

<b>TITLE:</b>	Budget Consultation 2026-27
<b>Background</b>	
1.	Consultation on the 2026-27 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.
<b>Online Consultation</b>	
2.	<p>The online consultation was open from 28 November 2025 to 9 January 2026. The online form had five questions, which allowed for “free text” responses:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What would be your spending priorities for the Council?</li> <li>2. Where would you suggest the Council could reduce spending?</li> <li>3. Do you have any concerns about the Council's current budget?</li> <li>4. Council Plan budget priorities</li> <li>5. Do you have any other thoughts on the budget?</li> </ol> <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"> <li>• Places are thriving, safe and clean</li> <li>• An economy that works for everyone</li> <li>• Children and young people achieve their potential</li> <li>• Residents live safe, healthy and independent lives</li> <li>• One Council that listens and learns</li> </ul> <p>A total of 89 people completed the online consultation. This represented a significant increase in the number of responses that were received on the Budget Consultation in the previous year (54). A summary of responses is set out below.</p> <p><b>What would be your spending priorities for the Council?</b></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"> <li>○ The most frequently mentioned spending priority was the maintenance of roads and pavements (35 mentions), with comments mostly related to repairing potholes and improving the general condition of roads and pavements. 10 respondents made specific references to parking and road safety issues, and 3 respondents made negative comments about either cycle or bus lanes.</li> <li>○ The second most frequently mentioned spending priority was street cleanliness/ waste management (25 mentions).</li> <li>○ The third most frequently mentioned spending priority was community safety and tackling crime/ anti-social behaviour (ASB) (21 mentions).</li> <li>○ Also mentioned frequently were priorities relating to more investment in local areas (13), adult social care (13), housing (12 mentions including comments on tackling homelessness, rogue landlords, improved/more social housing), general mention of social care (11), education/schools (10), children's social care (9), facilities for families and children (8), opportunities for children and young people (7) and jobs (7).</li> </ul>

### **Where would you suggest the Council could reduce spending?**

A total of 18 areas for spending reductions were identified, spread across a wide range of themes:

- Adjusting service offers was the main category of savings suggestions (20 mentions). Comments included reducing/stopping spend on outsourced services, focussing on core services, scrutinising spend, more effective use of social value and finding efficiencies via automation and better systems.
- Thirteen respondents suggested cuts to staffing levels (several mentioned reducing senior management and a further 8 respondents specifically suggested cuts to salaries).
- Eleven respondents suggested stopping investment in cycle lanes.
- Eleven respondents suggested stopping all spend related to services for asylum seekers or refugees.
- Seven respondents suggested stopping investment in the Town Centre.
- Seven respondents suggested efficiencies around libraries, including reduced opening hours, fewer libraries, book donations and online services.
- Stricter enforcement of fines and policies was suggested by 6 respondents, as was ensuring value for money.

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

Around 70% of respondents (62) raised a concern in response to question 3. Twenty-seven concerns related generally to reducing/stopping waste, ensuring value for money, good financial management, and efficiency.

Other relatively frequent responses related to service priorities (12) with some respondents feeling that money was not being spent in the right service areas. A further 8 respondents had concerns around the high costs of social care, and 7 respondents were concerned that the budget will be insufficient to effectively deliver services.

### **Do you have any other thoughts on the budget?**

Around 72% of respondents (64) 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 additional investment in specific service areas and focussing on core/statutory services.
- *Ensuring value for money* – comments focussed on tightening finances, increasing efficiency, investing to save and spending locally.
- *Cutting waste* – for example reviewing the Council's estate, management staffing levels.
- *Accountability and transparency* – for example, responding to communications in a timely manner, transparency about budgets/overspends and working towards measurable targets.
- *Focussing on local communities/areas of need* – comments focussed on the need to undertake targeted work in local communities, understand their needs and being more visible in communities.

### **Council Plan themes**

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

*Places are thriving, safe and clean* (83 respondents provided comments in response to this question).

There were mixed responses to this theme with just under a third of respondents who provided a comment making a supportive/positive statement regarding the theme and just over a quarter of respondents making a negative statement.

