

Budget Survey

2019



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Methodology

The survey was open between 6th September and 3rd November 2019. It was promoted online through the Council's website and our social media channels. Residents who have signed up for consultation reminders were notified and sent an invitation to participate in the consultation. An incentive of entering a prize draw for £50 of shopping vouchers was offered to encourage responses.

There was a total of 1,465 responses to the survey, including 431 partial responses (this is where the respondent has abandoned the survey part way through).

As an online survey is a self-selection methodology, with residents free to choose whether to participate or not, it was anticipated that returned responses would not necessarily be fully representative of the wider adult population. This report discusses the weighted results to overall responses by demographic questions and by geographical area to ensure that it more accurately matches the known profile of Maidstone Boroughs population by these characteristics.

The results have been weighted by age and gender based on the population in the ONS mid-year population estimates 2018. However, the under-representation of 18 to 34 year olds means that high weights have been applied to responses in this group, therefore results for this group should be treated with caution. It should also be noted that respondents from BME backgrounds are under-represented at 3.1% compared 5.9% in the local area. The results for this group should also be treated with caution.

There was a total of 999 weighted responses to the survey based on Maidstone's population aged 18 years and over this means overall results are accurate to $\pm 2.59\%$ at the 90% confidence level. This means that if we repeated the same survey 100 times, 90 times out of 100 the results would be between $\pm 2.59\%$ of the calculated response, so the 'true' response could be 2.59% above or below the figures reported (i.e. a 50% agreement rate could in reality lie within the range of 47.41% to 52.59%).

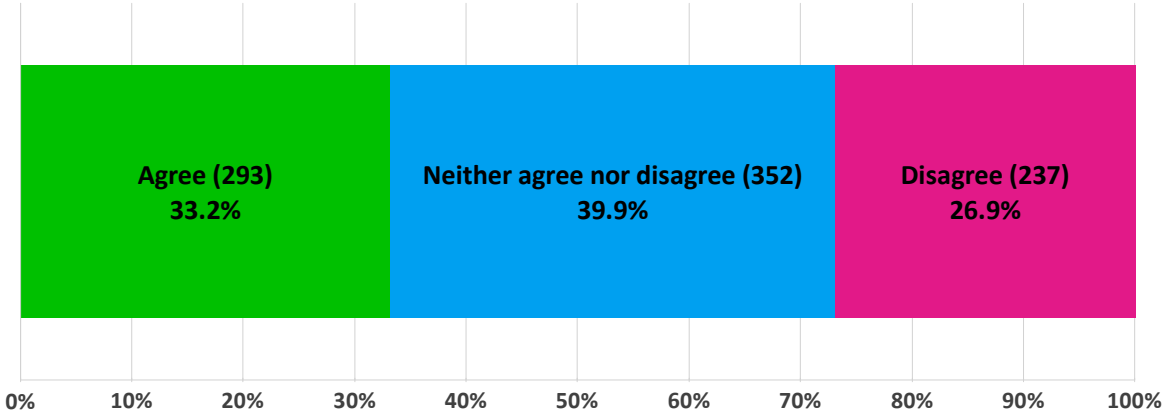
Please note not every respondent answered every question, therefore the total number of respondents refers to the number of respondents for the question being discussed not to the survey overall.

Findings

- Over time the proportion of respondents agreeing the Council provides good value for money has remained consistent and the proportion of people responding negatively has declined.
- 60% of respondents didn't agree that the Council should increase Council Tax for 2020/21.
- Infrastructure including flood preventions and street scene was rated as being the most important investment programme with more than half of all respondents placing this programme as their top priority. All demographic groups placed new homes as their lowest priority.

Value for Money

The survey asked respondents 'to what extent do you agree or disagree that Maidstone Council provides value for money?' and gave the five options for response ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. A total of 881 people responded to this this question.

