

ANNEX H: 2023/24 Draft Budget Consultation Response Summary

A budget consultation was open online to Surrey residents, business, and organisations from 22 November to 19 December 2022. The aim of the survey was to gain resident and stakeholder views on Surrey County Council's proposed budget for 2023/2024.

The survey was advertised through various forms of communication in a bid to reach both residents and key stakeholders from across the county. Of the 358 respondents, 94.1% were residents, with a majority of respondents over the age of 45 and 34% retired. Respondents were overwhelmingly white with just 7 respondents reporting as non-white. Approximately 15% of respondents reported having a disability or a health issue. It is therefore important to note, although the responses to this survey will be taken into account when forming the council's final budget for 2023/24, due to the small number of responses and the lack of diversity in many of the recorded demographics, this data cannot be seen as representative of the Surrey population. However, it did offer an opportunity for residents and stakeholders who wanted to comment on the budget to do so, and the findings complement the statistically representative research that was carried out in 2021.

When asked about the budget as a whole, over a third (36.8%) had a neutral response to the budget, 23.7% of the respondents were somewhat or strongly in favour of the budget proposals and 39.3% either strongly or somewhat opposed.

Survey respondents were asked for their thoughts on council tax increases to help fill the remaining budget gap and ensure services continued to run. A combined 41.9% of respondents were in favour of increasing council tax either to the limit permitted without a referendum or a more significant increase following a referendum. A further 22.4% of respondents were in favour of a moderate increase in council tax followed by more cuts to service budgets. Lastly 23.7% were in favour of no increase to council tax at all.

In the qualitative responses, a strong theme around the cost-of-living crisis was clear in responses opposing the increase in council tax with residents voicing concerns for the additional pressure on household finances posed by a potential rise in tax. However, there were also a large number of responses opposing further cuts to service budgets, particularly adult's and children's social care, and environment, transport and infrastructure. This indicates that despite worry around a rise in tax, many residents are willing to explore this as an option to fill the budget gap in order to ensure essential services continue to run and the most vulnerable in Surrey are not subject to extensive service cuts.

To ensure the budget consultation was accessible to residents, the online survey was provided in an easy read format. In addition, the draft budget report was taken to the Learning Disabilities Partnership forum to be discussed. Outcomes from the forum largely aligned with the responses of online respondents, with themes of cost-of-living pressures and tax rises being balanced by a fear of further cuts to social care and the impact that would have on service quality and availability. Specifically, there was a focus on making all

services inclusive and accessible for people with learning disabilities and autism, thereby reducing demand and financial pressure on Adult Social Care.