

The City of Edinburgh Council

10.00am, Thursday 20 February 2025

Consultation on Officer Budget Proposals – referral from the Finance and Resources Committee

Executive/routine
Wards

All

1. For Decision/Action

- 1.1 The Finance and Resources Committee has referred a report on the Consultation on Officer Budget Proposals to the City of Edinburgh Council on 20 February 2025 for consideration alongside budget papers.

Paul Laurence
Chief Executive

Contact: Carolanne Eyre, Assistant Committee Officer
Democracy and Governance, Chief Executive Directorate
E-mail: carolanne.eyre@edinburgh.gov.uk | Tel: 0131 529 4264

Referral Report

Consultation on Officer Budget Proposals – referral from the Finance and Resources Committee

2. Terms of Referral

- 2.1 On 4 February 2025, the Finance and Resources Committee considered a report on the Consultation on Officer Budget Proposals, which summarised the response to the public consultation on officer budget proposals for financial year 2025/26 and the response from colleague budget engagement. The report set out next steps for budget communication, further engagement, investigating money-saving ideas, and reporting.
- 2.2 The Finance and Resources Committee agreed:
 - 2.2.1 To note the feedback received as part of the budget consultation with residents and the budget engagement with colleagues.
 - 2.2.2 To refer the report to Council for consideration alongside budget papers.

3. Background Reading/ External References

- 3.1 [Finance and Resources Committee – 4 February 2025 - Webcast](#)
- 3.2 Minute of the Finance and Resources Committee – 4 February 2025

4. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Report by the Executive Director of Corporate Services

Finance and Resources Committee

10am, Tuesday, 4 February 2025

Consultation on Officer Budget Proposals

Executive/routine
Wards

All

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 Note the feedback received as part of the budget consultation with residents and the budget engagement with colleagues.
- 1.2 Refer this report to Council for consideration alongside budget papers.

Dr Deborah Smart

Executive Director of Corporate Services

Contact: David Porteous, Strategy Manager (Insight)

E-mail: david.porteous@edinburgh.gov.uk

Consultation on Officer Budget Proposals

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 This report summarises the response to the public consultation on officer budget proposals for financial year 2025/26 and the response from colleague budget engagement. This report sets out next steps for budget communication, further engagement, investigating money-saving ideas, and reporting.

3. Background

- 3.1 From April to June 2024 a budget engagement exercise was conducted with Edinburgh residents. The results of this were [reported to the Finance & Resources Committee](#) on 19 September 2024.
- 3.2 The same questions used in this public engagement exercise were repeated in a colleague engagement exercise running from 3 October 2024 to 31 October 2024. The results of this exercise are summarised in this report.
- 3.3 A budget consultation was undertaken with Edinburgh residents between 20 November 2024 and 14 January 2025 on officer proposals to balance the budget for financial year 2025/26. This report summarises the final results of this consultation. Interim results of this consultation were shared with elected members on 18 December 2024.
- 3.4 All officer proposals and all context provided to participants was based on the best information available at the time. This information did not include details of Scottish Government's budget or how this would impact Edinburgh as this information would not have been available until four weeks later.

4. Main report

Resident budget consultation

- 4.1 3,260 residents participated in the budget consultation. Detailed reporting on who participated and the feedback we received is included as Appendix One.

- 4.2 Communication activities to promote the budget consultation were targeted to reach residents aged over 16 years in all Edinburgh neighbourhoods using a combination of press, outdoor, community, radio and digital channels. This included:
- 4.2.1 Lamp post wraps and posters placed in over 150 locations,
 - 4.2.2 Digital posts displayed over 1.5 million times with over 21,500 click throughs,
 - 4.2.3 Radio reaching 36% of residents in Edinburgh,
 - 4.2.4 Press interviews and a press release issued to 400 outlets resulting in 13 pieces of coverage including STV, Forth Radio, Edinburgh Evening News, Edinburgh Reporter and Edinburgh Inquirer.

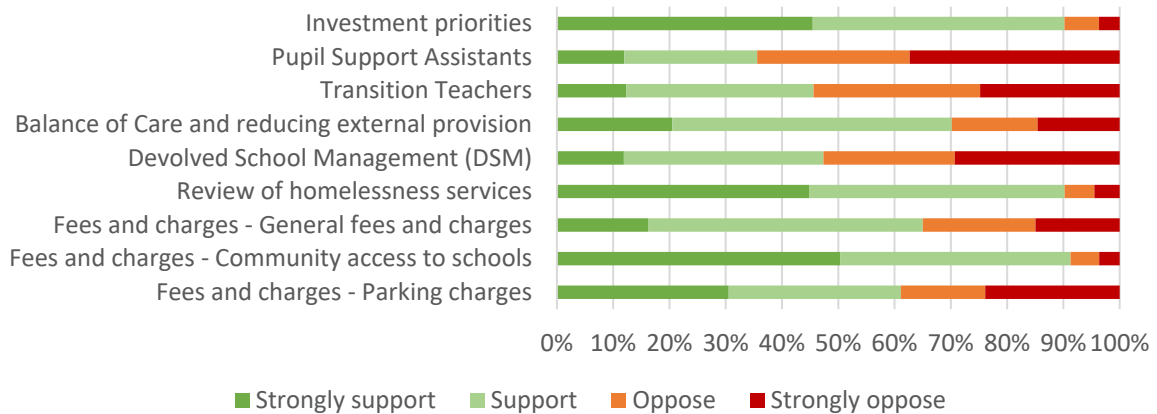
4.3 Residents were informed that some level of increase in Council Tax would be necessary following the freeze in 2024/25, with a likely minimum increase of 5%. Within these restrictions, on average, residents felt Council Tax should increase by 6.4%. Excluding don't know and non-response, most residents (69%) felt the increase should be 5%, with others (31%) selecting higher amounts. This is summarised in the graph below.

Figure 1 – selected Council Tax increases (minimum 5%)



- 4.4 Those who preferred a smaller increase, or who specifically said there should be no increase, were concerned about the general cost of living, which had become higher in the last two years. Residents were also concerned that any increase should be spent efficiently on issues which they believed should be a priority. Those who preferred a larger increase were generally concerned about the quality of services.
- 4.5 Residents were presented with decisions to address the Council's budget shortfall. For proposals where there would be some impact on residents or other service users, these proposals were presented in more detail and included the results of integrated impact assessments. For changes that were not felt to impact residents or other service users, the change was summarised to demonstrate all the ways the Council was seeking to address its budget shortfall.
- 4.6 The following graph shows the extent to which residents supported or opposed each of the more detailed proposals, excluding don't know and no response. Further information about impacts and reasons for support is included in Appendix One.

