

BCP Council Budget Consultation 2026/27

1. Summary

- 1.1 We want to understand our residents' and businesses' views to help us set our 2026/27 budget and medium-term financial plan (MTFP). We launched a consultation on Tuesday 18 November 2025 asking for views on the importance of council services, priorities for spending and levels of council tax.

2. Methodology

- 2.1 This report looks at the results from the open consultation conducted in 2025 and the sample survey conducted in November 2024. We undertook an open consultation survey so that we could inform residents and stakeholders about the current position with the council's finances and give everyone a chance to have their say on how the council should prioritise its spending. Open surveys by their nature often don't receive a representative response (e.g. they tend to attract more responses from residents over the age of 65 compared to those residents under the age of 30). This is why we have chosen to provide the results of the sample survey conducted in 2024 alongside the results of the 2025 consultation. The sample survey, although a year old provides insight from a representative sample of residents, and we can ensure, to a certain degree of confidence, that the results would be the same if we were to survey every resident over the age of 18 living in our area. Generally, sample survey data can be relied upon for up to 3 years dependent on the rate of change in the environment (e.g. survey data ages faster when services and policies have changed or external shocks occur e.g. cost of living pressures, pandemics). Sample survey from 12 months ago can be considered reliable evidence to use alongside other information to support decision making.

2.3 Open consultation

A survey and an accompanying information document were produced and available online and in paper format. The consultation was widely promoted through a press release, social media channels and in all local libraries. The consultation was sent to residents and stakeholders signed up to the council's consultation register. The consultation closed on Sunday 14 December 2025. A total of 869 responses were received.

2.4 Sample Survey

In 2024 the council commissioned a research company to run a sample survey. A knock-and-drop paper survey method was used. This is where teams of trained staff call on residents door-to-door and ask for co-operation with the survey. Support is offered to the resident if needed, for example if they have sight loss or need help with reading/writing, and the interviewer is then able to help them at their door. If support is not required, the interviewer arranges a time to come back and collect the survey. To ensure the survey sample was representative by area, a random sample was drawn from a ranked list of Lower Super Output Areas (geographies that comprise between 400 - 1,200 households and have a resident population between 1,000 and 3,000) and surveys were conducted in those selected LSOAs.¹ The sample was selected so that it closely resembled the wider BCP Council population in

¹ The Indices of Deprivation are a unique measure of relative deprivation at a small local area level (Lower-layer Super Output Areas). The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) ranks every small area in England from 1 (most deprived area) to 32,844 (least deprived area). There are 240 LSOAs in the BCP area.

terms of the Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole area and IMD quintiles 1 - 5. Interviewers were given quotas of certain numbers of surveys they had to get completed so that the sample was representative by sex, age, and ethnicity.

- 2.4 A sample of 750 was achieved which provides a confidence level of +/-3.6% at a 95% confidence level.
- 2.5 Throughout this summary the terms open consultation and sample survey will be used to distinguish between the results of both methods.

3. Profile of respondents

3.1 Open consultation

Compared to the overall BCP Council resident population, the open consultation received a higher proportion of responses from those aged 45 and older and fewer responses from those under the age of 44. It also received a higher proportion of respondents from a White Other ethnic background.

3.2 Sample survey

The research company was asked to meet a quota so that the survey sample was representative of sex, age, (area Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole) and the index of multiple deprivation and ethnicity. The data was weighted to improve its representativeness further within an accepted tolerance.

4. Awareness of the Council's financial situation

- 4.1 In the sample survey 15% of respondents said that they felt informed of the council's financial situation. This compares to 56% of respondents to the open consultation. Some open survey respondents may feel more informed because they are more likely to engage with council communications, for example newsletters or social media. Due to how the open survey is promoted e.g. through the council e-newsletters, social media etc, the sample survey provides better insight into whether the BCP population feels informed about the council's financial situation.

5. Council Tax

- 5.1 63% of the open consultation respondents said that their first choice for level of council tax would be to raise it by less than 4.99%, 35% said their first choice would be to raise council tax by 4.99% and 10% said their first choice would be to raise council tax by more than 4.99%. Whereas 81% of respondents to the sample survey said their first choice would be to raise it by less than 4.99%, 16% said their first choice would be to raise council tax by 4.99% and 4% said their first choice would be to raise council tax by more than 4.99%.

