C

Northumberland County Council

COMMITTEE: CABINET

DATE: 8TH FEBRUARY 2022

BUDGET CONSULTATION REPORT 2022-23

Report of: Cllr Richard Wearmouth

Executive Director of Finance

Purpose of report

This report provides a summary of results of the budget consultation undertaken between 10th December 2021 and 21st January 2022. The budget consultation helps to inform the Council's Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan.

Recommendations

Cabinet is requested to:

- **Consider and note the summary results of the budget consultation undertaken between 10th December 2021 and 21st January 2022 as well as wider engagement undertaken.**

Link to Corporate Plan

As the budget consultation helps to inform the Council's budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan, it is aligned to all the priorities outlined in the Corporate Plan.

Key issues

1. It's important that the Council's budget reflects services and investments that are most important to residents and businesses in all communities across the County. From 10th December 2021 to 21st January 2022, we consulted on our budget proposals. This report sets out the summary results of that consultation as well as outlining other engagement undertaken.

Background

2. On 10th December 2021, the Council launched its online budget consultation. This was through an online survey tool and was open to anyone wishing to participate, including residents, businesses, partner organisations, Members and staff. The consultation was

promoted through a variety of media channels. As the survey was online and open to all, the responses are not a ‘statistical sample’ of the population and therefore we are not presenting the results as representative of the population as a whole. However, the results do provide a useful sense of views across a range of stakeholders, including:

- Residents (94.55% of the responses);
- Local businesses;
- Charities;
- Community Groups;
- NCC staff who are residents;
- NCC Staff who are non-residents;
- Councillors;
- Public Sector;
- Other.

3. In total, we were very pleased to receive 312 responses to the consultation and thank everyone who took the time to share their views. In the consultation, we asked for views on each of the key services. For each of these areas we asked:

(i) Would you spend more / less / same on these services?

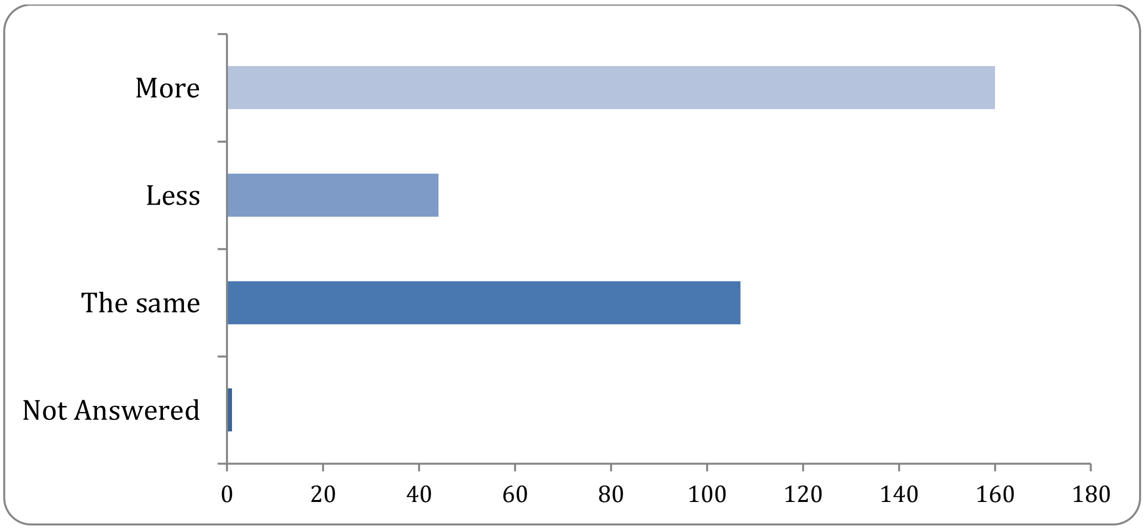
(ii) How important are these services to you (‘extremely’ / ‘very’ / ‘important’ / ‘not very’ / ‘not at all’)?

4. The following paragraphs summarise the responses to these questions, grouped by high-level service areas.

(i) **Adults’ Wellbeing –** the vast majority of respondents (82%) viewed services to adults as ‘important’, ‘very important’ or ‘extremely important’. Over a third (33.97%) ranked these services as extremely important. Some 86% of respondents would spend more (51.28%) or the same (34.29%) on these services, with 14% saying these would spend less.

Table 1 Adults’ Wellbeing: Would you spend more, less or the same on this service?

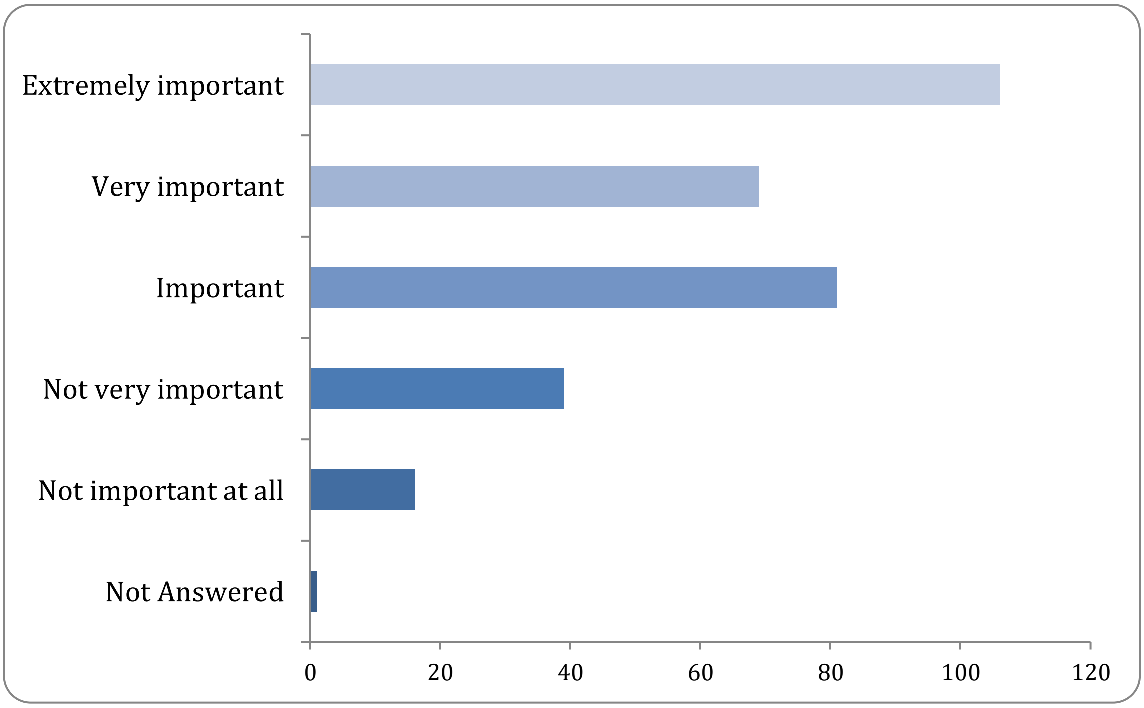
There were 311 responses to this part of the question.



