

ANGUS COUNCIL – 19 DECEMBER 2024

**2025/26 BUDGET CONSULTATION – RESULTS OF STAGE 1 CONSULTATION AND
PROPOSED CONTENT FOR STAGE 2 CONSULTATION**

REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

ABSTRACT

This report advises members of the results from the first stage of the Council's 2025/26 Plans and Budgets Consultation and seeks approval for the second stage on the basis set out in the report. The report also provides a brief update on the progress of the 2025/26 budget setting process.

1. ALIGNMENT TO THE COUNCIL PLAN AND COUNCIL POLICIES

- 1.1 This report is relevant to all of the priorities set out in the Council Plan.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Council:

- a) notes the results from Stage 1 of the Council's 2025/26 Budget Consultation as set out in Appendices A1 and A2 and that regard will need to be had to this feedback as the Council finalises its 2025/26 Plans and Budgets;
- b) approves the proposals for Stage 2 of the 2025/26 Budget Consultation as set out in Appendix B noting that minor refinements may be needed for the final version published; and
- c) notes the progress on the 2025/26 budget setting process shown in Appendix C.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Over the years the Council has adopted a range of approaches for communication, consultation and engagement on its plans and budgets. These have ranged from communication only to detailed consultation about specific budget options using statistical techniques and online tools together with public engagement events.
- 3.2 Through Report 271/24 members agreed to adopt a 2 stage approach to consultation for the 2025/26 plans and budget setting process.

4. STAGE 1 – CONSULTATION RESULTS

- 4.1 Consultation Stage 1 was a circa four week consultation which ran from 19 September to 14 October 2024 and sought views on the existing priorities and actions in the Angus Council Plan. The current priorities and actions in the Council Plan were agreed more than two years ago, so seeking public views on whether these are the activities people want the Council to continue to focus on and the relative priority of each of these was seen as a valuable first step as we work towards setting the 2025/26 Budget. A copy of the consultation questions is attached as Appendix 1 for ease of reference.

4.2 The consultation was promoted via the following channels:

- **Traditional media**

In print (and online) by The Courier: [26 September 2024](#)

- **Social media**

This produced overwhelmingly the highest level of response to the 37 posts which were issued over the council's social media channels over the period of the engagement from 16 September – 14 October:

- Total impressions 62,005
- Engagements 3,196 (engagement rate per impression 5.2%)
- Post link clicks 373

	Published Posts	Total Impressions	Average Reach Per Post
Cross-Network Totals	37	62,005	2,839.25
X	9	929	N/A
Facebook	10	57,547	5,488.8
Instagram	10	1,955	189.7
LinkedIn	8	1,574	N/A

- **Schools**

An email was issued twice to Headteachers asking them to share with their young people directly and encourage/support them to complete. It was also included in the schools eNewsletter which is issued to subscribers.

- **Housing**

Housing teams were sent the consultation link to share with tenants.

- **Community councils**

All community councils were emailed the link to Engage Angus, made aware of the availability of paper copies and were sent posters for them to promote the consultation in their meetings and on their notice boards.

- **Libraries**

Paper copies were delivered to all libraries including the mobile ones. Posters were also sent out for prominent display within libraries. Librarians were also asked to assist people to complete online. Two paper copies were returned from libraries.

- **Communities' teams**

Staff working on the ground were given the consultation link and asked to share paper copies if required or assist people to complete online.

4.3 Attached as Appendix A1 is a report from the Engage Angus system providing details of the consultation results in terms of who took part and the choices they made. Summary highlights are:-

Highlights:

Total visits	1600
Aware visitors	1407
Informed visitors	954
Engaged visitors	429
Submitted surveys	432

Demographic Information About People Responding

0-18	33 (10.2%)
19-24	2 (0.6%)
25-39	40 (12.3%)
40-49	69 (21.2%)
50-64	133 (40.9%)
65+	44 (13.5%)
Prefer not to say	4 (1.2%)

Disability Information

No	252 (77.5%)
Yes	60 (18.5%)
Prefer not to say	13 (4.0%)

