

Balancing our budget 2026/27 – General survey

Consultation Summary Report

Why we consulted?

Councils across the country continue to face unprecedented financial pressures, and West Berkshire Council is no exception. The council is responding to increasing demands in adults' and children's social care services supporting our most vulnerable residents, and in other areas such as homelessness and home to school transport. The increases in demand, combined with higher inflation and increasing costs, are financially impacting the council and its suppliers.

In 2026/27, we need to find £6.4 million in savings or income generation. This figure assumes that Council Tax increases by the maximum 4.99%.

To fill the remaining gap, we have a range of options available, including changing how we provide services and making internal savings, for example: re-tendering contracts for better value for money, streamlining processes, and introducing new charges or increasing existing charges for some services.

In February 2026, we will set our budget for the financial year ahead (2026/27). To help shape that process, we asked local residents, communities and other parties for their views on how we could fund and prioritise the services we provide. We are also sought their views on two specific proposals.

For more information, please visit <https://www.westberks.gov.uk/balancing-our-budget>

Approach

We published the 'Balancing our Budget' consultation on our website on Monday, 1 December 2025 with feedback requested by midday on Monday, 12 January 2026.

Respondents were directed to a central index pageⁱ, which outlined the overall background to the exercise, and provided links to our 'Balancing our Budget 2026/27' survey, as well as the individual proposals on our Consultation and Engagement Hubⁱⁱ. Feedback was then invited through an online survey, and a hardcopy made available on request.

As well as publishing the exercise on our website, we also emailed members of the West Berkshire Community Panel (around 2,500 people).

We issued a press release on Monday, 1 December 2026 and further publicised our consultations through our social media accounts and residents' e-newsletters. We also placed posters in our main offices.

Consultation Response

Number of Responses

In total, 147 responses were received.

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Summary of Main Points

93.9% of respondents identified themselves as West Berkshire residents.

The top five services prioritised by respondents were:

1. Roads and Transport
2. Education
3. Children's Social Care
4. Waste and Recycling
5. Housing and Homelessness

This is closely followed by:

6. Economic Development and Regeneration
7. Adult Social Care

The options to help protect and improve the services we provide for local people that respondents were most supportive of were:

1. Growing the Local Economy
2. Focussing more on early prevention
3. Increasing Income through Commercial Activities

The least supported option was Increasing Existing Fees and Charges.

The main areas of comment were about:

- Economic growth
- Efficiency, transparency, and financial accountability
- Fees and charges
- Governance, decision-making, and leadership
- Human Resources e.g., staffing levels, staff pay and benefits, senior management structure
- Infrastructure e.g., roads, transport, housing
- Prevention and social care
- Prioritise core and essential services, instead of “nice-to-haves”

Summary of Responses by Question

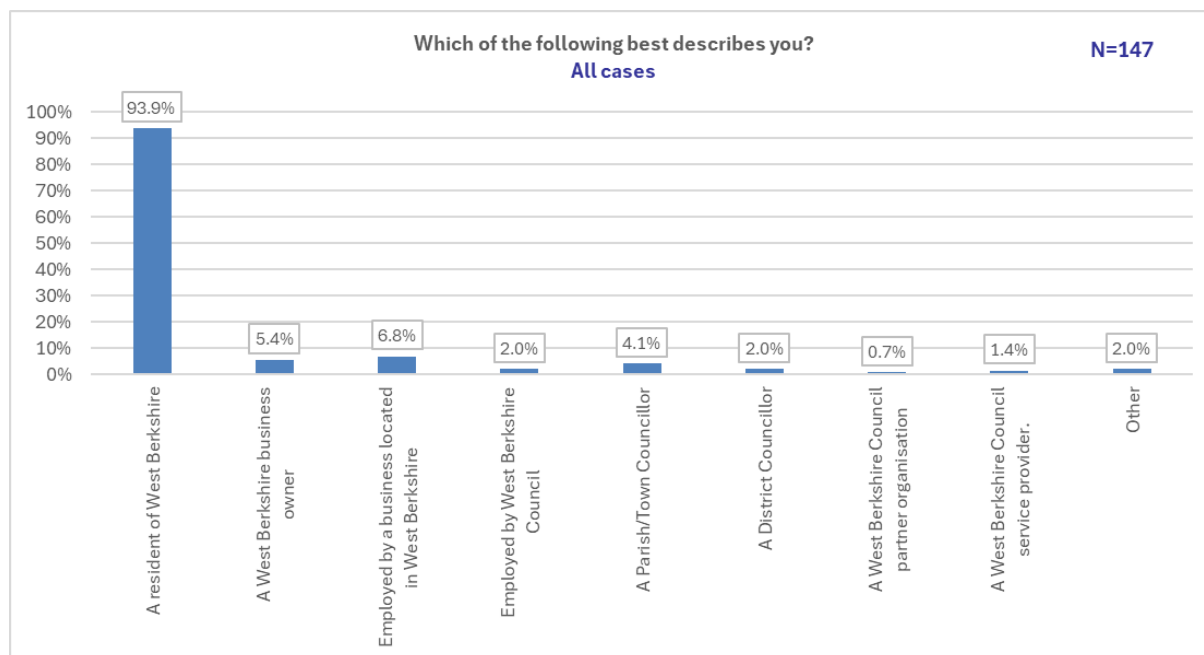
1. **Which of the following best describes you?** *(N.B % will not total 100% as respondents were able to select more than one)*