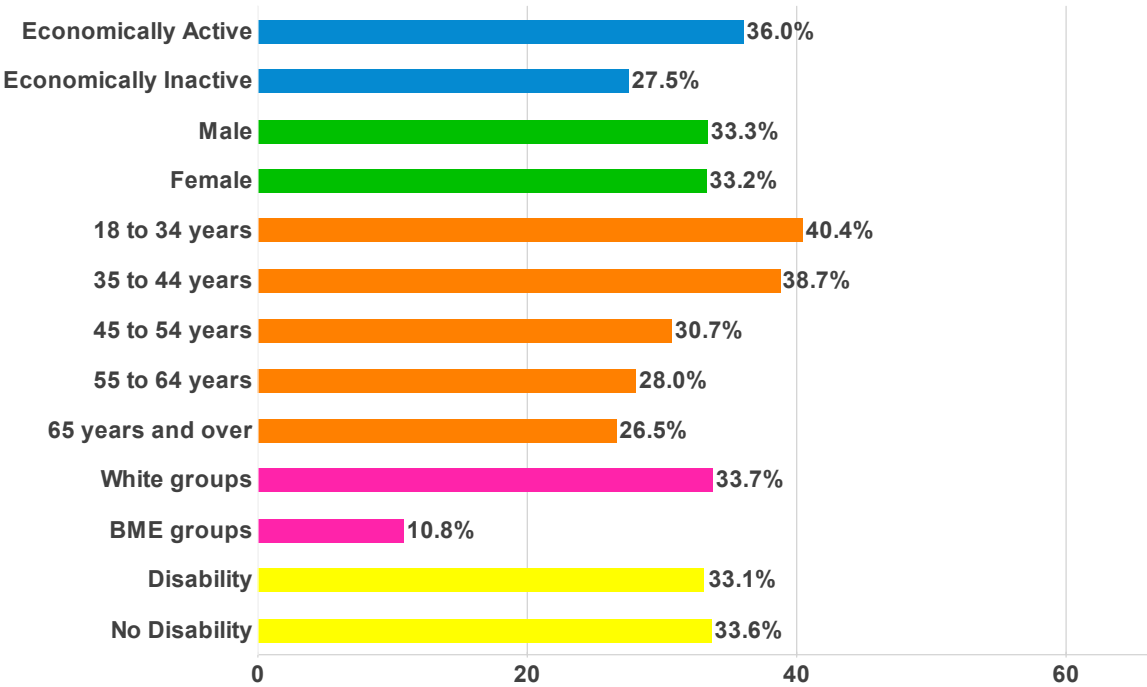


Overall, 33.2% responded strongly agree or agree. Across the range of responses, the most common was Neutral with 39.9% responding this way.

We previously asked residents this question in the 2018 Budget Survey and 33.4% responded Strongly Agree or Agree. Prior to that this question was asked in the 2017 resident survey and 30.2% of respondents agreed. Although over this time the proportion of respondents agreeing as remained broadly consistent, the proportion of people responding negatively to this question has declined from 28.6% in 2017 to 26.9%.

Demographic Differences

The chart below shows the proportion of people responding 'Strongly agree' and 'Agree' to the question across the different demographic groups.



The data shows a significant difference between the way respondents that are economically active and those that are economically inactive have answered this question. The most common response for those that are economically active was 'Agree', while the most common response for those economically inactive was 'Neither agree nor disagree' with 50.4% of this group responding this way.

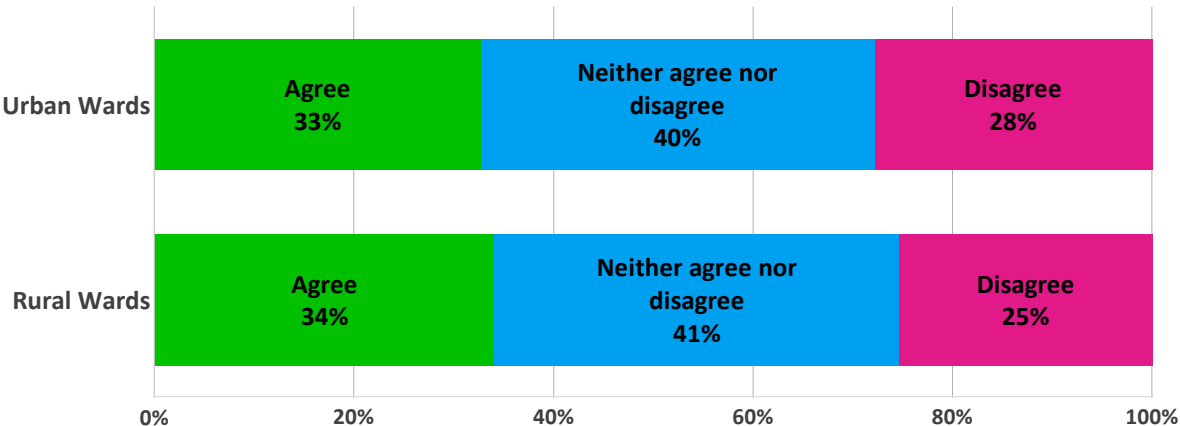
There was no significant difference in the proportion of male and female respondents agreeing with the question.

