

TITLE:	Budget Consultation 2025-26
Background	
1.	Consultation on the 2025-26 Council budget was conducted via an online form, with feedback also invited via social media. In addition, a letter was sent to key partners seeking their views.
Online Consultation	
2.	<p>The online consultation was open from 18 November 2024 to 10 January 2025. The online form had five questions, which allowed for “free text” responses:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What would be your spending priorities for the Council? 2. Where would you suggest the Council could reduce spending? 3. Do you have any concerns about the Council’s current budget? 4. Council Plan budget priorities 5. Do you have any other thoughts on the budget? <p>Question four was sub-divided into five separate questions, with respondents asked to give their comments on the five themes in the Council Plan:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every neighbourhood thriving • People are safe, healthy and live well • Every child able to fulfil their potential • Expanding economic opportunity • A cleaner, greener local environment <p>A total of 54 people completed the online consultation, this represented a significant decrease in the number of responses that were received on the budget consultation in the previous year (112). A summary of responses is set out below.</p> <p>What would be your spending priorities for the Council?</p> <p>A total of 29 different spending priorities were identified, spread across a wide range of themes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The most frequently mentioned spending priority was the maintenance of roads and pavements (23 mentions), with comments mostly related to repairing potholes and improving the general condition of roads and pavements. A number of respondents (5) made specific references to parking and road safety issues and 4 respondents made negative comments about either cycle or bus lanes. ○ The second most frequently mentioned spending priority was street cleanliness / waste management (17 mentions). ○ The third most frequently mentioned spending priority was the regeneration of Rotherham (11 mentions) with 5 of these comments specifically mentioning the town centre. ○ Also mentioned frequently were priorities relating to community safety and tackling crime/ASB (10), improving housing, including repairs (8) education/schools (7 mentions with a further 3 respondents specifically referencing SEND provision), children’s social care (7), adult social care (6) and general mention of social care (6).

Where would you suggest the Council could reduce spending?

A total of 12 areas for spending reductions were identified, spread across a wide range of themes.

- Adjusting service offers was the main category of saving suggestions (22 mentions). Comments included reducing spend on outsourced services by bringing them in-house, focussing on core services, scrutinising spend, and finding efficiencies via automation and better systems.
- Sixteen respondents were not supportive of spending on bus and cycle lanes.
- Nine respondents suggested reducing salaries, benefits, expenses or staffing levels. Of these 9 responses, 6 specifically mentioned elected members and 3 mentioned senior management.
- Nine respondents specifically mentioned reducing spending on 'wasteful or vanity projects'.
- Eight respondents made suggestions around selling off or reducing costs associated with council buildings/properties.

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

Just over 75% of respondents (42) raised a concern in response to question 3. Fourteen concerns related generally to stopping waste, ensuring value for money, good financial management, and efficiency. Themes included:

- Avoiding waste and careful budgeting around projects – in particular regeneration projects.
- A focus on debt collection and debt management.
- Using budgets fairly and intelligently.

Other relatively frequent responses related to service priorities (11) including managing the high cost of social care for both adults and children.

Do you have any other thoughts on the budget?

Around fifty-nine percent (32) of respondents provided additional comments in response to this question. Again, there was a wide spread of topics, and many served to reinforce points made in response to previous questions. The main comments were focussed on:

- *Service specific suggestions* - for example bringing more services in-house, generating rental income through more council homes and investment in specific service areas.
- *Ensuring value for money* – comments focussed on cutting waste, tightening finances and increasing efficiency.
- *Spending on the right things* – comments focussed on spending money on services that really matter to people and make a difference to their lives. Some comments were critical of spend on 'pet' or 'vanity' projects.

Council Plan themes

Respondents' views on budget priorities for the five Council Plan themes are summarised below.