	Responses	Percent of Cases
A resident of West Berkshire	138	93.9%
A West Berkshire business owner	8	5.4%
Employed by a business located in West Berkshire	10	6.8%
Employed by West Berkshire Council	3	2.0%
A Parish/Town Councillor	6	4.1%

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	Responses	Percent of Cases
A District Councillor	3	2.0%
A West Berkshire Council partner organisation	1	0.7%
A West Berkshire Council service provider	2	1.4%
Other	3	2.0%



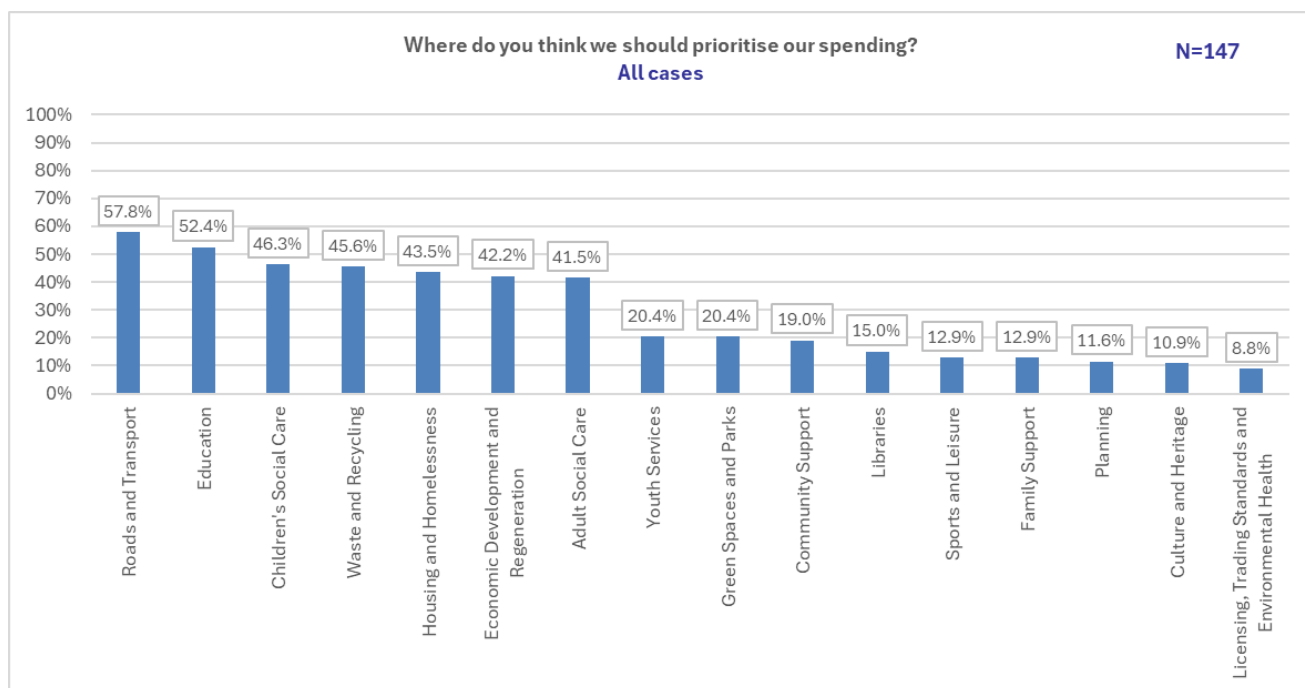
2. **Where do you think we should prioritise our spending? Please choose your top five.** (N.B % will not total 100% as respondents were able to select more than one)

	Responses	Percent of Cases
Roads and Transport	85	57.8%
Education	77	52.4%
Children's Social Care	68	46.3%
Waste and Recycling	67	45.6%
Housing and Homelessness	64	43.5%
Economic Development and Regeneration	62	42.2%
Adult Social Care	61	41.5%
Youth Services	30	20.4%
Green Spaces and Parks	30	20.4%
Community Support	28	19.0%
Libraries	22	15.0%
Sports and Leisure	19	12.9%

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	Responses	Percent of Cases
Family Support	19	12.9%
Planning	17	11.6%
Culture and Heritage	16	10.9%
Licensing, Trading Standards and Environmental Health	13	8.8%



Summary of Comments Received:

Prioritise Essential Services

- Strong support for prioritising statutory and essential services.
- Preventative services should be protected because they reduce long-term costs.
- Some feel the council should “focus on the basics” and stop or scale back non-essential activities that don’t benefit the whole community.
- Some requested that the council stop spending on Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) and other non-essential programmes.

Waste and Recycling

- Waste and recycling services are seen as essential for health, environment, and quality of life.
- Some call for a return to weekly waste collection or a reverse of the three-weekly change.
- Reuse and recycling are valued.

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Roads, Transport, and Infrastructure

- Potholes and poor road maintenance cause high costs for residents and safety risks.
- Requests for full, proper, and timely pothole repairs and resurfacing.
- Concerns about new developments increasing traffic noise and pollution e.g., Sandleford.
- 20mph schemes are not seen as a priority.
- Some feel that school transport costs are unfair and all families should pay to spread costs.

Housing, Homelessness, and Community Wellbeing and Safety

- Support for helping homeless people access safe accommodation and re-enter society.
- Affordable housing is needed for young people, workers, and older adults to prevent population decline.
- Concern about lack of activities for young people contributing to anti-social behaviour.
- Libraries valued for learning, digital access, and social connection.
- Licensing, trading standards, and environmental health keep people safe.

