

Draft Budget Consultation 2021/22 – Analysis Report

Introduction

1. The purpose of this report is to set out the Draft Budget consultation process, and key consultation findings (including an understanding of who participated in the consultation), the results of which will be used to help inform decisions on the West Northamptonshire Council's Budget for 2021/22.

Shadow Executive decisions and formal consultation

2. The [Draft Budget 2021-22 and Medium Term Financial Plan](#) was approved by the Shadow Executive on 5 January 2021 and consultation on the budget proposals began 6 January 2021. The consultation concluded on 2 February 2021.
3. The public consultation was conducted by the Future Northants Programme, and supported by the Consultation and Engagement Team based within Northamptonshire County Council's Business Intelligence Team. The structure and design of the consultation set out the budget proposals and enabled both online and non-digital means of participation, in accordance with nationally recognised good practice.

How was the consultation promoted?

4. The consultation was hosted on the [Future Northants Consultation Hub](#) website. Councillors, local MPs, district and borough councils, parish and town councils, partner organisations, voluntary and community sector organisations, representatives of protected characteristic groups, local business groups including Chamber of Commerce and Federation of Small Businesses, and members of both the Northamptonshire Residents' Panel (circa 1,000 members) and the County Council's Consultation Register were invited to give their views and asked to promote the consultation to their members, or within their local area where appropriate.
5. Opportunities to take part in the consultation were also promoted in the local media via press releases. The press release went to over 60 newsrooms (local and national, print and broadcast including the Chronicle & Echo and BBC Radio Northampton), plus individual reporters and other local news sites. It was promoted through the sovereign Council's and Future Northants websites, e-newsletters and social media channels, enabling both internal (e.g. staff) as well as external consultees to get involved in the process. The Facebook post was seen by 3,867 people and the Twitter post was seen by 2,911 people.

How did consultees have their say?

6. Local people, organisations and other interested parties were able to have their say about the Draft Budget proposals in a range of ways, by:
 - Visiting the Draft Budget Consultation webpage and completing the questionnaire or requesting a paper questionnaire

- Emailing futurenorthants@northamptonshire.gov.uk
- Writing to Budget Consultation Response, West Northamptonshire Shadow Authority, Consultation & Engagement Team, One Angel Square, 4 Angel Street, Northampton, NN1 1ED
- Using social media by Tweeting (@futureNwest) or posting comments on the [Future Northants Facebook page](#)
- Contacting us by telephone to give verbal feedback
- A toolkit was developed to enable user groups/forums to hold their own discussions, and provide their feedback as a collective group.

Number and type of responses received

7. During the draft budget consultation period, using the various means available to consultees, local people and organisations contributed to the consultation 457 times. All of the feedback received was via the questionnaire.
8. Within the questionnaire, respondents could choose which questions they responded to, and so there are lower response numbers to each question when compared with the overall number of participants, depending on whether participants had a particular interest in the subject matter.
9. During the consultation period, regular summaries of consultation responses received were circulated to senior Finance officers and all responses received were circulated to decision makers upon conclusion of the consultation to enable them to see each response in full.

What did people say?

10. This report is a summary of the feedback received. It is recommended that it is read in conjunction with the full consultation results, including the detail and suggestions contained within some of the written comments. The full consultation results have been made available to Shadow Authority Members and are available on the [Future Northants Consultation Hub](#).
11. The questionnaire was structured so that respondents could give their views on any of the individual proposals if they chose to do so. This means we were able to summarise views by proposal, and also collate the views from the different consultation channels.
12. An [equality impact assessment for the budget proposals](#) was published within the equality impact assessment area of the Future Northants West website and made available via the questionnaire.

Draft Budget 2021/22 Consultation Questionnaire

13. In total, 457 respondents filled out a questionnaire on the draft Budget proposals, either partially or fully. Respondents did not have to answer every question and so the total number of responses for each question differs and is shown in relation to each question.

14. Respondents were asked in what capacity they were responding to the consultation, and could select more than one option. There were 457 responses to this question. Over three-quarters of respondents said they were local residents (78.77%), and a quarter (25.60%) said they were either a District, Borough or County Council employee. The following table details the various respondent types to the consultation questionnaire.

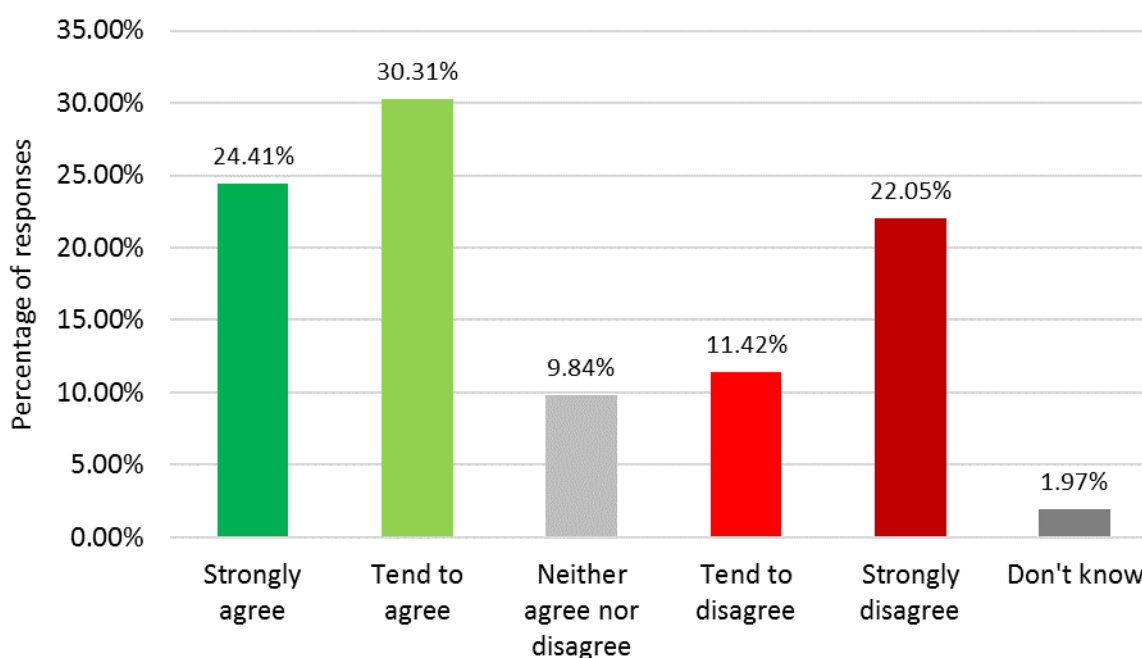
	Response number	Percentage (%)
A service user	48	10.50%
A local resident	360	78.77%
A District, Borough or County Council employee	117	25.60%
District, Borough or County Councillor	12	2.63%
A Town or Parish Councillor	16	3.50%
A representative of the voluntary sector or a community organisation	10	2.19%
A representative of the local business community	4	0.88%
A representative of a Town/Parish Council	2	0.44%
A representative of a health partner organisation	1	0.22%
A representative of a user group	1	0.22%
Other	3	0.66%

Proposed harmonisation in Council Tax

15. As part of the Draft Budget Proposals, the Council was proposing to harmonise all Council Tax Bands A–H to make consistent single rates of Council Tax across West Northamptonshire. Rates residents pay would still depend on which Council Tax Band A–H they fall within but the rate would not differ between the three districts and boroughs of West Northamptonshire.
16. The proposed harmonised rate for Band D (before any annual increase) is £1,491.94, the composition of this being the weighted average of sovereign councils.
- Daventry District Council £1,451.56
 - Northampton Borough Council £1,516.26
 - South Northamptonshire Council £1,481.75
17. It should be noted that these figures do not include the Council Tax for individual town and parish councils or the Council Tax set for fire and police by the Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner. These are not within the scope of this consultation and these amounts are added afterwards before people receive their final bills.
18. Respondents were presented with an explanation of the proposed harmonisation approach and provided with an example of how the new Council Tax precept for West Northamptonshire Council will be calculated based on a Band D property.

