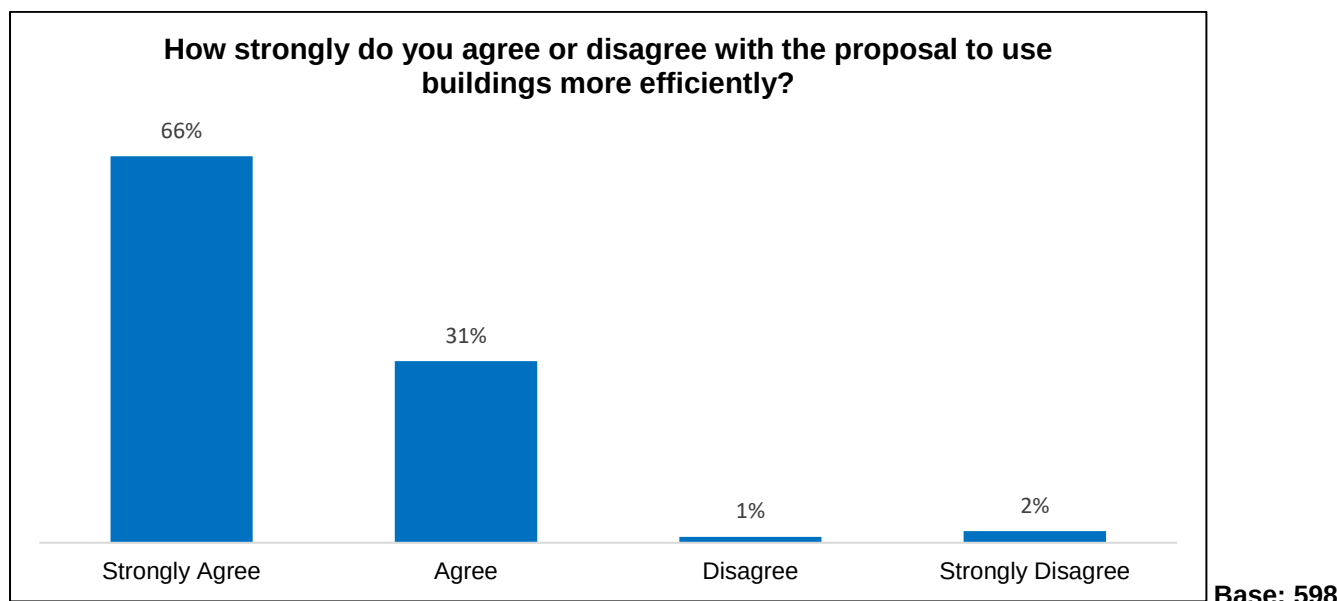
Other service-based comments

16 additional comments were received that outlined a range of concerns. These include:

- Raising of Council Tax rates, yet residents receiving a reduction in service provision, *“I do not understand why the council is seeking to reduce services provided when council tax has increased year on year. If the services are to be reduced then so should Council tax”.*
- Wider pollical concerns both within Greater Manchester and nationally, *“if one council goes ahead with one scheme in Greater Manchester how would this work with a GM run service?”* and *“call to Central Government please to give councils greater budget stability an not play politics with people’s lives”.*
- Levelling up opportunities for residents, *“education and attainment levels and unemployment are all in issue in Bolton and we need to support the residents to level up”.*
- Outsourcing of services, *“I am not happy about “outsourcing” services currently run by the council - experience has shown that this leads to a lower level of service and further problems down the line”.*
- Council inefficiencies, *“The council doesn’t do a good job now so looking at different ways means less for more cost”.*

6. Use buildings more efficiently

Residents and stakeholders were asked to consider whether the Council should look to use its buildings more efficiently. This could include reviewing where we pay rents and determining whether we have assets available that could be utilised instead. It could also include a review of when buildings aren’t in use and renting them out to the community and private sector. Of the 598 responses received, 97% agree with the proposal.



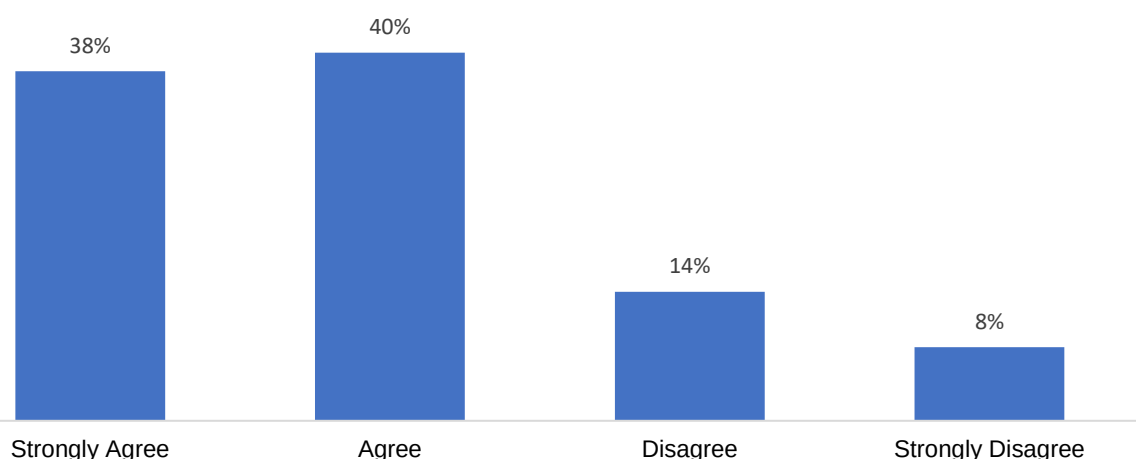
9 respondents explained why they disagreed with this proposal. These have been categorised into three themes.

- There were concerns about the effect on local groups *“Blackrod Community Centre is doing well for many local interests, why change the wheel that works well?”* and *“You should support communities and volunteers with free spaces, after all they’re picking up the slack where funded service provision has been withdrawn.”*
- Centralising services could be unhelpful *“No point putting everyone in the town centre when this does not suit customers or those delivering the service”*. Another respondent was concerned that staff would not have a base and suggested it was *“vital for teams to remain strong and connected. Forced hybrid working is not acceptable.”*
- Respondents felt they needed further information about the proposals, such as who would be using them, and how much rent the council was paying. It also suggested that renting out *“to other organisations may cause data concerns”*. Another respondent felt that sharing buildings would be problematic. Selling surplus buildings was also suggested as an alternative to renting out.

7. Staff costs and efficiencies

Those taking part in the consultation were asked to consider whether the Council should undertake regular staff service reviews, determining where efficiencies could be made, including merging responsibilities and teams, as well as reviewing posts and duties when someone leaves their post. 565 responses were received, of which 78% agree with the proposal and 22% disagree.

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the proposal around staff costs and efficiencies?



Base: 565

Of the 565 that disagree with the proposal, 106 went on to comment further. These comments are categorised into 6 key themes, which are outlined in the table below.

Please tell us why you disagree with the proposal around staff costs and efficiencies		
Rank	Category	No. of respondents
a.	Impact on staff and service workload	39
b.	Impact to service users	27
c.	Review pay scales and roles	18
d.	Impact on staff mental health, wellbeing and morale	17
e.	Review capacity of service areas & associated posts	15
f.	Staff leaving the organisation / loss of talent	10

a. Impact on staff and service workload

39 comments were received from stakeholders that outline the impact the proposal could have on workers and the cumulative impact on services.

- “A lot of teams are already working beyond their means”.
- “Council staff are already stretched and often already covering work for colleagues who are off sick or on leave.”
- “Council staff is already overworked and merging duties will not help.”
- “Everything seems to be run on a skeleton staff at the moment. The ideas of cutting staff or not replacing staff won’t work.”
- “Peoples time is stretched and they are unable to work effectively and efficiently as they are spread a mile wide and an inch thick.”
- “How many staff have been cut since 2010 and how can staff be expected to keep doing more with less?”

- *"I have experience of people leaving and their roles just being passed on to other people who are already at full capacity."*
- *"Most Council teams are stretched to breaking already, running on skeleton levels of staffing, with many being forced to take on unreasonable levels of additional responsibilities beyond their remit and capacity following year on year reviews."*

b. Impact to service users

27 comments were received that highlighted the risk cutting staff would have on the productivity of service areas and ultimately the quality of services received by residents and stakeholders.

- *"Systems could become inaccessible if someone is off sick if they have no colleagues sharing the role."*
- *"Merging teams, or not replacing people who leave has a detrimental effect on services".*
- *"To reduce staffing any more will result in services not being delivered as they should be and could impact on the councils statutory duties."*
- *"This could lead to a reduction in the quality in the delivery of services."*
- *"It's difficult now to talk to or seek help from a council employee."*
- *"Over the last 20 years staff has been decimated. You can only cut a service so many times and continue to deliver a meaningful service."*
- *"Staffing at the council has been cut to levels in most areas which are unsustainable - focus should be on delivering good quality services".*

c. Review pay scales and roles

18 comments were received that called for pay scales and roles to be reviewed. This included comments around officer salaries being reviewed to remain competitive with other providers; reviewing salaries if additional duties are added; as well as comments received calling for higher tier managerial and councillor roles to be reviewed.

- *"Bolton Council does not currently offer the most competitive level of salaries for most posts, and as such I think it would be more beneficial to review this, and have higher calibre employees, paid the industry average, with a lower overall FTE headcount."*
- *"Employees are drastically underpaid".*
- *"If a role isn't being replaced the work shouldn't fall to other people in the team without a pay rise."*
- *"Additional duties should be rewarded and not just added on."*
- *"Cut councillors expenses and other cost for elected members before cutting staff cost".*
- *"You need to look at how your paying the leaders and councillors."*
- *"Its the fat cats at the top and middle management that need "stream lining" and "merging".*

d. Impact on staff mental health, wellbeing and morale

17 comments explored the impact of the proposal on the mental health and wellbeing of the workforce. Those commenting outlined how the proposals would have an adverse effect on employees.

- *“Staff are already exhausted / overworked and very despondent.”*
- *“Added stress for the existing staff members, especially if a full time role is being lost.”*
- *“Asking staff to do more by reducing staffing levels but maintaining a service leads to stress resulting in higher sickness levels”.*
- *“Staff morale is low and the services we offer are very much being provided and maintained on staff goodwill, so any further cuts would create more issues.”*
- *“More work would be passed on to the remaining members of the teams which will increase stress levels which in turn will result in bigger sickness costing more money.”*

e. Review capacity of service areas & associated posts

15 residents and stakeholders called for a review of the staffing and workload capacity within service areas, including non-statutory services.

- *“Review the service areas that do have capacity.”*
- *“If staff costs and efficiencies are to be looked at, those on the front line and in those roles should lead with suggestions and ways to improve. It should not be led by high level staff looking to save money and not thinking about the impact on the staff or working conditions.”*
- *“If the staff are performing mandatory services they should be fully resourced. If they are not legally required services they should be cut to fit existing budget.”*
- *“Many 'back office' teams / services are operating with much reduced staff resources and are now at a point where further reductions in back office staff resources can only be achieved IF first some services provided by the Council cease, reducing the demands on the back office functions.”*
- *“The Council should be considering non-productive headcount reductions before any other aspect of service provision. Given the scale of cuts needed, this should be a critical part of any review. To ignore this is irresponsible and would never be tolerated in the private sector.”*
- *“A lot of the time, the job description is the only metric used by management, this means that a lot of 'unseen' jobs aren't taken into account and when a post is then removed.”*
- *“If a post is being deleted then all jobs associated with that need to be as well so that other workloads are not increased unfairly”.*

f. Staff leaving the organisation / loss of talent

10 comments referenced the number of staff leaving the organisation due to pay and working conditions. Respondents also reflected on the loss of skills, knowledge and talent wasted, as a result of staff leaving the organisation.

- *“By not replacing staff this puts pressure on other staff and can force them to leave.”*
- *“Councils are losing all the built up expertise from staff, they are not replaced and remaining staff are having to cover vacant posts”.*
- *“There is an utter lack of knowledge and experience left on many teams”.*
- *“It is important not to lose corporate memory. The same ideas have landed the NHS locally in a mess in the past that has taken years to recover from.”*
- *“Previous service reviews have led to specialisms disappearing”*

Other staffing-based comments

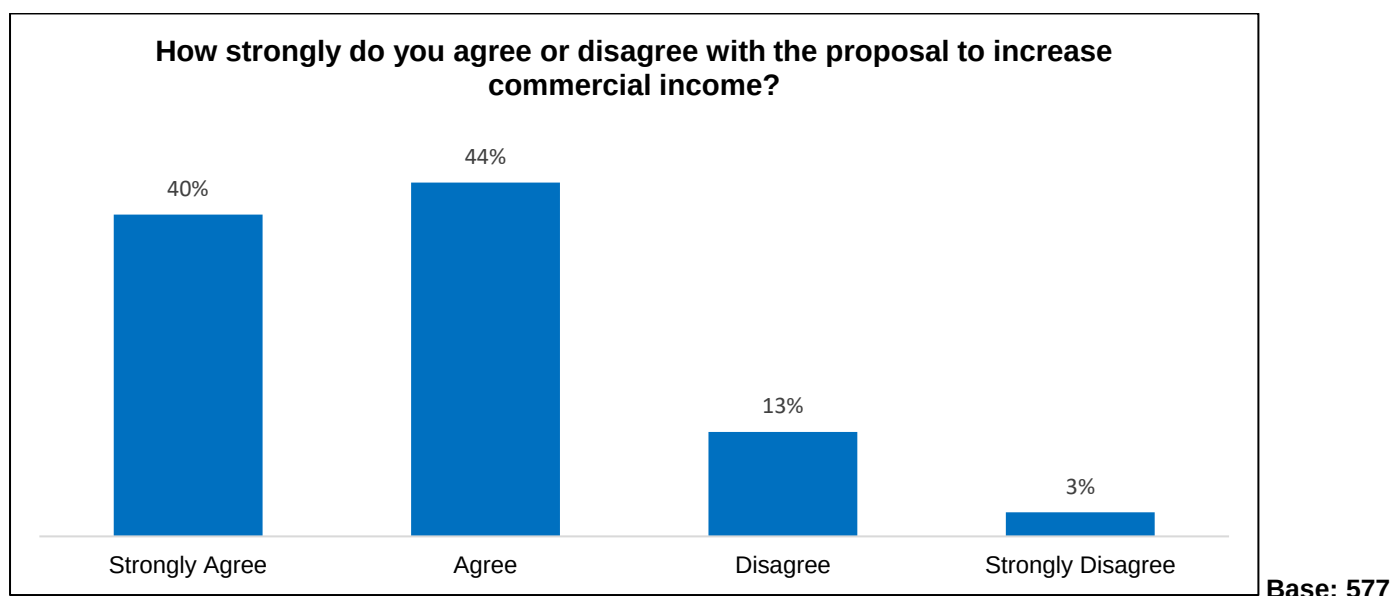
Additional comments were received that outlined the reliance on agency staff and outsourcing, *“this will place a reliance upon agency staff who are paid more thus defeating the purpose”* and *“keep the Bolton community council in house”*.

Wider political challenges were seen as a barrier, “staff shouldn’t be on the chopping block because the council has lost money, should be standing up to central government with all the other councils who are down on cash and making Gove & Co. aware that a reduction in central funding is unreasonable.

General disagreement with the staffing proposal was also commented upon, “to many reviews what is the cost of this?”, “staff are already working efficiently and rely on their income, so no” and “efficiencies - yes, once they are achievable and make sense”.

8. Increase commercial income

Residents and stakeholders were asked to consider a proposal around increasing the volume of commercial income brought into the organisation through filming and sponsorship income. The proposal also includes increasing the hire charges and rents that organisations and groups pay for Council owned buildings. 577 responses were received, with 84% of respondents agreeing to the proposal.



Residents and stakeholders who disagreed with the proposal were provided the opportunity to expand on their reservations. 79 comments were received, which have been categorised into 5 key themes.

Please tell us why you disagree with the proposal to increase commercial income		
Rank	Category	No. of respondents
a.	Subsides and affordability	29
b.	Losing inward investment	17
c.	Attracting investment and remaining competitive	13
d.	Town Centre challenges	13
e.	Filming and events	9
f.	Impacts to protected groups	6

a. Subsidies and affordability

29 respondents reflected upon the affordability of services and the hiring of assets and whether subsidies would be offered to charity and third sector enterprises.

- *"Agree to charging but needs to be aware of who is hiring and what is affordable".*
- *"Agree to consider raising the amounts charged to commercial / private organisations. I disagree with increasing hire charges to third sector organisations".*
- *"If rents are increased to local organisations and groups it is important take account of the fact that many local organisations have had their funding stripped almost entirely since 2009 /10. The only way that they may be able to offer socially important services which save the council money is if they are given or offered preferential low rates of rent. They may fail if pushed hard financially which may create pressures elsewhere in the system".*
- *"Community groups should not be charged extra, fine for the big budget films and other things".*
- *"A higher number of buildings being rented out for a smaller rent fee will increase money for the council compared to empty buildings where nobody pays rent".*
- *"I think this needs to be done on a tiered basis e.g cheaper rates for community groups etc and a higher rate for private organisations".*

b. Losing inward investment

17 comments were received that outlined caution, referencing a loss to the local economy if implementation does not remain competitive.

- *"Be careful with raising rates as you may drive people out of the town centre, in a similar way to high car parking charges."*
- *"Bolton has become a very deprived area in the last few years, the shopping centre is now non existent, the area looks very run down and neglected, increasing costs will only drive even more people out of what was once a thriving town".*
- *"Bolton hasn't got much to offer by putting prices up investors will just go elsewhere".*
- *"Deterring commercial activity further in the town centre by increasing costs is only going to make that worse".*
- *"By increasing the fee's could have the opposite effect and firms look elsewhere for filming at a lower cost to them, thus being a loss of income".*

c. Attracting investment and remaining competitive

13 comments were received that called for the proposal to remain competitive in order to attract further investment into the town, but called for caution on pricing, as could deter new income streams.

- *"Don't undersell yourself but Don't get greedy !!! Hard balancing act".*
- *"Getting more money in is absolutely right, but pricing yourselves out of the Market is not".*
- *"Increasing hire charges is all well and good but do we actually have the demand on our buildings that would guarantee an income? If not increasing the charges won't help."*
- *"Maybe in years ahead when we could potentially be a hub for business, filming or booked up to capacity year round then could be the time to look at prices being higher."*

d. Town Centre challenges

13 residents and stakeholders referenced challenges with deprivation in the Town Centre. Comments received called for business rates to be reviewed, to provide incentives for businesses to establish themselves in the town. Others called for parking fees to be reviewed to attract visitors to the town.

- *"The town has near fallen. You need business in town. Not their profits when they arrive."*
- *"Drop all prices for rent to entice small business to the town...the place is disgraceful...no personality everywhere boarded up".*
- *"Reduce rents for town centre businesses. Get people back into the town centre and using the facilities."*
- *"Town centre needs major up grade before business will come".*
- *"The town is terrible, I never shop in the town centre there's nothing interesting here. It's dull, gloomy and full of pasty shops and betting shops. You should acknowledge that big names pulling out - must tell you something about the town."*
- *"People want shops in the centre of town, if you increase cost we will not get people coming to set up stores, we have lost far to many, Bolton is a shadow of its former self, it is disgusting what has been allowed to happen to this town. We need free parking or cheap parking, you do good events, but on a day to day basis it's pitiful."*

e. Filming and events

9 comments reflected on progress made with attracting events and filming to the town and whilst some respondents called for charges for private enterprises to increase, others urged caution. Other comments called for events to be reviewed, as they felt that these shouldn't be publicly subsidised.