Looking at the age groups the data suggests that as age increases the proportion of respondents agreeing that the Council provides value for money decreases.

Geographical Differences

There was a total of 729 responding to this question and also providing their postcode.

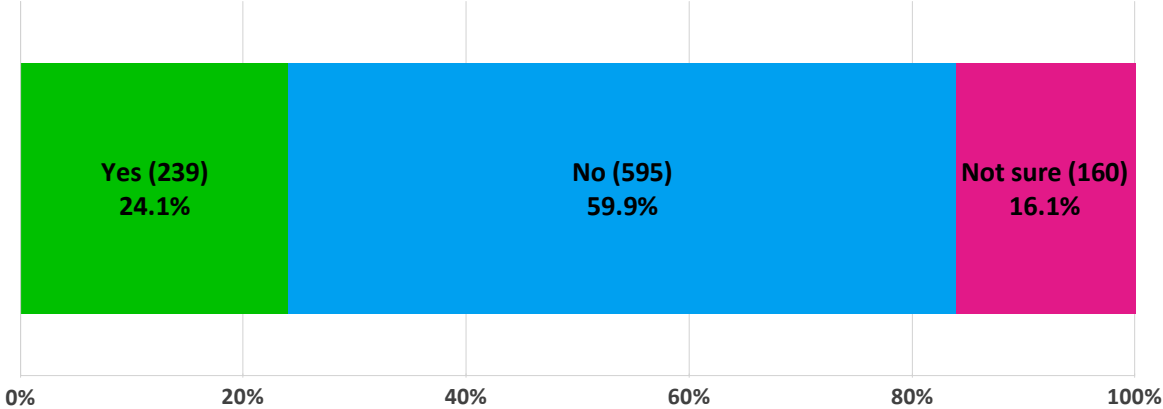
There were no significant differences between Urban and Rural wards in response to the question 'to what extent do you agree or disagree that Maidstone Council provides value for money?'