Option	Total	Percent
More	160	51.28%
Less	44	14.10%
The same	107	34.29%
Not Answered	1	0.32%

Table 2 Adults' Wellbeing: **How important are these services to you?**

There were 311 responses to this part of the question.



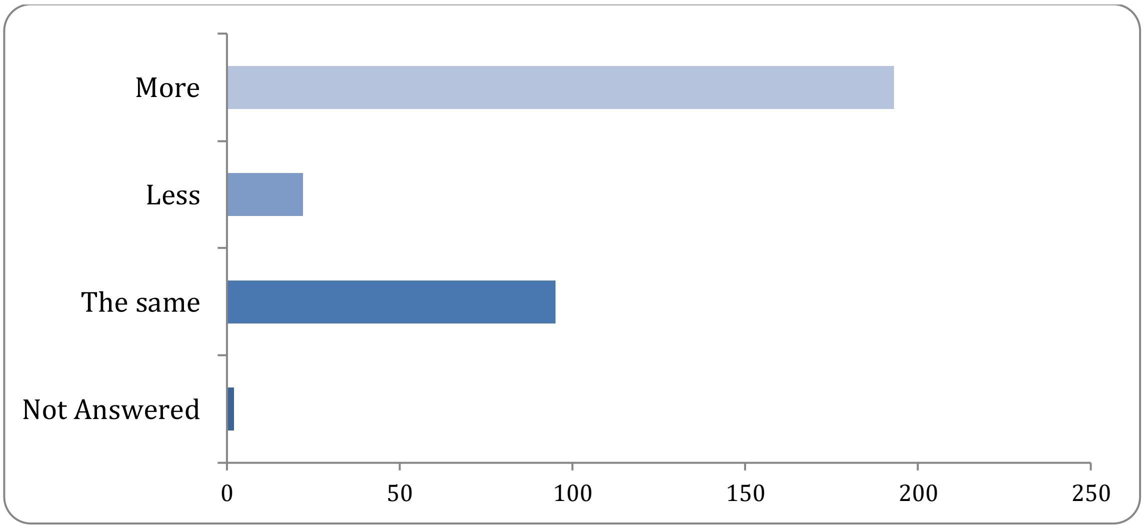
Option	Total	Percent
Extremely important	106	33.97%
Very important	69	22.12%
Important	81	25.96%
Not very important	39	12.50%

Not important at all	16	5.13%
Not Answered	1	0.32%

(ii) **Children and Young People –** like Adult' Wellbeing, respondents attach high levels of importance to Children's Services. Some 88% viewed these services as 'important', 'very important' or 'extremely important', with 42% respondents ranking these services as 'extremely important'. Some 92% of respondents would spend more (62%) or the same (30%) on these services, with 7% saying these would spend less.

Table 3 Children and Young People: Would you spend more, less or the same on this service?

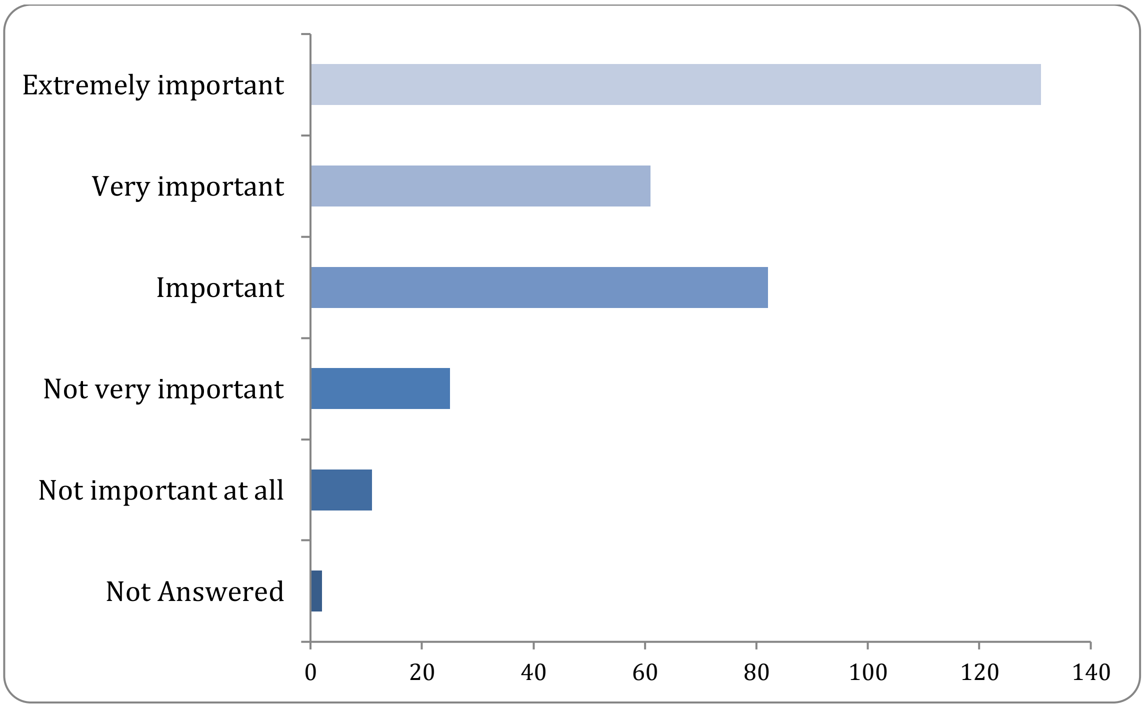
There were 310 responses to this part of the question.



Option	Total	Percent
More	193	61.86%
Less	22	7.05%
The same	95	30.45%
Not Answered	2	0.64%

Table 4 Children and Young People: How important are these services to you?

There were 310 responses to this part of the question.

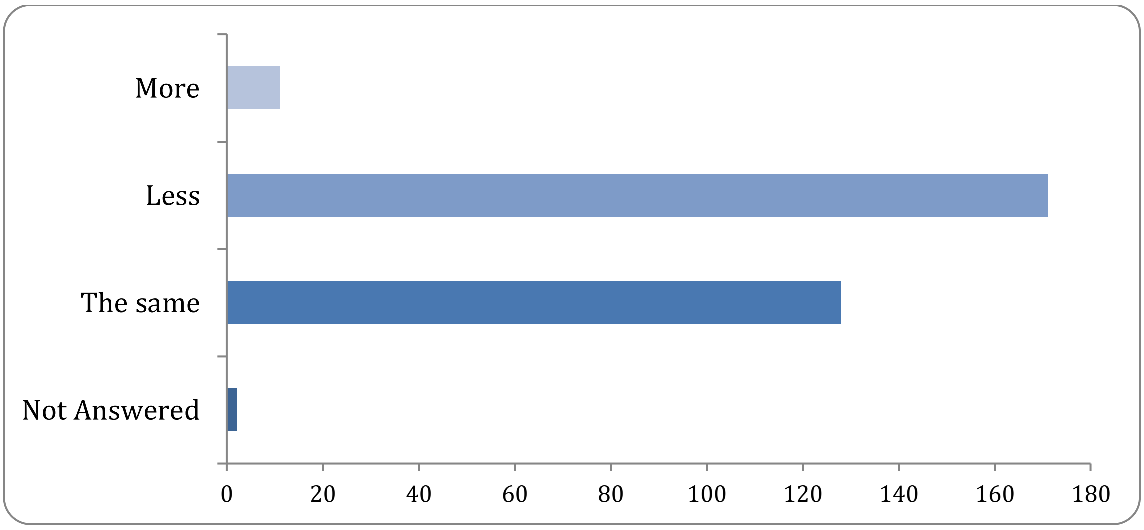


Option	Total	Percent
Extremely important	131	41.99%
Very important	61	19.55%
Important	82	26.28%
Not very important	25	8.01%
Not important at all	11	3.53%
Not Answered	2	0.64%

