

**BUDGET ENGAGEMENT 2024-25**

Results Report – Cabinet 08 January 2024



## I. INTRODUCTION

A public engagement to support the 2024-25 budget setting process took place between Tuesday 14 November and Monday 11 December 2023. A questionnaire was developed which asked respondents their view on which priorities the Council should focus on in the coming year - the Council's priorities are:

- Working with the Police to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour.
- Fewer potholes, cleaner, greener streets and transport.
- Build more homes - for social rent and affordable ownership.
- Green investment, jobs, skills and better education.
- Working with the NHS to provide better access to health, care and dentistry.
- Keeping children, adults and communities safe.
- Making Plymouth a great place to grow up and grow old.
- Minimising the impact of the cost-of-living crisis.

The questionnaire also asked respondents to provide their level of agreement on six statements in regard to managing the Council's budget. The statements were designed to 'test' public opinion on a range of activity that could be considered by the Administration to balance the Council's budget for the 2024-25 fiscal year.

- 436 online questionnaires were completed and entered for analysis.

The results of this engagement will be considered by the Council's Cabinet and will form part of the final Budget report to Council in February 2024.

## METHODOLOGY AND COMMUNICATION

A simple questionnaire was developed to help identify which priorities respondents felt the Council should be focussing on over the next year and to generate ideas to help the Council balance the books for 2024.

The questionnaire was available online through Plymouth City Council's consultation portal and hard copies were made available upon request.

An engagement with business representatives took place on 13 December 2023.

A communications plan was developed which set out the required materials, branding and opportunities for advertising and promoting the engagement.

The engagement exercise was promoted through a news release and the Council's website, social media channels and email bulletins for residents.

The engagement featured on the home page of the Council's website and a budget web page provided more information and a link to the questionnaire.

Social media posts were shared by community leaders and councillors and engagement was amplified by shares with community Facebook groups.

There were regular reminders on social media and through email bulletins.

*Note: all percentages cited in this report are rounded to the nearest whole percentage point.*

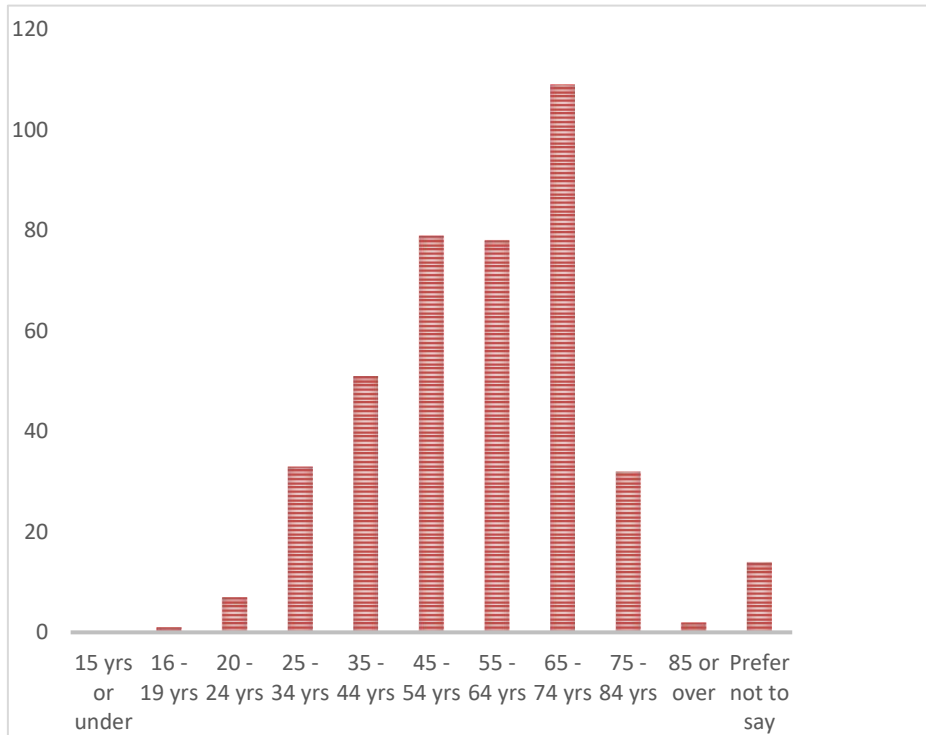


## SECTION I - WHO RESPONDED?

This section provides an overview of how many people responded and the demographics of those respondents.

