

# Report to Cabinet

**16<sup>th</sup> November 2022**

<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Draft General Fund Budget 2023/24 and Medium-Term Financial Strategy</b>
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Cllr Piper – Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources
<b>Director:</b>	Simone Hines - Director of Finance
<b>Key Decision:</b>	Yes
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Rebecca Maher (Head of Finance) <a href="mailto:Rebecca_Maher@sandwell.gov.uk">Rebecca_Maher@sandwell.gov.uk</a>

## 1 Recommendations

### That Cabinet:

- 1.1 Note the draft budget position for 2023/24 and the savings required to ensure a balanced budget can be achieved
- 1.2 Approve the savings identified in para 4.14 onwards and Appendix B in principle for consultation and an Equality Impact Assessment where required
- 1.3 That a further report be brought back to Cabinet in February 2023 setting out the results of the consultation referred to in 1.2 for Cabinet to consider prior to final budget proposals being approved
- 1.4 Refer the draft budget and savings options to the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Panel on 29<sup>th</sup> November.
- 1.5 Approve the Medium-Term Financial Strategy as approved at Appendix D









## 2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 The Local Government Finance Act 1972 requires the Council to set a balanced, risk assessed budget each year and approve a Council Tax precept by 11<sup>th</sup> March.

## 3. How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

The Council's financial position helps to underpin all of the Council's Corporate Plan and the associated aspirations.

	Best start in life for children and young people
	People live well and age well
	Strong resilient communities
	Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods
	A strong and inclusive economy
	A connected and accessible Sandwell

## 4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 The budget process for 2023/24 is the most challenging for Local Government since the beginning of austerity in 2010. This is due to a combination of factors, including the exceptional levels of inflation, partly caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and the unprecedented political and economic turmoil in the UK.
- 4.2 There is also significant uncertainty around Local Government funding in the absence of a multi-year settlement or any clarity about government funding reform which has been in the pipeline since 2016. The draft



budget proposals in this report have made a number of assumptions about funding for 2023/24 which won't be confirmed until the Local Government Finance Settlement, usually announced in mid-December.

- 4.3 The initial budget deficit for 2023/24 set out in the previous Medium-Term Financial Strategy was estimated to be in the region of £14m, but a number of spend pressures have emerged as part of the budget process, largely due to demand and inflationary pressures, that exceed the assumptions initially made in the previous forecasts. Service spend pressures and growth items are shown in more detail at Appendix A and total £17.7m. The draft budget also makes further provision for inflationary increases across key contracts and utilities of £8.7m. These are estimates at this stage and will be kept under review as the budget process progresses.
- 4.4 There have however been changes to funding assumptions that have positively impacted on the estimated budget position for 2023/24. The previous MTFS position assumed that Local Government Funding Reform would progress in time for the 2023/24 settlement, which would potentially involve a reset of business rates growth, changes to the funding formula mechanism and a loss of one-off grants which were included in the 2022/23 settlement. However, any significant changes to the funding regime would require consultation with the sector, a process which should have started before the summer. As this has not occurred and there is no further information available from the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) we have now assumed that there will be no significant changes to the level of funding we currently receive, and that the one-off grants received in 2022/23 will continue for a further year at the same rate. There is a degree of risk with these assumptions which must be noted, although it is in line with the assumptions that many other Local Authorities are making as part of their draft budget processes.
- 4.5 In addition, as business rates income is linked to inflation (September CPI) the draft budget assumes an increase of 10% in business rates income (compared to 3% in the previous MTFS). This generates additional income in the region of £4.5m, before any other changes to business rates base are taken into account). In previous years the government has capped business rates increases to 2% but funded the difference by way of grant. The Council is required to formally estimate its income from Business Rates in January each year, a process which is



likely to be complicated by the national revaluation of business rates for 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023. Therefore the business rates forecast included in the draft budget is subject to change.

- 4.6 The draft budget also assumes additional investment income due to rising interest rates as well as a £3m saving by changing the way the Council accounts for borrowing repayment. This is based on advice from our external Treasury Advisor and CIPFA guidance.
- 4.7 A summary of the current draft budget position is shown in the table below. This is based on current assumptions and is subject to change as the budget process progresses:

<b>Draft Budget Position</b>	<b>2023/24</b>
	<b>£'000</b>
Net Budget Requirement 2022/23	237,044
<b>Additional Revenue/Savings/Income:</b>	
Increase in Council Tax	(5,400)
Net change in Business Rates and Collection Fund	(10,100)
Increase in Services Grant	0
Increase in New Homes Bonus	(497)
Changes in Reserves	(4,700)
Minimum Revenue Provision saving	(3,000)
	<b>(23,697)</b>
<b>Cost Pressures/Reduced Income:</b>	
Pay inflation	12,300
Service Pressures/Loss of Income	17,300
Additional inflationary provision for utilities and key contract	8,750
Prudential Borrowing additional debt charges	0
	<b>38,350</b>
<b>Net Budget Requirement 2023/24</b>	<b>251,697</b>
<b>Budget Gap before savings options</b>	<b>14,653</b>
Provisional Directorate savings options identified	(9,645)
Transformation and Corporate Savings (based on 75% delivery)	(6,400)



<b>Remaining (surplus)/deficit</b>	<b>(1,392)</b>

4.8 The assumptions that have been applied when preparing the draft budget are as follows:

- Inflation where contractual and unavoidable
- Provision for an annual pay award
- Pension contributions at current rates, pending the outcome of the triennial revaluation this year
- Business Rates income based on current trends and assuming there is not a re-set of business rates baselines or any change to the 100% pilot arrangements
- Business Rates income increasing by September CPI
- 1% increase in the Council Tax Base
- 2.99% increase in Council Tax, made up of 1.99% 'core' increase and 1% Adult Social Care precept

4.9 All of the assumptions above, and the spend pressures included in the draft budget to date, are all still subject to change as the budget process progresses. As already mentioned above, there is particular uncertainty this year due to the high level of inflation and lack of any information government spending plans.

4.10 There are two key Adult Social Care Reforms for implementation during 2023/24 – the Fair Cost of Care and Care Cap. The Fair Cost of Care requires the Council to work with the care sector to establish a median hourly rate for care and work towards that over a three-year period. The Care Cap will limit the amount that an individual is required to pay towards their care in their lifetime, as well as making some changes to eligibility criteria and charging thresholds. There are significant financial implications from both of these changes, but the draft budget assumes that these costs will be entirely funded from additional government grant. This funding was due to come from the 1% increase in National Insurance Contributions but as that has now been reversed it is unclear how government intend to fund these costs. There is lobbying for these reforms to be deferred by 12 months because of the impact on the sector but there has been no confirmation yet on whether this will happen.



- 4.11 The contract sum negotiations with Sandwell Children's Trust are still ongoing and are due to conclude in December. SCT are being impacted by inflationary pressures as well as recruitment and retention issues. The draft budget provision for SCT for 2023/24 is based on their previous MTFP assumption plus an allowance for additional pay costs. Council officers are working closely with SCT colleagues to agree the contract sum for 2023/24 and this includes discussions around savings options and invest to save proposals.
- 4.12 The funding assumptions are dependent on the announcement of the Local Government Finance Settlement which is not expected until mid-December. There was due to be an updated budget statement on 31<sup>st</sup> October but this has now been delayed until 17<sup>th</sup> November due to the new incoming Prime Minister. This has now been upgraded to a full Autumn Statement so may give some indication of the quantum of funding available for Local Government. There is a lot of speculation about public finances and what measures will be announced in the Autumn Statement, with a deteriorating economic outlook and the possibility of a recession next year.

#### 4.11 Savings options

- 4.12 Cabinet and Leadership Team have been working closely on the draft budget for 2023/24 and have undertaken a 'Star Chamber' exercise with all Directorates to challenge existing budgets and identify savings options. The Council has also made use of benchmarking data to compare our current costs against our nearest neighbours.
- 4.13 Given the extent of the budget challenge and the need to ensure a balanced and sustainable budget is set in March while maintaining an adequate level of reserves, Directorates were set a 7% target to either achieve savings or increase income in their services.
- 4.14 The initial savings proposals following this exercise are attached at Appendix B, setting out the service impact and risk rating of each proposal. These savings total £9.645m.
- 4.15 The proposal to charge for green waste collection is subject to a separate item on this agenda.





- 4.16 Some of the savings require consultation, either with employees or service users which will be started imminently, subject to Cabinet approval and in line with Council policies on consultation. Where required, Equality Impact Assessments will be as part of consultation processes. Feedback on the consultation and EqiA process will be reported to Cabinet alongside final budget proposals in February.
- 4.17 Alongside the Directorate savings approach, Leadership Team has been developing a Corporate and Transformation Savings Plan which includes a number of cross-cutting workstreams. This are:
- Maximising Digital Technologies
  - Customer Journey
  - Business Process Reviews
  - Maximising income and commercial opportunities
  - Smarter Support Services
  - Prevention and Promoting Independence
  - Maximising Partnership Working
  - Efficient Procurement
  - Sustainable Delivery Models
  - Reducing the cost of high cost services
- 4.18 The Council has interim transformation resources in place which will be developing delivery plans to progress these savings and so far, high-level savings targets have been set over the next three years. There are some workstreams where savings are expected to start being achieved in 2023/24 and others where savings are not profiled until Year 2 and 3. A more detailed breakdown of the savings identified to date against each workstream is shown at the table in section 4 of the MTFP at Appendix D but the table at 4.7 above assumes 75% delivery of the Year 1 savings at this point in time, pending detailed delivery plans being completed.
- 4.19 The Local Government Finance Act also requires Council's to consult with Business Ratepayers in its area. It is proposed that this report and the savings proposals are shared with the Black Country Chamber of Commerce and Business Ambassadors Group. A presentation on draft budget proposals and savings options will also be given to the Sandwell Business Ambassadors Group in December. Again, feedback from these consultations will be reported back to Cabinet in December.



- 4.20 As mentioned at section 4.8 above, the draft budget currently assumes a 2.99% Council Tax increase, based on a 1.99% 'core' increase and a 1% Adult Social Care precept. This is based on previous Council Tax Referendum limits but will depend on the limits set by government for 2023/24, which won't be known until the Finance Settlement is announced in December.
- 4.21 Subject to Cabinet agreeing the savings proposals at Appendix B in principle, officers will carry out the appropriate consultation and Equality Impact Assessments and report these back to Cabinet in February so final budget decisions can be made.
- 4.22 Assuming all savings at Appendix B are approved following consultation, the savings would be sufficient to close the current estimated budget gap with a small surplus remaining. However, there are several caveats in this report, the outcome of the Autumn Statement and Local Government Finance Settlement announcement being the most significant. There are also some key areas of spend, such as the Contract Sum process with Sandwell Children's Trust which are still to be determined. Therefore, it is likely that the draft budget position will continue to change, both from an expenditure and funding perspective, as the process continues. However, given the requirement to set a budget in March each year and the consultation process required for some savings, it is important that draft budget proposals are considered at an early stage and in advance of the settlement announcement.
- 4.23 Given the Cost of Living crisis affecting residents in Sandwell, it is suggested that any surplus savings are contributed to a specific Cost of Living reserve to further support the 'Supporting Sandwell' campaign that the Council has recently launched.

## 4.24 Budget Consultation

- 4.25 The Council carried out a budget consultation exercise earlier this year to inform the budget process and ensure the Council's resources are focused towards priority services. The Council commissioned Eventure Research to deliver the consultation and in total 1,070 telephone interviews took place with a representative sample of residents, and an online survey was completed by 577 residents. The survey asked





residents to rank the services that were most important to them and also asked for views on how the Council should close the budget gap and what services the Council should/could be charging more for. An Executive Summary of the consultation response is attached at Appendix C.

- 4.26 In terms of closing the budget gap, the option most supported by residents was to 'sell/develop Council buildings', with 34% of the telephone respondents selecting this option and 66% of online survey respondents selecting this. Introducing more charging for non-essential services, stopping or reducing non-essential services and reducing the number of staff/salaries also scored higher compared to other options. Increasing Council Tax was the lowest scoring option with both telephone and online respondents.
- 4.27 The survey findings do show a gap between the reality of the Council's financial capacity after a decade of austerity, and residents' willingness to pay for services through council tax or service charges, especially those deemed non-essential. This suggests the need for an ongoing programme of engagement over service priorities and how they are paid for.
- 4.28 Leadership Team and Cabinet have considered the results of the consultation as part of the process in identifying spend pressures and savings for 2023/24 and the development of the Transformation Savings Plan and the results will continue to inform the budget process before final proposals are considered by Cabinet in February.
- 4.29 The survey reports sub-group findings in detail and will be further examined by the Council's Research & Intelligence Team in conjunction with the Residents' survey to maximise the strategic value of this investment and to inform an annual consultation process.

#### **4.30 Medium Term Financial Strategy**

- 4.31 The Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) has had a fundamental review as part of the early budget setting process for 2023/24. The revised MTFS is included at Appendix D to this report and includes the Council's financial plans between 2022-26 across Revenue and Capital, a review of the Council's reserves and a budget risk assessment.



- 4.32 Assumptions have been made in the MTFS around future government funding and spend pressures. One of the key assumptions is that Local Government funding reform will progress by 2024/25 which will lead to a re-set of business rates growth and a loss of some time-limited grants. This may be an overly pessimistic outlook as it is likely that government would introduce some form of transitional relief to smooth the impact of reform over a Spending Review period, but at this stage it is felt that assumptions should be prudent so that appropriate savings plans can be developed.
- 4.33 The MTFS shows that the Council is facing a cumulative funding gap in the region of £50m over the next three years. A Transformation Savings Plan is being developed and initial savings targets have been incorporated into the MTFS but there is further work to do to ensure that the Council has savings plans to meet the estimated budget gap. This is particularly important given the relatively low level of unallocated reserves that the Council currently holds.
- 4.34 As mentioned throughout this report, the current national political and economic climate makes financial planning extremely difficult. As such, the MTFS is considered an interim update, with a further review to be undertaken alongside the final budget report to Cabinet in February.

#### **4.35 Next Steps**

- 4.36 The assumptions and estimates currently being used in the draft budget will be constantly monitored and the funding position will be revised if necessary once the Local Government Finance Settlement has been announced.
- 4.37 An external review of Fees and Charges is in the final stages of being completed and is expected to generate options for achieving the income target included in the Transformation Plan. Leadership Team will bring options on Fees and Charges increases to Cabinet for consideration and approval as part of the final budget report.
- 4.38 The Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy may need to be refreshed again as part of the final budget report when more information on government funding is available.



## 5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 Cabinet could request that alternative savings options be proposed and agreed, although there is limited time to do this and still be able to carry out the appropriate consultation on alternative savings.

## 6 Implications

<b>Resources:</b>	Resource implications are contained within the main body of the report. The draft budget shows an estimated gap of £15m for 2023/24.
<b>Legal and Governance:</b>	No direct implications arising from the recommendations.
<b>Risk:</b>	The Council is required to set a risk assessed balanced budget each year. A budget risk assessment is included within the MTFS
<b>Equality:</b>	Equality Impact Assessments will be carried out on savings proposals where required
<b>Health and Wellbeing:</b>	No direct implications arising from the recommendations.
<b>Social Value</b>	No direct implications arising from the recommendations.

## 7. Appendices

A.) Spend Pressures and Growth items

B.) Savings Options

C.) Budget Consultation  
Summary Results

D.) Medium Term Financial  
Strategy

## 8. Background Papers

None





## Appendix A

AREA OF BUDGET PRESSURE	2023/24 Pressure (£)	Rating	DETAILS
<b><u>Adult Social Care</u></b>			
External Placements - inflation	4,560,000	Unavoidable	Contractual Uplifts on Placement prices linked to inflationary and National Living Wage. Additional to inflation included in base Medium Term Financial Strategy.
Social Work	244,000	Growth	Introduction of Liberty Protection Safeguards & expansion of Independent Mental Health Advocate (IMCA) responsibilities - part year cost pending confirmation of implementation date
External Placements - demographics	2,653,000	Unavoidable	Demographic Growth in numbers of people requiring support - based on historic trends (excluding Covid years).
External Placements - loss of funding	1,346,000	Unavoidable	Withdrawal of Discharge to Assess Funding from Health & Social Care system. Cost of initial 4 weeks of support for clients leaving hospital will become the responsibility of ASC. Requesting funding from Better Care Fund towards this but not confirmed.
Staffing - Increments	113,000	Unavoidable	Impact of progression through the spinal points on particular grades.
<b>Adult Social Care Total</b>	<b>8,916,000</b>		
<b><u>Business Strategy and Change - Service Improvement</u></b>			
Service Improvement - Corporate Performance Management Staff	60,000	Growth - Improvement	Creation of Performance Management resources per Corporate Improvement Plan
Service Improvement - Corporate Performance Management System	100,000	Growth - Improvement	Implementation and ongoing maintenance of corporate performance management system. Costs are high level estimates at this stage
Service Improvement - Business Intelligence	70,000	Growth - Improvement	2 x posts for corporate business intelligence. 2022/23 costs funded from Improvement & Capacity Reserve as per Improvement Plan Report to Council 7 June 2022, will incur from half-way through 2022/23, therefore 2023/24 costs are the remainder
<b><u>Business Strategy and Change - ICT</u></b>			
ICT - Microsoft SCE	105,000	Unavoidable	22-23 is the first year of the 3 year renewal. Funded from cost centre 35663
Cyber Security	1,637,987	Unavoidable	Critical improvements needed to current Cyber Security arrangements, both system and staffing resources.
<b><u>Business Strategy and Change - Business Excellence</u></b>			
BE - Inform 360	144,391	Unavoidable	There has previously not be a budget allocated for this system
<b><u>Business Strategy and Change - Human Resources</u></b>			
Management and Leadership Development	100,000	Growth - Improvement	A new Management and Leadership Development Programme is a requirement of the Grant Thornton action plan.
<b>Business Strategy &amp; Change Total</b>	<b>2,217,378</b>		
<b>Borough Economy</b>			

Highway Infrastructure	1,100,000	Unavoidable	Additional investment in Highways infrastructure to address 'red risks' backlog, plus additional inflationary allowance. This is the revenue element - further pressures within Capital Programme
Leisure Facilities Utility Costs	600,000	Unavoidable	Escalating utility costs across leisure facilities - assumption based on current trends which will be kept under review
Leisure Community Sport Offer	262,000	Growth - Policy decision	Provision of a holistic service covering sports clubs, national governing body work, community and park locations. Part year implementation in Yr 1
Parking Fees and Charges	75,000	COVID	Car parking income is showing recovery post COVID, but some residual shortfall is possible with changing customer behaviour - e.g. reduced commuter parking and increased online shopping
Taxi Licensing	250,000	Unavoidable	The taxi licensing service has a historic income target that it has not been able to achieve.
Highways	50,000	Growth	Additional traffic calming measures
<b>Borough Economy Total</b>	<b>2,337,000</b>		
<b>Regeneration and Growth</b>			
Markets Service	454,000	Growth - Policy decision	Fall in income from West Brom Indoor market exacerbated by COVID. Long term plan to replace and relocate the indoor market should mitigate impact but not in 2023/24. Service will still break even.
Schools PFI Contract	65,000	Growth - Improvement	This post is critical to pro-actively manage the PFI Schools contracts
Increased Utilities Costs -	500,000	Unavoidable	Impact of increased utility costs across Council owned buildings. Estimate which will be kept under review
Regeneration pipeline revenue costs	250,000	Growth - Improvement	Revenue resources needed to deliver first phases of the Regeneration Pipeline
<b>Regeneration &amp; Growth Total</b>	<b>1,269,000</b>		
<b>Children's Services</b>			
Insurance	50,000	Growth	The premiums and claims history have increased since 2018/19. Three years of overspend of £45k-£50k
STEPS Centre		Growth - Policy decision	The Centre is currently funded from the Early Years underspend which will be exhausted by 2023/24
Early Years Attendance Team	218,900	Growth - Policy decision	The Team is currently funded from the Early Years underspend which will be exhausted by 2023/24
Educational Psychologist	838,100	Growth - Policy decision	Some of this team is currently funded from the High Needs Block but the service should be funded from general resources as the HNB is being over-committed
Youth Employment	308,500	To be funded from UKSPF	ESF funded due to end in December 2023.
School Improvement	140,000	Growth - Policy decision	Grant ending from April 2023
OT Assessments	61,200	Unavoidable	Statutory requirement that is currently unfunded
<b>Children's Total</b>	<b>1,616,700</b>		
<b>Corporate</b>			



2% increase in Transport Levy	260,000	Growth - Policy decision	Assume 2% p.a
Increase in External Audit Fee	102,204	Unavoidable	Increase of 150% - current budget £144k; 2021/22 audit fee £164k
<b>Corporate Total</b>	<b>362,204</b>		
<b>Legal and Governance</b>			
Contracts work	150,000	Growth	External legal advice to complete necessary contracts work in relation to key corporate projects
Equality & Diversity ongoing event budget	75,000	Growth - Policy decision	Allocation to fund ongoing training and events to support staffing team
Registration Services - income targets	112,000	Unavoidable	Adjust income target to more realistic levels based on current trends
Cessation of pre purchased graves to protect burial space	250,000	Growth - Policy decision	Suspension of Pre Purchased burial plots arrangements will impact on income in 2023/2025. This decision has been taken as consequence and as a mitigation action related to delays in the decision, appraisal and funding shortfall for the new cemetery for West Bromwich.
Registration Services - utilities	113,000	Unavoidable	Estimate based on current trends. To be kept under review
Whole Council Elections	50,000	Unavoidable	If Council resolve to move to whole Council elections then there will be additional one-off funding needed for administration
Election Service	208,000	Growth - Policy decision	Electoral services are historically underfunded and operate with a deficient budget. Despite repeated requests for the budget to be adjusted to reflect actual costs for the provision of statutory functions, this has been overlooked and needs to be remedied
<b>Law &amp; Governance Total</b>	<b>958,000</b>		
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>17,676,282</b>		