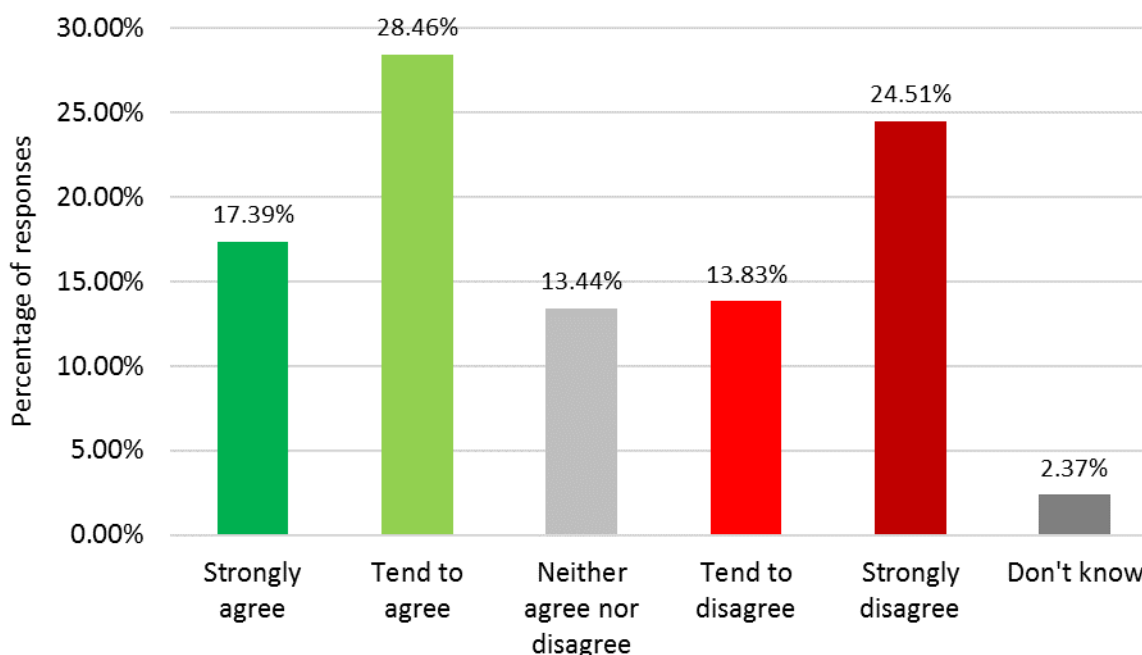
19. Respondents were asked to what extent they agree or disagree that all Council Tax Bands A–H should be harmonised for residents of West Northamptonshire. There were 254 responses to this question. Just over a half of respondents (54.72%) said they strongly agree or tend to agree with the proposal, while a third 33.47% said they strongly disagree or tend to disagree with the proposal.

To what extent do you agree or disagree that all Council Tax Bands A–H should be harmonised for residents of West Northamptonshire?



20. The Council is proposing to use the Average Council Tax approach to harmonise Council Tax. This approach uses a weighted average of the current West Northamptonshire Authorities to calculate new Council Tax Bands from A–H. This is the preferred option as it maximises income for the new West Northamptonshire Council. This option would ensure that there are no reductions in service provision as a result of reduced council tax yield. Unlike the alternative approach of the Individual Area Council Tax option, which was dismissed because of this reason.
21. Respondents were asked to what extent they agree or disagree that we should use an Average Council Tax approach to recalculate the Council Tax Bands A–H. There were 253 responses to this question. Just under half of respondents (45.85%) were in favour of this approach and said they strongly agree or tend to agree with the proposal, while 38.34% said they strongly disagree or tend to disagree with the proposal.

To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should use an Average Council Tax approach to recalculate the Council Tax Bands A–H?



22. Respondents were then asked why they answered the previous question in the way that they did. There were 90 comments made in relation to this question. Many of the responses were regarding Council Tax and the rate changes, and only some respondents specifically mentioning the methodology used.
23. A total of 18 respondents who agreed with the proposal provided comments, the most frequently mentioned comments centre on accepting the proposal because they felt it was fair. Some said there was no choice but to harmonise in the creation of a new authority which brings together four new authorities. Whilst others stated that although the effect of the harmonisation may mean some will pay more, it was not in the interest of everyone to prolong the process and the new council had to 'get on with it'.
24. A few respondents expressed their concerns over people's ability to afford the rise and thought there should be a system in place that helps them to pay the increase over time.
25. Some respondents said they were not happy with the Council Tax policy by which lower valued properties pay the same as those in higher values and thought a new policy system needs to reflect the overall size and or value of the property. They questioned the weighted approach being proposed and said it was unfair. Others expressed their unhappiness regarding rural areas as they felt those in rural areas would be paying for services which mostly benefited towns. Others mentioned what they considered to be historical mismanagement of local authorities which is causing a high rise in Council Tax for some areas.
26. Some respondents said that quality of services and the access to them needs to reflect the higher rates they are being asked to pay. They felt that services ought to be made equitable across the new authority as they felt there is at present great disparity between different areas.

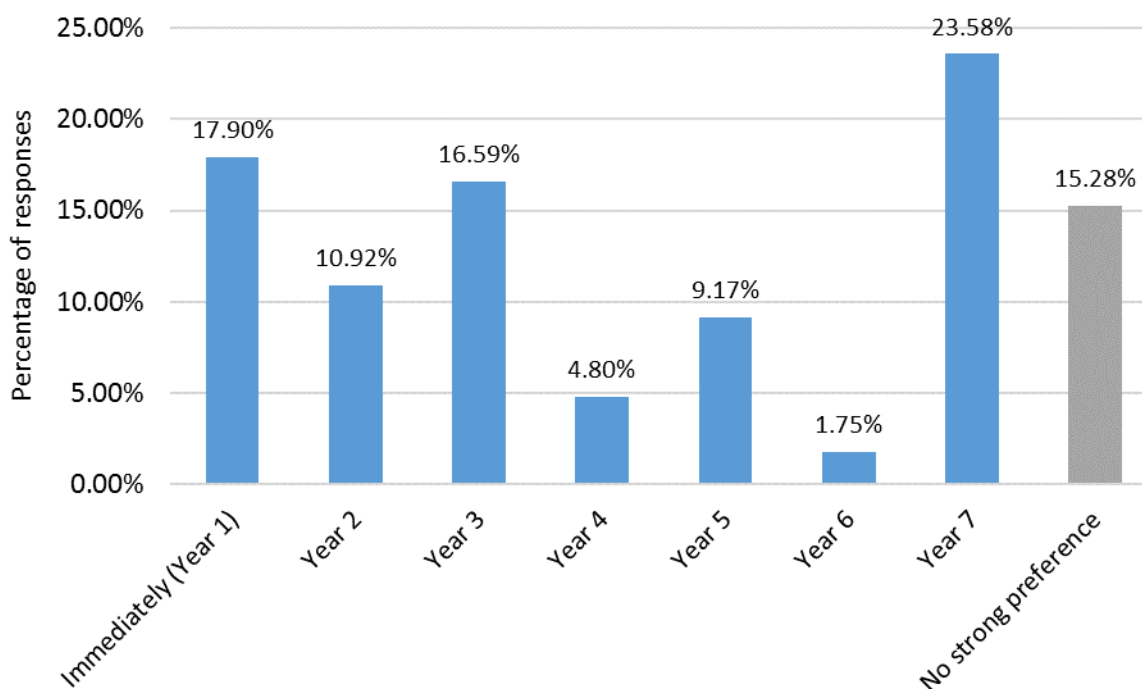
Although some respondents also acknowledged the difference in demographics i.e. population density, rural and urban, large and small towns, and differences in parishes.