(iii) **Corporate Services** – these include a range of 'back office'-type services such as HR, IT and Finance. Some 65% of respondents ranked these as 'important'-extremely important'. Some 45% would spend more or the same level on these services, with 55% indicating they would spend less.

Table 5 Corporate Services: Would you spend more, less or the same on this service?

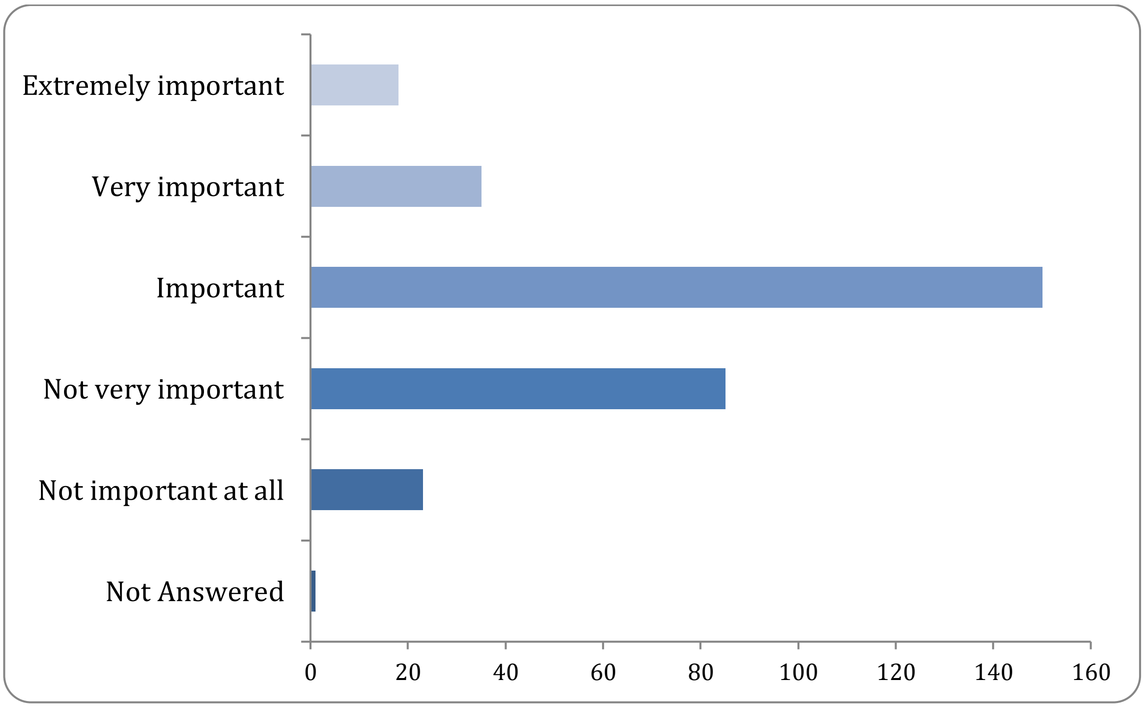
There were 310 responses to this part of the question.



Option	Total	Percent
More	11	3.53%
Less	171	54.81%
The same	128	41.03%
Not Answered	2	0.64%

Table 6 Corporate Services: **How important are these services to you?**

There were 311 responses to this part of the question.



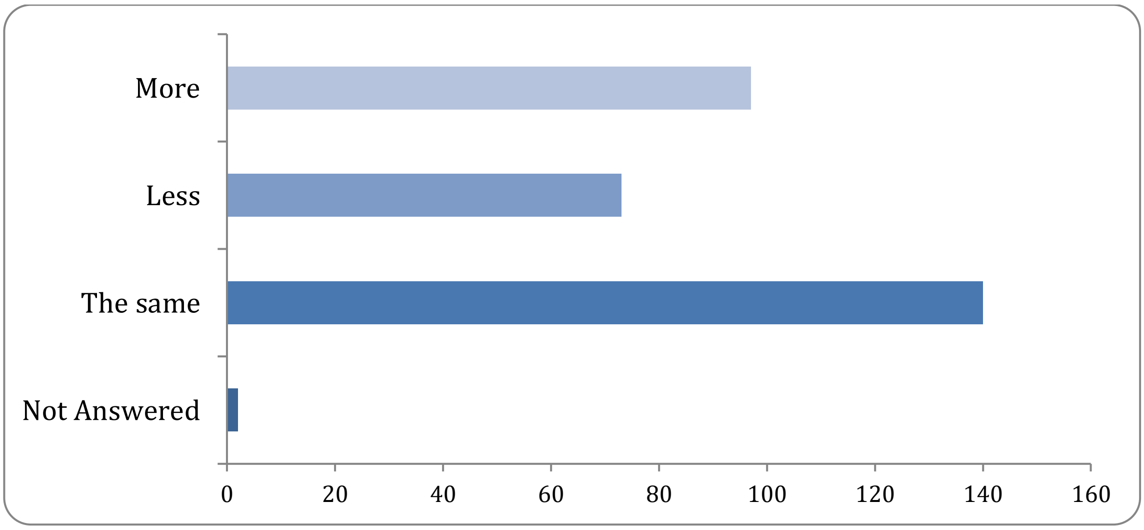
Option	Total	Percent
Extremely important	18	5.77%
Very important	35	11.22%
Important	150	48.08%
Not very important	85	27.24%

Not important at all	23	7.37%
Not Answered	1	0.32%

(iv) **Healthy Lives –** some 78% of respondents ranked these services as either ‘important’, ‘very important’ or ‘extremely important’, with 76% indicating they would spend the same (45%) or more (31%) on culture, arts & leisure.

Table 7 Healthy Lives: Would you spend more, less or the same on this service?