Financial Management and Council Spending

- Reduce internal costs e.g., councillor and staff benefits.
- Prioritise spending on residents.
- Some want more focus on increasing council income.
- Concerns that unpopular decisions may be reversed for political reasons rather than budgetary.

Sports, Leisure, and Public Health

- Investment in sports, green spaces, parks, and leisure is seen as important for community health.
- Keeping facilities free helps reduce long-term health and social care costs.
- Parks, green spaces, and leisure facilities should remain free to use and well maintained.

Economic Development and Local Business Support

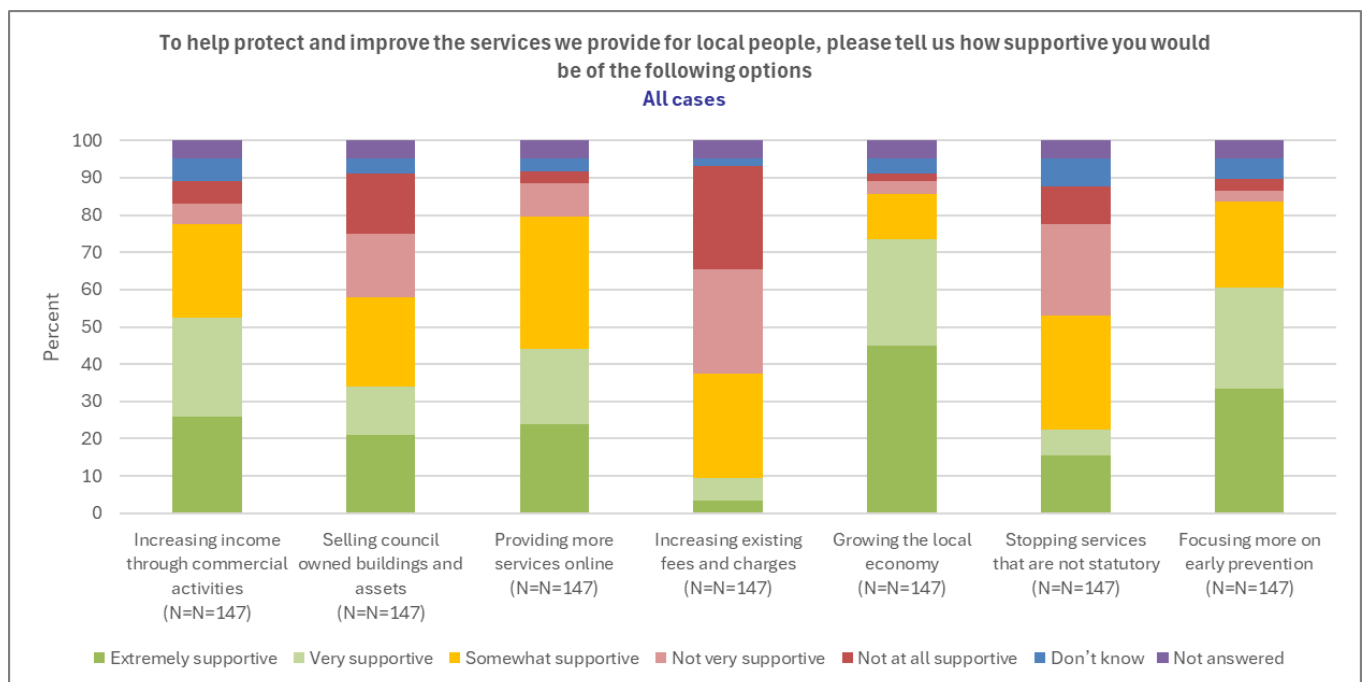
- Request for regeneration in West Berkshire to attract business.
- Prioritise services that make West Berkshire a good place to live.
- Lower commercial rents could help growth.
- Licensing, trading standards, and environmental health supports local businesses.

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3. To help protect and improve the services we provide for local people, please tell us how supportive you would be of the following options.

	Percent						
	Extremely supportive	Very supportive	Somewhat supportive	Not very supportive	Not at all supportive	Don't know	Not answered
Increasing income through commercial activities	25.9	26.5	25.2	5.4	6.1	6.1	4.8
Selling council owned buildings and assets	21.1	12.9	23.8	17.0	16.3	4.1	4.8
Providing more services online	23.8	20.4	35.4	8.8	3.4	3.4	4.8
Increasing existing fees and charges	3.4	6.1	27.9	27.9	27.9	2.0	4.8
Growing the local economy	44.9	28.6	12.2	3.4	2.0	4.1	4.8
Stopping services that are not statutory	15.6	6.8	30.6	24.5	10.2	7.5	4.8
Focusing more on early prevention	33.3	27.2	23.1	2.7	3.4	5.4	4.8



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Summary of Comments Received:

Fee and Charges

- Raising fees reduces participation and revenue, increasing costs overall.
- Fees should only rise with inflation.
- Further fee increases may provoke a backlash.
- Rising fees feel like extra taxation.
- Increase in fees and charges should be the last resort.
- Increase fees for non-essential services.
- Stop cutting services and increasing fees.

Focus on Core Services

- Focus on doing the basics well.
- Core, universal services come first e.g., waste, roads, statutory duties and education.
- Potholes should be fully repaired and roads resurfaced where needed, as safe roads are a statutory duty. Poor road maintenance creates high costs for residents and increases accident risks.
- Focus on providing core services, statutory duties, and those that add value.
- Stop spending on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.
- Challenge unsustainable statutory costs.
- Cutting non-statutory services without understanding consequences could be harmful.