27. Other comments included positive comments about specific services which respondents feel are good; opinions that Council Tax should reduce for some; and disharmony amongst different areas could be aligned.
28. A total of eight respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed with the proposal made comment. The most frequent comments mentioned affordability, with respondents saying that due to the current pandemic many households are struggling financially. They also said it seems unfair to be introduce Council Tax rises at this time especially by a new council.
29. A few of respondents mentioned concerned over the composition, size and general makeup of the new unitary authority area. They said to try and harmonise services would be difficult due to differing needs and environments, for example rural and urban needs. A few respondents did not want a blanket approach and one respondent suggested that different individual rates should be applicable based on the individual and the area in which they live.
30. Other comments said that the system seems fair; and the people should not to have to claim support from government when a local discount would save extra administration cost.
31. A total of 63 respondents who disagreed with the proposal provided comments. Comments ranged from thematic issues such as affordability, the amount of the rise, the impact on families and individuals, to specifics about individual circumstances.
32. The majority of the comments were concerned about those sovereign areas which respondents say would experience a very high increase in Council Tax. They felt their increased bill came at the expense of the creation of the unitary organisation. They stated a sense of loss of their locality and of their unique geographical identity and felt they were having to pay for mistakes of others. They felt that they did not and would not receive equitable services for the amount that they would be asked to pay.
33. Respondents said the increase was on top of other precept charges they would incur from other Council Tax raising bodies' i.e. small councils and the Police and Fire Commissioner. This, some said, would in real terms amount to high increases which they thought were not legally possible.
34. Many respondents further outlined their concerns on family budgets, saying their outgoings continue to rise and their income remains static. They expressed that financial hardship is increasing and the Council needs to consider its morale responsibility and how the new Council is contributing to financial stress. A few said that in applying a high rate of council tax, the Council would effectively see more people claiming for Council Tax reduction or would see a high rate of non-payment and effectively all this would contribute to an overall negative outcome for all. They stated the Council needs to set an affordable rate that would result in all paying and contributing to local government services. Another respondent said the changes should be introduced in increments.

35. Many respondents said the geographical sub areas of West Northamptonshire are very different and having a one size fits all system was not appropriate as the needs of urban and rural are different. They felt an increase in rates did not mean they would receive enhanced or new services.
36. Others questioned the overall policy of council tax setting, with a few commenting that property should be re-evaluated with new bands being introduced for high value properties.
37. Some respondents said that they understood the need to introduce and operate a fair council tax rate system, but felt generating extra income in this manner was concerning. A number of respondents were surprised rates were increasing as they thought the new unitary council would be saving money due to creating efficiencies.
38. Other comments included suggestions that the Council should cut its own costs to live within its means; that decisions should be made after a democratic election for the new Council; and that they did not understand the information provided.
39. The one respondent who indicated 'don't know' and provided comment said they saw the need for the Council to be fair to all but were concerned about their rate increase as they already find it a struggle to pay the current rate.
40. Any respondents who felt the proposal would have a negative impact were then asked to tell us what they thought the impact would be, along with any suggestions on how any potential negative impacts could be mitigated. A total of 81 respondents provided comment. These respondents made a variety of comments.
41. Overall most said the proposal itself was negative as they felt it introduces a high increase to Council Tax. Many respondents were concerned about the current health pandemic and the effect the increase might have on households. They felt this put extra financial burdens on households, especially low income households. Some felt the Council should be more empathic to the current health crisis and that this could result in non-payment, with others saying this action could contribute to mental health and wellbeing issues. They understood that the unitary had been created to save money but is already raising Council Tax to its maximum limit. Some resented paying for councils which they felt had not previously managed their finances.
42. Respondents consistently commented on the reorganisation of local councils and the creation of the new unitary authority. Some commented on the difference between rural and urban and felt rural areas receive fewer services. As respondents felt services were not available equally they thought Council Tax should not be applied equally until services were equitable. It was suggested the Council should consider historic council rates and the demographic and social economic issues before setting proportionate rate rises. Others said the new Council should 'bed down' before high increases were instigated.

43. Respondents wanted the Council to review any non-essential spending, current contracts, and salaries to ensure its efficiency.
44. Several suggestions were provided to mitigate impacts. These included giving households an opportunity to review finances and introduce a staged payment approach; undertaking overall cuts to council projects and a reduction to out sourced services; reducing the increased rate to reflect the rate of inflation; and to introduce increased rates for some Council Tax bands only. A few said the impacts can be mitigated by not using an average approach but looking at creating efficiency saving and by also using the new council structures to create further efficiencies.
45. A few respondents asked for council buildings to be re purposed. One respondent commented there should be more centralisation to Northampton, whereas others wanted more equity in service provision and access which recognised local identity and good practice. Other suggestions included improving public transport for rural areas; and stopping the local government reorganisation.
46. Some respondents suggested that the changes proposed were fair. They felt that it was equitable to charge all households but have discounts for low income and vulnerable people or that contributions should be based on income or services received. Others felt that increases were necessary in some bands but not in others, but no band should rise by the maximum level being proposed.
47. Other comments included a request that Adult Social Care services and its expenditure be reviewed; that care leavers services are improved, such as discretionary payments; that the information provided was confusing and did not show the true figure of the Council Tax as it did not take into account other precepts set by other Council Tax raising authorities.
48. Respondents were then informed that the new Council has a statutory requirement to harmonise Council Tax rates for West Northamptonshire by the start of the eighth year of the new organisation. The maximum period to achieve this is therefore seven years from Vesting Day.
49. Respondents were asked over what period they thought Council Tax rates should be harmonised across West Northamptonshire. There were 229 responses to this question. Many of the respondents (45.41%) would prefer the harmonisation to be introduced within the first three years, with 17.90% saying they would prefer harmonisation within the first year. However, 23.58% said they would rather harmonisation be implemented as late as possible and opted for year seven. There was little desire for harmonisation to be implemented between four to six years (15.72%).

Over what period do you think Council Tax rates should be harmonised across West Northamptonshire?



50. Respondents were then asked why they answered the previous question in the way that they did. There were 85 comments made in relation to this question.
51. Respondents who said harmonisation should occur immediately (Year 1) felt the new Council should harmonise the rate as soon as possible, as the Council needed to apply an equitable and transparent system from the start. A respondent stated that households should have due notice of the changes so that the household can budget for the year.
52. Respondents who indicated 2 years consider this timeframe appropriate so that householders could adjust their finances to accommodate the change. Another respondent felt that this would also allow for any lasting financial impacts of the pandemic to pass.
53. Respondents who indicated 3 years mostly commented that people should be offered time to help manage the impact of the increase. They felt this period would be beneficial for all including giving time for the new council to embed and harmonise services. They felt the Council needs to give people a reasonable time and notice to bring in such large increases, in particular for those areas of the new authority that would see a high increase. Other respondents also stated that the Council need to consider the impact of the current Covid 19 implications both on the economy and individuals.
54. The few respondents who commented on a 4 year timeframe said that either they were against harmonisation; or they wanted the process to be given time and not rushed through. They also said that smaller rises over a long period of time makes the process manageable and that the Council should show consideration to peoples finances in times of financial struggle.

