

# Section 3

## Budget consultation

### Public consultation

This Budget Setting Report (BSR) has been informed and shaped by the council's public consultation on Priorities and Budget 2026-27, which was carried out between 7 October and 16 November 2025. Public consultation took place earlier in the budget-setting process this year, to ensure that the results of the consultation could contribute meaningfully towards the strategic direction and individual budget proposals set out within the BSR. This meant a slightly different approach to last year, whereby the public were asked more general questions about the council's vision and where it should prioritise its resources, rather than being asked for their opinion on specific pre-determined budget proposals.

### Promotion and participation

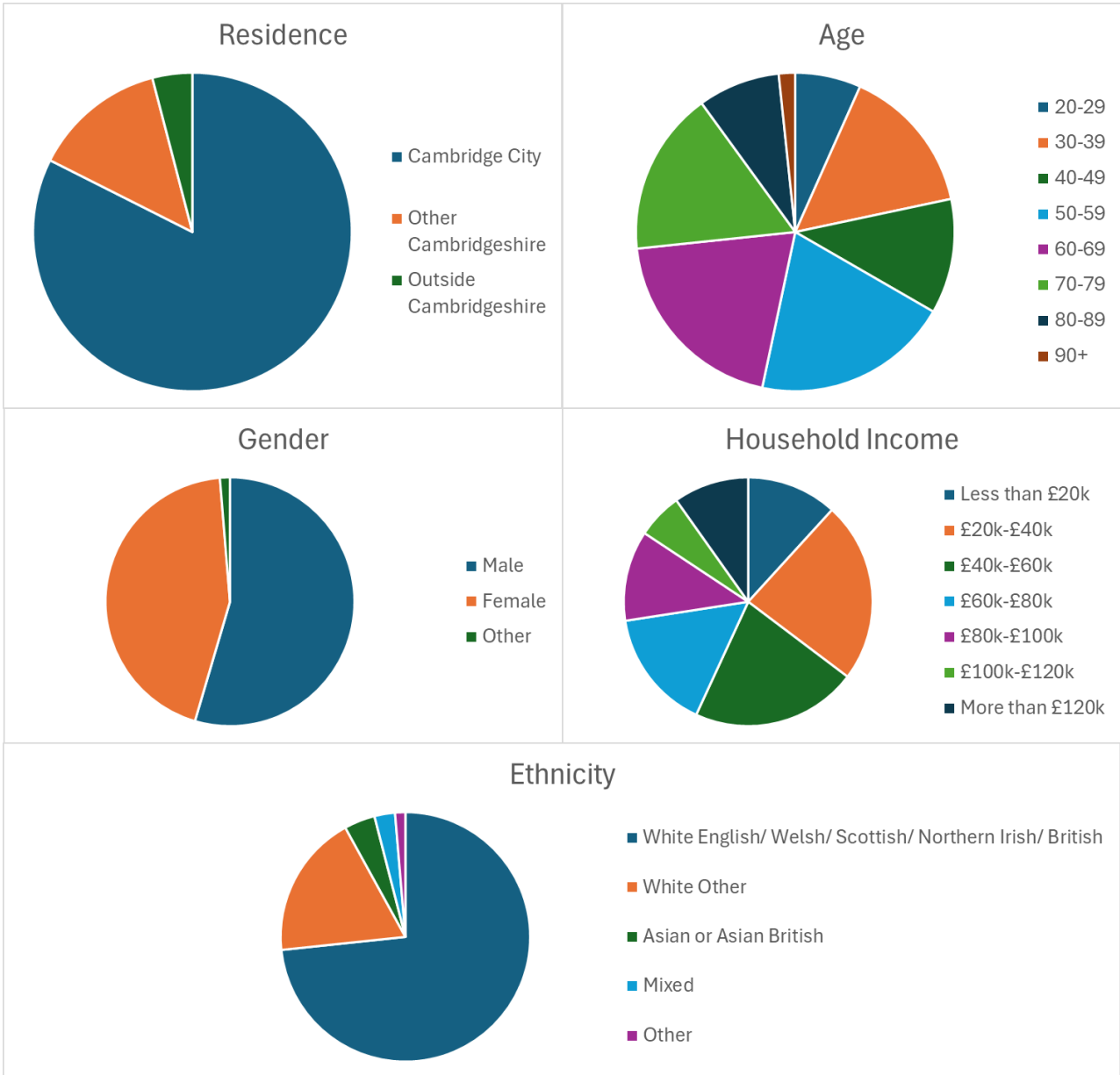
The consultation was run on the council's online engagement platform, in accordance with the Code of Best Practice on Consultation and Community Engagement. However, paper copies of the survey were available upon request.