Efficiency, Cost Management and Accountability

- The council should improve efficiency, not charge residents more.
- Shorten the decision-making process.
- Too much money is spent on council expenses with little accountability.
- Re-negotiate contracts and manage suppliers better.
- Be proactive, not reactive.
- Management structure is top-heavy, and these posts should be cut before frontline services are impacted.

Asset Management

- Assets create wealth. Selling them doesn't.
- Selling assets is short-term gain and only moves the problem down the road.
- Prefer using or renting buildings, not selling assets.
- Repurpose or sell underused council-owned buildings for income generation.
- Sell assets that are expensive to maintain (evaluate cost vs value/need).
- Sell council owned assets for market value.
- Sell office space and shift staff to remote-working.

Economic Growth and Income Generation

- Boosting the local economy is the best way to raise revenue without increasing costs for taxpayers.
- Grow the number of local businesses but don't increase tax on existing ones.
- Increase income from commercial activities but be mindful of risks.

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- Explore commercial income, using community focus groups for feedback.
- Support economic growth with incentives for start-ups.

Digital and Operational Changes

- Move most services online with a digital-first approach, supported by community help.
- Keep face-to-face services because many struggle with online access.
- Some online shifts can save money, but alternatives must remain.

Prevention and Social Care

- Early prevention can save money if benefits are reliable.
- Prevention should be evidence-based, with outcomes clearly measured.
- Early prevention work is important but must not reduce support for people with high needs.
- Voluntary groups should be part-funded to help meet social care needs.
- Challenge legal requirements for social care.

Community and Public Benefit

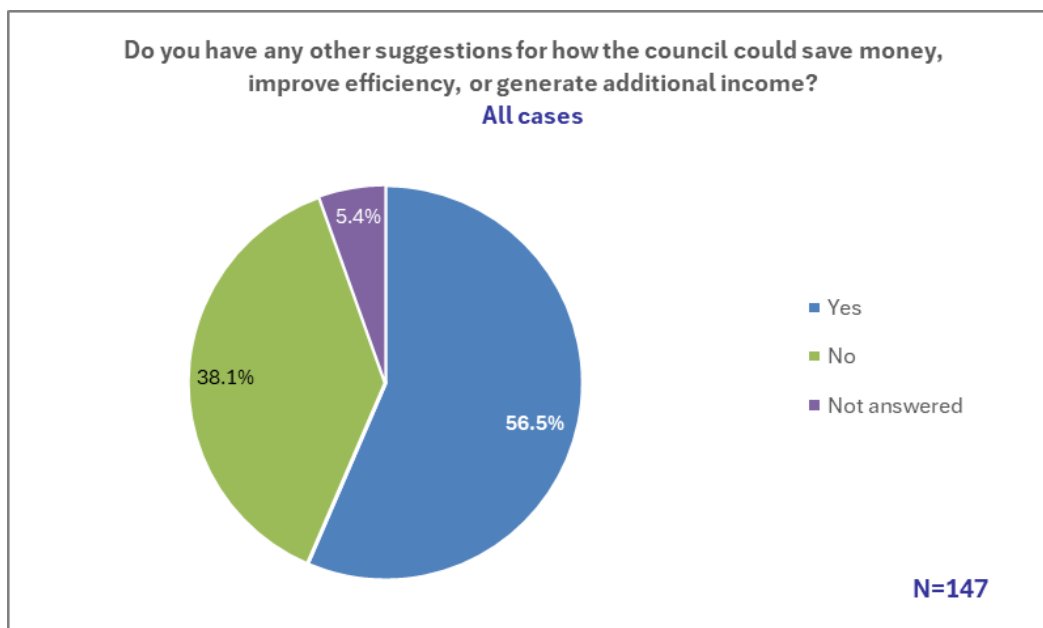
- Public services should prioritise community benefit, not operate like a business.
- Invest more in free-to-use sports, leisure, parks, and green spaces to boost health and cut future health and social care costs.
- Charging sports clubs is short-sighted and delivers little financial benefit.

4. Do you have any other suggestions for how the council could save money, improve efficiency, or generate additional income?

	Frequency	Percent (All cases)	Percent (Responses only)
Yes	83	56.5	59.7
No	56	38.1	40.3
Total	139	94.6	100.0
Not answered	8	5.4	
Total	147	100.0	

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5. What are your suggestions for how the council could save money, improve efficiency, or generate additional income?

Summary of Comments Received:

Efficiency, Cost Management and Accountability

- Implement stricter financial diligence and accountability.
- Outsource or use in-house services based on cost-effectiveness.
- Cut council expenses instead of reducing public services.
- Review all services for necessity, effectiveness, and value for money.
- Review existing contracts to decrease costs.
- Hold contractors accountable.
- Reduce demand from service users rather than cut provider payments
- Look at best practice.
- Consultants may be needed to review spending.

Fees, Income Generation and Taxation

- Stop increasing fees whilst reducing services
- Raising fees reduces participation and revenue, increasing costs overall.
- Increase Council Tax for higher bands or wealthy households.
- Revalue Council Tax bands where properties that have been extended.
- Explore sponsorships and partnerships with local businesses.
- Ensure council owned properties are making a profit
- Consider commercial ventures managed by experienced professionals.
- Charge for certain services, e.g., libraries, parking for bigger vehicles, soil-improver and community events.
- Increase developers' contribution.
- Charge staff for using the Station Car Park.
- Sell all WBC property.