	Sample Survey	Open Consultation
First choice would be to raise Council tax by less than 4.99%	81%	63%
First choice would be to raise council tax by 4.99%	16%	35%
First choice would be to raise council tax by more than 4.99%	4%	10%

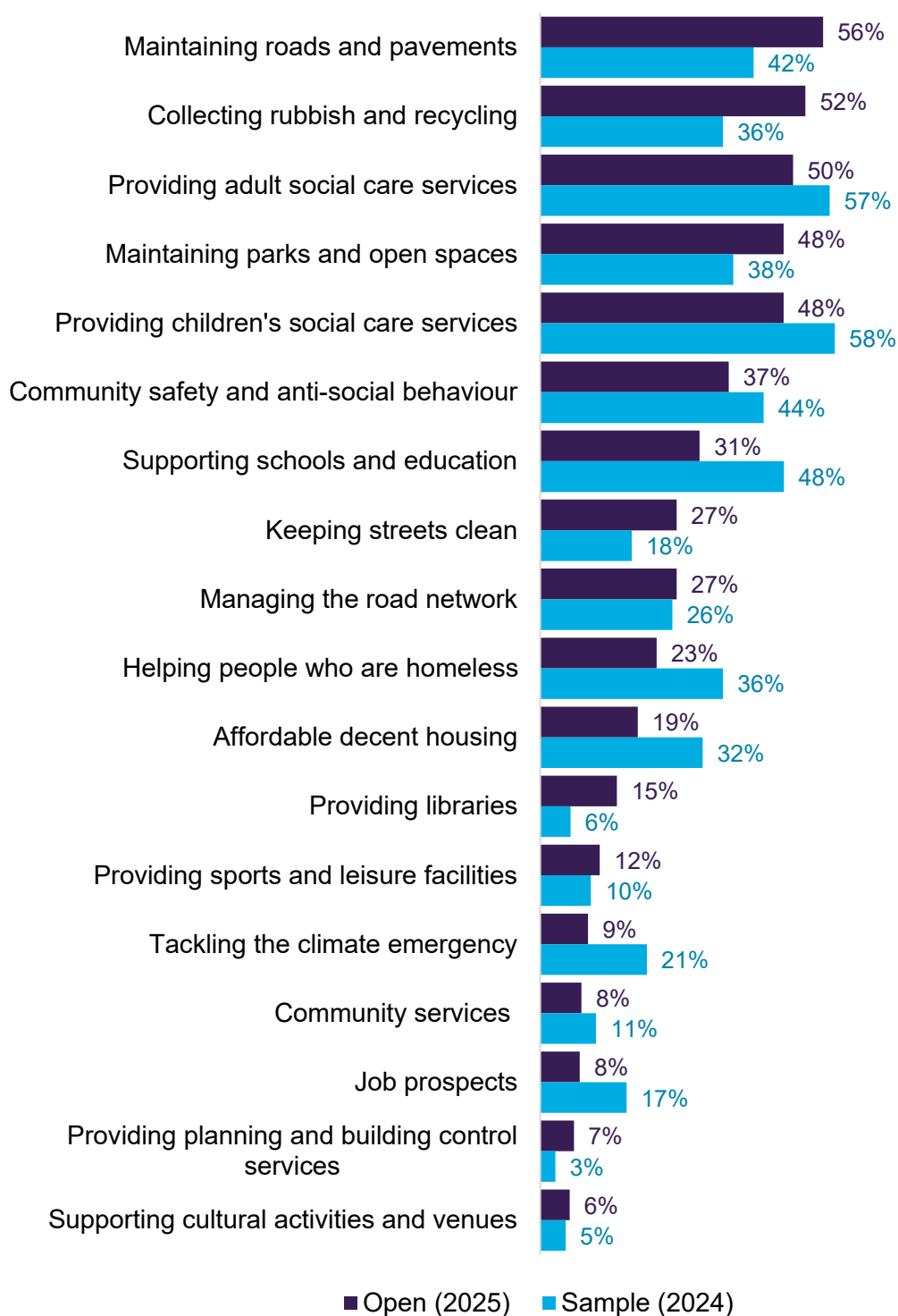
6. Importance of council services

- 6.1 Respondents were asked '*thinking generally about the local area and council services which five services do you feel are most important.*' The cells highlighted in green show the top five selected services for each of the methods and the orange show the five services thought by respondents to be least important. The five most important services to respondents of the sample survey were children's social care, adults social care, supporting schools and education, community safety and anti-social behaviour and maintaining roads and pavements. For the open consultation maintaining roads and pavements, collecting rubbish and recycling, adults social care, maintaining parks and open spaces and children's social care were seen as the top five most important services.