The consultation was promoted heavily in order to encourage wide participation from a diverse range of stakeholders, including residents and local businesses. Examples of ways in which the consultation was promoted include:-

- Emails were sent to all registered subscribers of the council's online engagement platform (over 7,300 individuals), and a further 57 individual business and voluntary sector stakeholders.
- The consultation was promoted at the top of the council website home page, and on street-facing digital screens at the front of Mandela House, for three weeks.
- An article on the consultation was included in the autumn 2025 issue of Cambridge Matters, which is delivered to every home in Cambridge.
- Social media posts on the consultation were 'boosted' at a cost of £200, achieving a reach of 89,000 individuals.

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In total, 512 responses to the consultation were received. The demographic profile of respondents is set out in the following charts:-



Note in each of the above charts, those who opted not to provide the relevant demographic data are excluded.

The above represents a reasonably broad mix of respondents, although it is recognised that there remains a bias towards older age groups, particularly in the context of the city’s relatively young population. This will be taken into consideration in planning next year’s budget consultation.

## Results

The detailed results of the consultation are set out at Appendix B, with key highlights summarised below.

### Council vision and services

Participants were asked, for each of the six key objectives in the council vision, whether the council should spend more, less, or the same as other objectives. The results were as follows:-

Key objective	Spend more	Spend the same	Spend less
Residents enjoy a high quality of life and exemplar public services	62%	32%	6%
Decarbonisation and sustainability are central to prosperity	34%	34%	32%
Innovation benefits people and planet	20%	47%	33%
Development is sustainable and inclusive	28%	44%	28%
Arts, sports, and culture are thriving	34%	50%	16%
Democratic accountability is genuine and accessible	26%	54%	20%

The consultation shows a clear preference for the council to prioritise its resources towards the first objective, “residents enjoy a high quality of life and exemplar public services”.

In addition, participants were asked for their views on the importance of the council spending money on a variety of its services. The three services with the highest percentage of respondents which rated them as ‘very important’ were:-

- Public safety (75%)
- Waste and recycling (68%)
- Streets and open spaces (67%)

These results have been reflected in this BSR through budget bids to invest in a number of core services, with a clear focus on those of most importance to the public, for example:-

