



BUDGET SURVEY

2023

Produced November 2022

ABSTRACT

A report summarising the results of Maidstone Borough Council's Budget Survey 2023.

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Introduction

This report presents the findings of Maidstone Council's Budget Survey 2023/24. The survey was conducted to gauge opinion on Council spending as well as its priorities and investment programmes.

Maidstone Borough Council is committed to providing high quality and good value services to meet the needs of the local community.

Reductions in central government funding and the pandemic have had a significant impact on the Council's finances and will continue to do so. Looking further ahead, the financial outlook for Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) is uncertain, given the lasting impact of the pandemic and lack of information about the level of central government support in the future.

As part of that process, the Council sought to understand residents' views on where they think savings should be made and what the Council's priorities for spending should be.

Methodology

The survey was open between 20 October and 20 November 2022.

The survey was carried out online, with a direct email sent to approximately 9,000 residents who had consented to being contacted by email. The survey was also promoted on the Council's website, social media, in Borough Insight and in the local press. The survey was open to all Maidstone Borough residents aged 18 years and over.

A total of 1,332 people responded to the questionnaire. Data has been weighted according to the known population profile to counteract non-response bias. The weighting profile is based on the 2020 mid-year ONS population estimates. However, the under-representation of 18- to 34-year-olds means that high weights have been applied to responses in this group, therefore the results for this group should be treated with caution. In addition, the result for minority groups should also be treated with caution due to the sample being unrepresentative of the local population.

The economically active group includes respondents in employment (full, part-time or self-employed) or who are looking for work.

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

With a total of 1,332 responses to the survey, the overall results in this report are accurate to $\pm 2.7\%$ at the 95% confidence level. This means that we can be 95% certain that the results are between $\pm 2.7\%$ of the calculated response, so the 'true' response could be 2.7% above or below the figures reported (i.e., a 50% agreement rate could in reality lie within the range of 47.3% to 52.7%).

Findings

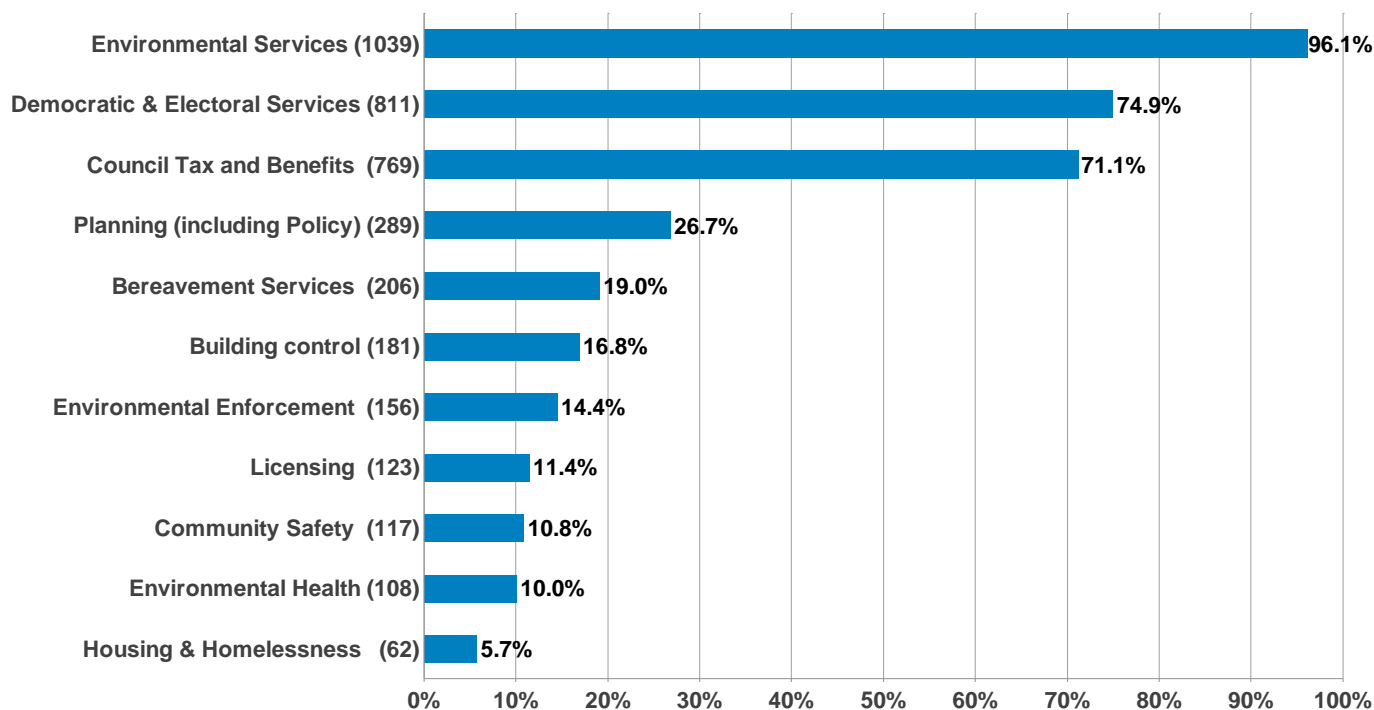
- Environmental Services was the most used service mandatory service and the most important mandatory service with 96% and 87% responding this way respectively.
- The most common mandatory service that people felt should be reduced was Democratic & Electoral Services with 936 answering this way.
- 87% of respondents told us they have used Parking Services making it the most used discretionary service, while Parks and Open Spaces was deemed the most important service (87%).
- Markets and Civic events were most common discretionary services that people felt should be reduced with 431 and 420 answering this way respectively.
- Infrastructure including flood prevention remained the top investment priority for the third year in a row.
- Overall satisfaction with the local area as a place to live has increased from 51.0% in 2021 to 57.8%.