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Service Prioritisation

- Focus on essential services e.g., road maintenance, waste collection, social care for those most in need.
- Scrap all net-zero projects.
- Reduce/stop spending on non-essential projects e.g., pedestrianisation, peace park, cycle lanes, 20mph zones, and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
- Public services should prioritise community benefit.

Infrastructure

- Prioritise road repairs and pothole fixes over cosmetic changes and traffic schemes.
- Scrap or limit 20mph schemes unless supported by evidence.
- Ensure infrastructure is in place before approving new developments.
- Improve efficiency in waste and recycling collection e.g., larger bins, optimised schedules.
- Reduce recycling collection to 3-weekly (provide bigger bins).
- Reinstate 2 weekly bin/recycling collection or provide refund for reduced service.
- Make the tip accessible for all without booking.
- Hold developers to account and require affordable housing and adequate infrastructure.
- Reduce cost of Home to School Transport.

Community Engagement and Volunteering

- Increase the use of volunteers.
- Encourage retired residents and people receiving benefits to volunteer to support services.
- Promote community involvement in environmental maintenance.
- Seek sponsorship and donations from local businesses and the community.

Staffing

- Merge departments where functions overlap.
- Introduce performance-related pay.
- Stop working from home.
- Freeze or reduce high-level salaries.
- Review and restructure management to eliminate unnecessary layers.
- Review pension schemes.
- Use qualified, experienced professionals to manage commercial ventures.
- Reduce agency spending.
- Invest in council staff and resources to avoid increasing cost of outsourcing.
- Reduce holiday allowance.

Policy, Governance and Decision-making

- Reduce number of councillors and meetings.
- Freeze or reduce councillor allowances.
- Lobby central government for more funding and policy flexibility.

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- Consider joining larger unitary authorities for economies of scale.
- Be transparent with residents and back policy changes.
- Councillors should work together, not along party lines.
- Quicker decision-making.
- Close Parish/Town councils.

Prevention, Social Care and Benefits

- Tighten controls on benefit fraud and review care packages regularly.
- Focus social care spending on those that really need it.
- Provide childcare support for low-income families to enable work.
- Explore voucher systems for essentials instead of cash benefits.
- Focus on preventive services to reduce long-term costs e.g., health, social care, education.

Economic Development

- Attract businesses to the area by reducing business rates.
- Attract young people to the area.
- Encourage big companies to contribute more to local communities.
- Promote regeneration through reduced parking charges and improved town centres.
- Implement a district village growth policy.

6. Do you have any further comments?

Summary of Comments Received:

Fee and Charges

- Raising fees for services e.g., sports, leisure, parking, bins, is seen as counterproductive as it reduces participation, lowers revenue, and increases long-term costs.
- Improve efficiency instead of charging more.
- Don't increase parking charges and Council Tax.
- Invest more in free-to-use sports, leisure, parks, and green spaces to boost health and cut future health and social care costs.

Efficiency, Transparency, and Financial Accountability

- Better financial management, transparency and efficiency.
- Criticism of wasteful spending on projects e.g., Faraday Road, Victoria Park café, and high social care costs.
- Council is perceived as being poorly managed.
- Look for opportunities to improve efficiency, modernise services.
- Work with voluntary groups and neighbouring authorities for efficiency.
- Stop borrowing

Focus on Core Services

- Prioritise essential statutory services e.g., roads, waste, social care.
- Road maintenance and pothole repairs are seen as critical statutory duties.

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- Protect frontline services and ensure fairness across the district.

Community Focused Approach

- Public services should prioritise community benefit, not operate like businesses.
- Equal distribution of spending across rural and urban areas.
- Engage residents meaningfully in consultations e.g., listen to consultation responses the first time when decision-making.
- Hold consultation meetings outside normal working hours.

Preventative and Long-Term Value

- Focus on prevention and early intervention, especially in education and mental health.
- Fund EHCPs promptly, expand school nurture units, and recruit newly qualified teachers to reduce costs.

Staffing

- Reduce staff costs, including pensions.
- Stop inflation-busting salary increases.

Climate, Net Zero and Waste

- Questions about value for money on solar farms and climate projects.
- Reduce staffing for Net Zero initiatives.
- Charge for bigger bins.
- Waste collection should be simplified.
- Bring back fortnightly waste collections.

Economic Growth

- Reduce business rates and parking charges to attract shoppers and businesses.
- Make West Berkshire attractive for young people.