Appendix B

SERVICE AREA	PROPOSAL	NET SAVING £	Risk Rating	SERVICE IMPACT
ICT	Various ICT network maintenance and support savings	97,230	Green	None
ICT	Restructure savings	271,365	Green	None - service realignment and Planned Leaver requests
ICT	Renegotiation of the corporate printing contract	45,873	Green	None, all aspects of the contract remain the same.
Corporate	Mobile telephony and Data Card Contract	120,000	Green	None
HR	Graduate Scheme - Year 2	170,000	Amber	Graduate salaries to be funded from vacancies within service areas that would benefit from the introduction of the graduate and need to invest in the future talent pipeline.
HR	Delete Senior Learning and Development Officer post	45,427	Amber	Post is currently vacant would reduce delivery capacity across the team
<b>Business Strategy &amp; Change Total</b>		<b>749,895</b>		
Financial Services	Finance Restructure - full year saving	100,000	Green	Structure already approved and implemented from August 2022
Business Management	Adult Social Care charging review - full year saving	700,000	Amber	Pending consultation exercise - Cabinet decision due in November 2022
Business Management	Business Process Review of Business Support	150,000	Green	Based on 10% of current staffing budget
Revenues and Benefits	Reduction of one post	40,000	Green	None
<b>Finance Total</b>		<b>990,000</b>		
Development Planning & Building Control	Increase Building Consultancy fees and existing planning pre-application charges	32,000	Amber	Building Control is a trading account and has to compete with private inspectors. Any increase in fees may lead to the loss of work.
Development Planning & Building Control	Admin Support - Reduced Spend	11,000	Green	None
Growth and Spatial Planning Service	Reduced expenditure due to COVID and charging proportion of salaries to Capital	14,000	Green	None
Assets & Land	Riddins Mound - premises transferred to housing so budget no longer required	59,000	Green	None

Assets & Land	C2 New Square - rent review	60,000	Green	None - increased income due to rent review
Assets & Land	Wednesbury AEC - reduction in ongoing planned maintenance	60,000	Amber	May lead to backlog maintenance
Assets & Land	Cleaning Services - reduction in frequency	100,000	Green	Reduced cleanliness of corporate buildings
Assets & Land	Providence Place Sinking Fund no longer required	207,000	Green	None
Assets & Land	Building Surveying and Urban Design - deletion of two posts	61,000	Amber	Reduced capacity within the service
Assets & Land	Climate Change - top slice of current budget	17,000	Green	Less ability to meet Climate Change targets
<b>Regeneration Total</b>		<b>621,000</b>		
Learning Improvement - SAFL	Reduce target funding to the service so that the service operates within the Adult Education grant received.	40,000	Amber	The service will operate within grant funding and other income received and this will be achieved on a phased basis over a 3 year period.
Sandwell Children's Trust	SCT Efficiency Savings	350,000	Amber	To be achieved from the "Invest to Save" proposals submitted by SCT. To be discussed as part of Contract Sum Negotiations
Children's Services Directorate	Staffing Restructure	100,000	Green	The net impact of the Directorate staffing restructure. Already being implemented
SEND Transport	Efficiencies gained as a result of the new contract	150,000	Green	No service impact as the saving is due to reduced costs from the new procurement exercise. Some allowance has been made for increased demand but this will need to be monitored closely.
Community Transport	The grant allocation to Community Transport has reduced from Target funding of £289k to £62k	227,000	Green	The grant given to Community Transport has been reduced to £62k for 2022/23.
Learning Improvement - Early Years Play Service - Sustainability	Reduce Sustainability Budget	10,000	Green	None - based on current spending patterns.
Youth Employment Initiative (YEI)	Loss of YEI grant to be funded from UKSPF	308,500	Green	None - use of UK Shared Prosperity Funding to cover loss of YEI grant.
<b>Childrens and Education Total</b>		<b>1,185,500</b>		

External Placements	Better Care Fund inflation allocation	566,000	Green	None - additional external funding
Integrated Hub	Reduction of STAR Service	131,900	Amber	Would reduce the capacity of STAR to assist with reablement. Current review of service will give a much clearer impact on what resources will be required and what can be 're-cycled' in other parts of the market to support Discharge to Assess.
Commissioning	Review Supporting People contracts	30,000	Amber	None
Commissioning	Review Voluntary Sector grants	135,000	Green	To be fully funded by Public Health Grant
External Placements	Increase Direct Payment clawback income	500,000	Amber	None - increase income budget inline with previous years recovery
Social Work	Introduce an admin charge for services to self funders	226,000	Amber	Introduce an administration fee to cover the cost of arranging services for people who have savings and/or assets over the capital limits (i.e. self funders). Proposed charge of £300 cost to set up and a £200 charge annually thereafter.
Social Work	Reduce reliance on 6-week PIP pathway and introduce an automatic charge after 6 weeks	500,000	Amber	Encourage service users to engage in review at or before 6 week free service ends and introduce a charge for longer stays.
Therapy	Moving with Dignity project	556,000	Amber	Reviews of care packages to ensure they are meeting the needs of service users and encourage reablement and independence.
All	2021/22 underspend review	263,000	Green	In line with 2021/22 underspend review
Social Work	Undertaking outstanding reviews of care packages	150,000	Amber	Examples from providers experience of 900 cases reviewed delivered a £150k cost reduction. Can monitor the actual level of any saving as reviews get underway.
Direct Services - In House LD Creative Arts project	Change in the way the Creative Arts projects is delivered using partnership arrangements	30,000	Green	Creative arts currently runs as service exclusively for people with a Learning Disabilities. Opportunity to make the project a community based resource for general public use rather than specific LD service.
External Placements	Impact of Harvest View on long term placements due to reablement	130,000	Green	
<b>Adults Social Care Total</b>		<b>3,217,900</b>		

Waste	Charging for Green Waste	1,564,000	Amber	Introduce charge for green waste, based on initial assumption 40% take up at mid point fee and charge of £34 in 2023/24
Waste	Reduction of Contract Monitoring Team	32,000	Green	Joining up the contract monitoring for waste & leisure. Deletion of a vacant post Band D
Parks	Sandwell Valley income	200,000	Amber	None
Parks	Lightwoods House Inc	60,000	Green	None
Parks	Lightwood House Catering	30,000	Green	None
Events	Tender for Sandwell Valley	50,000	Green	None
Parks	Events income community events	20,000	Green	None
Grounds	Mowing schedule efficiency	50,000	Green	None
Taxi Licensing	Delegate to shared service	225,000	Green	None. Part year effect in 2023/24
Sport & Leisure	General	15,000	Green	Budget reductions
Libraries	Implementation of Library+ model	200,000	Green	Reduction of staffed hours in smaller libraries (over 2 years)
Libraries	Reduce ICT budget	10,000	Green	Support costs for self serve kiosks - reduction in number of kiosks. New kiosks funded from ACE money.
Libraries	Review of Home Library Service	60,000	Amber	Contract out service - reduce staffing and vehicles
Heritage	Implement heritage service review proposals/recommendations	50,000	Red	Change of use for 2 heritage facilities - requires review and consultation
<b>Borough Economy Total</b>		<b>2,566,000</b>		
Floating Support	Reduce service in line with grant funding reductions	77,600	Amber	Floating support is a preventative service so this may generate more demand elsewhere e.g. homelessness or Adult Social Care.
Community Partnerships	Reduction in service	30,500	Green	Less capacity to support community work
Enforcement (standards)	Increased income	43,000	Green	None - based on current trends
Shopmobility	Reduce Shopmobility Service	57,100	Amber	Will reduce service for customers but demand has not recovered to pre-COVID levels. Transfer to VCS being considered
Community Centres	Review delivery model at three Community Centres	107,000	Amber	Potential loss of staff at two community centres and cessation of grant. In the process of being reviewed. Alternative delivery models may be available.
<b>Housing Total</b>		<b>315,200</b>		

Grand Total		9,645,495		



# Budget Consultation

## Research Report

September 2022



Thornhill Brigg Mills, Thornhill Beck Lane, Brighouse, West Yorkshire, HD6 4AH

T: 01484 404797

W: [www.enventure.co.uk](http://www.enventure.co.uk)

**Report prepared by:**

Mark Robinson  
mark@enventure.co.uk

Kayleigh Pickles  
kayleigh@enventure.co.uk

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**Enventure Research**

**Head Office:**

Thornhill Brigg Mill, Thornhill Beck Lane, Brighouse West Yorkshire HD6 4AH  
T: 01484 404797

**London Office:**

Smithfield Business Centre, 5 St John's Lane, London, EC1M 4BH  
T: 0207 549 1616

W: [www.enventure.co.uk](http://www.enventure.co.uk) E: [info@enventure.co.uk](mailto:info@enventure.co.uk)

Reg no: 4693096  
VAT no: 816927894



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# 1. How to read this report

## 1.1 Interpreting the research findings

This report contains results from the surveys conducted to gain insight from residents to support Sandwell Council in the development of the budget proposals and future spending priorities.

The representative resident survey was conducted via telephone and face-to-face with quotas set on age group, gender, disability, ethnic group and area of the district. Alongside the representative survey was an online survey open to all Sandwell residents.

In total, 1,070 responses were received to the representative resident survey and 577 responses to the open online survey. The surveys were conducted in July and August 2022.

This report contains several tables and charts that present survey findings. In some instances, responses may not add up to 100%. There are several reasons why this might happen:

- The question may have allowed each respondent to give more than one answer
- Only the most common responses may be shown in the table or chart
- Individual percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number, so the total may come to 99% or 101%
- A response of between 0% and 0.5% will be shown as 0%. Where there were no respondents in a category, this is indicated by -

This report includes subgroup analysis that has been undertaken for the budget consultation to explore the results provided by different groups. This includes subgroup analysis by gender, age group, disability, working status, area of the district and ethnic group. This analysis has only been carried out where the sample size is seen to be sufficient for comment. Where there are no significant differences between subgroups, no comment has been made.

Differences that are statistically significant according to the z-test at the 95% confidence level are highlighted in the subgroup analysis boxes. The z-test is a commonly used statistical test used to highlight whether differences in results are 'significant'. By this we mean that we can say with 95% confidence that we would see a difference if all people in the group took part in the consultation. It should be noted that the percentages shown in the subgroup analysis reflect the proportion of the subgroup who answered the question and gave a particular response.

For the analysis of open-end responses, comments were read through by a researcher and a coding frame was developed for each open-end question based on the themes emerging. This then allowed for categorisation of the themes.

## 1.2 Terminology and clarifications

Throughout this report, those who took part in one of the surveys are referred to as 'respondents'.

Sandwell Council is referred to as 'the Council'.

## 2. Executive summary

### 2.1 Introduction

Sandwell Council is committed to consult with its residents to support evidence-based policy decision making, service delivery and performance management. Enventure Research was commissioned to deliver the Council's budget consultation to explore which services are most important to residents and where the Council should prioritise spending. This report sets out the findings from the research programme.

### 2.2 Methodology overview

The research programme involved a telephone survey, taking approximately 12 minutes to complete, with 1,070 residents of Sandwell aged 18 and above, with quotas set to achieve a sample that was representative of the area. In addition, some interviews were undertaken face-to-face on-street and in local community groups to consult with hard to reach residents.

An online version of the survey was also made available for all Sandwell residents to complete.

Enventure Research was commissioned to conduct the research programme, analyse and evaluate the feedback and provide a comprehensive report on the findings. The questionnaire was co-designed by Enventure Research and Sandwell Council.

### 2.3 Key findings

Detailed findings can be found in **Section 4**.

#### **Closing the budget gap**

- The option most supported by respondents in both surveys was *sell/develop Council buildings*, selected by 34% of representative survey respondents and 66% of online survey respondents
- *Introduce more charging for non-essential services* and *stop or reduce non-essential services* were also frequently mentioned by representative survey respondents (29% and 27% respectively)
- Online respondents were more likely to support *reduce number of staff/salaries* and *charge more for some paid-for services* (28%)

#### **Most valued services**

##### **Theme 1: The best start in life for children and young people**

- *Preventative help for vulnerable children* was selected as the most important area of work, chosen by half (50%) of representative survey respondents and just over two in five (43%) online respondents
- *Early years education* (37%) and *children's social care* (35%) were next most frequently selected by representative survey respondents
- Online survey respondents more frequently mentioned *youth facilities* (40%) and *quality, accessible school places* (36%)

##### **Theme 2: People live well and age well**

- *Helping older people live independently for longer* was viewed as important by over half of representative (55%) and online (53%) survey respondents

- *Providing day centres for older people* (44% representative; 35% online) and *encourage exercise and better health by maintaining parks and open spaces* (37% representative; 47% online) were also selected by high proportions of respondents

### **Theme 3: Strong resilient communities**

- *Community safety and tackling antisocial behaviour* was chosen as important by 64% of representative survey respondents and 69% of online respondents
- Over half of respondents in both surveys also selected *maintaining our parks and open spaces* (51% representative; 52% online)
- A quarter (26% in both surveys) said that *providing social hubs and community centres* was important

### **Theme 4: Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods**

- In both surveys, the most frequently mentioned area of work was *accessible affordable housing*, mentioned by 58% of representative and 55% of online survey respondents
- *Tackling homelessness and rough sleeping* was viewed as important by 47% of representative survey respondents and 41% of online respondents
- Similar proportions in both surveys said that *more energy efficient housing* was important (35% representative; 33% online)
- Online respondents were more likely to suggest *working with private landlords to bring empty homes back into use* (43%) in comparison with representative survey respondents (33%)

### **Theme 5: A connected and accessible Sandwell**

- *Maintaining roads and pavements* was selected as important by high proportions of respondents in both the representative survey (72%) and the online survey (79%)
- Similar proportions mentioned *improving transport options and transport links* (47% representative; 53% online) and *improved partnership working with local authorities and West Midlands Combined Authority* (30% representative, 25% online)

### **Theme 6: A strong and inclusive economy**

- Over half (55%) of representative survey respondents said that *creating more jobs for local people* was important and half (50%) said the same about *creating apprenticeship opportunities for young people*, with similar proportions of online respondents saying the same (51% and 42% respectively)
- Almost half (46%) of online respondents mentioned *improving Sandwell's town centres*, which was higher than the proportion of representative survey respondents selecting this option (31%)

### **Service provision**

- Services most frequently expected to be provided at no cost to residents in both surveys were *green waste* (66% representative; 81% online) and *library services* (63% representative; 58% online)
- *Adult social care services* were also expected to be provided at no cost by the majority of representative (58%) and online (51%) respondents
- A higher proportion of online survey respondents (53%) expected *cremation and burial* to be provided at no cost than did representative survey respondents (36%)
- Respondents were most willing to contribute financially towards *public shows and events* (74% representative; 82% online) and *sports and leisure facilities* (71% representative; 76% online)
- Over 50% of respondents in both surveys indicated that they would be willing to contribute towards *pest control services*, *car parking*, *cultural services* and *bulky waste item collections*



## Council tax

- Three in five (59%) representative survey respondents and almost half (46%) of online survey respondents felt that an increase of *0%-0.99%* in council tax would be reasonable to enable the Council to provide the current level of service
- Similar proportions in both surveys felt that an increase of *1.00%-1.99%* would be reasonable (24% representative; 31% online)
- Only small proportions felt that an increase of *2.00% or higher* would be reasonable

## Accessing services online

- The highest proportion of respondents in both surveys indicated that they would be *happy to contact the Council/use MySandwell account for all services* (56% representative; 49% online)
- However, over three in ten (31%) representative survey respondents said that they would prefer to access *all council services* in-person or by telephone (14% of online respondents gave the same response)
- All other services listed were selected by higher proportions of online respondents than representative survey respondents
- Of those who preferred to contact the Council in-person or via telephone for any service, the majority said this was because they *simply prefer to speak to someone* (40% in both surveys), and the next most frequent response was related to the *convenience of speaking to someone* (18% representative; 24% online)

## Doing things differently

- The most common suggestion for other things the Council could do to help with making the required savings was *stop wasting money/work more efficiently* (16% representative; 28% online)
- *No unnecessary spending/cut back on non-essentials* was suggested by 13% of representative survey respondents and 17% of online respondents
- Other common responses included *reduce staff/managers/salaries* (11% representative; 17% online) and *sort problems quickly/more prevention* (6% representative, 10% online)

## 3. Research programme

### 3.1 Background

Sandwell Council is committed to consult with its residents to support evidence-based policy decision making, service delivery and performance management. Enventure Research was commissioned to deliver the Council's budget consultation to explore which services are most important to residents and where the Council should prioritise spending. This report sets out the findings from the research programme.

### 3.2 Methodology and sampling

#### Representative telephone and face-to-face survey

A representative telephone survey was conducted with residents of the Sandwell district aged 18 and above by a team of telephone interviewers using a CATI methodology (Computer Aided Telephone Interviewing), whereby respondents' answers to questions are directly input into survey software. In addition, some interviews were undertaken face-to-face on-street and in local community groups to consult with hard to reach residents.

The survey used a questionnaire that was developed by Enventure Research and Sandwell Council. Interviews took approximately 12 minutes for an interviewer to complete with a respondent. The questionnaire can be found in **Appendix 1**.

Interviewer shifts took place at different times, on both weekdays and weekends (including at peak times). In addition, interviews were undertaken at community events with residents from ethnic minority groups, with translation support provided where required.

Before launching the survey, the questionnaire was tested with a small number of residents, who were asked to take part and provide feedback on their experience. This helped ensure that the questionnaire was easy to understand, would elicit useful responses, was of a suitable length and that the questions were asked in a non-biased manner to collect valid and reliable data.

In total, **1,070 interviews** were completed, with research taking place from 14 July to 25 August 2022.

Sandwell was divided into six areas, known as the Towns, each having several wards. Quotas were set on these Towns as shown in **Figure 1**.

**Figure 1 – Sandwell Towns and their council wards**

Oldbury	Bristnall, Langley, Oldbury and Old Warley
Rowley Regis	Blackheath, Cradley Heath and Old Hill, Rowley and Tividale
Smethwick	Abbey, Smethwick, Soho and Victoria and St Pauls
Tipton	Great Bridge, Princes End and Tipton Green
Wednesbury	Friar Park, Wednesbury North and Wednesbury South
West Bromwich	Charlemont with Grove Vale, Great Barr with Yew Tree, Greets Green and Lyng, Hateley Heath, Newton and West Bromwich Central

Quotas for the survey were set on age group and gender based on mid-year population estimates for the district, and on ethnic group and disability based on the 2011 census, to provide a sample that was broadly representative in terms of those demographic characteristics.

### Online survey

An online version of the same questionnaire used in the representative telephone and face-to-face survey was made available for residents to complete.

### Respondent profile

The figures below show the respondent profiles for the survey.

**Figure 2** shows the quota for each area and the number of completed interviews achieved in the representative survey.

***Figure 2 – Number of interviews for the representative survey by Sandwell Town***

Sandwell Town	Quota	Achieved no.	Achieved %
Oldbury	175	166	16%
Rowley Regis	168	189	18%
Smethwick	191	196	18%
Tipton	134	125	12%
Wednesbury	128	124	12%
West Bromwich	266	270	25%

**Figure 3** shows quotas for gender, age group, disability and ethnic group and the breakdown of the achieved sample by those characteristics for the survey.

**Figure 3 - Quotas for the representative survey**

Characteristic	Quota	Achieved no.	Achieved %
Gender			
Male	520	500	47%
Female	540	561	52%
Other	-	1	0%
Prefer not to say	-	8	1%
Age			
18-24	120	106	10%
25-34	195	171	16%
35-44	196	201	19%
45-54	187	213	20%
55-64	157	154	14%
65-74	109	115	11%
75+	95	92	9%
Prefer not to say	-	18	2%
Physical or mental health condition			
Yes	-	250	23%
No	-	793	74%
Prefer not to say	-	27	3%
Ethnicity			
White, White Other	734	747	71%
Black, Asian & Minority	319	233	22%
Mixed	-	59	5%
Other	-	8	1%
Prefer not to say	-	23	2%

The full respondent profile for this survey can be found in **Section 5** of the report.

Based on an approximate total population of 341,900 in Sandwell (2021 Census, ONS), a sample of 1,070 respondents gives results that are accurate to approximately +/- 3.0% at the 95% confidence interval. This means with a result of 50%, we can be 95% sure that if we interviewed all residents then the result would be between 47.0% and 53.0%.

### 3.3 Acknowledgments

Enventure Research would like to thank Sarah Sprung, Simone Hines, Claire Sanderson and Harpreet Dhillon from Sandwell Council, and Brushstrokes Community Project for their help and cooperation on this project, and to express gratitude to everyone who took part in the research.

