



Renfrewshire Resident Survey

Focus Group Key Findings Report



Background

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- Research Resource carried out Renfrewshire Council's 2025 Resident Satisfaction Survey.
- A representative cross section of 1,016 Renfrewshire residents were interviewed either face to face or by phone during May and June 2025.
- The objective of the Residents Survey was to measure residents' current perceptions and satisfaction with the Council, access new information, ideas and suggestions which will improve planning and decision making in relation to budget decisions and help shape future activities around resident needs and priorities.
- 6 focus groups were then carried out with respondents to explore their perception and satisfaction in more depth and provide further insight into resident priorities.
- This report summarises the key findings of the focus groups.

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Focus group profile

- 6 focus groups were carried out between 19th and 27th August 2025.
- Focus group participants were recruited from resident survey respondents who had said they would be interested in taking part in further research.
- Focus groups were carried out in person and online, daytime and evening.
- 4 focus groups were held in Renfrewshire House, Paisley and 2 were online in the evening in order to allow a wide range of residents to participate.
- Overall 37 residents participated in the focus groups.
- Residents were from across Renfrewshire, including the more rural villages and ranged in age from mid 30s to into their 70s.
- Participants included Council tenants and owner occupiers, single people, older couples and families with children. There were also a small number of disabled residents who attended.



Focus group themes

- Three focus group themes were covered with two focus groups covering each theme.
- There were also two cross cutting themes which were discussed at every focus group.
- These were:



Budget Principles

Introducing charges for some services?

How should resources be targeted?

Suggestions for innovation in service delivery?

Should the Council stop providing some services?



Council priorities

Understanding residents priorities for Council priority themes

Where budgets are limited where do residents want the Council to focus?



Place and Neighbourhood

What is it like living in Renfrewshire?

What impacts residents quality of life?

General perceptions of Council services



Cross cutting themes

Improving transparency and communication

Listening to residents



Budget Principles



Budget principles

Introducing charges

- There were mixed views on charging for services.
- There was generally a willingness to pay for non essential or discretionary services, especially if the charge is reasonable, the service is high quality and the money is invested locally.
- Examples where residents would be happy to pay are aspects such as museums and other cultural activities, nominal library fees, leisure activities, venue hire and small parking charges.
- Garden waste bin charge was already paid by most participants and it was reluctantly accepted. There were concerns about price increases and fly tipping as a consequence of charges for waste collection. It was believed that further charges should not be introduced or carefully considered.
- It was believed that some services should always be free at point of use such as general refuse, schools/ education and care services, although there was discussion that some aspects that support older people such as a 'meals on wheels' type service should be means tested.
- There was strong support for means-testing and targeting resources based on need.
- Residents expressed some confusion over what services are statutory vs discretionary.
- Residents had a desire for transparency on how charges are set and how revenue is used.



Budget principles

Targeting resources

- There was strong support across both groups for the principle of targeting resources to those in greatest need. This is seen as a fair and necessary approach, especially in the context of limited budgets.
- There was some concern over prioritising one group or area at the expense of others and residents wanted there to be an emphasis on balance and inclusivity. Targeting should not mean neglecting others.
- **People in greatest need:** In terms of people in the greatest need, elderly, disabled, those on low incomes were consistently identified as the top priority for support, reflecting vulnerability and limited access to services. Carers, especially unpaid carers were noted as important as were children from low income households.
- **Areas in greatest need:** Geographically Paisley, Johnstone and Linwood were highlighted as needing more attention but there was concern that need could be hidden in areas such as Bridge of Weir and Bishopton and that those in more rural areas may have different needs that warrant support such as lack of transport and broadband which create isolation.
- It was felt important that support should go beyond area-based deprivation, as children in “better” areas may still face hardship, particularly in single-parent families. It was highlighted that need isn’t always visible and sometimes people in more “affluent” areas are struggling.
- It was also believed that there are services to help out there, but they are not always widely known about and residents pointed to a gap in communication and outreach.



