

Investing in Reading's Recovery – Reading Borough Council Budget Consultation 2021/22 – Results Report

1. Introduction

Each year, the Council sets its budget for the coming year. The budget defines our income and the amount we will spend on day-to-day services and one-off investments over the year.

The draft budget for 2021/22 consists of:

- General Fund net revenue budget of £143.7m for 2021/22
- General Fund capital investment of £178m over three years 2021/22 to 2023/24
- Efficiency savings and increased income totalling £14.2 million in 2021/22 (£27.7m over three years 2021/22 to 2023/24)
- An assumed Council Tax increase of 1.99% and a one-off Adult Social Care precept of 1.0%

The focus of the revenue budget is running day-to-day services such as parks, playgrounds, libraries, waste and recycling, planning, transport, highways, street cleaning, environmental health, children's services and adult social care. The proposals for 2021/22 maintain current services and allow for £15 million in increased costs driven by inflation and Reading's growing population.

There remains a gap of £5m between the planned income and the planned spend, which needs to be closed before the final proposals are agreed in February.

Key proposals for capital investment include:

- £20m on the school estate including Re-provisioning at Phoenix College and extra capacity at Katesgrove school
- The delivery of new fit-for-purpose leisure facilities across all four of the Council's leisure centres including the re-provisioning of the Rivermead site to BREEAM excellence
- £11m Investment in the Council's local highways infrastructure addressing feedback from the resident survey
- Provisioning of Green Park station and Reading West Station and Dee Park Regeneration
- £13.8m on South Reading MRT (Phases 5 & 6)
- Vehicle replacement totalling £9.2m over the three-year planning period to ensure the Council's fleet assists in reducing CO2 emissions.
- Investment in the Council's IT systems and software to support service efficiency and channel-shift in how customers transact with the Council.

2. The Budget Consultation

We launched our budget consultation on the Council's Consultation Hub on 15 December 2020. The consultation ran until 15 January 2021.

The consultation content is available here <https://consult.reading.gov.uk/css/budget-2021/>

The consultation invited comments on the draft budget proposals and where respondents didn't agree with them, suggestions for alternative savings, income generation opportunities or investment proposals. A second question asked for any additional suggestions for how we could we make the savings required to balance the budget.

3. Communication

The consultation was promoted:

- In local media
- On the council's website
- Emailed to residents through the 17 December update from Reading Borough Council on our response to the COVID-19 pandemic
- Emailed to the citizens panel (1,000 people)
- Face to face briefing with business partners and stakeholders

In total, 114 responses were received online through the consultation hub.

4. Profile of respondents

<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>Budget consultation responses</i>		<i>2011 Census</i>
	<i>No</i>	<i>%age</i>	<i>%age</i>
Age			
Under 16	0	0.0%	19.3%
16-25	1	0.9%	16.5%
26-35	5	4.7%	19.2%
36-45	17	15.0%	14.6%
46-55	22	19.3%	11.3%
56-65	28	24.6%	8.2%
66+	38	33.3%	10.8%
Gender			
Male	56	49.1%	50.2%
Female	51	44.7%	49.8%
Prefer not to say	3	2.6%	
Prefer to self-describe	1	0.9%	
Ethnicity			
White	95	83.3%	74.8%
Mixed	0	0%	3.9%
Asian	0	0%	12.6%
Black	0	0%	7.7%

<i>Responding as</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Resident	109	95.6%
Service user	1	0.9%
Family or friend of service user	0	0.0%
Voluntary organisation	2	1.9%
Business	0	0.0%
Public Sector	0	0.0%
Employee of Reading Borough Council	0	0.0%
Other	0	0.0%
Not Answered	2	1.9%

5. Summary of Responses

A very wide-ranging set of suggestions and comments were received, with 133 different comments and proposals. Many suggestions were around reviewing a whole range of services, reducing some services and investing in others.

- **Top themes:**
 - Fair budget/ agreement with proposals 21
 - Spend more on road maintenance 11
 - Increase charging for services 9
(e.g. allotment and garage rents, library archives, registrars services)
 - Reduce cost of salaries/review workforce 7
 - Manage accounts better 5
 - Delay/review swimming pool/leisure plans 4
 - More shared services 4
 - Many responses related to **transport**:
 - Reduce/don't increase parking charges 11
 - Don't spend money on/fewer cycle lanes 6
 - Fewer bus lanes 5
 - A number of comments related to **refuse collection and recycling**, especially the new food waste scheme, where there are concerns about the investment in new bins, as well as the potential increase in flytipping it is thought might be caused:
 - Don't invest in new bins/ don't replace bins 8
 - Increase flytipping fines 4
 - Scheme good idea 3
 - Scheme won't make savings 3
 - A number of comments related to **Council Tax**, both for and against an increase:
 - Don't increase Council Tax 8
 - Increase Council Tax 5
 - Compared to last year's budget consultation, relatively few responses made reference to **climate change and sustainability**.
- 6.0 The meeting with the Council's Statutory consultees was both well attended and well received. The principal feedback included a desire to see:
- Transformation of safeguarding services and the Education front door
 - Increased youth provision
 - Increased priority skills provision to meet local employers needs and address levelling up
 - Innovation and skills training for local businesses to enable them to adapt and change