## 4. Research findings

### 4.1 Closing the budget gap

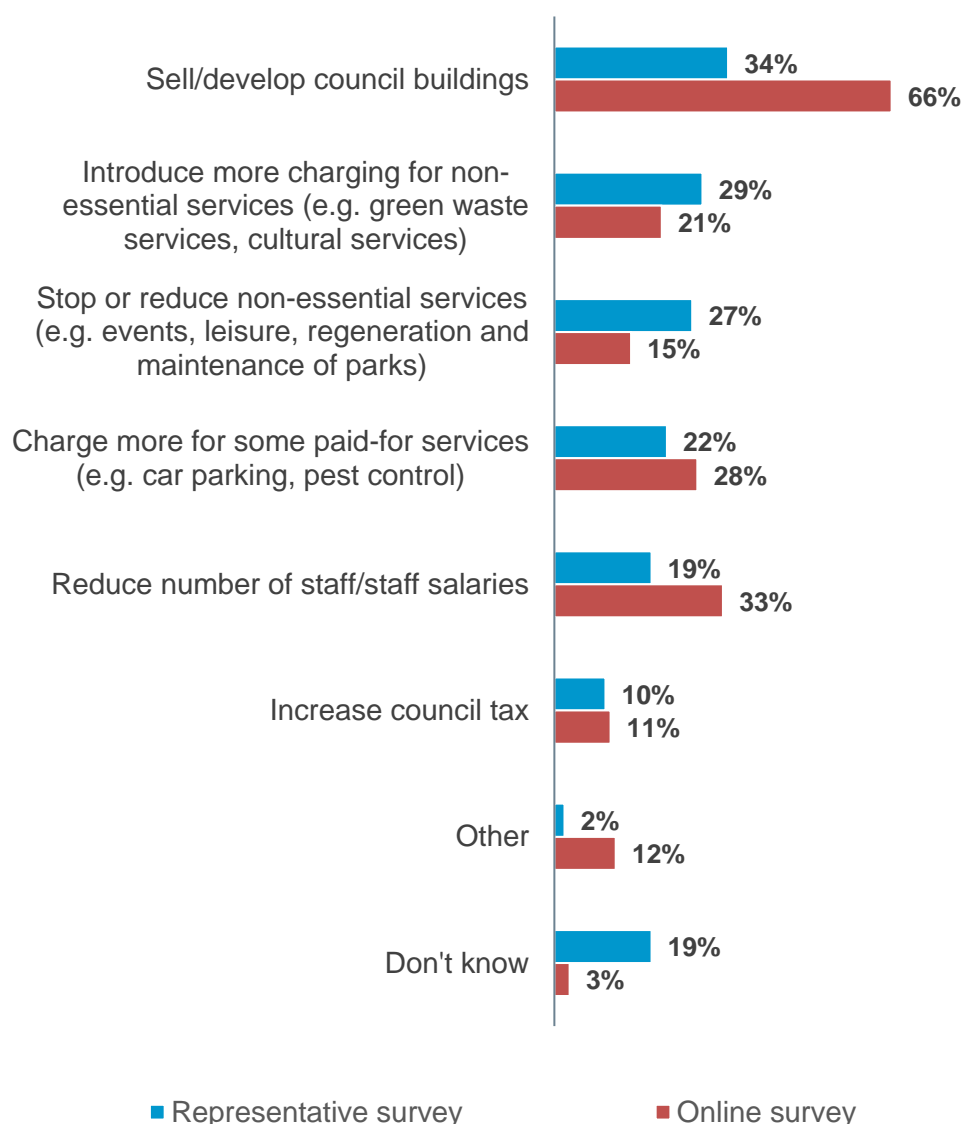
Survey respondents were asked to select from a list which options they would support to enable the Council to close the budget gap, and could select as many as applied.

As shown in **Figure 4**, respondents from both surveys were most likely to support *sell/develop Council buildings*, suggested by a third (34%) of representative survey respondents and two thirds (66%) of online survey respondents.

Representative survey respondents also frequently supported *introduce more charging for non-essential services* (29%) and *stop or reduce non-essential services* (27%), whilst online survey respondents were more likely to support *reduce number of staff/staff salaries* (33%) and *charge more for some paid-for services* (28%).

**Figure 4 – Which of the following options would you support to enable the Council to close the budget gap?**

**Base: Representative survey – 1,070 / online survey – 577**





## Subgroup analysis

### *Representative survey*

Subgroups most likely to suggest **sell/develop council buildings** (34% overall) were:

- Aged 55-64 (39%) and 65-74 (40%) compared with those aged 18-24 (26%)
- Retired (42%) compared with those not working (other) (28%)

Subgroups most likely to suggest **introduce more charging for non-essential services** (29% overall) were:

- Living in Wednesbury (36%) or Rowley Regis (35%) compared with those living in West Bromwich (20%)
- Aged 65-74 (37%) compared with those aged 45-54 (22%)
- Retired (36%) compared with those not working (other) (21%)

Subgroups most likely to suggest **stop or reduce non-essential services** (27% overall) were:

- Living in Smethwick (34%) compared with those living in Oldbury (20%)
- Aged 35-44 (31%) compared with those aged 65-74 (17%)
- Black, Asian and Minority ethnic groups (32%) compared with White (25%)
- Those who did not have a physical or mental health condition (30%) compared with those who did (17%)

### *Online survey*

Subgroups most likely to suggest **sell/develop council buildings** (66% overall) were:

- Living in West Bromwich (74%) or Oldbury (73%) compared with Rowley Regis (58%)
- Female (70%) compared with male (58%)

Subgroups most likely to suggest **reduce number of staff/staff salaries** (33% overall) were:

- Aged 65-74 (51%) compared with those aged 25-34 (25%) or 35-44 (27%)
- Retired (45%) compared with employed (29%)

Subgroups most likely to suggest **charge more for some paid-for services** (28% overall) were:

- Living in Smethwick (40%) compared with those living in Wednesbury (15%)
- Male (35%) compared with female (26%)

‘Other’ responses were thematically coded and are presented in **Figure 5**. As shown, the most common responses received in the representative survey were that *none* of the options were supported (6 responses) or that the Council should *stop wasting money* (4 responses).

Online survey respondents most frequently suggested *fewer managers/reduce staff salaries* (14 responses), *save money elsewhere/better manage budget* (8 responses), *reduce councillors/councillor spending* (6 responses), and *generate more income* (6 responses).

**Figure 5 – Which of the following options would you support to enable the Council to close the budget gap? Other responses (coded)****Base: Representative survey – 17 / online survey – 63**

Response	Count	Percentage
<b>Representative survey</b>		
Nothing/none	6	35%
Stop wasting money	4	24%
A combination of all	1	6%
Reduce pension contribution	1	6%
Fewer bin collections	1	6%
Collect outstanding rent	1	6%
Spend less on translation services	1	6%
Remove corruption in council	1	6%
Free bus passes	1	6%
<b>Online survey</b>		
Fewer managers/reduce staff salaries	14	22%
Save money elsewhere/better manage budget	8	13%
Reduce councillors/councillor spending	6	10%
Generate more income	6	10%
Stop wasting money	5	8%
More enforcement/collect arrears/tackle fraud	4	6%
Fewer bin collections	3	5%
Offer more paid-for services	3	5%
More green investment	3	5%
Nothing/none	2	3%
Do more in-house	2	3%
Reduce benefits	2	3%
Lobby government for funding	1	2%
Increase taxes for high earners	1	2%
Refurbish instead of building new	1	2%
Other/unrelated comment/complaint	6	10%

## 4.2 Most valued services

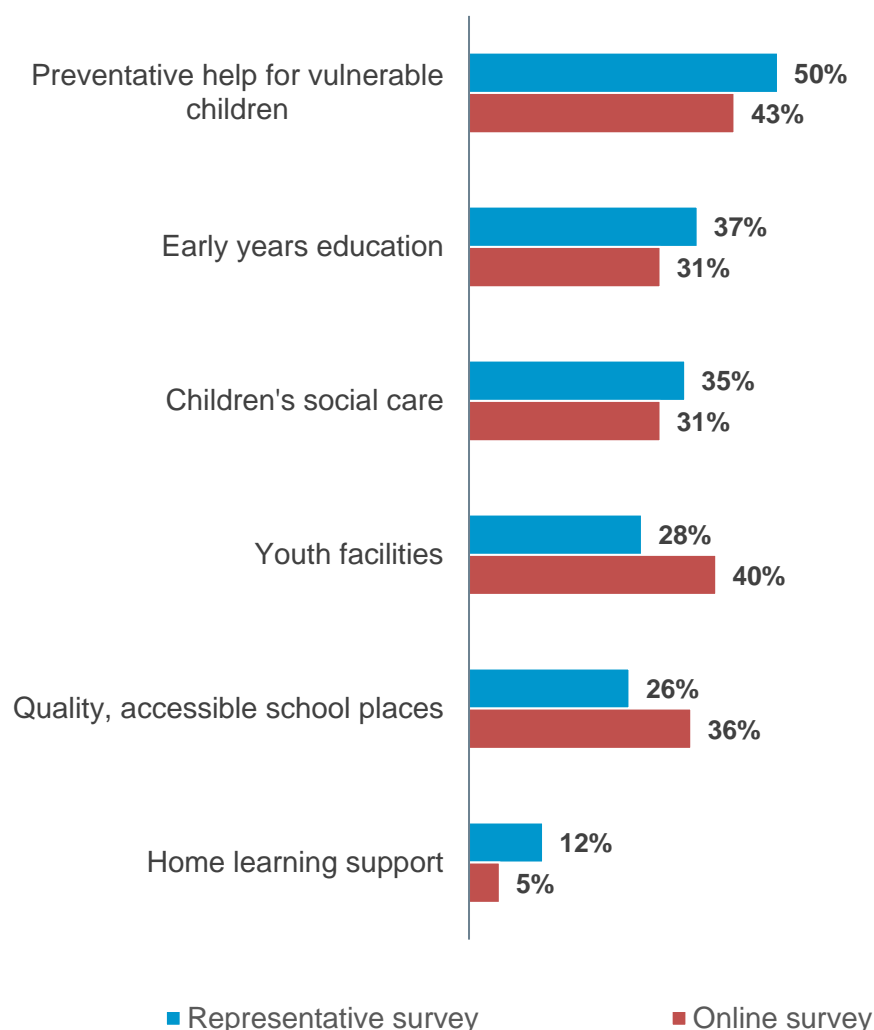
Sandwell Council has identified six different themes that feed into its corporate plan. Respondents were asked to state which areas of work in each theme they thought were most important, and were able to select up to two options.

### Theme 1: The best start in life for children and young people

As shown in **Figure 6**, *preventative help for vulnerable children* was the most commonly suggested area in both surveys, identified by half (50%) of representative survey respondents and just over two in five (43%) online survey respondents.

Similar proportions in the representative survey suggested *early years education* (37%) and *children's social care* (35%), whilst online survey respondents were more likely to suggest *youth facilities* (40%) and *quality, accessible school places* (36%).

**Figure 6 – Theme 1: The best start in life for children and young people**  
**Base: Representative survey – 1,070 / online survey – 577**



## Subgroup analysis

### *Representative survey*

Subgroups most likely to suggest **preventative help for vulnerable children** (50% overall) were:

- Living in Rowley Regis (58%) or Tipton (56%) compared with those living in West Bromwich (44%)
- Aged 25-34 (58%) compared with those aged 65-74 (39%)
- Employed (52%) compared with retired (43%)

Subgroups most likely to suggest **children's social care** (35% overall) were:

- Aged 65-74 (44%) or 75+ (47%) compared with those aged 25-34 (30%)

### *Online survey*

Subgroups most likely to suggest **preventative help for vulnerable children** (43% overall) were:

- Living in Oldbury (53%) compared with those living in Wednesbury (33%)
- Female (48%) compared with male (34%)

Subgroups most likely to suggest **youth facilities** (40% overall) were:

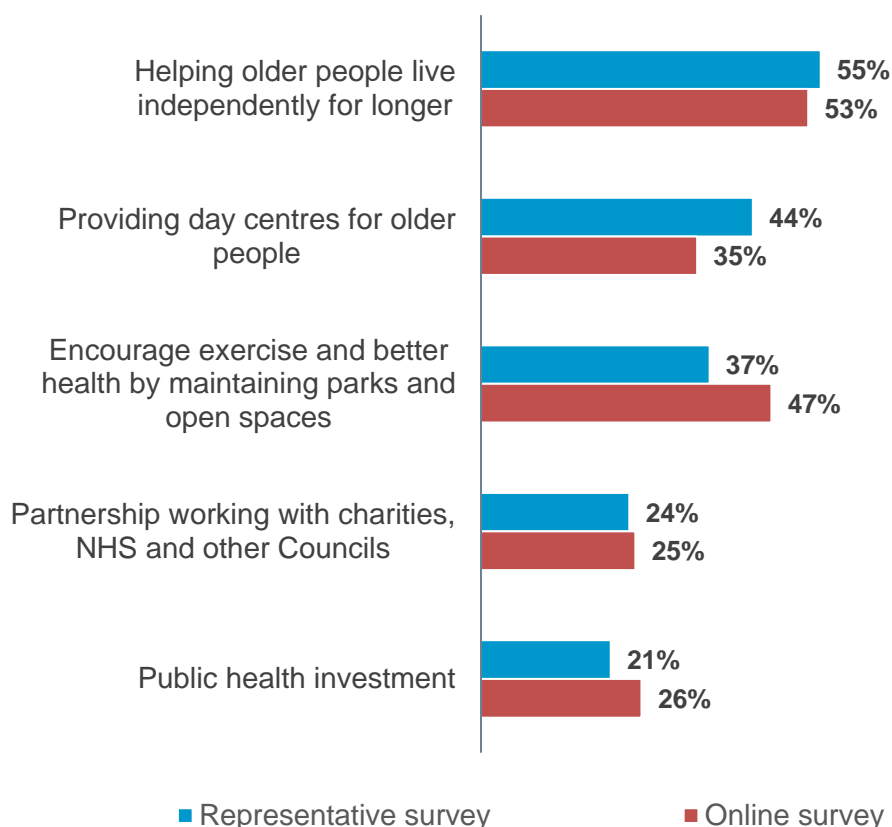
- Living in Smethwick (43%) compared with those living in Oldbury (32%)

Subgroups most likely to suggest **quality, accessible school places** (36% overall) were:

- Those who did not have a physical or mental health condition (39%) compared with those who did (28%)

## Theme 2: People live well and age well

Over half of respondents in both surveys identified *helping older people live independently for longer* as important (55% representative; 53% online). Over two in five (44%) representative survey respondents suggested *providing day centres for older people*, whilst 47% of online survey respondents mentioned *encourage exercise and better health by maintaining parks and open spaces*. These results are shown in **Figure 7**.

**Figure 7 – Theme 2: People live well and age well****Base: Representative survey – 1,070 / online survey – 577****Subgroup analysis***Representative survey*

Subgroups most likely to suggest **helping older people live independently and for longer** (55% overall) were:

- Female (59%) compared with male (52%)
- Aged 65-74 (72%) or 75+ (68%) compared with younger age groups (40% to 56%)
- White (59%) compared with Black, Asian and Minority ethnic groups (47%)
- Those who had a physical or mental health condition (62%) compared with those who did not (54%)
- Retired (72%) compared with employed (50%)

Subgroups most likely to suggest **providing day centres for older people** (44% overall) were:

- Aged 25-34 (53%) compared with those aged 65-74 (37%) or 75+ (38%)
- Employed (49%) compared with retired (38%)

Subgroups most likely to suggest **encourage exercise and better health by maintaining parks and open spaces** (37% overall) were:

- Living in Wednesbury (46%) compared with those living in West Bromwich (32%)
- Male (41%) compared with female (34%)
- Aged 55-64 (46%) compared with those aged 25-34 (30%)

### Subgroup analysis (cont.)

#### Online survey

Subgroups most likely to suggest **helping older people live independently and for longer** (53% overall) were:

- Aged 65-74 (74%) or 75+ (82%) compared with those aged under 45 (36% to 41%)
- Retired (73%) compared with not working (other) (48%) and employed (50%)

Subgroups most likely to suggest **encourage exercise and better health by maintaining parks and open spaces** (47% overall) were:

- Male (54%) compared with female (45%)
- Aged 25-34 (61%) compared with those aged 35-44 or 45-54 (both 45%)

Subgroups most likely to suggest **providing day centres for older people** (35% overall) were:

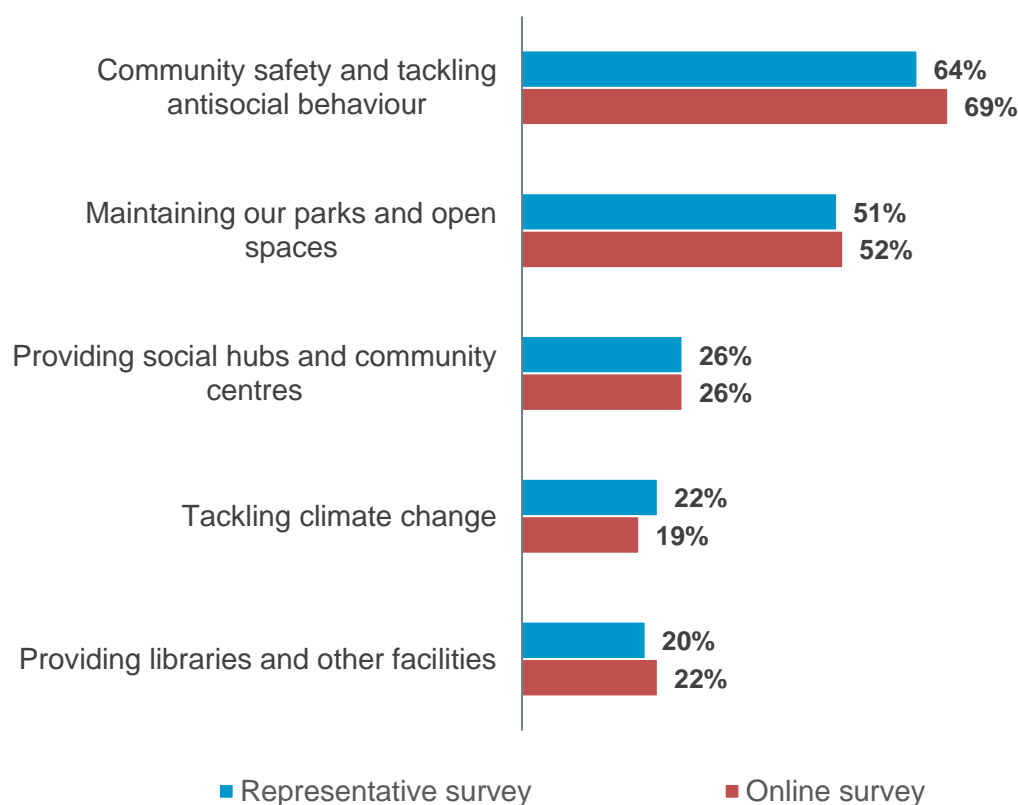
- Living in Wednesbury (46%) or West Bromwich (42%) compared with those living in Tipton (20%) or Oldbury (25%)
- Aged 35-44 (42%) or 45-54 (40%) compared with those aged 55-64 (26%)

### Theme 3: Strong, resilient communities

*Community safety and tackling antisocial behaviour* was most frequently identified by respondents from both surveys (64% representative, 69% online). Over half (51% representative, 52% online) said *maintaining our parks and open spaces*, whilst a quarter (26% for both surveys) suggested *providing social hubs and community centres*. The full breakdown of responses is shown in **Figure 8**.

**Figure 8 – Theme 3: Strong, resilient communities**

**Base: Representative survey – 1,070 / online survey – 577**



## Subgroup analysis

### *Representative survey*

Subgroups most likely to suggest **community safety and tackling antisocial behaviour** (64% overall) were:

- Living in West Bromwich (70%) compared with those living in Smethwick (56%)
- Aged 45-54 (71%) or 55-64 (73%) compared with those aged 18-24 (54%) or 75+ (53%)

Subgroups most likely to suggest **maintaining our parks and open spaces** (51% overall) were:

- Living in Oldbury (57%), Rowley Regis (56%) or Wednesbury (56%) compared with those living in West Bromwich (44%)
- Male (55%) compared with female (48%)
- Aged 75+ (63%) compared with those aged 55-64 (43%)
- White (53%) compared with Black, Asian and Minority ethnic groups (46%)
- Retired (59%) compared with those not working (other) (44%)

Subgroups most likely to suggest **providing social hubs and community centres** (26% overall) were:

- Living in Wednesbury (34%) compared with those living in West Bromwich (21%)
- Aged 25-34 (37%) compared with those aged 65-74 (19%) or 75+ (16%)
- Students (48%) compared with retired (17%)

### *Online survey*

Subgroups most likely to suggest **maintaining our parks and open spaces** (52% overall) were:

- Living in West Bromwich (61%) compared with those living in Tipton (37%)
- Retired (60%) compared with those not working (other) (35%)

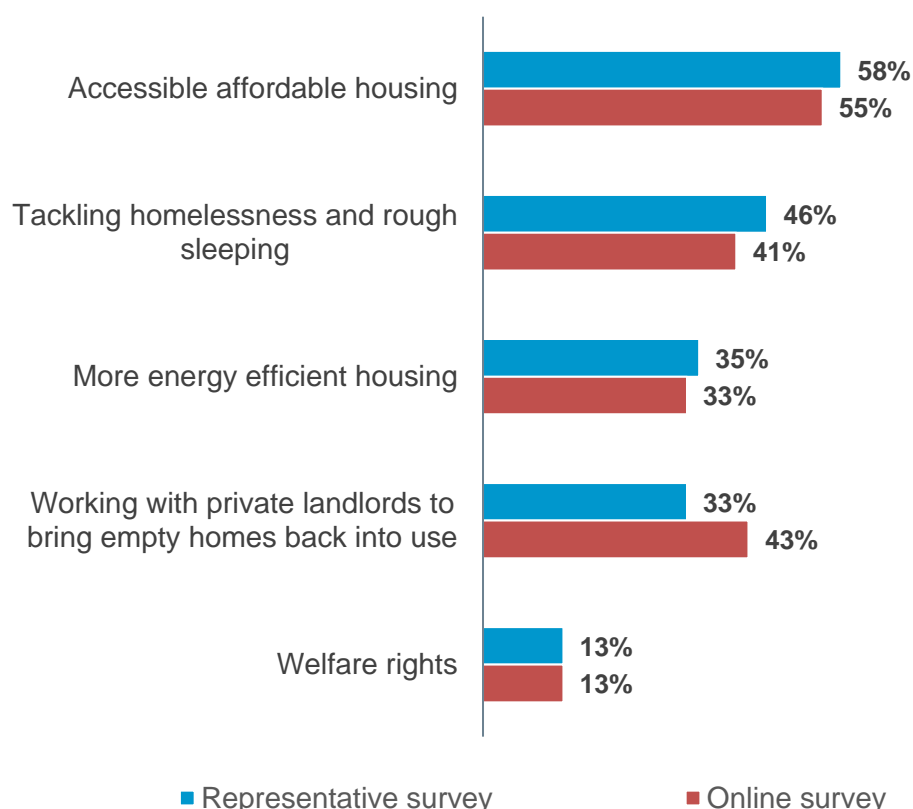
Subgroups most likely to suggest **providing social hubs and community centres** (26% overall) were:

- Those who had a physical or mental health condition (33%) compared with those who did not (24%)

## Theme 4: Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods

*Accessible affordable housing* was identified as one of the most important areas within this theme, suggested by over half of representative survey respondents (58%) and online survey respondents (55%). *Tackling homelessness and rough sleeping* was important for almost half (46%) of respondents in the representative survey, whilst online respondents were more likely to mention *working with private landlords to bring empty homes back into use* (43%). **Figure 9** presents these findings.