The most frequently mentioned topic was 'safety/feelings of safety' with almost a quarter of respondents highlighting the need to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour as a priority for them. The other most frequently mentioned topics were cleanliness and maintenance of the street scene (both in local areas and the town centre). Some respondents highlighted the need for a stronger focus on keeping local areas clean and safe and investing in them to make them thriving local centres. Eight respondents specifically mentioned issues with the town centre.

*An economy that works for everyone* (73 respondents provided comments)

About a third of respondents were critical of, or sceptical about this theme with most comments relating to pessimism that the economy is actually working for everyone and a belief that people who are in work are disadvantaged in comparison to those receiving benefits. Ten comments related to providing support for residents who are struggling, and 6 comments mentioned job creation and employment opportunities. Other topics with several mentions included providing help for businesses, and suggestions that job creation is outside of the scope of the Council and should be the responsibility of others.

*Children and young people achieve their potential* (69 respondents provided comments)

About a third of respondents provided a positive comment about this theme, with a fifth providing no comment at all (suggesting they didn't feel that the theme related to them). The most frequently mentioned topic was concerns about specific service offers and resources needed to maintain services (this included concerns about school budgets, and the lack of influence that the Council has over academy schools). Six respondents suggested that there should be more activities for children and young people and improved quality of education/standards. Additional topics mentioned were parental responsibility, more mental health support, support for children in care and care leavers and the need for children to feel safe in order to thrive.

*Residents live safe, healthy and independent lives* (70 respondents provided comments)

Around a third of respondents made a negative statement regarding the theme. Several made comments suggesting that residents did not live well at all and were merely existing. Housing received 9 mentions, with many comments focussing on the need for good quality, warm homes. Empowering people and communities received 7 comments, this included taking responsibility for their own health and wellbeing and encouraging residents to be involved in their communities. The need to feel safe within communities to live well received 6 comments. Other topics receiving several mentions included service specific comments regarding resources, more funding for older people, issues around the street scene and cleanliness of areas.

*One Council that listens and learns* (79 respondents provided comments)

Over half of responses provided a negative/critical comment regarding this theme. Twenty-four responses stated that the Council does not listen or learn, and 19 responses suggested that the Council needs to demonstrate that it is listening to residents. Five respondents stated that the Council does listen to them. Other topics with several mentions included that the Council 'does what it wants' and that it should be open and transparent with residents.

Social Media Engagement	
3.	<p>The Budget Consultation was publicised widely to different audiences using the Council's main communications channels, as set out below.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Media – press release issued and picked up by a number of local outlets, including the Rotherham Advertiser.</li> <li>• Social media – regular posts on the main corporate Facebook and Instagram accounts:</li> <li>• Total number of posts: <b>12</b></li> <li>• Overall views and reach: <b>32,101</b></li> <li>• Average percentage of followers reached: <b>71%</b></li> <li>• Average percentage of non-followers reached: <b>29%</b></li> <li>• Link clicks generated to the consultation page: <b>108</b></li> <li>• Residents were asked some of the budget questions on social media such as "Social Care is one of the largest areas of Council spending. We want your feedback to guide our priorities for 2026/27." to encourage comments on posts and link clicks.</li> </ul> <p><b>Comments on posts</b></p> <p>A small number of comments were made and largely negative in sentiment, with strong frustration about local services and how money is being spent.</p> <p>Summary of comments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor road conditions, especially potholes.</li> <li>• Perceived wasteful spending in the town centre.</li> <li>• Concerns about housing priorities, especially homelessness.</li> <li>• Service failures, including bin collections and home-to-school transport.</li> <li>• Distrust in decision making, with a belief that public feedback is ignored.</li> <li>• Criticism of selective licensing and its impact on landlords and rents.</li> </ul> <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: Rotherham Round-Up newsletter, issued 5 December 2025 and 19 December 2025 to circa 10,938 subscribers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• News from your Neighbourhood newsletters, issued throughout December 2025 to 12,007 subscribers</li> <li>• Total link clicks generated (including consultation home page): <b>235</b></li> <li>• Total direct consultation link clicks: <b>225</b></li> </ul>
Other responses	
4.	<p><b>Partners</b></p> <p>Letters were sent to partners requesting comments on the Council's Budget proposals, but at the time of writing this report no responses had been received.</p>
Recommendations	
5.	<p>To note and consider the findings as part of the overall budget discussions.</p>