Ethnicity Information

White Scottish	276 (85.7%)
White Other British	30 (9.3%)
Other White	10 (3.1%)
Gypsy/Traveller	2 (0.6%)
Polish	2 (0.6%)
Showperson	1 (0.3%)
Irish	1 (0.3%)

Overall Survey Results

- 4.4 Appendix A1 also shows the results from the survey questions asked. The majority of respondents scored the priorities and actions as either important or very important, indicating continued relevance of the Council Plan's priorities for respondents, which is encouraging. However, members may also note that Council Plan actions to tackle climate change, move towards Net Zero and to encourage active travel received the highest percentage of "not at all important" and "low importance" ratings which suggests that respondents are less supportive of the Council Plan actions on these aspects. Of note were the following:
- In Care for the Economy, encouraging and investing in jobs across Angus which pay fairly and treat employees equally and with respect was scored highly as "very important" with 255 (59%) of responses.
 - In Care for People, providing the best start in life for children was the highest "very important" score with 272 (63%) of responses.
 - In Caring for Place, actions towards reducing climate change were rated as "not at all important" or of "low importance" by 94 (22%) respondents.

Survey Comments

- 4.5 Appendix A2 includes the comments that were made in the free text responses in the survey. These are split into 6 separate sub-sections (Appendices A2a to A2f). Comments on matters which are not part of the Council's duties or responsibilities have been deleted as not being relevant to members' consideration of the consultation results. This includes repeated comments against the planned Kintore to Tealing power line where the Council's role is that of statutory consultee rather than decision-maker. Some comments have been deleted in full or part where offensive language was used.
- 4.6 Overall the Stage 1 consultation had greater engagement than any previous budget engagements. The demographic profile was also more diverse, with a significant increase in younger people sharing their views. While the number of responses overall remain limited, the results indicate broad support among respondents for the priorities and actions identified in the Council Plan.
- 4.7 Consistent themes for the Caring for the Economy priorities and actions were:
- Concern about the future and state of Angus high streets, with a desire to support local shops or make better use of vacant shops, such as using them for homes. There was some confusion around the Council's role, with some responses reflecting a belief that the Council has control over what shops may or may not open on the high streets which, members will appreciate, is not the case.

- There was broad support for local companies, suppliers and jobs, particularly for young people, with several comments reflecting the role of education in providing a suitable workforce for the future and supporting young people into careers locally. Also the role of the Council in using, and increasing the use of, local suppliers in procurement of goods and services was commented on.
 - Responses offered polarised views around the importance and desirability of investment in sustainable energy with some very supportive of increasing Angus' role in this industry while others were opposed to this.
- 4.8 Consistent themes for the Caring for People priorities and actions were:
- Some confusion around the Council's role in delivering physical and health services with a number of comments around services provided by the NHS rather than the Council.
 - Importance of a good start for children at home and in educational settings, and support for the elderly including financial and practical support.
 - The role of the environment to improve mental and physical health, and a desire for the Council to nurture parks and other open spaces, libraries, good local jobs, etc. Also comments on the role of the individual in managing and taking responsibility for their own health and wellbeing without the need for benefits or intervention was referenced.
 - Views that there is a need for equality in services and a recognition that staffing and funding for caring has diminished.
- 4.9 Consistent themes for the Caring for Place priorities and actions were:
- Connectivity – mobile networks, high speed and reliable Broadband and good WiFi coverage being essential to support education, access to council services and work across Angus, particularly in rural areas.
 - Other infrastructure – roads, pavements and public transport were all commented on, in particular the view that rural bus services and roads should be maintained.
 - There was a tension between support for the preservation of the rural countryside and wildlife, and more action against flooding and erosion, with some resistance to Net Zero and low carbon initiatives indicated. This may suggest that some members of the public do not yet connect the need to reduce damage caused by climate change, with actions taken in support of climate change mitigation.
- 4.10 Council is being asked to note the results from Stage 1 of the Council's 2025/26 Budget Consultation as set out in Appendices A1 and A2 and that regard will need to be had to this feedback as the Council finalises its 2025/26 Plans and Budgets.