Mandatory Services

Mandatory Services Used

The survey asked respondents to select the services they had used from a list of services that the Council is required to provide by law. A total of 1,082 responses were received.

The most common response was Environmental Services with 1,039 respondents telling us they have used this service. The least common response was Housing & Homelessness with 62 respondents telling us they have used this service.



Demographic Differences

- Female respondents and the economically inactive were significantly more likely than their counterparts to have used Council Tax and Benefits services.
- Economically inactive respondents were more likely than economically active to have used Democratic & Electoral services with 83.5% compared to 71.6% of economically inactive respondents.

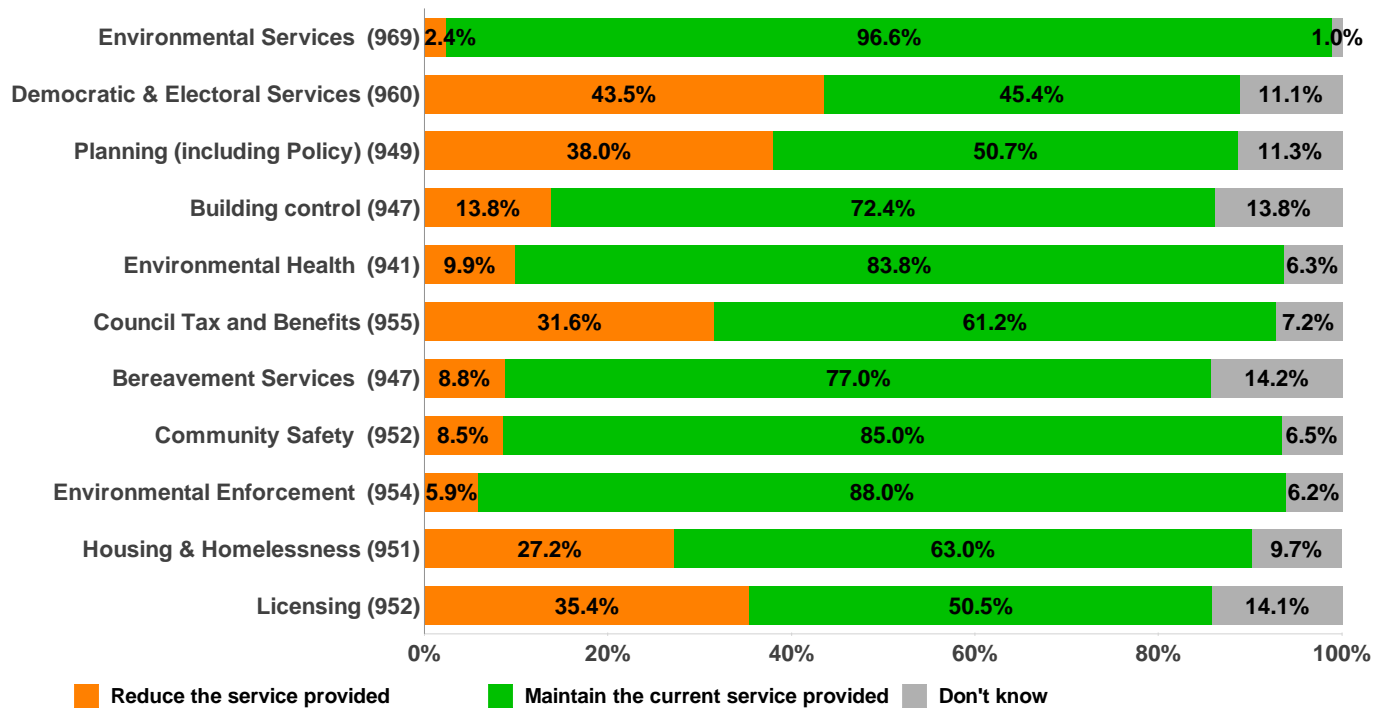
Mandatory Services Spending Approaches

Respondents were provided with the list of mandatory services detailing the current spend for each per council tax band D household. They were asked to indicate what approach they felt the Council should take in delivering the mandatory services. Three options were provided for respondents to select from:

- Reduce the service provided
- Maintain the current service
- Don't know.

There was a total of 969 responses to this set of questions. Democratic Services and Planning (including policy) had the greatest proportions where respondents stated 'reduce the service provided' at 43.5% and 38.0% respectively.

Environmental Services and Environmental Enforcement had the greatest proportions where respondents answered, 'maintain the current service' at 96.6% and 88.0% respectively.