- *"The fact that Bolton is useful for filming and outside agencies for various reasons is a real positive, it puts the town in the map, it presents the town in a positive light, it brings business to the town and it keeps the town centre busy. Increased rents puts this at risk."*
- *"I believe increasing charges for huge events and filming is reasonable".*
- *"Lots of filming is being done in le man's, and this is the sort of marketing is helping also with putting Bolton back on the map."*
- *"I think Bolton Council should be looking at a 'spun out' social enterprise leading big events. The risk could easily be transferred to a non-profit 'Marketing Bolton' social enterprise with all profit being invested back. This would then remove the associated costs aligned to such activity and create a much more focused commercial offer that could potentially attract even more sponsorship for those high profile signature events".*
- *"Whilst the food and drink festival is great for some in our town it isn't for everyone and it should not be subsidised by the council"*
- *"It should be concentrating on the things that it legally has to do and not try to do the things it cannot do."*

f. Impacts to protected groups

6 comments raised concerns that the proposal will have an adverse impact on protected groups.

- *"A lot of elderly and people rely on the use of events and services held in council owned buildings, if the hire charges are increased these would probably be stopped".*
- *"I fundamentally disagree with your charging more to groups that may be having an amazing impact on people's lives in the borough - the completely undermines your stated commitment to social value".*
- *"Many community groups are non profit and exist to help local residents including groups for those who would normally be isolated."*

Other commercial income comments

Other comments focused on having the capabilities, skillset and acumen, as a public organisation, to operate commercially.

- *“Also, there would need to be staff qualified in, and with the time to, seek out commercial investments and to ensure we provide a quality enough service to actually invest in. Is the infrastructure in place to do this?”*
- *“It is pretty obvious for years that BMBC have very little experience in this respect”.*
- *“The Council does not appear to know to operate Commercially. It is not set up to operate like the private sector, its employees are not skilled in this area and those that try appear to be hampered by red tape and unqualified councillors.”*

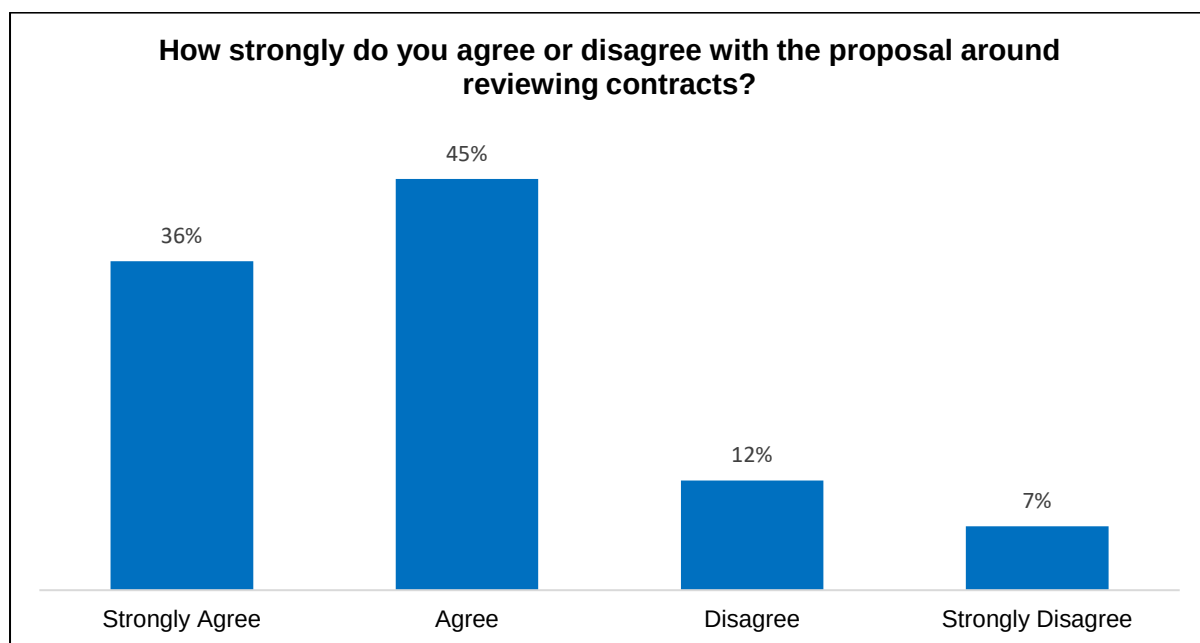
9. Review and renew contracts

All stakeholders were asked to reflect on how the Council commissions some of its services from external providers. The proposal would look to retender all commissions, rather than simply renewing them.

Furthermore, the Council proposes to regularly review existing commissions to make sure that they still meet the organisation’s needs and provide good value.

In addition, respondents were also asked to consider whether the Council should introduce the Real Living Wage [currently £12 an hour] as a minimum for staff employed by organisations that provide services to the organisation under a contract.

564 residents and stakeholders reflected on the principle to review and renew Council contracts, with 81% agreeing with the proposal. Just under one-fifth disagreed with the principle (19%)



Base: 564

Of the 107 respondents who disagreed with the principles set out in this proposal, 86 chose to outline their reflections further. These comments have been categorised into 6 key themes.

Please tell us why you disagree with the proposal around reviewing contracts		
Rank	Category	No. of respondents
a.	Outsourcing / tendering contracts	32
b.	Real living wage	32
c.	Staffing and salaries	17
d.	Bring services in-house	16
e.	Review Bolton Council services / delivery	10

a. Outsourcing / tendering contracts

32 respondents outlined reservations with outsourcing contracts to private providers, some questioning the quality of the provision/service provided. Other stakeholders outlined how markets had changed and supported the proposal to review contracts and commissions.

- *“Tendering out to private providers has been utterly disastrous both locally and nationally”.*
- *“Be just like the trains, price goes up every year for a service not fit for one of the top five richest countries in the world.”*
- *“Commissioning services does need to be re considered as the market in some areas has grown so new providers could tender for contracts.”*
- *“Contracts are regularly retendered for the building I work in and it is often clear that the budget tender has been chosen, over the more experienced and therefore more expensive tender, to the detriment of the service.”*
- *“I, and many other residents have zero confidence that these retenders will be beneficial to Bolton, only beneficial to certain councillors contacts and acquaintances that will inevitably win these contracts”.*
- *“This will lead to companies over promising and not delivering. Or a decline in working standards”.*
- *“Re-tendering has its own costs and there are no guarantees of cheaper prices, plus the providers tend to increase their costs or not fully comply with their contractual obligations once in place and it is then expensive and time consuming to ensure compliance/re-tender if not satisfied.”*

b. Implementing the Real Living Wage

32 respondents commented specifically on introducing the Real Living Wage for employees of contracted services. Whilst some respondents agreed with this proposal, others didn't think it was the Council's position to enforce that on businesses that were tendering for contracts. It was felt by some stakeholders that this could ultimately lead to services costing more and it being counterproductive in trying to save the organisation money.

- *"Agree with Real Living Wage idea".*
- *"I do however agree with the real living wage element."*
- *"By increasing the minimum wage for these providers will probably mean the service they provide will suffer as they will probably reduce their staff to cover their loss".*
- *"The real living wage is not guaranteed to be paid to the employees of the external providers."*
- *"Do not feel that the real living wage should be the benchmark of what you are aiming for and should not impose this on contractors."*
- *"I feel those on the lowest wages are catching those up who are paid for their skills."*
- *"If service provided under a contract the wages should be taken into account by them in their bid not by council and tax payers money".*
- *"Possibly a double edged sword as dictating to contractors what they pay their staff may lead to less bids being received."*

c. Staffing and salaries

17 comments were received that referred to the Council workforce and the risk the proposal could have on reducing staff numbers. Other comments reflected upon the salaries Bolton Council employees are paid, particularly referencing lower paid skilled workers not receiving a competitive salary.

- *"As long as this isn't a way of reducing the number of staff within the Council."*
- *"Bolton Council needs to put the staff who are employed direct 1st, not staff working for organisations that provide services."*
- *"Employ more staff and get rid of expensive third parties. Would be a cheaper option in the long run and Council expenses would be more transparent."*
- *"By contracting services out, it risks further job losses for staff".*
- *"There is also concern amongst Council staff on grades 3 / 4 / 5 etc that the lowest paid Council staff are earning almost as much as they do for far lower job requirements".*

d. Bring services in-house

16 respondents called for Council commissions to be brought back in-house, saving money on employing staff to deliver, and increasing the quality of the service for local people.

- *"A suggestion would be bring it back in house and stop merging with other councils like Wigan for "shared services", just look after your own residents please".*
- *"Bolton council should have it's own workforce, contacted out work costs more is not always well done or honestly costed, having a council work force ensures the quality of it's workforce and work undertaken, no middle men to take out".*
- *"I don't understand why everything has to be tendered out, surely by employing people you would save more money in the long run?"*
- *"I would opt to bring services back in-house. This would give us more control over the work, the quality and the cost."*
- *"Need to look at how much it would cost in house rather than commissioning the work out".*
- *"Why can't the council have its own workforce to do the works then you'd have a greater control over the quality of work and access to accountability directly."*

e. Review Bolton Council services / delivery

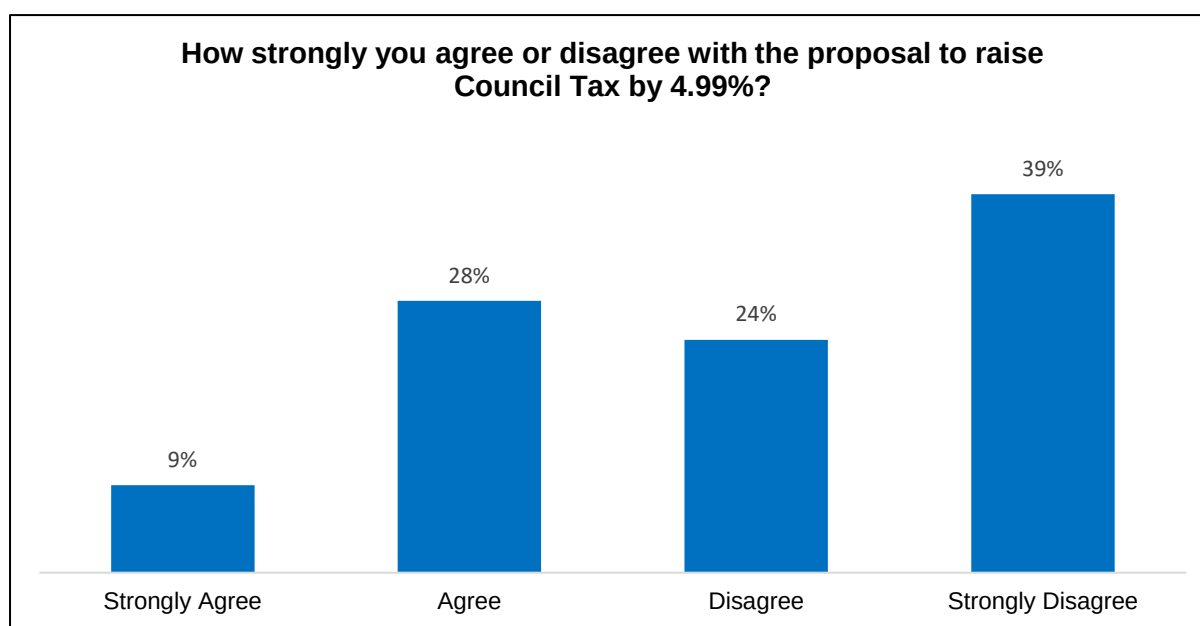
10 comments were received that called for a review of services to be undertaken, to establish inefficiencies and where priorities for improvement and investment is needed.

- *“Being certain that their isn’t wasteful practices in all services including the Council should always be a highest consideration.”*
- *“You can’t deliver your own services effectively, so concentrate on this first”.*
- *“There should be a cost/benefit analysis of the existing commissions and only look to change those that are clearly not best value following market research.”*
- *“Money saving to spend on urgent issues such as social issues, street repairs, lighting and bins. Not giving money away to other companies to pocket”*

Other comments focused on the principle not being effective enough to deliver the savings outlined; as well as comments that disagreed with the proposal, *“it sounds like it will cost more money to organise and implement this”*; *“not sure we get value for money as it is”*; and *“the scope of this review only seems to extend to services already with external providers. There should be thorough examination of services delivered internally that could be delivered externally at better value for money”*.

10a. Proposal to increase Council Tax

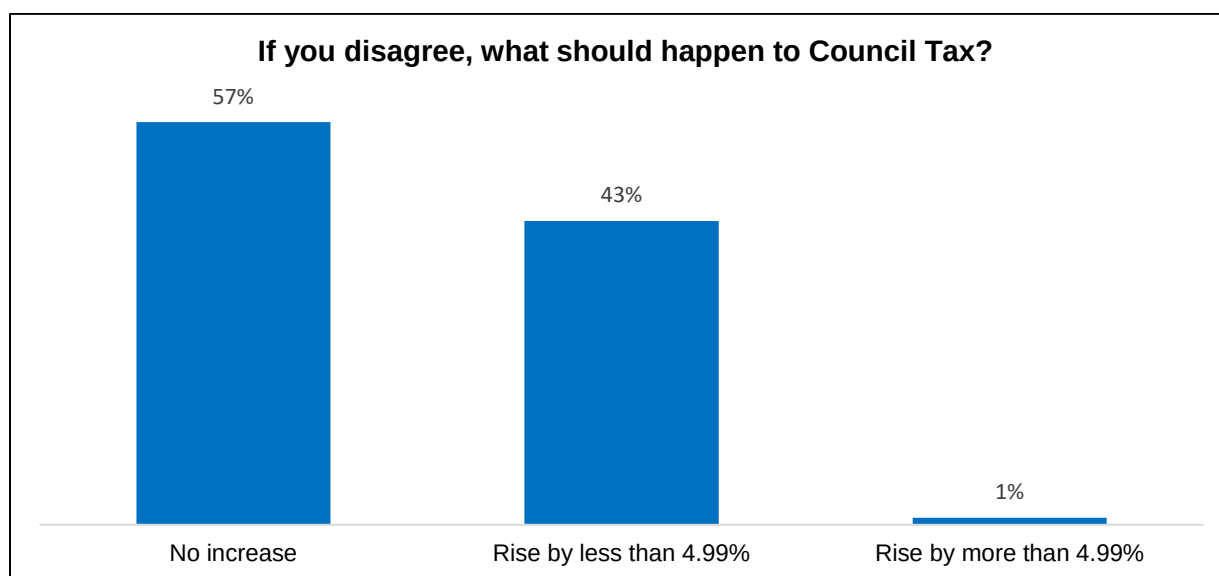
Respondents taking part in the survey were asked whether or not they supported the proposal to increase Council Tax by 4.99%; proposing a 2.99% increase in the General Levy, plus a 2% rise for Adult Social Care. Of the 578 responses to this question, 63% were opposed to the increase and 37% of respondents agreed with the increase.



Base: 578

10b. Preferred Council Tax percentage increase

Of the 358 respondents who disagreed with the percentage increase and went on to provide further detail, 57% wanted no further increases in the current Council Tax rates. 43% stated that there should be a rise of less than 4.99%; and 1% of respondents thought rates should rise above the proposed 4.99%.



Base: 358

10c. Suggested rate rises

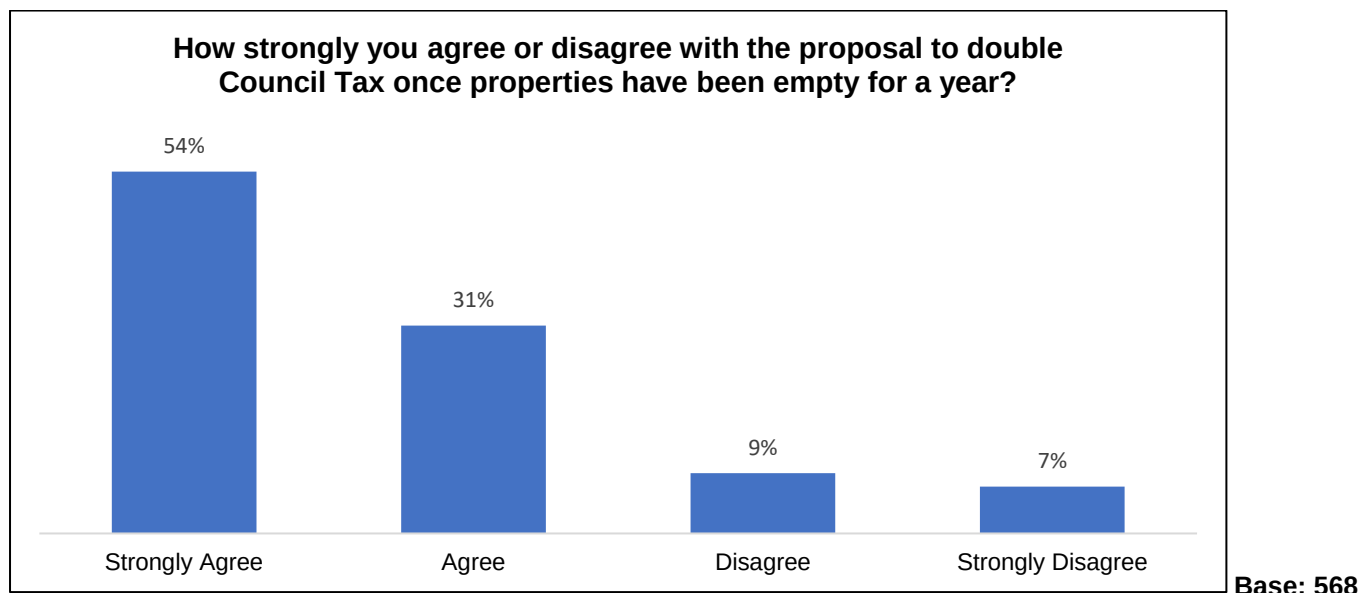
111 respondents suggested amounts that could be quantified, with a further 16 suggesting revisions to the system such as replacing Council Tax with an income / capital tax or revising the bands.

The table below outlines what the preferred rise should be by residents and stakeholders. The highest number of respondents [39] felt that the rise should be between 2.1% and 3%. While 36 respondents did not suggest a figure, however, they did outline that any rise should be under 4.99%.

Budget 24 / 25	
How much do you think Council Tax should rise by?	
% rise	Number of respondents
Not stated but under 4.99%	36
0.1% to 1%	5
1.1% to 2%	25
2.1% to 3%	39
3.1 to 4%	5
Referendum level	1

11a. Empty properties discount (Council Tax)

Bolton Council currently charges owners of empty properties double Council Tax when their property has been empty for two years. To support the cuts needed, the local authority is proposing to start charging double Council Tax once a property has been empty for one year. Of the 568 respondents reflecting on this proposal, 85% agreed that this was an effective way to make savings. 16% disagreed.



Of those that disagreed with the proposal, 70 stakeholders went on to comment further. Their comments have been categorised into 4 key areas of concern. These are outlined in the table below.

Please tell us why you disagree with the proposal to double Council Tax once properties have been empty for a year		
Rank	Category	No. of respondents
a.	Look at why properties are empty / grant exemptions	38
b.	Shouldn't charge double when services aren't being used	27
c.	Alternative ideas	14
d.	Will reduce quality of housing / affect landlords	7

a. Look at why properties are empty / grant exemptions

38 respondents felt there could be good reasons, rather than choice, why a property was empty. These could include being under renovation, subject to probate, not selling or where the owner was in a care home. Exemptions could be offered in those cases, with some respondents agreeing that Council Tax could be doubled in other cases. Stakeholders also felt that it was up to the owner what they did with their property.

