

Appendix 11 – Summary of the Response to the Budget Engagement 2026/27

Introduction

The engagement ran from 19th December 2025 to 17th January 2026. The survey was available online via the Council's consultation platform (GoVocal). Paper copies were also made available at each of the Council's libraries.

285 responses were received. This compares with 178 responses last year.

The engagement was promoted via the following channels:

- residents' weekly email
- online citizens' panel
- RBC social media
- a number of the Council's working groups and forums
- voluntary sector partners
- South Reading newsletter
- Community Health Champions bulletin
- head teachers briefing
- RVA newsletter

Posters were also sent to services for display in:

- libraries
- museum
- community centres
- leisure centres
- cultural venues
- Whitley Community Café
- supermarkets
- Broad St Mall

Summary

- Residents were split over whether to increase Council Tax by the proposed amount. 50.5% of respondents were opposed, while 49.5% were in favour. This compares with 39.3% opposed and 60.1% in favour last year.
- Residents were most comfortable with reducing spending on central services (customer services, human resources, finance, legal, digital and technology) and executive management team and communications. Around two-thirds of residents placed these areas in their top 3 areas for reducing spending.
- Residents were much more divided in their opinions about where they would be least comfortable reducing spend.
- 84.2% of respondents supported a 4.8% increase in social housing rents.
- The free text comments elicited a wide range of suggestions.

Results

1. Should the Council look to increase Council Tax by 2.99% plus 2.00% Adult Social Care precept (an increase of £2.03 per week for a Band D property) to reduce the financial gap for 2026/27?

285/285 - Multiple choice - choose one - required

No 50.5% (144 choices)



Yes 49.5% (141 choices)



2. Which 3 areas, shown in the list below, would you be MOST comfortable with the Council reducing spending on?

285/285 - Multiple choice - choose many - required

(Net budget for 2026/27 shown in brackets.)

Central services (customer services, human resources, finance, legal, digital and technology) (£24.6 million) 70.2% (200 choices)



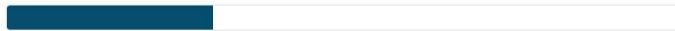
Executive management team and communications (£1.6 million) 67.4% (192 choices)



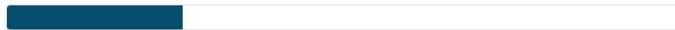
Adult social care (home care, residential care, occupational therapy, carer support) (£72.9 million) 35.4% (101 choices)



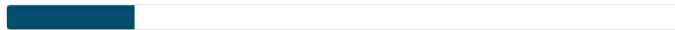
Property (including community facilities), assets, and sustainability (£1.3 million) 30.5% (87 choices)



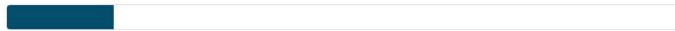
Children's social care (child protection, fostering, adoption, family support) (£58.0 million) 26% (74 choices)



Culture (libraries, leisure centres, Hexagon) (£2.5 million) 18.9% (54 choices)



Education (school admissions, SEND support, school transport) (£5.5 million) 15.8% (45 choices)



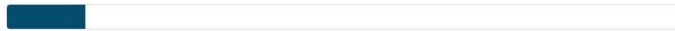
Housing, homelessness, and community safety (£5.9 million) 12.6% (36 choices)



Planning, transport, and public protection (food safety, licensing, trading standards) (£1.6 million) 11.6% (33 choices)



Environmental services (roads, parking, waste management, street cleaning, parks) (£16.3 million) 11.6% (33 choices)



3. Which 3 areas, shown in the list below, would you be LEAST comfortable with the Council reducing spending on?

285/285 - Multiple choice - choose many - required

(Net budget for 2026/27 shown in brackets.)

