

## Budget consultation on future priorities for 2022/23: making people’s lives better

### Background

Between October and December 2021 East Renfrewshire residents were invited to take part in a budget consultation to help shape the Council's future priorities for 2022/23. The budget consultation gave residents the chance to have their say on how the Council supports the people of East Renfrewshire.

Six key themes were outlined within the survey, with a focus on how Covid has impacted on all our lives and the priorities for post-pandemic recovery, along with questions on climate change, living locally within 20 minute neighbourhoods, supporting our young people and vulnerable groups, digital council services and tackling the funding challenge. The feedback received is crucial in shaping future decisions on how we use the Council's resources.

In total, we had **251** responses.

### 1. Covid Recovery

This section explores what the Council should focus on to help East Renfrewshire recover from the pandemic, and to rate key priority themes for our humanitarian efforts.

*Humanitarian efforts describes the work we do to ensure that residents’ basic needs including food provision, access to medication, financial support and improving wellbeing are met. Immediate responses were set up at the outbreak of the pandemic and the Council and our partners are continuing to address the ongoing impact on communities and plan for our recovery.*

Respondents were asked to list their top three priorities for the Council to focus on to help East Renfrewshire recover from the pandemic. **Education** was identified as the top priority, closely followed by **Health and Social Care** – including mental health. Joint third was **the Economy, Roads, and Health, Leisure and Wellbeing**:

| Themes                      | Occurrence |
|-----------------------------|------------|
| Education                   | 126        |
| Health and Social Care      | 118        |
| Economy                     | 63         |
| Roads                       | 63         |
| Health, leisure & wellbeing | 63         |

Respondents were asked to rate six key areas of focus that have emerged from our humanitarian effort from ‘not at all important’ to ‘very important’. While all areas were rated highly as ‘very or fairly important’, **mental health, social isolation, and support for the local economy** had the highest proportion.

| Humanitarian areas   | Proportion of respondents rating as fairly or very important |
|--|--|
| 1) Mental Health   | 95%  |
| 2) Social Isolation  | 92%  |
| 3) Support for the local economy                           | 91%  |
| 4) Giving people the skills to help them on the job market | 86%  |
| 5) Support for third sector                                | 85%  |
| 6) Support with managing finances                          | 84%  |

*“Providing more mental health support in the community is essential”.*

*“Restoring levels of pre-pandemic social interaction safely.”*

## 2. Climate Change

The Council has a vital role to play in supporting the Scottish Government’s target to reduce carbon emissions to net-zero by 2045.

Respondents were asked where the Council should focus its activity in tackling climate change by rating the level of importance on a number of measures.

| Climate measure  | Proportion of respondents rating as ‘fairly or very important’ |
|--|--|
| 1) Working to ensure that all Council buildings, operations and services are working towards a net-zero position       | 84%  |
| 2) Supporting local businesses to work towards net-zero operations   | 84%  |
| 3) Supporting local residents to adopt more sustainable behaviours which will help East Renfrewshire to reach net-zero | 83%  |
| 4) Supporting school pupils to raise awareness of climate change and encourage them to work towards a net-zero future  | 86%  |

*“Providing all residents with information around accessing grants or funding to support them in reducing the high costs of energy.”*

*“...training children and young people’s mindsets, like muscle memory, rewarding positive impacts and trends.”*

Respondents were also asked to prioritise what is important to them personally in terms of climate change. Reducing emissions through carbon reduction activities e.g. increased use of public transport and electric vehicles, supporting active travel (cycling and walking) and changing environmental behaviors were the most important priorities followed by restoring and protecting greenspace and biodiversity. In terms of broader areas for action to tackle climate change, improving biodiversity and greenspace was rated as most important followed by improving energy efficiency within homes and other buildings.

### 3. Living locally- 20 minute neighbourhoods

20 minute neighbourhoods are places where residents can meet almost all of their essential needs including education, health care, shopping and leisure within a comfortable walking distance from their home. This is designed to benefit local economies, health and wellbeing, community cohesion, pride of place, and climate change:

- **89%** of respondents felt that 20 minute neighbourhoods should ‘definitely or possibly’ be a focus for East Renfrewshire Council.
- Just over **47%** of residents access ‘All or Most of their Daily needs’ within a 20 minute walk from where you live (excluding work commute)

Locally, some respondents would like to see a more diverse range of shops and leisure places in East Renfrewshire. Others highlighted the need for improved public transport, as well as improved cycle lanes and infrastructure as an alternative to 20 minute neighbourhoods.

*“Not everyone has access to a car. Public transport locally is dreadful and does not meet every locality.....”*

*“ [20 minute neighbourhoods]..would mean less isolation and less car use”*

### 4. Supporting our young people and vulnerable groups

The pandemic has highlighted that additional support services for young people and vulnerable groups may be an increasing priority in the future. Respondents were asked questions on the importance of the Council providing additional services/support:

- **87%** felt that it is ‘very or fairly important’ for the Council to provide additional support for young people’s mental health and wellbeing.
- **90%** think that it is ‘very or fairly important’ for the Council to provide additional support for children and young people’s learning and achievement considering the impacts of the pandemic.
- **92%** of respondents felt that the Council providing additional funding to integrated health and social care services was ‘very or fairly important’ to them.