The following demographic information has been compiled from the total number of questionnaires analysed (436). This information has been used to identify the views of different groups of people where possible throughout this report.

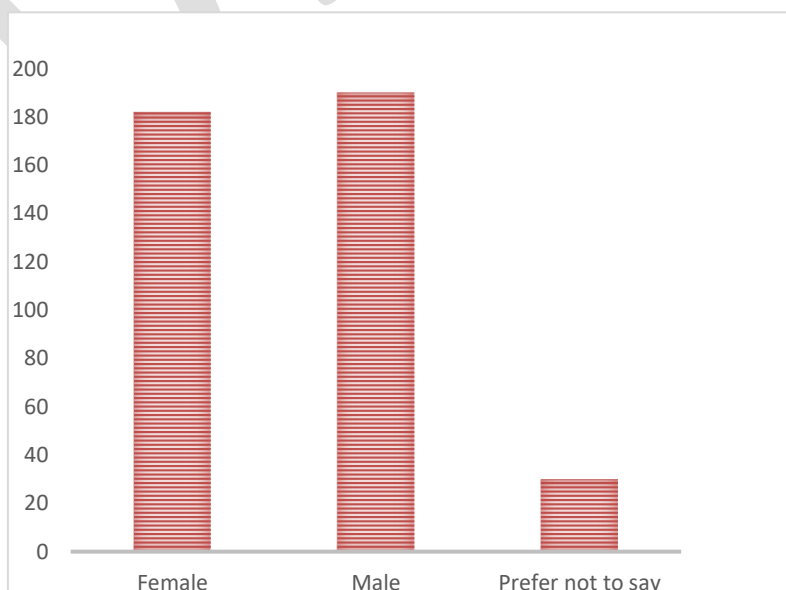
**Chart 1: Respondent by age**



Base: 406

The age group with the highest number of respondents was the 65 – 74 age group (109, 27%). This was followed by those aged between 45 and 54 (79, 19%) and those aged between 55 and 64 (78, 19%). There was a lower level of response from respondents aged 75 and over and those aged 24 or under.