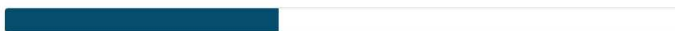
Children's social care (child protection, fostering, adoption, family support) (£58.0 million) 49.8% (142 choices)



Environmental services (roads, parking, waste management, street cleaning, parks) (£16.3 million) 47.7% (136 choices)



Adult social care (home care, residential care, occupational therapy, carer support) (£72.9 million) 40.4% (115 choices)



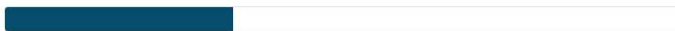
Housing, homelessness, and community safety (£5.9 million) 37.5% (107 choices)



Education (school admissions, SEND support, school transport) (£5.5 million) 36.5% (104 choices)



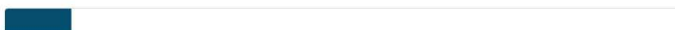
Planning, transport, and public protection (food safety, licensing, trading standards) (£1.6 million) 33.7% (96 choices)



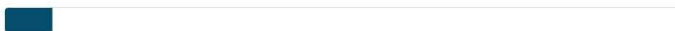
Culture (libraries, leisure centres, Hexagon) (£2.5 million) 31.2% (89 choices)



Property (including community facilities), assets, and sustainability (£1.3 million) 9.8% (28 choices)



Central services (customer services, human resources, finance, legal, digital and technology) (£24.6 million) 7% (20 choices)



Executive management team and communications (£1.6 million) 6.3% (18 choices)



4. Are there any other service areas you think the Council should consider reducing spend on?

Area	No. of responses
Transport schemes/ road changes/ public transport	6
Housing & homelessness	4
Equality & diversity initiatives	4
Management/ pay	3
Climate change/ net zero	3
Benefits	2
Road maintenance	2
Consultancy fees and agency staff	2
Catering/travel costs	2
SEND	2
Housing in hotels	2
Car park fines & enforcement	2
Central services	1
Car park fines & enforcement	1
Pensions	1
Translation	1
Digital platforms	1
Outdoor gyms	1
New library	1
Red route enforcement	1
Bus services	1
Public safety	1
Homelessness and drug addiction is an issue	1
Maintaining empty RBC assets which have been put up for sale	1
Office buildings	1
Food banks	1
Other suggestions/comments:	
Categories too broad	2
Accelerate the "Lilli" sensor pilot to reduce residential care costs	1
Introduce automated facility management system	1
Manage contracts better	1
Road design poor	1
Roads and pavements badly maintained	1
Library does not have digital newspapers	1
Reduce length of Council reports	1
Consider longer term approaches	1
Clean parks, paths and keep the town tidy by encouraging community action	1

5. Listed below are a selection of capital projects over the next 5 years that are not fully funded by grants from central government and have a net funding requirement of over £1 million. Of the projects in this list, are there any that you would stop or scale back?

272/285 - Multiple choice - choose many - optional

(Net funding requirement over the next 5 years shown in brackets.)

Gypsy and traveller accommodation (£3.5 million) 57.9% (165 choices)



Replacement vehicles (£8.9 million) 36.1% (103 choices)



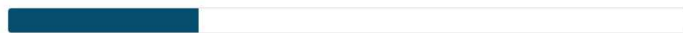
Corporate and community buildings (£10.1 million) 29.8% (85 choices)



Cemetery land acquisition (£2.5 million) 28.4% (81 choices)



Additional burial space (£3.1 million) 28.1% (80 choices)



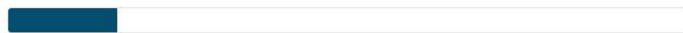
Corporate solar panel programme (£1.6 million) 24.6% (70 choices)



Maintenance and enhancement of Council properties (£8.7 million) 22.8% (65 choices)



Highway traffic signals (£1.1 million) 16.1% (46 choices)



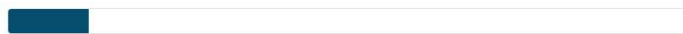
Private sector renewals - funding repairs and improvements to the private residences of vulnerable people (£1.5 million) 16.1% (46 choices)



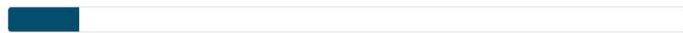
Delivery fund (invest to save projects) (£7.5 million) 15.1% (43 choices)



ICT tech refresh (£2.5 million) 11.9% (34 choices)



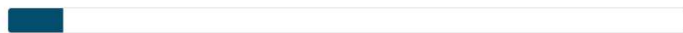
Streetlighting investment (£2.3 million) 10.5% (30 choices)



Local traffic management and road safety schemes (£1.3 million) 10.2% (29 choices)



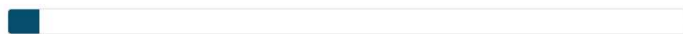
Highways infrastructure programme (£3.7 million) 8.1% (23 choices)



Sheltered housing and day opportunities/respite facility for people with profound and multiple learning disabilities (£1.8 million) 4.9% (14 choices)



No answer 4.6% (13 choices)



Children's home for children with disabilities (£1.1 million) 2.1% (6 choices)



6. The Government has announced a maximum increase of 4.8% on social housing rents, equivalent to £6.16 per week on the average social housing property. Do you support the Council opting for a 4.8% increase in social housing rents?