Council Tax

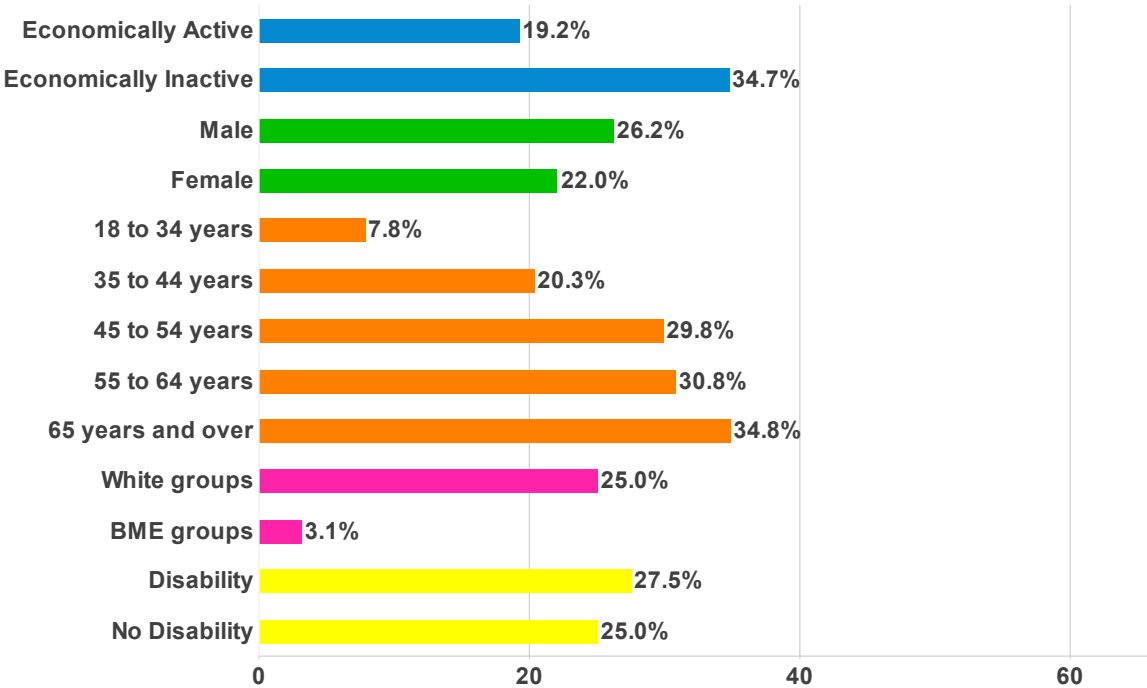
Council Tax Increases

Respondents were asked 'Do you agree that the Council should increase Council Tax for 2020/21?'. A total of 994 respondents answered this question. The majority of respondents said No.



Demographic Differences

The chart below shows the proportion of people responding 'yes' to the question across the different demographic groups.



Economically inactive respondents had the greatest proportion across all demographic groups who said they were in favour of a council tax increase, at 34.7% ($\pm 4.4\%$). This is significantly different from the response from people who are economically active where just 19.2% ($\pm 2.5\%$) answered the same way.

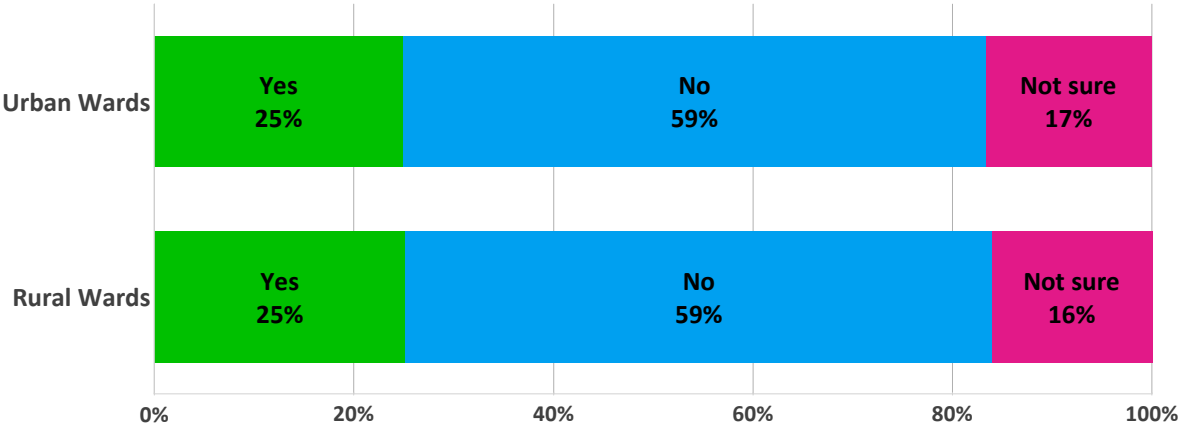
The proportion of respondents answering 'Yes' increases with age, and the proportion responding 'No' decreases with age. The proportion of respondents answering 'Not sure' is broadly consistent across the age groups.

The difference in the proportion of people from BME and White backgrounds responding 'Yes' is significant, but should be treated with caution due to the low number of responses from people with BME backgrounds.