**Figure 9 – Theme 4: Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods**  
**Base: Representative survey – 1,070 / online survey – 577**



### Subgroup analysis

#### *Representative survey*

Subgroups most likely to suggest **accessible affordable housing** (58% overall) were:

- Aged 18-24 (72%), 25-34 (64%) or 35-44 (64%) compared with those aged 65-74 (48%) or 75+ (52%)
- Those who did not have a physical or mental health condition (60%) compared with those who did (52%)
- Unemployed (69%) or employed (62%) compared with those who were retired (48%)

Subgroups most likely to suggest **tackling homelessness and rough sleeping** (46% overall) were:

- Living in Tipton (53%) or Rowley Regis (51%) compared with those living in Smethwick (39%)
- Female (49%) compared to male (42%)

Subgroups most likely to suggest **more energy efficient housing** (35% overall) were:

- Living in Smethwick (43%) compared with those living in Rowley Regis (33%) and West Bromwich (33%)
- Male (38%) compared with female (32%)
- Aged 18-24 (40%) and 25-34 (40%) compared with those aged 65-74 (24%)
- Students (48%) and employed (37%) compared with those who were retired (29%)



### Subgroup analysis (cont.)

#### Online survey

Subgroups most likely to suggest **accessible affordable housing** (55% overall) were:

- Aged 25-34 (66%) compared with those aged 65-74 (49%) and 75+ (35%)
- Students (83%) and employed (58%) compared with those not working (other) (39%)

Subgroups most likely to suggest **working with private landlords to bring empty homes back into use** (43% overall) were:

- Living in Tipton (57%) compared with those living in Smethwick (38%) and Wednesbury (33%)
- Aged 18-24 (79%) and 65-74 (53%) compared with those aged 25-34 (29%)

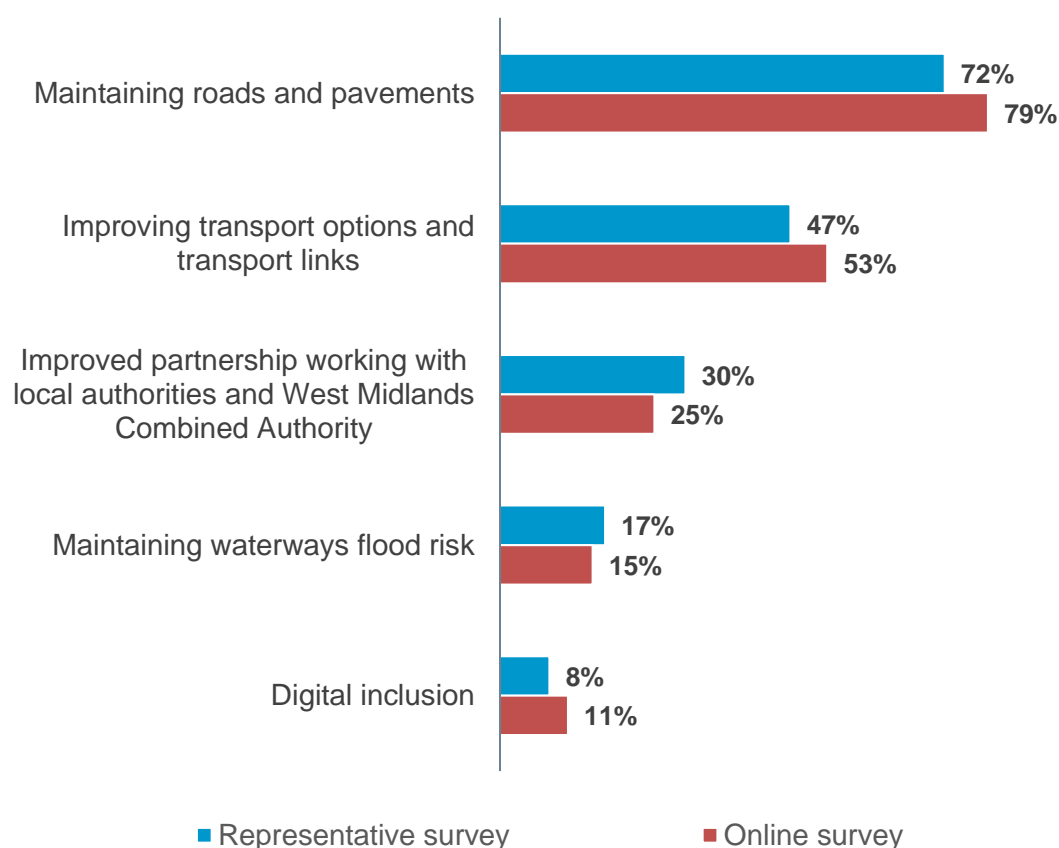
Subgroups most likely to suggest **tackling homelessness and rough sleeping** (41% overall) were:

- Living in Smethwick (46%) compared with those living in Tipton (22%)
- Female (44%) compared with male (34%)
- Black, Asian and Minority ethnic groups (57%) compared with White (39%)

### Theme 5: A connected and accessible Sandwell

As shown in **Figure 10**, *maintaining roads and pavements* was the most commonly identified area, mentioned by 72% of representative survey respondents and 79% of online survey respondents. *Improving transport options and transport links* was important for 47% of representative survey respondents and 53% of online respondents.

**Figure 10 – Theme 5: A connected and accessible Sandwell**  
Base: Representative survey – 1,070 / online survey – 577



## Subgroup analysis

### *Representative survey*

Subgroups most likely to suggest **maintaining roads and pavements** (72% overall) were:

- Living in Oldbury (80%) compared with those living in Wednesbury (66%) and West Bromwich (70%)
- Aged 75+ (86%) and 55-65 (78%) compared with those aged 25-34 (63%) and 35-44 (66%)
- Those who had a physical or mental health condition (77%) compared with those who did not (70%)
- Retired (82%) compared with employed (69%)

Subgroups most likely to suggest **improving transport options and transport links** (47% overall) were:

- Living in Tipton (53%) compared with those living in Wednesbury (40%)
- Aged 65-74 (56%) compared with those aged 35-44 (42%) and 45-54 (43%)

Subgroups most likely to suggest **improved partnership working with local authorities and West Midlands Combined Authority** (30% overall) were:

- Living in Wednesbury (42%) compared with those living in Oldbury (23%) and West Bromwich (26%)
- Male (33%) compared with female (27%)  
Aged 25-34 (43%) compared with those aged above 55 (17% to 24%)  
Not working (other) (38%), unemployed (33%) and employed (33%) compared with retired (18%)

### *Online survey*

Subgroups most likely to suggest **maintaining roads and pavements** (79% overall) were:

- Living in Rowley Regis (88%) and Wednesbury (89%) compared with those living in Smethwick (68%)

Subgroups most likely to suggest **improving transport options and transport links** (53%) were:

- Living in Smethwick (65%) compared with those living in Rowley Regis (42%)
- Female (56%) compared with male (46%)
- Aged 24-34 (64%) compared with those aged 35-44 (48%)

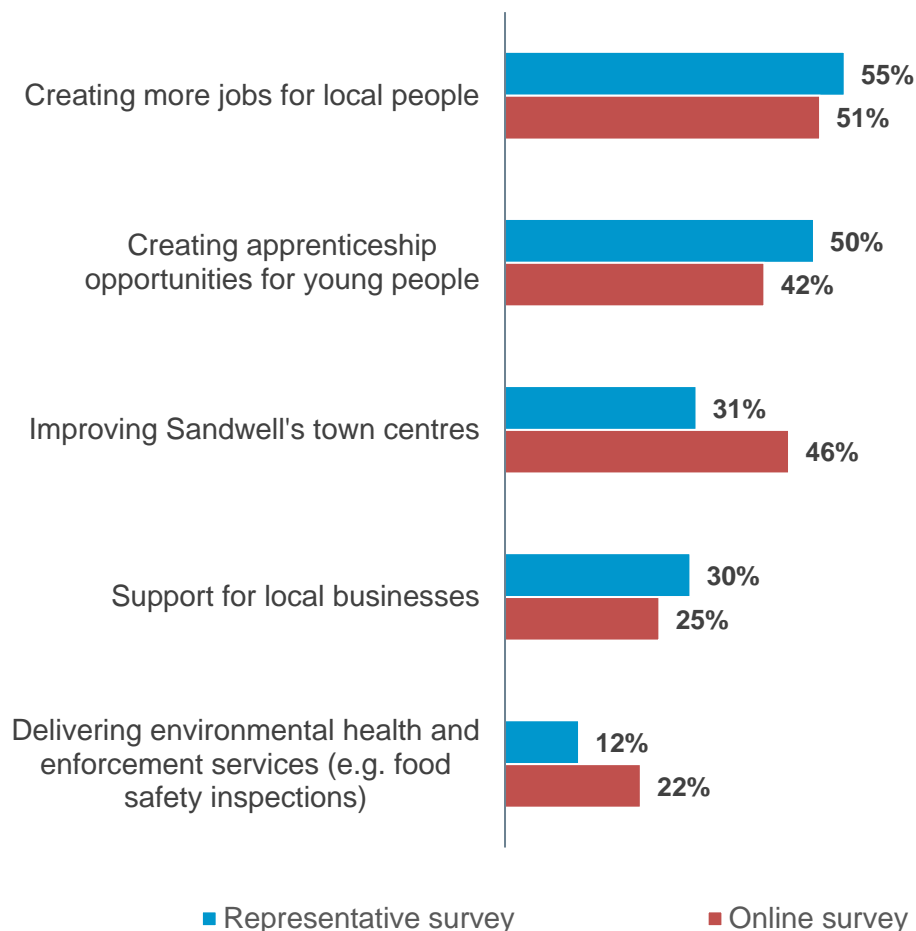
Subgroups most likely to suggest **improved partnership working with local authorities and West Midlands Combined Authority** (25% overall) were:

- Living in Tipton (35%) and Smethwick (34%) compared with those living in Rowley Regis (16%)
- Aged 18-24 (79%) compared with all other age groups (21% to 35%)
- Black, Asian and Minority ethnic groups (35%) compared with White (24%)

## Theme 6: A strong and inclusive economy

Similar proportions in both surveys suggested *creating more jobs for local people* (55% representative; 51% online) and *creating apprenticeship opportunities for young people* (50% representative; 42% online). *Improving Sandwell's town centres* was suggested by a higher proportion of online respondents (46%) than representative survey respondents (31%). The full breakdown of responses is shown in **Figure 11**.

**Figure 11 – Theme 6: A strong and inclusive economy**  
**Base: Representative survey – 1,070 / online survey – 577**



## Subgroup analysis

### *Representative survey*

Subgroups most likely to suggest **creating more jobs for local people** (55% overall) were:

- Employed (58%) compared with retired (47%)

Subgroups most likely to suggest **creating apprenticeship opportunities for young people** (50% overall) were:

- Aged 65-74 (60%) compared with those aged 25-34 (46%)
- White (52%) compared with Black, Asian and Minority ethnic groups (44%)
- Retired (57%) compared with employed (48%)

Subgroups most likely to suggest **improving Sandwell's town centres** (31% overall) were:

- Living in Tipton (42%) compared with those living in West Bromwich (26%) and Smethwick (28%)
- Aged 65-74 (39%) compared with those aged 25-34 (27%)
- Not working (other) (38%) and retired (32%) compared with unemployed (17%)

### *Online survey*

Subgroups most likely to suggest **creating more jobs for local people** (51% overall) were:

- Living in Smethwick (69%) compared with those living in Oldbury (43%), Rowley Regis (44%) and West Bromwich (48%)
- Female (54%) compared with male (45%)
- Aged 25-34 (61%) compared with those aged 65-74 (40%)
- Employed (54%) compared with retired (42%)

Subgroups most likely to suggest **improving Sandwell's town centres** (46% overall) were:

- Living in Wednesbury (61%), Rowley Regis (56%) and West Bromwich (51%) compared with Smethwick (29%)

Subgroups most likely to suggest **creating apprenticeship opportunities for young people** (42% overall) were:

- Aged 65-74 (49%) compared with those aged 25-34 (33%)
- Not working (other) (61%) compared with employed (40%)

## 4.3 Service provision

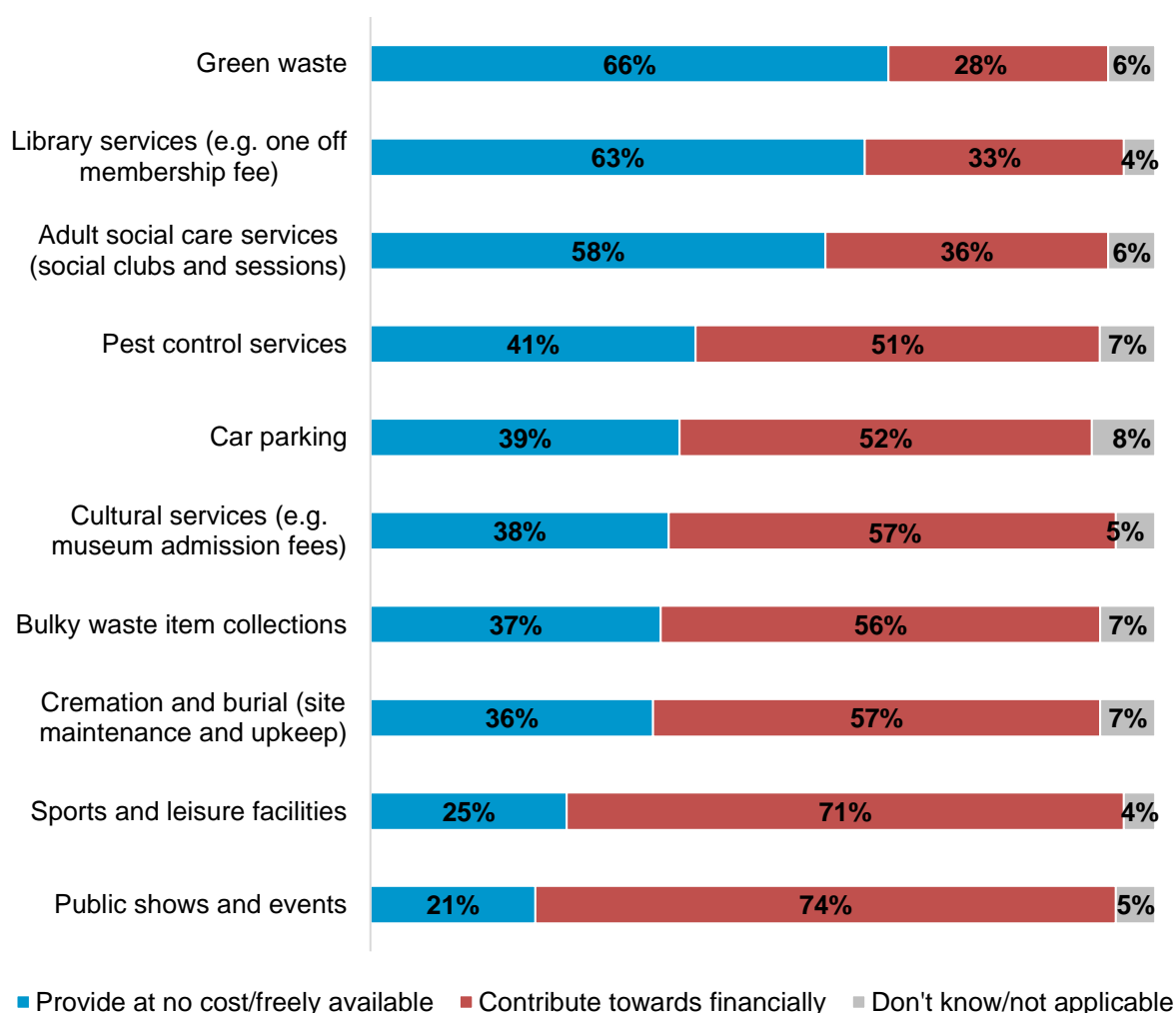
Respondents were asked which services they would expect or like to be provided at no cost to residents, and which services they would be happy to contribute towards financially. **Figures 12 and 13** present the responses from the representative and online surveys.

In both surveys, participants were most likely to expect *green waste* to be provided at no cost (66% representative, 81% online), followed by *library services* (63% representative, 58% online). Over half of respondents expected *adult social care services* to be provided at no cost, suggested by 58% in the representative survey and 51% in the online survey. *Cremation and burial* was suggested by a higher proportion of online survey respondents (53%) than representative survey respondents (36%).

Respondents were most willing to contribute financially towards *public shows and events* (74% representative; 82% online) and *sports and leisure facilities* (71% representative; 76% online). Over 50% of respondents in both surveys indicated that they would be willing to contribute towards *pest control services*, *car parking*, *cultural services* and *bulky waste item collections*.

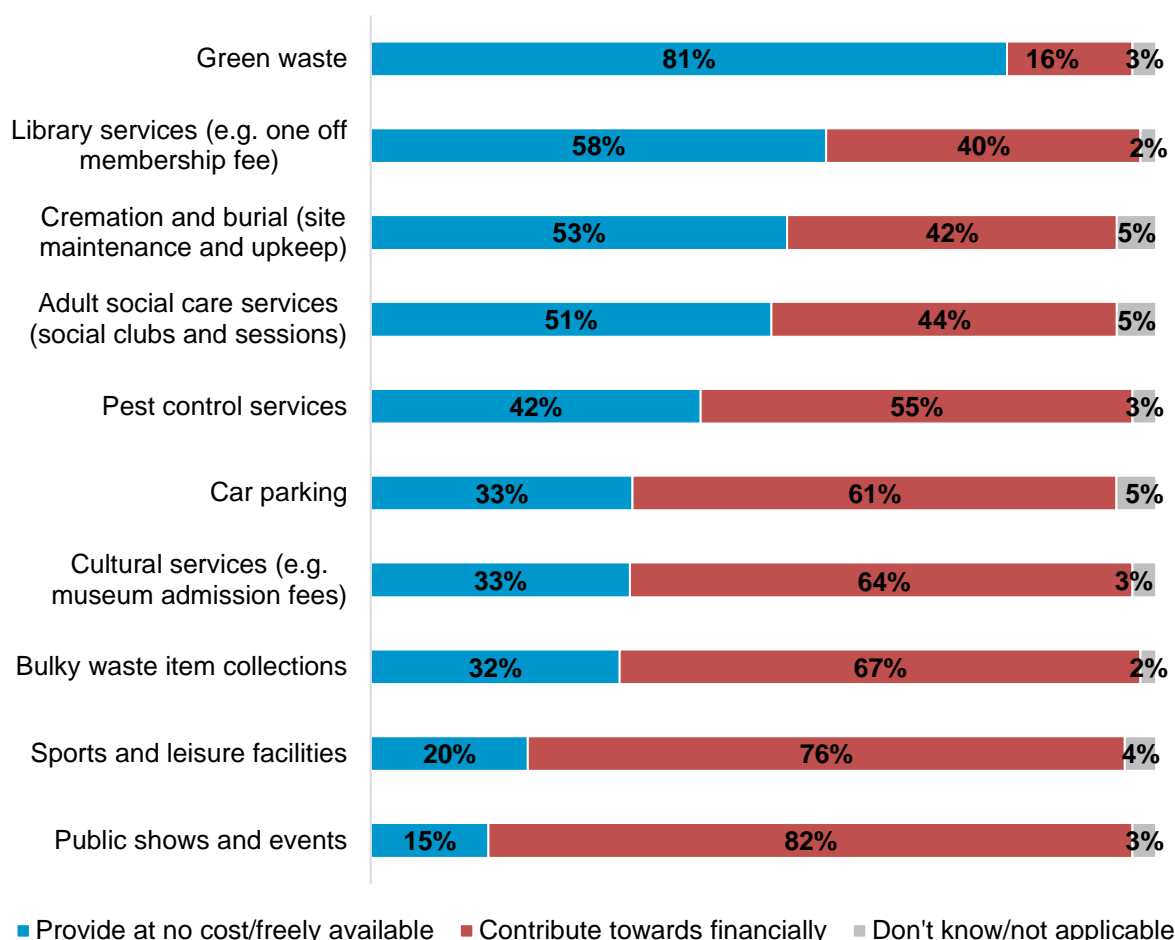
**Figure 12 – Which services would you expect or like to be provided at no cost to residents, and which services would you be happy to contribute towards?**

**Base: Representative survey – 1,070**



**Figure 13 – Which services would you expect or like to be provided at no cost to residents, and which services would you be happy to contribute towards?**

**Base: Online survey – 577**



### Subgroup analysis

#### Representative survey

Subgroups most likely to expect or like **car parking** to be **provided at no cost/freely available** (39% overall) were:

- Living in Tipton (46%) and West Bromwich (44%) compared with those living in Smethwick (31%)
- Aged 55-64 (56%) and 65-74 (51%) compared with younger age groups (29% to 34%)
- Those who had a physical or mental health condition (51%) compared with those who did not (35%)
- Retired (48%) and not working (other) (49%) compared with employed (34%)

Subgroups most likely to be **willing to contribute financially** towards **bulky waste item collections** (56% overall) were:

- Living in Wednesbury (63%) compared with those living in West Bromwich (52%)
- Aged 25-34 (67%) and 45-54 (63%) compared with those aged 75+ (36%)
- Those who did not have a physical or mental health condition (59%) compared with those who did (48%)
- Employed (62%) compared with not working (other) (48%) and retired (43%)

