

TITLE:	Budget Consultation 2021-22
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Background

1. As the Councils proposed budget for 2021-22 required no new savings to be identified, consultation on the 2021-22 Council Budget has been conducted via an online form, with feedback also invited via social media. The online form went live on the 05 January 2021 allowing for responses to be issued up until the 26 January 2021. In order to raise awareness of the consultation taking place the Council issued a press release and a series of social media alerts to invite response.

In addition, a letter has been distributed to key partners seeking their views.

Online Consultation

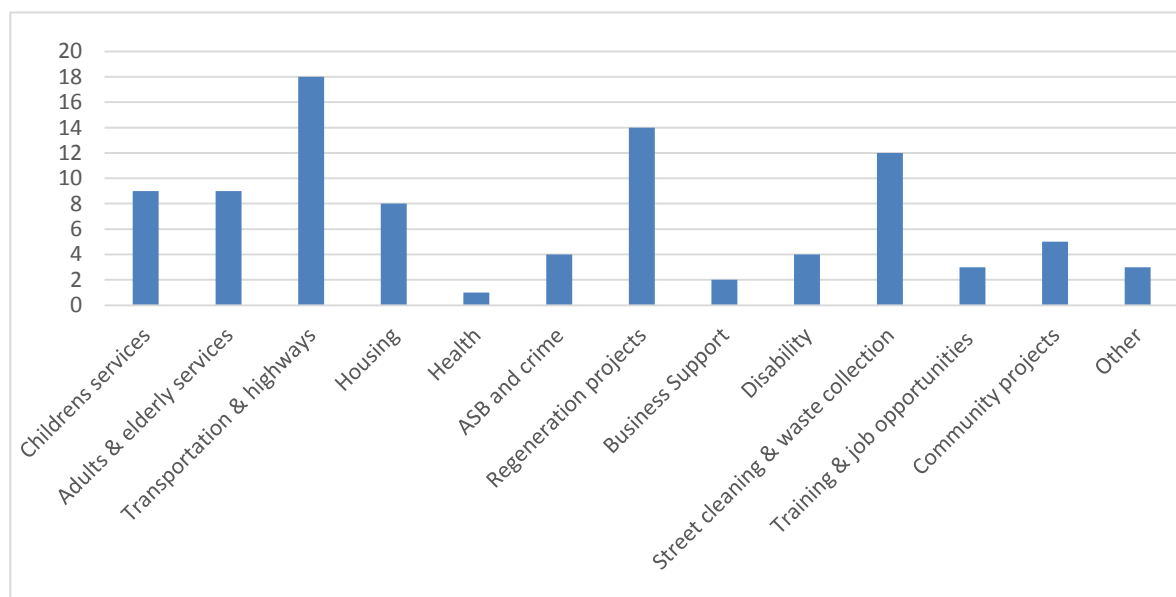
2. The online consultation was open from 05 January to 26 January and the online form had three questions, which allowed for “free text” responses:

- What would be your spending and saving priorities?
- Do you have any concerns about the Council’s current budget?
- Do you have any other thoughts on the budget?

A total of 56 people completed the online consultation. A summary of responses is set out below.

What would be your spending priorities?

All respondents answered question 1, which was concerned with spending and saving priorities; of these, all but five gave spending priorities. Many gave more than one priority. The responses are summarised by subject in the graph below.



- Transportation and highways were most frequently mentioned (18 mentions by respondents). Of these mentions, nine focussed on road maintenance/repairing potholes/resurfacing specifically and other mentions included traffic management and improved cycling infrastructure/walking pathways.
- Regeneration projects were also mentioned relatively frequently (14 mentions). This topic generated mixed responses – some respondents suggested more regeneration, with others against existing regeneration plans (Primark redevelopment). Nine respondents mentioned improvements to local areas – specifically parks/green spaces, and two mentioned the town centre.
- Of the 12 prioritisations of street cleaning and waste collection, four responses specifically mentioned fly-tipping, seven referenced general litter and more availability of bins, with two specific mentions of dog fouling.
- Services for children and adults were each prioritised nine times by respondents. Most respondents mentioned prioritising services for the most vulnerable and safeguarding. There were specific mentions of more support to care homes, improving primary school resources and the provision of safe places for vulnerable families.
- Eight respondents prioritised housing, with most mentioning new builds and affordable/environmentally-friendly homes. Three respondents mentioned homelessness as an issue they would like to see addressed.
- Community projects was mentioned by five respondents. These included specific responses around bringing diverse communities together and ensuring that BME communities feel safe.

What would be your saving priorities?