285/285 - Multiple choice - choose one - required



7. Are there any other comments you would like to make about the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy Update?

78/285 - Long answer - optional

...

Topic	No of responses
Be more efficient and not waste money	5
Council tax should not be increased	4
Cut 'novelty'/'vanity' projects	4
Focus on the vulnerable and the majority of people not minority groups	3
Info provided too limited/ MTFS doesn't include details of specific savings proposals	3
Reduce benefits for working age/ those who can work	3
Review/ reduce number of Council jobs/ management	2
Roads and footpaths have been badly maintained	2
Road safety schemes taken forward/ zero road deaths	2
Remove/ don't spend on cycle lanes	2
Don't increase social housing rents	2
Central govt need to resolve funding issues	2
Get developers to make greater contributions to the town's funds/ support the local services	2
Permanent maintenance and repair staff instead of using contractors	1
Establish robust reporting processes	1
Optimise office spaces	1
Digitise physical records	1
Does the council have an internal business improvement team?	1
Use local providers	1
Commission an asset capture and condition process	1
Improve maintenance operations	1
Concern budget gap is being addressed too heavily through reserve drawdowns rather than structural modernisation.	1
Prioritise 'Invest to Save' initiatives	1
Utilise grant schemes	1
Encouraging to see investment in publicly owned assets	1
Increase revenues not through taxation	1
Deposit Return Scheme will mean cost reductions in waste collections and recycling should be possible	1

Topic	No of responses
Invest more in flytipping	1
Invest in repainting road markings	1
Ensure bins emptied and the streets clean	1
Reduce spending on highways	1
Reduce pollution	1
Reduce the per capita per night expenditure on accommodation for young adults in care	1
Stop funding drug rehab programs	1
Focus on drug rehabilitation for homelessness	1
Reduce ASC costs	1
Ring-fence a portion of the proposed 2% Adult Social Care Precept to accelerate the full-scale rollout of the 'Lilli' preventative sensor technology.	1
Cut spending on taxis for SEND children	1
Congestion in Reading is terrible	1
Maintain older vehicles instead of replacing them	1
Stop spending on traffic projects	1
Convert some of vehicle fleet into active travel	1
Road design poor	1
Improvements to public transport services should be prioritised	1
Reduce transport-related waste	1
Further encourage sustainable transport	1
Allow residents to pay for parking permits to increase revenue	1
Introduce bridge toll charge for non residents/ lorries	1
New bus lanes are causing chaos	1
The town centre has been destroyed by bad planning	1
Reduce business rates and parking rates to encourage more businesses and shoppers into Reading	1
Invest in revitalising the high street	1
Skip all the plans to impose Urban Vehicle Access Regulations (UVARs) into Reading town.	1
Ensure derelict buildings in central Reading are converted into housing	1
Proposed reduction to Culture budget is disproportionate and avoidable and undermines the civic fabric and place identity.	1
Reduce libraries	1
Library still does not have access to digital newspapers	1
Re-look at/ increase social housing costs	1
Increase council tax by more than 5%	1
CT payers are struggling	1
Invest in support to communities to take action in their local area	1
Get people struggling to get into work to give back to their community	1
Use community service for some services	1
Invest in more EVs and solar panels. Seek Corporate Power Purchase Agreements	1
Abandon any environmental initiatives.	1
Reduce spending on hotels for migrants	1
Stop travellers camping	1
Abandon any inclusivity initiatives.	1
Suggest a public reading of MTFS so that it is better understood	1

Topic	No of responses
Publish your annual reports broken down by service area	1
Make residents aware of the budget situation	1
Create citizens assemblies to discuss savings	1
Reduce budget on homelessness and housing	1
Don't invest in outdoor gyms; invest in proper gyms	1
Invest in our children	1
Invest on preventing antisocial behaviour, homelessness etc	1
Increase business rates for gambling establishments and slot machine venues.	1
Don't delete the Staff Club Administrator post	1
No noticeable improvement for council tax paying citizens	1

Demographic profile of respondents