- *"There would need to be exceptions where the homes are undergoing substantial repair/renovation/remodelling that may take more than one year, but the estimated timescales for completion should be agreed at the start of the exemption period to avoid fraudulent use of this clause through lack of progress on a project, which is left unfinished to take advantage of the exemption".*
- *"Needs to be done on a one-by-one basis eg if there is a death and the family are waiting to sell the property but it's not sold in one year I think it's unfair to expect council tax - the family would have to prove the house is up for sale - however if it's a property owned by a developer then yes charge them".*
- *"In a house market that is falling, you are penalising owners of residential property who are unable to sell the properties either inherited or already owned".*
- *"Will those that inherit properties be able to delay payments until the property sells?"*
- *"A house can take a long time to sell. I would agree for houses that are unoccupied and not up for sale."*
- *"If the property has been empty for years then yes maybe. If the council tax is being paid what business is it of yours if the house is not lived in".*
- *"Sometimes properties are unoccupied for a number of valid reasons - renovation, death, etc".*
- *"Properties are empty in most of the cases because of the recession. Who doesn't want to get income from his investment. This will make things worst. Idea has no commercial basis".*
- *"You will need exceptions. You can't assume all empty properties = a wealthy company hoarding properties"*
- *"You need to look carefully at why it's empty. If someone has died sometimes people can't sell for various reasons. The relatives who are trying to sell may find it hard to pay".*
- *"Cases may need to be dealt with additional exceptions if the property is for sale, the owner has died and has been living in a care home, etc".*

b. Shouldn't charge double when services aren't being used

27 respondents suggested that it was unfair to charge double [or some cases any] Council Tax when few, if any services, were being used. Respondents also felt that it was up to the owner what they did with their property.

- *"If empty what services of the council's/fire/police etc would they really be using -- charging 100% is pushing it in my opinion".*
- *"Blatantly unfair to charge double for a property that would appear to not be using services such as refuse, and schools, etc".*
- *"The measures currently in place are stringent enough, and these empty properties are less of a drain on public services".*
- *"People shouldn't be penalised for owning property. It's private property not the councils".*
- *"If a property is empty then logic states that they would require less council services (bin emptying, tip provisions, welfare, etc) and therefore I can't see a need to charge double on the property".*
- *"No one should ever be paying double for service they are not receiving".*

c. Alternative ideas

14 respondents suggested other ways that money could be raised, such as compulsory purchases, cutting other services, charging everyone Council Tax, etc, so that this proposal would not need to be implemented. Other respondents however felt that the proposal didn't go far enough and higher Council Tax rates should be applied sooner.

- “[Properties] that are derelict with “investors” who have abandoned the property, stop beating around the bush with them and either force them to sell or rent out. Or maybe those could be paying the extra premiums”.
- “Focus on making the relevant cuts to your own services first. Too much money wasted on incompetent management. Serious service reviews are needed”.
- “You need to look at those that don't pay council tax or supported with council tax. Should be applied fairly”.
- “You need to look at why these homes are empty and perhaps introduce compulsory procedures to ensure these properties are habitable and lived in”.
- “Perhaps you could charge local gypsies council tax, rather than giving them the land, without discussion of local residents they may then look to look after the area yet local residents and litter groups do your work for you, yet again costing us more”.
- “Property empty longer than 6 months should be chargeable”.
- “Need incentives and initiatives to encourage empty properties to be used”.
- “Target all the people in Bolton who are at present NOT paying their council tax and make a positive effort to get that first.”
- “Fair approach need to be made including helping to get the property on use rather than heavy council tax if empty more than 3 years I then 1.5 increase etc”.

d. Will reduce quality of housing / affect landlords / tenants

7 respondents were concerned that the increased Council Tax burden would reduce the quality of housing stock, as repairs and renovations wouldn't be carried out to a desirable standard. Landlords may sell, thus affecting the availability of rental properties.

- “What does this hope to achieve, it won't bring in income, it will encourage bad standards of house to circumvent this”.
- “You are being unfair to landlords who cannot predict the market. They may then be forced into taking tenants who may not fit the landlords right to sense check”.
- “I am a landlord of a small number of good quality private rental houses, but when I have to pay full council tax whilst a property is temporarily empty when services are not being used seems excessive to me. This causes me to either increase rents or sell the properties, reducing the number of houses available, which causes an increase in rental costs”.

Other comments

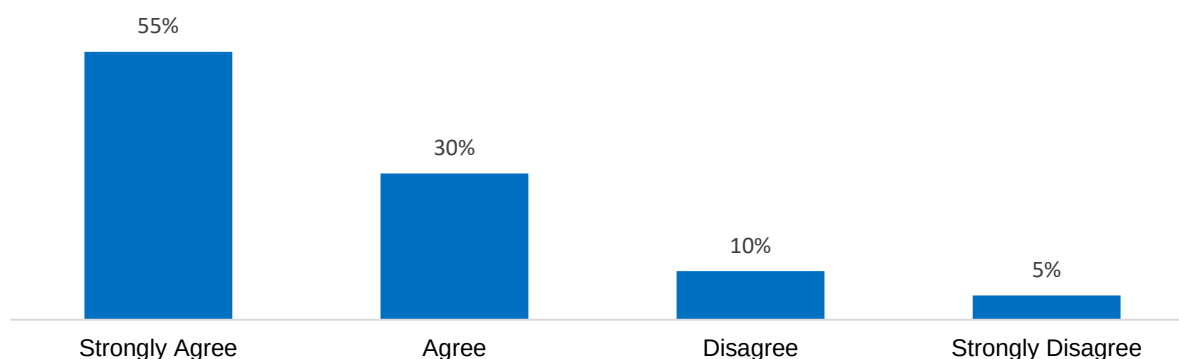
Other comments were around the proposal penalising those who worked / were wealthy, and a few comments about general hardship and the current Council Tax rate being too high.

11b. Second home discount (Council Tax)

Currently, second homeowners are charged full Council Tax during the first year, which doubles after the second year. As with the proposal for empty homes, the Council is also proposing to start charging double Council Tax after the first year on second home properties. This will potentially come into effect for second home owners from April 2025.

570 stakeholders reflected on this proposal, with 85% agreeing and 15% disagreeing.

How strongly you agree or disagree with the proposal to charge full Council Tax on second homes?



Base: 570

56 respondents provided additional comments on their reflections to double Council Tax on second homes after 12 months. These comments have been themed into 5 key areas, which are outlined in the table below.

Please tell us why you disagree with the proposal to charge full Council Tax on second homes		
Rank	Category	No. of respondents
a.	Shouldn't charge double as aren't using services	18
b.	Would affect investors, landlords, tenants, employers	13
c.	Penalises success	9
d.	Time constraints – probate, selling, refurbishment	7
e.	Proposal unclear	7

a. Shouldn't charge double as aren't using services

18 respondents felt that an extra charge shouldn't apply because those with second homes weren't using extra services.

- "Unless they are using twice the services then its unfair".
- "What extra services do these people use. Answer None".
- "Even if it's a second home it's fair to pay a standard rate not double. That's ridiculous".
- "The measures currently in place are stringent enough, and these empty properties are less of drain on public services".
- "You can only live in one house. Charge should remain the same or be scrapped on the second house".
- "Second homeowners are not using council services as much, so why do they need to pay more council tax!"

b. Would affect investors, landlords, tenants, employers

13 respondents felt that imposing extra charges could stop people investing in the borough or being landlords. Landlords who remained could also pass on the additional costs in the form of rent increases. Companies who provide accommodation for employees may also relocate elsewhere. Furthermore, some

stakeholders thought the proposed change could also bring down property prices if owners felt forced to sell.

- *"If rented will just be passed on".*
- *"This would have to be carefully reviewed against Bolton Council's growth plan and future ambitions - if we attract more employers to the region, they would need more staff and as such need more accommodation in the area. The perceived "attack" on landlords or similar model may have the effect of driving investment away".*
- *"This can discourage more well-off individuals from buying a second property as buy-to-let investment, which can indirectly benefit those who cannot afford mortgage but do require housing".*
- *"This will kill investments and will drop property prices".*
- *"This is punishing landlords who property manage as their main source of income".*

Penalises success

9 respondents felt that the proposal could punish those who had inherited a property, or who had worked hard to be able to afford a second home.

- *"Why should home owners be penalised for owning assets they have worked hard for?"*
- *"Why should someone pay more if they have a second home. The home could have been inherited so they would have already been hit with inheritance taxes".*
- *"Not everyone wants to live in a poxy hotel when travelling for work or holiday. They dont want to keep having to move all their belongings here, there and everywhere. People have 2 places that are "home". Why should they have to pay more for having the privilege, whereas people that wont work due to their "lifestyle choices" get things for free or at a discount. I am not saying everyone on benefits is a lifestyle choice".*
- *"Why should they pay double when they have worked hard to get a property. Workers get nothing and are penalised whilst non workers are given more and more money".*

Time constraints – probate, selling, refurbishment

7 respondents felt that the proposal was unfair as people may not be choosing to have a second home. They could have inherited and be awaiting probate, or be unable to sell, rent or improve a property within the time constraints.

- *"Probate can take a long time".*
- *"Second homes could be waiting for probate or refurbishment".*
- *"With the state of the housing market it may be difficult to sell, this should be taken into consideration as it may take more than 12 months".*
- *"Not always a thing that can be avoided if cannot sell a property get punished and penalized".*

e. Proposal unclear

7 respondents felt that the proposal was unclear, which made it difficult to comment.

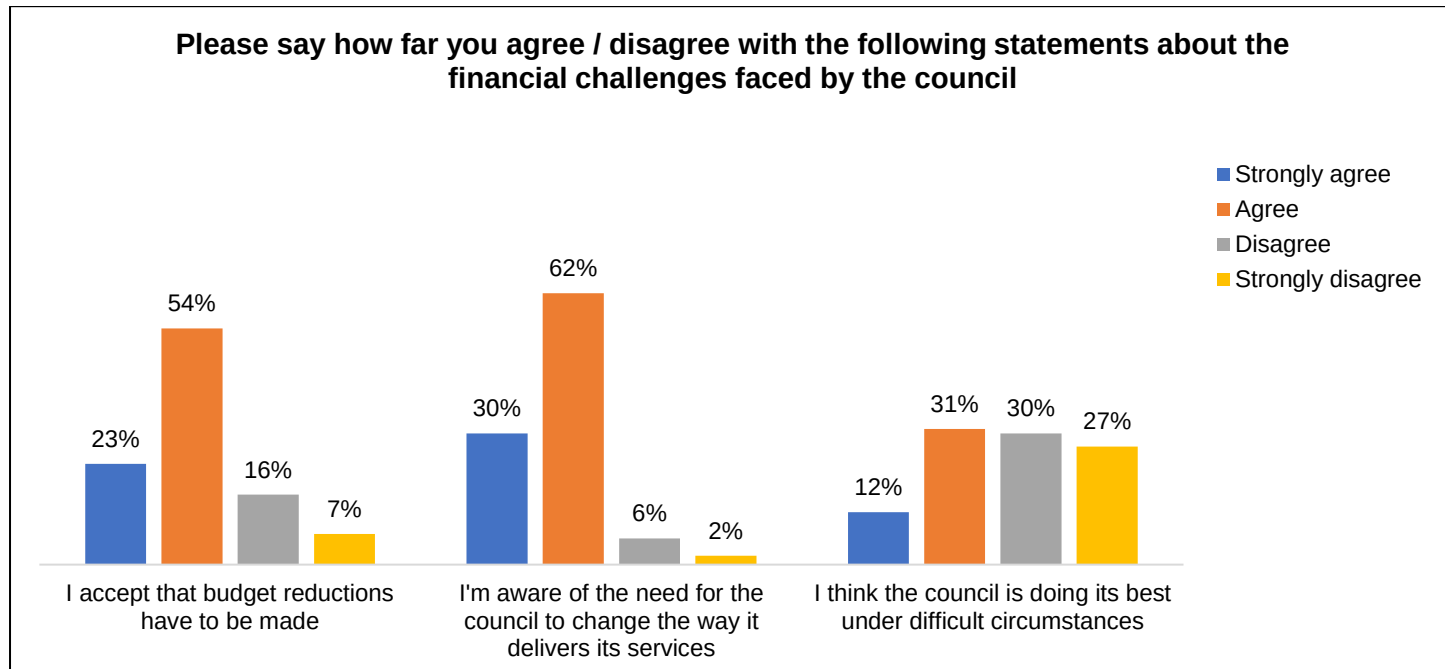
- “The term second home owners needs to be defined to make a better judgement. How will you know if it is a second home for those outside of Bolton”.
- “Not even sure why this is in here - how many people have second homes in Bolton?”
- “Read your question. Is it full rate or double?”
- “I don’t understand why you feel you need to penalise someone for a second home and it being their choice to have it empty... what is your logic ??”

Other comments

Other comments were from stakeholders who felt the proposed increase would cause hardship; that people would avoid tax, “People will just put properties in their siblings or partners names to avoid this”; that the current Council Tax system should be revised or scrapped; and that it could affect certain residents more, including those that live in multi-generational households, “Due to large family members some needs 2nd home” .

12. Managing change

As part of the consultation process, respondents were asked to reflect upon the rationale for changing service delivery, whether reductions were necessary and whether the local authority was ‘doing its best’ under difficult circumstances. Of the 570 stakeholders answering this question, 77% of respondents agreed that budget reductions have to be made. 92% were aware of the need for the Council to change the way it delivers its services. 43% believe the Council is doing its best under difficult circumstances.



Base average: 570

13. Impact to stakeholders

Residents and stakeholders were asked to reflect on the overall impact the reduction of £4.3 million to services would have on them, their families and wider network. 398 responses were received, which have

been themed into 10 key areas. The most significant impacts would be the introduction of a 4.99% rise in Council Tax, as well as the overall impact on residents' finances and their mental health.

Comments highlighted a cause for concern for residents who are economically vulnerable, as well as those from protected groups, including single parent families and younger people with mortgages and rent, who could be pushed into economic hardship, resulting in a subsequent rise in applications for support.

Other significant impacts were raised around the changes to paper bin collections, impacting larger families, those in smaller properties and those with limited access to transport.

Each thematic area is outlined in the table below, with further explanation provided beneath.

Please describe how you / your family / the people you represent will be affected if the proposals are carried out		
Rank	Category	No. of respondents
a.	Rise in Council Tax	149
b.	Financial impact	104
c.	Bin collections	70
d.	Staffing, Management & Councillors	46
e.	Council inefficient as a business	42
f.	Dimming & trimming lighting	42
g.	Social care / Early Help and the impact on vulnerable groups	34
h.	Investment in the borough / outsourcing	28
i.	Agree / Disagree	27
j.	School Transport / SEND offer	24
k.	Alternative solutions	23
l.	Negative impact on the quality of services	19
m.	Political / Government support, including Household Support Fund	19
n.	Libraries	12

a. Rise in Council Tax

149 residents raised concerns with the proposal to raise the Council Tax rates by 4.99%, with some questioning the level of service they would be receiving to justify the rate rise. Other comments explored the economic impact this would have on residents, outlining how it would push some residents into poverty. Some stakeholders thought a tiered approach to rate increases would be a fairer option for residents, with those that are on higher band rates paying more. Some residents, who felt financial more comfortable,

agreed with the proposal, as long as it didn't push those worse off into hardship and was invested into service provision.

Further economic hardship

- *"A substantial rise in council tax, in the current climate of heat or eat would be too much to cope with."*
- *"An increase in council tax would be detrimental. When combined with increases in utilities bill it would be just awful."*
- *"If council tax increases, we, along with other households, may have to apply for Council Tax Support - so seems a double edge sword."*
- *"We are living hand to mouth, increases to our council rent and council tax would see us struggle to keep essentials! "Cost of council tax going up will result in more non payment and more cost of living squeezes on everyone"*
- *"Council tax increase will increase financial hardship for my family."*
- *"Local residents are already struggling with cost of living increases and this has a detrimental impact on mental and physical health. Further increases will lead to A further increase in people who can simply no longer afford basic things for living."*
- *"An increase in council tax would just put extra pressure on myself and also my children who are struggling in their own households."*
- *"I'm a working single parent with no benefits, Increasing council tax again in the middle of a cost of living crisis is poor!"*

Increasing Council Tax / reducing service level

- *"Would like to understand the benefits to the community to pay for more and lose services."*
- *"People of Bolton do not feel they get best value from their council tax".*
- *"Council tax payees paying more without service's improving doesn't seem fair for the Bolton communities".*
- *"Don't feel amounts paid already are used effectively or provide any justification for the amount charged".*
- *"Council tax rises will force greater poverty on household for a reduced or usually shocking level of service."*
- *"It may also cause people to need to rely more on emergency provision. This might end up costing more in the long run if the council are supporting people with the cost of living crisis."*

Agree with the proposal / more affluent should pay more

- *"The council tax increase is affordable for me, and services need to be maintained."*
- *"I'm happy to pay more council tax but don't want burden falling on people who can't afford it."*
- *"The rich should be charged more council tax and the less affluent should pay less."*
- *"Increasing council tax for the lowest bands is not the way to go. Why not increase from band C? Definitely not those who are in A or B who are already struggling the most and have the least left from wages to live from."*

b. Financial impact

104 comments were received from residents who stated the proposals would have an adverse financial impact, affecting vulnerable people the most, including the working poor, disabled people and older people having to support younger family members or are reliant on low pension incomes. Stakeholders warned that implementation of the proposals could lead to a worsening of mental health, a rise in social inequality and an increase in people accessing emergency support and funding.

- *“Cuts to vital services impact on all by making our society so much worse”.*
- *“Already pushed deeper into financial/social hardship. There seems to be a greater class divide now.”*
- *“Always affected financially - always a stress and strain as a family”.*
- *“The increase in living costs, especially those with families and children will have an effect on peoples' health, as people will compromise on eating healthier foods, reduced opportunities to support mental health and strengthen relationships via days out and paying for school trips etc”.*
- *“Families who are struggling are likely to rely heavier on public services.”*
- *“As a pensioner my income does not increase, so higher outcomes is a concern”.*
- *“As a widow all the increases impact on my income.”*
- *“As a working family on minimum wage, earning just too much to claim universal credit we would be left in financial difficulties.”*
- *“As pensioners we are already having to cut our cloth as a result of cost of living.”*
- *“Our children and grandchildren may be impacted and we will probably need to help them in a variety of direct and indirect ways.”*
- *“Further marginalisation of the most vulnerable and a lack of hope and aspiration.”*
- *“I took early retirement due to health issues. I don't qualify for benefits and am just managing.”*
- *“If I go into debt or lose my job because of cuts I will be evicted. My landlord won't tolerate tenants who can't pay the rent / bills and will only accept working tenants. If I can't be guaranteed a council property I'll end up on the street”.*

c. Bin collections

70 comments were received outlining concerns in the change to paper recycling collections. Respondents outlined the impact to flats and households with multiple tenants, who rely on a fortnightly collection, including those with limited access to transport. Comments were also received that highlighted the inconsistency in storage collection, with some residents having a sack for paper waste collection, whilst others had storage bins. The proposal could also impact those with limited means to store cardboard and paper waste.

Other stakeholders highlighted the rise in paper and cardboard manufacturing, highlighting how retailers were reducing plastic packaging in order to meet climate targets, whilst residents were also seeing a rise in online delivery, which results in a rise of cardboard waste. Whilst residents were keen to support climate ambitions, they highlighted an effect of the proposal could push some to use their general waste bin to dispose of the additional recycling waste.

There was call for the Council to reconsider the proposal and look at alternative ways to reduce cost and be efficient. Some residents suggested mixed recycling waste (burgundy bins) were less full after 2 weeks, so asked whether there was an option for that to be moved to a 3 or 4 weekly collection? Alternatively, some highlighted that green waste is reduced during winter months, so could move to a monthly collection during certain seasons.