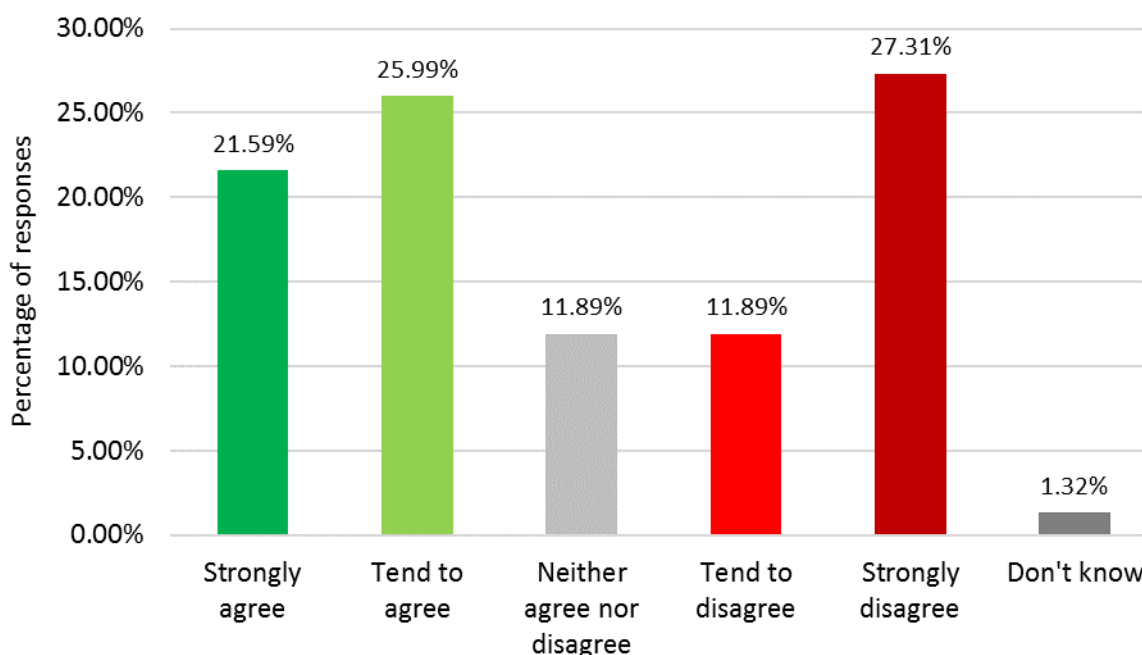
55. Respondents who indicated a 5 year timeframe on the whole commented that the current pandemic had long financial implications which have created financial difficulties for many. They felt it would be ethical of the Council to bear these difficulties in mind. Others said that it was a fairer period of time and it gave the council time to review services and identify other savings and efficiencies. Respondents also added that they did not support the harmonisation process.
56. The few respondents who said 6 years commented that time was needed due to the high increase along with the general economic imbalances.
57. The most comments received for a particular timeframe were from those who said their preference was for harmonisation to occur in year 7. Many of these respondent's comments centred on the financial hardships of the pandemic and affordability. They said that the immediate increase did not take into consideration static wage levels and that the economy needed time to recover. Respondents felt that a gradual introduction of increases would aid householders and would decrease the impact for those who were to experience a greatest increase. Respondents also mentioned the impact of financial changes on people's mental wellbeing. Many comments came from people who were concerned about their local area, in particular areas outside of Northampton town. They felt that the increase was high for them and may not be in line with government levels. They also thought they do not experience equitable or comparable services and until this happened they should not be asked to pay more Council Tax or be given more time to adjust to the changes. Others commented saying they were opposed to any increase; or that they already paid enough and that the proposal was unfair.
58. The few respondents who said they do not have a strong preference as to when harmonisation took place and made comment thought it was not the right time to harmonise the Council Tax; that they had not seen changes in services; or that the Council was putting the rate beyond the maximum referendum level.
59. A few respondents did not indicate a choice but still made comment. They said they felt that no harmonisation should take place; that the Council would not listen to consultation feedback; and they did not think Adult Social Care services would improve despite a 3% increase in council tax.
60. Any respondents who felt the proposal would have a negative impact were then asked to tell us what they thought the impact would be, along with any suggestions on how any potential negative impacts could be mitigated. A total of 44 respondents provided comment. Respondents commented in general about local taxation rates; the development of the new council; their feelings about their current area or their sovereign council; and the current health pandemic.
61. Many respondents felt the Council should stop increasing Council Tax, whilst others just asked for no increase. Others said that the new Council ought to understand the financial strain that households face and that many households had a fixed income either because of their age; the type of job they have; the lack of a salary increase or the financial effect of the current Covid 19 situation. They felt the Council has a social and moral obligation to support the wider community.

62. Many of the respondents identified themselves as living within the Daventry District area. These respondents thought the increase was too high. They felt that rural areas would suffer as more money would be needed to regenerate urban areas of the new authority. Another respondent said that the rural/urban differences would never be harmonised within the county.
63. A few respondents commented on the need for transparency from the new Council. Others said harmonisation was inevitable.
64. Some suggestions for mitigation were provided. These included operating a staged approach for collection of the higher rate; the use of online tools or support to help people managing their household budgets; and for the council to effectively manage its finances without the need of rate increases. A few suggestions centred on communication and engagement practice and thought the Council could create a public awareness programme to build a positive image as it is a new and fresh start for many. Some respondents suggested specific matters such as only asking lower paying districts to harmonise their contribution in order to ensure equity and; not to use the weighted average approach; asking housing developers to pay for the increases; and for the new Council not to use expensive consultants.

Proposed Council Tax rate increase

65. As well as harmonising Council Tax, the Council is proposing to increase Council Tax up to the level currently allowed by the government, without triggering a referendum – 4.99%. This increased rate includes a general increase of 1.99% and the allowable Adult Social Care precept increase, which is 3%.
66. This 4.99% increase would result in a 2021-22 Band D Council Tax increase for West Northamptonshire Council of £74.45 per year, which is £1.43 per week.
67. The Council's proposal to increase the core council tax rate by 1.99% in 2021/22 means an average (Band D) Council Tax payer's rate would increase £29.69 per year (£0.57 per week) for the West Northamptonshire Council precept.
68. Respondents were asked to what extent they agree or disagree with the proposal to increase Council Tax by 1.99% to help fund services. There were 227 responses to this question. A little under half of respondents (47.58%) said they strongly agree or tend to agree with the proposal, while 39.20% said they strongly disagree or tend to disagree with the proposal.

To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should increase Council Tax by 1.99% to help fund services?



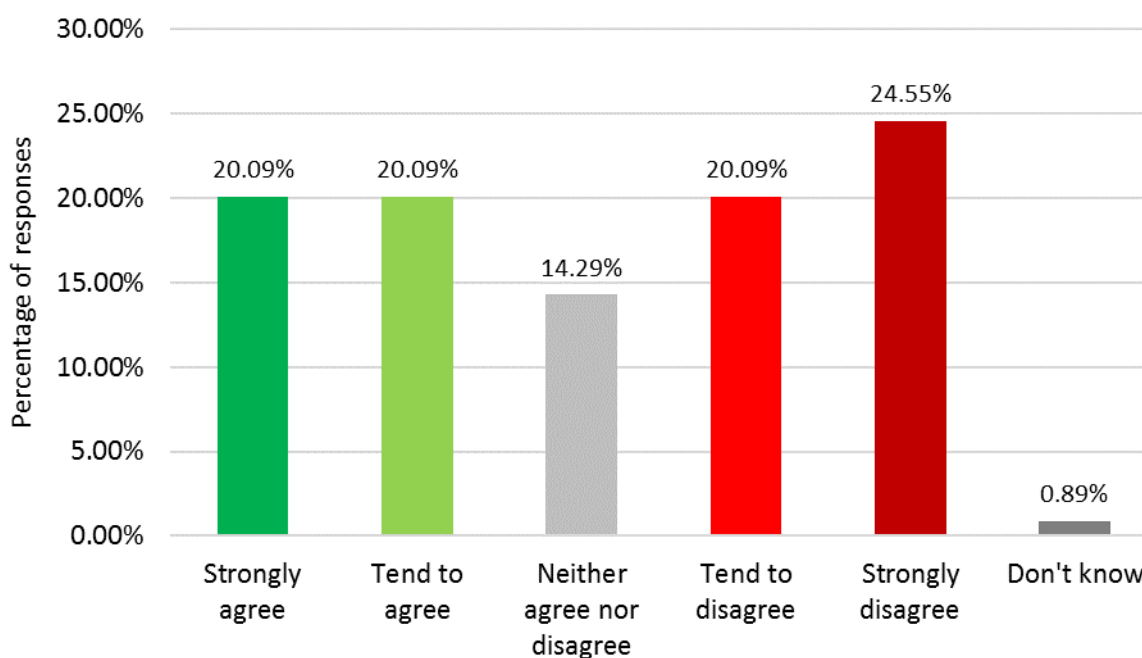
69. Respondents were then asked why they answered the previous question in the way that they did. There were 82 comments made in relation to this question.
70. A total of 21 respondents who agreed with the proposal provided comments. The most frequently mentioned reason for people agreeing with the proposal was that they acknowledged that services need more funding and that they accepted a Council Tax increase was necessary to do this. There were a handful of comments from respondents saying how they feel social care had been underfunded for a number of years, and the proposed increase should be directed towards the most vulnerable.
71. Others respondents, while accepting the need to increase Council Tax, added that they would want to see more investment in services and the increase was too much and too soon. A handful of respondents expressed their concern for those who are struggling financially and with the potential impact and financial pressures brought about by Covid 19.
72. Other comments queried the increase in Council Tax despite the savings brought forward through the unitary programme, and felt the new Council should allow the benefits of the unitary programme to embed before increasing taxation. A few respondent's comments cited additional funding from central government should be sought, and said Council Tax in the county should have been increased sooner.
73. Other comments included requests for greater transparency on how money is being.
74. There were only six respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed with the question and made comment. Responses centred around why an increase was necessary in light of significant

unitary savings, and greater transparency being required and a concern for those struggling financially. One respondent felt the increase was reasonable.