Figure 2 – support and opposition to proposals



4.7 As part of the first phase of budget engagement, residents were asked for their priorities to improve their neighbourhood. In the budget consultation, we highlighted actions that were being taken to address to those priorities – road condition, cleansing services, and adult social care – and asked whether those actions were supported. 90% of participants supported those priorities, while 10% opposed them.

4.8 Residents were invited to suggest additional priorities the Council should consider. This feedback was consistent overall to what was received as part of the budget engagement exercise in spring/summer 2024. Suggestions included:

4.8.1 Improve the quality of roads and fix potholes;

4.8.2 Invest in education provision and facilities;

4.8.3 Improve street cleaning;

4.8.4 Invest in community facilities including parks, green space, libraries, community centres and hubs.

4.9 There continues to be strongly divided opinions on active travel infrastructure. Some residents believe further investment in infrastructure is essential to enable and encourage active travel. Some residents believe this investment has been at the expense of general road and pavement maintenance and that cyclist numbers remain small and do not justify the extra spending.

4.10 There are divided opinions on tourism and heritage spending, with some believing it is vital for Edinburgh’s economy and others concerned this spending does not benefit residents. The introduction of a tourism levy continues to be desired by residents.

Colleague budget engagement

4.11 124 colleagues participated in the colleague budget engagement.

4.12 Colleagues felt that the Council was performing well in the following areas:

4.12.1 Colleagues praised their co-workers in general for going above and beyond in working conditions that could be difficult. Teachers were especially praised.

- 4.12.2 The new colleague behaviours framework was welcomed. The framework and additional investment in trauma-informed practice were felt to contribute positively to culture change in the Council.
- 4.12.3 Colleagues were pleased with parks and greenspace maintenance, tree planting, and timely waste collection services, though some felt the city could be cleaner.
- 4.12.4 Colleagues noted improvements in transport links including active travel routes, and while they understood the low emission zone to be controversial, they believed it was necessary to reduce traffic and emissions.
- 4.13 Colleagues felt the Council needed to improve in the following areas:
 - 4.13.1 Education was felt to require more funding, especially to meet children's additional support needs and to maintain the school estate. Youth services were also seen as under-resourced.
 - 4.13.2 Colleagues noted the housing shortage in Edinburgh, and that the Council's homelessness services were under pressure. They felt that the Council should make better use of empty housing stock and needed to build far more affordable housing.
 - 4.13.3 Colleagues were generally unhappy about the condition of roads and pavements across the city, with colleagues reporting potholes, roadworks, and uneven pavements.
 - 4.13.4 The appearance of Princes Street was felt to be poor, in part due to long-term empty properties.
- 4.14 Colleagues suggested that the Council had several opportunities to save money:
 - 4.14.1 Colleagues felt the Council relied too much on external contractors to carry out repairs and felt bringing this function in-house would reduce costs and improve response times.
 - 4.14.2 Colleagues noted that there was no local control of heating in buildings (offices and schools), which were generally too warm.
 - 4.14.3 Colleagues noted that temporary accommodation was much more expensive than other forms of housing and wanted the Council to make better use of empty housing stock to meet urgent needs.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 The Strategic Programme Board has allocated resource to investigate ideas and suggestions received from colleagues and residents through all three engagement and consultation exercises. Following this work, we will communicate to colleagues and residents about how we are taking forward their ideas, where actions have already been taken or are not possible.

- 5.2 Residents could choose to give us permission to recontact them about budget issues and most did. Following a decision on the Council's budget, we will write to participating residents to tell them about the decisions we made as a result of their feedback. There will also be general communications to all residents about the budget decision.
- 5.3 Budget engagement work will continue with the focus groups approved by Finance and Resources in September and this work will contribute to the development of budget options for the 2026/27 budget. We will report the results of these groups to Policy and Sustainability Committee.
- 5.4 Policy and Sustainability Committee requested a report on best practices in engagement and consultation on budget and this will be prepared as a business bulletin item in May 2025.
- 5.5 We will begin consultation with residents on budget options for the 2026/27 budget in late 2025 using an approach informed by the report on best practices.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 Costs of budget engagement and consultation were met from within existing budgets.

7. Equality and Poverty Impact

- 7.1 A cumulative integrated impact assessment on the budget proposals is being prepared and will go to Council with budget papers. This assessment will reflect feedback received as part of this consultation.

8. Climate and Nature Emergency Implications

- 8.1 There are no environmental impacts from this work and no environmental impact assessments were required for proposals.

9. Risk, policy, compliance, governance and community impact

- 9.1 An open consultation process on budget decisions which includes the publication of integrated impact assessments reduces the risk of judicial review of Council budget decisions.

10. Background reading/external references

- 10.1 [Budget Engagement Phase Two](#) report to Finance and Resources Committee on 19 September 2024