Whilst all respondents answered the first part of the question, only 31% (17 respondents) included a savings priority. These priorities broke down as follows:

Category	Cutting salaries/ expenses	Operational efficiency	Changes to services	Other
Frequency	4	5	6	2

The majority of responses relating to cutting salaries/expenses and operational efficiency suggested scaling back the Council's organisational structure to varying degrees. There were three mentions of reducing the number of councillors, and two mentions of freezing/reducing Council Tax. Others mentioned less waste, not printing documents, squandering money on failed projects, and cutting red tape and meeting expenses.

Only six respondents suggested changing a specific service in order to make savings. These suggestions included:

- Cutting back on events/less use of slogans

- Cutting back on house building (not giving permission for any further developments on council-owned land)
- Fewer new or widened roads
- Scrapping free bus passes and introducing a concessionary fare
- Not buying new gritters (hiring them as and when required)

“Other” saving priorities were as follows:

- Outsourcing to the private sector
- Stop HS2

Do you have any concerns about the Council’s current budget?

25 respondents (45%) raised a concern in response to question 2; others either left no response or indicated that they had no concerns. Concerns were raised in the following categories:

Category	Efficiency /wasted money	Salaries/ expenses	Consultation process/ budget clarity	Specific services	Overall spending priorities	General issues/ comments
Frequency	12	3	3	4	5	9

Comments on (lack of) efficiency or perceptions that money was being wasted focused on capital projects (e.g. Primark site development, bus station refurbishment) or unspecified “vanity projects”, as well as referencing poorly targeted road resurfacing, too many councillors, and not fully utilising Government Covid funding to support businesses (it was suggested that some of this money was sent back to the Treasury).

The “specific services” category included suggestions to prioritise children’s parks/centres, invest more in adult social care (via public sector provision), spend less on the town centre, and provide brown bins for free.

“Overall spending priorities” included broad concerns about there not being enough money available to support vulnerable people and the need to spend money in a particular place (Maltby).

General issues included:

- Not enough money available (e.g. due to lack of Government funding)
- People can’t afford a Council Tax increase
- Outlying towns forgotten
- More services should be “sold” to the private sector
- Various things are in a mess (e.g. roads, streets, security) and it’s hard to see where the money is spent

Do you have any other thoughts on the budget?

Question 3 received a slightly higher response rate than question 2, probably due to respondents wanting to elaborate on comments made on previous spending/saving priority questions.

Q3 Response rate	
Response	No response
37 66%	19 34%

“No response” includes indications given by respondents that they have no further thoughts/comments. Responses received were separated into the following categories:

Category	Queries	Service comments	Budget priorities	Organisational comments	Other
Frequency	2	3	21	8	4

One query question focused on how the Government can reinstate pre-financial crisis council budgets of 2008; the other query asking how the Council can increase residents’ involvement in the budget process.

Of the three comments regarding services, two aired concerns/priorities about street and pavement repairs. The other comment mentioned a dissatisfaction with the Primark development in the town centre.

“Budget priorities” refers to occasions where individuals restated their key spending/savings priorities, as broken down in earlier questions.

In the eight responses relating to organisational comments, the following themes were mentioned:

- Using more digital resources and reducing paper waste
- Tackling institutional racism within the Council
- Greater clarity on auditing practices
- Increasing income generating work

Comments in the “other” category were placed here due to not conforming to other discrete categories. They included:

- Increasing councillor engagement with local communities
- Suggestions that pay freezes for “essential workers” were disgusting
- Praise for the Council/Budget

Social Media Engagement

3. A series of posts on Twitter and Facebook alerted people to the budget consultation. The total audience reach (as at 26 January) was 27,016, with 45 comments, 37 shares and 16 likes.

Comments focused on the following issues:

- The importance of flood defences
- A suggestion that the Council is making profits from household recycling and a wider point about how Council Tax is being spent

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A suggestion that rents should be subsidised in the town centre to broaden the retail offer • Specific issues with missed bin collections and a general comment about fly tipping and bins • A specific request for investment in Coronation Park (Maltby) and a comment about investing in local football pitches/facilities • A request for the return of community grit bins • A comment about dealing with potholes
Other responses	
4.	<p>Partners</p> <p>Three responses have been received to the letter sent to key partners. These were from Rotherham Clinical Commissioning Group, Voluntary Action Rotherham and Barnsley and Rotherham Chamber of Commerce, and all were broadly supportive.</p> <p>In addition, a letter has been received from Alexander Stafford, the Member of Parliament for Rother Valley. Mr Stafford drew attention to a range of issues in his Rother Valley constituency relating to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local parks • Fly-tipping • Crime prevention • Investment in local high streets • Investment in public transport • Planning • Social care • Road maintenance
Recommendations	
5.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To note and consider the findings as part of the overall budget discussions.