Impact to families and multi occupancy households / communities

- *"I share my neighbour's paper bin due to limited area, but, if monthly collections come in I will have to get the council to give me a bin."*
- *"Living in a development of 23 flats, we have continually pushed recycling, communal bins are extremely well used and reach capacity each fortnight. Move to Fortnightly will be unsustainable".*
- *"My property has a shared rear with 4 houses and 2 businesses. The rear cannot cope with more bins so 3 houses share the paper and bottles/cans recycling bins. They are both full each fortnight."*
- *"Reduction in paper waste collection as we are a large combined household."*
- *"Would make a vast difference to families thus causing more litter blowing around streets and gardens!"*

Increase in paper/cardboard manufacturing and rise and rise in general waste

- *"I would be concerned about reducing the frequency of emptying bins and the impact this has on fly tipping- same reason as the cost of removing fly tipping will counter balance the savings?"*
- *"Biege bin reduction will mean us needing to put recyclables into the grey bin which is frustrating when we want to recycle."*
- *"What do I do, put the excess in the 'general waste' bin? It could also lead to more fly tipping, a current blight on our society."*
- *"People buy lots online these days (Amazon for instance) and this results in more packaging so the argument that there will be less doesn't stack up."*

Consider alternative waste saving measures

- *"4 week bin should only be the red bin. It is only quarter full every fortnight but the cream bin is full every fortnight"*
- *"A reduction in green bin would be preferable."*
- *"If monthly collections are brought in then missed collections will have to be rectified (snow days meaning no collection etc.)"*
- *"Could I leave boxes next to the bin or could you have a large paper recycling bank in horwich / middlebrook to replace it otherwise I have to travel several miles to dispose of it."*
- *"Burgundy bins could easily be emptied monthly, whereas the paper/pulpable waste must be emptied at the current fortnightly rate. This is simply because so much corrugated/paper packaging is used to deliver on-line shopping that everyone uses".*

d. Staffing, Management & Councillors

46 comments were received which outline concerns around staffing. Whilst some respondents called for a staffing review to be undertaken, to really understand where there are challenges and efficiencies needed to run services effectively; other respondents highlighted the impact of potential job losses.

Some respondents raised concerns with the Council not remaining competitive with salary rates and not paying some workers the living wage. Some stakeholders reflected on a perceived top-heavy management structure and a need to undertake efficiency savings at this level. Others commented on the need to review Councillors and their expenses.

- *"The approach should be based on the services that are needed, not around trying to protect internal jobs."*
- *"Cuts need to be made to non essential areas"*
- *"I think the council and its councillors need to take a long hard look internally and I would suggest a reduction of staff at all levels would be better."*
- *"Reviewing pay bands versus job demands is a better place to start."*
- *"Reduce the council wage bill and change the managements pension schemes to save money."*
- *"Facing the threat of potential redundancy once again which is never good for mental health"*
- *"Wasting money on agency staff is not good."*
- *"I continue to look for other employment that pays more in order to provide for my family, these jobs are predominantly outside of Bolton Council."*
- *"Maybe councillors should take a pay cut instead of taking it from us"*
- *"If my team were to lose vacant posts this would lead to even more stress on to the existing staff members."*
- *"There is too much waste and too many highly paid people at the council. Cut the number of senior leaders."*

e. Council inefficient as a business

42 comments were received from stakeholders that outlined the inefficiencies already taking place within the Council and called for a business improvement review of the organisation and the exploration of adopting a different business model.

- *"What has been the impact of the changes implemented last year (2023/24) - has it led to positive change? You have given no evidence of the impact to last year's budget cuts, so how can you ensure this year's proposed cuts will result in positive change and not result in greater cuts next year?"*
- *"An annual review should be carried out to ensure the council's needs are up to date and appropriate."*
- *"The council needs to be operated as a business, control local and government costs."*
- *"Needs to address the costly mistakes from incompetence (eg. planning and Peel Holdings, giving a £500k refund to the town centre housing developers because the market has changed, being soft on NCP, failing to get grant applications in on time). I have not seen any actions taken why not?"*
- *"The council does waste a lot of money and when this is challenged, there is little support to make matters right."*
- *"The council staff should do their jobs rather than passing the buck. How much revenue is generated compared to spent when putting on events in Bolton such as Ironman, Food festival and light show?"*
- *"There is so much money WASTED by Bolton council yet it's the residents that have to suffer to make up the difference."*
- *"Lack of imagination and vision."*

f. Dimming and trimming lighting

42 comments were received from stakeholders that expressed concern with the proposal to dim and trim lighting. Specific concerns were raised, including the adverse impacts to women, those with disabilities, children and shift workers. Other comments reflected safety concerns, particularly to drivers identifying other road traffic users, such as cyclists and pedestrians. Some comments agreed with the proposal.

- *"Will have a negative impact on Bolton residents, meaning they don't feel safe at night and the possible increase in crime if less likely to be seen/identified."*
- *"As a person with mobility issues poor lighting will increase the likelihood of injury".*
- *"By reducing streetlight brightness, it will increase criminal activity and ASB which will add further strain to the underfunded police service."*
- *"I would have to come off shift work to feel safe walking on an unlit street after work".*
- *"Likely to impact people from a number of protected groups, trial dimming for focus groups of people from these groups, , but that would need to take place soon while dusk is still early".*
- *"I am registered sight impaired any dimming of already poor street lighting will impact my ability to go out independently during the winter months."*
- *"As a woman and a mother of 2 daughters I am very concerned about reducing street lighting when violence to woman is at an all time high".*
- *"I have a child who is of an age that will be able to walk alone within the next few years however dimmer street lighting will impact on his safety in my opinion".*
- *"Reducing street lighting could impact driving as it is already sometimes hard to see under the current street lighting"*
- *"We agree with the dimming of street lights with the proviso that in areas which are considered dangerous, then consideration of maintaining safe levels of illumination should take place."*

g. Social care / Early Help and the impact on vulnerable groups

34 comments were received that identified impacts to social care and Early Help recipients, as well as the wider impacts to vulnerable members of the community. Some residents highlighted challenges within the service and further reductions in funding could compound the problem.

- *"We use the adult social care services and without these our adult child wouldn't have a life. We can't keep burdening disabled people more and more".*
- *"Any cuts to the adult social care budget will have a significant impact on already stretched services and staff".*
- *"As a senior officer of one of Bolton's Housing Providers I do worry about the extent to which we will be impacted by the £4m saving on Adults and Housing."*
- *"People, especially disabled people, will start to become even more disenfranchised, stigmatised and unequal."*
- *"For some reason adult social care increases every year but the support for vulnerable adults decreases."*
- *"I feel that any cuts in funding to early help, children's social care or adult Social care would have a detriment on myself, my family, and the wider families of Bolton."*
- *"To remove the vital funding, the services need would undoubtedly lead to further trauma, and re-traumatisation for the vulnerable and in turn cost the council more in services that are needed once harm is done (adult and children's social care)".*
- *"Early help plans have been vital for my children and families we support to receive the help they need but the assessments just aren't there . Waiting lists are too long meaning help isn't given at the right time at school causing long term mental health problems."*
- *"If you cut back on what is already a failing service then the consequences will be enormous. The care system is already broken but this will ensure it goes beyond repair".*

h. Attracting investment in the borough / outsourcing

28 stakeholders referred to attracting investment into the borough and the risk of losing potential investment if the proposals are implemented. Residents were particularly concerned that the proposals could result in them having less disposable income to spend in the town, which could result in providers

closing or moving out of the borough. Other stakeholders referred to the outsourcing of contracts and called for Council to use local providers to create inward investment opportunities.

- *"Invest in our town and get extra income rather than making damaging cuts."*
- *"Higher costs mean I spend less money in Bolton businesses and they could move or close."*
- *"Use local business for services... when you use local firms the money spent stays local and is reinvested".*
- *"I feel that some of these proposals are pushing me further toward relocating".*
- *"I question mine and my families future in the town".*
- *"Bolton Council needs to look at heightening engagement with the town centre and the council facilities available in the town centre."*
- *"Less money available to spend supporting local businesses so it's a vicious circle."*
- *"Many businesses I know and many people too, have moved from or plan to move from Bolton. The council have lost their commercial acumen and have alienated its businesses from the town centre".*
- *"Businesses will go under because there does not appear to be an effective plan to help support them."*
- *"Service contracts provided by external suppliers should be reviewed on an ongoing basis by the Council's client side of the contract."*

i. Agree / Disagree

27 comments were received that expressed overall agreement or disagreement with the proposals.

- *"We do not support reducing service provision at all and certainly not as the default option".*
- *"Cuts don't benefit anyone so obviously we will all be negatively affected."*
- *"The council has been implementing budget cuts since 2010, when is this going to end?"*
- *"I think that there should be a concerted effort to push back on local government cuts"*
- *"I do not accept that we just need to keep "accepting" the cuts"*
- *"Any changes will have little to no impact, unless I lose my job."*
- *"I would support this measure however if there were assurances that these potential negative impacts would be monitored & steps put in place to address any remaining impacts."*
- *"I've no problem with some of the proposals. But the council aren't the only people struggling to balance budgets."*
- *"I fully support the council's need to save budget".*

j. School Transport / SEND offer

24 comments were received that outlined how the proposal to introduce transport costs for pre-school and post 16 children with Special Educational Needs, could have an adverse impact on family finances. Some residents highlighted how disabled people had greater expenses and already reduced budgets. Some stakeholders thought the proposal could impact working parents, with some considering giving up work or reducing their working hours in order to claim additional funding to afford transport costs. Other comments reflected upon the current SEND offer, highlighting how challenging it is to access services, and any further cuts to delivery could cause significant impact to disabled children.

- *"I work with vulnerable early years children who often access special education services and need transport - without transport they will not be provided with quality early years provision."*
- *"We have a YP who uses the transport to a specialist school, we can't transport him, nor afford to pay for transport."*
- *"As someone who has a child that uses transport, this will greatly affect myself, as I have had to restruct working hours and job promotions due to work life balance/caring needs."*
- *"This is not a lifestyle choice we have made and these special kids/young adults should not be penalised or should have to pay when services are already in rock bottom for them already."*
- *"Charging for disabled children's transport to and from school is just simply disgusting"*
- *Particularly affect people from lower socioeconomic groups"*
- *"Services for these families have reduced year on year, whether it's a reduction in funding for children with disabilities social care, the end of council grants towards providing targeted short breaks or cutting travel training, the availability of support for SEND families is becoming a more significant issue in Bolton and this would be another blow to those families."*
- *"It cannot be assumed that families with one or more disabled children or young people are even accessing the benefit that could help them with the above additional costs. This affects families disadvantaged by language or ability"*
- *"My son has special educational needs with an autism diagnosis. I am a single parent and I work full time. I do not claim any state support. I have been disgusted with how disabled children and social care are run in this borough"*
- *"The SEND reform project highlights all the current flaws with local authority input and this reinforces why parents are so upset with local SEND offers."*
- *"School transport is an essential provision for such disadvantaged children and its retention should be protected. Without such a provision any sense of a normal family life is unachievable resulting in significant hardship."*
- *"We have 3 kids with a range of additional needs, one of which utilises transport to special school. We are barely making ends meet and can't afford sudden charges for transport, meaning our child could miss out on desperately needed education and social interaction."*

k. Alternative solutions

23 comments were received which suggested a range of alternative solutions to the proposal to reduce the Council's budget by £9.1m.

- *"There are other options - eg. headcount reductions in non-productive functions, outsourcing more services, selling off council buildings, re-purposing buildings etc"*
- *"Could more renewable energy be brought in to power street lights ,council buildings etc?"*
- *"Stop lighting up buildings in diff colours and stop wasting tax payers monies"*
- *"Maybe reassessment of bands would generate further income as many properties have had extensions since originally assessed."*
- *"Money could be saved via lighting and heating in large Council buildings. Empty Council buildings could be sold, rather than left empty/unused."*
- *"Cut back traffic wardens that might save some money."*
- *"If you make parking free in the town center this will attract more people leading to more spending and more money coming from companies to the council."*
- *"Why not use empty properties to help businesses establish themselves, and provided shared services like accounting and marketing?"*
- *"Working from home implemented on a more permanent basis could massively reduce spend on bills and bring the council in line with other organisations."*

l. Negative impact on the quality of services

19 comments were received which highlighted the negative impact to the quality of Council services being delivered, as well as a potential reduction in the number of services residents can access.

- *"Won't be able to speak to anyone or long delays with staff not being replaced at council."*
- *"Currently in a challenging environment and to cut services further is just going to make matters worse".*
- *"Can't see how much more budget cuts can continue, services are becoming less and less and timescales increasing."*
- *"Aware we will not see an increase in services but would like to not feel like services are decreasing which fear they will do."*
- *"It will cost me more to live in Bolton and there will be fewer services should we need them in Bolton."*
- *"Services are already minimal and these are going to be cut even more, its going to have a negative affect on all people in the Bolton area".*
- *"Services are scarce and this will continue to undervalue the workforce and make service users receive poor service".*

m. Political / Government support, including Household Support Fund

19 comments reflect wider political and central government challenges, with a call for government to do more to support local authorities. Some references indicate a reliance on national Household Support Funding and this being a risk that could negatively impact the borough's most economically deprived residents.

- *"I'm concerned about LWP being replaced by HSF; what happens if/when the government reducing or withdraws that funding - would LWP be reintroduced to protect our vulnerable residents?"*
- *"I am more concerned about the impact of using HSF to replace local funding as I work for a voluntary sector organisation who see the benefits of HSF to the many people we help."*
- *"The proposed changes to welfare provision leaves the most vulnerable at risk."*
- *"National Government should be lobbied and made aware of the difficulties caused by such cuts in spending - also GMCA with their increased devolution powers should support us."*
- *"I also think it is useful to look at initiatives that could be being funded by the government."*
- *"Government funding needs to be stepped up to cover costs and focus on vulnerable, elderly isolated and mental health sufferers."*
- *"I feel central government should stop starving local councils of income".*

n. Libraries

12 residents and stakeholders were concerned by the proposal to review libraries, outlining the impact of moving to a community or privatised model could reduce the quality of service for families, children, older residents, and vulnerable adults that access the support offers available.

- *"They are key community hubs with a wide range of services which support vulnerable people and enquiring young minds".*
- *"Books will always be important and libraries offer a community hub."*
- *"Blackrod Library very well attended. The ability to socialise and avoid isolation is also invaluable especially for the more infirm who would need to catch a bus to reach other libraries."*
- *"I will be greatly affected if the libraries reduce their offers in any way."*
- *"I use the local library, and do not want it to go into private hands"*

Other comments

A series of other comments were received, which highlighted the increase in inequality of service delivery across the borough, as well as the increase in demand for additional services from partners and volunteers

within the community sector, *“more money is given to household/areas in central Bolton & much less to outlying towns such as Horwich, which has suffered from years of under investment, whilst paying more year on year”* and *“as an employee in the voluntary sector I would like to see far more value, not always financial, placed on the excellent job Bolton's voluntary sector are doing in 'propping up' the local community and leveraging in further external funding wherever possible”*.

Further to this, a number of stakeholders reflected upon concern that the community and voluntary sector may be impacted by a reduction in funding at a time when further investment was needed to support vulnerable communities, *“Commissioners and decision makers should not be allowed to cut the 'low hanging fruit' and not for profit provision [VCSE sector] should be prioritised and supported to flourish”* and *“activities that promote community cohesion have benefited significantly from local public funding in Bolton over the past decade and more; it would be particularly helpful if there was still some capacity for funding and otherwise supporting this area of work as it simply can't be done effectively solely by volunteers”*.

A handful of comments were also received that reflected upon the impact to second homeowners and those with empty properties, *“it's not fair to penalise landlords who are trying to let them and a review of the circumstances is necessary, possibly including help to convert to housing”* and *“the threat of double council tax on empty properties also means we will have to remain unsafely in property”*. Others agreed with the proposal, *“I think it's important to recoup extra finances from those who can most afford it, the second homeowners, for instance”*.

The area which saw least impact and greatest agreement was the proposal to reduce the mayoral budget, *“the mayor is an outdated expensive joke these days and certainly not needed”* and *“the council needs to stop spending on the mayor”*.

Some respondents found that the consultation proposals were too broad to determine what the impact would be, *“the proposals give generalised examples, there is no real detail yet”* and *“it is difficult to say without knowing how the proposals are to be carried out as the report doesn't go into specifics”*.

14. Alternative Solutions

The consultation process encouraged respondents to put forward alternative suggestions to reducing the budget by £9.1 million. 365 valid responses were received, with suggestions categorised into 13 themes. These are outlined in the table below.

Please use this space if you want to suggest any other ways Bolton Council could make cuts of £9.1 million whilst still delivering statutory services, or other ways we could raise income

Rank	Category	No. of respondents
a.	Review staff costs / improve efficiency	146
b.	Reduce provision - services events etc	95
c.	Increase charges, fines, & seek funding / revenue sources / use reserves	74
e.	Stop fraud / recover debts / increase transparency	64
f.	Review contracts / agencies	64
g.	Review buildings / assets	58
h.	Attract investment	47
i.	Pro-active spending	46
j.	Review councillor / mayoral costs	40
k.	Look at / work with voluntary sector / other LAs / businesses	32
l.	Central Government / MPs	20
m.	Environmental savings [non-building]	19
n.	Comments on consultation / need more information	12

a. Review staff costs / improve efficiency

146 respondents felt that staff costs should be looked at and efficiency improved. There were calls to reduce the number of staff and their pay, particularly around senior management, although a minority of respondents did suggest paying more to attract better quality staff. Teams and functions should be combined wherever possible, and productivity measured.

Whilst some respondents suggested that working from home could be more productive, others saw this as an excuse for idleness.

- Pay staff competitive salaries or market supplements, attract staff through re visiting hybrid working.
- All the top brass, above pay grade N could take a pay cut.
- Far to many senior managers, several years ago the council deleted many posts and now they have created more posts, which doesnt make any sense.
- Far to top heavy with salaries for top executives appraoch £200k, this is completely disproportionate and a full top town review of services and staff should be rolled out and remove unneccesary roles at the top.
- Reduce salary of the top level staff by leading from the top. If they lead from the top and show a willingness to reduce their salary, then rest of the staff may follow suit.
- Suggest that Town Hall staff are paid less when they are new. Not necessarily cutting wages, however some new roles are advertised at ridiculously High salaries.
- Stop giving people in office pay rises.
- Review senior roles (there seems to be a LOT of them) Review teams and their impact on the department compared to cost to run.
- Cut out middle management and merge teams.

- *Get rid of unnecessary staff such as PA's.*
- *Needs to review all service delivery and staff efficiencies made not shyed away from.*
- *Save by making current vacant positions over 6 months not filled void as not required.*
- *Ask for redundancy for people over certain ages or offer deals with pensions ... cut back on staff that actually want to leave and go from there do shuffle after the older staff leave new younger staff be on lower wages.*
- *Combining services such as family support with Adolescent Resource Centre.*
- *Merge back office services with neighbouring councils such as payroll & HR.*
- *Get rid of the levels of bureaucracy within the council. Too many paper pushers.*
- *A complete overhaul and potential restructure of the council teams needs to take place.*
- *Refreshments/lunch costs could be cut/reduced when there are meetings for staff.*
- *Stop providing so many lunches at staff events - ask staff to bring their own food!!*
- *Make existing staff part time.*
- *Close pension scheme to new starters.*
- *Reduce the terms of full and half pay sickness allowance fro 6 months full and six months half, to 3 months full and 3 months half, that should save a few million and also increase efficiency as staff will return from absence earlier. Overall the council need to get a grip with staff absence by being much tougher.*
- *Make productivity improvements to council services, there are far too many slackers stealing a living.*
- *Supervise and monitor workers more.*
- *Stop home working altogether. Zero productivity.*
- *Stop staff working from home to get people back into the town centre and improve services.*
- *Reduce the number of staff who either can't or won't do the job they are employed for.*
- *I worked for the Council for seven years, and the amount of excess staff who are playing the system is ridiculous. Processes need to be streamlined, and dead wood staff need to be scrutinised far more rigorously. So many staff have worked at the Council for years, and are lazy and complacent.*
- *No working from home. Employees key stroke tracked. All employees subject to rigorous time management and appraisal of their abilities and what benefit they give to council services. If they cannot do their job they must be made redundant. Across the board 25% staff reduction in every department.*

b. Reduce provision – services, events etc

95 comments fell into this category, which covers reducing services and events that the respondent either didn't value or felt were unaffordable. Some felt that the Council should only provide those which it was legally obliged to do, whilst others saw little point in, for example, libraries, events and services aimed at those who were either wealthy enough to pay privately or would not benefit from the provision to which they had become accustomed.