**Chart 2: Respondent by sex**

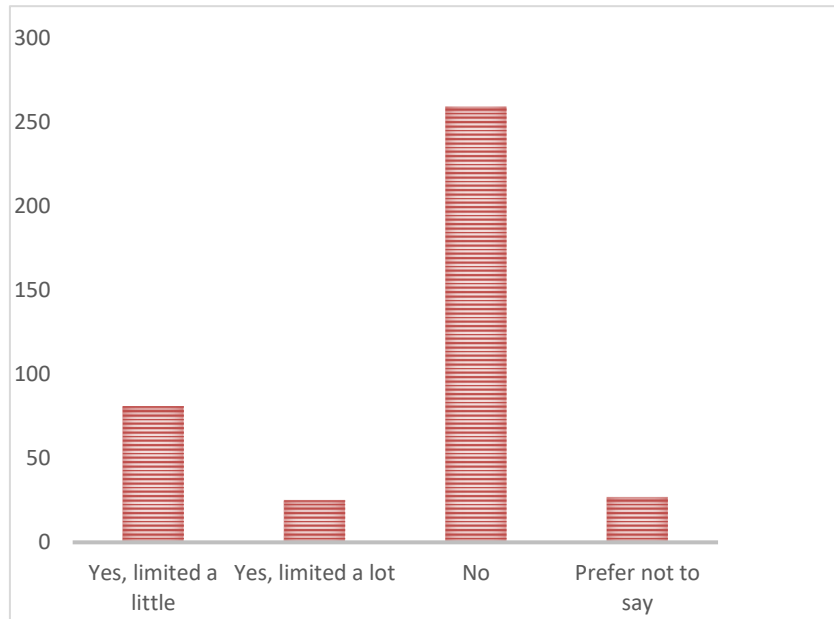


Base: 402

This engagement generated a slightly higher number of male respondents (190, 47%) compared to female respondents (182, 45%).

The majority of respondents indicated that their gender identity was the same as the sex that they registered with at birth.

**Chart 3: Respondent by health and disability**



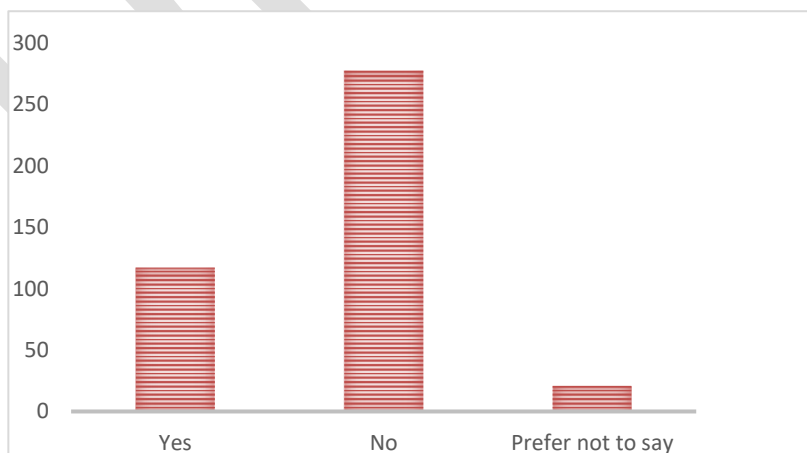
Base: 392

Most respondents indicated that they did not have any limitations due to a health condition or disability (259, 66%). 27 per cent of respondents did indicate that they were 'limited a little' or 'limited a lot'.

The majority of respondents identified their ethnicity as 'White' (329, 75%). The engagement received a small number of responses from other ethnic groups (9 in total).

The majority of respondents stated that they were not previously served in the armed forces, regular or reserves (331, 81%), however 56 respondents stated that had (14%).

**Chart 4: Respondent by care experience**



When asked about experience of the care system, 117 respondents indicated that they had care experience (28%), whilst 277 (67%) said that they didn't.

## SECTION 2 – YOUR PRIORITIES

The questionnaire asked respondents to select up to three priorities that the Council should focus on in the coming year - the Council’s priorities are:

- Working with the Police to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour.
- Fewer potholes, cleaner, greener streets and transport.
- Build more homes - for social rent and affordable ownership.
- Green investment, jobs, skills and better education.
- Working with the NHS to provide better access to health, care and dentistry.
- Keeping children, adults and communities safe.
- Making Plymouth a great place to grow up and grow old.
- Minimising the impact of the cost-of-living crisis.

The analysis added together the selections made by respondents to generate a final number and the top three priorities. Respondents could not choose the same priority more than once.

The results show that 251 respondents selected ‘working with the NHS to provide better access to health, care and dentistry’ as the top priority that they would like the council to focus on in the next 12 months.

This was followed by ‘fewer potholes, cleaner, greener streets and transport’, selected 169 respondents and then ‘working with the Police to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour’ which was selected by 160 respondents as one of their top three.

**Chart 5: Top priorities**



## Further analysis of priorities

**Age:** Respondents aged 34 years or under selected 'working with the NHS to provide better access to health, care and dentistry' and 'minimising the impact of the cost-of-living crisis' as priorities for the Council to address. Those aged between 35 and 64 years selected 'working with the NHS to provide better access to health, care and dentistry' and 'working with the Police to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour' as clear priorities they want the Council to focus on over the next 12 months. These respondents aged 65 years and over clearly want the Council to work with the NHS to provide better access to health, care and dentistry.

