

West Northamptonshire Council Draft Budget 2022/23 – Consultation 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 2022/23.

Cabinet decisions and formal consultation

2. The [Draft Budget 2022-23 and Medium Term Financial Plan](#) was approved by Cabinet on 21 December 2021 and consultation on the budget proposals began 22 December 2021. The consultation concluded on 1 February 2022.
3. The public consultation was conducted by the Council's Consultation and Engagement 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 Council's [Consultation Hub](#) website. Councillors, local MPs, town and parish 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 West Northamptonshire Residents' Panel (circa 500 members) and the 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 198 newsrooms and individuals (hyperlocal, local, regional and national, print, digital and broadcast including the Chronicle & Echo and BBC Radio Northampton). It was promoted through the Council's website, 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 Reach (i.e. the number of people who saw any content from or about the consultation web page) was 23,181 and the Twitter Reach was 7,110.

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 haveyoursay@westnorthants.gov.uk
- Writing to Budget Consultation Response, West Northamptonshire Council, One Angel Square, 4 Angel Street, Northampton, NN1 1ED
- Using social media by Tweeting (@WestNorthants) or posting comments on the Council's 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 853 times. Nearly all of the feedback received was via the questionnaire, with 751 respondents participating via this method. There was also one facilitators feedback form, 90 respondents submitted a written response, and 11 responded via social media.
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 Members and are available on the [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 screening assessment for the budget proposals](#) was published alongside the Cabinet papers and was also made available via the questionnaire.

Draft Budget 2022/23 Consultation Questionnaire

13. In total, 751 respondents filled out a questionnaire on the draft Budget proposals, either partially or fully, and one facilitators feedback form was submitted. 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. There were 735 responses to this question, with respondents being able to select more than one option if applicable. Nearly all of the respondents said they were local residents (97.1%). The second highest respondents were service users (7.1%), followed by West Northamptonshire Council employees (4.5%). The following table details the various respondent types to the consultation questionnaire.

	Response number	Percentage (%)
A local resident	714	97.1%
A service user	52	7.1%
A West Northamptonshire Council employee	33	4.5%
A West Northamptonshire Council Councillor	7	1.0%
A representative of a Town/Parish Council	5	0.7%
A Town or Parish Councillor	20	2.7%
A representative of the voluntary sector or a community organisation	8	1.1%
A representative of the local business community	5	0.7%
A representative of a health partner organisation	1	0.1%
A representative of a user group	1	0.1%
Other	4	0.5%

15. The one facilitators feedback form received was submitted by Northamptonshire VCSE Assembly. There were 13 participants who said they represented older people, younger adults, carers, black and minority ethnic groups, and people with a mental health condition, learning disability, and physical disability.

Proposed Council Tax rate increase

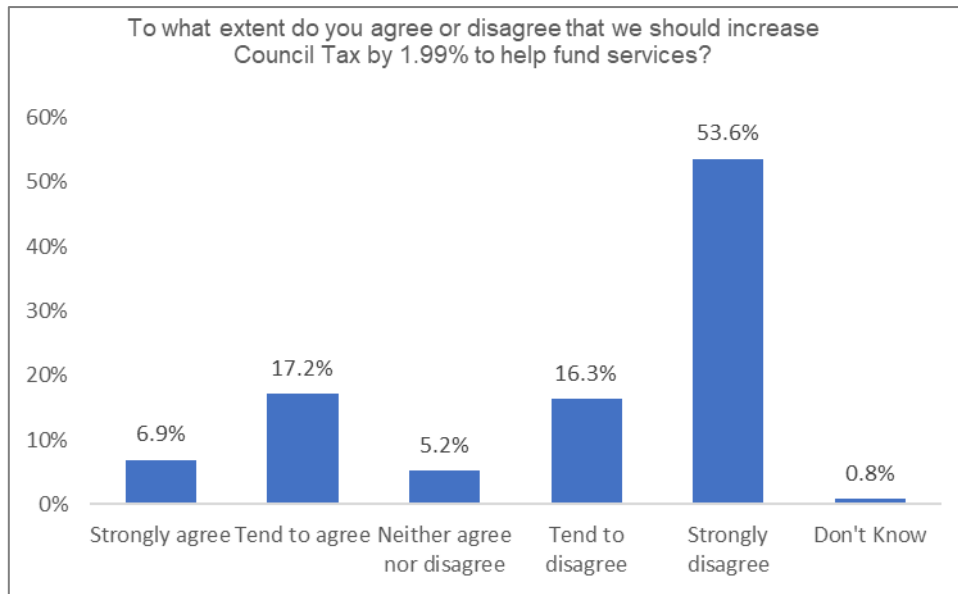
16. The Council is proposing to increase Council Tax up to the level currently allowed by the government, without triggering a referendum – 2.99%. This increased rate includes a general increase of 1.99% and the allowable Adult Social Care precept increase, which is 1%.
17. In February 2021 it was agreed that the Council Tax for West Northamptonshire be harmonised over a three year period, with rates to be fully harmonised by 2023/24. This means that the average Band D rate in the former Daventry District will need to increase