11. Appendices

Appendix One – Budget Consultation – summary of all responses

Budget Consultation 2024/25

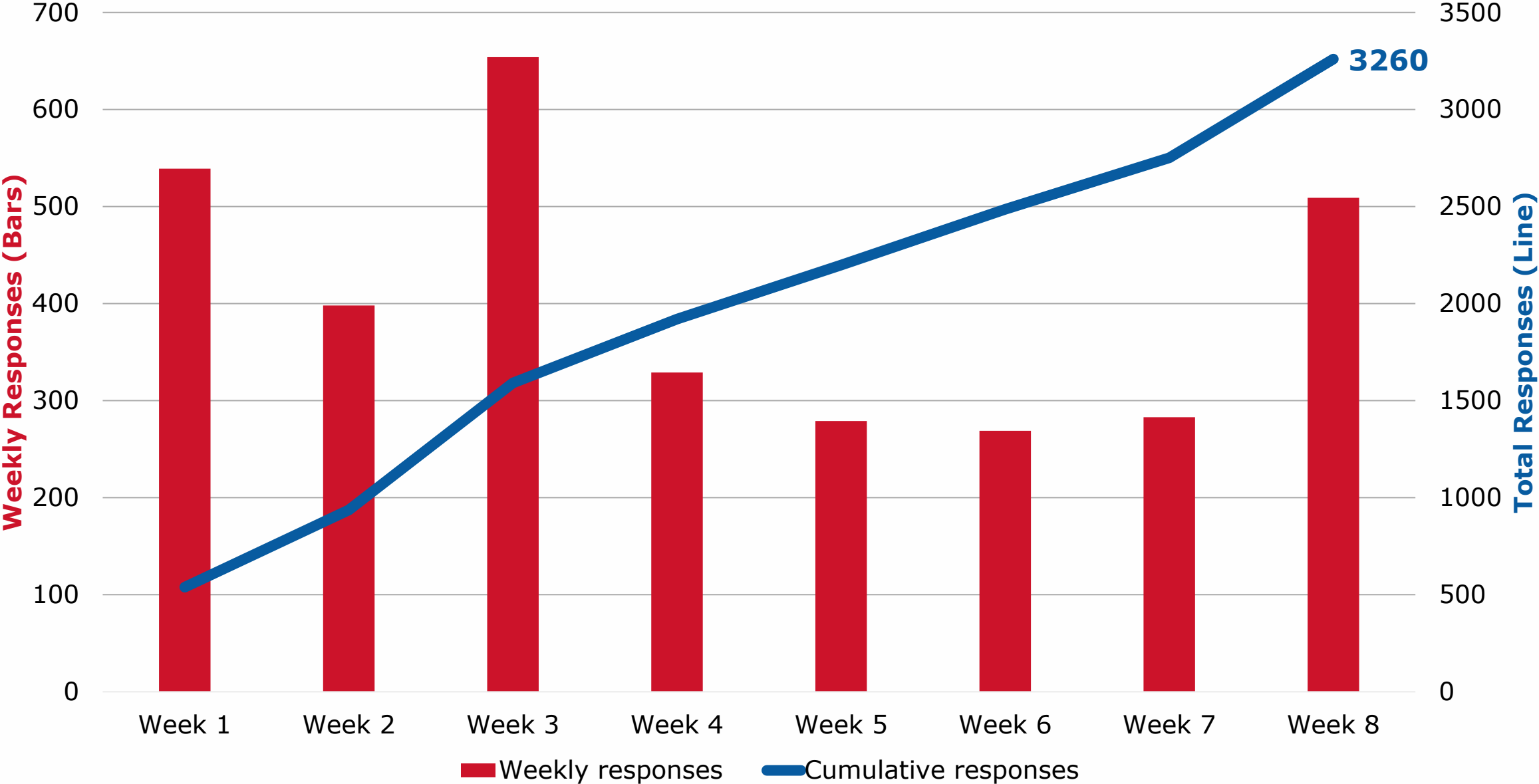
Summary of all responses

Introduction

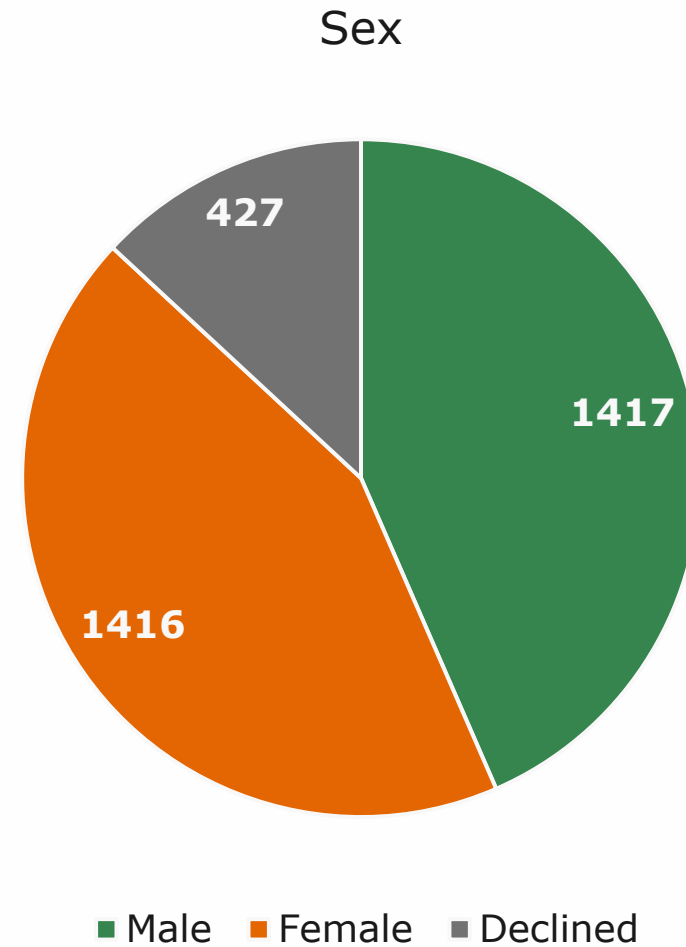
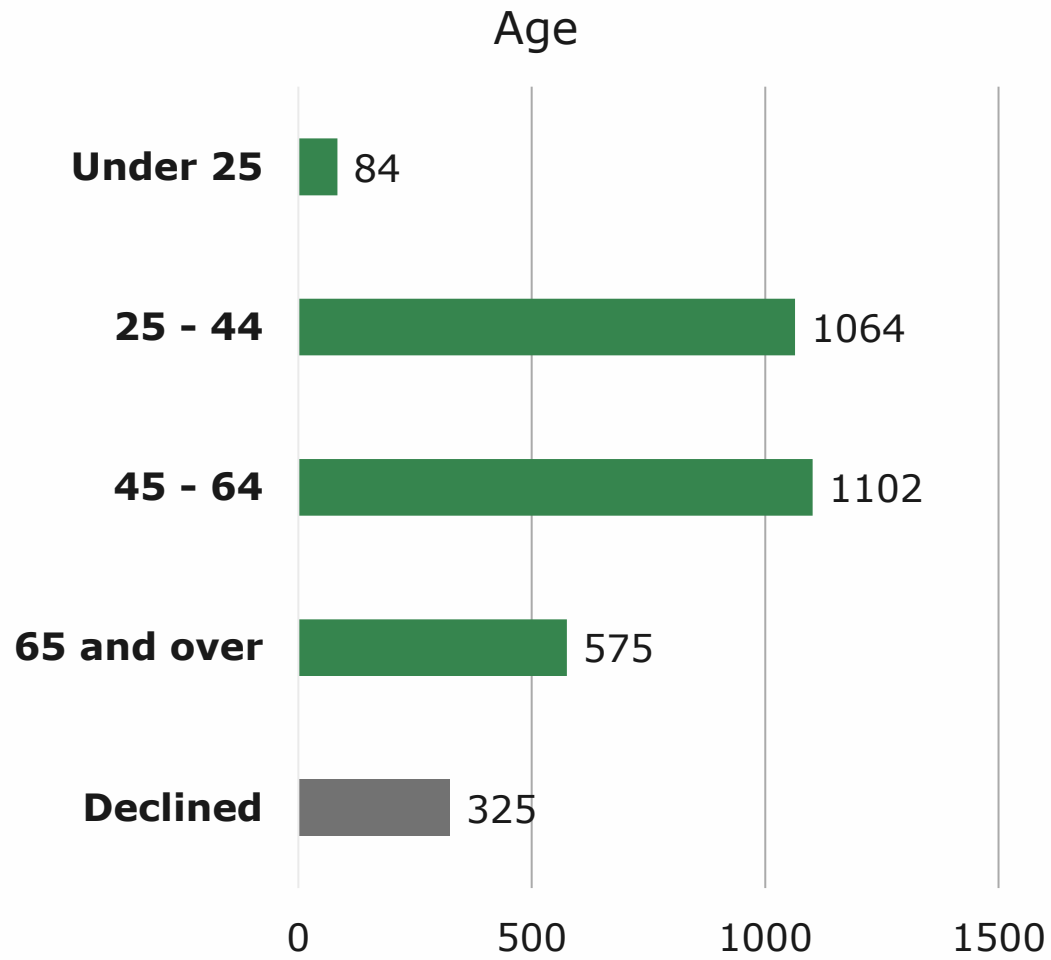
A summary of officer proposals for how to balance the Council's budget was put to residents through a consultation exercise starting on 20 November 2024 and closing on 14 January 2025.