Geographical Differences

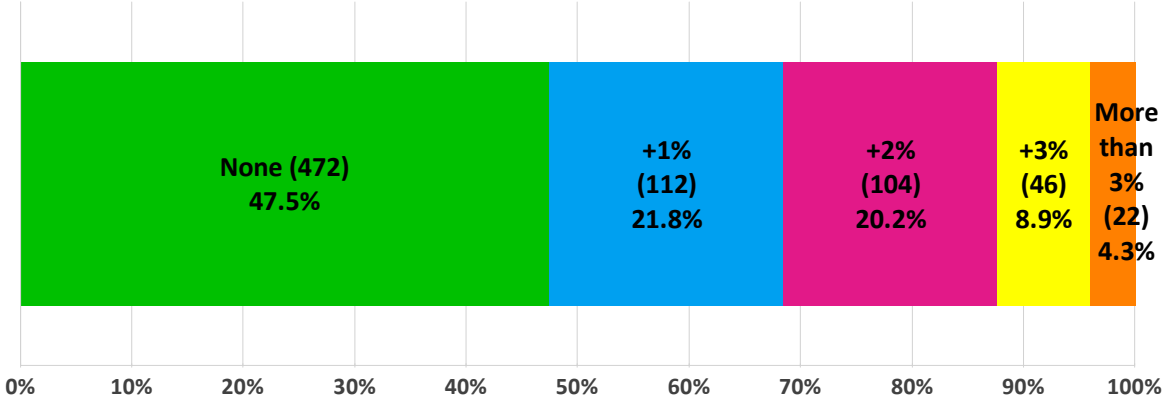
There was a total of 814 respondents who gave a response to this question and also provided their postcode.

There were no significant differences between Urban and Rural wards in response to the question 'Do you agree that the Council should increase Council Tax for 2020/21'?



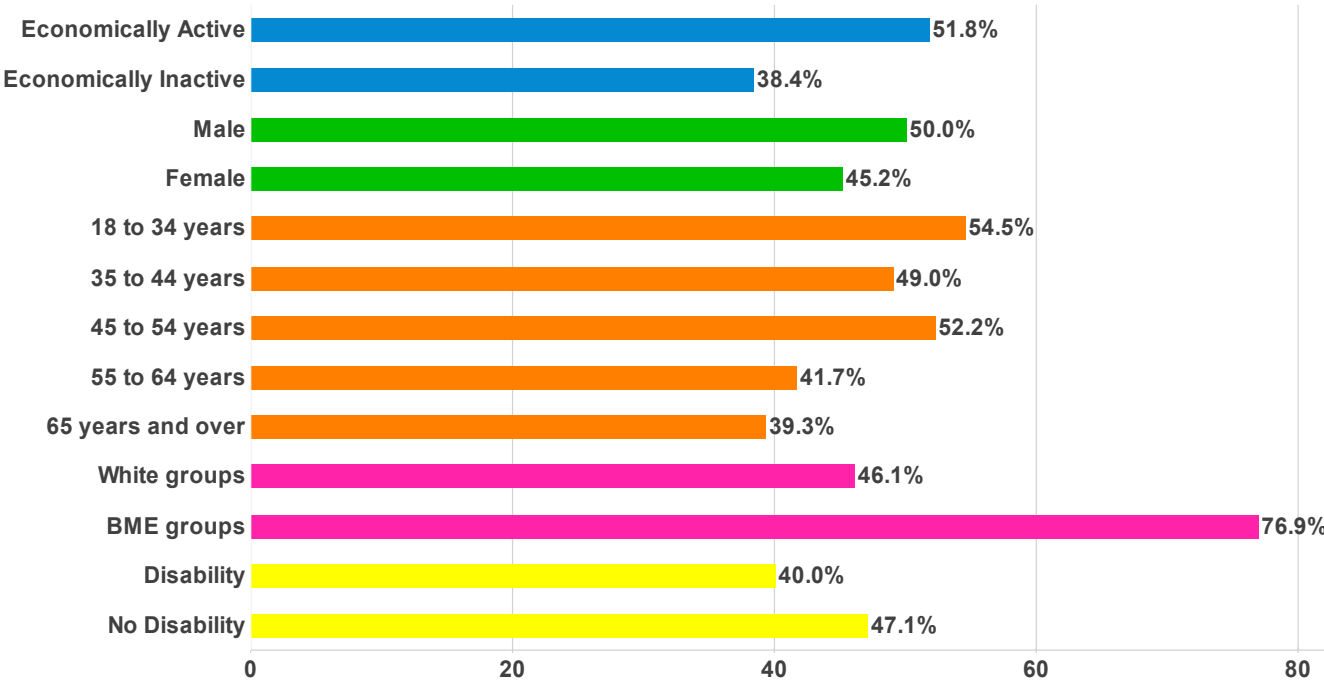
Council Tax Increase – How much?