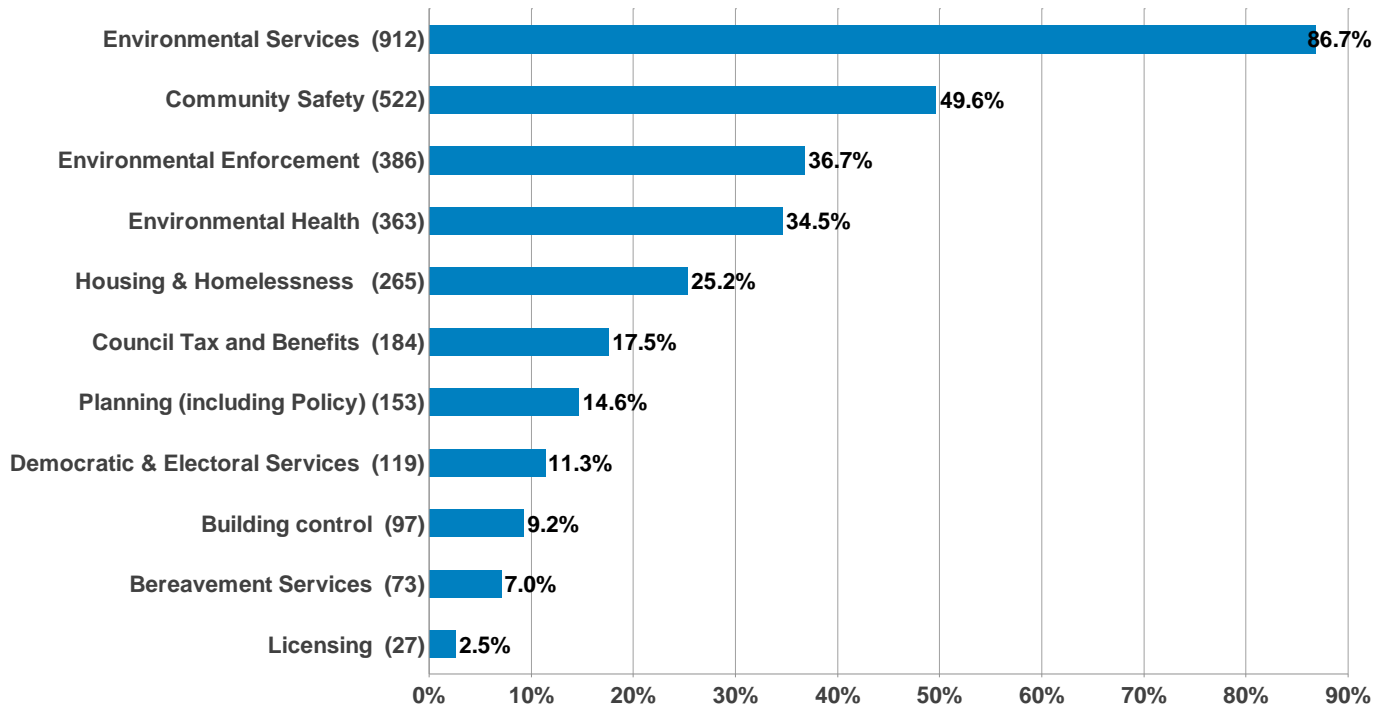
Demographic Differences

- A significantly greater proportion of respondents with a disability said that the Planning (including policy) service should be reduced with 57.3% answering this way compared to 34.8% of respondents without a disability.
- Respondents who have lived in the borough between 3 and 5 years had a significantly greater than average proportion that said Building Control should be reduced at 28.6%.
- A significantly greater proportion of male respondents said that Council Tax and Benefits services should be reduced with 39.2% answering this way compared to 26.0% of female respondents. Economically active respondents were also more likely than their counterparts to say that this service should be reduced.
- A significantly greater proportion of male respondents said that Bereavement services should be reduced with 12.8% answering this way compared to 4.6% of female respondents.
- Male respondents and respondents with a disability had significantly greater proportions than their counterparts that said that Community Safety services should be reduced.
- Male respondents and respondents under 35 years had greater proportions than their counterparts that said Environmental Enforcement services should be reduced.
- Respondents from minority groups and male respondents had significantly greater proportions stating that Housing & Homelessness services should be reduced at 63.9% and 34.4% respectively, compared to the overall response of 27.3%.
- Respondents who have lived in the borough for less than a year had a significantly lower proportion that said that Licensing services should be reduced compared to their counterparts.

Most Important Mandatory Services

The survey asked respondents to select which three Mandatory services provided by the Council were most important to them.

There were 912 responses to this question. The most common response was Environmental Services with 912 respondents selecting this service. The least common response was Licensing with 27 respondents selecting this service at one of their top three services.



Demographic Differences

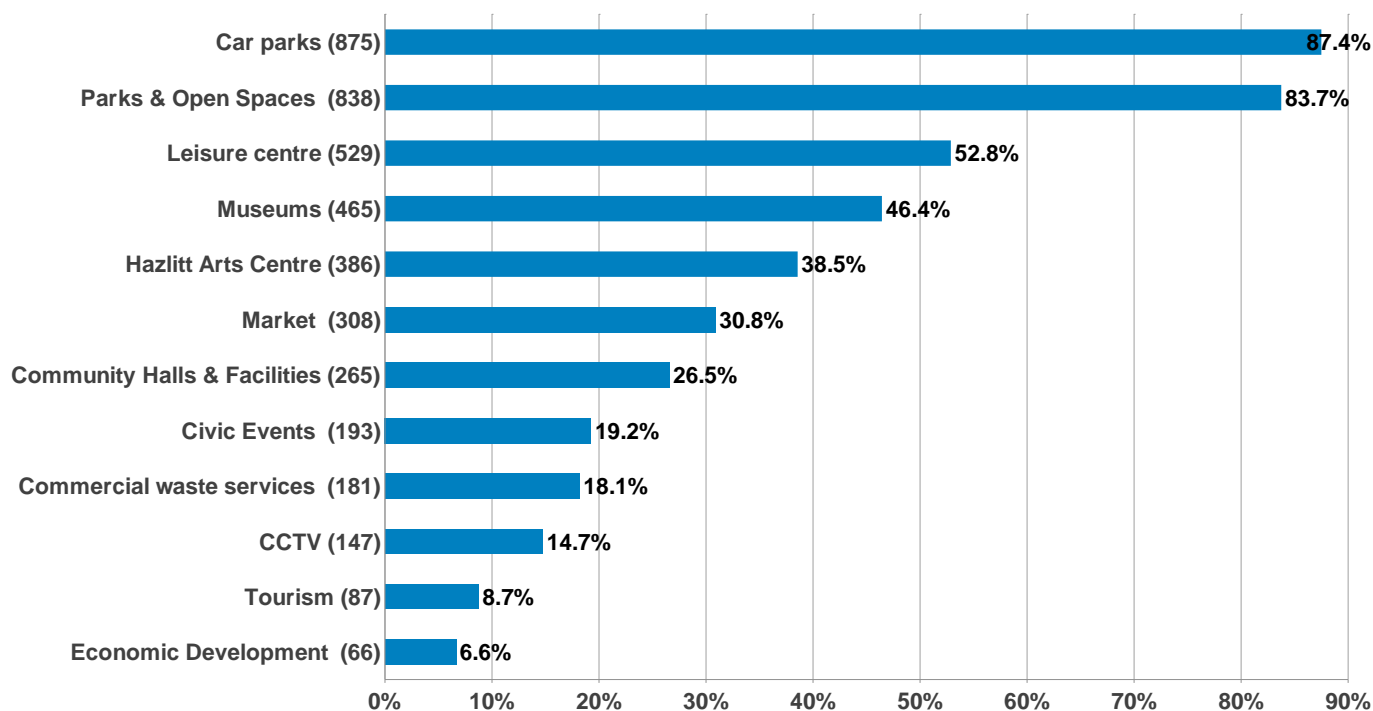
- Environmental services was the most common response across all demographic groups.
- Respondents who had lived at their current address for less than a year were only group where community safety did not have the second greatest proportion. This group's second choice was Environmental Health with 60.2% and Community Safety was third for this group.
- There were three groups whose third most important Mandatory Service response differed from the overall result. These were 18- to 34-year-olds, minority respondents and those who have lived at their present addresses for less than a year. These three groups put Environmental Health above Environmental Enforcement.