Budget principles

Delivering services in new ways

Participants offered several practical and creative ideas:

- **Digital Services:** There was strong support for expanding online access to services (e.g. reporting issues, booking appointments, logging fallen trees or road issues) via the Council website. However, residents suggested improvements to the Council's website were required to make it more user-friendly and intuitive. Inclusion for those not digitally engaged was also a concern.
- **Community-Led Initiatives:** Residents believed that volunteering and community ownership should be encouraged. It was suggested that tasks such as park maintenance, flower planting, and events could be done by community groups and volunteers. Participants mentioned successful local groups like *Bonnie Bishopton*, *Smile in Kilbarchan*, and *Bridge of Weir volunteers*.
- In terms of transferring ownership to the community there was broad interest in the idea, though participants highlighted significant challenges around logistics, capacity, and sustainability. While some communities have managed successful transfers, others struggled to get projects off the ground. Potential barriers included the need for strong local leadership, funding, and governance structures like trusts. Furthermore, success was seen as dependent on community willingness to engage, volunteer, and sustain activities over time.
- **Better Use of Libraries, Schools and Town Halls:** Libraries were seen as a venue which could be a hub for information and access to services. Schools were seen as a place that could be a focal point for children's focused services out of hours allowing leisure clubs, cubs and scouts and other activities to be held at these venues meaning they are better used. Town halls could host events, weddings, cinema nights, and community meetings. A good example was that Johnston's police now share a space in the town hall.



Budget principles

Stop delivering services that are not legally required

- Participants were unsure what the Council is legally obliged to provide, with some questioning if anything is required at all. Schools, roads and child protection were mentioned as likely statutory duties, though with uncertainty.
- When told about services that the Council is and is not legally obliged to provide, the biggest surprise was that parks and open spaces are not legally required, particularly as some had been gifted to towns. Others, however, felt unsurprised by the list.
- Participants suggested that local communities, charities, and organisations could help deliver some discretionary services, especially where Council resources are stretched.
- Examples of organisations who could help were local housing associations (who are already known to be involved in tenant participation and community development), local charities and social enterprises (who could take over community centres or run services like befriending, gardening or cultural activities).
- There was strong support for community involvement, particularly around parks and open spaces. Examples were given of local groups already raising funding play equipment and maintaining flower beds, parks and organising local events.
- It was suggested, however, that the council could share responsibilities on some of these services and that there was a need for support and co-ordination from the Council to help with funding applications, leadership skills and ensuring that groups have the capacity to do what is required.



Council Priorities



Council priorities and budget options

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Prioritisation activity

- It was explained to participants that the Council's funding comes from a number of different sources and that each year the Council has to agree on how this budget will be spent and that the Council has to balance its budget every year. Each participant was given tokens which they had to use to identify their greatest priorities. They must allocate one token to each priority and then could allocate additional to any priority as they saw fit.
- This identified priorities in the following order:

Maintain roads, pavements, open spaces and public places	49
Support vulnerable people	39
Support older people	32
Support libraries, community and sports & leisure facilities	29
Support the health and wellbeing of children and families	28
Support local businesses	27
Support cultural activities, arts, museums and events	27
Support people into training, employment and education	26
Invest in school buildings and our learning estate	23
Support tourism and the visitor economy	22
Community safety services	19
Invest in measures to achieve Net Zero for Renfrewshire	16

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Budget principles

Cross cutting themes

- It was noted that there are a lot of cross cutting themes across priorities and participants did not always find it easy discuss what was important about one particular priority without straying into other priority areas.
- For example children and young people were a priority group but that crossed into health and wellbeing, education, school buildings and learning estate, and also libraries, community and sports & leisure facilities.
- A further example is that supporting vulnerable people strayed into both older people and children and families.



Budget principles

Top priorities

- **Maintaining roads, pavements, open spaces and public places:** Participants prioritised the general environment around them and how this looked and feels. They wanted to live somewhere they can take pride in and that stems from roads, pavements, open spaces, public places and buildings were also mentioned. Roads were a source of frustration with participants perceiving a lack of joined up thinking and frustration at seeing utilities companies digging up roads on repeated occasions and works not being co-ordinated. They were also frustrated at patch filling of pot holes and a lack of supervision of contractors. Participants said they don't see cycle lanes being well used due to cars spitting stones onto cycle lanes and meaning that cyclists are instead using the pavements to cycle on. Parks are seen as a valuable community asset but they are often believed to be under used or neglected. There was a desire for more community gardens, green spaces and places to sit and reflect.
- **Support libraries, community and sports & leisure facilities:** Libraries were seen as multi-functional spaces for study, safety, socialising and access to services. Some participants wanted to see longer and more reliable opening hours and tailoring to young people's needs as well as providing a space for older people to socialise, to learn how to IT and to support their mental health. Participants raised concerns about libraries being closed down which they would not want and also spoke about having quiet areas as well as separate areas for children such as toddler groups. Community and sports and leisure facilities were also considered critical for health and wellbeing, socialisation and inclusion for all sections of the community, not just young people. There was a strong desire to use these facilities to build community connections. Participants also spoke about the use of schools in the evenings for clubs etc but spoke about the charges involved in using school buildings. Some felt that facilities were not accessible enough or evenly distributed across the area. There was also concern about lack of investment and poor maintenance.