### Subgroup analysis (cont.)

Subgroups most likely to expect or like **green waste** to be **provided at no cost/freely available** (66% overall) were:

- Living in Wednesbury (73%) compared with those living in Oldbury (57%)
- Female (70%) compared with male (60%)
- Aged 65-74 (77%) and 75+ (73%) compared with those aged 25-34 (49%)
- White (67%) compared with Black, Asian and Minority ethnic groups (59%)
- Retired (77%) compared with students (48%), not working (other) (60%) and employed (63%)

Subgroups most likely to be **willing to contribute financially** towards **sports and leisure facilities** (71% overall) were:

- Living in Smethwick (76%) compared with those living in Rowley Regis (65%)
- White (74%) compared with Black, Asian and Minority ethnic groups (66%)
- Those who did not have a physical or mental health condition (76%) compared with those who did (61%)
- Employed (76%) compared with retired (63%) and not working (other) (63%)

Subgroups most likely to like or expect **library services** to be **provided at no cost/freely available** (63% overall) were:

- Living in West Bromwich (69%) compared with those living in Rowley Regis (55%)
- Aged 65-74 (74%) compared with those aged 18-24 (57%) and 25-34 (53%)
- Black, Asian and Minority ethnic groups (68%) compared with White (61%)
- Those who had a physical or mental health condition (69%) compared with those who did not (61%)

Subgroups most likely to be **willing to contribute financially** towards **cultural services** (57% overall) were:

- Living in Wednesbury (67%) compared with those living in West Bromwich (51%)
- Aged 25-34 (66%) compared with those aged 55-64 (49%) and 65-74 (50%)
- Those who did not have a physical or mental health condition (60%) compared with those who did (50%)

Subgroups most likely to like or expect **adult social care services** to be **provided at no cost/freely available** (58% overall) were:

- Female (60%) compared with male (54%)
- Aged 55+ (61% to 65%) compared with those aged 18-24 (42%) and 25-34 (47%)
- Those who had a physical or mental health condition (72%) compared with those who did not (54%)
- Retired (63%) and unemployed (61%) compared with students (38%)

Subgroups most likely to be **willing to contribute financially** towards **public events and shows** (74%) were:

- Living in Tipton (78%) compared with those living in Rowley Regis (68%)
- Aged 55-64 (80%) compared with those aged 18-24 (65%)
- Those who did not have a physical or mental health condition (75%) compared with those who did (71%)
- Employed (77%) compared with students (59%) and unemployed (63%)



### Subgroup analysis (cont.)

Subgroups most likely to be **willing to contribute financially** towards **cremation and burial** (57% overall) were:

- Living in Oldbury (63%) compared with those living in West Bromwich (52%)
- Aged 45-54 (63%) compared with those aged 65-74 (50%)
- Employed (60%) compared with unemployed (44%) and not working (other) (48%)

Subgroups most likely to be **willing to contribute financially** towards **pest control services** (51% overall) were:

- Male (56%) compared with female (47%)
- Aged 18-24 (64%) compared with 55-64 (34%) and 75+ (34%)
- Those who did not have a physical or mental health condition (55%) compared with those who did (41%)
- Employed (57%) compared with not working (other) (43%) and retired (40%)

#### Online survey

Subgroups most likely to expect or like **car parking** to be **provided at no cost/freely available** (33% overall) were:

- Living in Wednesbury (46%) compared with those living in Rowley Regis (25%)

Subgroups most likely to be **willing to contribute financially** towards **bulky waste item collections** (67% overall) were:

- Living in Rowley Regis (74%), Wednesbury (74%) and Oldbury (73%) compared with those living in Smethwick (55%)
- White (69%) compared with Black, Asian and Minority ethnic groups (53%)

Subgroups most likely to expect or like **green waste** to be **provided at no cost/freely available** (81% overall) were:

- Living in Rowley Regis (85%) compared with those living in Tipton (71%)
- Aged 75+ (94%) compared with those aged 18-24 (57%)
- Not working (other) (94%) compared with unemployed (60%)

Subgroups most likely to be **willing to contribute financially** to **sports and leisure facilities** (76% overall) were:

- Living in Tipton (90%) compared with those living in West Bromwich (70%)
- Aged 45-54 (81%) compared with those aged 75+ (53%)
- White (78%) compared with Black, Asian and Minority ethnic groups (68%)

Subgroups most likely to expect or like **library services** to be **provided at no cost/freely available** (58% overall) were:

- Aged 35-44 (67%) compared with those aged 45-54 (49%)
- Black, Asian and Minority ethnic groups (68%) compared with White (56%)

Subgroups most likely to expect or like **adult social care services** to be **provided at no cost/freely available** (51% overall) were:

- Not working (other) (77%) compared with employed (48%)

Subgroups most likely to be **willing to contribute financially** towards **public shows and events** (82% overall) were:

- White (84%) compared to Black, Asian and Minority ethnic groups (73%)



### Subgroup analysis (cont.)

Subgroups most likely to expect or like **cremation and burial** to be **provided at no cost/freely available** (53% overall) were:

- Aged 55-64 (61%) compared with those aged 35-44 (48%)

Subgroups most likely to be **willing to contribute financially** towards **pest control services** (55% overall) were:

- Living in Tipton (67%), Wednesbury (63%) and Rowley Regis (61%) compared with those living in Smethwick (43%)
- Those who did not have a physical or mental health condition (58%) compared with those who did (49%)
- Employed (60%) compared with retired (45%) and not working (other) (32%)

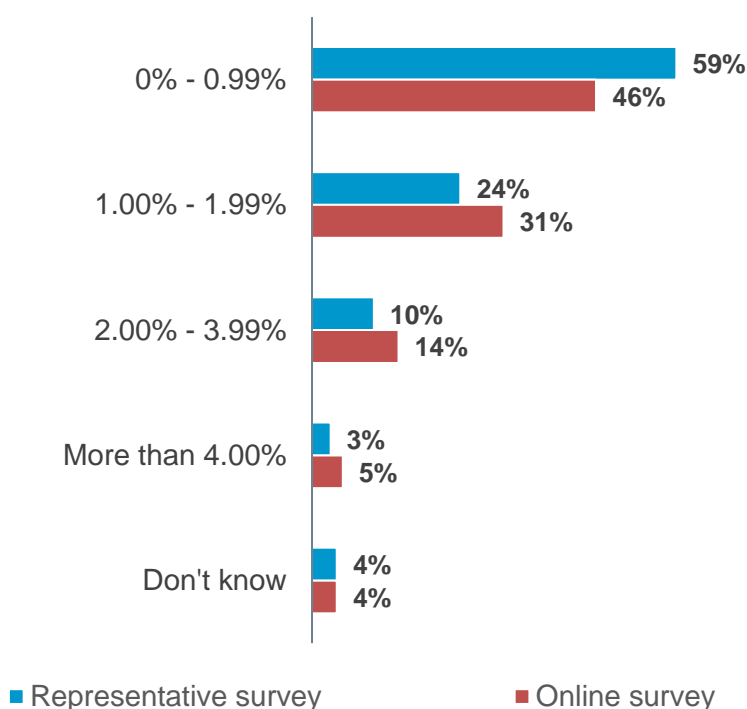
## 4.4 Council tax

Taking into consideration the financial challenges the Council is facing, respondents were asked what they considered to be a reasonable council tax increase to enable the Council to provide the current level of service. **Figure 14** presents these results.

The most common response in both surveys was 0%-0.99%, suggested by three in five (59%) representative survey respondents and almost half (46%) of online respondents. Similar proportions felt that an increase of 1.00%-1.99% would be reasonable (24% representative; 31% online). Only small proportions felt that an increase of 2.00% or higher would be reasonable.

**Figure 14 – Taking into consideration the financial challenge the Council is facing, what would you consider to be a reasonable council tax increase to enable it to provide the current level of service?**

**Base: Representative survey – 1,070 / online survey – 577**



## Subgroup analysis

### *Representative survey*

Subgroups most likely to be **willing to pay 0%-0.99%** (59% overall) were:

- Those aged under 65 (60% to 67%) compared with older age groups (65-74 – 41%; 75+ – 51%)
- Unemployed (80%) compared with retired (46%)

Subgroups most likely to be **willing to pay 1.00%-1.99%** (24% overall) were:

- Female (27%) compared with male (20%)

Subgroups most likely to be **willing to pay 2.00%-3.99%** (10% overall) were:

- Living in Smethwick (15%) compared with those living in Tipton (6%), Oldbury (8%), Rowley Regis (8%) and West Bromwich (9%)
- Aged 65-74 (22%) compared with younger age groups (6% to 9%)
- Retired (18%) compared with not working (other) (7%) and employed (8%)

Subgroups most likely to be **willing to pay more than 4.00%** (3% overall) were:

- Male (5%) compared with female (2%)
- Aged 75+ (8%)
- Retired (7%) compared with employed (3%)

### *Online survey*

Subgroups most likely to be **willing to pay 0%-0.99%** (46% overall) were:

- Aged 45-54 (52%) compared with those aged 65-74 (35%)
- Black, Asian and Minority ethnic groups (52%) compared with White (44%)
- Employed (48%) compared with retired (37%)

Subgroups most likely to be **willing to pay 2.00%-3.99%** (14% overall) were:

- Living in Oldbury (19%) and Smethwick (17%)
- Male (19%) compared with female (12%)

Subgroups most likely to be **willing to pay more than 4.00%** (5% overall) were:

- Male (9%) compared with female (3%)

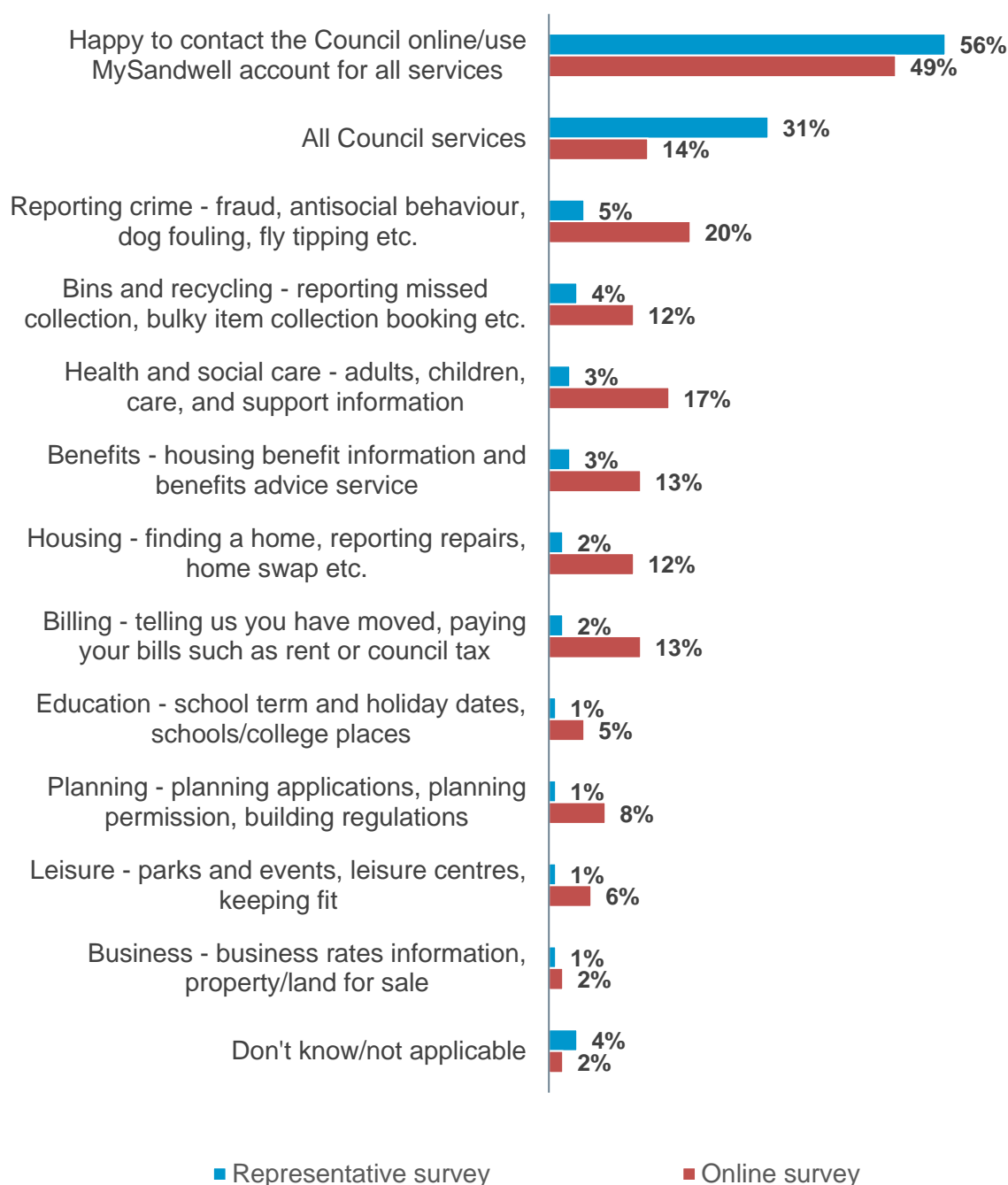
## 4.5 Accessing services online

Sandwell residents are able to access Council services in-person, by telephone or online. Survey respondents were asked which, if any, services they would prefer to access in-person or via telephone. **Figure 15** presents the responses from both surveys.

Respondents most frequently answered that they would be *happy to contact the Council online/use MySandwell account for all services* (56% representative, 49% online), however over three in ten (31%) representative survey respondents said that they would prefer to access *all council services* in-person or via telephone. All other services listed were selected by higher proportions of online respondents than representative survey respondents.

**Figure 15 – Are there any services that you would prefer to access in-person or on the telephone?**

**Base: Representative survey – 1,070 / online survey – 577**



## Subgroup analysis

### *Representative survey*

Subgroups most likely to be **happy to contact the Council online/use MySandwell account for all services** (56% overall) were:

- Living in Wednesbury (61%) compared with those living in Tipton (49%)
- Aged between 25 and 54 (60% to 71%) compared with those aged over 55 (33% to 45%)
- Black, Asian and Minority ethnic groups (63%) compared with White (53%)
- Those who did not have a physical or mental health condition (60%) compared with those who did (42%)
- Employed (63%) compared with retired (38%) and not working (other) (47%)

Subgroups most likely to suggest **all council services** (31% overall) were:

- Living in Rowley Regis (38%) compared with those living in Wednesbury (25%) and Smethwick (28%)
- Female (35%) compared with male (27%)
- Aged over 55 (40% to 57%) compared with those aged under 45 (19% to 21%)
- White (34%) compared with Black, Asian and Minority ethnic groups (23%)
- Those who had a physical or mental health condition (47%) compared with those who did not (26%)
- Retired (55%) and not working (other) (38%) compared to employed (24%) and unemployed (26%)

Subgroups most likely to suggest **reporting crime** (5% overall) were:

- Living in Oldbury (8%) compared with those living in Smethwick (3%)
- Aged 25-34 (9%)
- Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups (7%) compared with White (4%)

Subgroups most likely to suggest **bins and recycling** (4% overall) were:

- Living in Tipton (8%)
- Aged 25-34 (7%)

Subgroups most likely to suggest **health and social care** (3% overall) were:

- Living in Tipton (6%)

Subgroups most likely to suggest **benefits** (3% overall) were:

- Living in Tipton (6%)

### *Online survey*

Subgroups most likely to be **happy to contact the Council online/use MySandwell account for all services** (49% overall) were:

- Living in Smethwick (65%) compared with those living in Wednesbury (41%), Rowley Regis (46%) and West Bromwich (48%)
- Employed (53%)

Subgroups most likely to suggest **reporting crime** (20% overall) were:

- Aged 75+ (41%) and 65-74 (33%) compared with those aged 25-34 (11%)
- Retired (34%) compared with employed (17%)

**Subgroup analysis (cont.)**

Subgroups most likely to suggest **health and social care** (17% overall) were:

- Aged 75+ (35%) and 65-74 (26%) compared with those aged 55-64 (12%)
- Those who had a physical or mental health condition (23%) compared with those who did not (15%)
- Retired (25%) compared with employed (14%)

Subgroups most likely to suggest **all council services** (14% overall) were:

- Living in Tipton (20%) compared with those living in Rowley Regis (8%) and Smethwick (8%)

Subgroups most likely to suggest **benefits** (13% overall) were:

- Living in Wednesbury (20%)
- Aged 65-74 (19%) compared with those aged 25-34 (8%)
- Those who had a physical or mental health condition (23%) compared with those who did not (9%)

Subgroups most likely to suggest **billing** (13% overall) were:

- Aged 65-74 (23%) compared with those aged between 25 and 64 (10% to 11%)

Subgroups most likely to suggest **housing** (12% overall) were:

- Living in Rowley Regis (17%) and Wednesbury (17%)
- Those who had a physical or mental health condition (20%) compared with those who did not (9%)
- Not working (other) (26%) compared with employed (11%) and retired (11%)

Subgroups most likely to suggest **bins and recycling** (12% overall) were:

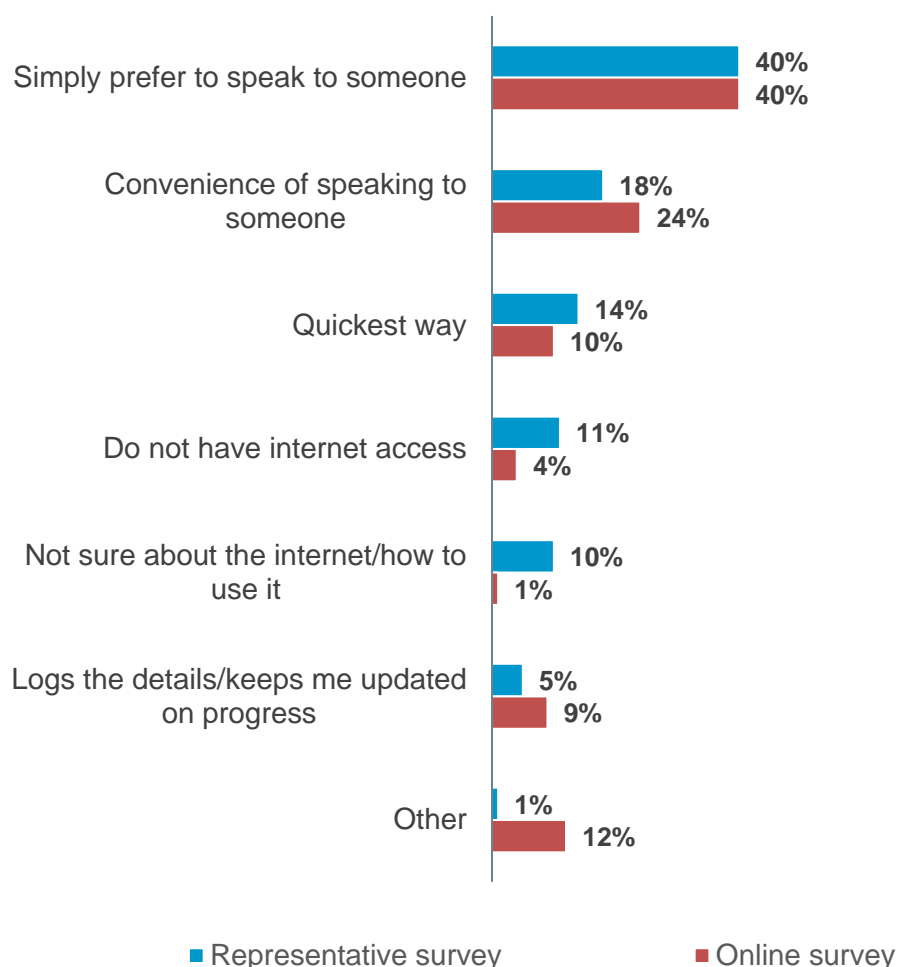
- Living in Rowley Regis (20%) compared with those living in Oldbury (9%) and West Bromwich (7%)
- Aged 65-74 (21%) and 75+ (29%) compared with those aged 25-34 (6%)
- Retired (20%) compared with employed (10%)

Subgroups most likely to suggest **planning** (8% overall) were:

- Male (13%) compared with female (6%)

Those who said they would prefer to contact the Council in-person or by telephone for any of the services listed were asked to explain the reason for this preference. Four in ten (40%) respondents from both surveys said that they *simply prefer to speak to someone*, with the next most common response being the *convenience of speaking to someone* (18% representative; 24% online). The range of responses received is shown in **Figure 16**.

**Figure 16 – Why would you prefer to contact the Council in-person or by telephone?**  
**Base: Representative survey – 422 / online survey – 280**



'Other' responses were thematically coded and are presented in **Figure 17**. In both surveys, the most common other response was that speaking to someone in-person or via telephone was *better/easier for complex issues* (2 responses in the representative survey and 8 responses in the online survey).

Other common online survey responses included being *more likely to get a response* (7 responses), feeling *reassured* or being treated with *empathy* (3 responses) and that there were *not enough options or choices online* (3 responses).