Governance, Decision-making and Leadership

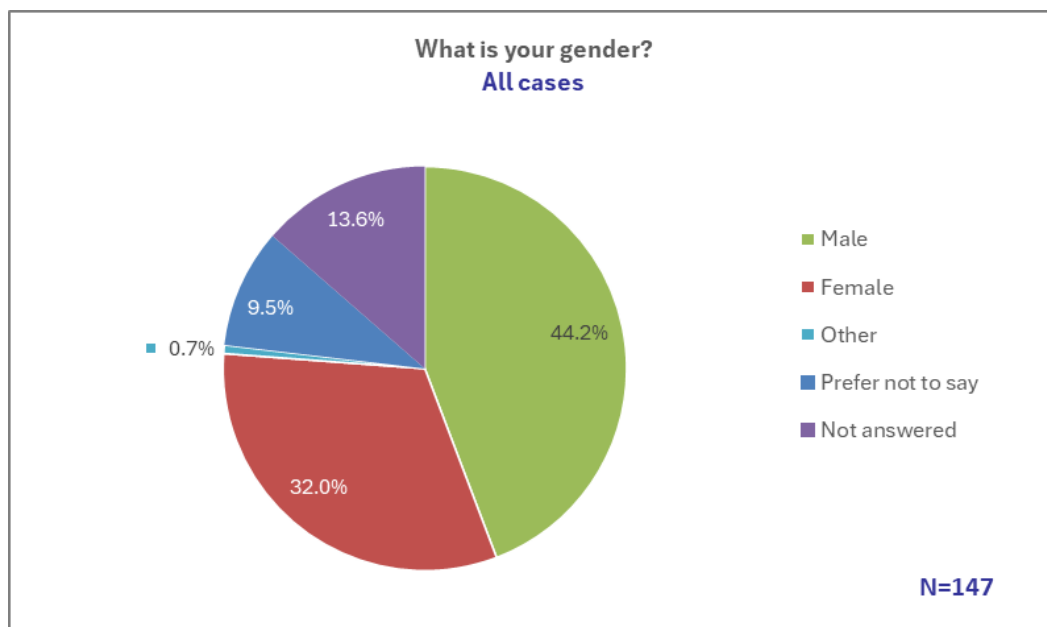
- Ensure leaders have strong financial skills and can make tough decisions.
- Abolish Parish/Town councils.
- Only consult when the decision can be affected.
- Cut councillor expenses
- Transparency and fairness in decision-making.
- Listen to consultation responses for the first time when making decisions.

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7. What is your gender? (Optional)

	Frequency	Percent (All cases)	Percent (Responses only)
Male	65	44.2	51.2
Female	47	32.0	37.0
Other	1	0.7	0.8
Prefer not to say	14	9.5	11.0
Total	127	86.4	100.0
Not answered	20	13.6	
Total	147	100.0	



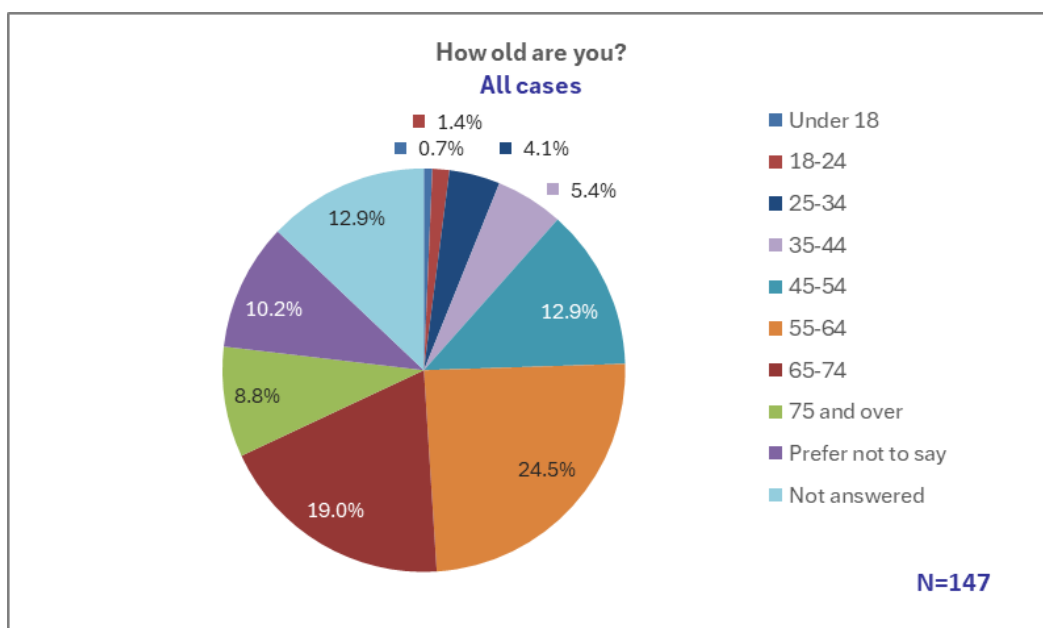
8. How old are you? (Optional)

	Frequency	Percent (All cases)	Percent (Responses only)
Under 18	1	0.7	0.8
18-24	2	1.4	1.6
25-34	6	4.1	4.7
35-44	8	5.4	6.3
45-54	19	12.9	14.8
55-64	36	24.5	28.1
65-74	28	19.0	21.9
75 and over	13	8.8	10.2
Prefer not to say	15	10.2	11.7

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	Frequency	Percent (All cases)	Percent (Responses only)
Total	128	87.1	100.0
Not answered	19	12.9	
Total	147	100.0	



9. Please tell us your postcode, excluding the last two letters, e.g. RG14 5

Responses were received from the following areas:

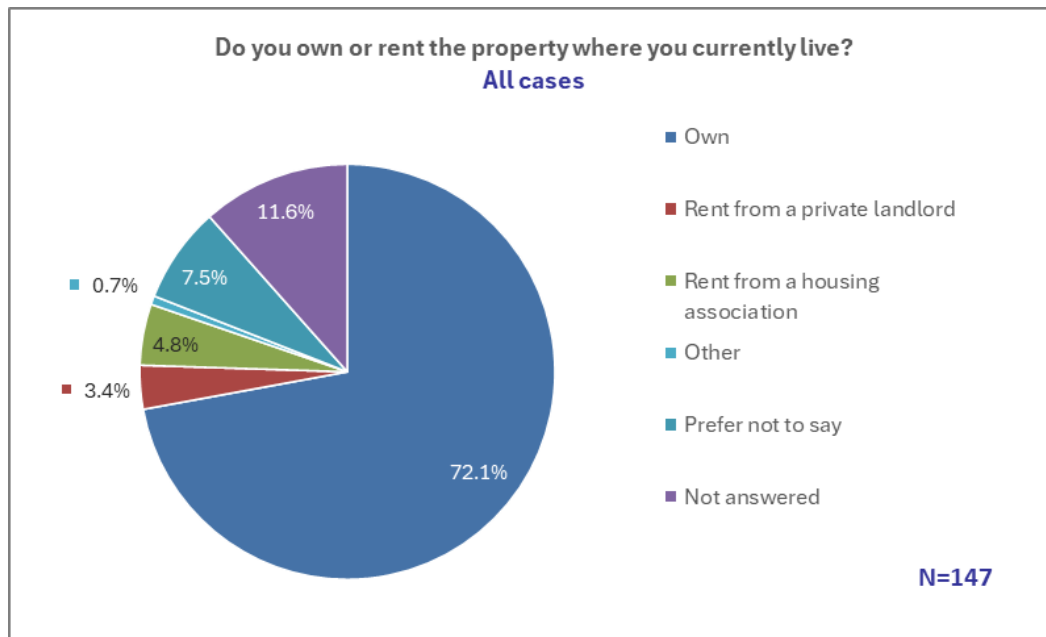
- RG8
- RG7
- RG31
- RG30
- RG20
- RG19
- RG18
- RG17
- RG15
- RG14

10. Do you own or rent the property where you currently live?

	Frequency	Percent (All cases)	Percent (Responses only)
Own	106	72.1	81.5
Rent from a private landlord	5	3.4	3.8
Rent from a housing association	7	4.8	5.4
Other	1	0.7	0.8
Prefer not to say	11	7.5	8.5
Total	130	88.4	100.0
Not answered	17	11.6	
Total	147	100.0	

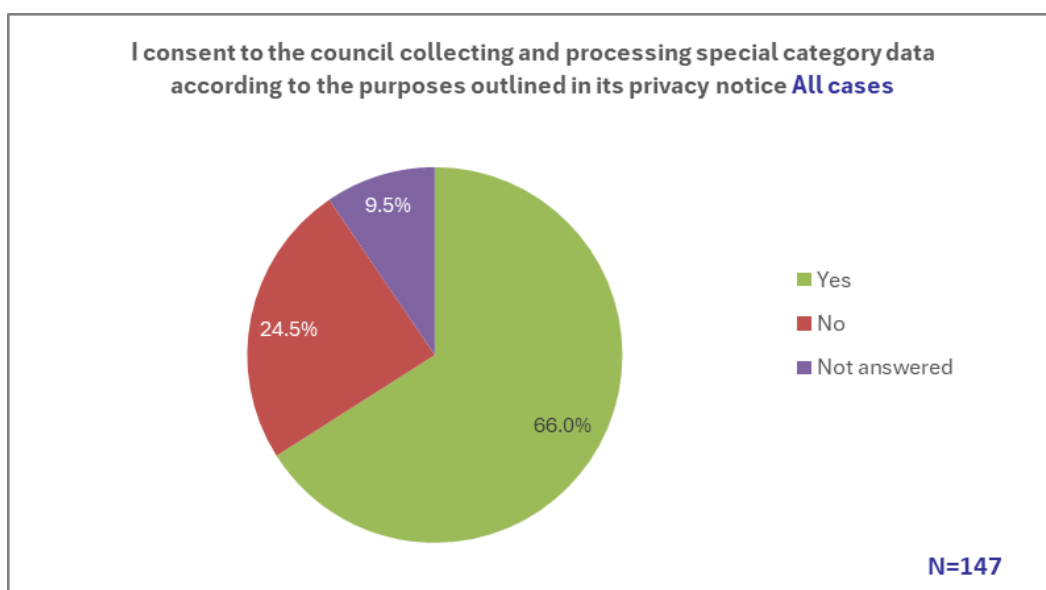
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11. I consent to the council collecting and processing special category data according to the purposes outlined in its privacy notice.

	Frequency	Percent (All cases)	Percent (Responses only)
Yes	97	66.0	72.9
No	36	24.5	27.1
Total	133	90.5	100.0
Not answered	14	9.5	
Total	147	100.0	