- 3,260 responses have been received. When accounting for the different sizes of local authorities, this compares reasonably with Aberdeen's similar budget exercise, which received around 1,500 responses prior to Christmas 2024
- When excluding don't know responses, education proposals were viewed more negatively, with the proposal to remove pupil support assistants being the most negatively received proposal. A summary of the feedback received against each of these main proposals has been included
- Participants were strongly in favour of the investing priorities put forward in response to the phase one budget engagement and they continued to emphasise priorities expressed earlier last year
- Participants were restricted to setting a minimum of a 5% Council Tax increase. Of the 2,691 residents who expressed a view, 69% favoured an increase of 5% and 31% favoured an increase of more than 5%.

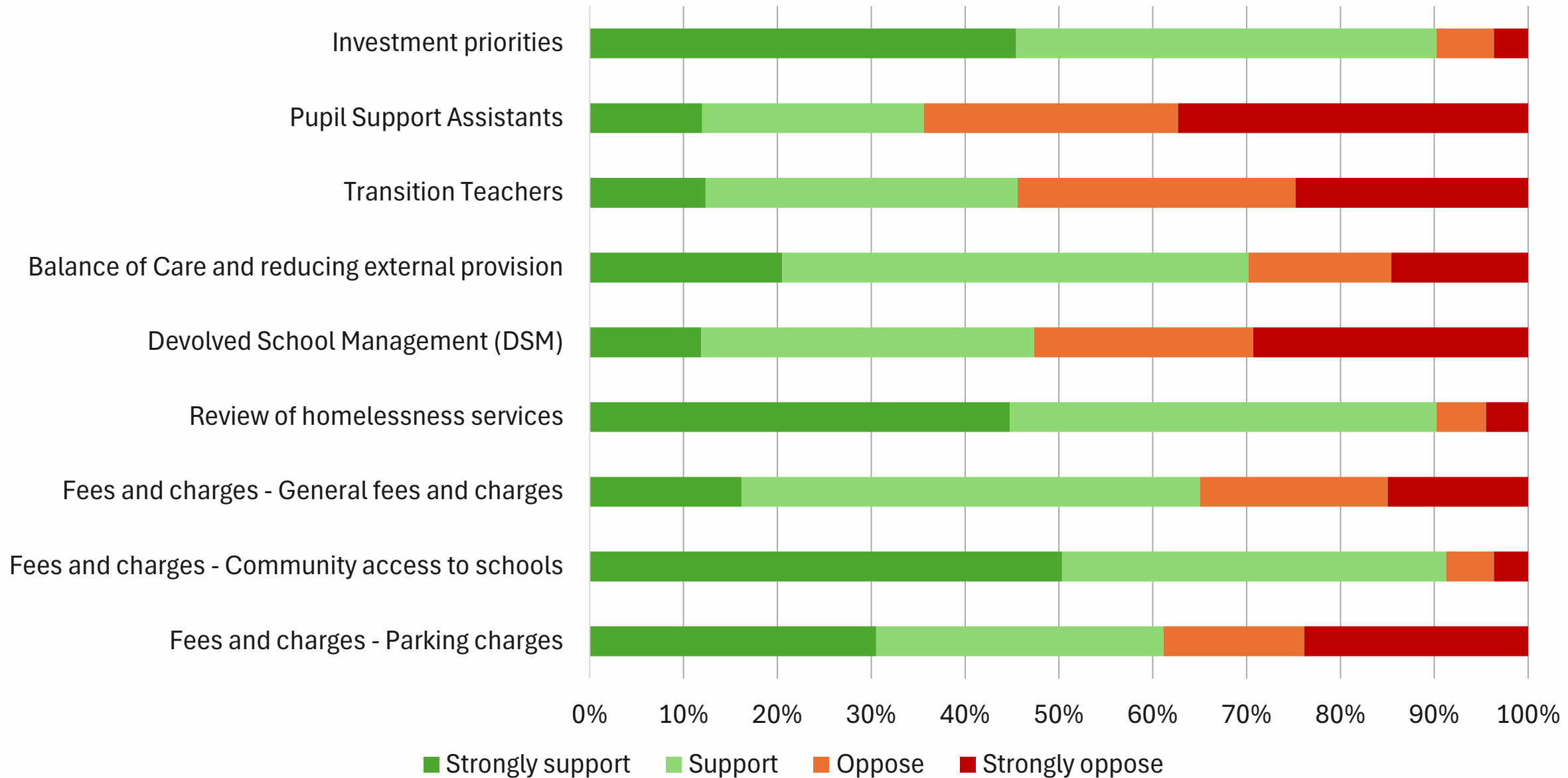
Responses received



Participant demographics – age, sex



Overall feedback on budget proposals (exc. D/K)