Discretionary Services

Discretionary Services Used

The survey asked respondents to select the services that they had used from a list of services that the Council is not required to provide by law but chooses to do so. A total of 875 responses were received.

The most common response was car parks with 875 (87.4%) telling us they have used this service. The least common response was Economic Development with 66 (6.6%) telling us they have used this service.



Demographic Differences

- Car parks and Parks & Open spaces were the two most common responses across all groups.
- Minority group respondents were significantly less likely to have used Parks & Open Spaces compared to white groups with 62.0% compared to 85.2% of white group respondents.
- Female respondents, the economically inactive and those without a disability were significantly more likely than their counterparts to have used the Leisure Centre.
- The data suggests that there is a linear negative relationship between age and using the Leisure Centre, meaning that as people age, they are less likely to use the Leisure Centre.
- Respondents aged 35 to 44 years were more likely than the other age groups to have used the Market at 43.7%.
- Female respondents were significantly more likely to have used the Hazlitt Arts Centre with 43.3% selecting this service compared to 32.6% of male respondents.

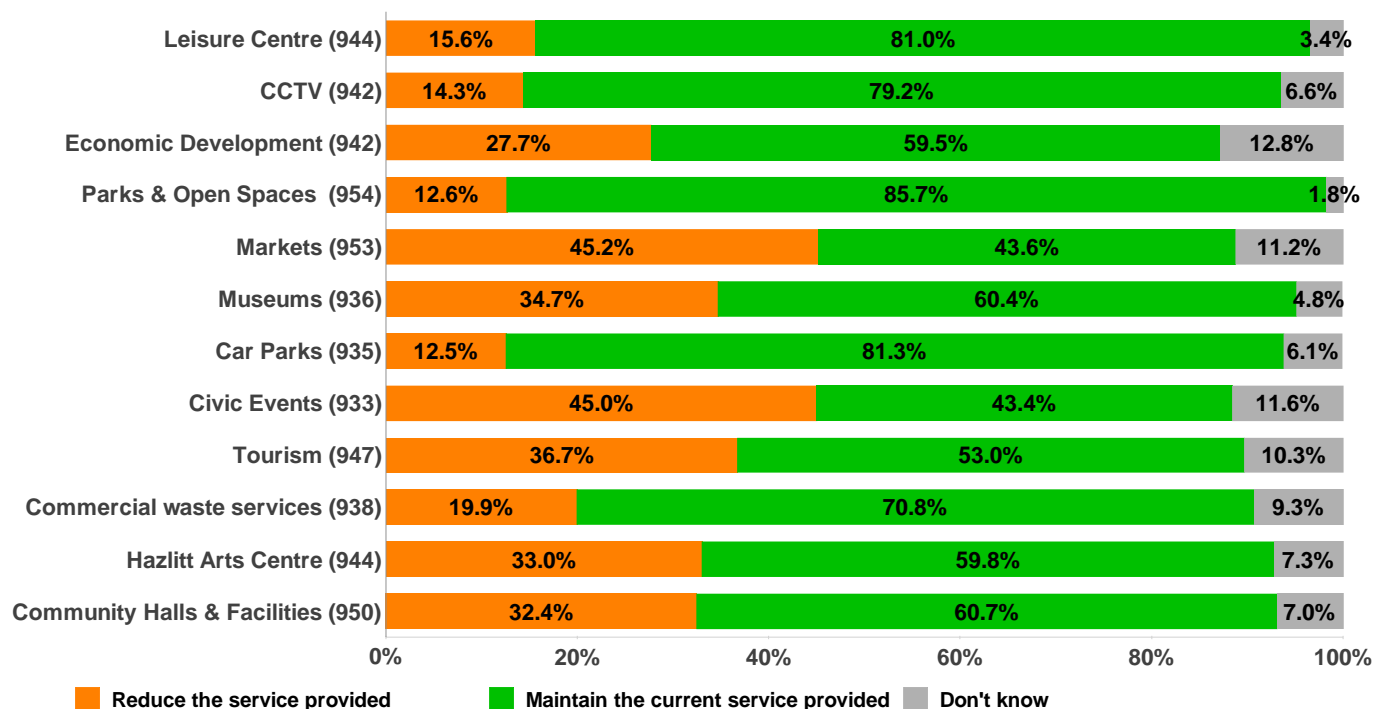
Discretionary Services Spending Approaches

Respondents were provided with the list of discretionary services detailing the current spend for each per council tax band D household. They were asked to indicate what approach they felt the Council should take in delivering the mandatory services. Three options provided for respondents to select from were:

- Reduce the service provided,
- Maintain the current service
- Don't know.

There was a total of 954 responses to this set of questions. Markets and Civic events had the greatest proportions where respondents stated 'reduce the service provided' at 45.2% and 45.0% respectively.

Parks & Open Spaces and Car Parks had the greatest proportions where respondents answered, 'maintain the current service' at 85.7% and 81.3% respectively.



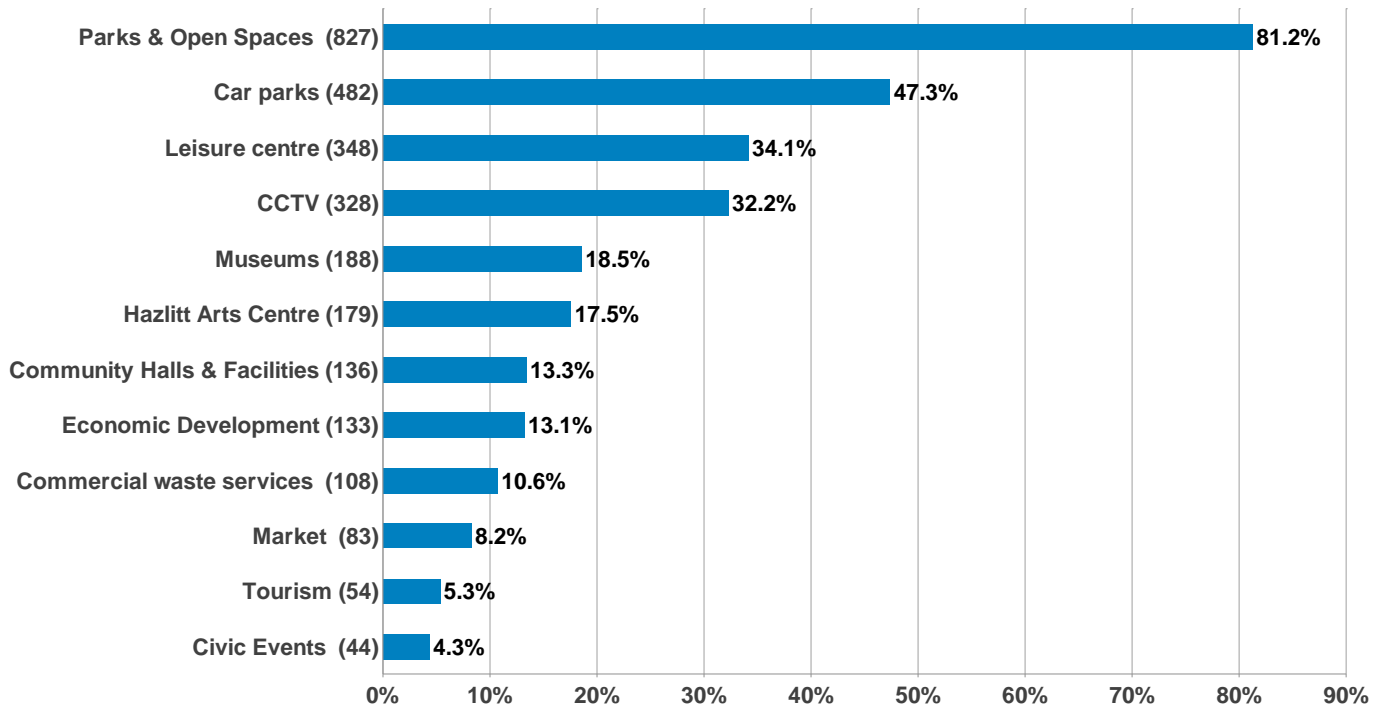
Demographic Differences

- A significantly greater proportion of respondents with a disability and those who are economically inactive said that Parks & Open Spaces should be reduced at 19.9% and 19.2% respectively.
- The proportion stating that Parks & Open Spaces should be reduced increases with age.
- A significantly greater proportion of economically inactive respondents said that the Market should be reduced with 50.1% answering this way compared to 42.6% of economically active respondents.
- A significantly greater proportion of male respondents said the Museum should be reduced with 37.9% answering this way compared to 30.5% of female respondents.
- Respondents with a disability had significantly greater proportion than those without a disability that said that Car Park services should be reduced with 19.7% answering this way compared to 11.1% of non-disabled respondents.
- Male respondents, economically inactive respondents and respondents in the age groups 55 years and upwards had greater than average proportions that said that civic events should be reduced.
- More than half of respondents with a disability said that Tourism should be reduced, significantly greater than the overall result and that for respondents without a disability.
- Respondents from minority groups and economically active respondents had significantly greater proportions stating that Commercial waste services should be reduced compared to their counterparts at 54.7% and 22.4% respectively.
- Male respondents and minority group respondents had significantly greater proportions than their counterparts that said that the Hazlitt Arts Centre and Community Halls & Facilities should be reduced.

Most Important Discretionary Services

The survey asked respondents to select the three discretionary services that were most important to them.

There were 827 responses to this question. The most common response was Parks & Open Spaces with 827 selecting this service. The least common response was Civic Events with 44 selecting this service as one of their top three.