*“Free extra tutorials for kids who have missed a lot of their education through COVID”.*

*“Better social care seems to free up health worker’s time to deal with those that need it”*

## 5. Digital Council Services

Many Council services have become more accessible in recent years as we have increased the number of services residents can request or access online. Booking systems, payments and applying for housing are just some of the services which are now available digitally. As we continue to drive forward with our digital plans, we want to make sure that our services remain accessible for all residents:

- **82%** of respondents think that they would either ‘possibly or definitely’ like to see the Council make more services available online.

Some respondents would like to see more focus on improving the digital services the Council currently offers. There were also suggestions for introducing digital health services, and increasing capacity to help those who are digitally excluded.

*“More local classes provided at various times for people of all ages from complete novice to ECDL/coding type classes to allow people to progress into employment”.*

*“Provide computing workshops for the older residents”*

## 6. Tackling the funding challenge

The Council’s overall expenditure is about £300 million every year. Although this is a lot of money, much of it is already committed to providing essential services such as education for around 17,000 children and young people, early learning and childcare and supporting older people to live in their own homes or in care homes. We must provide these and other services by law and – while we are of course keen to do so – it leaves us with limited scope to change how we spend the money we receive.

Most of our funding (around 80%) comes from Government grants, with only 20% raised by Council Tax. Our government grant has not increased in line with inflation for many years and we have had to look for savings every year to balance our budget.

Bearing in mind the need for the Council to balance future budgets, respondents were asked questions on whether the Council should consider charging more for services that are/aren’t currently paid for by residents.

| Should the Council consider charging more for services that are currently paid for? |            |
|---|------------|
| Definitely  | 13%        |
| Possibly  | 43%        |
| Definitely Not  | 41%        |
| Do not know   | 4%         |
| <b>Total Responses</b>  | <b>247</b> |

While some respondents indicated they were willing to pay more for services; others expressed concerns about the current cost of living and indicated that are already experiencing financial constraints so worry about any increase in Council charges.

| Should the Council consider charging more for services that are not currently paid for? |            |
|---|------------|
| Definitely  | 9%         |
| Possibly  | 42%        |
| Definitely Not  | 43%        |
| Do not know   | 6%         |
| <b>Total Responses</b>  | <b>247</b> |

Of 247 that responded to the question on whether the Council should consider reducing or stopping some services, **46%** said ‘possibly or definitely’, and **45%** said ‘definitely not’.

### Budget Themes Ranked

For the six budget themes, respondents were asked to rate on a scale of 1-10 how important it is for them for the Council to action or invest in each theme. With 1 indicating ‘unimportant’ and 10 ‘very important’. Scores were calculated for those scoring 6 and above to indicate what is most important for the people of East Renfrewshire.

Respondents prioritised the most important budget themes as:

**Support for young people and vulnerable groups** (87% of respondents answered 6 or higher out of a scale of 10) **Tackling the funding challenge** (80%) and **Climate change** (79%)

| Theme rank   | Proportion of respondents scoring 6 and higher for level of importance |
|--|--|
| 1) Supporting our young people and vulnerable groups | 87%  |
| 2) Tackling the funding challenge                    | 80%  |
| 3) Climate Change                                    | 79%  |
| 4) Covid Recovery                                    | 77%  |
| 5) Living locally – 20 minute neighbourhoods         | 64%  |
| 6) Digital Council services                          | 63%  |

## Demographics of respondents

63% of survey respondents were female, and the greatest response was from the 40-49 year age group (32% of respondents). The majority of respondents identified as White Scottish.

| Gender Identity | Number of respondents | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| Female          | 158                   | 63%            |
| Male            | 83                    | 33%            |
| In another way  | 2                     | 1%             |
| Did not answer  | 8                     | 3%             |

| Physical or mental condition lasting more than a year | Number of respondents | Percentage (%) |
|---|-----------------------|----------------|
| Yes   | 50                    | 20%            |
| No  | 189                   | 75%            |
| Did not answer  | 12                    | 5%             |

| Age            | Number of respondents | Percentage (%) |
|----------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| 18-29          | 9                     | 4%             |
| 30-39          | 56                    | 22%            |
| 40-49          | 80                    | 32%            |
| 50-64          | 51                    | 20%            |
| 65+            | 22                    | 9%             |
| Did not answer | 33                    | 13%            |

| Ethnicity                              | Number of respondents | Percentage (%) |
|--|-----------------------|----------------|
| White – All Groups                     | 219                   | 88.7%          |
| Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British | 11                    | 4.5%           |
| Other                                  | 3                     | 1.2%           |
| Not Answered                           | 14                    | 5.6%           |

| Ward                                 | Number of respondents |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Barrhead, Liboside and Uplawmoor     | 33                    |
| Clarkston, Netherlee and Williamwood | 45                    |
| Giffnock and Thornliebank            | 28                    |
| Newton Mearns North and Neilston     | 63                    |

|                                   |            |
|-----------------------------------|------------|
| Newton Mearns South and Eaglesham | 59         |
| Other                             | 23         |
| <b>Total</b>                      | <b>251</b> |

### Thank you

East Renfrewshire Council would like to thank all the respondents that participated in the survey.

If you have any questions or want to know more about the survey results please get in touch at [Listening@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk](mailto:Listening@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk)