

## Outcomes of phase two of the budget engagement: representative residents’ survey

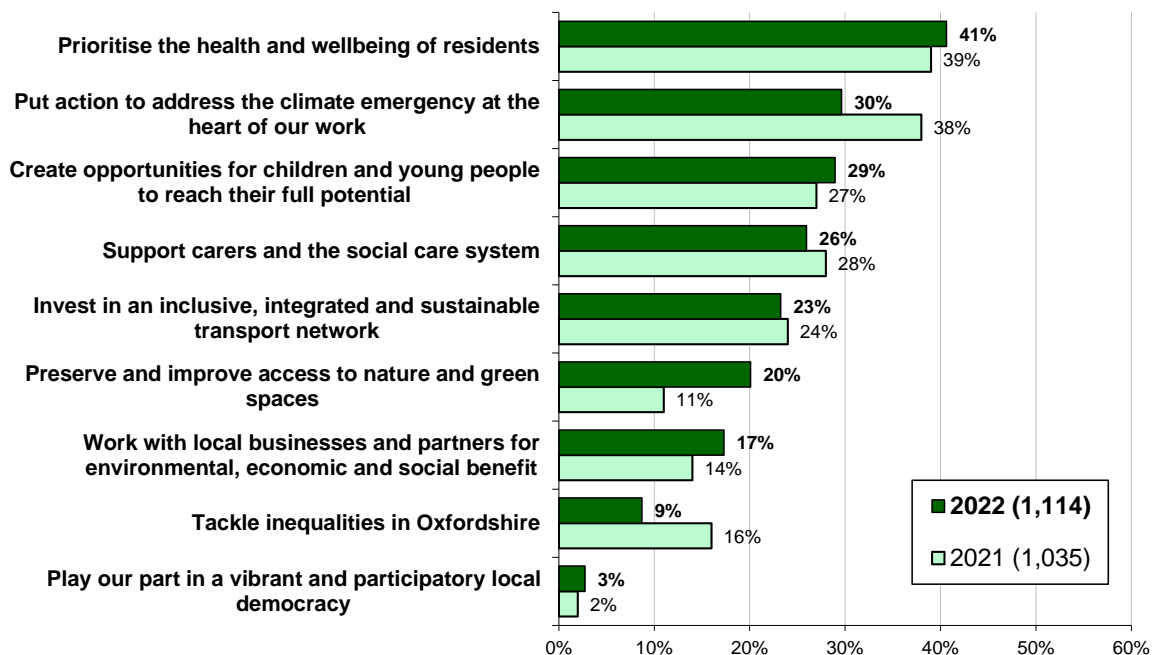
### Introduction

1. Between 1 August and 26 September 2022, the council undertook a large-scale residents’ survey with adults aged 18+ to gauge their satisfaction with the council, the services we provide and their local area, as well as asking for opinions on our strategic priorities, how we might make savings and to explore council tax rises.
2. The survey was conducted by market research agency Marketing Means, using a postal approach supported by an online survey. In total, 4,900 households were randomly selected to take part and, following two reminders, 1,162 residents responded giving a response rate of 23.9 per cent.
3. The survey questionnaire covered a range of subjects. The feedback on questions asked on the council’s priorities and on budget and council tax are set out below to inform the council’s 23/24 budget and business planning process.

### Council priorities

4. All respondents were asked to read summary notes on the council’s nine priority themes and then to select two that they considered to be most important for the council to concentrate on. The chart below (provided by Marketing Means) summarises the results, including comparisons between 2021 and 2022.

**Chart 1: Most important priority themes for the council to concentrate on?**



Source: Marketing Means 2022

Base: All who gave a valid response

5. Prioritising the health and wellbeing of residents is the most popular of the nine strategic priorities amongst respondents (41 per cent), with the reasons given including:
  - Need to tackle health and wellbeing / healthcare problem
  - More accessible/ faster health care, eg more GPs
  - Consider the future / future generations / children are our future
  - Healthier society / population has wider / knock on benefits
6. The next most popular choices were put action to address the climate emergency at the heart of the council's work (30 per cent), creating opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential (29 per cent) and supporting carers and the care system (26 per cent). The only other theme selected by more than one in five respondents was investing in an inclusive, integrated and sustainable transport network (23 per cent).
7. The largest proportional shift in attitudes towards our priorities between 2021 to 2022 is seen for **preserving and improving access to nature and green spaces**, which has increased significantly from 11 per cent to 20 per cent (although it should be noted that the wording in 2021 referred only to "Improving access to nature and green spaces").
8. The largest proportional decreases since 2021 were for **tackling inequalities in Oxfordshire**, which has fallen from 16 per cent to nine per cent and for **put action to address the climate emergency at the heart of our work**, declining from 38 per cent to 30 per cent.
9. Based on the same summary notes on nine different council priorities, respondents were also asked to indicate which two themes they felt were the least important for the council to concentrate on and the most frequently selected priority was play our part in a vibrant local democracy (55 per cent).
10. The reasons for this included:
  - Council can't or shouldn't affect change / individuals or other bodies should focus on priority instead / Council doesn't have responsibility.
  - Priorities aren't as pressing or already underway / should be dealt with after other priorities.
  - More important areas of life to get involved with than politics / disengagement from politics.
  - Democracy strong / not needing improvement.
11. Table 1 below (provided by Marketing Means) summarises the most important priorities and least important priorities side by side.