Individual proposals

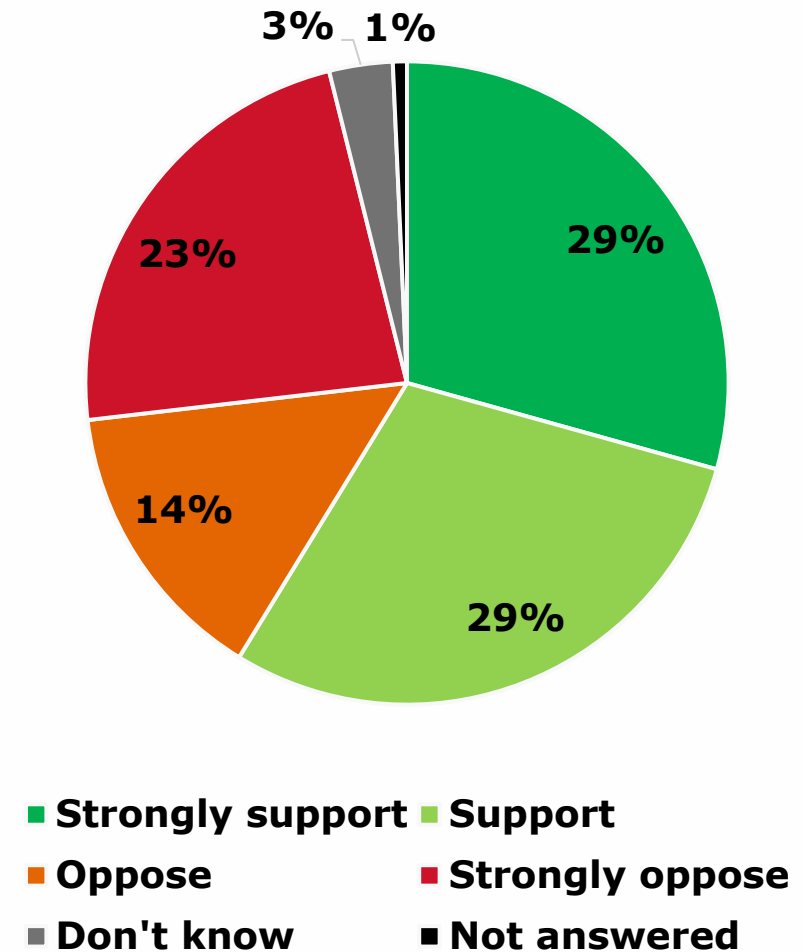
The following proposals were put to residents in some detail, with most having interim Integrated Impact Assessments. Response to each proposal is summarised showing:

- A pie chart of the response to the proposal – this includes both the participants who said “don’t know” and those who completed the survey but did not respond to this question. All charts are based on 3,260 responses.
- ***A very brief summary of the proposal put to residents. This text is in bold and italics.***
- Analysis of the views received. This text is plain.
- *“Direct quotes from participants. This text is in italics and quotes.”*

Parking charges

£0.6m increased revenue from a 10% increase in pay and display parking charges.

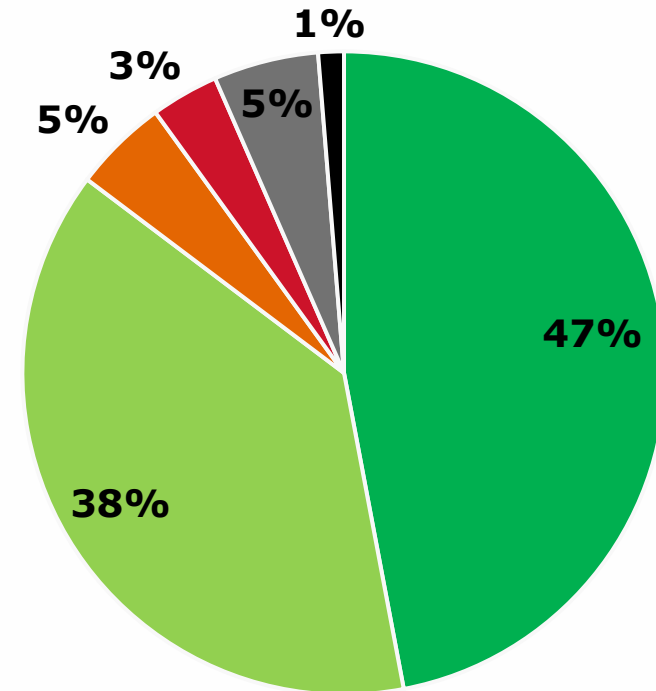
- Concerns about the fairness and necessity of increasing parking charges, with those opposed feeling the Council is mostly motivated by raising revenue. Participants noted that car drivers are also impacted by recent cost of living changes.
- Participants noted that not all people with mobility issues qualify for blue badges.
- Concern that increasing parking charges discourages people from visiting the city, the city centre, and businesses in the city centre.
- Public transport was not felt to be affordable, reliable, or accessible enough for them to stop travelling by car.
- *"Parking charges are fair if they help reduce congestion but should be balanced to avoid deterring visitors."*



Community access to schools

£0.7m from additional use of school facilities. Edinburgh Leisure will take more responsibility for letting school facilities to the community when these are not needed by schools.

- Concern that school facilities should remain affordable to community groups, after school groups, etc. and that this additional revenue should reflect additional use, rather than charging existing users more.
- Concern that additional use leads to additional wear on facilities, and this should be accounted for.
- "School buildings are public assets and should be used for community benefit."
- "Less likely to use community / school facilities if costs increase."

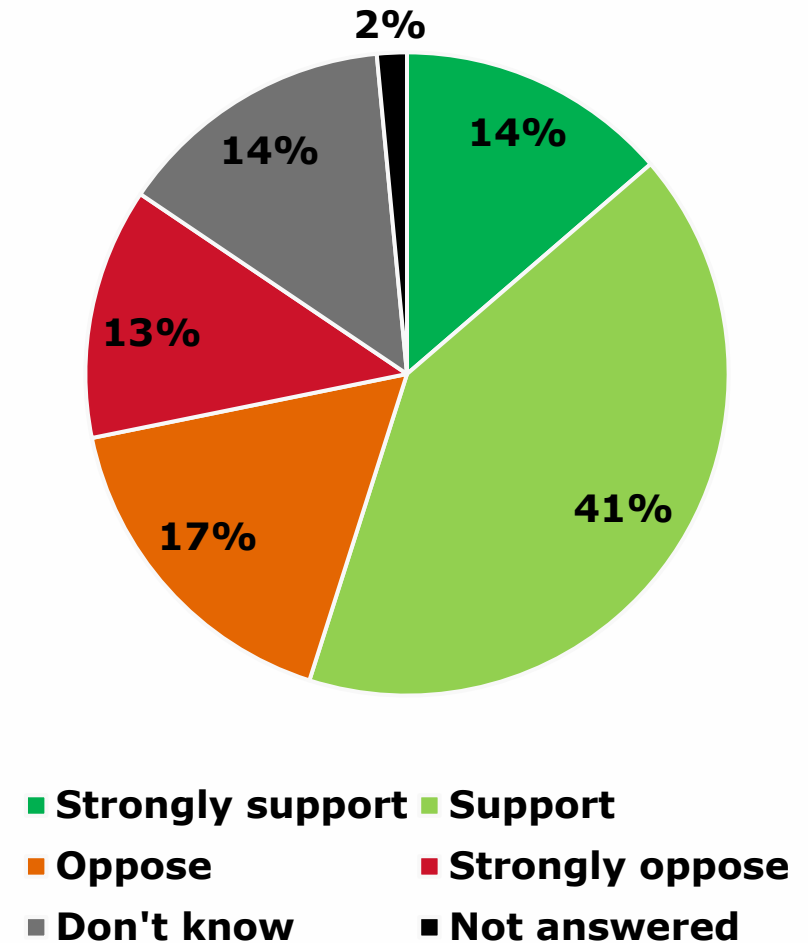


- Strongly support
- Support
- Oppose
- Strongly oppose
- Don't know
- Not answered

General fees and charges

£0.7m in additional income from a general increase in fees and charges... Many fees and charges have concessions for older people, vulnerable people, and those on low incomes.