Respondents were also asked 'How much more, if any, would you be willing to pay in council tax to protect services?'. There were 994 weighted responses to this question. The most common response was None.



Demographic Differences

The chart below shows the proportion of people responding 'None' to the question across the different demographic groups. This was the most common response for each demographic group.



The difference between the proportion of economically active and economically inactive respondents answering 'None' is significant, with a greater proportion of those that are economically active against a Council Tax increase. This aligns with the responses to the previous question.

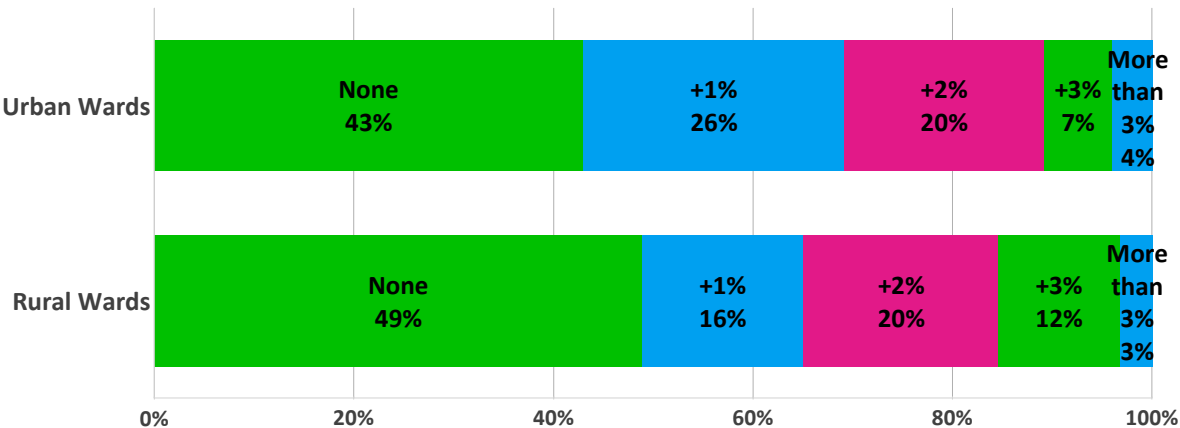
As with the previous question, it appears that willingness to pay more Council Tax increases with age.

The difference in the proportion of people from BME and White backgrounds responding 'None' is significant, but should be treated with caution due to the number of responses from people with BME backgrounds.

Geographical Differences

There was a total of 813 responses to this question where a postcode was also given.

There are significant differences between Urban and Rural wards in the proportions responding '+1%' and '+3%'. The Rural ward respondents had a greater proportion stating they would be willing to increase Council Tax by 3%. The difference between the proportions responding 'None' is not significant.