Every neighbourhood thriving (45 respondents provided comments in response to this question)

There was some scepticism about this theme with around half of respondents who provided a comment stating that they were unsure what it meant, that it didn't resonate with their experience of their own neighbourhood, or critical of the theme in general, whereas only around 15% of respondents were positive about the theme. 'Local priorities', comprising suggestions for spend in a particular part of Rotherham, or a more equal share

of spend across the borough received 8 responses. The other most frequently mentioned topics were the need to encourage residents to have pride in their local area by getting involved or volunteering, the need for more community facilities, and the need to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour in neighbourhoods. Funding inequalities between different areas (examples included limiting additional funding for deprived areas and too much focus on the town centre) were raised as an issue by some. Some respondents commented that many parts of the borough looked run down and improvements need to be made to the street scene and general cleanliness in their local area.

People are safe, healthy and live well (47 respondents provided comments)

Crime and anti-social behaviour had the most mentions within this theme (18). Accessibility to health services also featured in multiple responses, with specific mentions of difficulty accessing GPs, mental health services and dentists. The need to improve street lighting so people feel safe in their local areas received several mentions. Other topics receiving more than one mention included mental health, better homes, cost of living, and the ability to take individual responsibility for health matters.

Every child able to fulfil their potential (41 respondents provided comments)

There was a focus on good quality education, guidance and support (9) in the responses to this theme, as well as specific mentions of better support and funding for children with special educational needs. Additional topics mentioned were parental responsibility, more activities for children and young people and the provision of out of school hours care and activities (including breakfast clubs).

Expanding economic opportunity (37 respondents provided comments)

About a third of respondents were critical of, or sceptical about this theme with most comments relating to a perceived lack of opportunities available in the town. Support for businesses (e.g. supporting small, local businesses and attracting private sector investment) received 8 comments. Job creation (attracting/growing businesses) was mentioned in 7 responses. Other topics with several mentions included support to remove barriers to work (including helping people get into work and off benefits), workforce engagement/development, local issues and town centre investment/improvement.

A cleaner, greener local environment (45 respondents provided comments)

Issues relating to waste collections, litter and fly-tipping were predominant (18 mentions). Other topics mentioned several times were the importance of protecting green belt and farmland from development, more planting (of both trees and wild flowers), maintenance and access to green spaces, recycling facilities, road/traffic issues, improving the street scene, a need for better public transport (especially buses), and renewables/net zero.

Social Media Engagement

3.

The budget consultation was publicised widely to different audiences using the Council's main communications channels, as set out below.

- Media – press release issued and picked up by a number of local outlets, including the Rotherham Advertiser.
- Social media – regular posts on the main corporate Twitter and Facebook accounts:
- Total number of posts: 16
- Overall views and reach: 41,149
- Average percentage of non-followers the posts have reached: 15.2%

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average percentage of followers the posts have reached: 84.8% • Link clicks generated to the consultation page: 421 • Residents were asked some of the budget questions on social media such as “What would your spending priorities be” to encourage comments on posts and link clicks • Please note, additional posts were also shared on LinkedIn and Instagram. <p>Comments on posts</p> <p>A small number of comments were made in response to the social media posts, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expressing concerns around a lack of street lighting and street cleaning • Calling for footpath and road repairs and improved properties • Calling for improved drainage and flood defences at locations across the borough • Mentioning money on street cleanliness and waste management in local areas • Expressing concerns around active travel schemes <p>The budget consultation was promoted through the Council’s email bulletins, which were issued to those people on the Council’s database who have consented to receive information directly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rotherham Round-Up newsletter, issued 6 December 2024 to 10,919 subscribers • News from your Neighbourhood newsletters, issued throughout December 2024 to 11,843 subscribers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Total link clicks generated (including consultation home page): 44 ○ Total direct consultation link clicks: 42
Other responses	
4.	<p>Partners</p> <p>One response was received to the letter sent to key partners. This was from Voluntary Action Rotherham. The response welcomed the collaborative multi-agency and partnership approach to ensure that the voluntary and community sector is engaged and able to contribute to Rotherham’s needs.</p>
Recommendations	
5.	To note and consider the findings as part of the overall budget discussions.