**Table 1: Most and least important priority themes for the council to concentrate on**

	<b>% considered most important (1,114)</b>	<b>% considered least important (941)</b>
Prioritise the health and wellbeing of residents	41%	4%
Put action to address the climate emergency at the heart of our work	30%	22%
Create opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential	29%	7%
Support carers and the social care system	26%	3%
Invest in an inclusive, integrated and sustainable transport network	23%	19%
Preserve and improve access to nature and green spaces	20%	18%
Work with local businesses and partners for environmental, economic and social benefit	17%	26%
Tackle inequalities in Oxfordshire	9%	31%
Play our part in a vibrant and participatory local democracy	3%	55%

### **Budget engagement**

12. To preface the budget engagement section of the questionnaire, respondents were given a brief explanation of the financial challenges that the council faces (using information that was available at the time) and asked how much they agreed or disagreed with each of a list of nine possible approaches that the council suggested it could take to make savings / generate income.

13. Table 2 below (provided by Marketing Means) summarises the results and shows the feedback split into three groups.

**Table 2: Net agreement with different approaches that the council could take to make savings or generate income**

<b>APPROACH</b> <i>(base totals shown after each)</i>	<b>Total % disagree</b>	<b>Total % agree</b>	<b>Net % agreement</b>
Generate additional income by maximising the use of buildings and land the council owns (our assets) (1,109)	<b>3%</b>	<b>86%</b>	<b>+83%</b>
Reduce costs by using digital technology to deliver services more efficiently (1,098)	<b>10%</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>+61%</b>
Reduce the costs of the contracts we use to provide services (1,105)	<b>11%</b>	<b>64%</b>	<b>+53%</b>
Reduce staffing costs by redesigning services, using fewer agency staff and/or holding vacancies (1,109)	<b>14%</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>+49%</b>
Use the council's financial reserves (money set aside for unexpected events), to provide one-off funding (1,103)	<b>23%</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>+18%</b>
Reduce spending on services the council is not legally required to provide (1,089)	<b>24%</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>+14%</b>
Generate additional income from sales, fees, and charges (1,083)	<b>26%</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>+11%</b>
Reduce spending on frontline services (1,102)	<b>66%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>-56%</b>
Generate additional income by increasing council tax (1,113)	<b>70%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>-57%</b>

14. The four most popular approaches drawing net support (total percentage agree minus total percentage disagree) of nearly +50 per cent or higher were:

- Generate additional income by maximising the use of buildings and land the council owns (our assets) (+83 per cent net agreement).
- Reduce costs by using digital technology to deliver services more efficiently (+61 per cent net agreement).
- Reduce the costs of the contracts we use to provide services (+53 per cent net agreement).
- Reduce staffing costs by redesigning services, using fewer agency staff and/or holding vacancies (+49 per cent net agreement).

15. Three approaches drew more mixed views, and a modest net agreement. These were:

- Using the council's financial reserves (+18 per cent net agreement).
- Reducing spending on services that do not legally need to be provided (+14 per cent net agreement).
- Generating more income from sales, fees and charges (+11 per cent net agreement).

16. By far the least palatable approaches were:

- Reduce spending on frontline services (-56 per cent net agreement).
- Generate additional income by increasing council tax (-57 per cent net agreement).

16. When respondents were asked to suggest other ways in which the council could save money and/or generate income very few people chose to put forward an idea. None were mentioned by more than four per cent of respondents.
17. Some of the comments reflected or built on some of the nine approaches set out in the previous question, eg different ways of making more efficient use of staff with some possible staffing cuts, cutting back on any non-essential spending, selling off assets, and improving contractors or bringing services back in-house.
18. Just over one per cent put forward suggestions related to the need to invest in some services/ activities now to avoid more expensive consequences in future, with examples including preventing fly tipping or maintaining home visits by carers.
19. Focusing specifically on council tax, respondents were provided with supporting information and asked whether they agreed or disagreed that the council should consider increases of 4.99, 5.99 or 6.99 per cent to help fund adult social care and other key services.
20. All three suggested levels drew general disagreement and, as shown by table 3 below, net agreement scores of -9 per cent, -42 per cent and -56 per cent respectively. A third of respondents nevertheless agreed with the idea of a 4.99 per cent increase. Some of the most frequent comments supporting people's views related to how current cost of living pressures and/or the already high level of council tax meant that council tax should not be increased, but others accepted that a rise was inevitable to help the council address a shortfall in funding, especially if the money raised is ringfenced for specific uses.

**Table 3: Net support for possible council tax increases the council could consider to help fund adult social care and other services**

<b>Levels of increase in Council tax (base totals shown after each)</b>	<b>% disagree</b>	<b>% agree</b>	<b>% don't know</b>	<b>Net % agreement</b>
<b>4.99 per cent increase</b> , which is equal to an additional £82.42 per year or £1.59 per week in council tax on a Band D property (1,103)	43%	34%	6%	<b>-9%</b>
<b>5.99 per cent increase</b> , which is equal to an additional £98.93 per year or £1.90 per week in council tax on a Band D property (1,074)	59%	17%	6%	<b>-42%</b>
<b>6.99 per cent increase</b> , which is equal to an additional £115.45 per year or £2.22 per week in council tax on a Band D property (1,078)	68%	12%	6%	<b>-56%</b>