Demographic Differences

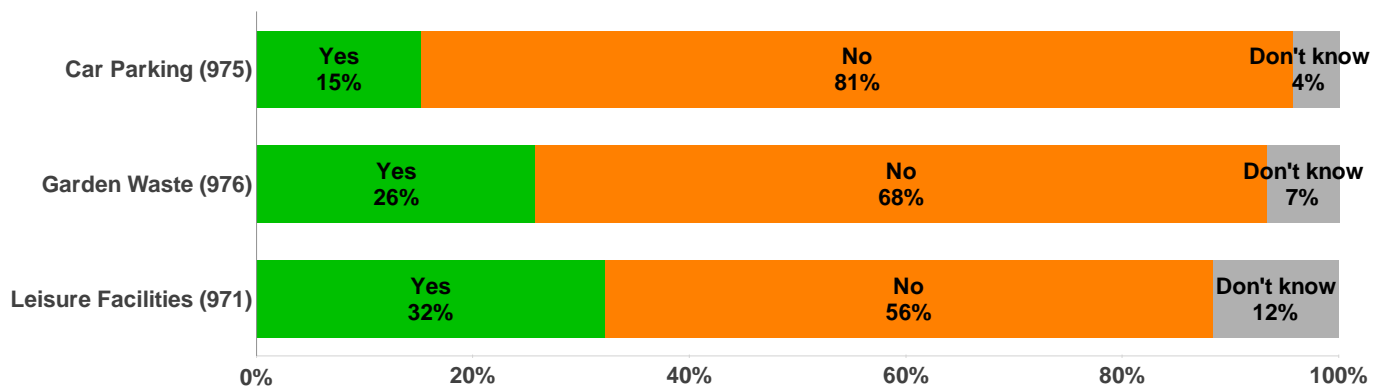
- Parks & Open Spaces was the most common response across all demographic groups.
- The second most common response was Car parks for all but three groups:
 - The Leisure centre was the second most common response for the 18 to 34 years and the 35 to 44 years groups. Both groups third most common response was Car parks.
 - The second most common response for those who had lived at their current address between 3 and 5 years was CCTV. This groups third most common response was the Leisure centre.

Paying more for services

The survey asked respondents if they would be prepared to pay more for car parking, garden waste and leisure facilities. There were 976 responses to this question.

Just under a third of respondents said they would pay more to use leisure facilities and just over a quarter said they would be prepared to pay more for garden waste collection.

Would you be willing to pay more for any of the following services?



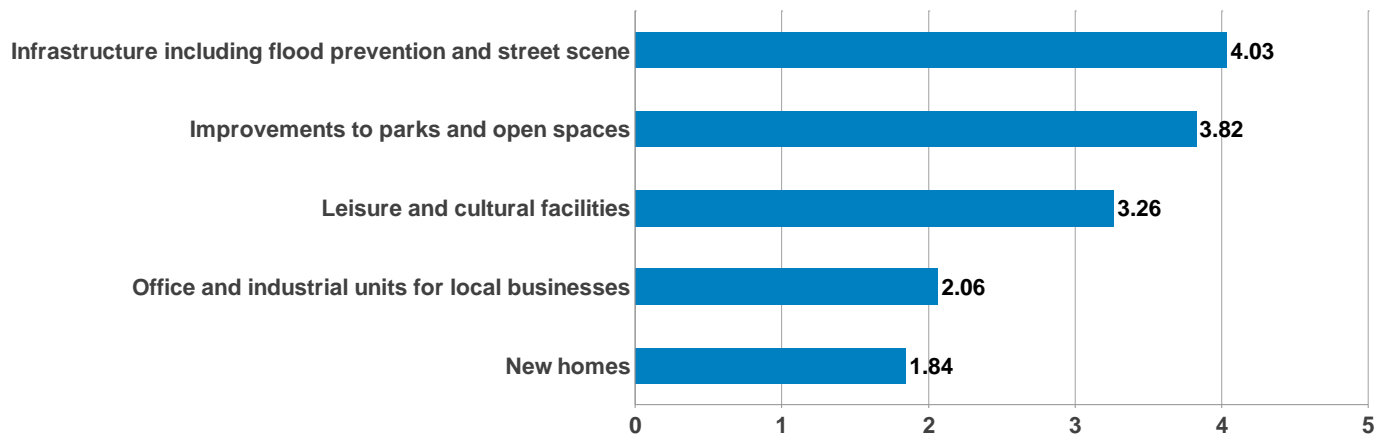
Demographic Differences

- Respondents from minority groups had a significantly greater proportion in favour of raising charges for car parking with 36.7% responding this way compared to 14.6% of respondents from white groups.
- Male respondents had a significant greater proportion in favour of increasing charges around leisure facilities with 41.3% answering this way compared to 24.9% of female respondents.

Priorities & Investments

Survey respondents were asked to place a list of investment programme priorities into their preferred order of importance. A total of 1,016 respondents ranked the investment priorities.

To assess this data, a weighted average has been used. The programmes placed first received 5 points and the programmes ranked last were given 1 point. These were then added together and divided by the number of respondents to give a weighted average.



This question was asked in the 2021/22 Budget Survey, undertaken in Autumn 2020 and the 2022/23 Budget Survey undertaken in Autumn 2021. Since the 2021/22 survey the order of the top three programmes has not changed.

In 2021/22 New Homes was ranked as fifth but moved up a place to fourth in 2022/23 and Office and Industrial units for local businesses has dropped from fourth to fifth. For this year (2023/24) New Homes has moved back to being the lowest priority for residents.

Demographic Differences

- Economically inactive respondents were more likely than economically active respondent to rank infrastructure, including flood prevention and street scene, as their top priority with 62.2% responding this way compared to 42.7% of the economically active group.
- The survey data suggests that as age increases there is a greater likelihood of Infrastructure being ranked first.
- Female respondents had a significantly greater proportion that ranked new homes last with 62.9% ranking this priority as fifth compared to 51.8% of male respondents.