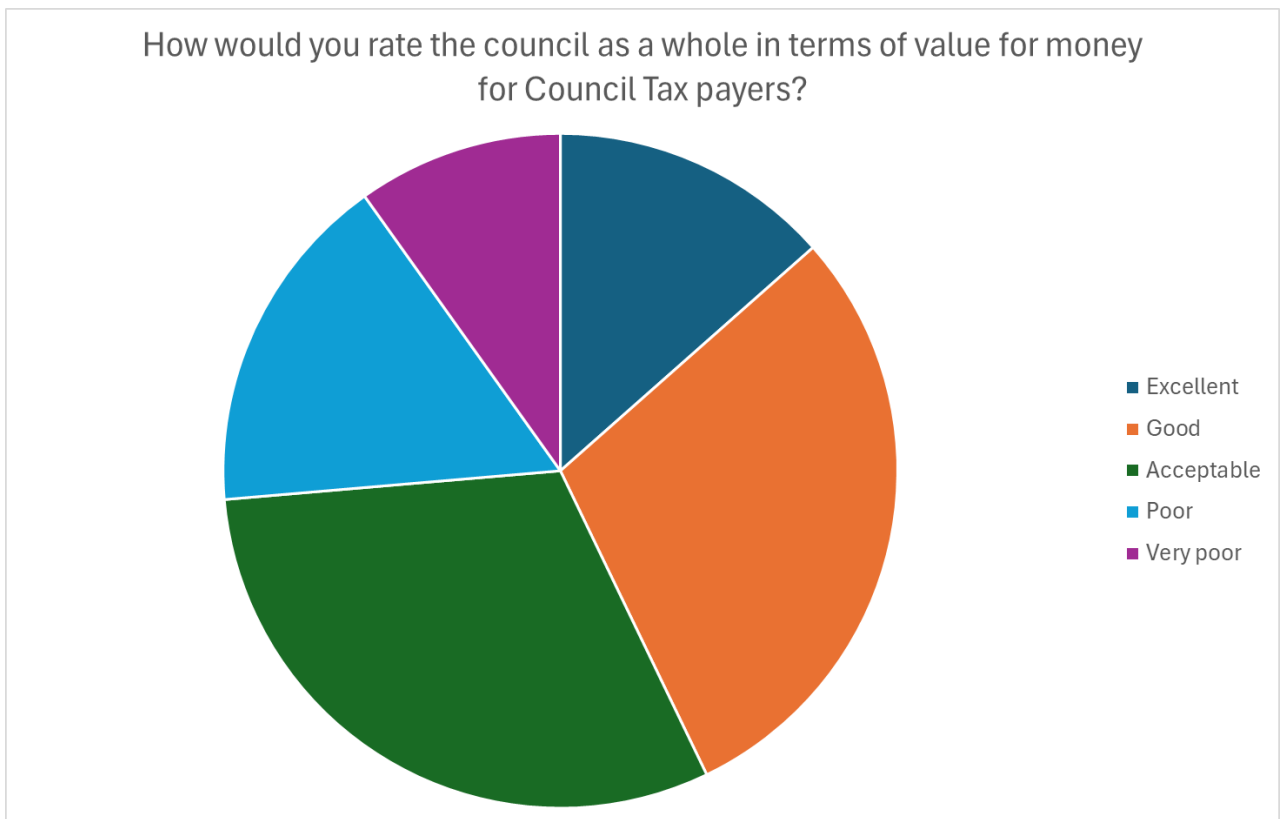
- An ongoing commitment to maintain city street lighting at 80% brightness between 10:00pm and 2:00am, rather than the 60% funded by the county council as the responsible body for street

lighting.

- Ongoing investment of £1.387 million per year in the Shared Waste Service, including the introduction of a new food waste collection service.
- An additional £50,000 per year (bringing the total budget to £253,000 per year) towards day-to-day playground maintenance, including the repair or replacement of damaged equipment.
- An additional £80,000 over two years to fund additional seasonal resource to support weed clearance in the city's streets and open spaces during peak growth periods.
- An additional £165,000 per year commitment to maintaining high cleaning standards for key city assets, such as public toilets and the market square.

### Value for money

Overall, 42% of respondents rated the council as 'good' or 'excellent' value for money for Council Tax payers, with a further 30% rating the council 'acceptable':-





## Priorities and Budget 2026-27

### How should the council approach its six priorities moving forward?

512/512 - Matrix - required

	1- Spend more on this	2- Spend the same on this	3- Spend less on this
Residents enjoy a high quality of life and exemplar public services	62.3%	32.03%	5.66%
Decarbonisation and sustainability are central to prosperity	33.98%	33.59%	32.42%
Innovation benefits people and planet	19.92%	46.88%	33.2%
Development is sustainable and inclusive	28.32%	43.95%	27.73%
Arts, sports, and culture are thriving	33.79%	49.8%	16.41%
Democratic accountability is genuine and accessible	25.98%	54.49%	19.53%



## Do you have any further comments to make regarding the six priorities in the council's vision?

168/512 - Long answer - optional

The most common theme across responses is a strong desire for the council to focus on “getting the basics right” and prioritising essential services. Many respondents repeatedly mention the poor state of roads and pavements, calling for urgent repairs to potholes and better maintenance of public spaces. Cleanliness, street cleaning, graffiti removal, and more bins are also frequently cited as priorities.

Housing is another major concern, with many calling for more social and affordable housing, and action on homelessness. Many link the cost of living crisis directly to unaffordable housing and insufficient public transport.

There is widespread frustration with the vagueness and perceived lack of clarity or measurability in the six priorities, with several respondents saying the statements are too general, ambiguous, or “tick-box” in nature, making it hard to give meaningful feedback or hold the council accountable. Some feel the survey and consultations themselves are poorly designed or biased.