- *No council run firework displays, less Christmas lights.*
- *Stop funding trade unions, cut back on council events, whilst they are generally great it is an inefficient use of money and staffing in a time of cutbacks.*
- *Less focus on events and "extra" activities.*
- *Reduce events which are not making a profit or at least completely self funded.*
- *The Bolton Food & Drink Festival is a complete waste of money - if services for adults and children are cut, it will be scandalous and absolutely obscene if this still runs.*
- *Spending less on decorations for cultural / leisure services.*
- *Reduce "community" cohesion projects on flimsy Integration ideas. Stop art installations and funding.*

- *Tone down Black History Month and Pride month. People can go to Manchester for these. The attendance at gay pride was poor when I visited.*
- *Stop printing things in multiple languages.*
- *Stopping whatever money is currently being paid for the discover app. It doesn't work or promote any local independent businesses in the area only the national brands.*
- *Evaluate all payments/grants allocated to charities/businesses ensure actually being used correctly.*
- *Stop wasting council money on ridiculous architect fees for plans that never will be built.*
- *Stop wasting money on schemes like replacing the paving in Westhoughton. It wasn't needed.*
- *Get rid of the poppies, we have memorial services to commemorate our armed forces we don't need poppies.*
- *Stop providing for people who can't be bothered to do anything about their situation.*
- *Stop paying to alcoholics and drug addicts money to subsidise their addiction*
- *Stop housing people who are not contributing to the economy! .. Stop transporting special needs children up to age 19 to school if the parents receive an allowance for a vehicle.*
- *Stop giving to immigrants. Stop giving them everything!!!!!! Stop giving them our homes, jobs, benefits!!!*
- *Cut funding to non essential work/ services.*
- *Cutting funding to voluntary groups who have a minimal impact on services.*
- *If it's not statutory, these can be cut to make the savings. Don't try to spend money you haven't got or make the public pay for non essentials.*
- *If the function is not statutory reduce or cut it to match existing budget - operate like most private businesses.*
- *Simply deliver your statutory services, anything else can only be delivered if you have a budget. If not stop it.*
- *Deposit scheme to ensure return of disability equipment that is often thrown away. I have family members who have given up trying to return items.*
- *Stop wasting money on unnecessary road junction 'improvements' and cycle lanes for now, this money can be better spent on people.*
- *Stop subsidising the taxi trade.*
- *Reduce the amount spent on unnecessary street furnishing, especially aluminum poles, we're fastly becoming a Poleton.*
- *Stop revamping Bolton ...town centre.*
- *Reduce the bottle / glass/ plastic recycling to four weekly as well as the waste paper.*
- *Paper and bottles/tins could easily be once a month providing household bins are large enough.*
- *Burgundy bins emptied monthly. Paper/pulpable bins emptied fortnightly as now.*
- *Instead of having cuts for cardboard recycling, delay the red bin collection instead as these are rarely full every two weeks.*

c. Increase charges, fines, & seek funding / revenue sources / use reserves

74 respondents felt that revenue could be increased. Charges could be brought in or increased for services; everyone could pay Council Tax; fines and taxes could be implemented; and new funding sources could be investigated, in addition to using further reserves.

- *Make people pay more for the extra services they use.*
- *Everyone paying at least 25% of c/t*
- *People with children with special needs who need transport should have it means tested - parents should contribute to transport if they can afford it but should get the transport for free if needed.*
- *Higher service prices for those that use a particular service.*
- *Make the gypsies pay council tax. ... Make non local taxi drivers pay to come into an area they don't know, and take a test, both written and driving.*
- *Means-testing of all free bus passes.*
- *What do people get for free which a small charge after means testing could make a difference?*
- *Charge more for filming rights.*
- *Increase filming licence fees and the commercial rates for using Council buildings for profit-making entities.*
- *Charges on empty homes including social houses.*
- *Stop allowing homes to be classed as places of worship, making them exempt from council tax.*
- *Use the town hall square for more "market" type events and charge for spaces.*
- *Increase parking fees Charge Licensed Premises more.*
- *Increase recycling lates and commerciality of recycling, particularly trade recycling which can help subsidise residential.*
- *A congestion charge for the whole borough for using cars before 0930; local by-laws fining cars that park on the pavement*
- *Enforce parking fines at school times, the amount of double yellow parking that occurs surrounding Walmsley, St John's and Eagleley would build some revenue.*
- *Fines on people who own beautiful buildings in town centre and just let trees grow out of them and don't look after them?*
- *Spot fines for ...littering and parking on pavements or parking facing in the wrong direction, or speeding, collected by and paid directly to Bolton Council (or shared with the police service if they are involved in collecting the fines).*
- *Fines to residents for dog fouling which is increasing*
- *Make multimillion pound companies pay an annual tax for operating here.*
- *Raising the cost of council licences and permits. Being more strict on Utilities working on the highways by issuing more fines for breeches of street works, issuing more FPN's and Section 74 charges.*
- *Increasing council tax more than 5%.*
- *Community Fundraising events using the family hubs.*
- *Going to schools and making small cupcakes or selling cupcakes or having more charity fairs and making a variety of English food and Asian food and raising money that way.*
- *Events in the town are successful and bring money in so probably more of those, and increase revenue from filming in le mans.*
- *Providing a deputyship service whereby we can charge fees as Council deputies.*
- *Chargeable advisory services: Planning department; Environment Health; Waste; Health and Safety; Fire etc,*
- *Make better use of the café in the town hall as it is currently not offering much - could promote this more especially during events on the square. Could also make better offering for staff to use more regular.*
- *Acquire funding streams for work in the Borough*
- *Use some of the huge cash balance you have in the bank.*
- *Is it a question of raising income or spending our reserves? To have millions of pounds in reserves is a crime in itself - get spending!*

d. Stop fraud / recover debts / increase transparency

64 respondents were concerned that debts were not being pursued, with the NCP write-off cited, in particular. Respondents felt that fraud should be rigorously dealt with, and that the Council should be more transparent about its affairs to rule out corruption and waste.

- *Get NCP to pay in full - how can a multi-billion pound company escape its contract.*
- *Do not make a free gift to NCP.*
- *Don't write off the debt of foreign bank that owns NCP car parks.*
- *The money from that car park issue, they're in a contract and should pay end of.*
- *Charge NCP the full amount owed and not let them off with over a million pound of non payments. Why should our town suffer when big companies cant make their payments.*
- *Don't allow companies like NCP to underpay (improve collection rates) for non payers.*
- *Stop giving money away (brushing unpaid debt under the carpet).*
- *Have stricter rules/processes to collect debt owed.*
- *Rout out corruption.*
- *No massive bonuses for corrupt councilors.*
- *Do more internal and external auditing to manage funds better and making sure no fraud or incorrectly charging. I've read of 2 cases already this last few months.*
- *Ensure good governance in the council so there is no room for fraud for a start*
- *Be more transparent about wages and pensions of your staff.*
- *More checks on people who are working the black side of jobs and claiming benefits.*
- *Get the unpaid council tax off the none payers.*
- *A stricter policy in relation to organisations that do not pay fees etc.*

e. Review contracts / agencies

Some of the 64 respondents felt that more work should be brought in-house to save money and ensure profits were retained by the Council, whereas others felt that savings could be made by contracting out, particularly to local businesses. Agency staff should be avoided due to the increased cost, particularly over the long-term.

- *I do find there is a lot of red tape at the council and outsourcing to large big name firms who are very expensive to use. I again promote the use of local firms who are cheaper and thier staff will spend the money in the town.*
- *Offer the opportunity for quality assured providers (either Bolton based or from outside) to see if they can deliver better value for money.*
- *Could more of your services be tendered out to local providers who could bring additional added value, more efficiencies at a cheaper cost?*
- *Privatisation of some aspects of the work, ie school bus services would cut vehicle fleet costs.*
- *Better supervision and control over outsourcing.*
- *Utilising organisations within the borough that could tender for the work.*
- *100% behind tendering out contracts and getting the better cost.*
- *Stop using consultants & agency staff & using external companies to deliver public services.*
- *Reduce reliance on agency staff for vacancies.*
- *Stop using consultants.*
- *Be a lot more efficient on all council contracts and stop outsourcing so private companies can make millions.*
- *Bring the Corporate Property Services back in-house. An enormous amount of money is spent on fees (£m's each year). .. The council can employ in-house caretakers, electricians, joiners, plumbers, etc to reduce large scale costs for these trades when appointing external contractors.*

- *Council should allow staff to purchase goods from a wider range of suppliers to reduce costs. Some local shops offer better prices for goods that can cost more via the council's Supplier List.*
- *Have tighter policies on commissioned work to ensure money is not wasted and companies are making big money off the back of the council*
- *Stop paying over the odds for smaller contracts such as subsidised travel, construction and maintenance costs. You know full well any business that gets a council contract see it as a payday. Review Bolton at Home completely.*
- *More efficient purchasing and commissioning. Some services to be brought back in house.*
- *Review Virador license again.*
- *Children's social services are severely over priced for care homes and children's carers. I feel the use of more council run care homes will be far more efficient than paying external services for care.*

f. Review buildings / assets

58 respondents felt that better use could be made of buildings, land and other assets owned by the Council. Renting should be curtailed, and our building used to maximum capacity and rented out when not in use. Redundant buildings and assets could be sold, and functions consolidated. For some this meant increasing use of town centre assets, whilst other felt that the outlying towns and areas would provide better value for money.

Savings could also be made by turning down heating and lighting levels, not only when buildings were empty but as they were too hot and bright for staff and public.

- *Allow more staff to work from home as this will save the need for more offices and fuel etc to fund buildings when it is not necessary in certain roles.*
- *Allow more home working to reduce the office costs.*
- *Is it necessary that Council offices (eg Town Hall) are open to staff from 7am to 7pm? Could the opening hours be reduced to say 8am to 6pm to save on heating / lighting costs?*
- *Depending on job roles, just a single day a week (or fortnight) in the office could mean a building is no longer required somewhere. Could desks be moved closer together? How is space utilised efficiently... Close buildings where possible.*
- *Turn down the heating and lighting in your buildings, especially the town hall. Every day I work in the town hall I have to open the window in the morning to let the heat out as the rooms are too hot and you cannot manually control the radiators. People complain everyday of headaches due to the lighting being too bright in the offices.*
- *Any buildings Bolton council is paying rent on to stop and use their own buildings they own*
- *Sell some of the artwork in the foyers of the council buildings, in fact, sell it all.*
- *Sell off some Council owned land in prime areas.*
- *Sell off services and buildings that could add money to the budget.*
- *Afraid realistically buildings like Smithills etc should be National Trust not Council.*
- *Shut down the aquarium. Anyone who wants to see fish in real life that badly will go to a proper big aquarium with turtles and sharks down the road in Blackpool. If/when Bolton council manages to make enough money to be the type of council that can afford the luxury of a live fish museum for the public, then you can bring it back, but at this stage, it's like holding on to silk bedsheets when you don't have a straw mattress to sleep on.*
- *Use the family hubs out for hire at a charge.*

g. Attract investment

47 respondents suggested that attracting investment was vital. By encouraging businesses to set up in and move to our borough, revenues could increase and the retail offer could be improved, attracting visitors and residents alike.

- *Increase safety in the town centre to attract more businesses and customers.*
- *Encourage people to try and start a business that would improve the area,*
- *Lower rents in Bolton town centre commercially to attract trade & business.*
- *Reduce rents and business rates on town centre properties so rather than them staying empty they generate funds.*
- *Low rents for town centre businesses to encourage people into the town to visit, work, spend.*
- *The amount of empty buildings is scandalous, especially with the current housing shortage. Can the area not be reconfigured to address both these issues. More investment into the town would equate to more revenue and therefore eliminate the need to cut services.*
- *Review of inward investment for the Bolton area, the main high street is boarded up with very few "big names" still in the area, why? How can we incorporate growth, investment whilst developing people, skills and talent in the region.*
- *Bolton town centre needs investors and businesses to move in - we don't even venture in there anymore, preferring Bury.*
- *The town is on its knees and needs serious work to bring people into town.*

h. Pro-active spending

46 respondents suggested that, although it would initially increase costs, spending should be made to provide high quality / proactive services to save money in the long term. This includes doing road repairs to a high standard, and providing intervention and other support to vulnerable residents.

- *What is the longer term plan and what will the area look like in a further 5/10 years?*
- *Do a job right first time rather than having to revisit to put right. ie cut grass shorter at initial visit. At moment its not cut short enough and needs recutting sooner. Make sure all gullies are cleared properly at first visit rather than reacting to blocked/flooding issues.*
- *Putting more time into teaching those who get benefits and other monetary reward how to budget effectively and prioritise. There are so many people getting access to money and services who are wasteful with the resources they have been given.*
- *Ensure taps aren't dripping to reduce water wastage / costs.*
- *Although I can understand cultural investment would be at the bottom of the priority list I wonder if the Council would consider the long term tourism and revenue impacts (not to mention public wellbeing) that the town could benefit from by making a pledge to keeping money aside for it.*
- *Stop building "quick/cheap" accommodation when we know due to poor quality they will become in need of renevatng again.*
- *Build council-owned flats and houses in the town Center to bring income into the area.*
- *Providing art spaces which will bring people in the city centre.*
- *Reopen community hubs like Start Well centres can relieve some pressures on other social services - this is the kind of thing Bolton people need especially those in vulnerable areas.*

i. Review councillor / mayoral costs

40 respondents felt that councillor / mayoral costs could be cut. The number of councillors could be reduced, as could events and symbols of office. Whilst some saw the mayoral function as a nice thing, it was felt incongruous when services that were seen as more important were being cut and residents and businesses were being asked to pay more.

- *Reduce the number of councillors per ward and reducing their expenses.*
- *Make wards bigger.*
- *Cut councillor expenses.*
- *Tighten councillors allowances so at least it looks like everyone is making a contribution to the cuts that are required*
- *Give all councillors a free bus pass and stop paying expenses for travelling.*
- *Reviewing expenses of councillors and the Mayor.*
- *Getting rid of the mayor's office should save around £200k.*
- *Get rid of the mayor.*
- *Do we really need a Mayor? In the present climate can the role be justified against the amount of money this may bring in and the potential savings this could make?*
- *Reduce mayoral duties or disband completely*

k. Look at / work with voluntary sector / other LAs / businesses

32 respondents suggested that greater use could be made of the voluntary sector or efficiency savings could be made by combining shared functions with local businesses or neighbouring Local Authorities. We could also look at best practice in those organisations.

- *Go see what Wigan are doing More collaborative working on borders with Wigan, Chorley, Bury and Salford.*
- *Work in partnership with other councils in the area to reduce costs. Sharing HR departments for example.*
- *Stop all non statutory services and encourage and support local businesses to do these roles.*
- *Encourage community clean up schemes instead of relying on council workers.*
- *Allow for volunteers to keep areas such as the war memorial in Egerton's gardens rather than using the councils staff to do such jobs.*
- *Have all services been looked at through the filter of considering if our VCSE sector could provide all/some of that service?*
- *Working with the university to address issues of students leaving, and why they are doing so, is critical to the success of these projects in breathing some life back into the town.*
- *Increase commercial activities by forging closer partnerships with experiential lead businesses in the Bolton area who can develop events etc to drive footfall to the town centre. The northern lights initiative was great, however so many commercial opportunities were missed...*

l. Central government / MPs

20 respondents called for approaches to be made to central government, around funding gaps and expectations, in addition to looking at MP expenses.

- *Lobby the government to tell them how the pressures of having to accommodate people in emergency housing is affecting budgets.*
- *You also need to lobby more on business rates and lowering them to boost the town centre.*
- *I believe a big push back needs to go back to central government as they reduced funding. It's not up to us as residents to [pay] or the shortfall when we have never been so worse off.*
- *Reduce the number of MP's.*
- *How much time has been spent to get the Government to increase the funds to meet the needs of Bolton? Constantly trying to balance the books on a budget that is not increasing, by providing a reduced service at a higher cost is abysmal and shameful!*

- *Call a full general strike by all local authorities now.*
- *Tell central government that more is needed to house immigrants in the area and that the cost of supporting immigrants should not be the responsibility of the council or the people of Bolton.*
- *Can central gov explain where all the funding that has been cut over 13 years from LA budgets has gone ?*

m. Environmental savings [non-building]

19 respondents suggested savings around environmental services and issues, such as reducing street lighting to save costs and reducing mowing regimes to help wildlife. This category doesn't include reductions in heating and lighting etc within buildings.

- *Scrap the use of herbicides on [roadside] verges. We are in a biodiversity crisis and the total areas of native wildflowers and plants our verges support is immense. 1 cut a year in Autumn is all that is needed.*
- *Would agree with street lighting dimming. Better environmentally.*
- *Turn of town centre lighting.*
- *Switch off street light where possible by midnight and dim the rest.*
- *Trial turning off lighting to save costs or reduce the output to minimum.*
- *Good idea to reduce lighting in already well lit areas although could be unsafe in some areas of town.*
- *Renewable energy sources for ... street lighting... Dimming or turning off street lights in lower crime rate areas only.*
- *Dim the street lights in retail areas. In fact turn them off on retail parks after the shops close. These parks are lit up like Christmas trees all night.*
- *Bolton Council needs to close some of it's buildings and move to a more modern "working from home" model for its staff... It will also reduce Bolton Council's carbon footprint, including reduction of carbon footprint from staff travelling to and from work. Larger local authorities have done this to great affect i.e. Lancashire. It will also attract a more diverse workforce (including disabled workers - as most of Bolton Councils building do not adequately cater for them).*

n. Comments on consultation / need more information

12 respondents felt that the Council should not be asking the public about the proposals or were unable to suggest alternatives as they didn't have enough information about or knowledge of the issues – which had not been properly explained. Some respondents felt that there should be wider consultation in general.

- *Surely that is the Councils job... you were elected. If you can't do it step aside.*
- *Bit of a loaded question! An answer doesn't absolve you of being responsible for doing the job you are paid for.*
- *Actually ask residents what they want.*
- *You will not listen.*
- *Tax increase + cuts = why? Pay rises are sought to maintain the same standard of living - surely the Council works by the same rules?*

Other comments

Stakeholders suggested other ways that savings could be made, including improvements to ICT and the digital offer, which could bring in efficiencies and make it easier for residents to report issues online. Some respondents also suggested leaving Greater Manchester Combined Authority or refusing to pay for the Greater Manchester Mayor.

15. Further comments

155 further comments were received from stakeholders that outlined challenges and concerns across 6 key themes, with the priority concern being not to cut services, but invest further.

Please use this space for any further comments about the budget proposals		
Rank	Category	No. of respondents
a.	Don't cut / should invest in services	49
b.	Revise staff costs / improve efficiency	28
c.	Improve consultation / need more info	25
e.	Don't raise Council Tax / charges	23
f.	Attract businesses / funding / investment / people	17
g.	Central Government	14

a. Don't cut / should invest in services

49 respondents felt that services should not be cut, either at all or to the level suggested, with some feeling that service levels should be improved rather than reduced.

- *4 million reduction to adults seems a big ask in a climate where we have an increasing and more dependent population.*
- *Don't agree with less service for more money.*
- *Stop cutting services its despicable that you ask for more money and then provide less.*
- *How long can the council continue to make cuts to its services?*
- *If the bin collection needs to change, would it be possible for a period of 3 week collections, before jumping to a 4 week collection period?*
- *Please don't mess with recycling it will lead to more fly tips and grot spots in our town.*
- *4-weekly beige bin collections will further disadvantage vulnerable residents or those who are unable to get to a tip for example those residents who have a medical condition which generates a lot of cardboard waste.*
- *Don't scrap the beige bin - that's the one that's always full! Take the burgundy or green bin to monthly collections.*
- *I do not agree with the proposals to reduce the frequency of paper collection. This is particularly difficult for people who do not have room for a beige bin and put paper out in bags.*
- *I would not be pleased to see such things as cuts to library services/health facilities as they are essential for younger people but need to be kept relevant.*
- *Please do not cut libraries, they are a vital hub of all communities, especially those outlying towns, ie: Horwich/Blackrod.*
- *Please do not dim the street lights as this could cause issues for people with impaired vision.*
- *No No No to reducing street lighting! It will make it unsafe for school children & people who go out to work / work late & people who walk their dogs*

b. Revise staff costs / improve efficiency

28 respondents outline how staff costs and efficiencies could be looked at further to ensure that service function was streamlined to avoid duplication, unnecessary staff posts were removed, and employees were working to maximum efficiency.