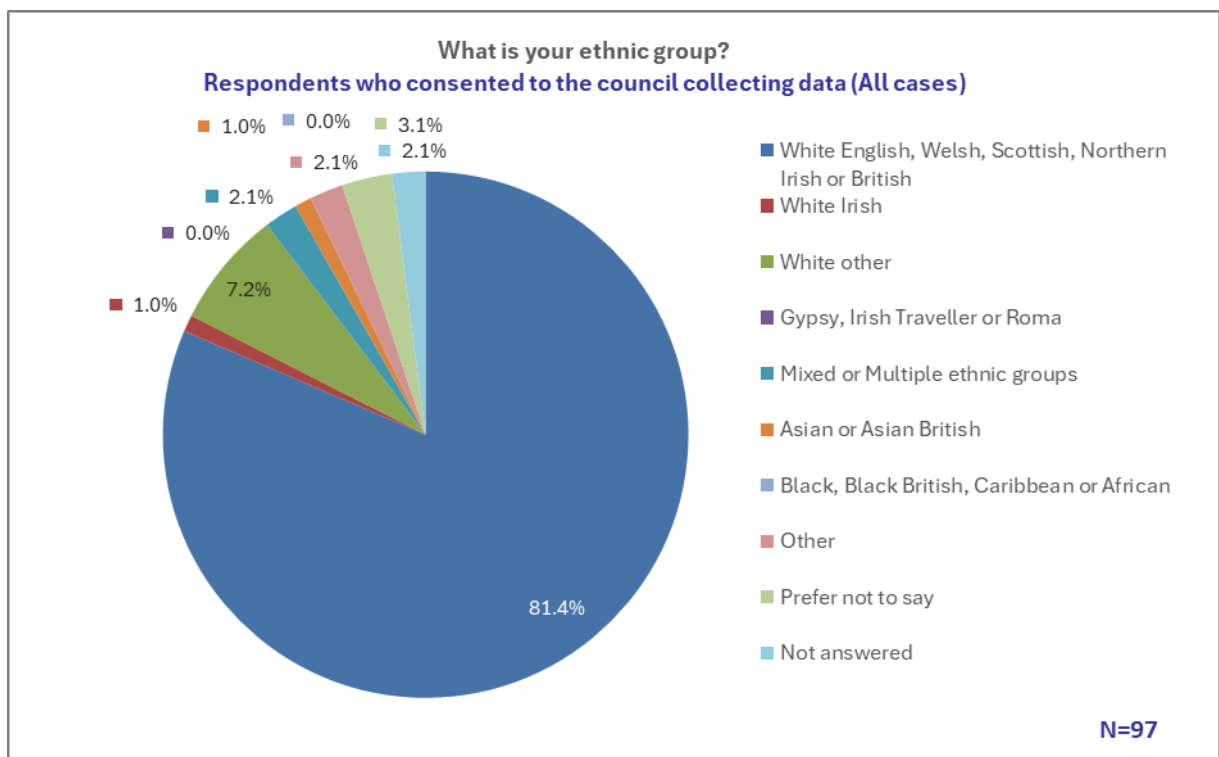
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N.B. The following two questions are out of 97 (not 147), as respondents that have not consented to the council collecting and processing special category data have been excluded.

12. What is your ethnic group? (Optional)

	Frequency	Percent (All cases)	Percent (Responses only)
White English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British	79	81.4	83.2
White Irish	1	1.0	1.1
White other	7	7.2	7.4
Gypsy, Irish Traveller or Roma	0	0.0	0.0
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	2	2.1	2.1
Asian or Asian British	1	1.0	1.1
Black, Black British, Caribbean or African	0	0.0	0.0
Other	2	2.1	2.1
Prefer not to say	3	3.1	3.2
Total	95	97.9	100.0
Not answered	2	2.1	
Total	97	100.0	

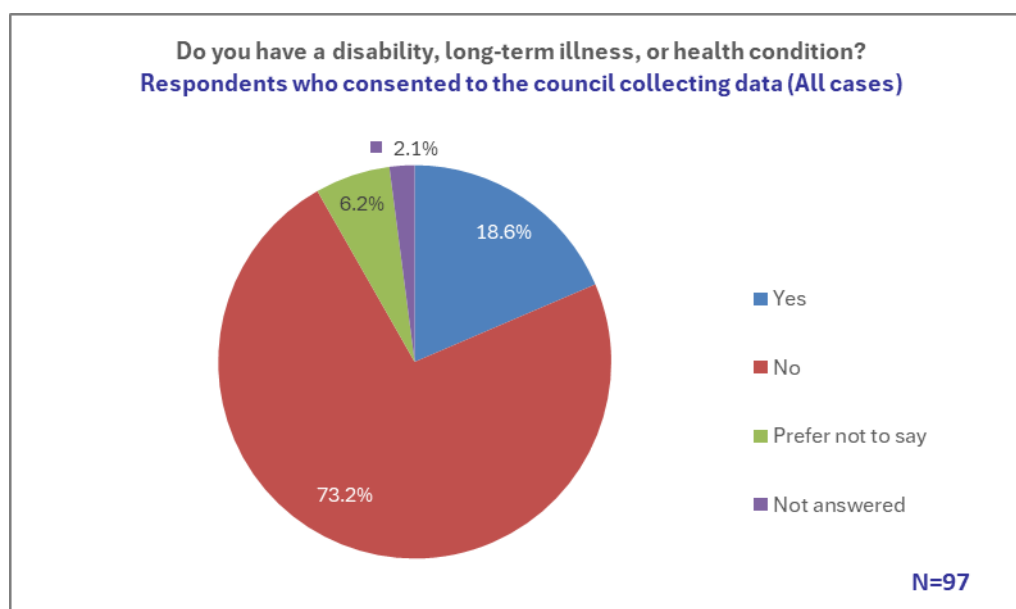


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13. Do you have a disability, long-term illness, or health condition? (Optional)

	Frequency	Percent (All cases)	Percent (Responses only)
Yes	18	18.6	18.9
No	71	73.2	74.7
Prefer not to say	6	6.2	6.3
Total	95	97.9	100.0
Not answered	2	2.1	
Total	97	100.0	



Sarah Winter and Jenny Legge
Performance, Research and Consultation Team
Strategy and Governance
13/01/2026

Please note: In order to allow everyone who wished the opportunity to contribute, feedback was not sampled. Therefore, this wasn't a quantitative, statistically valid exercise. It was neither the premise, purpose, nor within the capability of the exercise, to determine the overall community's level of support, or views on the proposals, with any degree of confidence.

The feedback captured therefore should be seen in the context of 'those who responded', rather than reflective of the wider community.

ⁱ <https://www.westberks.gov.uk/balancing-our-budget>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.westberks.gov.uk/consultations>