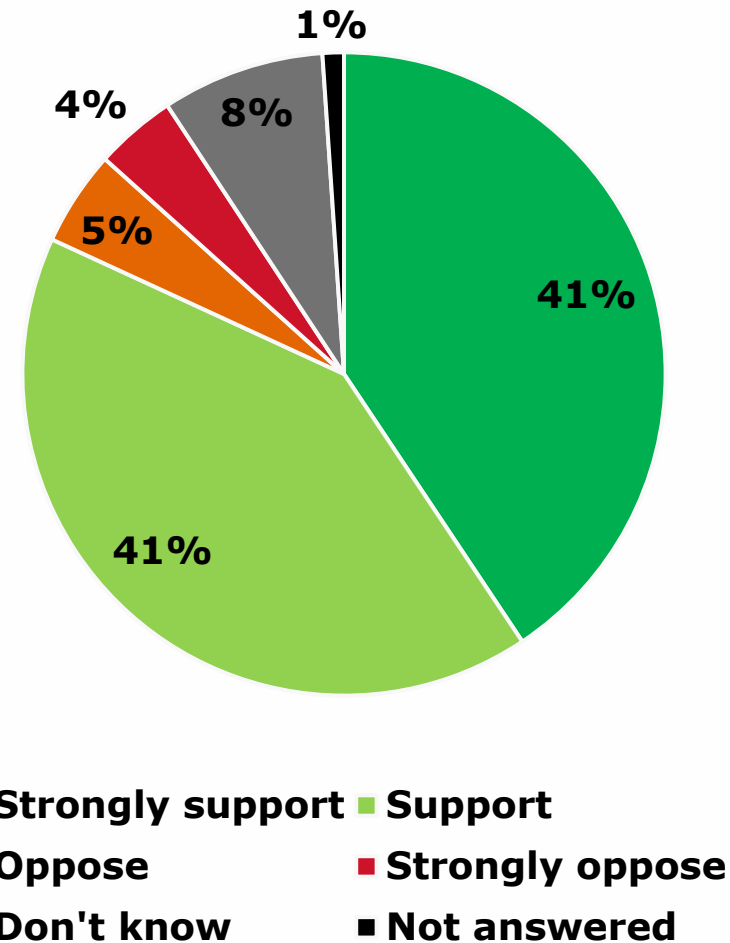
- Concerns about the rising cost of living and that increasing fees and charges general worsen financial pressures on residents.
- Concerns that increasing fees have larger impacts on vulnerable people, pensioners and those on low incomes who use our services.
- *"It feels like an unfair additional tax on individuals who are already struggling."*
- Suggestion that concessions should be linked to income, not just age or disability.
- *"The Council should be more transparent about how the money will be used."*
- *"People would accept increased charges if they knew the money was going to essential services."*



Review of homelessness services

£2.5m in total from a review of homelessness services which aims to reduce the use of expensive bed and breakfast temporary accommodation.

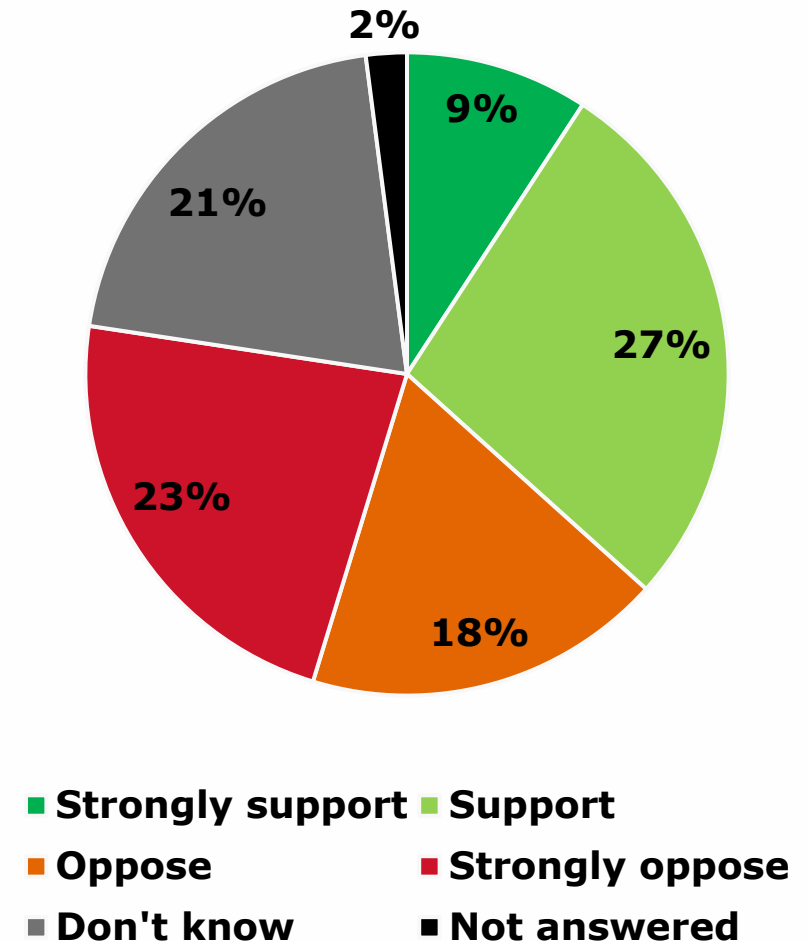
- Strong support for tackling homelessness and acknowledgement that Edinburgh has a housing problem.
- *"They will hopefully mean I see less homeless people in the city."*
- *"My children will hopefully have better accommodation options with these changes."*
- *"Little impact on me as I am a homeowner, but it's important for those in need."*
- Concern that buying properties adds to existing housing pressures.
- *"There is already so much pressure on housing. You need to build more affordable homes."*
- *"There are currently hundreds of unoccupied properties that could be put to better use."*
- *"Pressure the Scottish Government to provide more funding for housing initiatives."*



Devolved school management

£2.3m reduction in Devolved School Management (DSM) budgets, which is a reduction of around 1.6%.