75. A total of 56 respondents who disagreed with the proposal provided comments. The most common reason by far was concern that the increase would impact those struggling financially. Residents expressed concerns around their ability to afford the increase against the financial backdrop of Covid 19 and small to no increase in living wages. There were some concerns about where the increase in income to the Council would be used i.e. to increase salaries.
76. This was closely followed by views circling around requests for greater efficiencies and value for money from the Council. Views centred on what is being provided against the increase in taxation, with the general feeling that less is provided each year despite Council Tax increases. Comments also expressed an imbalance between rural and urban areas of the Unitary, and concerns were raised around how some respondents felt harmonisation is bringing about a disproportionate rate increase for some.
77. A handful of comments cited the increase as unnecessary as they thought sufficient financial savings would be brought forward through the unitary programme. It was felt a streamlined and progressively more efficient services should yield greater savings. A few respondents also felt a wider geographical area should also provide economies of scale for services previously delivered by borough/districts.
78. A small number of comments covered the need for greater transparency; that the increase should be higher; and the increase is too much too quickly.
79. None of the respondents who answered 'don't know' made a comment.
80. Any respondents who felt the proposal would have a negative impact were then asked to tell us what they thought the impact would be, along with any suggestions on how any potential negative impacts could be mitigated. A total of 48 respondents provided comment. The most common response by far was that the increase would impact those struggling financially. Respondents cited those that have received no increase in their living wage, but yet will have to find the additional increase in taxation. The impact of Brexit and Covid 19 were also identified as key factors amplifying the financial struggle the proposed increase may bring to some households.
81. A handful of comments were regarding requests for improved financial decision making in the future. These respondents cited changes to Councillor membership to gain better representation, and thought consultancy spend and executive salaries were excessive and should be reduced. These views were followed by a small number of responses around harmonisation being unfair.
82. A small number of comments covered the increase being too much too quickly; requests for more funding from central government; and that the increase should have been sooner. Other comments included acceptance of the increase; and that the increase should be more.

83. The questionnaire then outlined the Council's proposal to increase the council tax rate by 3% in 2021/22 as part of the Adult Social Care precept, which would be used to directly fund Adult Social Care, meaning an average (Band D) Council Tax payer's rate would increase £44.76 per year (£0.86 per week) for the West Northamptonshire Council precept.
84. Respondents were asked to what extent they agree or disagree with the proposal to increase Council Tax by 3% as part of the Adult Social Care precept, which would be used to directly fund Adult Social Care. There were 224 responses to this question. There was less support for this proposal compared to the previous questions, as 40.18% of respondents said they strongly agree or tend to agree with the proposal, whilst 44.64% said they strongly disagree or tend to disagree.

To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should increase Council Tax by 3% as part of the Adult Social Care precept, which would be used to directly fund Adult Social Care?



85. Respondents were then asked why they answered the previous question in the way that they did. There were 72 comments made in relation to this question.
86. A total of 19 respondents who agreed with the proposal provided comments. The most common responses were around acceptance of the proposals, and opinions that that the increase should be more. A few respondents said that more funding from central government should be available, and a couple of respondents said the Council should do more to provide greater efficiency and value for money.
87. Other comments included that staff should be rewarded more; that harmonisation principles were unfair for certain groups of residents; and a call for greater self-funding from service users.

88. Within the neither agree nor disagree section there were six respondents who commented. A couple of respondents said they accepted the proposals, and two wanted to see more investment and for the additional monies to be used effectively. A respondent requested greater transparency on expenditure. Another respondent commented on the increase being too much, too quickly.
89. A total of 47 respondents who disagreed with the proposal provided comments. Views included concerns around the history of financial management, not always obtaining good value for money and levels of transparency relating to expenditure. There were also strong overtones relating to the financial hardship the proposals could bring for some households.
90. The most common responses were around requests for greater efficiencies and better value for money from the new Council. This was followed by concerns for people that may struggle financially because of the proposals.
91. Several respondents called for greater transparency. A similar number said they were concerned that the increase is too much and too soon.
92. A handful of respondents said they felt savings should be realised through the unitary programme; that more funding should be made available from central government; and that the spend should be increased across all of the council's services evenly.
93. Other comments included a view that Adult Social Care should be completely self-funded.
94. None of the respondents who answered 'don't know' made a comment.
95. Any respondents who felt the proposal would have a negative impact were then asked to tell us what they thought the impact would be, along with any suggestions on how any potential negative impacts could be mitigated. A total of 31 respondents provided comment. The most common responses centred on a concern for those that would struggle financially within unsecure times and feelings around the hardship respondents felt the changes would bring were echoed across a number of responses. The impact of Covid 19 on family budgets and employment was also a strong theme.
96. A small number of respondents cited the need for the new Council to operate efficiently. The need for good levels of transparency by the Council was also mentioned by a handful of respondents.
97. A respondent wants the Council to explore more self-funding options within Adult Social Care.
98. A couple of respondents cited that more funding was still required. Other comments included the thought that the proposal would have a negative impact; that harmonisation will unfairly disadvantaging some residents; and that the increase should be higher.

Draft Capital Programme 2021-25

99. The new Council needs to optimise the use of its assets so they have a positive impact on costs and help to transform services so they are sustainable for the future.
100. The Council will need to make expenditure and investment decisions in line with service objectives and properly take account of stewardship, value for money, prudence, sustainability and affordability.
101. A Baseline Programme has been put together by taking the already approved schemes in year from each of the existing West Districts and Borough and the West share of Northamptonshire County Council's 2021-22 schemes including already approved slippage from the councils' 2020-21 programme. This has resulted in a General Fund Capital Programme of £63.9m over the four year period. Full details are set out in [Appendix E – West Northamptonshire Capital Programme](#), including the total programme for 2020/21, some of which may slip into 2021/22.
102. Respondents were given the above explanation and invited to contact us should they require further details about any of the schemes.
103. Respondents were asked if they had any comments on the proposed Base Capital Programme. A total of 18 comments were received about these schemes, covering a range of different services. There was little commonality within the responses. Schemes that were named included:
- Northampton North West Relief Road
 - A45 Daventry Development Link Road
 - Chipping Warden Relief Road
 - Daventry to Braunston Cycle Track
 - Parks/Allotments/Cemeteries Enhancements
104. Around half of respondents did not name a scheme but instead offered general thoughts on the proposed Base Capital Programme. A respondent thought there should only be essential schemes and another questioned whether capital receipts in West Northamptonshire will be used for revenue funding.
105. Three respondents commented on the distribution of the schemes across West Northamptonshire. One thought that there is a high number of schemes for Northampton compared to other areas. Two respondents thought that there was less investment in South Northamptonshire Council (SNC) as not many of the schemes originate from SNC – one, a resident of SNC, thought it unfair that they would be paying for upgrades across the rest of West Northamptonshire and the other questioned the benefits for SNC residents living outside of Towcester, which is a large town in the district.
106. A respondent thought that there are unnecessary expenses in the proposal (questioning the acquisition of the former Marks & Spencer 41-45 Abington Street building and suggesting that

leisure centres should be paid for by those that use them). A respondent encouraged more investment in sports and leisure for the health benefits of residents and highlighted investing in off-road cycle routes linking rural and urban areas.