by more than 2.99% (if this is set as the average increase), but the actual Council Tax levied will continue to be slightly lower than the average Band D rates in the former Northampton and South Northamptonshire areas in 2022/23. The proposed increases are well within the £99 maximum Band D increase set in the Council's Corporate Plan.

18. The table below sets out the average increases in the West Northamptonshire Council Band D Council Tax in each area in 2022/23 that are required in order to remain on course for harmonisation in 2023/24, at which point the average Band D in each area will be equal.

	Average Band D Council Tax 2021/22	Average Band D Council Tax 2022/23	Increase (£)	Increase (%)
Ex-Daventry Area	£1,533.13	£1,596.06	£62.93	4.10%
Ex- Northampton Area	£1,588.18	£1,624.42	£36.24	2.29%
Ex-South Northamptonshire Area	£1,555.50	£1,607.71	£52.21	3.34%
Average	£1,566.39	£1,613.23	£46.84	2.99%

19. A 2.99% increase would result in an average Band D level of Council Tax for West Northamptonshire Council increase of £46.84 per year, which is £0.90p per week.
20. 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.
21. The Council's proposal to increase the core Council tax rate by 1.99% in 2022/23 means an average (Band D) Council Tax payer's rate would increase £31.17 per year (£0.60p per week) for the West Northamptonshire Council precept.
22. 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 522 responses to this question. About a quarter of respondents (24.1%) said they strongly agree or tend to agree with the proposal, while 69.9% said they strongly disagree or tend to disagree with the proposal.



23. Respondents were then asked why they answered the previous question in the way that they did. There were 348 comments made in relation to this question.

24. A total of 59 respondents who agreed with the proposal provided comments.

25. Many respondents who agreed with the proposal frequently accepted the increase, stating that it was reasonable, inevitable, and fair. Respondents said that public services needed to be funded with some adding that more funding is required. A few said that local taxation was required as they felt services are underfunded nationally. Others felt an increase is important for quality local services to be provided.

26. Several respondents said that services need to be protected and enhanced. Some want to see investment in services with a few mentioning road infrastructure, economic growth, and social care for adults and children.

27. Respondents also affirmed their acceptance to an increase on the proviso that the Council Tax collected and overall Council resources were used prudently and in a fair and appropriate manner. However, some accepted the increase reluctantly saying the Council should apply a smaller increase. A few felt there was inequity of services and raised their disagreement with the new green waste collection charges in South Northants; and their concerns of trust and transparency with their new Council.

28. Other comments included concern about the financial impact on people's ability to pay; on the lack of wage increases; the overall financial effects of the Covid pandemic; and requests for more information on how Council Tax is spent.