A significant number of respondents express scepticism or outright opposition to spending on environmental and decarbonisation initiatives, describing them as “vanity projects”, “tick-boxing”, or not relevant to the council’s core responsibilities. Others, however, argue that sustainability and nature protection should be central to the council’s work.

Concerns about overdevelopment, population growth, and the impact on natural resources (especially water) are raised by several respondents, who feel the city is being overwhelmed and its character and environment are being damaged.

There is a strong call for the council to focus spending on residents’ needs rather than tourists, students, or businesses, and to address social inequality and inclusivity.

Many respondents want council tax kept as low as possible, with some calling for tax cuts or a freeze, and for the council to “spend less everywhere” or focus only on essentials.

Transport and accessibility are also recurring issues, with calls for better public transport, integrated transport planning, and improved access for residents from surrounding villages.

A number of respondents mention the need for more and better public toilets, community facilities, and support for arts, culture, and independent businesses, but these are less frequently raised than the above issues.

In summary, the strongest trends are: a demand for focus on core services (especially roads, cleanliness, and housing), frustration with vague or “utopian” priorities, scepticism about environmental spending, concerns about overdevelopment, and a desire for council spending to prioritise residents’ everyday needs and keep taxes low. Calls for better public transport, addressing inequality, and improved community facilities are also present but less dominant.

**How important is it for the council to spend money on these services?**

511/512 - Matrix - required

	1-Very important	2-Slightly important	3-Not very important	4-Not at all important
Public Safety	74.76%	20.74%	3.13%	1.37%
Sport and Recreation	32.09%	49.12%	14.87%	3.91%
Streets and Open Spaces	66.73%	28.77%	2.35%	2.15%
Waste and Recycling	68.49%	27.2%	2.94%	1.37%
Community Centres	30.72%	41.88%	20.35%	7.05%
Community Services	35.23%	39.73%	16.63%	8.41%
Cultural Services	22.7%	43.64%	21.14%	12.52%
Grant Support	22.11%	41.49%	25.44%	10.96%
Environmental Health	52.25%	35.03%	9.59%	3.13%



English

Appendix B Budget 2026-27 consultation responses

	1-Very important	2 - Slightly important	3 - Not very important	4 - Not at all important
Housing and Homelessness	52.64%	31.51%	10.18%	5.68%
Customer Service Centre	19.77%	41.29%	28.77%	10.18%
Greater Cambridge Planning Service	20.55%	41.88%	24.46%	13.11%

**Do you have any further comments to make on how we spend money on council services?**

119/512 - Long answer - optional

The most frequently raised concern is the poor condition of roads, pavements, and cycle lanes, with repeated calls for urgent repairs, resurfacing, and pothole fixing. Many feel cycling is unsafe and that the city is becoming less pleasant for pedestrians and cyclists due to neglect and poor maintenance.

A strong theme is the need to focus on “the basics” – clean streets, open spaces, public toilets, waste collection, and visible environmental upkeep. Many respondents are frustrated by what they see as “vanity projects” or “cosmetic” schemes (such as Market Square changes or landscaping) and want resources redirected to essential services.

Housing and homelessness are repeatedly identified as top priorities, with calls for more affordable housing, quicker planning, and support for the most vulnerable. Some feel planning is too slow or restrictive, making it hard for young people to stay in the city.

There is widespread dissatisfaction with the Greater Cambridge Partnership (GCP), with several calling for it to be scrapped or reformed, citing lack of accountability, waste, and a disconnect from residents’ needs.

Concerns about anti-social behaviour, crime, and lack of police presence are common, with some questioning the effectiveness of CCTV and calling for more visible enforcement.

Some want more efficient, transparent, and value-for-money council operations, including better management, less bureaucracy, and more use of technology (such as AI in customer service).

There is a call for more equitable distribution of services across the city, with some feeling that certain areas (especially the north or edges) are neglected compared to the centre or south.

Views on cultural services and events are mixed: some want less spending (especially on fireworks or large events), while others value distinctive community events and want more support for smaller arts initiatives.