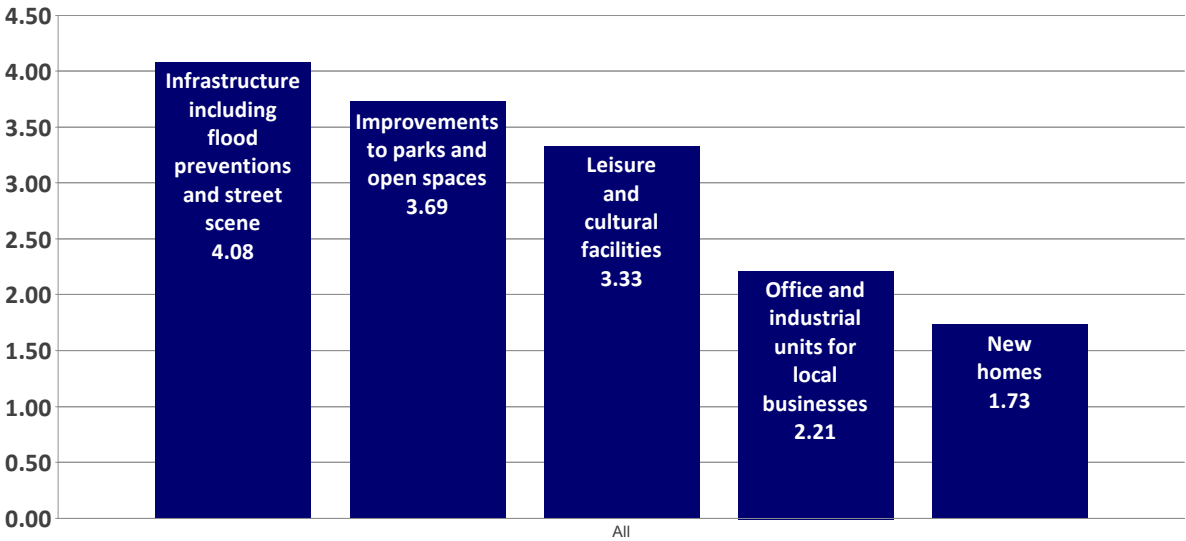


Investing in the future

The survey asked people to place five investment programmes in order of importance to them. A total of 937 respondents (weighted) provided an answer to this question.

In order to assess this data a weighted average has been used, with the programmes placed as first receiving five points and the programmes ranked last given one point. These are then added together and divided by the number of respondents to give a weighted average.

Overall, 52.2% placed Infrastructure, including flood prevention and street scene, as being the most important investment programme. 64.3% placed new homes as their least important investment programme.



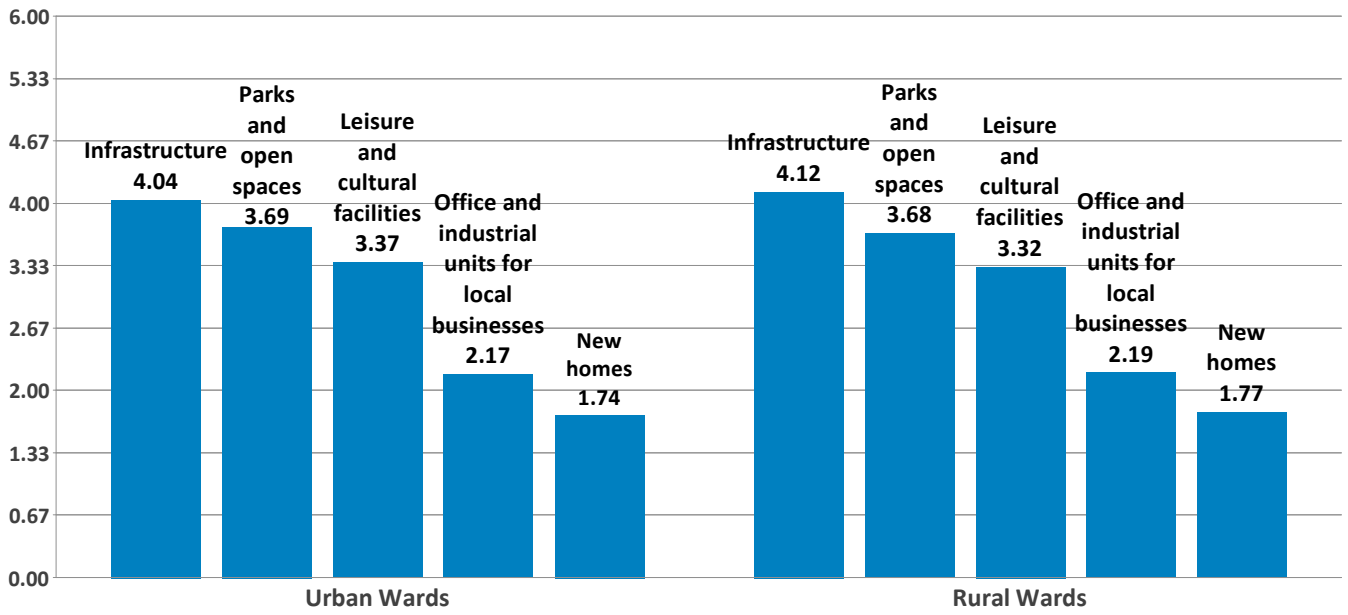
Demographic Differences

There were two groups that did not place Infrastructure as their top priority. These were the 18 to 34 years and the 35 to 44 years who placed Improvement to parks and open space as their top priority.

Every demographic group placed Leisure & cultural facilities as third, Office and industrial units for local businesses as fourth and New homes as fifth.

Geographical Differences

Residents from both Rural and Urban wards placed the investment programmes in the same order.