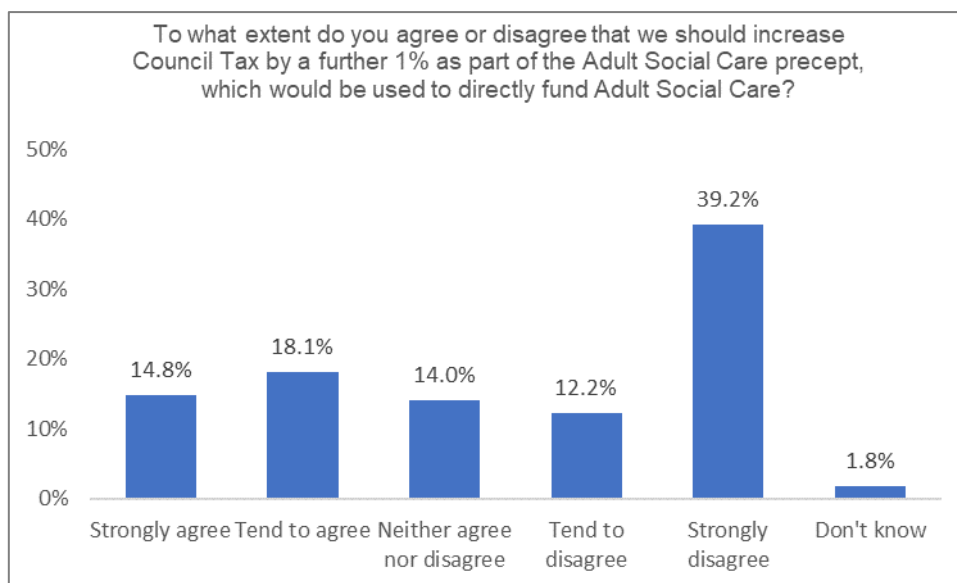
29. There were six respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed with the question that made comment. Most of these respondents accepted the increase and felt it was necessary to provide ongoing services. However, it was felt services need to be improved and be more transparent and accountable.

30. A total of 280 respondents who disagreed with the proposal provided comments. Most of the comments received mentioned respondents concerns or dissatisfaction about the services they receive or access. These respondents had strong feelings about equitable services and value for money, with many saying they feel services have been reduced or diluted despite their Council Tax contributions being increased.
31. About a fifth of responses referred to services being different from area to area. Many were aggrieved at the Council for increasing their Council Tax as well as charging for other services such as green waste. Some respondents felt that they were being penalised and still being made to pay for legacy Councils' financial problems. Respondents referred to the increase as a seemingly small amount, but a high increase overall once other precepts and local service cost variances were added. They felt this was unfair, and the Council should not pursue the increase or create what they believed to be double charging for services that had previously been included within their Council Tax payment. Several respondents referred to their higher than average Council Tax increase from the previous year due to the Councils ongoing journey of harmonisation, which they felt had not benefitted them, rather they considered there had been a decline in services. And a great many respondents felt they were not in receipt of many services despite having to pay more for them.
32. Alongside this, many respondents expressed their concern about increases in household bills married with no increase in wages and pensions. Respondents felt the Council was adding extra burden on people at a time when they were having to struggle to keep up with the increasing cost of living. Many respondents said they felt the proposed increase was too much and they could not afford to pay anymore. Respondents shared personal stories of hardship, struggle, and financial worry. They asked the Council to be more considerate and aware of low-income households. Many said that the Council should not be adding to the burden that many low-income families were facing.
33. Some mentioned the consequences of what they believed to be poor service delivery having an impact on them and their area. Whilst others said they want the Council to be more prudent and efficient. They wanted the Council to review operational costs and produce greater savings from the unitary structure as well as to significantly improve services. Others requested the Council be alert to difference with the communities and people it services in terms of a town, rural and village split.
34. There were two respondents who answered 'don't know' that made a comment. One requested openness, transparency, and more detail on the Council Tax proposal to make an informed decision. Another said overspending in one area meant that other areas were having to contribute more.
35. One respondent who had not indicated if they agreed or disagreed with the proposal but still made comment suggested collected green waste could be turned into compost for retail to the public.