Budget principles

Top priorities

- **Supporting vulnerable people:** vulnerable people were noted as children and young people, those with a disability, drug addicts and older people. With respect to children and young people this was interlinked with the health and wellbeing of children and families. Discussions also highlighted the role of schools and community facilities. Vulnerabilities for older people are discussed below under this aspect. It was noted that it essential that services are joined up and have effective communication for example care services with the police and social work to ensure the safety of vulnerable people. A number of participants were unaware of what to do if they were worried about the safety of a neighbour who they believe to be vulnerable and where to access support to help them especially if they do not have a next of kin. Participants also said there can also be challenges when vulnerable people don't want help. Mental health and trauma in adults was also highlighted and it was noted that mental health support is seen as inaccessible and underfunded. Participants shared stories of long-term trauma and the need for early intervention.
- **Supporting older people:** loneliness and isolation were major concerns. Participants advocated for community visitors, befriending services and non clinical-support. There was also frustration that care services are being too task focused and lacking compassion.
- **Support the health and wellbeing of children and families:** it was noted that many children face trauma, chaotic home lives and hidden disabilities. It was believed that schools are overcrowded and teachers are untrained to deal with the complex needs they are facing in class rooms. There was also concern that the education system is too focused on metrics and not sufficiently focused on emotional and social development. Children and families were believed to be key as without this early intervention, long term change was not believed to be possible. Safe environments and emotional and social wellbeing is believe to be key.



Budget principles

Lower priorities and limited resources

- When discussing lower priorities, the only priority that was unanimously agreed as a lower priority and one which does not require focus and could be one area where the Council withdraws some focus for a time would be **Net Zero and environmental goals**.
- Participants did not entirely dismiss Net Zero and Environmental goals but they were seen as long-term goals that shouldn't detract from immediate human needs which were believed to be a much greater priority.
- When participants were asked to remove tokens to indicate where cut backs could potentially be made, there was a focus on Net Zero. However, it was also felt that there was potential for more prudent and efficient spending and planning across different areas. For example:
 - **Road resurfacing** was criticised for inefficiency and poor oversight. "same road done three times".
 - **Arts and cultural events**: are these areas where spending could be reduced or restructured?
 - **Older adults and isolated individuals**: can community based support, partnership with charities and voluntary organisations fill service gaps?
 - **Unused Council buildings**: residents suggested selling or repurposing abandoned assets. They also wanted to see more communication about plans for buildings such as Paisley Grammar School and had concerns about the impact of the closure on local businesses within the area.
- Participants who removed tokens from supporting local businesses said that this was because they felt that if other priorities such as parking, roads, cleanliness etc were fixed then this would help local businesses.



Place and Neighbourhood



Place and neighbourhood

Positives about living in Renfrewshire

- **Overview:** Overall participants found Renfrewshire a positive place to live. The majority had lived in Renfrewshire for many years, or since birth and several said that although they work or have worked in other areas outside the local authority, they have actively chosen to live in Renfrewshire and commute to their place of work because they enjoy living there. Participants spoke about the nice surroundings for example the Braes, walks and the rich history and that all contribute to making the area an enjoyable place to live.
- **Transport links:** It was evident from discussions that one of the key positives about Renfrewshire is that it has good transport links such as motorway networks and public transport. As mentioned above, several participants chose to commute to their place of work due to excellent transport links.
- **Sense of community:** It was clear from participants that one of the key things that makes Renfrewshire such an enjoyable place to live is the people who live there. In some instances, participants noted that they may like to live in other areas but ultimately it is their family and friends that prevent them from moving away.
- **Organised cultural events:** Participants were positive about organised events that take place in Renfrewshire which are very well thought of by residents and a fantastic way to bring families together.
- **Local facilities:** Participants were positive about many Council led services such as good schools and sports and leisure services. Others spoke positively about nice places to go for food, nightlife and for socialising with friends. Participants were also positive about new facilities opening such as the Observatory and museum which will be a positive addition and hopefully draw people into the area.