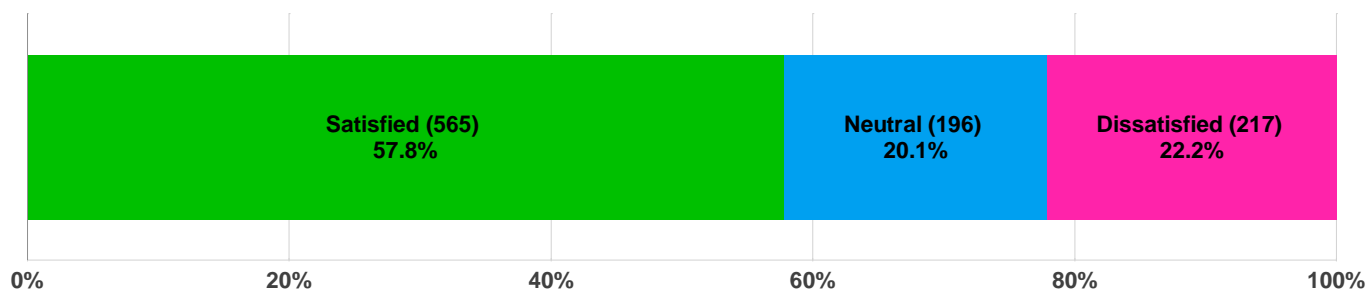
Living in Maidstone

Local area Satisfaction

Survey respondents were asked: 'How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your local area as a place to live?' and given a five-point scale from 'very satisfied' to 'very dissatisfied'. There was a total of 978 respondents.

The most common response was 'fairly satisfied' with 438 answering this way.

In the last Budget Survey, undertaken in Autumn 2021, 51.0% of respondents answered positively. This has increased by 6.8 percentage points to 57.8% for the current year and demonstrates an overall increase in resident's satisfaction with Maidstone as a place to live.



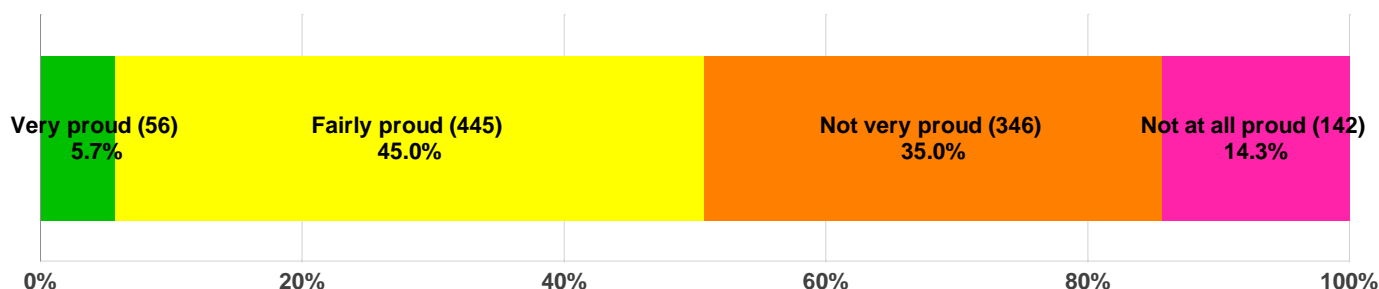
Demographic Differences

- Female respondents were significantly more satisfied with their local area as a place to live with 63.9% answering positively compared to 52.5% of male respondents answering the same.
- Respondents who have lived at their current address for more than ten years had lower proportions answering positively.

Pride in Maidstone Borough

The survey asked respondents: 'How proud are you of Maidstone Borough?', a total of 988 responded to this question.

Overall, 50.7% said they were either 'very proud' or 'fairly proud' of Maidstone Borough. The most common response was 'fairly proud' with 445 answering this way. In the last Budget Survey, undertaken in Autumn 2021, 50.4% of respondents answered positively. The change in the proportion responding positively compared to last year (0.3%) is considered negligible.



Demographic Differences

- Economically active respondents had a significantly greater proportion that answered positively with 54.8% answering this way compared to 43.2% of economically inactive respondents.
- Respondents with a disability had a significantly greater proportion that answered negatively with 61.8% answering this way compared to 46.2% of respondents without a disability.

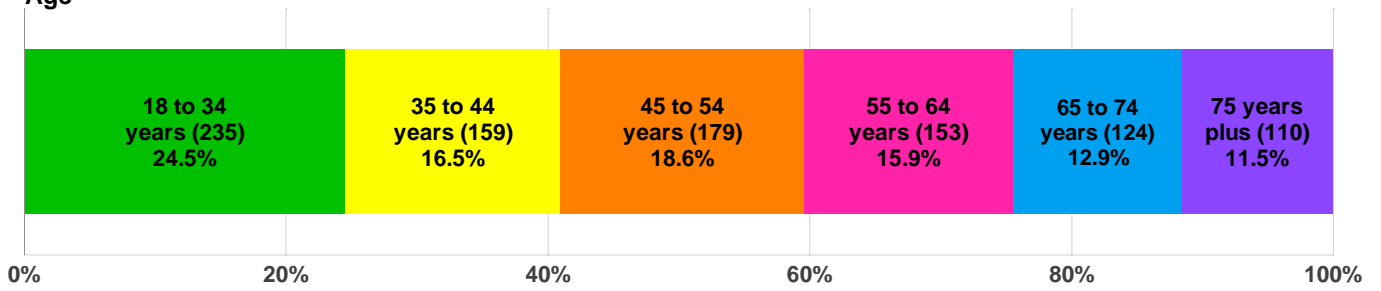
Budget Comments

Respondents to the survey were given the opportunity to make additional comments about the Council's budget and the funding of services. A total of 371 comments were received. These comments have been grouped into themes, with some comments containing multiple themes. The table below provides a summary of the comments for each of the top ten themes identified.