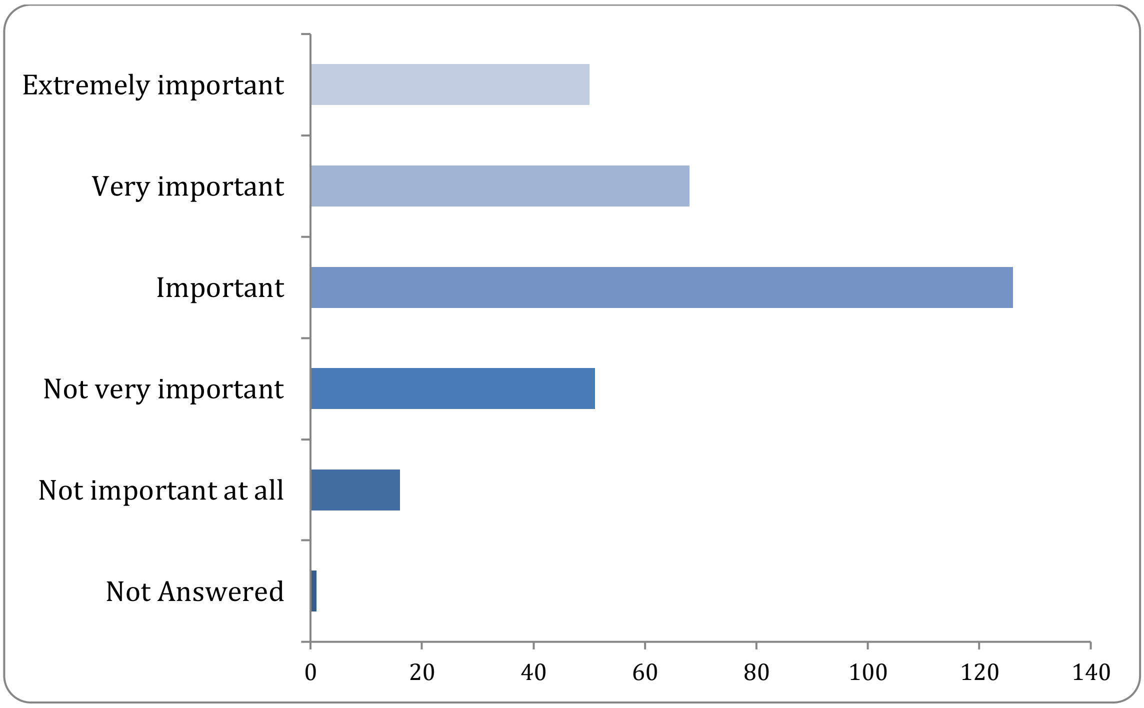
There were 310 responses to this part of the question.



Option	Total	Percent
More	97	31.09%
Less	73	23.40%
The same	140	44.87%
Not Answered	2	0.64%

Table 8 Healthy Lives: How important are these services to you?

There were 311 responses to this part of the question.

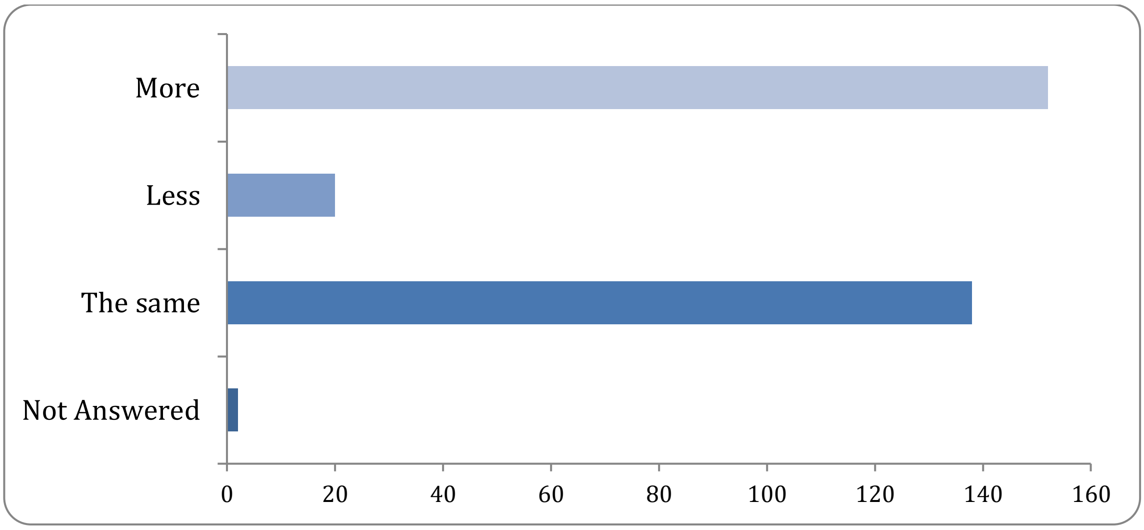


Option	Total	Percent
Extremely important	50	16.03%
Very important	68	21.79%
Important	126	40.38%
Not very important	51	16.35%
Not important at all	16	5.13%
Not Answered	1	0.32%

(v) **Local Services –** similar to services to Children and Adults, respondents attach high levels of importance to Local Services such as refuse collection, waste disposal, streetlighting, roads and pavements. Some 96% viewed these services as ‘important’, ‘very important’ or ‘extremely important’, with 37% ranking these services as ‘extremely important’. Some 93% of respondents would spend more (49%) or the same (44%) on these services.

Table 9 Local Services: Would you spend more, less or the same on this service?

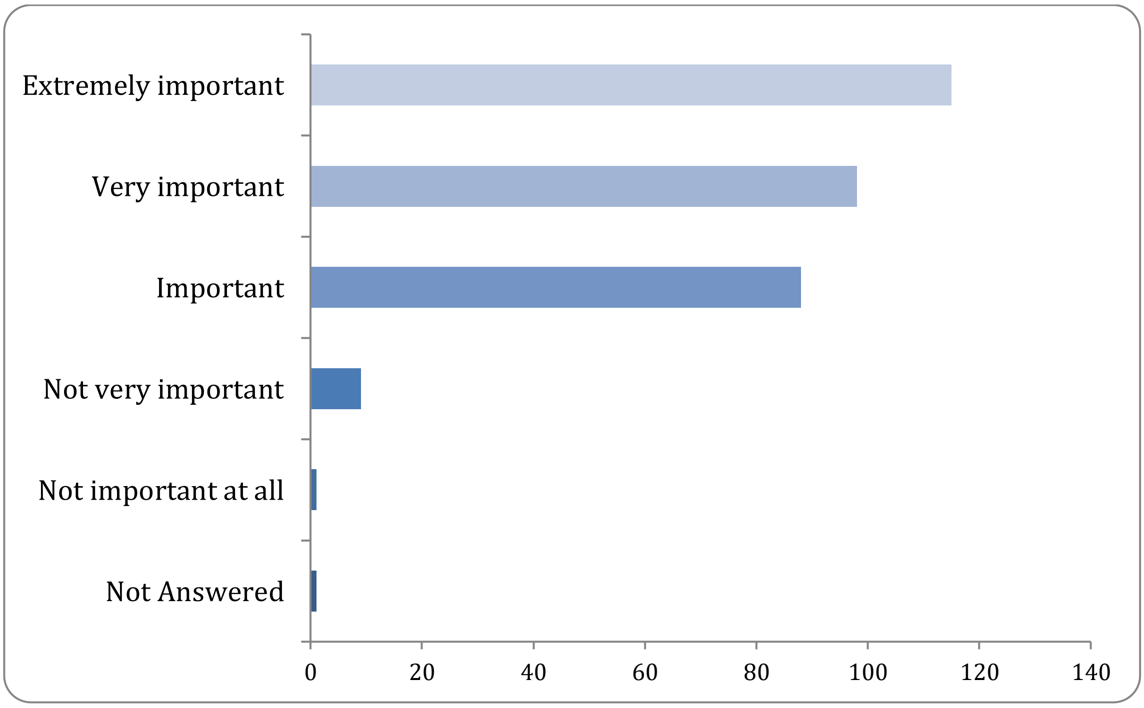
There were 310 responses to this part of the question.