Place and neighbourhood

Negatives about living in Renfrewshire

- **Facilities for young people:** At both groups participants expressed the need for more facilities for young people in an attempt to get them off the streets and to reduce the potential for antisocial behaviour issues. It was felt that there is nowhere for young adults to go and participants spoke about the challenges facing facilities for young people such as a lack of volunteers and commitment from volunteers to take part in safeguarding training.
- **Neighbourhood appearance:** A number of participants spoke about cleansing issues within their neighbourhood such as bins being on the pavements (particular issue in Paisley), dirty streets and a lack of street cleaning.
- **Roads:** potholes, cars parked on street (across different neighbourhoods) and narrow streets mean people have to park on pavements which causes issues for pedestrians and also makes the area look untidy.
- **Decline of the high street:** Participants spoke with pride about the renovated Town Hall and Paisley's heritage, but also highlighted the decline on the High Street, the loss of major shops, and a need for regeneration and vibrancy. Participants spoke about shopping units lying empty, being an eyesore and in some cases being dangerous. It was felt that Paisley town centre lacks a range of shopping outlets and that there are too many of the same types of shops such as hairdressers and nail salons.
- **Transport:** While participants were happy with the central traffic infrastructure a number of participants were unhappy with the local transport outside of Paisley and in more rural areas. Participants spoke about bus service timetables changing frequently and services being unreliable. Others spoke about the cost of the train being expensive and about a lack of connectivity between different bus routes and also the train service. They spoke about the Edinburgh bus service being an example of a good service where there is a more joined up approach.



What could improve your quality of life?

- **Cleanliness/ maintenance:** One of the main issues which impacts residents' quality of life was noted as "the dirt". Participants want to live in clean and well maintained neighbourhoods and gave examples of areas such as Dunn Square in Paisley which has a problem with pigeon mess and noted that people do not want to spend time in the square due to this issue. Another point of note was to ensure hedges are maintained on public pathways which can be dangerous for pedestrians as they often have to walk on the roads as not enough space on pavements .
- **Open areas:** Having well maintained open areas such as the Glennifer Braes was identified as being important for leisure purposes and providing a good quality of life. Participants were very positive about the area in terms of it being well looked after. However, they did note that there can be a problem with motorbikes on open spaces such as this.
- **Town centres and shopping more locally:** Participants spoke about a lot of derelict buildings and empty buildings within the town centres and that the Council should help address these, e.g. by putting a false face on the empty buildings or having initiatives to encourage people to take the buildings on. Participants said that while they would like to shop more locally parking charges and availability of parking prevent them from doing so. Others said that the parking charges were reasonable and they found parking to be easy compared to Glasgow and if there were more diversity in terms of shopping outlets they would prefer to shop in Renfrewshire town centres than in other areas such as Glasgow or Braehead.
- **ASB/ safety:** Participants felt feeling safe in the neighbourhood and town centres was important to their quality of the life and that they would like to see more community police patrols or community wardens. Having more CCTV was also something participants highlighted as something that would make them feel more safe (Bridge of Weir).



Perception of Council services

- **Care services:** Services that deliver care such as to the elderly, disabled people or families in crisis were perceived as being very important. Respondents spoke about Council run care homes that have shut down had a perception that private care homes treat care as a business and aren't of the same quality as council led facilities where participants were complimentary and said they had well trained and caring staff. Participants also spoke about people living longer and that there is more of a need for elderly care and rehabilitation care for patients to ensure that they are not using up hospital beds.
- **Local schools and nurseries:** Participants felt that Renfrewshire had good local schools that perform well academically compared to other local authorities. One participant spoke about the schools in Howwood and Johnstone being of similar age and that they are looking rundown and shabby. Participants also spoke about the challenges facing schools and teachers with neurodivergent children who need extra help are in with mainstream children and the importance of ensuring that children are able to get the support they need as without investing in these things it will lead to problems later.
- **Playpark, parks, gardens, open spaces:** Parks and play areas are valued by residents and residents were complimentary about these in Renfrewshire generally and in their local area. Some residents had concern about decline in facilities and also about facilities being taken away without consultation and that the Council should consult with residents when removing or adding facilities to find out what will be used and what is needed within the community. One participant had been involved with a community group and the Council to source funding for a local playpark and residents felt that this was something they would like to see the Council doing more to promote within neighbourhoods.
- **Libraries:** Participants felt that libraries can offer much more activities to the community, particularly to older residents. Accessibility was seen as key and ensuring that there aren't many stairs and that parking spaces are available nearby.