Table 1: Importance of council services

	Sample survey %	Sample Survey rank (1=most important)	Open survey %	Open survey rank (1=most important)
Providing children's social care services	58%	1	48%	4
Providing adult social care services	57%	2	50%	3
Supporting schools and education	48%	3	31%	7
Community safety and anti-social behaviour	44%	4	37%	6
Maintaining roads and pavements	42%	5	56%	1
Maintaining parks and open spaces	38%	6	48%	4
Collecting rubbish and recycling	36%	7	52%	2
Helping people who are homeless	36%	7	23%	10
Affordable decent housing	32%	9	19%	11
Managing the road network to address congestion	26%	10	27%	8
Tackling the climate emergency	21%	11	9%	14
Keeping streets clean	18%	12	27%	8
Job prospects	17%	13	8%	15
Community services	11%	14	8%	15
Providing sports and leisure facilities	10%	15	12%	13
Providing libraries	6%	16	15%	12
Supporting cultural activities and venues	5%	17	6%	18
Providing planning and building control services	3%	18	7%	17

Figure 1: The importance of council services (sample survey and open consultation)



7. Service improvement

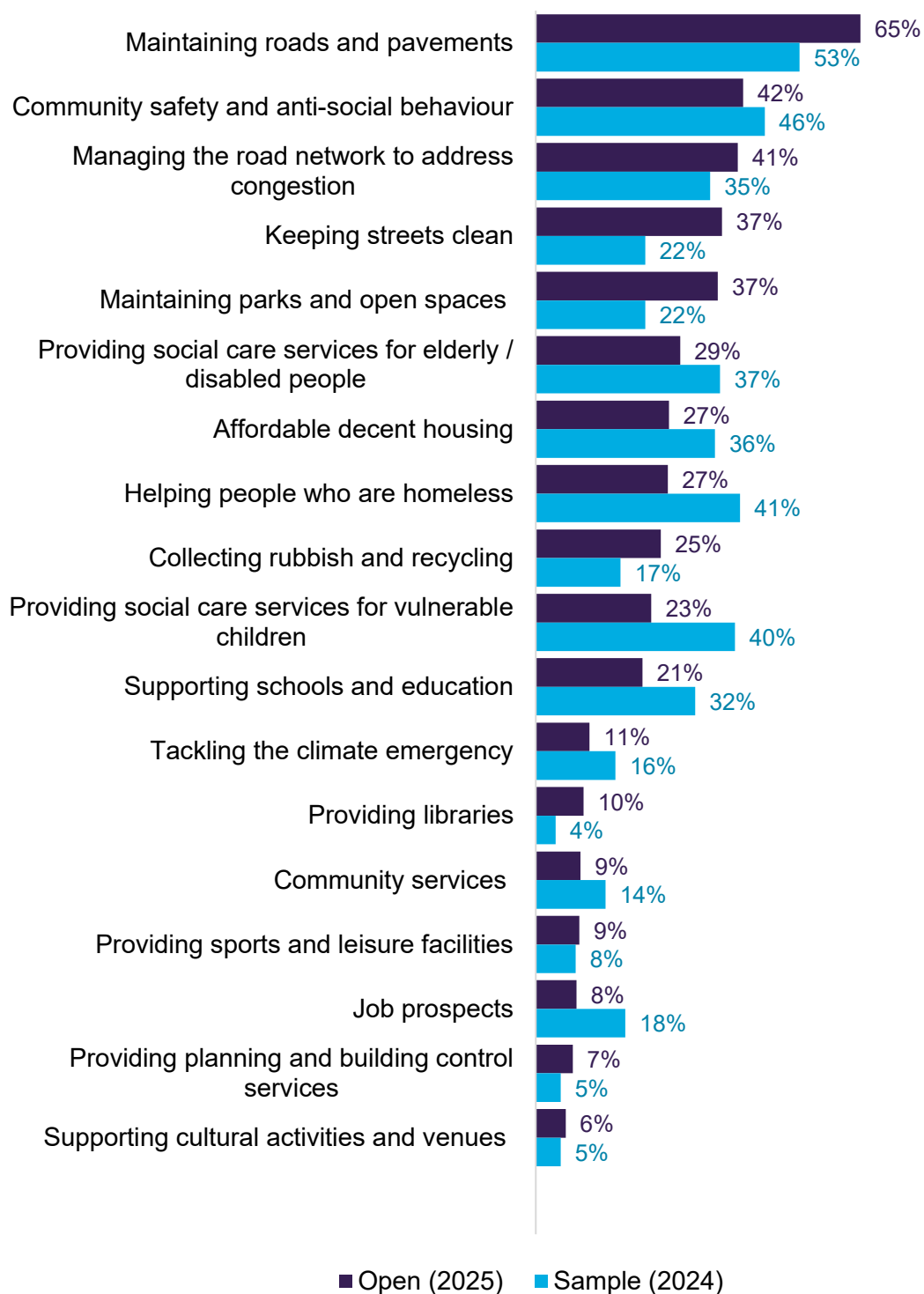
- 7.1 Respondents were asked to select up to five services that they felt were most in need of improving. The cells highlighted in green show the top five selected services for each of the methods and the orange show the five services thought by respondents to be least in need of improvement. In both the sample survey and the open consultation 'maintaining roads and