**Figure 17 – Why would you prefer to contact the Council in-person or by telephone?  
Other responses (coded)**

**Base: Representative survey –5 / online survey – 32**

Response	Count	Percentage
<b>Representative survey</b>		
Better/easier for complex issues	2	40%
Better to have more options	1	20%
Portal doesn't work properly	1	20%
Not enough information online	1	20%
<b>Online survey</b>		
Better/easier for complex issues	8	25%
More likely to get a response/online cases not answered	7	22%
Empathy/reassurance when speaking to a person	3	9%
Not enough options/choices online	3	9%
Online doesn't work properly/poorly designed	2	6%
Can't get through on telephone	2	6%
Difficult to navigate/not user friendly	2	6%
Vulnerable people need in person/telephone	2	6%
Personal preference	2	6%
Need to have various options	2	6%
Able to ask questions/seek further guidance	1	3%
More flexibility when speaking to a person	1	3%
Require quick/immediate response	1	3%
Websites not always secure	1	3%
Language barrier	1	3%
No-one to help	1	3%
Other/unrelated comment	1	3%

### Subgroup analysis

#### *Representative survey*

Subgroups most likely to suggest they **simply prefer to speak to someone** (40% overall) were:

- Living in Oldbury (53%) and West Bromwich (47%) compared with those living in Smethwick (29%) and Rowley Regis (33%)
- Aged between 45 and 74 (47% to 49%) with those aged 75+ (20%)

### Subgroup analysis (cont.)

Subgroups more likely to suggest the **convenience of speaking to someone** (18% overall) were:

- Aged 25-34 (25%) compared with those aged 65-74 (11%) and 75+ (9%)
- Those who did not have a physical or mental health condition (21%) compared with those who did (12%)
- Unemployed (35%) and employed (22%) compared with retired (9%)

Subgroups most likely to suggest it was the **quickest way** (14% overall) were:

- Living in Smethwick (21%) compared with those living in West Bromwich (9%)
- Aged under 55 (19% to 35%)
- Those who did not have a physical or mental health condition (18%) compared with those who did (8%)
- Unemployed (30%) and employed (21%)

Subgroups most likely to **not have access to the internet** (11% overall) were:

- Aged 75+ (45%) and 65-74 (16%)
- White (13%) compared with Black, Asian and Minority ethnic groups (4%)
- Those who had a physical or mental health condition (17%) compared with those who did not (7%)
- Retired (30%)

Subgroups most likely to say they were **not sure about the internet/how to use it** (10% overall) were:

- Aged 75+ (25%) and 65-74 (21%)
- Retired (18%) compared with employed (5%)

Subgroups more likely to suggest **logs the details/keeps me updated on progress** (5% overall) were:

- Aged 18-24 (15%) and 25-34 (11%)
- Unemployed (15%)

### Online survey

Subgroups most likely to suggest they **simply prefer to speak to someone** (40% overall) were:

- Living in Wednesbury (60%) compared with those living in Tipton (29%), Smethwick (30%) and West Bromwich (32%)
- Retired (49%) compared with employed (34%)

Subgroups more likely to suggest the **convenience of speaking to someone** (24% overall) were:

- Living in West Bromwich (34%)

Subgroups most likely to suggest it was the **quickest way** (10% overall) were:

- Those who did not have a physical or mental health condition (12%) compared with those who did (4%)

Subgroups most likely to **not have internet access** (4% overall) were:

- Living in Rowley Regis (9%)



## 4.6 Doing things differently

Finally, respondents were asked if there was anything else they would like to suggest that the Council could do to help with making the required savings, and were able to enter their response as free text. Responses received to this question in both surveys have been thematically coded and are presented in **Figure 18**.

In both the representative and the online surveys, the most common response received was that the Council should *stop wasting money or work more efficiently* (16% representative; 28% online). *No unnecessary spending/cut back on non-essentials* was suggested by 13% of representative survey respondents and 17% of online respondents. Other common responses included *reduce staff/managers/salaries* (11% representative; 17% online) and *sort problems quickly/more prevention* (6% representative; 10% online).

**Figure 18 – Is there anything else you would like to suggest that the Council could do to help with making the required savings?**

**Base: Representative survey – 364 / online survey – 306**

Response	Count	Percentage
<b>Representative survey</b>		
Stop wasting money/work more efficiently	57	16%
No unnecessary spending/cut back on non-essentials	46	13%
Reduce staff/managers/salaries	40	11%
Sort problems quickly/more prevention	23	6%
Improve safety/reduce crime/more police	18	5%
More housing/better access to housing	17	5%
Introduce/increase charges for some services	17	5%
Use empty properties	16	4%
Help people into work/encourage apprenticeships	14	4%
Better communication/listen to residents	14	4%
Support residents/those who need it	14	4%
More activities for children/young people	13	4%
Reduce litter/improve cleanliness	12	3%
Partnerships with local community/businesses	11	3%
Reduce benefits	11	3%
Shared services/jobs	10	3%
Improve town centres/fill empty shops	10	3%
Don't increase council tax/reduce council tax	10	3%
Generate income	8	2%
Better/more efficient staff	8	2%
Reduce councillors/expenses	8	2%
Do more in-house/stop subcontracting	8	2%
Sell unused buildings/land	8	2%

Response	Count	Percentage
<b>Representative survey (cont.)</b>		
More enforcement/collect arrears/tackle fraud	7	2%
Improve/invest more in services	7	2%
Encourage more volunteering	6	2%
Fewer bin collections	6	2%
Increase taxes for high earners/more means testing	6	2%
Cost of living support	6	2%
Invest in schools/education	5	1%
Make energy savings/reduce street lighting	5	1%
Don't make cutbacks	4	1%
Encourage visitors/tourism	4	1%
Invest in/encourage use of public transport	4	1%
Stop building	4	1%
Support businesses/encourage business	3	1%
Increase council tax	3	1%
Help the homeless	3	1%
More green initiatives/investment	3	1%
Cut back free nursery places	2	1%
Preserve/maintain green space	2	1%
<b>Online survey</b>		
Stop wasting money/work more efficiently	87	28%
Reduce staff/managers/salaries	51	17%
Sort problems quickly/more prevention	29	10%
No unnecessary spending/cut back on non-essentials	28	9%
More enforcement/collect arrears/tackle fraud	27	9%
Reduce councillors/expenses	25	8%
Better/more efficient staff	23	8%
Introduce/increase charges for some services	21	7%
Better communication/listen to residents	19	6%
Encourage volunteering	17	6%
Improve/invest more in services	17	6%
Do more in-house/stop subcontracting	16	5%
Use empty properties	16	5%
Reduce litter/improve cleanliness	16	5%
Preserve/maintain green space	15	5%
Generate income/fundraise	14	5%
Improve safety/reduce crime/more police	13	4%
Help people into work/encourage apprenticeships	12	4%

Response	Count	Percentage
<b>Online survey (cont.)</b>		
Sell unused buildings/land	12	4%
Do more things online/invest in technology	11	4%
More housing/better access to housing	11	4%
Partnership with local community/business	10	3%
Shared services/jobs	10	3%
Don't increase council tax/reduce council tax	10	3%
More green initiatives/investment	10	3%
Support residents/those who need it	9	3%
Reduce benefits	8	3%
Invest in schools/education	8	3%
More activities for children/young people	8	3%
More transparency	8	3%
Not all can use online services	7	2%
Fewer bin collections	7	2%
Increase taxes for high earners/more means testing	7	2%
Don't make cutbacks	7	2%
Cost of living support	6	2%
Make energy savings/reduce street lighting	6	2%
Lobby government	4	1%
Encourage visitors/tourism	4	1%
Improve town centres/fill empty shops	4	1%
Increase council tax	4	1%
Online service/website improvements needed	4	1%
Support businesses/encourage business	3	1%
Help the homeless	3	1%
Reduce childcare costs	3	1%
Invest in/encourage use of public transport	3	1%
Complaint about consultation/survey	3	1%
Libraries are a statutory service – cannot be charged for	2	1%

## 5. Detailed respondent profile

Figure 19 presents the respondent profile for the representative and online surveys.

**Figure 19 – Respondent profile**

**Base: Representative survey – 1,070 / online survey – 577**

Characteristic	Representative survey		Online survey	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
<b>Ward</b>				
Abbey	99	9%	32	6%
Blackheath	36	3%	16	3%
Bristnall	29	3%	18	3%
Charlemont with Grove Vale	31	3%	17	3%
Cradley Heath and Old Hill	5	0%	23	%
Friar Park	26	2%	14	2%
Great Barr with Yew Tree	13	1%	14	2%
Great Bridge	25	2%	14	2%
Greets Green and Lyng	47	4%	17	3%
Hateley Heath	53	5%	18	3%
Langley	31	3%	24	4%
Newton	18	2%	17	3%
Old Warley	38	4%	29	5%
Oldbury	68	6%	31	5%
Princes End	50	5%	18	3%
Rowley	113	11%	23	4%
Smethwick	46	4%	15	3%
Soho and Victoria	32	3%	11	2%
St Pauls	19	2%	7	1%
Tipton Green	50	5%	17	3%
Tividale	35	3%	27	5%
Wednesbury North	32	3%	16	3%
Wednesbury South	66	6%	16	3%
West Bromwich Central	108	10%	13	2%
Unmatched	-	-	130	23%
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	500	47%	167	29%
Female	561	52%	379	66%
Other	1	0%	2	0%
Prefer not to say	8	1%	29	5%

Characteristic	Representative survey		Online survey	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
<b>Age group</b>				
18 - 24	106	10%	14	2%
25 - 34	171	16%	80	14%
35 - 44	201	19%	132	23%
45 - 54	213	20%	134	23%
55 - 64	154	14%	122	21%
65 - 74	115	11%	57	10%
75+	92	9%	17	3%
Prefer not to say	18	2%	21	4%
<b>Physical or mental health condition or illness</b>				
Yes	250	23%	152	26%
No	793	74%	369	64%
Prefer not to say	27	3%	56	10%
<b>Ethnic group</b>				
White - English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British	712	67%	444	77%
White - Irish	7	1%	1	0%
White - Gypsy or Traveller	1	0%	-	-
White - Any other White background	27	3%	13	2%
Mixed - Black Caribbean & White	26	2%	6	1%
Mixed - Black African & White	16	1%	-	-
Mixed - Asian & White	11	1%	3	1%
Mixed - Any other Mixed background	6	1%	1	0%
Asian/Asian British - Indian	103	10%	24	4%
Asian/Asian British - Pakistani	39	4%	9	2%
Asian/Asian British - Bangladeshi	14	1%	7	1%
Asian/Asian British - Chinese	6	1%	-	-
Asian/Asian British - Any other Asian background	5	0%	3	1%
Black/Black British - African	25	2%	3	1%
Black/Black British - Caribbean	34	3%	15	3%
Black/Black British - Any other Black background	7	1%	-	-
Any other ethnic group	8	1%	6	1%
Prefer not to say	23	2%	42	7%

Characteristic	Representative survey		Online survey	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
<b>Employment status</b>				
Employed full-time (30 hours or more a week)	424	40%	291	50%
Employed part-time (less than 30 hours a week)	170	16%	63	11%
Employed zero-hours	9	1%	5	1%
Seasonal or casual worker	5	0%	1	0%
Self-employed or company director	32	3%	22	4%
Unemployed and looking for work	54	5%	10	2%
Retired	210	20%	104	18%
Student	29	3%	6	1%
Looking after family/home	60	6%	-	-
Long term sick	47	4%	-	-
Not working/other	5	0%	31	5%
Prefer not to say	25	2%	44	8%
<b>Housing accommodation</b>				
Owned (outright or with a mortgage)	509	48%	388	67%
Rent (Council)	256	24%	79	14%
Rent (Housing association/social housing)	38	4%	17	3%
Rent (private landlord)	182	17%	42	7%
Other rented/living rent free	38	4%	8	1%
Part rent and part mortgage	9	1%	2	0%
Don't know	5	0%	2	0%
Prefer not to say	33	3%	39	7%

## 6. Key findings

### Closing the budget gap

- The option most supported by respondents in both surveys was *sell/develop Council buildings*, selected by 34% of representative survey respondents and 66% of online survey respondents
- *Introduce more charging for non-essential services* and *stop or reduce non-essential services* were also frequently mentioned by representative survey respondents (29% and 27% respectively)
- Online respondents were more likely to support *reduce number of staff/salaries* and *charge more for some paid-for services* (28%)

### Most valued services

#### Theme 1: The best start in life for children and young people

- *Preventative help for vulnerable children* was selected as the most important area of work, chosen by half (50%) of representative survey respondents and just over two in five (43%) online respondents
- *Early years education* (37%) and *children's social care* (35%) were next most frequently selected by representative survey respondents
- Online survey respondents more frequently mentioned *youth facilities* (40%) and *quality, accessible school places* (36%)

#### Theme 2: People live well and age well

- *Helping older people live independently for longer* was viewed as important by over half of representative (55%) and online (53%) survey respondents
- *Providing day centres for older people* (44% representative; 35% online) and *encourage exercise and better health by maintaining parks and open spaces* (37% representative; 47% online) were also selected by high proportions of respondents

#### Theme 3: Strong resilient communities

- *Community safety and tackling antisocial behaviour* was chosen as important by 64% of representative survey respondents and 69% of online respondents
- Over half of respondents in both surveys also selected *maintaining our parks and open spaces* (51% representative; 52% online)
- A quarter (26% in both surveys) said that *providing social hubs and community centres* was important

#### Theme 4: Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods

- In both surveys, the most frequently mentioned area of work was *accessible affordable housing*, mentioned by 58% of representative and 55% of online survey respondents
- *Tackling homelessness and rough sleeping* was viewed as important by 47% of representative survey respondents and 41% of online respondents
- Similar proportions in both surveys said that *more energy efficient housing* was important (35% representative; 33% online)
- Online respondents were more likely to suggest *working with private landlords to bring empty homes back into use* (43%) in comparison with representative survey respondents (33%)

#### Theme 5: A connected and accessible Sandwell

- *Maintaining roads and pavements* was selected as important by high proportions of respondents in both the representative survey (72%) and the online survey (79%)



- Similar proportions mentioned *improving transport options and transport links* (47% representative; 53% online) and *improved partnership working with local authorities and West Midlands Combined Authority* (30% representative, 25% online)

#### **Theme 6: A strong and inclusive economy**

- Over half (55%) of representative survey respondents said that *creating more jobs for local people* was important and half (50%) said the same about *creating apprenticeship opportunities for young people*, with similar proportions of online respondents saying the same (51% and 42% respectively)
- Almost half (46%) of online respondents mentioned *improving Sandwell's town centres*, which was higher than the proportion of representative survey respondents selecting this option (31%)

#### **Service provision**

- Services most frequently expected to be provided at no cost to residents in both surveys were *green waste* (66% representative; 81% online) and *library services* (63% representative; 58% online)
- *Adult social care services* were also expected to be provided at no cost by the majority of representative (58%) and online (51%) respondents
- A higher proportion of online survey respondents (53%) expected *cremation and burial* to be provided at no cost than did representative survey respondents (36%)
- Respondents were most willing to contribute financially towards *public shows and events* (74% representative; 82% online) and *sports and leisure facilities* (71% representative; 76% online)
- Over 50% of respondents in both surveys indicated that they would be willing to contribute towards *pest control services*, *car parking*, *cultural services* and *bulky waste item collections*

#### **Council tax**

- Three in five (59%) representative survey respondents and almost half (46%) of online survey respondents felt that an increase of *0%-0.99%* in council tax would be reasonable to enable the Council to provide the current level of service
- Similar proportions in both surveys felt that an increase of *1.00%-1.99%* would be reasonable (24% representative; 31% online)
- Only small proportions felt that an increase of *2.00% or higher* would be reasonable

#### **Accessing services online**

- The highest proportion of respondents in both surveys indicated that they would be *happy to contact the Council/use MySandwell account for all services* (56% representative; 49% online)
- However, over three in ten (31%) representative survey respondents said that they would prefer to access *all council services* in-person or by telephone (14% of online respondents gave the same response)
- All other services listed were selected by higher proportions of online respondents than representative survey respondents
- Of those who preferred to contact the Council in-person or via telephone for any service, the majority said this was because they *simply prefer to speak to someone* (40% in both surveys), and the next most frequent response was related to the *convenience of speaking to someone* (18% representative; 24% online)



## Doing things differently

- The most common suggestion for other things the Council could do to help with making the required savings was *stop wasting money/work more efficiently* (16% representative; 28% online)
- *No unnecessary spending/cut back on non-essentials* was suggested by 13% of representative survey respondents and 17% of online respondents
- Other common responses included *reduce staff/managers/salaries* (11% representative; 17% online) and *sort problems quickly/more prevention* (6% representative, 10% online)

# Appendices

- Appendix 1: Budget consultation

# **Sandwell Budget Consultation 2022**

## **INTERVIEWER NOTE**

- 1. Speak to residents aged 18 or over according to your given quota**
- 2. Read the introductory text “READ OUT” where it is provided, before asking the questions**
- 3. Do not read out the ‘don't know’ or 'prefer not to say' category in questions where marked**

**READ OUT: Good morning / afternoon / evening my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am calling from Enventure Research on behalf of Sandwell Council, which has asked us to carry out a budget consultation with residents. Your views will help develop and deliver Council services.**

**The interview should take around 15 minutes to complete.**

**Your answers will be anonymous and confidential.**

**Would you have time to take part in the survey?**

**All information provided will be analysed by Enventure Research, an independent research agency, and treated in accordance with General Data Protection Regulations and the Market Research Society Code of Conduct. Enventure Research will only use information you provide to inform the research. Enventure Research is registered with the Data Controller and is a Market Research Society Company Partner. For our privacy notice, please refer to our website [www.enventure.co.uk](http://www.enventure.co.uk)**

**If resident seems unsure...**

**You do not have to answer any questions if you don't want to, and you can end the interview at any time. Are you happy to proceed?**

Age Please tell me which of the following age bands you fall into?

SINGLE CODE

- ☐ 18-24 years
- ☐ 25-34 years
- ☐ 35-44 years
- ☐ 45-54 years
- ☐ 55-64 years
- ☐ 65-74 years
- ☐ 75+years
- ☐ Prefer not to say (DO NOT READ OUT)

Gender What is your gender please?  
r

SINGLE CODE

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Other
- ☐ Prefer not to say (DO NOT READ OUT)

Q2 What is your postcode please?

(Use capital letters and a space between the two parts)

Q3

- ☐ Abbey
- ☐ Langley
- ☐ Friar Park
- ☐ Oldbury
- ☐ Smethwick
- ☐ Greets Green and Lyng
- ☐ Old Warley
- ☐ Soho and Victoria
- ☐ Bristnall
- ☐ St Pauls
- ☐ Tividale
- ☐ Cradley Heath and Old Hill
- ☐ Charlemont with Grove Vale
- ☐ West Bromwich Central
- ☐ Tipton Green
- ☐ Rowley
- ☐ Princes End
- ☐ Great Barr with Yew Tree
- ☐ Blackheath
- ☐ Great Bridge
- ☐ Wednesbury South
- ☐ Wednesbury North
- ☐ Hateley Heath
- ☐ Newton

**We want to hear residents’ views about the services that are most important to you, and where we should prioritise spending.**

**Like all local authorities, we are facing significant financial challenges. Demand for our services for our most vulnerable residents is going up, and so too are our costs due to the high rate of inflation that is affecting us all.**

**We are making savings of around £16m this financial year and expect to need to save a similar amount next year.**

**The Council spends around £583m on our day-to-day services, such as refuse collections, street cleansing, providing libraries and leisure centres and our adult and children’s social care services. We must meet all our legal requirements, but can make choices in how we deliver some of these services.**

**Your answers to these questions will help to shape our budget proposals for the next three years.**

**Closing the budget gap**

**Q4 Which of the following options would you support to enable the Council to close the budget gap:**

**MULTI CODE**

- ☐ Increase Council Tax
- ☐ Reduce number of staff/staff salaries
- ☐ Stop or reduce non-essential services (e.g. events, leisure, regeneration, and maintenance of parks).
- ☐ Sell/develop council buildings
- ☐ Charge more for some paid-for services (e.g., car parking, pest control)
- ☐ Introduce more charging for non-essential services (e.g., green waste services, cultural services)
- ☐ Other
- ☐ Don't know (Do not read out)

**Other (please specify)**

**We want to know what residents value the most. We have six different themes that feed into Sandwell Council's Corporate Plan. Please identify which areas of work in each theme you think are most important, by choosing two options.**

**Q5 Theme 1: The best start in life for Children and Young People**

- ☐ Early Years Education
- ☐ Quality, accessible School Places
- ☐ Home Learning Support
- ☐ Youth facilities
- ☐ Children's Social Care
- ☐ Preventative help for vulnerable children

**Q6 Theme 2: People Live Well and Age Well**

- ☐ Public Health Investment
- ☐ Partnership working with charities, NHS and other Councils
- ☐ Helping older people live independently for longer
- ☐ Providing day centres for older people
- ☐ Encourage exercise and better health by maintaining parks and open spaces

**Q7 Theme 3: Strong, Resilient Communities**

- ☐ Providing libraries and other facilities
- ☐ Providing Social Hubs and Community Centres
- ☐ Tackling climate change
- ☐ Community safety and tackling antisocial behaviour
- ☐ Maintaining our parks and open spaces

**Q8 Theme 4: Quality Homes in Thriving Neighbourhoods**

- ☐ Accessible affordable housing
- ☐ More energy efficient housing
- ☐ Tackling homelessness and rough sleeping
- ☐ Working with private landlords to bring empty homes back into use
- ☐ Welfare Rights

**Q9 Theme 5: A Connected and Accessible Sandwell**

- ☐ Maintaining roads and pavements
- ☐ Improving transport options and transport links
- ☐ Digital Inclusion
- ☐ Maintaining waterways flood risk
- ☐ Improved Partnership working with local Local Authorities and West Midlands Combined Authority

Q10 **Theme 6: A strong and Inclusive Economy**

- ☐ Improving Sandwell's town centres
- ☐ Support for local businesses
- ☐ Creating more jobs for local people
- ☐ Creating apprenticeship opportunities for young people
- ☐ Delivering environmental health and enforcement services (e.g., food safety inspections)

**Service provision**

Q11 **Which services would you expect or like to be provided at no cost to residents and which services would you be happy to contribute towards?**

	Provide at no cost / freely available	Contribute towards financially	Don't know / Not applicable (DO NOT READ OUT)
Car parking	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Bulky waste item collections	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Green waste	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sports and leisure facilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Library services (e.g. one off membership fee)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cultural services (e.g. museum admission fees)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Adult social care services (social clubs and sessions)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Public shows and events	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cremation and burial (site maintenance and upkeep)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pest control services	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Council tax**