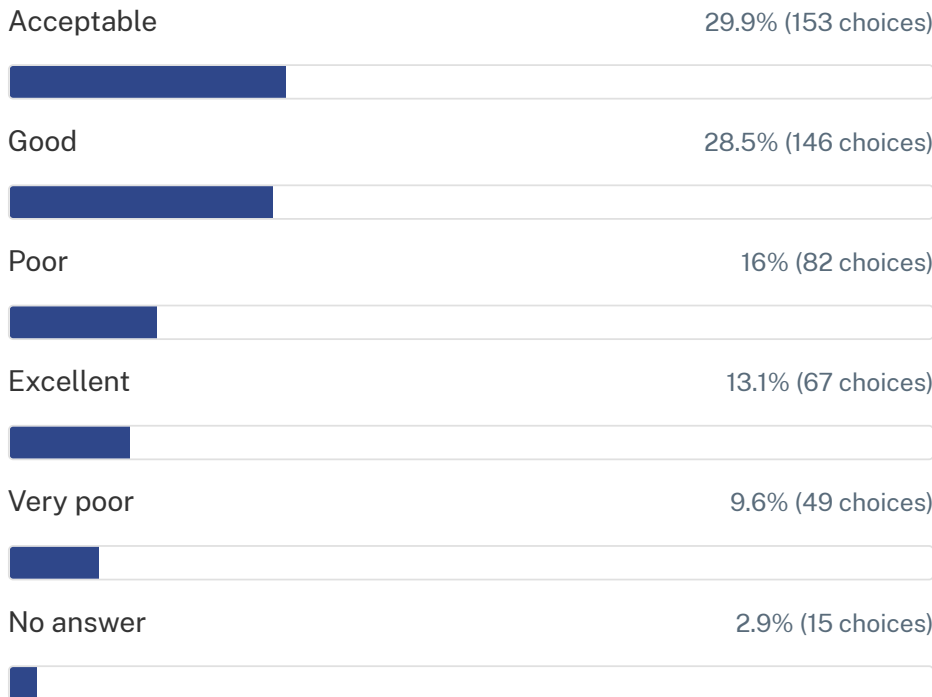
Some respondents suggest charging more for non-essential services, introducing tourist taxes, or making services more self-funding, especially for those who can afford to pay.

A few mention the need for better support for volunteers, youth services, and independent local businesses.

Overall, there is a strong desire for the council to prioritise essential, visible services that benefit all residents, ensure fairness across the city, and avoid wasteful or unpopular projects. Many express frustration with current management, lack of transparency, and a perceived disconnect between council decisions and residents’ needs.

## Bearing in mind Cambridge City Council's share of Council Tax of £232.13 per year, how would you rate the council as a whole in terms of value for money for Council Taxpayers?

497/512 - Multiple choice - choose one - optional

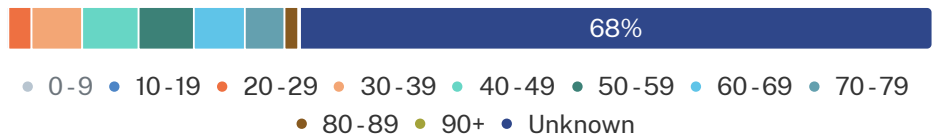


## Demographic data

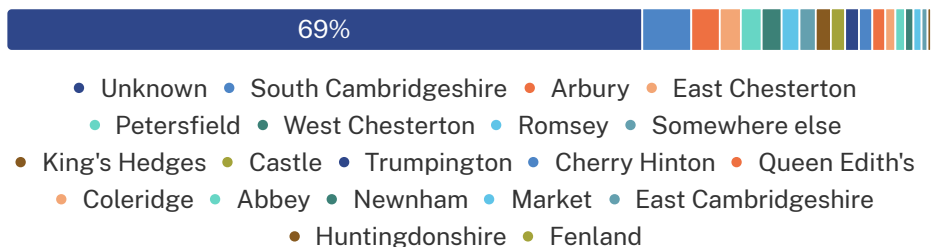
Respondents are invited to share some details about themselves as part of the registration process on our online engagement platform. This helps us better understand how representative the responses are of the people who live and work in Cambridge.

To ensure that the survey is accessible to as many people as possible, we do not make it compulsory to provide this data. The online engagement platform is continually working to improve how it presents this data.

### Age



### Place of residence



### Which of the following describes how you think of yourself? (please select one response from the following)