36. 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 241 respondents provided comment.
37. The issue of affordability and rising costs of living dominated the comments received. Many respondents expressed deep concern for households who were facing financial challenge and hardship. They cited issues of high energy costs and an increase in food bills. Some said that those low-income households or those that were on the threshold of the breadline would find the increase a greater burden this year. Respondents felt the Council should not be adding to their financial stress and ought to be doing more to assist people. A few respondents felt these pressures would manifest in increased mental and social health issues which would adversely cost the Council/ the taxpayer more.
38. Many comments mentioned aspects of the wider economy and no rises in wages or salaries. Again, respondents shared their personal experience of their financial challenges whilst others made general comments like families having to compromise on essentials in order to pay the Council for the increase it was proposing. Several respondents said they, or people in general, would not be able to afford the increase with some indicating that they would abstain from paying it altogether. Again, it was commented that the increase was too high and should be lower. A similar number of respondents questioned what difference the increase would make on the Council finances and asked the Council to cancel or freeze the rise.
39. Many respondents also commented on the Council itself. They questioned the value of the local government reorganisation and said that they had paid increases in their Council Tax last year and they were aggrieved that they are again being asked to pay an increase. Several respondents said they felt the Council was providing inefficient and ineffective services; that services have been diluted; and they were not good value for money. Respondents thought the Council needed to reduce management, rationalise some job functions, and ensure accountability and scrutiny is in place.
40. Several respondents also felt their locality was receiving no service or poorer service than they had been used to. Some of these respondents specifically mentioned green waste collection with most of these comments raising their objection to paying for green waste as a separate charge. A couple of comments asked for more equity in green waste charges with levelling up charges across the authority. With others saying the outcome of charging for waste would have other financial and environment consequences for the Council such as an increase in fly tipping or green waste being disposed as part of household waste.
41. Other comments included views that members of the public are aware of what services the Council provides. Other comments stated the reduction of pride in their locality; an increase in poor wellbeing; dissatisfaction with service delivery of other public agencies

such as police and fire and rescue; the national government monetary settlement; and the continuing financial effects of the Covid pandemic and its impact on society.

42. There were 18 responses which indicated various alternative suggestions.
43. Some simply wanted no Council Tax increase, whereas others suggested an increase based on services used or for it to be means tested. Respondents also suggested delaying the increase for a year, freezing the Council Tax rate, or staggering the increase over two years; or introducing gradual small increases and expand the collection of Council Tax over 12 monthly instalments instead of 10.
44. A respondent suggested housing should be allocated to only those that only lived in West Northamptonshire. Another suggested that the Council should request and engage in genuine and open dialogue with people to identify innovative ways to save money or attract income into the Council. One response suggested recycling more plastics.
45. Specific mitigation ideas included reducing the services of other Council Tax raising authorities; asking central government for more funding; reducing adult social care costs; and introducing enforcement cameras on bus lanes.
46. The questionnaire then outlined the Council's proposal to increase the Council tax rate by a further 1% in 2022/23 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 £15.66 per year (£0.30p per week) for the West Northamptonshire Council precept.
47. Respondents were asked to what extent they agree or disagree with the proposal to increase Council Tax by a further 1% as part of the Adult Social Care precept, which would be used to directly fund Adult Social Care. There were 508 responses to this question. Respondents were slightly more in favour of this proposal, with just under a third of respondents (32.9%) saying they strongly agree or tend to agree with the proposal, while approximately a half (51.4%) said they strongly disagree or tend to disagree with the proposal.



48. Respondents were then asked why they answered the previous question in the way that they did. There were 258 comments made in relation to this question.

49. A total of 74 respondents who agreed with the proposal provided comments.

50. The majority these said that they accepted the proposal as it is an area they felt needed more investment, and that it was about helping and providing services to vulnerable people. A few added that due to the Covid pandemic they felt it was everyone's duty to help to contribute towards services for vulnerable people and for those needing social care support.

51. Several respondents said they were in acceptance of the increase but wanted reassurance that the money raised would be ringfenced for adult social care services and not be repurposed elsewhere.

52. A few respondents said they wanted more transparency in the financial management of the adult care budgets coupled with better decision making. It was also mentioned that there needs to be continued innovation of the service so it can meet service users' requirements.

53. A couple of respondents said improved pay for frontline social care employees should be prioritised over management costs.

54. Other comments included thoughts that it was a fair amount to pay; whilst another felt there should be a choice about the amount to pay and whether they paid or not. A few respondents said adult social care should be funded by national government instead of local government.