pavements' and 'community safety and anti-social behaviour' were seen as most in need of improvement.

Table 2: Council services most in need of improvement

	Sample survey %	Sample Survey rank (1=most improving)	Open survey %	Open survey rank (1 = most improving)
Maintaining roads and pavements	53%	1	65%	1
Community safety and anti-social behaviour	46%	2	42%	2
Helping people who are homeless	41%	3	27%	7
Providing children's social care services	40%	4	23%	10
Providing adult social care services	37%	5	29%	6
Affordable decent housing	36%	6	27%	7
Managing the road network to address congestion	35%	7	41%	3
Supporting schools and education	32%	8	21%	11
Maintaining parks and open spaces	22%	9	37%	4
Keeping streets clean	22%	9	37%	4
Job prospects	18%	11	8%	16
Collecting rubbish and recycling	17%	13	25%	9
Tackling the climate emergency	16%	13	11%	12
Community services	14%	14	9%	14
Providing sports and leisure facilities	8%	15	9%	14
Supporting cultural activities and venues	5%	16	6%	18
Providing planning and building control services	5%	16	7%	17
Providing libraries	4%	18	10%	13

Figure 2: Council services most in need of improvement (sample survey and open consultation)



8. Service priorities

- 8.1 The analysis of the importance and the improvement of services can help the council prioritise which services it should look to improve and which services it should look to sustain or possibly reduce if funding is limited.
- 8.2 The council should look to improve these services and should strive for a high standard of service as these services are most important to residents and are seen as most in need of improving.

Sample survey

- Affordable decent housing
- Community safety and anti-social behaviour
- Helping people who are homeless
- Maintaining roads and pavements
- Providing adult social care services
- Providing children's social care services
- Supporting schools and education

Open consultation

- Collecting rubbish and recycling
- Community safety and anti-social behaviour
- Keeping streets clean
- Maintaining parks and open spaces
- Maintaining roads and pavements
- Managing the road network to address congestion
- Providing adult social care services

- 8.4 There are two different services that scored above average for importance but below average for needing improvement for both the open consultation and the sample survey. These are the areas where the council could look to sustain performance as they are important to residents but are not seen as a priority for improvement.

Sample survey

- Collecting rubbish and recycling
- Maintaining parks and open spaces

Open consultation

- Providing children's social care services
- Supporting schools and education

- 8.5 There is one service which scored above average for improvement but below average for importance from the sample survey and two from the open consultation. Although this is not seen as important compared to other services residents want to see improvements in this area.

Sample survey

- Managing the road network to address congestion

Open consultation

- Affordable decent housing
- Helping people who are homeless

- 8.6 There are eight services from the sample survey and seven from the open consultation which score below average for importance and improvement.