**Q12 Taking into consideration the financial challenge the Council is facing, what would you consider to be a reasonable Council Tax increase to enable the Council to continue to provide services.**

**DO NOT READ OUT, FOR INFORMATION ONLY IF ASKED BY RESPONDENT:**

Impact of increased payment based on a **band D** property:

0%- 0.99% - An increase of £0.00 to £18.13 per year

1% - 1.99% - An Increase of £18.31 to £36.45 per year

2% - 3.99% - An Increase of £36.63 to £73.08 per year

More than 4.00% - An increase greater than £73.26 per year

**SINGLE CODE**

- ☐ 0% - 0.99%
- ☐ 1.00% - 1.99%
- ☐ 2.00% - 3.99%
- ☐ More than 4.00%
- ☐ Don't know (Do not read out)

**Accessing services online**

**Q13 Residents are able to access Council services in-person, by telephone, or online (*mysandwell.gov.uk* account or online forms on Sandwell Council website). Are there any services that you would prefer to access in-person or on the telephone, or are you happy to contact the Council via online/using mysandwell account?**

**DO NOT READ OUT, MULTI CODE**

- ☐ Bins and recycling - reporting missed collections, bulky item collection booking etc.
- ☐ Housing – finding a home, reporting repairs, home swap etc.
- ☐ Billing – telling us you have moved, paying your bills such as rent or council tax
- ☐ Business - Business rates information, property/land for sale
- ☐ Planning - Planning applications, planning permission, building regulations
- ☐ Benefits - Housing benefit information and benefits advice services
- ☐ Health and social care – Adults, Children, Care, and support information
- ☐ Education – School term and holiday dates, Schools/College places
- ☐ Leisure - parks and events, leisure centres, keeping fit
- ☐ Reporting Crime - fraud, anti-social behaviour, dog fouling, fly tipping etc.
- ☐ All Council services
- ☐ Happy to contact the Council online/use mysandwell account for all services
- ☐ Don't know / not applicable (DO NOT READ OUT)

Q14 **Why would you prefer to contact the Council in-person or by telephone? (Tick the most important reason)**

- ☐ Do not have internet access
- ☐ Not sure about the internet/how to use it
- ☐ Convenience of speaking to someone
- ☐ Quickest way
- ☐ Logs the details/keep me updated on progress
- ☐ Simply prefer to speak to someone
- ☐ Other

**Other (please specify)**

## Doing things differently

Q15 **Is there anything else you would like to suggest that the Council could do to help with making the required savings?**

## DEMOGRAPHICS

**READ OUT: This last set of questions relate to your own circumstances and help us monitor that we are speaking to a wide range of residents. Your answers will be strictly anonymous and confidential.**

Disability **Do you have any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last for 12 months or more?**

### SINGLE CODE

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Prefer not to say (**DO NOT READ OUT**)

Ethnicity **What is your ethnic origin?**

**READ OUT, SINGLE CODE**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="radio"/> White - English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British | <input type="radio"/> Asian/Asian British - Pakistani                  |
| <input type="radio"/> White - Irish   | <input type="radio"/> Asian/Asian British - Bangladeshi                |
| <input type="radio"/> White - Gypsy or Traveller                            | <input type="radio"/> Asian/Asian British - Chinese                    |
| <input type="radio"/> White - Any other White background                    | <input type="radio"/> Asian/Asian British - Any other Asian background |
| <input type="radio"/> Mixed - Black Caribbean & White                       | <input type="radio"/> Black/Black British - African                    |
| <input type="radio"/> Mixed - Black African & White                         | <input type="radio"/> Black/Black British - Caribbean                  |
| <input type="radio"/> Mixed - Asian & White                                 | <input type="radio"/> Black/Black British - Any other Black background |
| <input type="radio"/> Mixed - Any other Mixed background                    | <input type="radio"/> Any other ethnic group                           |
| <input type="radio"/> Asian/Asian British - Indian                          | <input type="radio"/> Prefer not to say <b>[DO NOT READ OUT]</b>       |

Employment **Just so we can get a good variation of respondents answering the survey, could I ask which best describes your employment status?**

**READ OUT, SINGLE CODE**

- ☐ Employed full-time (30 hours or more a week)
- ☐ Employed part-time (less than 30 hours a week)
- ☐ Employed zero-hours
- ☐ Seasonal or casual worker
- ☐ Self-employed or Company Director
- ☐ Unemployed & looking for work
- ☐ Retired
- ☐ Student
- ☐ Looking after family home
- ☐ Long term sick
- ☐ Not working/other
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Housing  
g

**Which of the following describes your housing accommodation ?**

**READ OUT, SINGLE CODE**

- ☐ Owned (outright or with a mortgage)
- ☐ Rent (Council)
- ☐ Rent (Housing association / social housing)
- ☐ Rent (private landlord)
- ☐ Other rented/living rent free
- ☐ Part rent and part mortgage
- ☐ Don't know
- ☐ Prefer not to say **[DO NOT READ OUT]**

FR

**Would you like to take part in further research, any details you provide will only be used to contact you about further research. Your details will not be passed on to any third parties and will be kept separate from your survey answers, meaning that you will not be identified in any way. Your contact details will be kept securely for a maximum of six months, after which they will be confidentially deleted**

**IF RESPONDENT DOES NOT HAVE AN EMAIL ADDRESS PLEASE LEAVE BLANK**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

**Thank you for taking part, As part of our quality checking process we contact a proportion of people to check you were interviewed in a friendly and professional manner and in accordance with the MRS code of conduct. It will only be used for this purpose and WILL NOT be passed on or used in the future.**

RN	Name	<input type="text"/>
	Telephone number	<input type="text"/>
	Email address	<input type="text"/>





Thornhill Brigg Mill, Thornhill Beck Lane, Brighouse, West Yorkshire, HD6 4AH

T: 01484 404797

W: [www.enventure.co.uk](http://www.enventure.co.uk)

# **MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2022-26**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) sets out how the council will structure and manage its finances now and, in the future, to ensure delivery of corporate priorities, vision and objectives. It is aligned to the Council's new Corporate Plan and other strategic documents.

The strategy provides a robust and consistent approach that places the council's finances on a sound and stable footing, whilst supporting our 2030 Vision.

The key objectives of the council's MTFS are: -

1. Establish key financial principles to ensure the council remains financially stable and resilient, avoiding the use of reserves to fund long term commitments.
2. Define a prudent, risk assessed reserves policy
3. Protect front-line services for the residents of Sandwell as far as possible.
4. Deliver a multi-year budget planning process that fully integrates revenue and capital resources.
5. To align resources to the Corporate Plan.
6. Identify and pursue transformation in service delivery and commercial opportunities
7. Ensure consistent good governance and excellent financial management

During 2021 the Council refreshed its Corporate Plan, setting out our key aims and objectives to achieve our 2030 Vision. Our plan sets out 7 strategic outcomes and a series of commitments, together with our vision for one team, one council – creating a modern efficient council to deliver this exciting agenda.

We want our residents to have better, more fulfilling lives in a thriving community. There are 7 key outcomes we want to achieve:

- The best start in life
- Live well and age well;
- Strong, resilient communities;
- Quality housing
- Strong and inclusive economy;
- A connected and accessible Sandwell.



- One Council One Team

By prioritising these, we will be tackling poverty and inequality, maximising outcomes for residents and putting Sandwell on the map.

The national and local context issues set out below will impact on the Council's financial position over the next three years and there is a high degree of uncertainty, particular in relation to the Local Government Funding Reform and the exceptionally high inflation rates that the UK is experiencing. For this reason this MTFP will need to be kept under review and updated at an appropriate point alongside the 2023/24 budget setting process.

## 1 THE NATIONAL CONTEXT

- 1.1 The national and international instability in recent years, due to factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic, Brexit and the war in Ukraine are all having an impact on the Council's financial position and create continued uncertainty around future spending needs and income sources.
- 1.2 At the time of developing this strategy the UK was going through exceptional and unprecedented political and economic turmoil as a consequence of the governments mini budget announced in September 2022. The tax cuts set out in that budget have led to greater uncertainty over public spending making financial planning incredibly difficult, and perhaps represents the most challenging time for local government since the beginning of austerity.

### COVID-19 Pandemic

- 1.3 The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the Council's finances and the long-term impact, particularly in relation to the Council's income streams, is still uncertain. Income from services such as car parking and street markets has still not returned to pre-COVID levels and the Council is still managing backlogs that arose because of the COVID response. One of the main priorities for the council now is recovery and reset from COVID-19, and in June 2022 Cabinet approved a COVID Recovery Strategy with a number of projects to address some of the consequences of the pandemic. The forecasts included in this MTFP reflect the ongoing uncertainty about the long-term impact of COVID-19 on the Council's services and finances.
- 1.4 It's also worth noting that a high level of COVID grants were beneficial for the Council's cash flow position and meant borrowing costs could be minimised. With COVID grants now largely wound out the cash flow position is likely to return to more normal levels and there may be a greater need to borrow externally and incur debt costs.





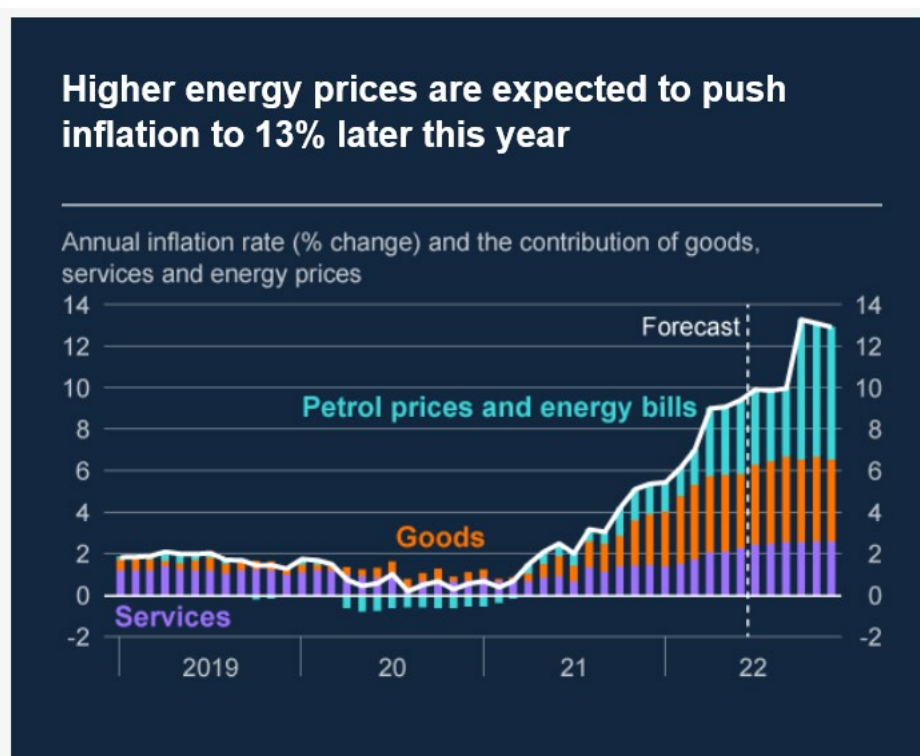
## Local Government Funding Reform

- 1.5 Since 2020 Local Government has had one-year Finance Settlements, with the previous multi-year settlement ending in 2019/20. This makes financial planning extremely difficult, especially with the other uncertainties referenced in this section.
- 1.6 This is compounded by uncertainty around government policy in relation to reform of the Local Government Finance system. In late 2016 the government set out its intention to move forward with two key areas of funding reform:
- Fair Funding – reviewing the formula used to allocate government funding to each local authority
  - Business Rates – consideration of a 75% retention model and a reset of business rates baselines.
- 1.7 Both of these reforms have been deferred due to national issues, such as Brexit and COVID. It is unclear whether the government still intends to move forward with both reforms and if so when. Given the timescales required to consult and implement on such reforms it seems unlikely that this would be completed for 2023/24, but until there is clarity from government it remains a significant risk to the Medium Term Financial Plan.
- 1.8 Sandwell is currently part of the West Midlands business rates pilot, which means the Council retains 100% of the growth generated in the borough compared against a baseline set at the outset of the scheme. The impact of a reset of baselines and the pilot not continuing are difficult to estimate as it depends how much of the funding is retained within the local government finance system for reallocation. It's estimated that around £15m of funding could be lost through Funding Reform, through a combination of loss of business rates growth and loss of time-limited grants.
- 1.9 There are a number of one-off grants currently included in the Council's core funding from government. This includes the Lower Tier Services Grant and Services Grant, which in 2022/23 totaled £7.5m combined. The 2022/23 Finance Settlement made it clear that the Services Grant would not continue in the same form in the future and would not be included in any transitional arrangements. However, there has been no further update on how the funding would be allocated in future years.
- 1.10 Finally, the New Homes Bonus grant is time-limited and has reduced significantly in recent years as the scheme policy has been reviewed. The Council received £786k in 2022/23 and it is unclear whether this will continue from 2023/24.
- 1.11 Central government funding and funding reform therefore represents significant uncertainty to the MTFP and the assumptions in the Plan will need to be reviewed when more information becomes known around government policy.



## Inflationary Pressures/Cost of Living

- 1.12 The UK is currently experiencing exceptionally high inflation rates, with Consumer Price Inflation reaching 10.1% in September 2022 (and Retail Price Inflation at 12.6%) and expecting to increase further, possibly up to 13% before the end of 2022, although reducing petrol prices may have a dampening impact. This is being driven by higher gas and electricity prices as a result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and the higher prices of good imported from abroad has also contributed to the situation. It's worth noting that this level of inflation has not been seen in the UK for more than 30-years and it is likely to significantly impact on pay and contractual expectations.
- 1.13 The table below shows the forecast to the end of 2022. This is impacting on the Councils financial situation in a number of ways, putting pressure on our pay bill, contracts and procuring of goods and services. In September 2022 the government announced an energy price cap for households and businesses, including the public sector. However, this is for an initial period of 6 months only, and so the forecasts included in this Plan do not assume that any support will be available from April 2023.



- 1.14 The squeeze on household budgets as a result of these inflationary pressures may also impact on demand for services and collection rates of some of our key income streams, such as Council Tax and Business Rates. There may also be a rise in company failures leading to empty properties. Demand for services is also likely to increase, especially in terms of homelessness and welfare rights. The Council is currently developing a range of Cost of Living initiatives to support residents and has recently launched a 'Supporting Sandwell' campaign.
- 1.15 Though the Bank of England expect inflation to start to fall in 2023 it is not expected to come back within the 2% target for around 2 years. The assumptions in this Plan are based on inflation remaining high initially with a gradual reduction over the life of the plan.
- 1.16 Investment and borrowing rates are also being impacted by the economic situation and although this is having a positive impact on interest paid on the Council's investments, it is also making borrowing more expensive, with PWLB rates exceeding 5% at some points in October although they have started to reduce from this peak following the announcement of Rishi Sunak as the new Prime Minister. The higher borrowing rates are having an impact on the Council's Capital Programme and particularly housing new build schemes which are already seeing increased costs due to inflationary impact on construction supplies and services. It is possible that bank rate could increase further during November, possibly up to 3% or even 3.25% from the current rate of 2.25%.

### **Recruitment and Retention issues**

- 1.17 The Council, like many others, has struggled to recruit and retain its workforce during the last 12 months, particularly in the care sector and professional and technical roles. Some limited market supplements have been applied to counteract these issues but this has only had limited success so far and the Council may have to do more and for longer in order to ensure statutory services can continue. Only confirmed market supplements have been built into the forecasts in this Plan.

### **Adult Social Care Reform**

- 1.18 As part of the governments 'Build Back Better: Our Plan for Health and Social Care' two key elements of Adult Social Care Reform will be implemented over the next 12-18 months. These are:
- Market Sustainability and Fair Cost of Care (implementation from October 2023) – each Local Authority is required to undertake a 'Fair Cost of Care Exercise' and set out a plan for moving towards this rate over a 3-year period.



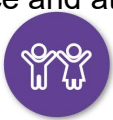
- Cap on Care Costs and extension to the means test (October 2023) – which sets a cap on how much an individual will be expected to pay towards their care over their lifetime.

- 1.19 The Finance and Adult Social Care teams are working together to understand the impact of the above reforms, which could be significant. Early modelling shows that the combined financial impact of both reforms could be in the region of £18m from 2023/24.
- 1.20 The government has previously announced that funding would be allocated to Local Authorities to support them in preparing the markets for Adult Social Care Reform and to help move towards paying a Fair Cost of Care. There is expected to be £772m allocated for 2023/24 for the Care Cap implications and £600m for the Market Sustainability and Fair Cost of Care fund. The government released a consultation in August 2022 on the distribution of funding for the Care Cap reforms, but no further information is available on the allocation methodology for the Fair Cost of Care reforms.
- 1.21 This Plan assumes that the financial impact of both reforms will be covered by government funding as set out above and will therefore be cost neutral. However, due to the limited information on how funding will be allocated, this represents a significant risk to the plan.

## 2 Sandwell Context

### Demographics

- 2.1 Sandwell is one of the most deprived boroughs' in England, and whilst the number of localities in the top 1% most deprived nationally has reduced, overall Sandwell remains the 8<sup>th</sup> most deprived English district. The population has low skills and educational attainment, higher levels of child and family poverty and poor health and life expectancy. Sandwell has a £6bn economy, with almost 9,000 businesses employing 136,000 people. It retains a significant manufacturing sector with strengths in logistics, health and social care as well as retail and wholesale.
- 2.2 Demand for services continues to increase, particularly for Adult and Children's Social Care and COVID has created new and/or delayed demand which the Council is focusing resources on. The Council makes use of benchmarking data to inform service and budget planning, and this indicates that Adult Social Care is a high cost service when compared to our demographic nearest neighbours, whereas Children's Social Care is a low spender comparatively. The Council is mindful of this when considering the savings plans within the MTFP.
- 2.3 Children's Social Care is increasingly under pressure due to increased demand and exceptionally high cost placements, and emerging legislative changes may add further pressures to the service (delivered through Sandwell Children's Trust).
- 2.4 The government launched its White Paper on educational reforms and as part of this legislative change, placed an emphasis on LAs to meet the increased statutory duties in relation to attendance and attainment which are above the current offer



and capacity. Sandwell is one of the 55 confirmed Education Investment Areas and one of the 24 Priority Investment Areas.

- 2.5 In addition, nationally placement pressures are being felt across the children's social care sector (alongside workforce), with the average cost per week increasing by £700 to £800 per child. These increases are unprecedented and largely due to seismic demand coming through the system. The national lack of LA owned and run children's homes further compounds the issue. SMBC are currently considering options for the reinstatement and development of children's homes as a longer-term solution to this funding pressure. This review is underway with Regeneration colleagues with input re suitability from the Children's Trust.

### Regeneration and Asset Management

- 2.6 Sandwell has been successful in applying for over £67m of Towns Fund funding to regenerate the areas of West Bromwich, Smethwick and Rowley Regis, in recognition of the deprivation in the borough and the need for public sector intervention to stimulate economic growth and regeneration.
- 2.7 Recognising the need for further intervention to create more employment, housing and community facilities, the Council has developed a Regeneration Pipeline which intends to deliver over £1.8bn of investment into the area over the next 5 years. Some of the resources required have already been secured, such as those from the Towns Fund. Due to low land values across Sandwell it is likely that the Council will have to take a leading role in bringing sites forward, and additional staffing resources have been built into the MTFP from 2023/24.
- 2.8 To reflect the Council's ambitions to deliver the Regeneration Pipeline, the MTFS has built in capacity for £50m of prudential borrowing over the life of the plan, with a further £50m forecast to be required in 2026/27 and 2027/28. These are very indicative figures at this stage, pending much more detailed work being required on viability and funding options. Further information is given in section 6.4 of the Plan.
- 2.9 The Council has also fundamentally reviewed its Asset Management Plan which has identified a number of workstreams which will impact on both capital and revenue resources in the medium to longer term. The Council is reviewing use of its asset base, identifying potential surplus land to dispose of and addressing backlog maintenance issues. A major programme of change will be required over the three year Budget period to deliver significant savings from the Council's land and assets which will result in a smaller more efficient asset base.
- 2.10 Sandwell is currently part of the Black Country Local Plan, which covers housing and employment land supply across the area. This has enabled the four local authorities across the Black Country to coordinate and share costs incurred for the evidence needed to support the plan. However, Dudley MBC has announced its intention to withdraw from the Black Country Plan. As it is a Statutory obligation to have a Local Plan in place, Sandwell will be required to develop its own Local Plan. Continuing with a joint Local Plan without Dudley is not seen as an option. The Council will need to incur additional costs to produce its own Local Plan, and work





is ongoing to identify what may be needed. It is anticipated that costs can initially be accommodated using existing budgets and earmarked reserves, but further resources will be required over the life of the plan.

### Improvement and Government Intervention

- 2.11 During 2021/22 the Council had a number of external reviews - a governance review by Grant Thornton, an LGA Peer Review, and the CIPFA Financial Management Review. Following these in March 2022 government intervention was announced which is still in place. Even before the intervention announcement the Council was preparing an Improvement Plan to address the issues raised in the various reviews. A single Corporate Improvement Plan was subsequently approved by Council in June 2022. The plan requires significant resources, both in terms of existing officer capacity and additional financial investment. An Improvement Plan earmarked reserve was established during 2021/22 to fund some of the immediate costs. There are specific earmarked reserves set aside for actions included in the plan, such as the implementation of Oracle Fusion, the Council's new Finance and HR system.

## 3 Medium Term Financial Strategy overview

- 3.1 Due to the uncertainty the Council currently faces it is extremely difficult to set an MTFS from 2023/24. A number of assumptions have been made around service pressures and funding sources and the key assumptions are set out in the table below:

Cost/Funding area	Assumption (2023/24 onwards)
Pay award	5% in 2023/24, reducing to 2% thereafter
Price Inflation	In line with current inflationary forecasts but only where contractually required
Utility inflation	Approx 80% increase in costs in 2023/24 assuming Energy Price Guarantee is not extended after March 2023
Pension triennial revaluation	No change to current contribution rates based on initial actuarial advice.
Adult Social Care Reform	Government funding to cover estimated costs
Adult Social Care demand	Demographic growth based on recent trends
Council Tax	Council Tax increases at 1.99% Core, 1% Adult Social Care Precept 1% increase in the Council Taxbase each year
Business Rates	Continuation of the current pilot for 2023/24 only.