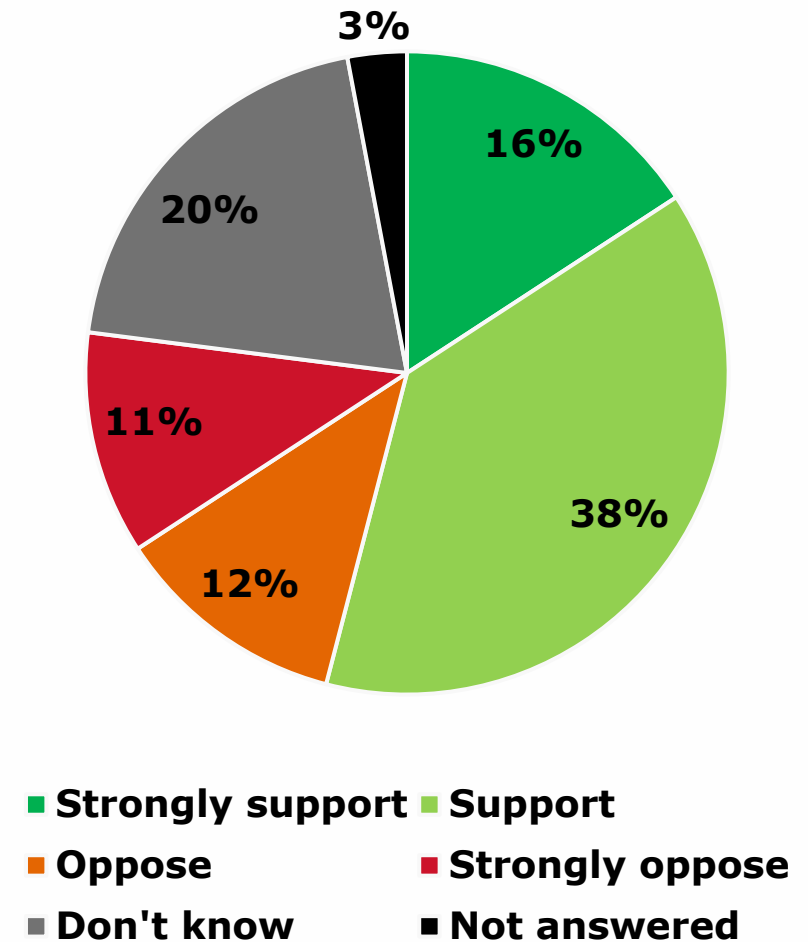
- Some belief that schools need to do more to ensure that resources are better managed locally and are accountable for spending decisions.
- Concerns that changes might impact on operations and staff morale.
- Uncertainty on how DSM changes would impact on staff and pupils.
- *"Any changes to management should not compromise the quality of education delivered to pupils."*
- *"Funds should be directed towards education, not administrative overhead."*
- *"Schools need investment in their buildings and teaching materials to provide a proper learning environment."*



Balance of care and reducing external provision

Up to £1.5m saving by reducing the use of external care provision. We provide essential fostering for children who cannot live with their own families for a wide range of reasons. Some of that fostering service is provided by foster parents in Edinburgh, while additional capacity is provided by foster care agencies outside of Edinburgh (we call this external care provision).

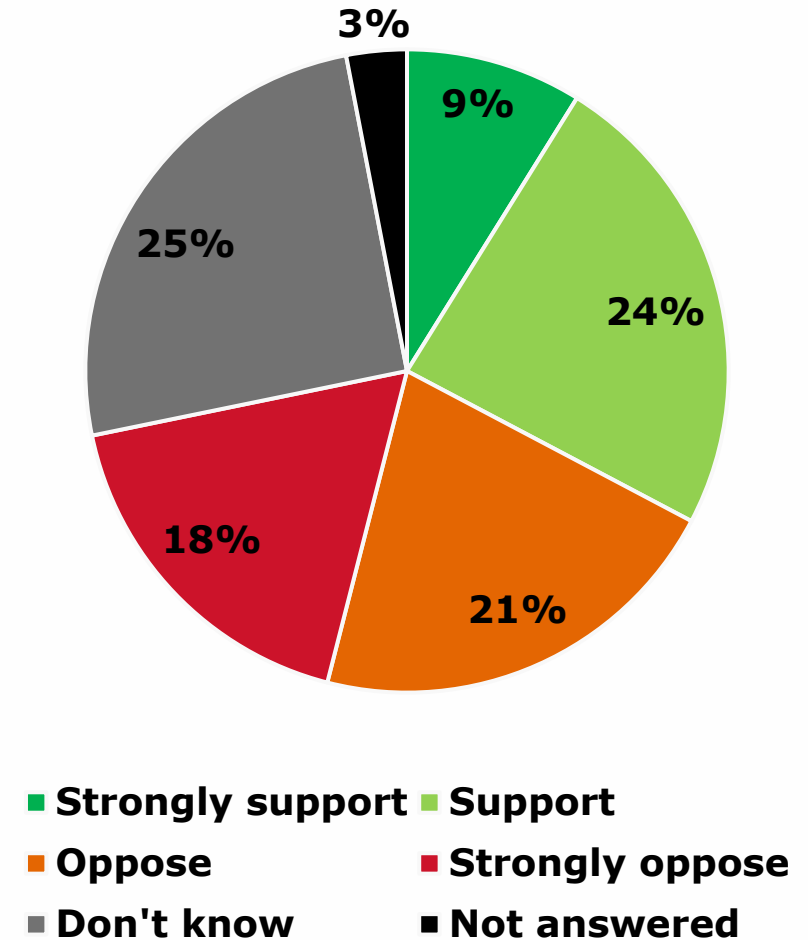
- Concern that care transitions should be carefully managed to protect vulnerable young people.
- Concern that relying on external providers for care services potentially risks service quality. Balancing what is done in-house and what is external is important.
- *"External provision can save costs but often lacks the personal touch required for vulnerable care."*



Transition teachers

£0.9m from removing Transition Teachers posts. (In a full academic year this would be £1.3m). We had provided this additional, non-statutory funding for the previous four years to support the implementation of the Council's plan to improve literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing learning.