Sample survey

- Community services
- Job prospects
- Keeping streets clean
- Providing libraries
- Providing planning and building control services
- Providing sports and leisure facilities
- Supporting cultural activities and venues
- Tackling the climate emergency

Open consultation

- Community services
- Job prospects
- Providing libraries
- Providing planning and building control services
- Providing sports and leisure facilities
- Supporting cultural activities and venues
- Tackling the climate emergency

9. Spending priorities

- 9.1 Respondents to both the open consultation and the sample survey were given a list of council service areas and information about how much of its revenue budget the council currently spends within that area. Respondents were given the total cost but also how many pence in one pound was spent on that service. They were also given a brief description of what was included within each of the services.

9.2 Open consultation

For nearly all the spending areas the most popular answer was 'to retain the same level of funding,' except for highway services where the most frequent answer was 'increase a little' and support services where the most frequent answer was 'decrease a little.'

- 9.3 Each response was given a value of +2 for 'increase a lot' through to -2 for 'decrease a lot'. A mean score was calculated to indicate which services respondents would like to spend more on and which they would like to spend less on.² The service areas with the highest mean score for the open consultation were:

- Highway services (0.72)
- Street cleaning (0.48)
- Parks and open spaces (0.36)
- School Services (0.27)
- Children's Social Care (0.25)

² The *mean* of a set of numbers in a data set is obtained by adding up all the numbers then dividing by the size of the data set. When people use the word 'average' in everyday conversation, they are usually referring to the mean. Source: [Newcastle University](#)

9.4 The service areas with the lowest mean score were:

- Support Services (-0.72)
- Cost of running our operational premises (-0.65)
- Customer Service (-0.35)

9.5 **Sample survey**

Similarly to the open consultation, for most spending areas the most common answer was 'retain the same level of funding' except for children's social care and school services where 'increase a little' was the most popular answer.

9.6 Again, each response was given a value of +2 for 'increase a lot' through to -2 for 'decrease a lot'. A mean score was calculated to indicate which services respondents would like to spend more on and which they would like to spend less on. The service areas with the highest mean score for the sample survey were:

- School services (0.76)
- Children's social care (0.71)
- Highway services (0.68)
- Street cleaning (0.57)

9.7 The service areas with the lowest mean score were:

- Cost of running our premises (-0.45)
- Other central items and accounting (-0.37)
- Support services (-0.22)
- Planning (-0.20)

9.8 For both the open and sample survey, most respondents want the council to retain the same level of funding for most of its service areas. If there was additional budget, the open survey respondents prioritised highway services, street cleaning and parks and open spaces as the services where they would like to see more money spent. The sample survey respondents said they would like to see an increase in spending for school services, children's social care, highways, and street cleaning. If the council were to look at reducing spending in any service area, both the open and sample survey respondents said that the council should look at the cost of running its premises and support services costs to make savings.

10. Key points to consider

10.1 Overall, residents in the representative sample survey do not feel informed about the council's financial situation, while respondents to the open survey feel more informed. Some open survey respondents may feel more informed because they are more likely to engage with council communications, for example newsletters or social media.

10.2 Most respondents want council tax levels to be increased below 4.99% sending a strong message that residents expect the council to keep any council tax level increases to a minimum.

10.3 When it comes to service importance and improvement, the insight from the open consultation and sample survey varies with a few similarities but more differences. The council should look

at the findings of the sample survey if it wants to understand what the population think about which services are most important and what needs improving as this is the data that is most representative of the BCP population. The council should consider the findings alongside other information e.g. service performance, costs etc. and consider whether it can prioritise these services:

- Affordable decent housing
- Community safety and anti-social behaviour
- Helping people who are homeless
- Maintaining roads and pavements
- Providing adult social care services
- Providing children's social care services
- Supporting schools and education

10.4 When it comes to how the council spends its money, most respondents would like the council to retain the same level of funding for most of its services. If savings are to be made, then respondents expect the council to make this from looking at the cost of running its premises and back-office functions. Residents want the council to prioritise front line services. There are some front-line services where residents would like to increase spending, for the sample survey this was school services and children's social care and for the open survey it was highway services and street cleaning.

10.5 Throughout this summary we can see there are differences between the sample survey and open consultation results. This emphasises the importance of conducting sample surveys alongside open consultations to inform big decisions the council must make.

11. Further information

11.1 Please see the full analytical report on our [consultation website](#).