55. There were 22 respondents who said they neither agree nor disagree and provided comment.

56. The respondents who accepted the rise wanted to have more information on where the money was spent, saying the money must be ringfenced for adult social care.
57. A third of the comments referred to the way in which adult social care was organised and felt it should be reviewed to help it become more efficient. Others said they thought the service currently provided was of poor quality and value. Others commented on their own direct lived experience saying they were not happy with the service.
58. A few respondents said they felt central government should be providing funds, with some mentioning that forthcoming rises in National Insurance contributions were meant for adult social care. It was also felt that government policy was failing adult social care provision.
59. Other comments included a call of cultural changes in the way older people are cared for; opinion that introducing a charge through local taxation was not required; or that there would never be enough funding to properly resource social care.
60. A total of 159 respondents who disagreed with the proposal provided comments. These responses mostly fell into three distinct areas – the use of the central government taxation and government responsibility; the Council’s operation, financial management and affordability; and personal responsibility for managing care and wellbeing.
61. Many responses referred to the forthcoming Health and Social Care Levy being introduced by central government in the coming tax year. Respondents felt this levy plus the increase in Council Tax meant that they were playing twice for social care. Others had strong opinions that financial resources for social care should be sourced from national funds and not left to local government. A few responses suggested that social care should fall under the remit of the NHS. Whereas some felt that they have little choice in the matter but to pay, with a few saying that the Council should totally discharge its discretion for the adult social care precept.
62. On Council operations, respondents questioned the effectiveness and efficiency of the service with many saying they felt it represented poor quality. Some felt that the Council did not use public money effectively, and that it should act with more transparency. References were made to legacy Council’s financial management, and it was felt there is a lack of equitable service provision across the new Council’s area. A few respondents mentioned the relationship of public and private care; and felt the care system was ‘broken’. Some respondents gave examples of their own experiences, including negative opinions regarding management and system design costs. A few respondents also said they had not seen how last year’s precept had been used and questioned whether the precept collected had been used solely for social care.
63. Again, respondents took the opportunity to voice their concerns about financial hardships for those who were struggling to manage current household bills considering increasing living cost and static wages. A few of the respondents said they simply could not afford to

pay or that the increase was too much. Many also thought that it was an unfair increase. Others wanted the Council to reconsider other ways to offset the cost of social care.

64. Some comments were received stating social care costs should be self-funded and not come out of the public purse. Other comments included that the increase was too low; whereas another felt they should be given a choice to decide whether they opt in or how much is paid.
65. There were two respondents who answered 'don't know' that made a comment. They said they required further breakdown of financial information and commented that the Daventry area was contributing a higher amount than other areas.
66. One respondent who had not indicated if they agreed or disagreed with the proposal but still made comment said they felt there was an over development of the area and that the Council should reduce its operational costs.
67. 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 122 respondents provided comment.
68. Respondents provided a various range of comments. The most common theme was affordability and the cost of living. Again, respondents stated their concerns of static wages and the stagnant nature of household income with less coming into the home and more demands being made through local and national taxations.
69. Respondents said many family budgets were stretched, and that they were not sure where they would find the money to pay for increases, with low-income families being impacted the hardest. Some respondents pointed out that they themselves were on the tipping edge of going into debt or losing their homes.
70. A few respondents said they felt the Council Tax was already too high and that the Council should use national government funds rather than keep asking residents to pay more. Respondents asked that other Council service areas ought to be reviewed with savings redirected back into social care.
71. Other responses expressed concern at the Council's own operational costs and felt it should make more efforts to reduce these before increasing local taxation. A few respondents thought that the Council has enough finances, but they were mismanaged; some mentioned specific legacy Council issues whereas others just stated that they felt the Council wasted money and resources.
72. Others mentioned that not all services were provided equitably across the new Council area; or that the amount being invested was not enough. A few respondents accepted the

charges as an inevitable consequence of providing local services that provided value for money.

73. Respondents did not provide direct suggestions or offer mitigation but provided a series of general comments and observations on the social care system. Some wanted a system which was fair and available equally across the Council area with suggestions that it should be funded centrally via higher corporation taxes or be provided through the NHS. Others felt it should be means tested or that the Council Tax system should be reviewed and based on the number of people in a household.
74. Respondents thought the parameters of the local Council Tax Reduction Scheme could be increased so more low-income families could be helped. Respondents said that providing improved communications and transparency on where resources are spent would enable the public to understand how their financial contribution is being used. Respondents also stated that more prudent scrutiny of Council spend, and procurement may deliver savings which could be redirected back to social care.