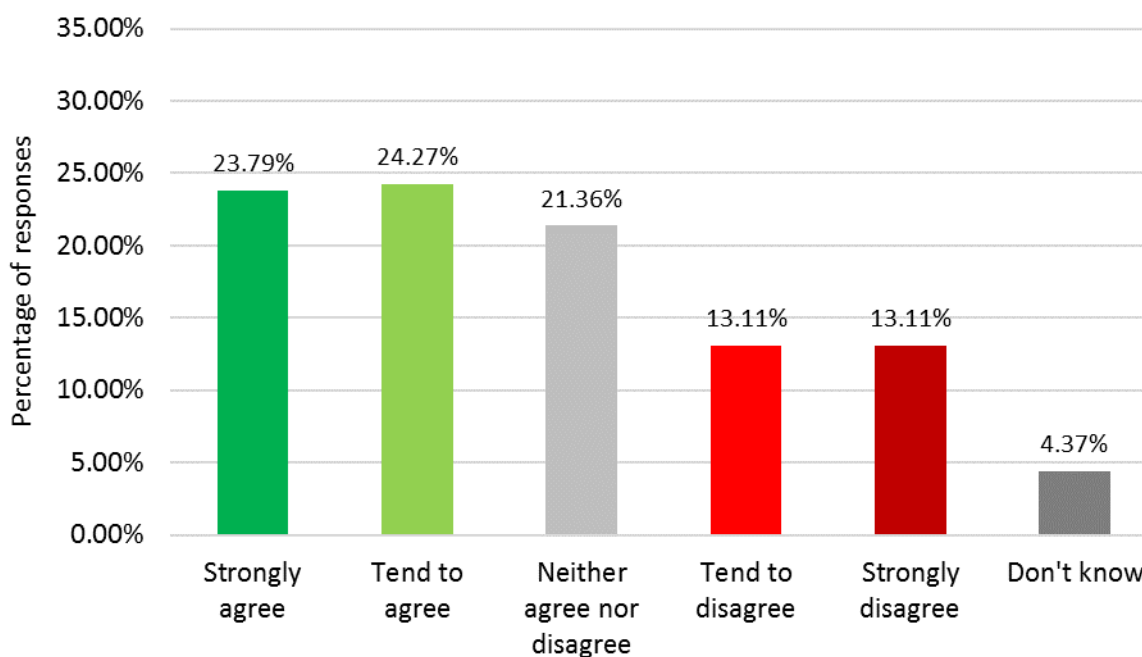
107. A respondent thought that the design of the Chipping Warden Relief Road was not fit for purpose, construction was not timely and that the cost could have been lower. They suggested having set finish dates for future projects with penalties for delays. A respondent thought that the money for the Cinema in Daventry District Council could have been better spent but offered no alternative suggestions.
108. A couple of respondents named North West Relief Road and raised concerns about the cost of the scheme. One questioned the money being spent on the project compared with current levels of progress and suggested reviewing the design/cost–benefit of the project. The other respondent thought that the relief road was being built to facilitate the construction of thousands of additional dwellings and therefore the road should be paid up front by developers.
109. A respondent raised questions about the ongoing cost of the A45 Daventry Development Link Road and the S106/Community infrastructure Levy (CIL) investment from Daventry District towards the project. A respondent questioned whether the Daventry to Braunston Cycle Track was actually going into Braunston and thought that Phase 2 needed to be planned and funded in order to prevent problems with individuals using a tow path.
110. Another respondent questioned why the £250,000 for Parks/Allotments/Cemeteries Enhancements had not been transferred to Northampton Town Council/Parishes. They commented that similar facilities are managed and financed by parishes through the Parish Precept.
111. One respondent commented that there is no budget for capital programs tackling climate change despite climate emergencies being declared at several of the sovereign authorities. They mentioned the ‘Sixth Carbon Budget’ and the ‘Prime Minister's Ten Point Plan’ as demonstrating the positive economic impact of investment into tackling climate changes – which they felt would benefit the Council.
112. A respondent questioned where the details are for the ‘Other schemes under £500k’.
113. Other feedback included a comment that Northampton Town Centre was not mentioned in the Base Capital Programme and an opinion that the town centre urgently needs major investment; and that staff pay should be a greater priority. Although these items were not listed in Appendix E - West Northamptonshire Base Capital Programme.

Draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget, Rent Setting 2021/22 and HRA Budget Projections 2022/23 to 2025/26

114. Local housing authorities are required by law to keep a Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

115. A new national policy that came into effect in April 2020 allows annual rent increases on both social rent and affordable rent properties of up to the rate of inflation (CPI) plus 1 percentage point. The Council is proposing to increase rent by the maximum 1.5% on average across the Council's housing stock in line with national government policy and a 0.5% increase to general service charges, as detailed within the [Draft Housing Revenue Account \(HRA\) Budget, Rent Setting 2021/22 report](#).
116. In the HRA the council is also proposing to spend £59.8million of capital money in 2021/2022, which will include £34.1m to deliver up to 200 new homes.
117. Respondents were asked to what extent they agree or disagree with the proposal to increase rent by the maximum 1.5% on average across the Council's housing stock in line with national government policy. There were 206 responses to this question. Almost half of the respondents (48.06%) said they strongly agree or tend to agree with this proposal, while just over a quarter (26.22%) said they strongly disagree or tend to disagree with this proposal.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal to increase rent by the maximum 1.5% on average across the Council's housing stock in line with national government policy?



118. Respondents were then asked why they answered the previous question in the way that they did. There were 53 comments made in relation to this question.
119. A total of 19 respondents who agreed with the proposal provided comments. Several respondents said they thought that the proposed 1.5% increase was reasonable, but two respondents felt that the financial situation of renters needed to be considered. A respondent thought that tenants could afford more rent, another thought that rent needs to be raised with inflation, whilst one respondent suggested that rent should be increased further for those working full time. Several respondents thought that the proposal would help with developing

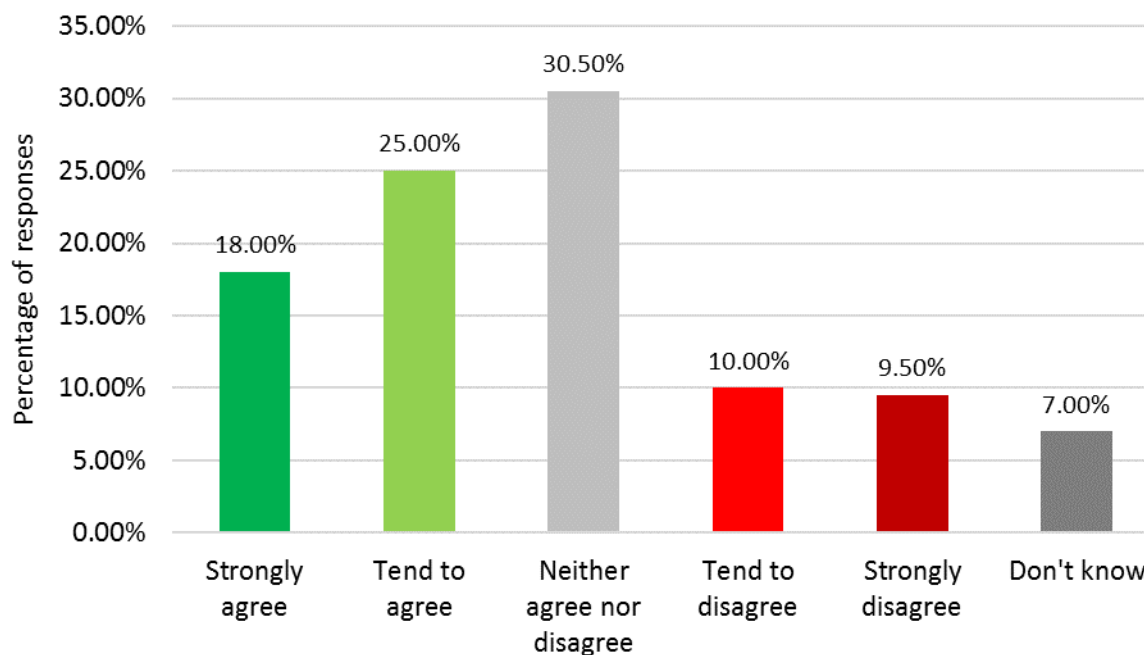
and maintaining the Council's housing stock, with a handful adding that the Council's housing stock should be more aligned with the private sector.