- *Some people would welcome redundancy and Early retirement, is this an option.*
- *Reduction in director salaries... Every employees or person receiving payment from the council has to give value for money that is capable of being measured and validated.*
- *Got to look at a good clear out.*
- *Scope to combine mutually similar services, such as payroll and pensions and HR , reduce total number of staff over both areas particularly admin.*
- *Appoint managers from the private sector.*
- *Already a lot of wastage at the council so start by sorting that out before charging people more to support those who take the micky and steal a wage.*
- *Services need to be managed better to produce better results.*
- *Remove some of the top bosses that will save you a fortune.*

c. Improve consultation / need more information

25 respondents felt that the consultation would make no difference, that they had not been given sufficient information to make a judgement. Respondents wished to be consulted on detailed proposals, rather than the principal remit. There was also suggestion that a wider consultation should have been undertaken.

- *It is difficult to complete this survey without a clear understanding of what the council currently delivers.*
- *Would be helpful to provide a menu which exceeds the the proposed savings required to give the impression this is not a fait accompli and provides a genuine choice.*
- *A full breakdown of monies raised ,costs and spending listed per area might see people understand the work of the council better in their hometowns, allowing potentially to identify areas people are willing to pay more or less for.*
- *Questions need to be more specific to have a proper ability to comment.*
- *Most of these proposals have both positives and negatives - agreeing means quite often with the principle, while not necessarily agreeing with some individual applications, so that if I object to a particular increase, the reply is that I voted for it.*
- *Questionnaire is an opportunity to ask for comments but uncertain if these will be taken into consideration as you have already come up with proposals.*
- *If Senior Management would speak to staff who are lower down the hierarchy about how savings can be made for their respective departments, perhaps the budget proposals would look different.*
- *Consult properly with residents through doorstep calling and local forums and meetings. Many of our elderly or more deprived demographic have no access to IT and technology.*
- *You need to restart this consultation and actually notify EVERY resident of it directly.*

d. Don't raise Council Tax / charges

23 respondents reiterated that they did not wish to see raises in Council Tax, nor increased charges for services.

- *Strongly against raising Council tax as a way for council to make money from residents.*
- *Considerations need to be given current cost of living crisis, especially to those who are low income families who have no access to benefits etc. These are the people who will end up being impacted the most when services are cut and council taxes rise.*
- *It is important to live within the budget without putting a heavy burden on council tax payers.*
- *Bolton people are struggling. Just be very careful in how much more you charge.*
- *Bolton Council should not be raising council tax.*
- *The increase in Council tax should reflect the service provided. If not, then no such increase should be made.*
- *Your hitting the low paid as usual.*
- *The residents of Bolton have suffered enough due to inflation and cost increase.*
- *The council should be aiming to ensure there is no increase in council tax.*

e. Attract businesses / funding / investment / people

Taking measures to attract business, investment and seeking funding was suggested by 17 respondents.

- *Let's make this town attractive to investors, and not put them off.*
- *Bring back a huge Marks and Spencer and that will be a good start!*
- *An increase in business rates should be avoided this should be reduced we need more business relocating to our town centre instead of them leaving our town and have nothing to bring investment in.*
- *Bring in developments.*
- *What have you got in the budget to attract retailers?*
- *Budget proposals in line with bringing investment into Bolton should be priority.*

f. Central Government

14 respondents felt that central government should play a greater part. There were calls for increased funding, a general election, lobbying and withdrawal of the role played by local councils.

- *Be much more vocal about the plight of council cuts in funding and how central government allocate funding while pushing increasing responsibility to local councils.*
- *Central government needs to increase funding to support councils better.*
- *Local Authorities have been decimated by central government without any understanding, empathy or care of how services (either statutory or non-statutory) impact the people we should be serving.*
- *Call a full general strike by all local authorities now.*
- *Wait it out for the Labour Government....they'll help out.*

Other comments

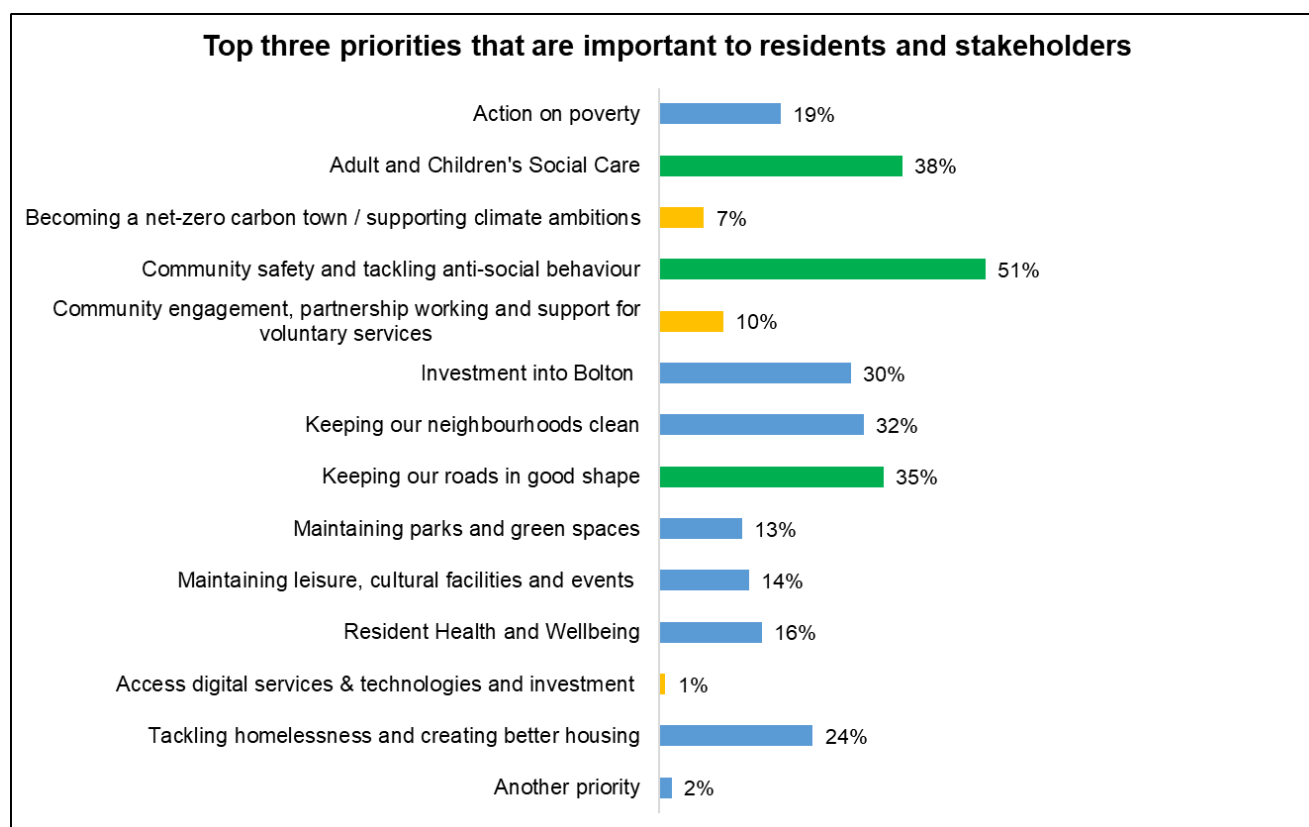
Other comments included those who felt that the measures didn't go far enough, and from those that felt the Council was doing its best. There were general comments which were unclear or couldn't be categorised; a feeling that cuts could be made around expenses associated with councillors and Bolton's Mayor. There was also concern about the effect of further cuts on staff; suggestions of environmental improvements, such as solar powered lighting and reusing resources; and a wish for spending and planning that looked to the future.

16. Resident and stakeholder priorities

All stakeholders were asked to consider their priorities for the budget period 2024/2025. 13 overarching themes were provided, with respondents asked to choose their top three priorities. Of the 608 responses received, the top priorities for residents and stakeholders are *'community safety and tackling anti-social behaviour'* (51%), *'Adults and Children's Social Care'* (38%), and *'keeping our roads in good shape'*. These have been highlighted in green in the table below.

Areas which were seen as being less of a priority are *'accessing digital services, technologies and investment'* (1%), *'becoming a net zero town / climate ambitions'* (7%), and *'community engagement, partnership working and supporting voluntary services'* (10%). These have been highlighted in yellow in the table below.

11 respondents suggested further priorities that could not be allocated to existing categories. Education / school places were suggested by 4 respondents. 2 respondents suggested targeting need, to save money in the long-term. Other suggestions included looking at public transport, social inclusion, reducing duplication in the council and reducing illegal and other migrants.

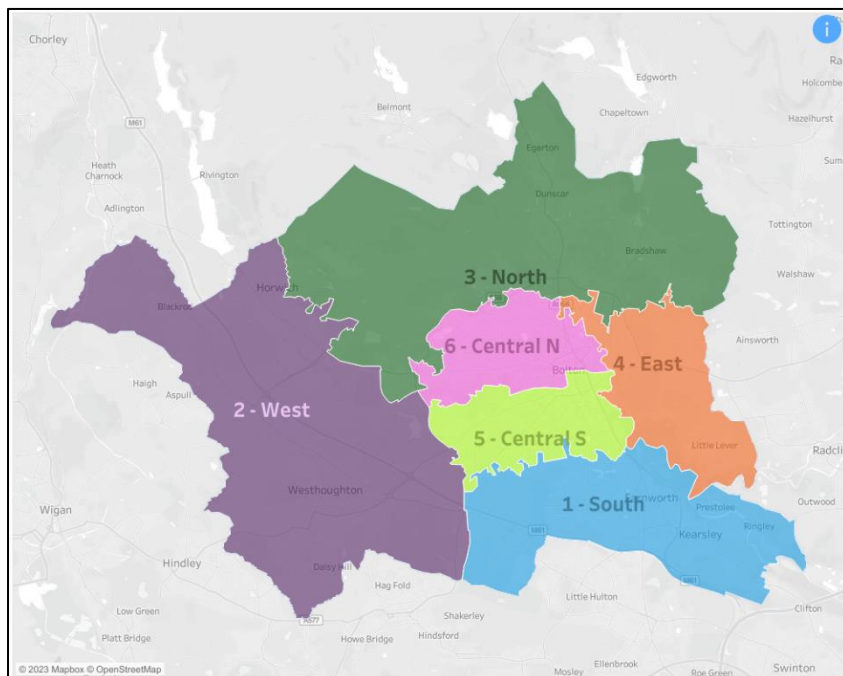


Base: 608

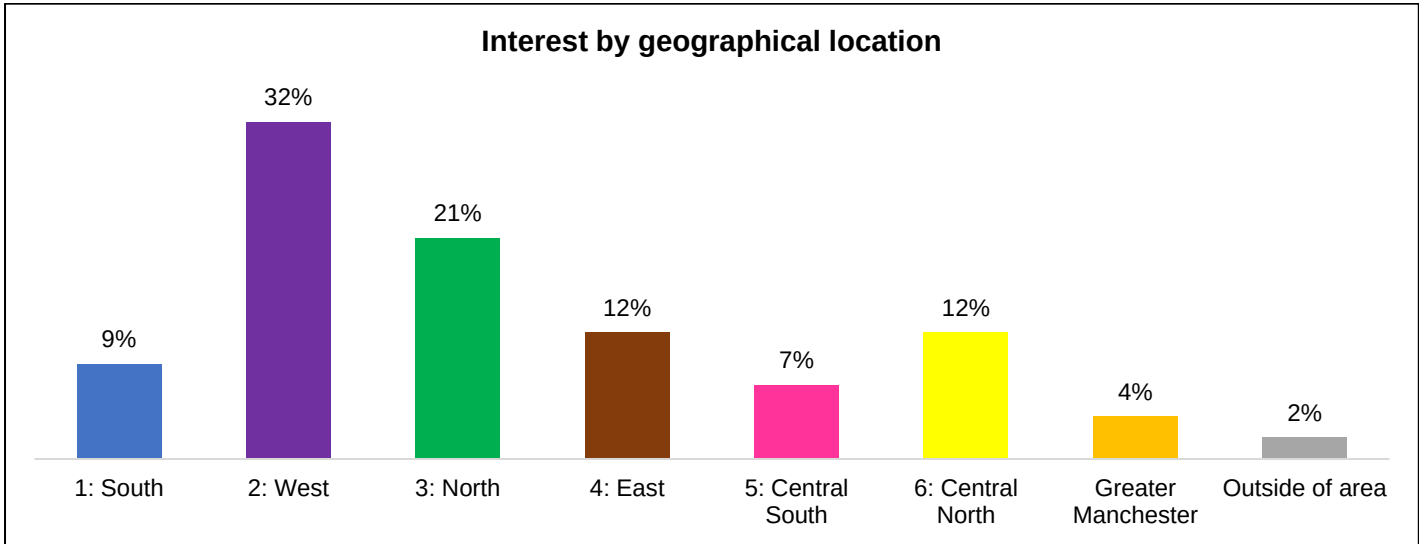
17a. Demographics: Geographical location

The table below outlines the demographics of respondents by geographical district. A total of 494 respondents provided a full, valid postcode. Residents in the West of the borough (purple bar) represent over one-third (32%) of responses received. Just over one-fifth (21%) of comments were received from

residents in the North of the borough (green bar) and 12% of responses came from each of residents in the East of the borough (brown bar) and Central North (yellow bar). The lowest engagement is from residents in the South of the borough (9% - blue bar) and Centre South (7% - pink bar). 6% of responses came from residents in Greater Manchester and further afield (orange and grey bars).



*Neighbourhoods are a local geography for integrated health and social care; all have a population of around 50,000 residents.



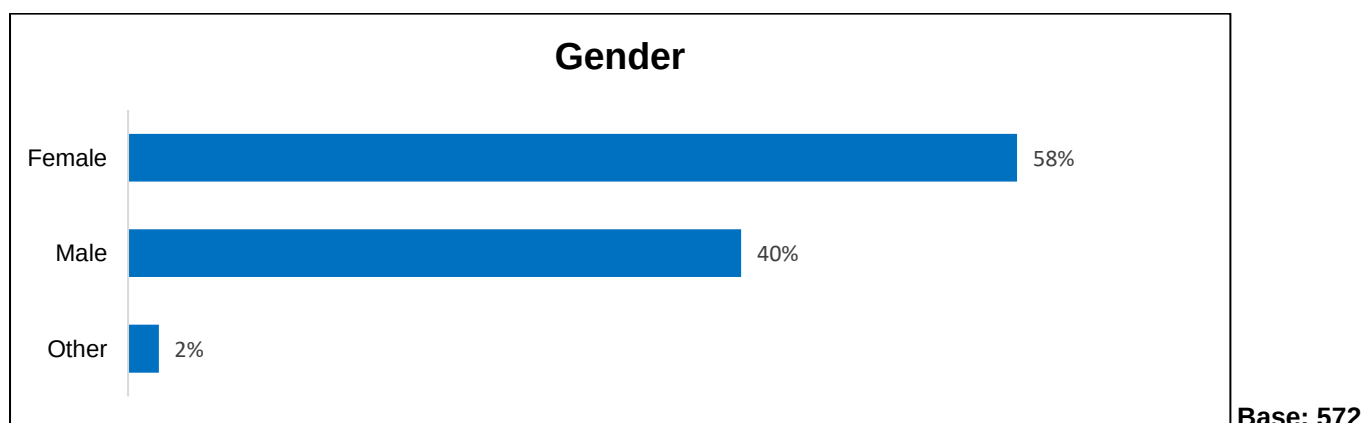
Base: 494

Ward level engagement

<u>Neighbourhood 1:</u> <u>South – 46 responses</u> Farnworth (N) – 17 Farnworth (S) - 12 Greater Lever – 5 Hulton - 3 Kearsley - 9	<u>Neighbourhood 2:</u> <u>West – 160 responses</u> Heaton, Lostock & Chew Moor – 3 Horwich (N) – 47 Horwich (S) & Blackrod - 46 Hulton – 3 Westhoughton (N) & Hunger Hill - 39 Westhoughton (S) - 22	<u>Neighbourhood 3:</u> <u>North – 106 responses</u> Astley Bridge - 40 Bromley Cross - 32 Bradshaw – 18 Heaton, Lostock & Chew Moor - 3 Smithills - 6 Tonge with the Haulgh - 7
<u>Neighbourhood 4:</u> <u>East – 60 responses</u> Bradshaw - 3 Brightmet – 28 Little Lever & Darcy Lever – 16 Tonge with the Haulgh - 13	<u>Neighbourhood</u> <u>5: Central South – 33 responses</u> Great Lever - 4 Heaton, Lostock & Chew Moor - 4 Hulton - 6 Queens Park & Central - 3 Rumworth - 10 Tonge with the Haulgh - 6	<u>Neighbourhood 6:</u> <u>Central North – 60 responses</u> Halliwell - 13 Heaton, Lostock & Chew Moor - 15 Queens Park & Central - 11 Smithills – 21

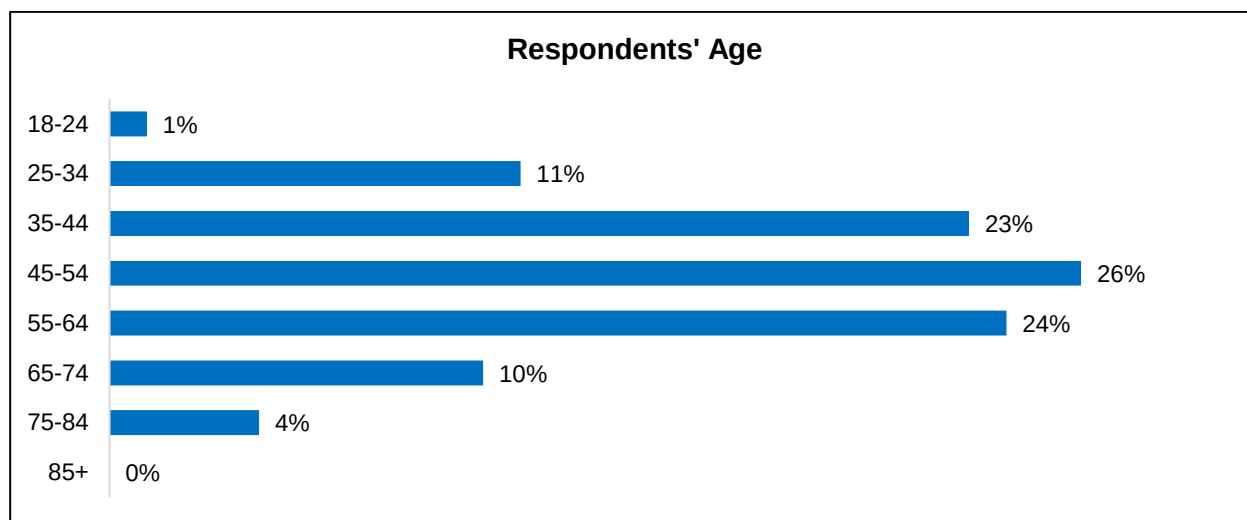
17b. Gender

572 responses were received providing the respondent's gender. 58% of respondents identify as female, 40% as male and 2% of respondents identify as 'other'.