**Sex:** Both male and female respondents selected 'working with the NHS to provide better access to health, care and dentistry' as a top priority for the Council to address. Female respondents also chose 'working with the Police to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour' as a clear priority, whereas male respondents chose 'fewer potholes, cleaner, greener streets and transport'.

**Veterans:** Respondents who indicated that they had served in the armed forces either as a regular or reserve selected 'working with the NHS to provide better access to health, care and dentistry' and 'fewer potholes, cleaner, greener streets and transport' as clear priorities they want the Council to focus on over the next 12 months.

**Disability and health:** Respondents who indicated that they were limited a lot or limited a little with a disability or health condition selected 'working with the NHS to provide better access to health, care and dentistry' as a top priority for the Council to address – this was also selected most frequently by those who were not limited with a disability or health condition. 'Build more homes - for social rent and affordable ownership' was also a priority selected by those with a disability or health condition.

**Care experience:** Respondents who indicated that they had experience of the care system selected 'working with the NHS to provide better access to health, care and dentistry' and 'working with the Police to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour' as clear priorities they want the Council to focus on over the next 12 months.

## Further comments relating to Council's priorities

Within this section of the engagement, respondents were asked to think about whether there was anything in addition to the Council's priorities that should be an area of focus for the coming year.

Out of the total 436 respondents, 170 entered a written response to this question. These free text responses were analysed thematically, for most part the free text space was used by respondents to verify their selected priorities and add context. Comments relating to better public transport, filling potholes, enhanced parking enforcement or no more parking charge increases, city cleanliness, access to green space and the issue with lack of NHS dentistry.

There were a high number of comments relating to better access and funding for adult social care and more general support for vulnerable residents including children, young people and issues around homelessness (30). A selection of comments is provided below.

*"Education system working together with the council and NHS and support mental health and behavioural issues at schools."*

*"I think we should be doing more for homeless people. It is totally unacceptable that in the 21st century, people are living in tents on our streets. There are so many unoccupied houses, especially on MOD housing estates that should be given to homeless people."*

*"Keeping disabled people in their own homes by providing adaptations to keep them independent."*

*“More activities for youth, spread around the city, to actually engage young people, especially 8 - 18-year-olds, to keep them out of trouble due to boredom...”*

*“Social care for young and old is in crisis and the most vulnerable people in our community are the ones suffering because of it. This should not happen in a civilised society.”*

Keeping libraries open was mentioned a few times in terms of something the council should focus on.

The comment that had the greatest single-issue focus was allotments (13), mainly in relation to reducing fees to encourage use, but respondents also cited how access to allotments has additional benefits.

*“Work more imaginatively with existing services and groups e.g. allotments do not get a mention here but thousands of residents benefit from cheaper and better food, mental and physical health, sense of community.”*

*“Allotment charges are amongst the highest in the Country; this is counter to three of PCCs published priorities: Green Investment; Making Plymouth a great place to grow old and Minimising the impact of cost-of living crisis.”*

*“Allotments provide source of exercise, social interaction and food provision, an area to be greatly encouraged. I would plead that these are supported, that rents are not increased again. Rises risk many folks being discouraged from maintaining their plots, especially the elderly who gain so much.”*

Encouraging business growth and investment into the city, alongside an ask that the Council focus on culture, art and sport also received a handful of comments worth noting.

*“Business growth needs to be a priority otherwise you can't afford anything else. You need to prioritise making Plymouth an attractive place for business investment. Get to it.”*

*“Facilitate the partnership between business and culture to have a joined up social value ask to feed into the top 3 three priorities.”*

*“Supporting and enhancing culture - which the Council already does extremely well by helping to finance the Box, the Theatre Royal, the upcoming Hoe Festival, etc.”*

### **SECTION 3 – MANAGING OUR BUDGET**

Section 3 of this engagement asked respondents to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements.