Fees and charges

75. All Fees and Charges have been subject to a review for 2022/23 and within the draft budget proposal there is an additional £1.2m of income that has been generated through this review.
76. This is the second year that the Council has been able to set its fees and charges. In some cases, there will have been different fees and charges set by the previous authorities for the same services. In these cases, the Council has looked to harmonise these fees and charges so that one consistent fee or charge is applied across the whole Council area. This has been done for most areas where there were different fees and charges for the same services, including all those where there is a legal requirement to harmonise. In a few cases harmonisation has not been possible for this financial year, and these fees and charges will be reviewed again during the year to look to harmonise as soon as possible.
77. The fees and charges schedule includes a proposal to harmonise kerbside garden waste collection for all residents of West Northamptonshire who opt into this service of £42 per bin per year, from 1 April 2022. This proposal was approved by Cabinet in November 2021. This proposal is estimated to generate an additional net income of £800k. In addition, it is expected that a further £100k income can be budgeted for due to uptake of this existing scheme in the Northampton area being greater than previously budgeted for.
78. Respondents were provided with the above explanation and the [proposed 2022/23 Fees and Charges schedule](#).
79. Respondents were asked if they had any comments on these proposals. A total of 214 comments were made about fees and charges.

80. The vast majority of respondents who made comment mentioned the harmonisation of the green waste, which was approved by Cabinet on 9 November 2021. Although the decision to harmonise a fee across West Northamptonshire had already been made many respondents took the budget consultation as an opportunity to express their disagreement with the harmonised fee, in particular respondents from the South Northamptonshire Council legacy area as no fee had previously been charged in this locality.
81. Many respondents felt the cost should be covered by their existing Council Tax. Some cited the higher than anticipated central government funding and felt this should be offset against the green waste collection fee. Respondents felt the fee would result in increased fly tipping within the south of West Northamptonshire area and disposal of green waste at landfill, which would have a detrimental impact on the environment. Some respondents also felt the fee was too expensive and disproportionate for the frequency of which they use the service, and that the service should not be run for profit.
82. A few respondents made general comments about fees and charges and felt that harmonisation only ever increases charges. It was also commented that any increases should be comparable to average salary increments; or there should be no fees and charges for Council services. It was commented that fees should be at a competitive rate, and not excessive. It was suggested that fees increase at the same rate as inflation.
83. A similar number of respondents mentioned Council Tax and felt that the Council's continued journey towards harmonising Council Tax and fees and changes meant some residents were seeing a much higher accumulation of cost than other areas.
84. A few respondents criticised the Council and actions of past legacy Council's and felt they were being financially penalised for what they said was the mismanagement of previous legacy Council's in other areas. It was also felt that service improvements were not increasing in line with fees and charges.
85. Respondents making specific comments regarding fees and charges included:
- One respondent felt there had been a reduction in planning department support, and that these fees should be waived to reflect that.
 - A school Governor said due to harmonisation the Council will no longer provide Finance, payroll and HR support for schools in their area, and that it is anticipated alternative providers will put additional pressure on school budgets and resources.
 - A respondent believes there are private companies making significant profits on new housing developments and thinks commercial planning permission should have an increase in their application fees up to 50%.
 - Request for easier access to parking for horse riders to access popular locations, with a booking system similar to the one offered in Milton Keynes.
 - Request for the reduced fees for Everdon Learning Centre, due to concerns that the increase may deter bookings and the sustainability of the facilities.

Draft Capital Programme 2022-26

86. The Capital Strategy demonstrates how the Council will make expenditure and investment decisions in line with our Corporate Plan, which sets out the Council's priorities. It sets out the key objectives and broad principles to be applied by the Council when considering capital investment and its funding and provides the context for how the Medium Term Capital Programme seeks to support the realisation of the Council's vision and corporate priorities.
87. Draft capital requirement proposals have been considered by the Capital and Assets Board who recommended that, at this stage of the budget setting process, only schemes which are fully funded are included for consideration as part of the draft budget setting process.
88. The draft budget therefore takes into account the schemes already approved in year through the Capital and Assets Board plus new fully funded schemes i.e. where there is no financial impact for the Council. A further review will be undertaken of all other proposals to agree prioritisation of schemes before they are submitted for final consideration.
89. Ten fully funded schemes have been submitted for 2022/23 onwards, totalling £35.3m.
90. Respondents were presented with the details of the capital programme additions for 2022/23 as set out in Appendix E , within the following agenda item [Agenda item - Draft Budget 2022-23 and Medium Term Financial Plan](#) and were invited to contact us if they would like further details about any of the schemes.
91. Respondents were asked if they had any comments on any of these schemes. A total of 80 comments were received about these schemes.
92. Many respondents made general comments. The majority of these were feelings that the Capital Programme is Northampton centric, with respondents feeling that other areas are underrepresented. These respondents want to see more investments in other towns and rural areas.
93. A small number of respondents commented about schools with most being in support of the proposals, although there were requests for more school places, especially outside of Northampton.
94. A similar number of respondents mentioned roads and felt there should be more investment in road maintenance and safety, including improved cycleways. It was commented that more should be done under the Active Travel scheme.
95. Other comments included request for greener infrastructure; more support for leisure and sport activities; that the Council should retain its stock of housing and flats; and for Capital

schemes to be funded either within budget, central government or via private investment. A few respondents make general comments of dissatisfaction with the Council.