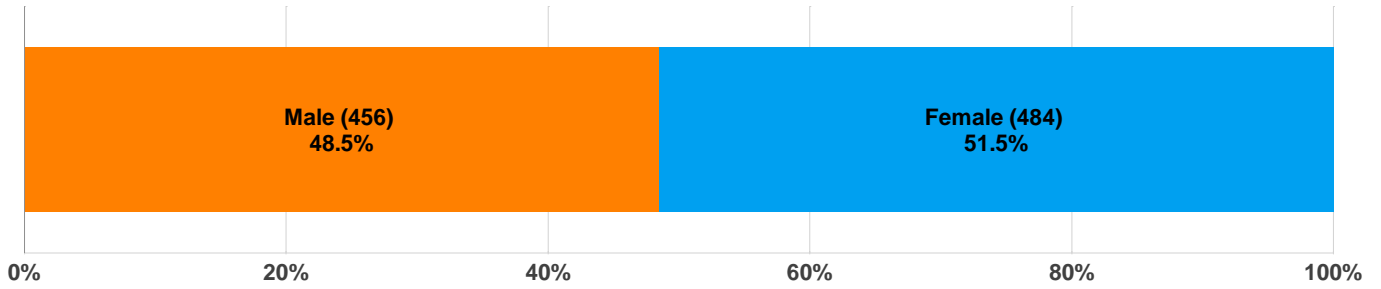
Theme	No.	Summary
Planning & Development (inc. infrastructure)	92	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stop building new homes. • No infrastructure improvements to support growth. • Too much green space disappearing to new housing.
Roads & Traffic	66	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conditions of roads. • Difficulty in getting from A to B due to congestion. • Speeding lorries, particularly in the rural communities.
VFM & Management Efficiencies	60	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not feel there is value for money from the amount of Council Tax paid (rural locations and suspension of services mentioned) • Spend money more wisely. • Don't spend money on 'vanity' projects. • Better contracts for services. • Cut managers and/or their salaries.
Crime, Safety & ASB	51	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concerns about levels of ASB. • Request for more CCTV. • Requests for more visible policing.
Town centre	47	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comments that the Town centre was shabby, with empty shops and little to attract people. • Several mentioned feeling unsafe in the Town Centre. • Desire to see improvements in the Town Centre.
Cleanliness	46	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statements that cleanliness has deteriorated. • Increased litter and graffiti. • Requests for more litter bins.
The Environment & Waste Services	43	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complaints about disruption to waste collections. • Concerns about pollution (many in reference to traffic). • Perception that the Council is anti-nature.
Parking & Public Transport	40	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comments about new developments without parking facilities. • Suggestions of cheaper or free town centre parking. • Disappointment about the removal of Park & Ride service. • Comments about inadequacy bus services.
Inward migration	24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comments about people moving to the Borough from other areas (many mentioned London boroughs moving their tenants to Maidstone) and the impact of population increase on local services.
Deliver Essentials & Maintain Services & Support the Vulnerable	20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on the essentials. • Ensure support is vulnerable for most vulnerable. • Maintain current services.
Attracting visitors & inward investment	19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring support for local businesses. • Making Maidstone a place where people want to invest.

Demographics

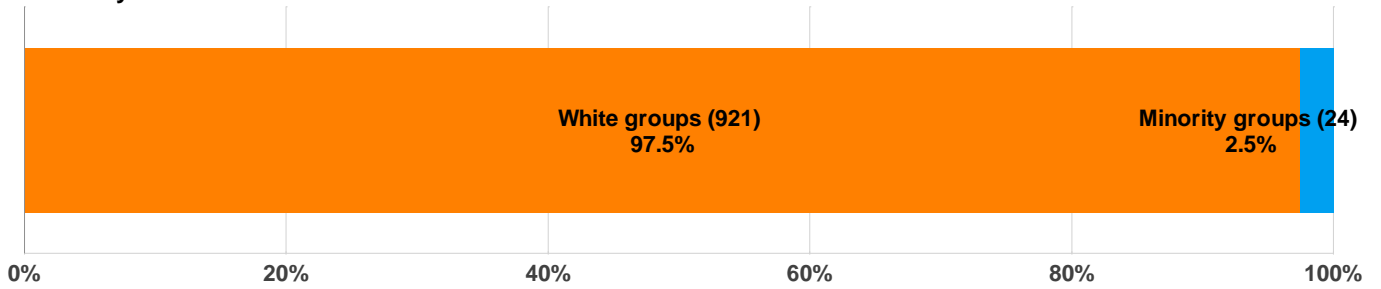
Age



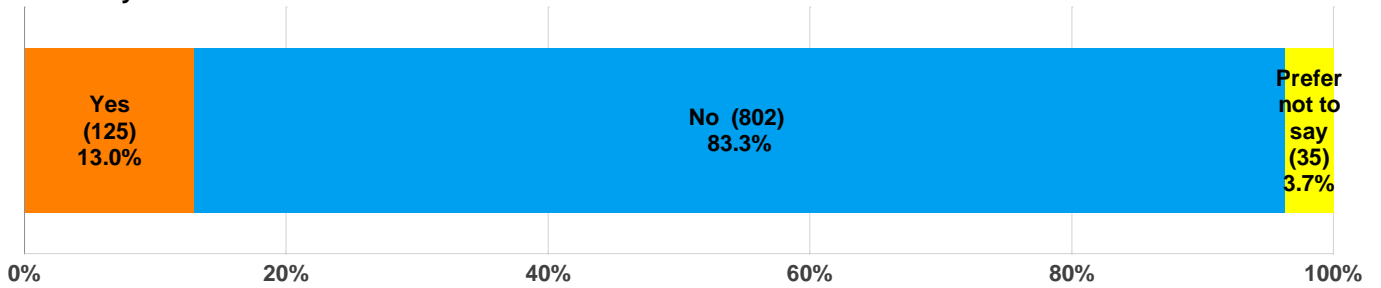
Gender



Ethnicity



Disability



How long have you lived at your present address?