- **The Council should protect local services where possible by delivering these in different and/or more efficient ways.**

This question generated 430 responses, of which 92 per cent of respondents (395) agreed or strongly agreed that the Council should protect local services where possible by delivering these in different and/or more efficient ways – over 50 per cent strongly agreed with this statement and only one per cent disagreed or strongly disagreed. 30 respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement.

- **The Council should help avoid reducing or stopping services by increasing fees and charges by the rate of inflation.**

This question generated 425 responses, of which less than 50 per cent (46%, 196) agreed or strongly agreed that the Council should help avoid reducing or stopping services by increasing fees and charges by the rate of inflation – 33 per cent (139) disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. 90 respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement.

- **The Council should avoid cutting services by following the Government's assumption that councils will maintain their spending power by increasing Council Tax by up to 2.99%.**

This question generated 426 responses, of which less than 50 per cent (47%, 202) agreed or strongly agreed that the Council should avoid cutting services by following the Government's assumption that councils will maintain their spending power by increasing Council Tax by up to 2.99 per cent – 32 per cent (138) disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. 86 respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement.

- **The Council should help pay for rising demand for care services for elderly and vulnerable adults by accepting the 2% precept the Government allows to be added to Council Tax for this purpose.**

This question generated 428 responses, of which 52 per cent (224) agreed or strongly agreed that the Council should help pay for rising demand for care services for elderly and vulnerable adults by accepting the 2 per cent precept the Government allows to be added to Council Tax for this purpose – 29 per cent (126) disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. 78 respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement.

- **The Council should lobby central government for more funding and a fairer share for Plymouth.**

This question generated 424 responses, of which 93 per cent (393) agreed or strongly agreed that the Council should lobby central government for more funding and a fairer share for Plymouth – 75 per cent strongly agreed with this statement and only 3 per cent (12) disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. 19 respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement.

- **The Council should help achieve the ambition for Plymouth to become a carbon neutral city by 2030 by using 'green' energy sources wherever possible.**

This question generated 420 responses, of which 54 per cent (229) agreed or strongly agreed that the Council should help achieve the ambition for Plymouth to become a carbon neutral city by 2030 by using 'green' energy sources wherever possible – 25 per cent (105) disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. 86 respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement.

### Further analysis of statements

Analysis was carried out to identify whether there were any differences in views between respondents with different protected characteristics in relation to each of the statements.

NB: these results are not statistically significant and in some cases the numbers of respondents is very low within the different protected characteristics. The results are only indicative of the different views.

- **The Council should protect local services where possible by delivering these in different and/or more efficient ways.**

There were no discernible differences in views between respondents with different protected characteristics in relation to this statement. The majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed.

- **The Council should help avoid reducing or stopping services by increasing fees and charges by the rate of inflation.**

The results don't show a great difference in levels of agreement or disagreement for this statement, however, those aged between 20 and 24 years were more likely than any other age group to agree or strongly agree with this statement, with those aged between 25 and 34 years more likely than any



other age group to disagree. There was no discernible difference in views between those respondents who indicated that they had a disability or health condition and those who did not, nor between female and male respondents.

Those respondents who indicated that they previously served in the armed forces were slightly less likely to agree with this statement than those who had not, however their level of disagreement was the same as those who had not previously served in the armed forces. Those who indicated that they had experience of the care system were slightly more likely to disagree with this statement than those who had not.

- **The Council should avoid cutting services by following the Government's assumption that councils will maintain their spending power by increasing Council Tax by up to 2.99%.**

Those aged 55 years and over were slightly more likely to agree or strongly agree with this statement with the 65 to 74 years age group being most likely to agree. Those aged under 44 years more likely to disagree or strongly disagree with this statement. There was no discernible difference in views between those respondents who indicated that they had a disability or health condition and those who did not, nor between female and male respondents or between those who indicated that they had experience of the care system and those who had not.