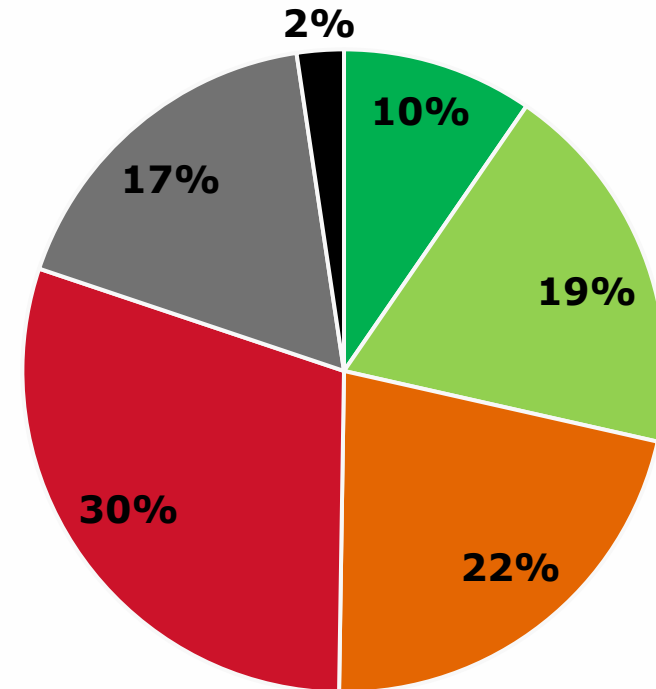
- Concern about the loss of experienced teachers.
- Concern about the impact on pupils during important stages of their educational journey.
- *"Transition teachers play a key role in supporting pupils' emotional and academic needs."*
- *"Removing transition roles could negatively impact students moving between primary and secondary education."*
- *"Teachers are already overstretched, additional cuts will only worsen the situation."*



Pupil support assistants

£0.7m from reducing Pupil Support Assistants (PSAs) from primary one and primary two. (In a full academic year this would be £1.1m). This was non-statutory funding and a full-time Early Years Practitioner will remain for primary one classes.

- Strong concern about the impact of reducing funding for pupil support assistants.
- Recognition of the important role of pupil support assistants in education.
- Concern that pupils with additional support needs would be disproportionately impacted by the change, with impacts on inclusion and attainment.
- Concern that this change would mean higher workloads for teachers in P1 / P2.
- *"Cuts to PSAs would disproportionately affect students who rely on additional support to access education."*
- *"Pupil support assistants are vital for ensuring every child receives the help they need to succeed."*
- *"Education should be the Council's top priority, ensuring children receive the best support possible."*



■ Strongly support ■ Support
■ Oppose ■ Strongly oppose
■ Don't know ■ Not answered

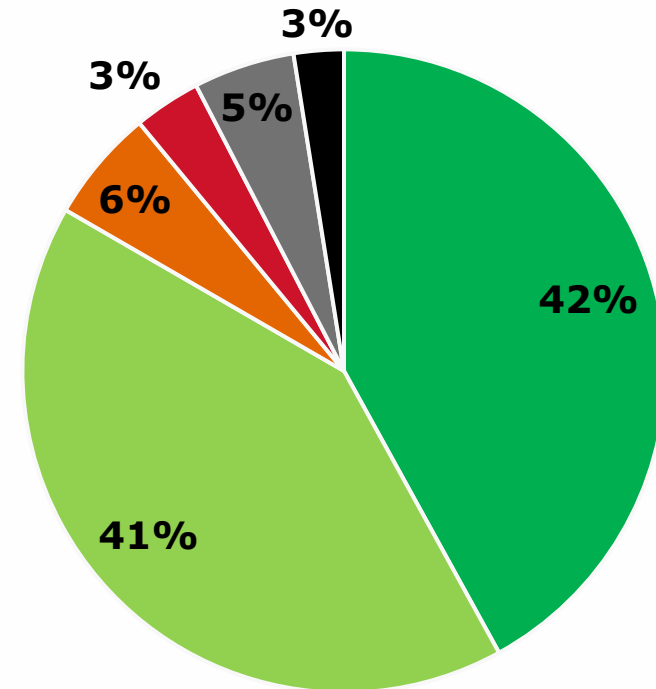
Investment priorities

As a part of the budget setting process, we want to prioritise spending in areas that residents have told us are important to them. We have already made investments in each of the following areas:

£12.5m to improve the condition of roads, pavements, lighting, road safety and drainage systems. In spring / summer of 2024, we asked residents where they felt there needed to be improvements in their neighbourhood or the city as a whole. The number one priority was road condition and this money is in addition to our ongoing programme of road improvement.

£4m for improved cleansing services in 2024/25. Residents have told us that Edinburgh should be cleaner and that the general cleanliness of the city affects how they feel every day. We will continue this investment next year, also providing the extra £4m for cleansing services in 2025/26.

£17m in direct and indirect support for adult social care services provided by the Council through the EIJB. Caring for older and vulnerable people is an important priority for residents of all ages.



- Strongly support
- Support
- Oppose
- Strongly oppose
- Don't know
- Not answered

Additional / alternative investment priorities

- Improve the quality of roads and fix potholes.
- *"Prioritise road repairs and improving public transport infrastructure."*
- Divided opinions on active travel infrastructure.
- *"Invest in more cycle paths and active travel to promote sustainable transport."*
- *"Stop wasting money on cycle lanes; focus on broader infrastructure."*
- Increased support for vulnerable people, including older people, people with disabilities, and low-income households.
- *"Invest in welfare programmes to address inequality and support struggling families."*
- Divided opinions on tourism and heritage.
- *"Stop spending so much money on the UNESCO site and focus on residents' needs."*
- *"Tourism is vital for the city; invest in maintaining heritage areas."*
- Invest in education provision and facilities.
- *"Invest in schools and learning opportunities for young people to secure a better future for Edinburgh."*
- Invest in parks and green spaces and protect all existing green spaces.
- *"Green spaces are essential for mental health and should be maintained and enhanced for public use."*
- Improve the cleanliness of the city, especially the city centre.
- *"There needs to be a focus on regular street cleaning and litter management."*
- Invest in community spaces such as libraries, community centres and hubs.

Council Tax

In 2024/25 Council Tax rates were frozen in Edinburgh... We believe we will need to increase Council Tax by more than 5%. We believe all Scottish local authorities are in a similar position.

- Concern about ability to afford any increase in Council Tax due to rising cost of living.
- *"I could not afford more than a 5% increase as it would put a strain on my finances."*
- Opposition to any increase in Council Tax linked to a belief that the Council is inefficient.
- *"I would accept a small increase if I knew it was going toward vital services, but I worry the money won't be used efficiently".*
- Belief that presenting a minimum increase of 5% is "biased".
- Calls to reassess Council Tax bands to improve equity, particularly for low-income households.
- Desire to see increases in Council Tax linked to specific spending and to ensure transparency.