120. Some respondents felt the Council should increase the number of social and affordable homes. However, a respondent felt that the Council should not use private landlords. Another respondent thought that many tenants on benefits were in private accommodation, with inflated rents, due to a lack of housing stock and questioned the role of housing associations in this issue.
121. Other comments included the thought that the proposal would make tenants downsize resulting in properties available for families and suggested regularly reviewing tenancies; that private rent has increased significantly; and that further government funding could mitigate the impacts of the rent increase.
122. A total of ten respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed with the proposal made a variety of comments. A couple of respondents thought that rent increase needed to be affordable and another respondent thought the proposal was reasonable. A respondent thought it was not helpful to increase rent during the Covid 19 pandemic whilst another comment was concerned for those living in poverty.
123. One respondent thought that West Northamptonshire Council should not own housing stock and should transfer ownership as the two of the sovereign councils have done successfully. Other comments included request that help is given to those that needed it; that rents cover expenses/maintenance and do not incur cost to the general tax payer; and that the focus should be on what the increase will be used for if the proposal is in line with national policy.
124. A total of 23 respondents who disagreed with the proposal provided comments. The majority of respondents said they disagreed with the proposal as they thought residents, especially social housing tenants, were already struggling financially and that the proposed increase would affect those that are vulnerable.
125. Around half of respondents questioned how tenants would pay for the proposed 1.5% increase. Multiple comments mentioned reduced income and the impacts of the Covid 19 pandemic. The comments included opinions that wage increases were not in line with cost increases and that the proposals would generate further hardship and that many people are experiencing unemployment/job insecurity. One respondent suggested that rents should be set against what people can afford as wages do not increase by the cost of living each year.
126. Several respondents thought that rent should not be increased. A couple of respondents thought that the increase would have greater effect on low income households and those unemployed and another respondent thought that rents were too high already and questioned how many tenants were in arrears. Two respondents commented about the accumulative impact of rent increases along with the proposed Council Tax increase. Another mentioned the additional impact to residents in South Northamptonshire because of the proposed changes to

the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme. A couple of respondents felt savings from West Northamptonshire Council should be able to cover the costs rather than increasing rent.

127. Two respondents thought that rent should be increased by more than the proposed 1.5%. One thought that rent should be increased by 2.5% whilst another questioned why rent did not go up by the same amount as the Council Tax.
128. Other comments included an opinion that the costs of administrating the changes to housing benefits would outweigh the increase; and questioning the decision to build only 200 new homes.
129. The one respondent who commented having said ‘don’t know’ said they are not directly affected.
130. Any respondents who felt the proposal would have a negative impact were then asked to tell us what they thought the impact would be, along with any suggestions on how any potential negative impacts could be mitigated. A total of 14 respondents provided comment. The most frequently mentioned impact was that the increase would put additional financial pressure on residents, including those that are vulnerable and those already struggling due to the current pandemic.
131. Several respondents were concerned about the negative impacts if tenants could not afford the 1.5% increase. Respondents were concerned the increase could lead to tenants being unable to afford food, going into arrears or becoming homeless. One responded feared that the increase would lead to increased costs if tenants claimed additional welfare support/ benefits - to pay for the increased rent or needed other support. Another respondent was concerned that the proposal could lead to long-term impacts ‘forcing’ tenants to permanently rent and unable to afford to buy a house.
132. A handful of respondents offered alternative suggestions. It was suggested that the timescale for the proposed 1.5% increase be reviewed at a later time due to the current pandemic and proposed Council Tax increase; that the increase should be reduced by half; and that if the housing stock was public and not for profit, it would lead to fair rents which could reduce rental prices in the private sector.
133. Respondents were then asked to what extent they agree or disagree with the proposal to increase general service charges by 0.5% as set out in [Appendix 3 – Schedule of Service Charges 2021/22](#) of the Draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget, Rent Setting 2021/22 report. There were 200 responses to this question. A total of 43.00% said they strongly agree or tend to agree with this proposal, while 19.50% said they strongly disagree or tend to disagree with this proposal.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal to increase general service charges by 0.5% as set out in Appendix 3 – Schedule of Service Charges 2021/22 of the Draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget, Rent Setting 2021/22 report?



134. Respondents were then asked why they answered the previous question in the way that they did. There were 22 comments made in relation to this question.
135. A total of seven respondents who agreed with the proposal provided comments. Several respondents supported the increase as they felt it would improve council services (including supporting the environment) and provide long-term benefits. A couple of respondents thought the increase would pay towards the increased costs for the Council. A respondent felt that the proposal would bring West Northamptonshire Council to the level of neighbouring councils.
136. A couple of respondents agreed with the proposed increase but included stipulations. One thought that the increase should only be used to improve services. Whilst the other respondent felt that maintenance costs should be reviewed to determine whether they are cost effective.
137. A total of five respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed with the proposal made comment. A couple of respondents said they felt that the 0.5% increase was reasonable, whilst another felt that general service charges could be increased further. A respondent questioned how the proposed increase of 0.5% was decided.
138. A total of nine respondents who disagreed with the proposal provided comments. Several respondents disagreed with the proposal as they thought residents were already struggling financially with multiple comments mentioning the impacts of the current pandemic.

139. A respondent thought that the new Council could function without the proposed increase. Whilst two other respondents questioned whether the charge increase would alter services, with one adding that they thought services were currently poor.
140. Other comments included that the charges should not be increased; that tenants do not have the finances to pay the proposed increase; and one respondent repeated their comment that residents in South Northamptonshire would experience an accumulative impact including the proposed changes to the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme.
141. The one respondent who commented having said 'don't know' said they are not directly affected.
142. Any respondents who felt the proposal would have a negative impact were then asked to tell us what they thought the impact would be, along with any suggestions on how any potential negative impacts could be mitigated. A total of 11 respondents provided comment. The most frequently mentioned impact was that the increase would put extra financial pressure on residents including those that are vulnerable and already struggling, made worse by Covid 19. One respondent thought the increase would force people in debt whilst another said they are unable to afford the increase. Respondents repeated their concerns over the accumulative impact of the proposals. In addition, a respondent emphasised that social housing is there for those experiencing financial difficulties and the more vulnerable in our society.
143. Other comments included an opinion that housing companies were not reinvesting profits; and suggestions not to increase general service charges to help mitigate negative impacts.
144. Respondent were then invited to give any other comments they would like to make about the details within the Draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget, Rent Setting 2021/22 and HRA Budget Projections 2022/23 to 2025/26 report. A total of ten respondents provided comment. Almost half of respondents made comments about perceived council mismanagement and performance. A respondent thought that the proposed number of new council houses being built was too low for too high a cost and that 5-10% of the housing stock in West Northamptonshire Council should be council housing. A respondent thought that social housing in South Northamptonshire needed to be increased and that planning decisions should maximise social housing for local people.
145. Other comments included a suggestion that monies be concentrated on improving homes/facilities and ensuring that new homes are not built without looking into the required local infrastructure; that there must be clear and concise communications about the HRA; that increases in cost are manageable for those affected; that decisions about HRA should be delayed until after the current pandemic; and that social housing tenants should be accountable/treated the same as private tenants.

Alternative suggestions and other comments

146. Respondents were then reminded that the budget report sets out the latest estimated funding position, service budget pressures, key financial risks and challenges influencing the development of the new West Northamptonshire Council's financial plans for 2021-22 and the ongoing financial impact of those plans, together with the longer term estimates of funding and spending requirements.
147. Respondents were asked if they had any other ideas about how we could save the same amount of money or generate the same amount of income if we did not go ahead with these proposals. There were 56 comments made in relation to this question. Comments ranged from individual concerns about specific issues, the performance of councils and their finances, through to concerns about the current health pandemic.
148. Many respondents thought that Councils could reduce expenditure by curtailing spend on high salaries for employees and that Councillor expenses could be reduced. They also said the new Council should drive efficiencies through the amalgamation of services and assets. Some respondents noted that Councils have a variety of physical assets and buildings which they felt could be more efficiently used or repurposed to raise income.
149. Other suggestions included requests for the Council to invest in land (commercial and residential) to generate income that could help fund critical public services. Council investment in renewable energy was also suggested.
150. Several respondents stated that they were not content with the overall Council Tax policy and questioned its inequality, as they thought bigger homes need higher tax rates. Whereas a few said that impact was worst felt for middle earners. Affordability for low income households along with the financial effect of the pandemic were also consistently cited as of concern i.e. people experiencing financial hardship and then their ability to pay. Some felt that rate increases would likely force people to access other public services for support which would cause further pressure on public finances. A few respondents commented that they thought services were poor and that the Council does not provide good value for money.
151. Quite a few respondents shared their concerns about what they perceive to be a difference in level of services between urban and rural areas. Several thought that most services were geared to Northampton town/ urban areas, with a respondent wanting more capital programmes outside of Northampton.
152. A few respondents expressed their concern at what they consider to be historic mismanagement of finances and want the new Council to adhere to stronger financial management scrutiny and improved and accountable commissioning process. Others thought the Council should lobby central government for more money rather than increasing and looking for local taxation. Another respondent thought the two sovereign district councils could use their current finances to help bridge the gap.