Those respondents who indicated that they previously served in the armed forces were slightly more likely to agree with this statement than those who had not. Those who indicated that they had experience of the care system were slightly more likely to disagree with this statement than those who had not.

- **The Council should help pay for rising demand for care services for elderly and vulnerable adults by accepting the 2% precept the Government allows to be added to Council Tax for this purpose.**

Those aged 55 years and over were slightly more likely to agree or strongly agree with this statement with the 75 to 84 years age group being most likely to agree or strongly agree with this statement.

Those respondents who indicated that they had a disability or health condition were slightly more likely to agree with this statement than those who did not and those who did not were more likely to disagree. Female respondents were quite a bit more likely to agree or strongly agree with this statement.

There was no discernible difference in views between those respondents who indicated that they had previously served in the armed forces and those who had not. Those who indicated that they had experience of the care system were quite a bit more likely to agree with this statement than those who had not.

- **The Council should lobby central government for more funding and a fairer share for Plymouth.**

There were no discernible differences in views between respondents with different protected characteristics in relation to this statement. The majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed.

- **The Council should help achieve the ambition for Plymouth to become a carbon neutral city by 2030 by using 'green' energy sources wherever possible.**

Those aged 44 years and under were more likely to agree or strongly agree with this statement with the 20 to 24 and 25- to 34-year-old age groups being most likely to agree. Those respondents who indicated that they had a disability or health condition were less likely to agree with this statement than those who did not. Female respondents were quite a bit more likely to agree or strongly agree with this statement and male respondents were more likely to disagree.

Those respondents who indicated that they previously served in the armed forces were quite a bit more likely to disagree with this statement than those who had not. Those who had not served the

armed forces were quite a bit more likely to agree or strongly agree with this statement. Those who indicated that they had experience of the care system were quite a bit less likely to agree with this statement.

## SECTION 4 – FURTHER COMMENTS

This final section asked respondents if they had any further suggestions about ways in which the Council could save money or raise revenue to support services.

Out of the total 436 respondents, 182 entered a written response to this question.

Several respondents (26) suggested that the Council could save money by reducing staff costs. The most common suggestion was to reduce the number or salary of senior managers. Other comments related to reducing the overall number of staff by increasing efficiency and removing any posts that were considered unnecessary.

*'Cut the massive salaries of those at the top and stop hiring advisors who are also paid huge amounts of money'.*

*'Cut waste whenever possible. Use staff efficiently and be prepared to slim the workforce down if possible'.*

13 respondents felt that either the number of Councillors should be reduced to save money or that expenses paid to Councillors should be reduced.

*'Remove perks from councillors, this used to be a voluntary position, paying only wages lost whilst doing council work'.*

*'Don't pay councillors extra money just because they have 'special responsibilities'. Reduce councillors expenses'.*

The second most common suggestion (22) was for the Council to focus on the provision of core services and reduce spending on services or projects considered unnecessary.

*'Focus ENTIRELY on providing real services for real people, and ONLY spend our tax money on providing proper services'.*

*'Reduce the amount spent on vanity projects that do not increase the wellbeing of people who live in Plymouth'.*

*'Stop wasting money on traffic issues, beryl bikes etc. sort the essential basics first'.*

12 respondents suggested that the Council should make more use of volunteers or the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS). A couple of respondents also suggested that the unemployed could be asked to volunteer.

*'We could concentrate on using local volunteers to help encourage people to help take care of where they live. This could include tree planting, litter collecting and removing graffiti'.*

*'Citizens task forces for street cleaning, rubbish clearing, verge cutting etc. Similarly long term unemployed task force for maintaining social housing stock & grounds'.*