

South Ayrshire Council

Budget Survey 2025-26

1. Background

1.1 The Council conducted a budget survey during December 2024 and January 2025 (closing date 31 Jan) to gather public input on financial priorities, service charges, and potential cost-saving measures. A total of 703 responses were received. Appendix 1 provides a note of the questions asked within the survey. Two questions allowed free text and suggestions to be made (questions 6 and 9). The thematic analysis of the responses identified key areas of concern and recommendations from residents which is provided in section 2 below.

2. Considerations

2.1 Potential Service Charges

- **Environmental and Waste Management Services:** Many respondents suggested introducing or increasing charges for services such as grass cutting, additional bin collections, recycling centre visits, and special uplifts for large waste items.
- **Leisure, Tourism, and Cultural Services:** There were recommendations to introduce or increase charges for golf courses, sports facilities, museums, and tourism-related fees, including parking at tourist sites and entry fees for major events like the Ayr Show.
- **Social and Welfare Services:** Suggestions included means-testing free school meals and transport, introducing charges for certain care services, and limiting free bus passes to those in financial need.
- **Business and Economic Contributions:** Respondents advocated for higher business rates for landlords and short-term rentals, fees for council-supported training, and penalties for neglected properties.

2.2 Survey Results

- **Preference on Fees vs. Service Reduction:**
 - 16.9% of respondents preferred an increase in fees and charges rather than reductions in services.
 - 41.8% favoured reductions in service provision over increased charges.
 - 41.3% favoured a combination of both.
- **Council Tax Considerations:** The survey highlighted that council tax contributes 20% of income for public services.
 - 22% of respondents were willing to accept a higher-than-normal increase to maintain services, while 71% opposed it. 7% were not sure.
- **Above-Inflation Fee Increases:** Residents indicated a willingness to pay increased fees for:
 - Leisure activities such as swimming and golf (38% in favour).

- Neighbourhood services like special uplifts and bereavement services (20% in favour).
- Parking charges (29% in favour).
- School meals (14% in favour).
- **New Charges Introduction:**
 - 56% of respondents supported introducing new charges, such as a visitor levy, to help prevent service cuts.
 - 44% opposed new charges.
- **Service Reductions:** Respondents were asked which services, if any, they would be willing to see reduced:
 - 22% said Enabling Services.
 - 19% said Planning and Development.
 - 18% said Economy and Regeneration.
 - 16% said thriving communities.
 - 13% said Destination South Ayrshire
 - 4% said Neighbourhood services.
 - 3% said Education.
 - 2% said Other.
 - 2% said HSCP.
 - 1% said Roads.
- **Digital Services vs. Face-to-Face Interaction:**
 - 67% of respondents indicated they would be willing to use more online services to reduce costs associated with in-person customer interactions at Council buildings.
 - 33% preferred maintaining face-to-face services despite higher costs.

2.3 Cost-Saving Measures

- **Reducing Management and Bureaucracy:** There is a strong call to reduce the number of senior and middle management positions, eliminate redundant roles, and conduct salary reviews.
- **Better Utilisation of Council Assets:** Respondents suggest selling or leasing unused buildings, increasing charges for council facilities, and seeking commercial partnerships to generate revenue.
- **Cutting Non-Essential Spending:** Many believe funds should not be allocated to "vanity projects" like public sculptures or underused redevelopments.
- **Enhancing Efficiency in Service Delivery:** Proposals include merging administrative functions with neighbouring councils, digital transformation to cut costs, and stricter enforcement of fines and fees.

- **Encouraging Community Engagement:** Suggestions include volunteer programs for park maintenance, increasing business responsibility for litter control, and enhancing public involvement in budget decisions.

Date: February 2025

Appendix 1

Question 1

Would you rather see an increase in fees & charges for services you receive or a reduction in services you receive?

Question 2

Council tax is a significant source of income for the Council and contributes 20% of the income needed to provide local public services. Would you be prepared to accept a higher-than-normal increase

Question 3

Which services would you be prepared to pay above inflation increases in fees and charges to restrict service reductions or cuts?

- Leisure charges such as swimming, golf etc
- Neighbourhood service charges such as special uplifts or bereavement service charges
- Parking charges
- School meals

Question 4

Would you be prepared to accept the introduction of new charges to restrict service reductions or cuts e.g. visitor levy charges?

Question 5

Are there any services you think the Council should charge for to help restrict service cuts?

Question 6

If 'Yes' to question 5 which type of service? (Free text for suggestions)

Question 7

Which services would you be prepared to accept service reductions in?

Options to select: Enabling services, Planning and Development, Economy and Regeneration, Thriving Communities, Destination South Ayrshire, Neighbourhood services, Education, HSCP, Roads.

Question 8

Would you be prepared to use more on-line services rather than face to face in Council buildings thereby reducing front facing public interaction which is more costly than on-line provision?

Question 9

What else do you think the Council should or could do to reduce cost or increase income? (Free text for suggestions)