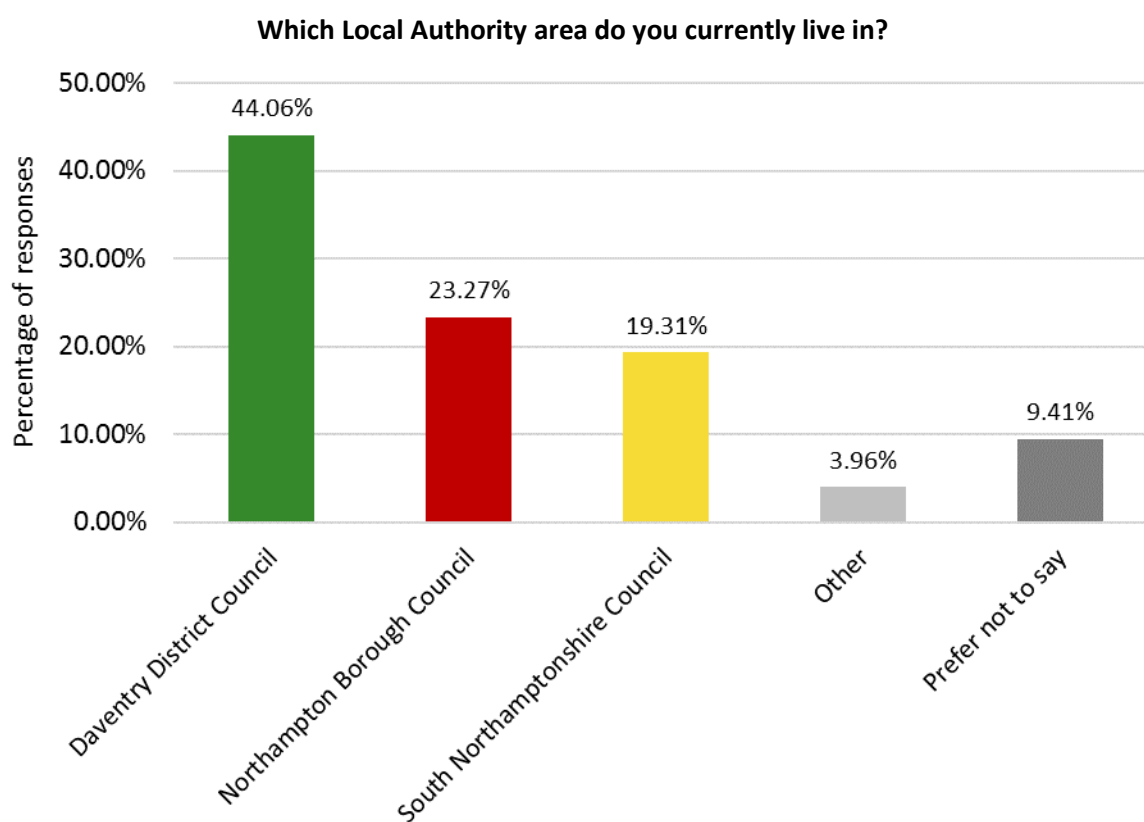
153. Other comments included an opinion that decisions had been made and that consultation was only a formality; that the information shared by the Council was too complex and difficult to comment on; and that the Council should listen to its employees more.
154. Respondents were then asked if they had any other comments they wanted to make that they have not already told us. There were 21 comments made in relation to this question. Overall respondents commented on increased taxes and their reducing income or being able to afford the proposed increases.
155. Many respondents said due to the current economic situation brought about by the pandemic many families are suffering financial hardship, so the Council should not be contributing to further financial hardship for residents and businesses. A couple of respondents thought that the Council was continually asking people to pay more, yet they could not see more services being provided; or improvement in services or efficiencies in Council operations. Several respondents said they want the new Council to be transparent about its spending.
156. A few respondents stated the Council has a reputation to build due to historical issues associated with some of the sovereign councils. They cited that the new Council should have a social conscious; ought to recognise difference in localities and the issues within them i.e. urban/ rural; and make sound decisions.
157. A couple of respondents commented on their views on the rises in Council Tax precepts from other organisations i.e. the town council, police and fire and rescue commissioner. They said how these precepts added further increases to their Council Tax bill which they said would make their overall bill high and for some unaffordable. Some stated that the development of new small councils undermines the development of a single unitary council and that they were unhappy with the changes. Quite a few respondents mentioned their positive feelings for their sovereign council and their feelings of loss of their local authority ceasing to exist.
158. A couple of respondents commented on council staff pay. With one saying they welcome a staff pay rise, adding that it would make them feel valued, whereas others commented how they think some Councils were known for 'wasting public money'.
159. A couple of respondents thought the Council could make better use out of its buildings and assets. They felt using policies such as 'home working' could be a way to save money; and that spare council assets/ buildings could be rented out or sold to generate income.
160. Other comments included views that a satisfactory level of standard should be in place for the housing building programme; and that the new Council should be aware and take note of how the North Northamptonshire Council operates and develops.

Demographic information

161. Respondents who were not responding on behalf of an organisation were asked a range of demographic questions about themselves to help us understand the characteristics of people who have taken part in the consultation.

162. Many respondents chose not to provide their demographic information. From the data received by those respondents who did complete this section, the information demonstrates that the respondents are broadly representative of the population of West Northamptonshire. However, the data does show some areas where demographic data is unaligned with known population statistics, such as the majority of consultation respondents stating they live in the local authority area of Daventry District Council (44.06%), even though this has a much lower population compared to Northampton. Full statistical data of the responses is available within the Appendix. The following is a brief summary of the data received.

163. Individual respondents were asked in which Local Authority area they live in. There were 202 responses to this question. Most respondents identified themselves as living within Daventry District (44.06%), followed by Northampton Borough (23.27%). The fewest responses came from South Northamptonshire (19.31%). Those who said 'Other' included a small number of respondents who stated they live in the north of the county. A similar number of respondents said they live within bordering local authorities to Northamptonshire. One respondent said they work in Daventry but live outside of the area.



164. There was a fairly even split between male (46.46%) and female (41.92%) respondents, with 11.62% saying 'Prefer not to say'. The most frequent age given by respondents were those aged between 50 to 64 years (34.52%).
165. A total of 54.21% of respondents were married; with 10.00% co-habiting/ living together; 17.89% being single; and 1.58% being widowed.
166. Other identified demographic information provided by respondents demonstrated that 13.27% were disabled, with physical disability being highlighted as the most frequent disability and mentioned by 16 of the 28 respondents who stated their disability. Predominantly respondents identified themselves as White British (79.01%), with 12.15% saying they were from another ethnic background and 8.84% saying 'Prefer not to say'. The most frequent religion identified was Christian (40.10%) with 38.02% of respondents choosing 'None'.
167. The final question within the questionnaire asked respondents how they found out about the consultation. A total of 187 respondents answered this question. The majority of respondents said they were made aware of the consultation via an email alert from their local council (37.50%), this was closely followed by social media promotion (31.52%). Other awareness raising channels included being notified as member of the Northamptonshire Residents' Panel (7.61%), and via the local media i.e. newspaper/ radio (7.07%). Most of the 17.39% that said 'Other' explained they found out about the consultation via internet searches on Council's websites; via Council's internal communications; being promoted on other organisations websites; and being informed of it by friends.

Other responses

168. No comments were received by letter/ email, social media or the group discussion facilitator feedback form.