	Business Rates baseline reset from 2024/25
Social Care Grant	Maintained at 2022/23 level
Services and Lower Tier Services Grant	Maintained at 2022/23 level for 2023/24 only.
New Homes Bonus	Final year of grant in 2023/24
Public Health Grant	Maintained at 2022/23 level

3.2 It is important to note that there is a high level of uncertainty in relation to the funding assumptions above and they are likely to change once more information on government policy is available. For this reason, a further review of the MTFP is likely to be required at a later stage in the 2023/24 budget setting process.

3.3 Based on the assumptions above, the indicative projections for 2023/24 to 2025/26 are shown in the table below:

	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
	£'000	£'000	£'000
Net Budget Requirement	237,044	251,697	281,305
<b>Additional Revenue/Savings/Income:</b>			
Increase in Council Tax	(5,400)	(5,200)	(5,200)
Net change in Business Rates and Collection Fund	(10,100)	15,700	(2,500)
Increase in Services Grant	0	0	0
Increase in New Homes Bonus	(497)	0	0
Changes in Reserves	(4,700)	0	0
Minimum Revenue Provision saving	(3,000)	0	0
	<b>(23,697)</b>	<b>10,500</b>	<b>(7,700)</b>
<b>Cost Pressures/Reduced Income:</b>			
Pay inflation	12,300	2,200	2,200
Service Pressures/Loss of Income	17,300	14,000	14,000
Additional inflationary provision for utilities and key contract	8,750	2,000	2,000
Prudential Borrowing additional debt charges	0	908	454
	<b>38,350</b>	<b>19,108</b>	<b>18,654</b>
<b>Net Budget Requirement 2023/24</b>	251,697	281,305	292,259
Budget Gap before savings options	14,653	29,608	10,954
Cumulative Gap by 2025/26			55,215



- 3.4 The significant drop in business rates income in 2024/25 is based on the assumption that a business rates reset will take place in that year, potentially removing the growth that has been generated since the outset of the scheme in 2013. However, this has not been confirmed by government and is a significant uncertainty in the forecast. Also, it is currently uncertain whether the Service Grant will continue so although the forecast above still retains the grant, it is likely that there will be some changes in funding after 2023/24 either from Business Rates reform or through changes in government grants, so the £15m reduction in the table above is indicative of potential changes in Local Government Finance across a number of funding sources.
- 3.5 The service pressures include demographic and inflationary pressures for Children's and Adult Social Care, inflationary pressures in major contracts and highways, and investment in our IT infrastructure.
- 3.6 This shows a significant savings requirement in the region of £55m over the next three years, which is around 20% of the Council's current net General Fund expenditure. This will be an extremely challenging financial picture for the Council, especially given that Sandwell has already experienced reductions in core funding of 26% since 2010. It should be noted that around 70% of the Council's net budget is spent on Adults and Children's social care, both of which are demand led statutory services with multiple future pressures. The savings required will not be achieved through minor service changes or increases in fees and charges. The Council will need to fundamentally change the way that it delivers services, and there is an opportunity to do this through improved use of technology, modernizing service delivery and adopting a more commercial approach to the way the Council operates.

## 4 Transformation and Savings Plans

- 4.1 The budget deficit projections shown above present a significant financial challenge to the Council, and the Leadership Team have been developing transformational, cross-cutting workstreams to reduce expenditure, increase income or a combination of both, whilst also improving the services that the Council provides to its customers.
- 4.2 The Transformation Savings Programme is centered around the following workstreams:
- Maximising digital technologies
  - Improving the customer journey
  - Delivering efficiencies through Business Process Reviews
  - Maximising income and commercial opportunities
  - Smarter support services
  - Making best use of our assets
  - Prevention and promoting independence





- Maximising the use of partnership working
- Efficient Procurement
- Sustainable Service Delivery models, ensuring resources are directed to Corporate Priorities

- 4.3 The Council has recently established a Corporate Transformation Board to take these initiatives forward and work is ongoing to develop outline business cases for specific projects which will include savings targets for the next three years as well as any implementation resources. The section below shows the initial savings that have been identified but there is still a significant amount of work required to clarify opportunities.
- 4.4 One of the key transformation projects currently in progress is the implementation of Oracle Fusion. An updated Business Case is being developed to show the cashable savings and process efficiencies that the new system will bring and this will be included in the savings plan when completed.
- 4.5 For the 2023/24 budget setting process, a dual approach has been taken to developing savings options has been taken, setting Directorate targets alongside developing corporate and transformation savings workstreams. For future years the emphasise will be on the latter approach, moving away from setting arbitrary service targets. This will be facilitated by the Council's newly created transformation resources to drive the workstreams referred to in 4.2 above.
- 4.6 The draft savings plans for 2023/24 (pending consultation and approval) and indicative targets for 2024/25 and 2025/26 are shown in the table below. There are some workstreams where savings targets are still to be confirmed, and work is ongoing to establish a medium term programme of Business Process Reviews. This has already begun with Transactional Finance, Debt Recovery and Business Support reviews underway.

<b>Saving</b>	<b>2023/24</b>	<b>2024/25</b>	<b>2025/26</b>
Directorate savings targets	9,600	9,600	9,600
Corporate and Technical savings	3,250	1,250	1,250
Maximising digital technologies	200	200	200
Customer Journey	60	430	430
Business Process Reviews			
Maximising Income and Commercial Opportunities	1,500	5,250	6,500
Smarter Support Services	-	1,200	1,200
Making the best use of assets	1,660	2,500	2,500
Prevention and Promoting independence		500	500
Maximising partnership working			
Efficient Procurement			
Sustainable Delivery Models	1,900	7,075	7,075
Reducing the cost of high cost services	0	2,000	4,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>18,170</b>	<b>30,005</b>	<b>33,255</b>



- 4.7 When compared to the budget deficit at 3.3 the remaining gap each year is as follows:

	<b>2023/24 £m</b>	<b>2024/25 £m</b>	<b>2025/26 £m</b>
<b>Estimated budget gap</b>	14.6	29.8	10.9
<b>Savings Plans (additional each year)</b>	18.2	11.8	3.2
<b>Savings still to identify</b>	(3.6)	18	7.7

- 4.8 A fundamental review of Fees and Charges is also underway as part of the Transformation Plan. This will consider how the Council's charges compare to nearest neighbours, opportunities for new or different charges and the development of a cost recovery model and charging strategy.
- 4.9 The Council's first Commercial Strategy is current in draft stage and a number of business streams have been identified with outline business cases being prepared. High level savings targets linked to these business streams have been included in the saving plan above.

## 5 Reserves position and forecast

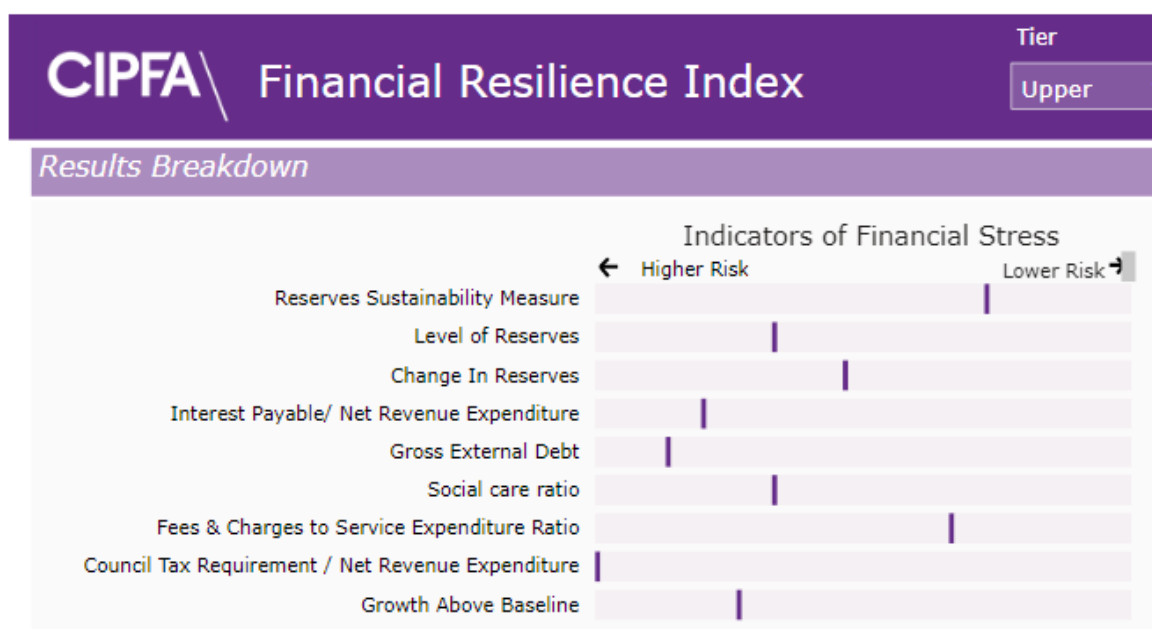
- 5.1 A review of earmarked and unallocated balances was undertaken as part of the 2022/23 budget setting process, including a restructuring exercise to identify reserves that were no longer needed and areas of financial risk or commitment where additional reserves were required.
- 5.2 The table below shows the current and forecast level of reserves during the period of the MTFS:

<b>Earmarked Reserve Balances</b>	<b>31/03/2022</b>	<b>31/03/2023</b>	<b>31/03/2026</b>
Ring-fenced grants	33,035	19,917	4,463
Risk	27,834	19,388	16,001
Capital and Regeneration	27,922	25,523	23,540
Service related and future projects	28,130	17,355	11,184
NNDR S31	30,896	0	0
COVID Risk and Recovery	16,931	7,812	4,492
<b>Total</b>	<b>164,748</b>	<b>89,995</b>	<b>59,680</b>
General Fund Unallocated Balance*	14,700*	14,700	14,700



\*assuming that the current forecast overspend in 2022/23 is managed with in-year spending controls

- 5.3 This shows that the Council's level of earmarked reserves is due to reduce significantly by 2026, although this is mostly due to planned use of capital reserves and ring-fenced grants as well as COVID recovery projects. The NNDR S31 grant is a reserve held to smooth the timing differences in business rates accounting which arose during the COVID pandemic and have unwound after 2022/23.
- 5.4 The Council is planning to use some reserves during 2022/23 to offset inflationary pressures that were not anticipated when the budget was set. The budget process for 2023/24 will need to consider increasing these reserves to a prudent level.
- 5.5 The Council's policy is to maintain a minimum working balance of 5% of net expenditure, which based on the 2022/23 net budget is £12m. Prior to 2022/23 the level of unallocated General Fund balance was at the lower end of what was considered prudent and the 2022/23 budget process aimed to increase the General Fund balance to £12m in line with the reserves policy.
- 5.6 When considering the appropriate level of reserves for the Council to maintain, CIPFA's Financial Resilience Index is a useful comparative analytical tool that can be used by S151 officers to support good financial management, providing a common understanding within a council of their financial position. The index shows a council's position on a range of measures associated with financial risk. The selection of indicators has been informed by extensive financial resilience work undertaken by CIPFA, public consultation and technical stakeholder engagement.
- 5.7 An extract of the 2022 index for Sandwell is shown below:



5.8 The key messages from this to inform the MTFP are:

- The 'Reserves Sustainability Measure' shows how long reserves will last if the Council continues to draw on them at the same level. This measure shows a lower risk than similar authorities
- Sandwell has a lower level of reserves than its nearest neighbours which puts it at higher financial risk
- Sandwell spends a higher proportion of its budget on social care, as these are demand led services this ratio shows that the Council has less flexibility in its budget and therefore has a slightly higher risk profile.
- Sandwell has a lower ratio of fees and charges as a proportion of it's over expenditure. This means the Council has a lower risk of income fluctuations and may also have opportunities to generate more income from fees and charges in the future
- Council Tax makes up a lower proportion of the Council's overall funding than similar authorities, and as this is a stable source of funding, a lower ration presents more of a risk.
- Sandwell has a higher level of business rates growth compared to our nearest neighbours, which means the Council is more exposed to changes in government policy on business rates retention

## 6 Capital Programme and Asset Management Strategy

6.1 The current Capital Programme for the 2022-26 is shown in the table below alongside funding sources. However, there are a number of factors that are likely to significantly impact on the programme in the medium term and as such this forecast is seen as an interim update with a number of actions being taken forward to review priorities and funding strategy. This includes the approval and delivery of the revised Asset Management Strategy which contains a number of workstreams which will determine future capital priorities and resources. The current programme is as follows:



<b>Capital Programme 2022-2026</b>				
<b>Directorate</b>	<b>2022/23</b>	<b>2023/24</b>	<b>2024/25</b>	<b>2025/26</b>
Law and Governance	4,399	-	-	-
Business Strategy and Change	3,691	1,233	1,200	1,200
Adult Social Care	4,224	763	-	-
Borough Economy	23,790	14,392	11,313	11,350
Regeneration and Growth	50,443	34,636	8,431	1,960
Housing	13,097	3,300	3,300	3,300
Children's	8,954	-	-	-
<b>Total Programme</b>	<b>108,598</b>	<b>54,324</b>	<b>24,244</b>	<b>17,810</b>
<b>Available Resources:</b>				
Prudential Borrowing	7,874	3,195	1,500	1,500
Supported Capital Expenditure	80			
Capital Grants	71,137	44,971	15,525	9,054
Capital Receipts	18,234	7,299	7,351	7,419
Revenue Contributions	5,427	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>102,752</b>	<b>55,465</b>	<b>24,376</b>	<b>17,973</b>
<b>Surplus/Deficit</b>	- 5,846	1,141	132	163

- 6.2 The deficit of £5.5m shown in 2023/24 is due to increasing inflationary pressures across Highways and Transport projects which was not anticipated when the original programme was approved. This will be funded by Prudential Borrowing if no further capital receipts are identified.
- 6.3 Whilst the programme currently shows that sufficient resources are in place, with reasonable levels of prudential borrowing, there are emerging pressures and priorities that are not yet included in the forecast above. This includes investment in IT infrastructure as well as backlog maintenance issues and further work is ongoing to understand the financial implications. This is linked to the surplus asset review that is also being undertaken, with the expectation that the additional capital receipts generated will go towards funding the additional investment requirements when identified.
- 6.4 This programme takes into account the Council's Towns Fund projects to be delivered by 2025 but the Council has ambitious broader regeneration plans which are not yet included in the Programme. This includes:
- Estimated investment of over £1.8bn (public and private)
  - Delivery of over 4,300 new homes
  - Investment in 10 education and skills facilities
  - £63m investment in new employment/commercial floorspace
  - Pipeline of 31 transport related projects
  - Town Centre investment



- 6.5 There is funding in place to deliver on some of these ambitions, such as Towns Funs and City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement grants but other projects are still in the early stages of identifying viability and resource options. The pipeline will require considerable time and resources to deliver as well as the management of risk and working closely with potential developers, investors and public sector partners.
- 6.6 Whilst work is ongoing to prioritise and plan the next steps for delivery of the MTFP does include additional revenue capacity for delivery of the programme as well as the revenue costs of Prudential Borrowing. A high-level estimate of £100m over the next five years has been included in the forecasts at section 3.3 above, with approximately 50% of that being required during the life of this plan. Once further information on delivery and timescales of the pipeline is available, suitable provision will be made in the Capital Programme, utilising the borrowing capacity that has been reflected in the plan.
- 6.7 The Council's Asset Management Strategy (AMS) has also been fundamentally reviewed with several key actions and workstreams arising from the revised plan which will impact on the Capital Programme. This includes:
- Reviewing surplus assets to reduce ongoing liabilities and generate capital receipts
  - Rationalising the Council's operational assets to improve coordinated service delivery and reduce ongoing costs
  - Identify opportunities to increase value from the Council's commercial property portfolio
  - Address the backlog maintenance issues in the Council's property estate and develop a planned maintenance strategy
- 6.8 Detailed delivery plans are being developed for the workstreams in the AMS and will be monitored by Leadership Team. The workstreams are intrinsically linked to the Capital Programme and Capital Strategy and will also support the Regeneration Pipeline by identifying capital receipts to facilitate delivery.

## 7 Risk Review

- 7.1 The financial risks that the Council faces will be managed using established best practice principles which are set out in the Corporate Risk Management Strategy. A proactive approach to the identification and management of risks and opportunities will be taken within the financial planning and budget monitoring process. This will support the council in:

- Achieving planned financial targets;
- Achieving a high level of customer satisfaction in our service delivery;
- Maintaining a safe and supportive working environment for staff;
- Enhancing our reputation;
- Maintaining compliance with legal and regulatory framework





- 7.2 The Audit and Risk Assurance Committee governs risk management. Key risks are evaluated within regular reports to the Cabinet, Council and Senior Management Board. The Chief Finance Officer uses this risk assessment to inform decisions on the appropriate levels of general reserves, central contingency and specific reserves.
- 7.3 In determining actions required to ensure balanced budgets are prepared, Directors have undertaken an Equality Impact Assessment on all identified service changes and policy amendments.
- 7.4 The specific risks arising through this plan are assessed in the table below:

Risk Area	Impact	Likelihood	Risk Rating	Financial implications	Mitigation
Impact of inflation on pay and price budgets	H	H	Red	Each 1% increase in salary budgets = £1.3m approx.  A 5% increase in major contracts and utilities = £5m	Prudent assessment of pay award and contractual inflationary increases included in the MTFP forecasts  Financial Planning Reserve maintained
Impact of cost of living increases on demand for services and collection rates	M	M	Amber	Each 1% reduction in Council Tax collection = approximately £1m  Increased demand for services such as homelessness is difficult to quantify.	Cost of Living Support offered to residents, such as Council Tax Reduction, Council Tax Hardship and Local Welfare Scheme



Medium Term Forecasting not accurate leading to higher level of savings needing to be achieved	M	M	Amber	Savings required in 2023/24 are in the region of £15m, rising to £30m the following year.	Regular review of assumptions and comparisons with other authorities. Prudent level of reserves held.
Insufficient capital resources to fund the Capital Programme leading to priority schemes not delivered	M	M	Amber	Risk is not generating estimated Capital Receipts (£7m p.a. assumed)	Surplus Asset Review to identify further opportunities to generate Capital Receipts Review of Capital Programme underway to ensure resources to targeted towards priority areas.
Transformation Programme not delivering on time	H	M	Red	Budget gap is £50m over the next three years, with a significant cliff edge in 2024/25	Transformation team in place to drive savings plan alongside some external resources. Invest to Save reserve maintained to fund transformation projects.





Income streams not recovering to pre-pandemic levels	M	M	Amber	Budgets for key income streams impacted by COVID amounted to £14m. Income streams have largely recovered to pre-COVID levels with some exceptions, largely car parks and markets.	The Council has some COVID funding remaining but the focus in budget planning is to assess realistic income levels post-pandemic to reflect changing behaviours.
Late government funding announcements	H	H	Red	Difficult to quantify. There are a number of one-off grants, such as the Services Grant alongside the Business Rates top-up received. Total funding received through the settlement is in excess of £50m, excluding social care related grants	Regular review of assumptions and savings plans which assume a degree of reduction in government funding. Prudent level of reserves maintained to smooth any short term fluctuations



Change in government policy e.g business rates retention, NHB, other grants	H	M	Amber	Core government funding is in excess of £50. Social Care Grants account for a further £45m approx.	Prudent assumptions built into the MTFS which are regularly reviewed. Savings plans assume some level of reduction in funding, particularly in 2024/25.
Further COVID restrictions	L	L	Green	Difficult to quantify	£2m contingency maintained in reserves for further COVID pressures.
Third Parties/contractor failure	H	M	Amber	Difficult to quantify	Regular contract monitoring arrangements including quarterly credit checks
Adult Social Care Reforms not covered by government funding	H	M	Amber	Initial estimates of the Fair Cost of Care and Care Cap impact indicate increased costs in the region of £20m.	Progress towards Fair Cost of Care will be phased to align with government funding received.



## 8 Action Plan

8.1 Given the outstanding issues referenced throughout this Plan, the following action plan has been developed to ensure that assumptions are reviewed at an appropriate time and progress continues towards developing the medium-term savings plan.

8.2

Action	Date	Responsible Officer
Complete review of Fees and Charges, including Charging Strategy and Cost Recovery Model	November 2022	Director of Finance
Update funding assumptions following any Spending Review/Settlement announcement	December 2022 or earlier depending on government announcements	Director of Finance
Surplus Asset Review	Phase 1 – decision to proceed in November 2022	Director of Regeneration and Growth
Business Case for Oracle Fusion implementation	January 2023	Director of Finance
Capital Programme Review of priorities and resources	December 2022	Director of Finance and Director of Regeneration and Growth
Finalise Commercial strategy and complete Strategic Business Cases	December 2022	Director of Finance
Develop programme of Business Process Reviews	December 2022	Director of Business Strategy and Change
Identify savings plans for all Transformation Workstreams	January 2023	Director of Finance and Director of Business Strategy and Change



## 9 Conclusion

- 9.1 The Council is facing a significant financial challenge over the period of this MTFP, which is further exacerbated by the uncertainty around future funding and government policy. There is a savings requirement in the region of £55m based on current assumptions (subject to change) and although sufficient savings have been identified for 2023/24 there is still around £25m to be found in the following two years.
- 9.2 Leadership Team will need to prioritise delivery of the Transformation Savings Plan, develop detailed business cases for each workstream and identify savings opportunities where there are current gaps in the plan.
- 9.3 The MTFS will be updated in early 2023 once further information about the Local Government Finance Settlement is available.