5. STAGE 2 CONSULTATION PROPOSALS

- 5.1 The initial intention had been for Stage 2 to be a six week consultation over December/January seeking views on specific budget proposals and options. However following review and an update to timescales it is now proposed to run a four week consultation starting in early January 2025.
- 5.2 Appendix B contains the proposed content for the Stage 2 consultation. This is broken into two sections as follows:-
- Part 1 – Background Information – providing contextual information about where the Council gets its income from, where this money is spent, information on the projected budget funding gap for 2025/26 and details of the broad options the Council has to consider to address that gap.
 - Part 2 – Funding Shortfall Survey – seeking the public's views on how the Council should address the funding gap using a combination of reductions in expenditure, increases in Council Tax, increases in fees and charges and use of Council uncommitted reserves.

- 5.3 An initial draft of the content of the Stage 2 consultation was discussed by the Policy and Budget Strategy Group (PBSG) meeting on 22 November 2024 and a number of alterations and refinements have been made based on the PBSG feedback.
- 5.4 Council is being asked to approve the content of Appendix B as the basis for Stage 2 of the 2025/26 Plans & Budgets consultation. It is possible some minor refinements may be needed for the final published version so members are also asked to note this possibility.
- 5.5 The intention is to launch the second stage of consultation in week commencing 6 January 2025 and as with Stage 1 this will be made available in paper form in libraries as well as through the Engage Angus online platform. The Stage 2 consultation will also be widely promoted using the same approach as was adopted for Stage 1 as described earlier in this report.

6. 2025/26 BUDGET SETTING PROGRESS

- 6.1 The approach and timetable for the preparation of the 2025/26 budget was approved by the Policy and Resources Committee in September (Report 242/24 refers). Attached as Appendix C is a brief update on progress achieved so far. The budget preparation process is on track at this point in time but significant challenges remain to address a projected funding gap of £9.5m for next year.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no additional financial implications arising from the recommendations in this report. Existing staff and systems will be used to deliver the Stage 2 consultation. Staff capacity for this work is however limited, so it will be necessary to ensure that the time committed to it is proportionate to the benefit and impact it will have.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 8.1 The following risks from the Corporate Risk Register are relevant to this report:-

- Financial Sustainability
- Transforming for the Future

9. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no direct environmental implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

10. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT, HUMAN RIGHTS AND FAIRER SCOTLAND DUTY

- 10.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out and is attached as Appendix D.

11. CHILDRENS RIGHTS AND WELLBEING IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 11.1 The Council is required to balance its budget as part of its duty under section 95 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 to make arrangements for the proper administration of its financial affairs.
- 11.2 Section 6 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 ("the UNCRC Act") places a duty on the Council not to act in a manner which is incompatible with UNCRC requirements when exercising a "relevant function". A "relevant function" is a duty created by the Scottish Parliament and does not extend to devolved functions created by legislation of the UK Parliament. The Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 is a UK Act of Parliament and, as such, the UNCRC compatibility duty does not directly apply to the duty implied by section 95 to set a balanced budget. However, in setting its budget there may be indirect impact on functions of the Council conferred by Scottish Acts of Parliament to which the UNCRC compatibility duty applies.

- 11.3 A Childrens Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment has been carried out within the EIA, including consideration of the four general principles of the Convention: non-discrimination (Article 2); best interests of the child (Article 3); right to life, survival and development (Article 6) and right to be heard in decision making (Article 12).

12. CONSULTATION

- 12.1 The Chief Executive and Director of Legal, Governance and Change have been consulted on this report. The Stage 2 proposals were also the subject of discussion at the Policy & Budget Strategy Group meeting on 22 November 2024.

NOTE: No background papers, as detailed by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 were relied on in preparing this report.

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List of Appendices

Appendix 1 – copy of original consultation / questionnaire

Appendices A1 and A2 – 2025/26 Plans and Budgets Consultation Stage 1 Results

Appendix B – Budget Consultation Stage 2 – Proposed Content

Appendix C – 2025/26 Budget Progress Update

Appendix D – Equalities Impact Assessment