Option	Total	Percent
More	152	48.72%
Less	20	6.41%
The same	138	44.23%
Not Answered	2	0.64%

Table 10 Local Services: How important are these services to you?

There were 311 responses to this part of the question.



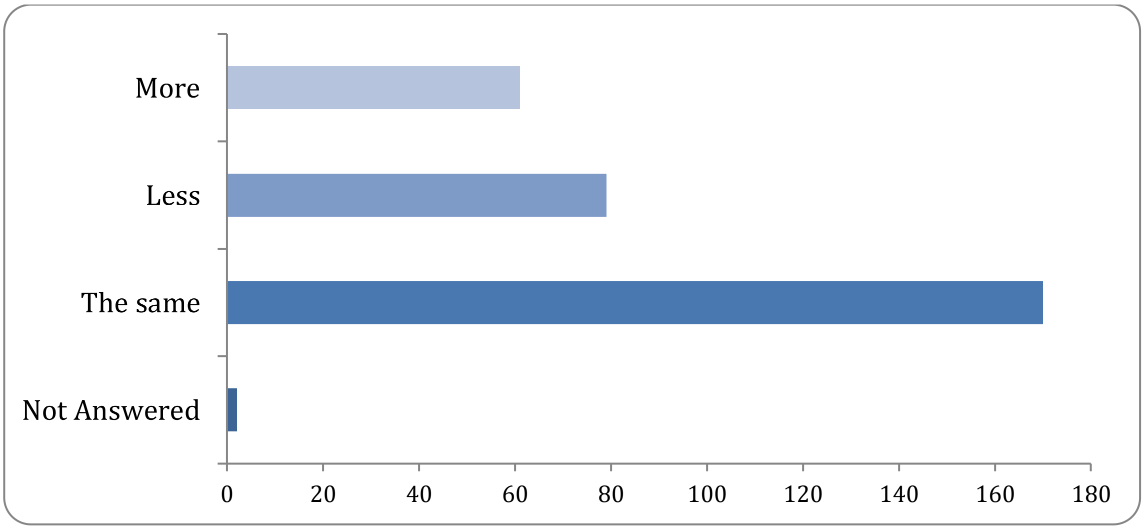
Option	Total	Percent
Extremely important	115	36.86%
Very important	98	31.41%
Important	88	28.21%
Not very important	9	2.88%

Not important at all	1	0.32%
Not Answered	1	0.32%

(vi) **Community Services –** 78% of respondents ranked these services as 'important', 'very important' or 'extremely important'. Some 74% would spend more or the same on these services.

Table 11 Community Services: Would you spend more, less or the same on this service?

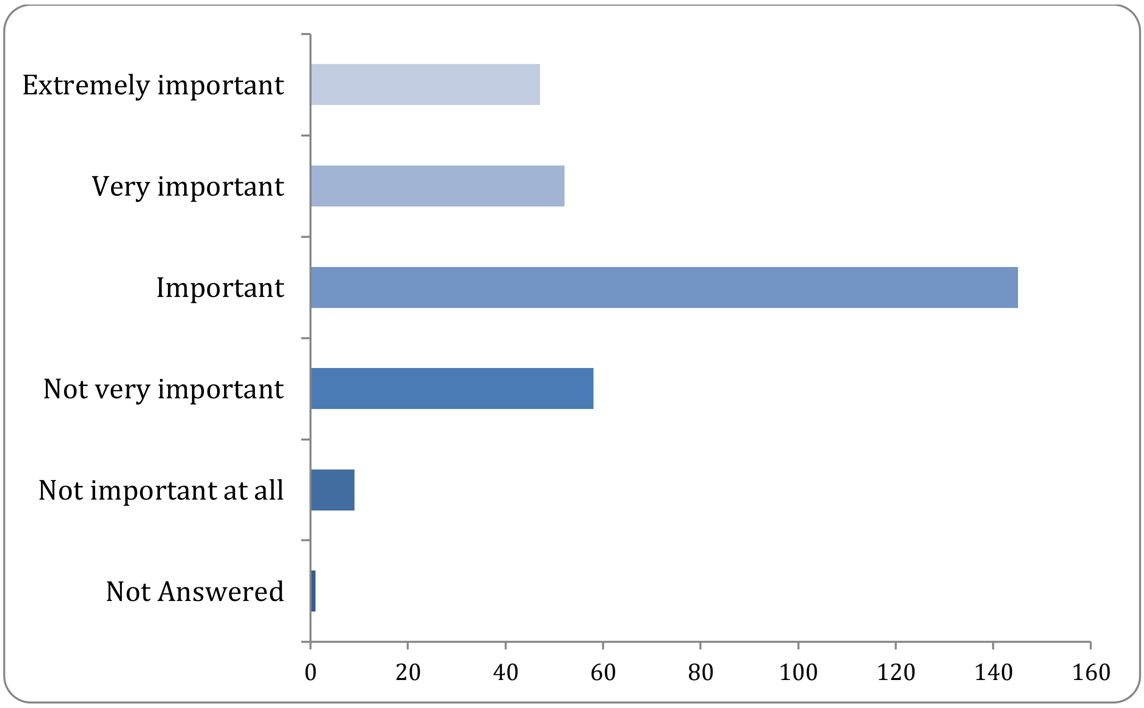
There were 310 responses to this part of the question.



Option	Total	Percent
More	61	19.55%
Less	79	25.32%
The same	170	54.49%
Not Answered	2	0.64%

Table 12 Community Services: How important are these services to you?

There were 311 responses to this part of the question.

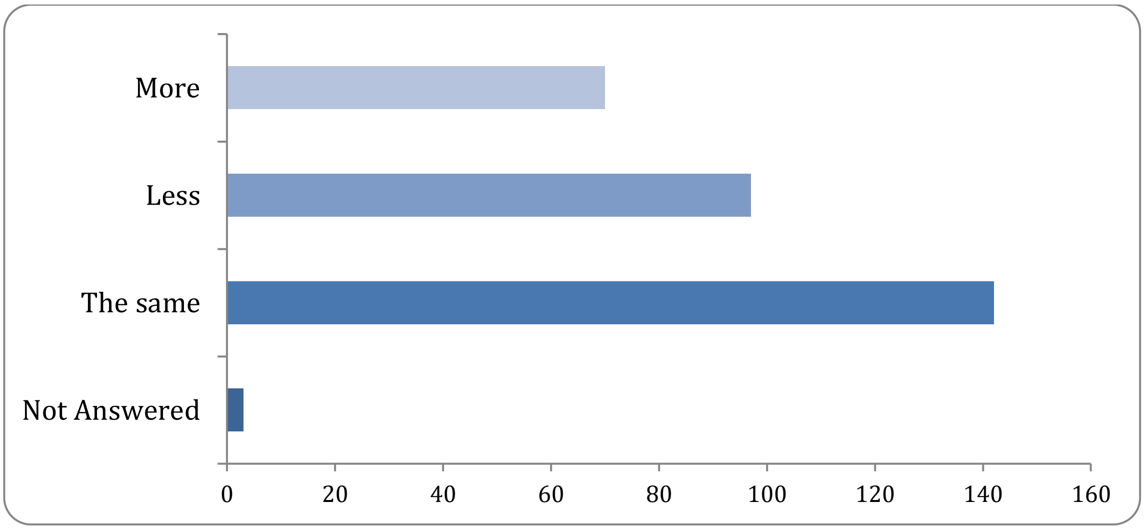


Option	Total	Percent
Extremely important	47	15.06%
Very important	52	16.67%
Important	145	46.47%
Not very important	58	18.59%
Not important at all	9	2.88%
Not Answered	1	0.32%

(vii) **Business –** 74% of respondents ranked these services as 'important', 'very important' or 'extremely important'. Some 68% would spend more or the same on these services.

Table 13 Business: Would you spend more, less or the same on this service?

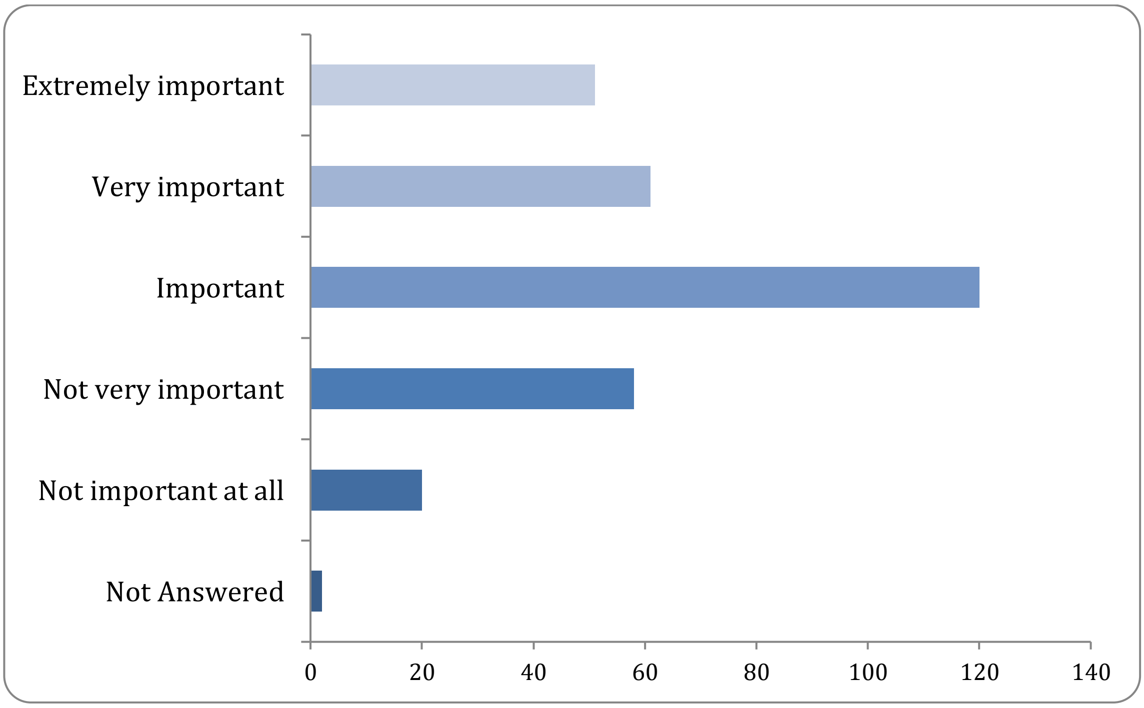
There were 309 responses to this part of the question.



Option	Total	Percent
More	70	22.44%
Less	97	31.09%
The same	142	45.51%
Not Answered	3	0.96%

Table 14 Business: How important are these services to you?

There were 310 responses to this part of the question.

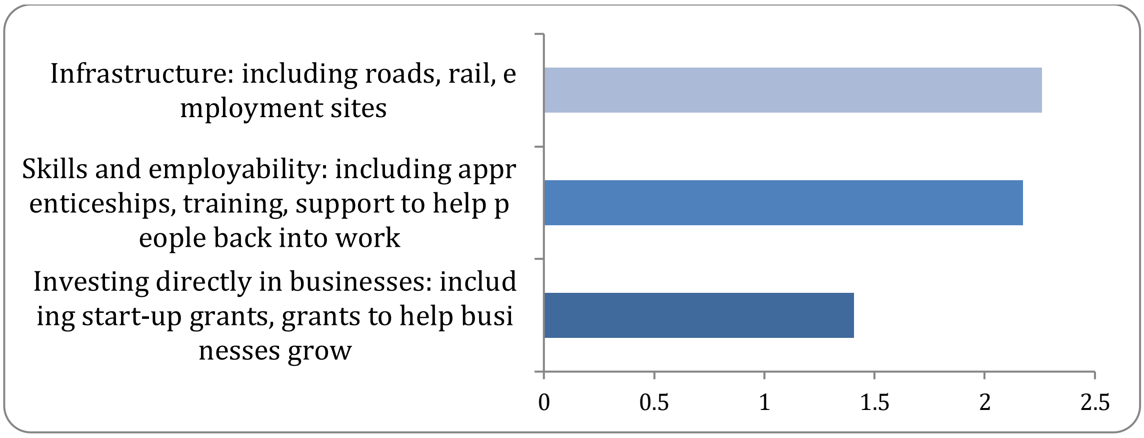


Option	Total	Percent
Extremely important	51	16.35%
Very important	61	19.55%
Important	120	38.46%
Not very important	58	18.59%

Not important at all	20	6.41%
Not Answered	2	0.64%

5. The survey also sought views on priorities for the Council to invest in jobs and businesses. Respondents were given three broad areas for investment and the ranking is set out in the table 15 below:

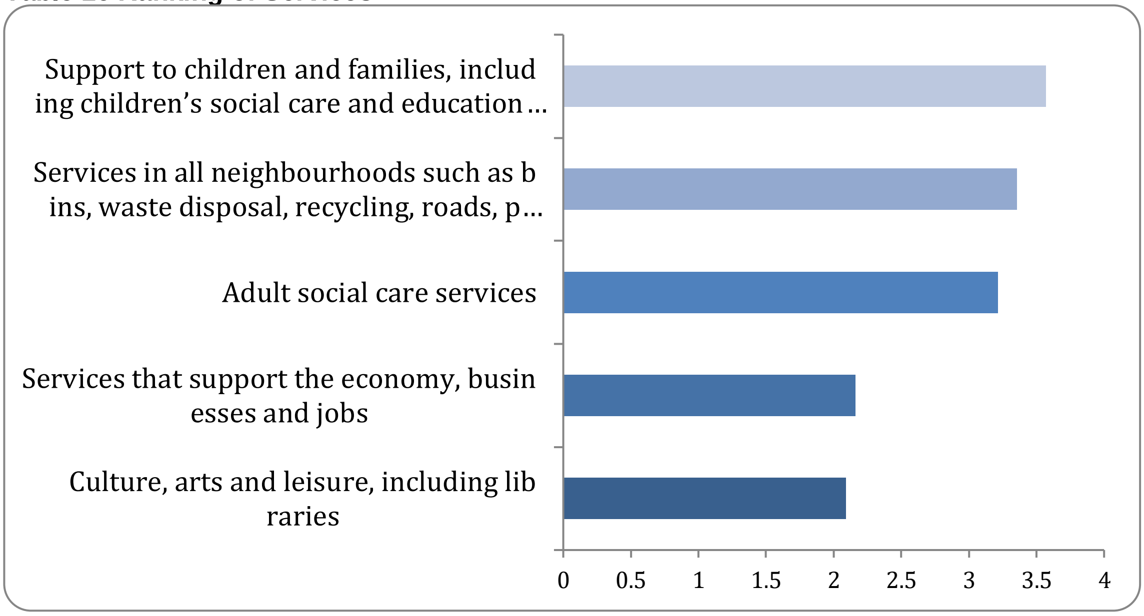
Table 15: What investment priorities do you think are most important to help jobs and businesses grow?



Item	Ranking
Infrastructure: including roads, rail, employment sites	2.26
Skills and employability: including apprenticeships, training, support to help people back into work	2.17
Investing directly in businesses: including start-up grants, grants to help businesses grow	1.41

6. We asked respondents to rank which services were most important to them. Support to children and families was ranked top, with services in all neighbourhoods second. Table 16 (below) shows there was not a big difference between the top three ranked services (Support to children & families, Adult Social Care and services to all neighbourhoods).

Table 16 Ranking of Services

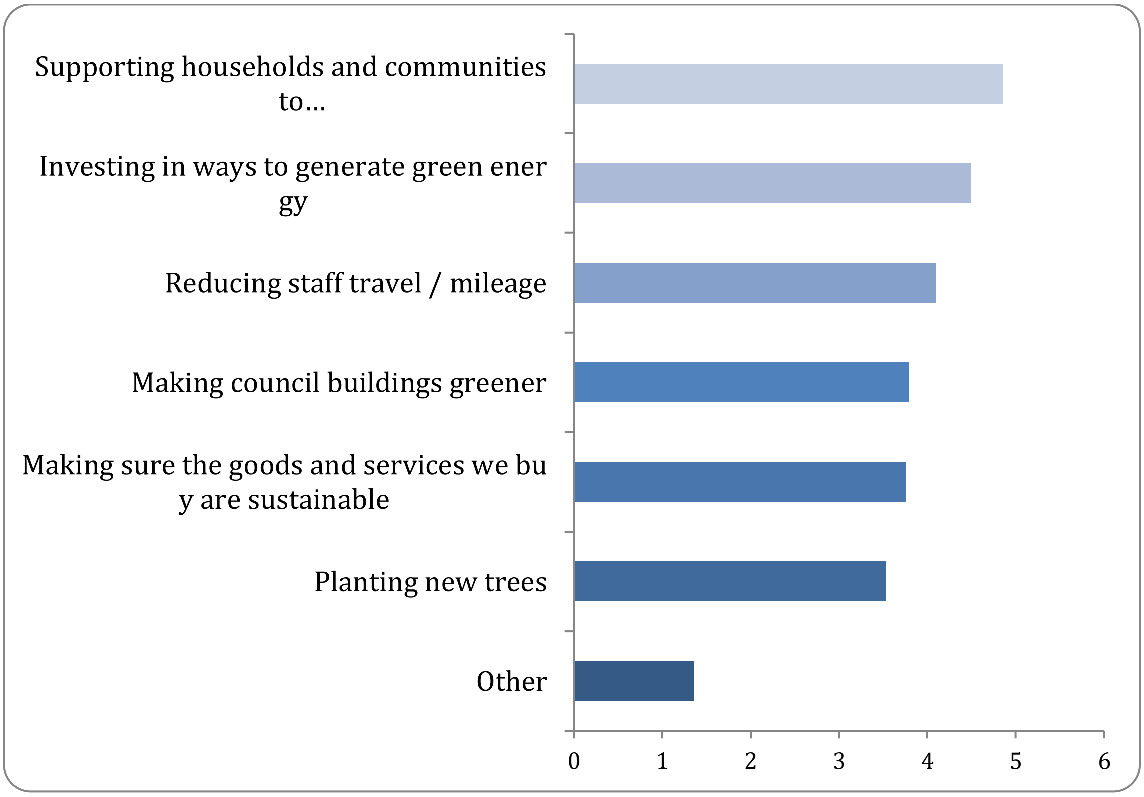


Item	Ranking
Support to children and families, including children's social care and education and skills	3.57
Services in all neighbourhoods such as bins, waste disposal, recycling, roads, pavements and streetlighting	3.36
Adult social care services	3.21
Services that support the economy, businesses and jobs	2.16
Culture, arts and leisure, including libraries	2.09

7. The Council is delivering on its ambitious Climate Action Plan, investing in services and infrastructure to reduce the county's carbon emissions. So, the Council wanted to know residents' priorities for tackling this agenda. The top ranked priority was 'supporting households and communities to reduce emissions', with 'investing in ways to generate green energy the second ranked priority'.

