

Surrey County Council

2021/22 Final Budget Report and Medium-Term Financial Strategy to 2025/26

10. ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION

- 10.1 The proposals set out in this budget report are based on significant engagement with residents, partners and businesses over the last two years with the insight from this engagement informing a robust evidence base underpinning the Organisation Strategy and MTFS.
- 10.2 This includes engagement with residents over the summer specifically to understand the impact of Covid-19 and their future priorities for the Council. As part of this we commissioned a statistically significant temperature check survey with approximately 2,200 Surrey residents looking at behaviours, attitudes and opinions during the period of the pandemic and a comprehensive Community Impact Assessment to fully understand the initial impact of Covid-19 on Surrey's communities, particularly for vulnerable populations and places.
- 10.3 The results of the survey highlighted that during the pandemic some residents, in particular those that have had to shield, have felt disconnected from their local community and there has been a significant impact on mental health & wellbeing. There was a reported impact on access to healthcare services, with significantly lower levels of use of out of hours GPs, mental health services and services for carers. Respondents also highlighted the importance of their support networks, including family, friends and neighbours as well as the services they have received during the crisis. The survey showed that resident support for local businesses is strong and that local recovery can be encouraged through innovation, support and funding.
- 10.4 The Community Impact Assessment (CIA) identified the health, social and economic impacts of Covid-19 among communities across Surrey and has helped further shape the refreshed Organisation Strategy. The findings from the CIA expand on the results of the temperature check survey, highlighting the negative impact that lockdown has had on mental health, as well as health inequalities with Covid-19 having a greater impact on certain groups, such as those that are vulnerable or from black and minority ethnic communities. The CIA has also highlighted the issue of overlapping vulnerabilities and complexity of cases, for example the interrelated nature of domestic abuse, homelessness and substance misuse.
- 10.5 To build on the research undertaken during the summer to understand resident's current concerns and priorities for the future, the Leader and Chief Executive held virtual resident roadshows in December to share details about the budget and listen to residents about their priorities. We have also engaged with residents and local partners such as Districts and Borough Councils, Health, Police and the voluntary, community and faith sector (VCFS) organisations to discuss the draft budget. An online budget survey for residents was also conducted which asked for their views on whether the Council should maintain, increase, or decrease budgets across a range of service areas. Due to the small number of respondents (213) the findings should be considered alongside other sources of resident insight. The following messages came through in the budget survey:

- When asked what the Council’s priorities for spending should be, respondents highlighted Education, Adult Social Care and Children’s Social care as their top three priority areas (see table below), which is broadly consistent with the findings of the budget survey last year; and
- Respondents were asked if they had suggestions for how the Council’s budget should be spent. Common suggestions were to spend money more efficiently and in joined up ways within the county. One respondent suggested ‘consulting with the public more, using low costs methods (not expensive agencies) to see what could be provided more efficiently locally’. Another respondent also suggested increasing the efficiency of services and said they would ‘like to see more digitalisation of Council services to make them as efficient as possible’.

Respondent support for spending priorities