17c. Age

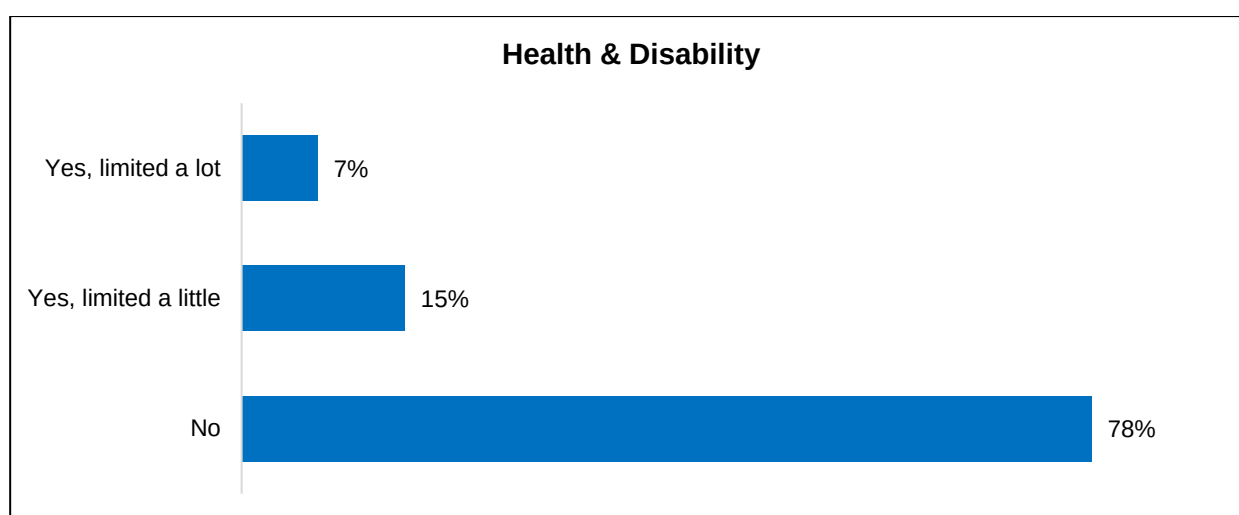
Responses were received from individuals in all age categories. 1% of responses are under the age of 18 years. 84% of respondents are aged between 25 – 64 years. 14% of responses were received from individuals above the age of 65 years.



Base: 575

17d. Health and disability

Of the 583 stakeholders responding to the consultation, over one-fifth (22%) have their day-to-day activities limited due to a long-term physical or mental health condition or illness.

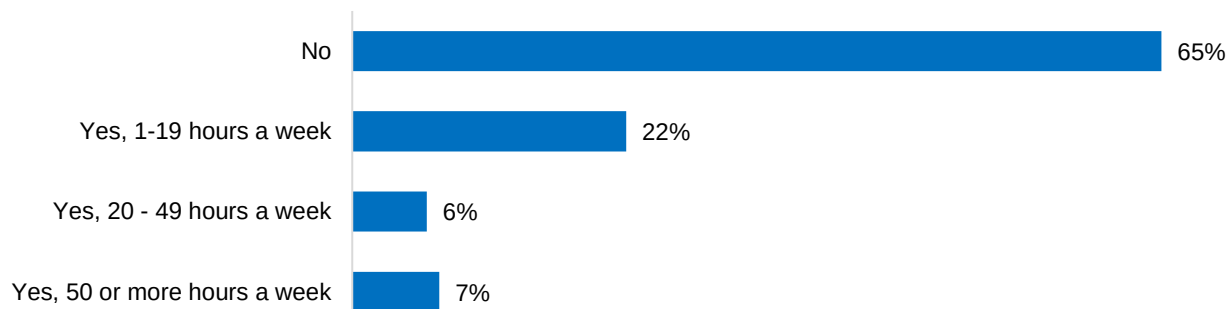


Base: 583

17e. Caring responsibility

Over one-third (35%) of individuals taking part in the consultation look after or provide some form of help or support to family members, friends, neighbours and others, who need help because they have a long-term physical or mental ill-health / are disabled or have problems relating to old age.

Caring Responsibilities

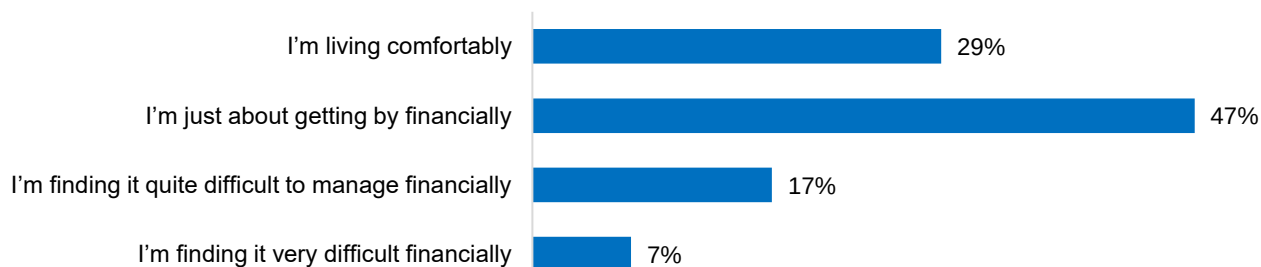


Base: 584

17f. Cost of Living

All stakeholders were asked to reflect on the cost-of-living impact and how financially stable they considered themselves. Of the 548 responses received, nearly one-quarter (24%) were finding it challenging financially.

Cost of Living

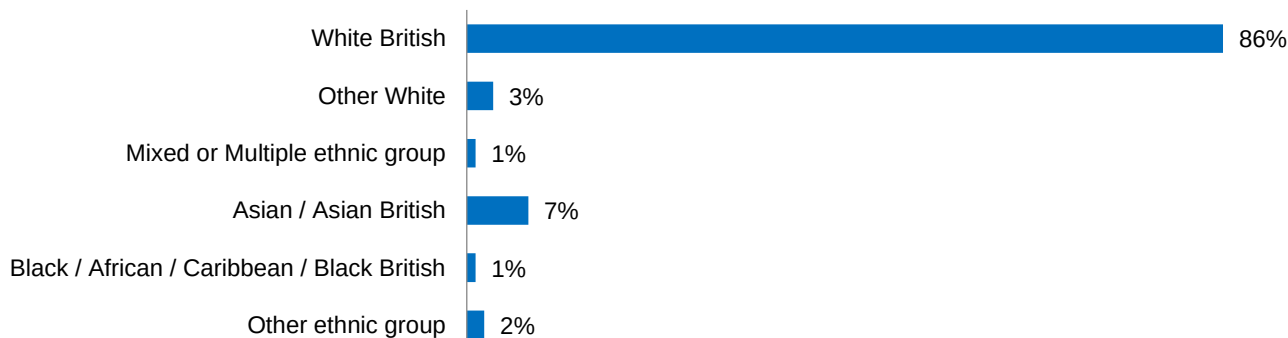


Base: 548

17g. Ethnicity

Of the 580 responses received, 86% are from residents and stakeholders who identify as being 'white British'. 14% of responses are representative of communities other than 'white-British', with 7% of those being from the Asian/Asian British community.

Ethnicity



Base: 580

18. Summary

In December 2023, Bolton Council's Cabinet approved proposals for the 2024/25 budget for consultation with stakeholders. The proposals reflected the continuing financial challenges faced by the organisation, resulting in a £9.1 million budget gap. Between 5th December 2023 and 9th January 2024, the Council ran a public consultation, seeking to engage residents and stakeholders impacted by future funding cuts in sharing their reflections on a proposed reduction in Council budgets.

During this period 618 residents and stakeholders engaged in the consultation process, with one formal response being received from Bolton Neighbourhood Watch.

The following information outlines a summary to the consultation responses.

- **Increase in fees and charges**

58% of stakeholders agreed in principle with the proposal. However residents raised concerns around the affordability of the offer and the proposals effect on those that are disabled, are carers and those that are economically disadvantaged.

The proposal to charge for **school transport**, for Early Years children and young people aged 16+ years who access SEND education, was seen to have a negative impact on families, particularly those that had more than one disabled child. Residents highlighted how disabled families have greater expenditure and reduced financial budgets and therefore the proposal seemed to be disproportionately impacting this cohort. Working parents were also seen as being disproportionately impacted, resulting in some questioning whether they could continue to work if the proposal was implemented. The responses also highlighted a concern that school and nursery attendance could decline and the continuation of post-16 education could be reduced if the proposal was introduced.

Some comments also referenced the challenges of accessing **SEND services**, stating that any further cuts could significantly impact an under resourced area and be detrimental to the future life outcomes of disabled children.

- **Changing the way we deliver services**

66% of stakeholders agreed with the principle to look at alternative ways to deliver services.

There were significant concerns with the proposal to change the **paper/cardboard waste collection**. Residents highlighted the different methods of collection currently in place, with some residents having to use refuse sacks and others having shared access to paper recycling bins. The proposal was seen to differentially impact families and multiple occupancy households, as well as those with limited access to



transport. Residents questioned whether additional community provision would be accessible if the proposal was to be introduced.

Concerns were also raised that the proposal could result in an increase in residents using general waste, as well as a rise in fly-tipping. Some stakeholders also outlined concern around the increase production of paper and cardboard by manufacturers and delivery firms.

Alternatives to the proposal were put forward, including reviewing whether mixed recycling waste (burgundy bin) or green garden waste could be more conducive to a monthly collection (only in winter for green bins).

Dimming and trimming street lighting was also a concern for residents, who thought that women, children, shift workers and people with disabilities could be put at risk as a result of the proposal (either through victims of crime or at an increased risk of having an accident). Some stakeholders are particularly concerned with the possibility of a rise in criminal activity and anti-social behaviour.

Respondents were concerned by the limited levels of service delivery being provided by **Early Help**, stating a significant under-resourcing of the provision. Other respondents are concerned that **Adult Social Care** would be negatively affected, with cuts to the service hitting our most vulnerable residents the hardest.

Residents are concerned with the proposal to review **libraries**, in particular moving to a commercial or privatised delivery model. They are particularly concerned with the quality-of-service depleting, which would negatively impact younger, older and socially disadvantaged service users the most.

Some residents and stakeholders were particularly concerned by a possible reliance on central government funding for **welfare support**, and the impact any change could have on vulnerable and economically deprived communities, including the working poor. Whilst respondents recognised the wider political challenges local authorities were facing nationally, they called for greater lobbying to take place. Some stakeholders also outlined the cumulative impact the proposals would have on the wider community and voluntary sector.

There was overwhelming agreement to review non-statutory functions, particularly in relation to the proposal to reduce **mayoral expenditure**. Stakeholders called for the Council to go further with its proposal and reduce this service further and review other non-statutory functions. This could reduce the impact of cuts for statutory services.

- **Using buildings efficiently**



97% of residents agreed with the proposal to use buildings efficiently, however there is concern around the impact to local community groups and whether mitigations would be put in place to reduce any potential impact for the community and voluntary sector.

- **Staff costs and efficiencies**

78% of stakeholders agreed with the proposal to review staff costs and evaluate where efficiencies could be made. However, concerns were raised by stakeholders and employees who outlined the additional impact on the workforce, particularly on teams running on limited resources and feeling overstretched. Respondents thought there would be an adverse impact on the mental health and wellbeing of staff, having to pick up extra responsibilities as a result of the proposals. This could lead to a risk in some employees leaving the organisation, and with it a loss of talent and knowledge.

Some respondents were concerned that the proposal would have a negative impact on service user experience, particularly as the level of service quality may diminish as a result. Other comments called for pay scales and roles to be reviewed to remain competitive, as well as a review of service areas to establish where there is stretch and capacity. Some felt that the organisation operated a top-heavy management structure and called for this to be reviewed, alongside the expenses of councillors.

- **Increasing commercial income**

84% agreed with the proposal to increase commercial income, however concerns were raised, including the affordability of services, particularly to charities and third-sector enterprises. Others aired caution, concerned that inward investment could be lost to neighbouring towns, whilst others highlighted the need to remain competitive and attract new investors. Some respondents referenced the challenges around town centre regeneration and the need to raise commercial prices to investors, including those from the film, events and corporate sector.

- **Review and renew contracts**

81% agreed with the proposal, however reservations around outsourcing was highlighted as a concern, particularly monitoring the quality of delivery. A number of respondents disagreed with the request for contracted organisations to implement the real living wage, stating it wasn't the Council's responsibility and could lead to services ultimately costing more. Some stakeholders felt it was more important to use our workforce effectively and pay skilled workers competitive salaries. Others called for services to be brought back in house, where budgets, quality and performance could be monitored more effectively.

- **Council Tax increase**

63% were opposed to the increase in Council Tax, with 57% stating that there should be no increase, and 43% stating any increase should be less than 4.99%. If an increase had to be implemented, the preferred option would be to raise between 2.1% and 3%.



Overwhelming stakeholders highlighted concerns with the proposal. A number questioned charging residents more for poorly delivered and reduced services. Others outlined significant economic impacts to residents, particularly the economically disadvantaged, including the working poor that can't access funding and services easily due to eligibility. Some outlined concern that it would push residents into poverty.

- **Empty and second homes**

85% agree with both of the proposals, however some thought grant exemptions should be available for certain circumstances (renovations, probate, older residents moving into residential care). Some respondents thought it wasn't a fair proposal, targeting owners that don't access additional council resources. Some thought the proposal could reduce the quality of housing stock and particularly impact those that rent.

- **Managing change**

77% agree that the budget reductions are needed and 92% are aware of the need to change the way the Council delivers services. However, 57% of stakeholders feel that the Council isn't doing its best in the current climate.

Stakeholders are particularly concerned by the financial impact the proposals would have on the borough, impacting those with socio-economic difficulties, people with disabilities and older generations supporting younger family members financially. Residents felt that implementation of the proposals could lead to a worsening in mental health, a rise in social inequality and an increase in people accessing emergency support and funding.

Some respondents raised concerns around the ineffectiveness of the Council's business delivery model and called for the organisation to review and explore alternative business approaches and solutions for making services financially viable.

An array of alternative approaches were presented, with the most popular suggestions being to review staff costings and whole council efficiency; reducing provisions within services that are non-statutory or are unaffordable; increasing charges and fines; and seeking alternative revenue streams.

- **Stakeholder priorities 2024 / 2025**

Stakeholders outlined their priorities for the financial year 2024/2025 as supporting '*community safety and tackling anti-social behaviour*'; '*Adults and Children's Social Care*'; and '*keeping our roads in good shape*'.

2024/25 Budget consultation

Please complete this questionnaire online if possible by going to Bolton Council's website www.bolton.gov.uk and searching for 'Active consultations', where you will also find the report and background documents. If, however, you need paper copies of any documents please ring the Consultation & Research Team on 01204 334875.

Consultation runs 5th December 2023 to noon 9th January 2024

In November 2023, Bolton Council's Cabinet approved a plan for consultation to balance the council's 2024/25 budget, by making cuts of £9.1 million and using £10 million from our reserves.

We have come up with several proposals to help us to make these cuts, and are now consulting on these proposals. By taking part in this consultation, residents and other stakeholders can help guide and shape the difficult decisions that need to be made.

Your views will be considered alongside other information to help Bolton Council decide on the final budget options in February 2024. Further consultation will be done once detailed service options have been drawn up.

Please read the full report and background documents before completing this questionnaire, which can be found online: www.bolton.gov.uk under 'Active consultations'.

Your response - keeping your data safe

Most questions are optional; just miss out any that you don't want to answer.

The results of this consultation may be made public. If you're responding as an individual you won't be identified in any report, as your responses will be anonymised and grouped with those from other people. If you're responding in an official capacity, your response may be published, but no personal details will be included.

Any personal data you provide will be held securely, in line with our retention schedule and privacy policy which can be found online: www.bolton.gov.uk/data-protection-freedom-information/privacy-notices. We use Snap Surveys professional software to collect and process your data. Their privacy policy can be found online www.snapsurveys.com/survey-software/privacy-policy-uk/. Snap Surveys Ltd. follow the UK General Data Protection Regulation.

Proposed cuts and income raising

We have come up with a number of proposals to help us to make cuts of £9.1 million to help balance our 2024/25 budget and would like your views. Cutting services won't be easy and we'll have to make some difficult choices.

Local authorities across the country are struggling due to increased demand for services and reduced income.

Whilst we will always try to protect the most vulnerable people in our society and meet the needs of our residents, the reality is that we are now faced with making more reductions to services and increasing or introducing direct charges for the services we provide.

The ways we are proposing to make cuts and bring in more money are outlined below, but more information can be found in the full report and background documents which can be found online: www.bolton.gov.uk under 'Active consultations'.

If these budget proposals are approved, more detailed consultation will take place before any service changes are made.

Increase fees and charges for residents

We're proposing to increase our income by charging for some services that currently we don't charge separately for. We're also proposing to increase some fees and charges for other services.

Free school transport, for children with Special Educational Needs, is currently provided so that pupils aged up to 19 get to school college or nursery free of charge. They may use public transport, school buses or special transport if they have special needs. Whilst we have a legal duty to provide this for those aged 5-16, we are considering implementing tiered and/or means tested transport charges for pupils who are under five or over sixteen. If this principle is approved, the details of this option would be subject to further public consultation in 2024.

Q1. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the proposal to increase some fees and charges for residents?

- ☐ Strongly agree - go to Q2
- ☐ Agree - go to Q2
- ☐ Disagree - go to Q1a
- ☐ Strongly disagree - go to Q1a
- ☐ No opinion - go to Q2

Q1a. Please tell us why you disagree with the proposal to increase some fees and charges for residents

Changing the way we deliver services

We could save money by offering services in different ways. This could include turning down street lights so they weren't as bright, not leaving them on all night, and switching off any that aren't needed. We are also considering emptying household paper / cardboard [beige] bins once a month instead of fortnightly.

Turning to social and welfare care and support, people's expectations and needs have changed. Increased use of technology, such as fall mats and remote monitoring, means that more people are able to live independently for longer. We may be able to offer different housing and social support at a lower cost that still meets individual needs.

In a similar way we could review the Early Help model and how we deliver Early Help to children and families. Early Help supports families at an early stage to stop issues becoming worse.

Another area that we'd like to review is the way we help people in crisis with one-off support to buy food and essential items. Rather than giving this support through the Local Welfare Provision, which is funded by Bolton Council, we may be able to help people through the Household Support Fund which is funded by the government.

We could also look at other services that have traditionally been run by the council, to see if there are alternative ways that we could continue to provide these services, for example in our library service.

The Mayor of Bolton represents the town at a wide range of functions and events. This is an important role, but we feel that savings could be made by reducing the number of events attended and by organising mayoral events in different ways.

Q2. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the proposal to look at different ways to deliver services?

- ☐ Strongly agree - go to Q3
- ☐ Agree - go to Q3
- ☐ Disagree - go to Q2a
- ☐ Strongly disagree - go to Q2a
- ☐ No opinion - go to Q3

Q2a. Please tell us why you disagree with the proposal to look at different ways to deliver services

Use buildings more efficiently

We could undertake further reviews to make sure our buildings are being used efficiently. This could include making maximum use of council owned buildings, so that we're not paying rent to someone else when we already own a suitable building that could be used instead.

If our buildings are only being used in the daytime, we could offer them to other organisations or groups to help raise income.

Q3. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the proposal to use buildings more efficiently?

- ☐ Strongly agree - go to Q4
- ☐ Agree - go to Q4
- ☐ Disagree - go to Q3a
- ☐ Strongly disagree - go to Q3a
- ☐ No opinion - go to Q4

Q3a. Please tell us why you disagree with the proposal to use buildings more efficiently

Staff costs and efficiencies

We would continue to undertake regular service reviews to see if teams can work more efficiently or if they can be merged.

When someone leaves we could review their post and duties to see if they can be done differently or if they need to be replaced.

Q4. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the proposal around staff costs and efficiencies?