Place and neighbourhood

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Council services

- **Road maintenance:** upkeep of roads, pothole repairs, and transport connections (bus routes between communities) were seen as crucial. Currently pot holes are a challenge around the Renfrewshire area – in and around local areas. Participants spoke about inconsistency in how roads are maintained with some areas having full roads upgraded whilst other areas have poor quality pothole filling.
- **Sports and leisure facilities** – Participants who use the facilities were generally positive about the range of sports and leisure facilities available to them and were complimentary on the staff who deliver the services. However, a number of participants spoke about the buildings and facilities within the centres needing to be maintained. Others spoke about the cost of facilities and also community events and that it is important to keep facilities affordable to all and that for families of multiple children the costs can add up.
- **Street cleaning:**– This was a service which had a lot of discussion around responsibilities. Participants noted the importance of living somewhere that is clean and tidy. There's little evidence of 'street cleaning' in action apart from one participant who lives opposite a quarry and has noted bags lined up at the side of the road. Others noted that they are aware of street cleaning being done by volunteers, especially in Bridge of Weir. Participants suggested the Council could do more to encourage local residents to get involved with small grants available to provide equipment, flowers and plants etc.
- **Refuse collection:** Participants believed that refuse collection was done consistently well in Renfrewshire. However as noted earlier the key issue was with residents leaving bins on pavements and participants wondered if bin collection staff could report these issues to the Council. Other comments related to the charges for brown bins which has seen an increase recently.
- **Customer care:** Throughout the groups participants spoke highly of Renfrewshire Council staff being helpful and easy to contact within various departments such as the planning team, staff at council run leisure facilities and when telephoning the Council.

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Cross cutting questions



Improving transparency and communication

- **Improving direct Council contact:** In terms of communication, there was a feeling that the current systems where residents contact the Council could be improved. There was frustration relation to automated systems such as the website's usability (which is seen as being confusing and hard to navigate) and the ability to speak to a real person as opposed to "Millie". This led to some participants feeling ignored or unheard when trying to resolve issues.
- **Current sources of information:** Participants felt that there is information available to residents but they have to search for it. It was suggested that having KPI tracking on the front page of the website would be useful. Local councillors were also seen as a good source of communication. Some older residents had concerns about communication being too focussed online, leaving some people without access to updates. While some receive council e-mails, others prefer or rely on paper copies. Local channels such as libraries and especially the Advertiser were highlighted as effective tools for sharing information.
- **Suggestions for improvement to communications:** Some participants suggested having an annual report available to residents on Council performance. It was important that this was cheap to produce and residents suggested this should be made available on the Council website.
- **Transparency:** Participants stressed the importance of openness from the council, particularly when resources are stretched or when the wrong or difficult decisions have been made. They felt residents should be kept informed, rather than issues being hidden. Transparency could be improved via things such as quarterly updates on actions taken, visible outcomes from resident feedback and more proactive outreach from councillors or officers.



Listening to residents

- **Participation:** Participants welcomed the chance to get involved in future decision-making activities and suggested that their preference would be face to face meetings with Council representatives to input into things such as the design of future builds, or new facilities. Another suggestion was for a Community Liaison Officer who residents can speak to about any issues and can take forward to the Council, someone local within their community and who they can meet with regularly in the community.
- **Responding to complaints and queries:** Participants felt that listening should be evidenced in the way that the Council can respond to residents queries and complaints. This meant things such as being able to speak to a real person if they want to, having acknowledgement of contact, following up on contact with updates and resolving issues effectively.
- **Providing feedback and updates:** Participants wanted to see evidence that their input leads to action. Some suggestions were things such as quarterly updates on progress, publishing results from surveys and focus groups and evidencing visible changes in service or infrastructure as a result of resident input.
- **Transparency in decision making:** Participants want to understand how decisions are made, where money is spent and why certain things are prioritised. They want to see clear evidence that the Council has heard residents and is prioritising the things that are most important. They want to know how money is spent and whether it is spent prudently.
- **Supporting communities:** Listening to residents means also supporting and empowering them to take action. For example helping residents set up local clean ups or events, providing funding and co-ordination support and supporting local groups.
- **Using multiple communication channels:** listening also means using multiple communication channels and acknowledging that not everyone uses social media or websites. This includes printed newsletters, library displays, community notice boards and local newspapers.