Table 17: Ranking of Climate Change priorities

Ranking of 'Climate Change ranking'

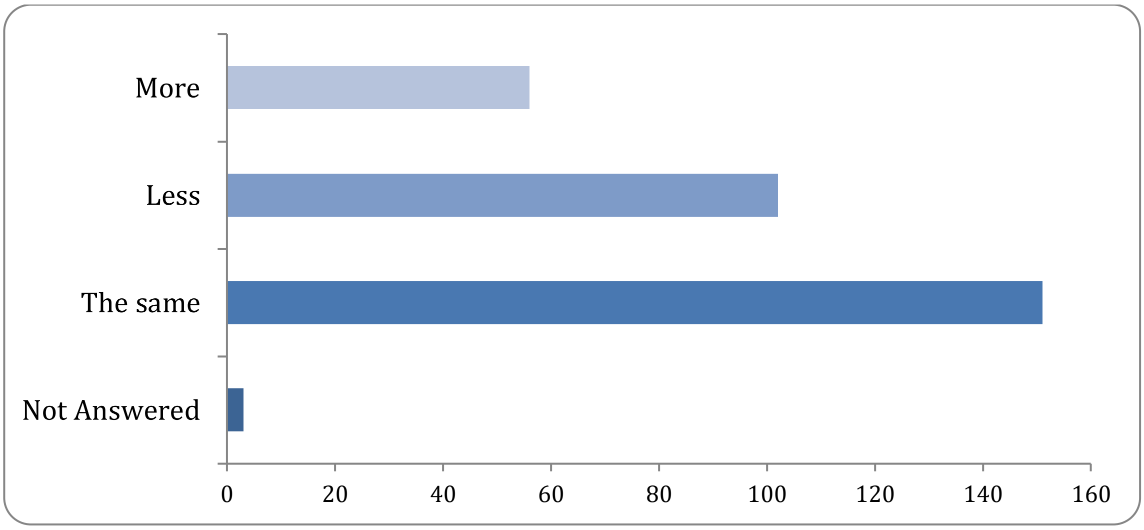


Item	Ranking
Supporting households and communities to reduce emissions	4.86
Investing in ways to generate green energy	4.50
Reducing staff travel / mileage	4.10
Making council buildings greener	3.79
Making sure the goods and services we buy are sustainable	3.76
Planting new trees	3.53
Other	1.36

8. Respondents were asked: whether the proposed Adult Social Care Precept increase should be more, less or the same?" Some 66% indicated this should be more (18%) or the same (48%), with 33% indicating this should be less.

Table 16: Adult Social Care Precept

There were 309 responses to this part of the question.



Option	Total	Percent
More	56	17.95%
Less	102	32.69%
The same	151	48.40%
Not Answered	3	0.96%

9. We asked for ideas on how the Council could raise more income or deliver services differently to save money and received 254 suggestions and comments. These comments fell into 8 broad themes although, naturally, there was a degree of overlap between the comments. The paragraphs below summarise the responses to this question.

(i) **Organisation –** we received 107 suggestions and comments on how we could make savings through organisational improvements and efficiencies. These covered a broad range of issues, including: reducing senior staff salaries / expenses, management structure, how we procure goods and services; opportunities for joint services with other partners or councils; general efficiencies; and, costs associated with local democracy.

(ii) **Tax base, charges and other fund raising** – there were some 44 suggestions on how the Council could raise more income through the local tax base, charges and other ways of raising funds. This was not simply about increasing Council Tax and there were comments against Council Tax increases. Many of the suggestions on this theme were focused on: supporting more business and town centres; providing people with support to get into work; and, encouraging more people and businesses to come to the County. There were also suggestions on charges for services and introducing, raising or increasing enforcement of fines. It should be noted that some of the suggestions made would require national legislation to take forward, for example introducing a ‘tourist tax or levy’.

(iii) **Assets –** this theme was about how the Council makes better use of its assets, including: selling / letting / making more efficient use of buildings, land and facilities; taking more commercial approaches generally; and, use of charges for services. Some of the suggestions were about better use of the County’s assets more generally, including use of assets outside the control of the Council (e.g.

privately-owned shops). Some 23 comments and suggestions on this overall theme were put forward.

(iv) **Reduce or re-prioritise investment –** whilst many suggestions supported investment as a way of encouraging business growth and increasing jobs, some people suggested the Council should look to prioritise spending on critical services and where necessary reduce investment where this is not deemed essential. Other suggestions were focused on increasing investment in areas where it was felt more, not less regeneration is needed. There were a total of 20 suggestions and comments on this theme.

(v) **Reduce or re-prioritise services** – this theme included suggestions (21 in total) and comments on how the Council should prioritise spending on what people felt were critical services. There were also suggestions on how the Council could support communities to do more for themselves and increase working with community and voluntary groups.

(vi) **Climate Change & sustainability** – we received 13 comments and suggestions on how we can save money or raise income as part of our overall approach to tackling climate change and delivering more environmentally sustainable services.

(vii) **Parking –** there were 10 comments on re-introducing car-parking charges (in areas where we don't charge) or increasing existing car parking charges. Some comments were focused on charging for non-residents.

(viii) **Government –** some people suggested that Government should provide more funding to the Council to support local services and investment. In total, there were 16 suggestions and comments on this theme.

Other engagement

10. In January, the Leader and Portfolio Members presented to the five Local Area Councils (LACs) on the budget. These meetings were open to the public to view through the YouTube channel. Table 17 (below) sets out viewing for these meetings.

Table 17 LAC Participation

Area	Views (YouTube)
Castle Morpeth LAC	314
Tynedale LAC	129
Ashington and Blyth LAC	221
Cramlington, Bedlington and Seaton Valley	223
North Northumberland	306
Total	**1,193**

11. In addition, the Leader of Council hosted a public question time session on the budget, supported by the Deputy Leader and the Executive Director of Finance and Section 151 Officer. Questions from members of the public were invited, and the livestream had 2,759 views.

12. The budget consultation was promoted on the Council's social media channels and reached 17,532 people – 12,922 engaged with our social media posts and 300 people commented.

Implications

Policy	The Budget Consultation helps to inform the Council's Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan
Finance and value for money	Whilst there are no financial implications arising directly from this report, the consultation and wider engagement on the budget help to inform the Council's Budget which is detailed in the separate report to Council.
Legal	Whilst there are no legal implications arising directly from this report, the consultation and wider engagement on the budget help to inform the Council's Budget which is detailed in the separate report to Council.
Procurement	There are no specific Procurement implications within this report.
Human Resources	There are no specific HR implications within this report.
Property	There are no specific Property implications within this report.
Equalities (Impact Assessment attached) Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A ☐	There are no specific Equalities implications within this report, although the consultation and wider engagement on the budget help to inform the Council's Budget which is detailed in the separate report to Council.
Risk Assessment	There are no specific risk implications within this report.
Crime & Disorder	There are no specific crime implications within this report.
Customer Consideration	There are no specific customer implications within this report.
Carbon reduction	There are no specific carbon reduction implications within this report although the feedback on carbon investment priorities will be shared more widely with teams leading on the Council's plans for carbon reduction.

Health and Wellbeing	There are no specific health and wellbeing implications within this report.
Wards	All wards

Background papers:

Budget Report Medium-Term Financial Plan

Report sign off.

	Full Name of Officer
Monitoring Officer/Legal	Suki Binjal
Executive Director of Finance & S151 Officer	Jan Willis
Relevant Executive Director	Jan Willis
Chief Executive	Cath McEvoy-Carr (Deputy CX)
Portfolio Holder(s)	Cllr Richard Wearmouth

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