Narrative Comments

A total of 458 narrative comments were received. Respondents used these as an opportunity to comment on issues about council services generally, rather than simply budget issues.

A total of 222 comments mentioned house building, with 106 of these also mentioning issues with road infrastructure or congestion. The general feeling derived from these comments is that residents feel that there are too many new homes being built or that new homes are being built in the wrong locations. There were a few mentions of offices being turned into housing being inappropriate. Many of the comments on this theme stated they do not feel that the Council listens to them, with some believing some new developments that have been agreed are contrary to the Local Plan.

There were 136 comments relating to environmental services. There were 23 comments that mentioned waste collection services with several making comments about missed or late bin collections (during the survey period there were a number of roadworks being undertaken in the borough which impacted on the Council's ability to make some collections according to schedule). There were also several comments about the streets being in more of a mess after refuse collection than they were before collection, a few comments about returning to weekly waste collections and a couple of comments that were positive about this service. There were 66 comments that referenced street cleansing services with comments about streets being unclean or that cleaning standards are good enough with some stating that bins are overflowing or not emptied frequently enough. There were also several comments about the paving work in the town centre, with some saying that these are already stained and dirty or that they don't feel they are good value for money.

There were 25 comments that raised the issues about the environment. Here people were mostly concerned with pollution and the reducing amount of greenspaces and building on greenfield sites. There were also two comments on this theme that felt the council should be doing more for biodiversity. 21 people raised issues with grass verges and hedgerows being overgrown, with some mentioning the blocking of road signed due to overhanging vegetation. Also under environmental services theme several comments mentioned the need to bring back the freighter service. Several expressed annoyance over proposed charges at Tovil Tip (a KCC service) and there were a few requests for more tree planting.

Overall, there were 134 comments with mentions of traffic, parking or roads. As outlined above the majority of these related to traffic and road infrastructure with comments about the town being 'gridlocked' or having insufficient infrastructure for new housing. Several people commented that it seems that the Council are not doing anything about these issues and 12 people specifically mentioned the need for a bypass or relief road. There were 30 comments that related to parking. Here people were concerned with perceived high parking charges in the town centre, development being built without parking provision and abuse/unfairness/over subscription of residential permit schemes.

There were 90 comments that have been categorised as relating to Council Administration, Councillors or staff. 32 comments stated they do not feel the Council listens or cares or is too political, with several making allegations of corrupt behaviour and a couple urging for transparency and openness. The majority of these seem to relate to development in the borough. 19 people mentioned issues around contact and communication with several stating they have raised issues but never got a response. There were 15 comments about staff salaries and allowances with several stating that the number of officers on £50k or more should be reduced. Six mentioned the amount of funding Maidstone Council receives from the Council tax with some stating Maidstone's cut should be bigger. Other comments relating to Council administration mentioned wasting money and high council tax levels.

There were 50 comments that referred to crime or policing in the borough. Here people requested more police on the streets and there was some reference to a recent stabbing in the town centre with concerns raised over the licensing of the establishment concerned. A few people made comment on the night-time economy causing problematic behaviours and there were several comments about drug use and dealing happening in the borough with Shepway Park, Brenchley Gardens and outside KFC being mentioned specifically. There were also a few people that commented they do not feel safe and a couple of comments about youths and anti-social behaviour.

There were 40 comments that have been assigned to the theme Leisure Services & Parks. In terms of the leisure centre people mentioned the need for investment and refurbishment with the changing areas specifically mentioned as needing work. One person stated they may use the centre more but doesn't see information about what's on. For Mote Park there were some comments that expressed annoyance about parking charges but also comments about the improvements to the play area and café: stating it being in disrepair and that it is now too busy and is focused on income generation. There was also a request for an outdoor swimming pool at Mote Park. The Hazlitt was mentioned by several comments. Generally people were positive about the Hazlitt but recognise that it is too small to attract major touring shows, several people said that there should be another venue/theatre that is bigger. Other comments in this theme mentioned lack of public transport from villages to leisure facilities and requests for more investment in these areas.

There were 144 comments that referred to services that are not provided by Maidstone Council, the most common of these included requests for more investment into adult social care and complaints about road surfaces and potholes.

Survey Demographics