- ☐ Strongly agree - go to Q5
- ☐ Agree - go to Q5
- ☐ Disagree - go to Q4a
- ☐ Strongly disagree - go to Q4a
- ☐ No opinion - go to Q5

Q4a. Please tell us why you disagree with the proposal around staff costs and efficiencies

Increase commercial income

Bolton town centre and borough already attracts investors both regionally and nationally, through its events, filming and sponsorship opportunities. By seeking out more investment and raising the amounts we charge, we could bring in more money to help support services for our residents.

We could also increase the hire charges and rents that organisations and groups pay to use council-owned buildings, whilst ensuring our charges remain competitive.

Q5. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the proposal to increase commercial income?

- ☐ Strongly agree - go to Q6
- ☐ Agree - go to Q6
- ☐ Disagree - go to Q5a
- ☐ Strongly disagree - go to Q5a
- ☐ No opinion - go to Q6

Q5a. Please tell us why you disagree with the proposal to increase commercial income

Review and renew contracts

The council commissions some of its services from external providers. Instead of services being provided directly by Bolton Council staff, we invite organisations to tender [or bid] for the work that needs to be done. We then carefully select the bid that offers the services we require at the right price.

We would look to retendering all commissions, rather than simply renewing them. We would also regularly review existing commissions to make sure that they still meet our needs and are providing good value.

We would like to introduce the Real Living Wage [currently £12 an hour] as a minimum for staff employed by organisations that provide services for us under a contract. As this would increase costs for our partners, it's likely that Bolton Council would have to pay more for contracted out services, but we feel it's important to recognise the valuable work done by staff who provide public services.

Q6. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the proposal around reviewing contracts?

- ☐ Strongly agree - go to Q7
- ☐ Agree - go to Q7
- ☐ Disagree - go to Q6a
- ☐ Strongly disagree - go to Q6a
- ☐ No opinion - go to Q7

Q6a. Please tell us why you disagree with the proposal around reviewing contracts

Council Tax

Council Tax is made up of a General Levy [for general services provided by Bolton Council], an Adult Social Care Levy [social care support for adults] and two Greater Manchester Mayoral Precepts [fire services, police and the Greater Manchester Mayor]
Residents in Blackrod, Horwich and Westhoughton pay an additional Parish Levy which goes towards the cost of their Town Councils.

We are proposing a 2.99% increase in the General Levy plus a 2% rise for Adult Social Care.

If this proposal goes ahead, this 4.99% rise would add £56.14 a year to a Band A property and £74.85 a year to a Band C property.

Any increases in the GM Mayoral Precept and Parish Levies would be on top of the 4.99% rise.

Each 1% rise in Council Tax would bring in around £1.3 million, so the proposed rise would bring in an extra £6.5million in 2024/25.

If Council Tax does not rise by 4.99%, further cuts would need to be made to services in order to balance the budget.

There would be no change to the Council Tax Support Scheme which allows those in most need to apply for help towards paying their Council Tax.

Q7. How strongly you agree or disagree with the proposal to raise Council Tax by 4.99%?

- ☐ Strongly agree - go to Q8
- ☐ Agree - go to Q8
- ☐ Disagree - go to Q7a
- ☐ Strongly disagree - go to Q7a
- ☐ No opinion - go to Q8

Q7a. If you disagree, what should happen to Council Tax?

- ☐ No increase - go to Q8
- ☐ Rise by less than 4.99% - go to Q7b
- ☐ Rise by more than 4.99% - go to Q7b
- ☐ No opinion - go to Q8

Q7b. How much do you think Council Tax should rise by?

Empty properties and second home discount

The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 changed the way we can apply Council Tax.

We currently charge owners of empty properties double Council Tax when their property has been empty for two years. We're proposing to start charging double Council Tax once a property has been empty for one year.

Q9. How strongly you agree or disagree with the proposal to double Council Tax once properties have been empty for a year?

- ☐ Strongly agree - go to Q10
- ☐ Agree - go to Q10
- ☐ Disagree - go to Q9a
- ☐ Strongly disagree - go to Q9a
- ☐ No opinion - go to Q10

Q9a. Please tell us why you disagree with the proposal to double Council Tax once properties have been empty for a year

We're also considering removing the second home discount. Currently, second home owners are charged full Council Tax during the first year, which doubles after the second year. We're proposing to start charging double Council Tax after the first year. This will come into effect for second home owners from April 2025.

Q10. How strongly you agree or disagree with the proposal to charge full Council Tax on second homes?

- ☐ Strongly agree - go to Q11
- ☐ Agree - go to Q11
- ☐ Disagree - go to Q10a
- ☐ Strongly disagree - go to Q10a
- ☐ No opinion - go to Q11

Q10a. Please tell us why you disagree with the proposal to charge full Council Tax on second homes

Managing change

Q11. Please say how far you agree / disagree with the following statements about the financial challenges faced by the council.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
I accept that budget reductions have to be made	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I'm aware of the need for the council to change the way it delivers its services	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I think the council is doing its best under difficult circumstances	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Impact of the proposals

Q12. Please describe how you / your family / the people you represent will be affected if the proposals are carried out.

☐ No impact / no comments

Alternative solutions

Q13. Please use this space if you want to suggest any other ways Bolton Council could make cuts of £9.1 million whilst still delivering statutory services, or other ways we could raise income

☐ No comments

Further comments

Q14. Please use this space for any further comments about the budget proposals

☐ No comments

Your priorities

Q15. Understanding what services are a priority for you is important to us, as it helps inform the way we deliver services and the decisions we make.

Please select the top THREE priorities that are important to you. Please choose a maximum of three.

- ☐ Action on poverty
- ☐ Adult and Children's Social Care
- ☐ Becoming a net-zero carbon town and supporting our climate ambitions
- ☐ Community safety and tackling anti-social behaviour
- ☐ Community engagement, partnership working and support for voluntary services
- ☐ Investment into Bolton
- ☐ Keeping our neighbourhoods clean, including fly-tipping and littering
- ☐ Keeping our roads in good shape
- ☐ Maintaining parks and green spaces
- ☐ Maintaining leisure, cultural facilities and events to keep people active and happy
- ☐ Resident Health and Wellbeing
- ☐ Supporting residents to access digital services & technologies and investment into digitalising services
- ☐ Tackling homelessness and creating better housing
- ☐ Another priority - go to Q15a

Q15a. If 'another priority' please state. We will look at a maximum of three priorities for this question, including any you have selected from the list.

Your interest

Q16. Which one of the following best describes you / your family's interest in this matter?

- ☐ Live in Bolton borough [Bolton Council area] - go to Q17
- ☐ Work in Bolton borough - go to Q17
- ☐ Study / have children at school in Bolton borough - go to Q17
- ☐ Visitor to Bolton - go to Q17
- ☐ Official response from Parish / Bolton borough Councillor / Elected Member - please answer Q16b and c, then there are no further questions for you. Please don't complete the 'About you' section
- ☐ Official response from a business / organisation / community group. You must have their permission to submit an official response on their behalf - please answer Q16b and c, then there are no further questions for you. Please don't complete the 'About you' section
- ☐ None of the above - please go to Q16a

Q16a. Please say what your interest is

Q16b. Please say which ward, business organisation or community group you represent

Q16b. Please say which ward, business organisation or community group you represent

Q16c. Please say what your role is - in what official capacity do you represent the business, organisation or community group?

About you

Your answers in this section help us to make sure we are getting views from different types of people. They won't be used to contact or identify you.

Q17. Please give your full postcode

Q18. Are you...?

☐ Female

☐ Male

☐ Identify in another way

Q19. Which age group are you in?

☐ Under18

☐ 35 - 44

☐ 65 - 74

☐ 18 - 24

☐ 45 - 54

☐ 75 - 84

☐ 25 - 34

☐ 55 - 64

☐ 85 or over

Q20. Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a long-term physical or mental health condition of illness?

☐ Yes, limited a lot

☐ Yes, limited a little

☐ No

Q21. Do you look after, or give any help of support to family members, friends, neighbours or others who need help because they have a long-term physical or mental ill-health / disability, or have problems relating to old age?

Please don't count anything you do as part of paid employment.

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ No | ☐ Yes, 20 - 49 hours a week |
| ☐ Yes, 1-19 hours a week | ☐ Yes, 50 or more hours a week |

Q22. We'd like to better understand how the cost of living might be affecting people in Bolton and what we can do to help. The next question is important to help us do this.

How do you feel you are managing financially these days?

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ I'm living comfortably | ☐ I'm finding it very difficult financially |
| ☐ I'm just about getting by financially | ☐ Prefer not to say |
| ☐ I'm finding it quite difficult to manage financially | |

Q23. What is your ethnic group?

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ White British | ☐ Asian or Asian British |
| ☐ White other | ☐ Black, Black British, Caribbean or African |
| ☐ Mixed or Multiple ethnic group | ☐ Other ethnic group |

Thanks! Please post to: Freepost RTTT-YTEL-YSXS, Consultation & Research Team, 2nd Floor, Town Hall, Victoria Square, Bolton, BL1 1RU

Appendix B



BOLTON BOROUGH NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH ASSOCIATION

Monday, 08 January 2024

Re: Budget Consultation 2024 -2025

To whom it may concern

On behalf of Bolton Borough Neighbourhood Watch Association I would like to raise objections to the proposal of dimming and turning off street lighting in the Bolton area.

Bolton Borough Neighbourhood Watch Association is part of the Greater Manchester Neighbourhood Watch Association and represents local registered members of the national Neighbourhood Watch Network, the largest volunteer crime prevention organisation in England and Wales.

Although we all understand the need to take cost saving measures, these savings should not be made at the cost of safety to people or property and crime prevention.

The Royal College of Policing has published a document that shows across the 13 studies reviewed, both violent and property crime was reduced by an average of 21% in areas with improved street lighting compared to areas without.

The document goes on to say

“Specifically, improved street lighting might reduce crime through the following mechanisms.

- Increasing visibility and the number of people that use the street. This could lead to increased or more effective natural surveillance that may deter crime. If this mechanism worked as anticipated in the studies included in the review, then you would expect the effects of street lighting to be greatest during the hours of darkness. However, in the case of the four studies that only examined the impact of improved street lighting on levels of crime at night, there was no evidence of an impact on crime. In contrast, the nine studies that examined changes in levels of crime during the day and night found a statistically significant impact on crime in the areas with improved street lighting, which suggests an alternative mechanism may be in place (see next bullet).
- Demonstrating investment in the neighbourhood. This has the potential to improve community conditions that could plausibly lead to residents caring more about their neighbourhood and consequently being more likely to take actions that might reduce crime in them. The finding that improved street lighting did not have an impact on crime solely after dark is consistent with this explanation.”

The police and crime prevention organisations will always advise people to ensure their homes and communities are well lit. We all know that criminals do not like to be seen. By decreasing the amount of light in our communities it gives criminals more opportunities to commit crime undetected. Descriptions of offenders can be vital in securing convictions and lighting can play a big part in a witness being able to identify an offender. If a defence solicitor puts even the slightest bit of doubt into a jurors mind when questioning a witness' recollection of events or how clearly they could see due to lighting in the area, it can result in a criminal walking free from court.

Reduced lighting could also delay emergency responses to incidents if house numbers are easily visible. Where minutes or seconds can be the difference between life and death, every moment can be critical. While it is the property owners responsibility to ensure their house number is visible, a lot choose to have less obvious numbers, some of which are only clear when ample lighting is applied to them. Any changes to the lighting within the borough should give ample notice to residents to make any adjustments necessary to maintain their safety and security of themselves, their property and others within the community.

We also have to consider the chances of any criminal to evade capture. Criminals wear dark clothing for a reason; it is so they cannot be seen. We should be looking at assisting our police officers in identifying and removing criminals from our streets. If you have ever chased a criminal down a street, it is imperative to keep them in sight. With reduced lighting comes increased dark areas for criminals to hide in. You could be a few feet away from someone and not know. This is before we even consider the increased risk to officers in not having good visibility not only of their surroundings but also of suspects. We do not want officers receiving injuries and reducing their already depleted numbers any further.

There is also the additional cost implications to home and business owners. Will insurance companies see the reduced lighting as an opportunity to increase the risk ratings on their policies? The increased risks equal increased costs, and while the council are looking to save money, the people in Bolton will suffer increased costs to their insurance premiums, which then can have further implications to their lives through the household budgets.

Personal safety is also an issue that should be looked at. The number one piece of advice is to stay in well-lit areas. The modern LED street lights already cast huge shadows due to the light being directional as oppose to the older sodium lamps. These shadows are partly caused by the distance between the street lights as they were positioned for radiant light as opposed to directional.

The argument could be used that anybody out walking at night could carry a torch. While that would be great advice already, a torch can also be used as a distraction or weapon. If a torch is shone at you can you see what is behind it? The answer is no! Who is behind the light? How many people are there that you can't see?

It is noted in the in the published FAQ document that the council have risk assessed all lights across the borough and 30% of these will not be dimmed. Will the council make the risk assessment documents available to the public? The document states that "certain Town Centre locations" will not be dimmed. How many shops are open overnight in the town centre? If they won't be dimmed due to safety of people using the town centre at night, then surely the same argument can be used that people using other areas of Bolton also require their safety to be protected and maintained.

Will the council publish prior to any proposal being voted on, the specific areas where it has been risk assessed that lighting should remain fully lit? Ideally this information should have been published prior to the consultation closing date.

Problems on our roads will also increase with reduced lighting. The safety of all road users should be considered. While I appreciate that less lighting may reduce speeds of vehicles due to less visibility of hazards, there will still be those who drive at excess speed and not to the conditions. The number of road users who wear dark clothing increases the chances of serious collisions taking place.

RoSPA have published an extract from a report into nighttime accidents:

"Street lighting provides a number of important benefits. It can be used to promote security in urban areas and to increase the quality of life by artificially extending the hours in which it is light so that activity can take place.

Street lighting also improves safety for drivers, riders, and pedestrians. Driving outside of daylight hours is more dangerous – only a quarter of all travel by car drivers is between the hours of 7pm and 8am, yet this period accounts for 40% of fatal and serious injuries to the same group.

Pedestrians and vulnerable road users suffer from decreased visibility in the dark too. For these reasons, ways of reducing the risk to all road users during the hours of darkness must be found."

A few comments from our scheme coordinators who represent over 3000 Neighbourhood Watch members across Bolton

- Turning off street lighting to save money is a thoroughly bad idea. This area and its surrounds has been particularly prone to ASB and low level crime all of which would be worsened by the cover of darkness.
- I don't think the lights should be turned off, but slight dimming would be a good option.

- I'm strongly against this proposal by BMBC.

I've noticed that when I report non-working lights these days it takes ages to get them repaired and if the lights are dimmed this will make areas much darker .

The streets are dark enough already and the new LED lights installed a few years ago were promised to save more electric and now this.

Many people won't go out at night and criminals will be less likely to be seen increasing crime.

Good lighting, the Police always tells reduces crime Park in well-lit areas etc install extra lighting etc.

The council should stop wasting money in other areas and become more efficient.

Rather not have Christmas lights and better street lighting.

As C Tax payers we get less and less from BMBC and this is a step too far.

- If Bolton Council is serious about road user safety FORGET THIS STUPID IDEA RIGHT NOW.

Why do you think street lighting was introduced ?? The lighting of Bolton's roads is already diabolical. LED lighting causes shadows and black spots, the absence of lit-up keep-left signs, bollards, islands and pedestrian refuges compounds the problem. The kerb edges of many of these non-highlighted large structures and additionally pedestrians in dark clothing and the extremities of parked vehicles cannot be easily seen, especially on damp evenings. Try driving down Blackburn Rd for example in inclement weather, it tests the capabilities of the most experienced of drivers. And if you think it's an age-related problem of deteriorating eyesight think again, that's an urban myth. I know many young drivers who have difficulties. There's a growing number of people that have ceased to drive after dusk seemingly believing this myth. You should be improving conditions Bolton Council not adding to the risks.

- I am registering my opinion on this ridiculous proposition. This is a ridiculous idea. Criminals will be able to move around undetected. People will be at greater risk of being hit by cars when crossing the road. Pedestrians will be unable to see trip hazards on pavements. Whoever came up with this nonsense needs to go and join the real world. Completely pratish suggestion.
- I would like to express my strong disagreement with the proposal to dim street lighting. Criminals thrive in darkness, taking advantage of reduced visibility to carry out illicit activities. The potential repercussions of dimming street lights on public safety are significant. The increased risk to both vehicle users and pedestrians poses a serious concern, especially given the modern dazzling headlights that can make obstructions and hazards harder to detect.

Moreover, with crime rates already on the rise, reducing the visibility in our neighbourhoods seems counterintuitive to effective crime prevention. Instead of addressing the root causes and finding proactive solutions to reduce criminal activity, dimming street lights may inadvertently contribute to an environment conducive to illicit behaviour.

Furthermore, I would like to highlight the potential economic consequences of this proposal. Diminished safety and security could lead to a decline in business activities and an exodus of businesses from the town. A thriving business environment depends on a sense of security, and any compromise in this regard may result in financial losses far exceeding the projected £9.1 million in savings. It is essential to consider the broader impact on the community, including potential job losses and economic downturn.

In conclusion, I urge the council to reconsider this proposal and explore alternative cost-saving measures that do not compromise the safety and well-being of the community. I believe that investing in robust crime prevention strategies and maintaining adequate street lighting is crucial for the overall prosperity and security of Bolton.

- I strongly feel this would be a mistake as burglars love the dark and there are some expensive cars around in our close and feel street lighting is a deterrent.
- No to turning off streetlights. Streetlight dimming is a problem, reason being it is hard to see trips on the pavements. Also cars/vehicles parking on pavements, shades the light making it harder to see.

I am against any reduction in lighting. In fact I would prefer more lighting to be put in place in some areas that have little or no lighting. Although not a Bolton problem....some of the unlit motorways feel very dangerous.

It will make pedestrians feel less safe.

It could result in more pedestrians injured in road traffic accidents.

It could result in more targeted sexual assaults.

It could result in more thefts from the person.

Vehicles broken down or involved in accidents would make passengers very vulnerable. Most especially if they were unable to operate any hazard warning lights on their vehicles.

All in all....this does seem to be a no starter to me. ..

I do sympathise with trying to find a solution to saving 9.1 million. I'm glad I don't have to come up with ideas.

- The dimming and turning off of certain streetlights is indeed highly contentious. Firstly, have Greater Manchester Police and the Council Anti-social Behaviour teams been consulted about this for their input?

Secondly, how much would the monitoring and potential need for increased resources to manage problems unidentified by the proposals cost? Where I live, there are certain areas that are already poorly lit, and they are a source of significant ASB ranging from drug taking, drug dealing, congregation of large groups of people, open sexual activity, and more. Residents are already concerned about leaving their homes after dark as a direct result of the criminal activity, and our estate is notoriously difficult for the police to apprehend criminals due to the amount of dimly lit footpaths and places to hide.

Thirdly, as a woman, I am constantly receiving the message to avoid poorly lit areas due to the growing problem of serious violence against women. What plans do the Council have to reassure the women of Bolton that their safety will not be compromised by dimming or removing lighting altogether?

Can any of the lighting costs be included as part of the proposed precept on businesses operating in the nighttime economy?

- Criminals love the dark as there is less chance of them being seen as they can hide in the shadows. Safety of road users could be compromised, both vehicle users and pedestrians, more so with the lack of maintenance on the areas roads. Obstructions and hazards could be more difficult to see especially with the dazzling headlights in use on modern vehicles.

In conclusion, there are more questions than answers, and it is essential that these questions are properly explored before this proposal is voted on. This should include input from GMP, and the Council ASB and Community Safety Officers.

If the proposals are accepted by the council to reduce the street lighting across Bolton, I would request that incidents and criminal activity is regularly reviewed and if an increase in risk to people or property is seen that all changes to the lighting are reversed as a matter of urgency. These reviews should be for a minimum of 12 months as crimes can increase over the winter months due to the longer and darker nights. You cannot put a cost on a life. Crime can affect people in many different ways and can place further strain on our already overstretched emergency services.

BOLTON BOROUGH NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH ASSOCIATION

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