

Budget Consultation

The Council budget and council tax consultation with residents and businesses closed on the 31 January 2022. There was a total of 275 responses, of which 266 were from residents. A summary of the results is shown below.

Summary

1. This consultation ran from 21 December 2021 to 31 January 2022.
2. We had a total of 275 responses, of which 262 used the online questionnaire. We have responses from 11 named local organisation, including six Parish and Town Councils.
3. In terms of residents' responses:
 - a. 54% lived in Bexhill, 9% lived in Battle, 5% lived in Rye and 32% lived in the rural areas of the Rother district.
 - b. 53% were male and 43% were female, 4% preferred not to say.
 - c. In terms of age groupings, the responses were as follows:
 - i. 47% were aged 65 to 79
 - ii. 25% were aged 55 to 64
 - iii. 19% were aged 35 to 54
 - iv. 7% were aged 80+
 - v. 2% were aged 18 to 34
 - vi. 0% were under 18
 - d. 16% were disabled or had a long-term illness or condition.
 - e. 91% were White British descent, 5% had another White background and 4% had another ethnic background.
4. We asked respondents for feedback about issues ranging from financial pressures, service provision and how they should be funded. The responses are summarised in paragraphs 5 to 10 below.
5. ***Overall, how well informed do you feel about the financial challenges facing councils?***
 - a. Very well informed – 14%
 - b. Fairly well informed – 52%
 - c. Not very well informed – 23%
 - d. Not well informed at all – 10%
 - e. Do not know – 1%
6. ***How strongly do you agree or disagree that Rother District Council should do each of the following when faced with financial pressures?***
 - a. Streamline services so that we can deliver the same outcomes – 91% agreed or slightly agreed
 - b. Prioritise spending to protect services for the most vulnerable and those without choice – 91% agreed or slightly agreed
 - c. Help people to help themselves more so they have less reliance on publicly funded services – 88% agreed or slightly agreed
 - d. Use or partner with other organisations to provide services – 85% agreed or slightly agreed

- e. Encourage local people and communities to deliver certain services – 78% agreed or slightly agreed
- f. Introduce charges for some services that are currently free or subsidised – 65% agreed or slightly agreed
- g. Reduce or stop delivering some services to protect others – 51% agreed or slightly agreed

7. Rother District Council should consider increases in council tax.....

- a. To protect services for the most vulnerable and those without choice – 84% agreed or slightly agreed
- b. Only when opportunities to streamline services have been exhausted – 79% agreed or slightly agreed
- c. When the only alternative is to stop delivering some services – 76% agreed or slightly agreed
- d. As an alternative to imposing or increasing fees and charges for services – 56% agreed or slightly agreed
- e. In other circumstances – 65% agreed or slightly agreed
- f. Under no circumstances – 39% agreed or slightly agreed

The question also gave responders the opportunity to provide other reasons for raising Council Tax that were not covered by the options. The responses are summarized below:

- i. To deliver and protect statutory and basic services, (6 responses)
- ii. To reduce debt/borrowing and protect reserves, (5 responses)
- iii. To improve and enhance the quality of services, (5 responses)
- iv. When other funding options have been exhausted, (4 responses)
- v. Increase council tax on second homes, holiday homes and larger properties, (4 responses)
- vi. To fund initiatives that deliver savings/generate income, (3 responses)
- vii. To fund initiatives aimed at reducing carbon emissions, loss of biodiversity loss and pollution, (3 responses)
- viii. To stimulate business growth and employment, (2 responses)
- ix. To fund concessions for the over 70s (1 response)
- x. To fund external resources to identify savings (1 response)

8. Please indicate which of the following services (by department) are a priority for you, (respondents could select more than one service)

- a. Housing:
 - i. Aids & adaptations to help residents remain in their home - 56%
 - ii. Provision of social housing – 41%
 - iii. Homelessness services – 40%
 - iv. None – 20%
- b. Environmental Services:
 - i. Waste collection and recycling – 82%
 - ii. Street cleaning – 48%
 - iii. Climate change and reducing carbon footprint in Rother – 40%
 - iv. None – 4%
- c. Planning:
 - i. Enforcement of planning – 64%

- ii. Planning policy – 48%
 - iii. Application process (planning permission) – 43%
- d. Public Health and Safety:
- i. Anti-social behaviour and pollution control – 79%
 - ii. Community safety (prevention and reduction of crime) – 74%
 - iii. Food safety – 46%
 - iv. Covid outbreak controls – 32%
 - v. Licensing – 31%
 - vi. Rented homes safety – 29%
 - vii. None – 6%
- e. Cultural Services:
- i. Parks and gardens – 73%
 - ii. Sports and leisure facilities – 49%
 - iii. Tourism support – 33%
 - iv. Cemeteries – 27%
 - v. None – 11%
- f. Economic Growth
- i. Economic regeneration – 58%
 - ii. Attracting inward investment – 54%
 - iii. Car parks – 33%
 - iv. Investing in Rother’s digital infrastructure – 29%
 - v. Investing in new commercial space for business – 21%
 - vi. None – 10%

9. Please let us know why you believe these areas should be prioritized

Below is a summary of the key points made by respondents on why they felt their selections were priority services.

- i. They provide essential services, e.g. Housing
- ii. They make the area safe, attractive and healthy
- iii. They help those who most need help
- iv. They protect the environment, reduce climate change and support sustainability
- v. They facilitate business growth, employment and tourism
- vi. They encourage younger families into the area
- vii. They support a reduction in crime and anti-social behaviour
- viii. They address poverty

10. Please let us know of anything else you would want us to consider as we set the Rother District Council budget for 2022/23 Budget

Unsurprisingly there were several wide-ranging responses to this question. Many of these conflicted with each other, e.g. funding ‘green’ initiatives, and several suggestions fall outside of the remit and control of Rother District Council. The responses are summarized below:

- i. Provide additional and improved service levels e.g. litter collection, funding for services in rural areas, more infrastructure near new housing developments, more regeneration, greater crime reduction, better public toilets, more online services.

- ii. No cuts to services
- iii. No charges for services, including car parking
- iv. Reduce management costs
- v. Lobby government for extra funding
- vi. Merge districts and ESCC
- vii. Hold a Council Tax referendum
- viii. Stop funding the De La Warr Pavilion
- ix. Devolve more services to town and parish councils
- x. Increase services for vulnerable people and those on low incomes
- xi. Provide more information the Council's services and finances
- xii. Increase investment in green infrastructure
- xiii. Do not fund climate change and carbon neutral projects.
- xiv. Make greater use of volunteering and community schemes
- xv. Do not build new council offices
- xvi. Change the council tax banding system
- xvii. Do not take on debt
- xviii. Privatize the provision of sport and leisure facilities,
- xix. Improve Planning services.
- xx. Lobby East Sussex County Council for improvements to highways, pavements, traffic flows, roadside verges, on-street parking, street lighting, education, social care, libraries, crime/policing, care homes, mental health services and public transport.