96. The specific schemes mentioned included the following:

- Many respondents who specifically named a scheme mentioned Abington Street and the Four Waterside development. There were mixed responses to these proposals. Some respondents were in favour of the plans, but it was added that the need for any development addresses sustainability and climate change. Others were concerned the Council would go over budget, or that more offices in Northampton town centre were not necessary as many working styles have changed because of the Covid pandemic. It was also questioned if there was a demand for a new hotel in the town. It was requested that any residential developments were affordable and prioritised to West Northamptonshire citizens.
- Schools were mentioned by a small number of respondents. It was requested new secondary schools be built to meet current demand, with three housing developments in the west of Northampton being highlighted as an example of where housing is increasing faster than supporting infrastructure. The proposal for the NSG sports facilities funding received mixed opinions. It was also commented that the £400k costs for Duston School seemed excessive.
- It was requested that highway infrastructure be reviewed to meet current and future demand, with the Old Stratford Roundabout being specifically highlighted by one respondent.

97. A small number of respondents said they did not understand the information presented within the Capital Programme papers, which made it hard for them to comment.

Alternative suggestions and other comments

98. Respondents were then reminded of the contents of the budget report and that the consultation questionnaire focusses on the new proposals for the draft budget 2022/23 that will likely affect residents and service users. However, respondents were welcome to comment on anything within the Draft Budget.

99. Respondents were asked if they had any other comments they would like to make, including any alternative ideas about how we could save the same amount of money or generate the same amount of income as outlined in the proposals. There were 62 comments made in relation to this question. Respondents made various comments and there were no strong defining themes.

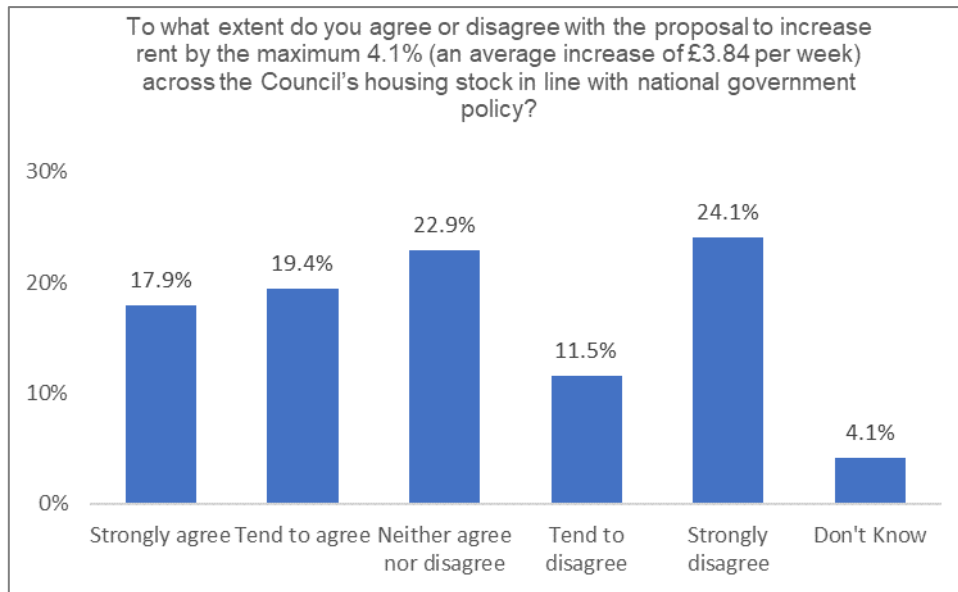
100. Several respondents took this opportunity to mention Council Tax. It was felt an increase was not justified. Concern was expressed as for some residents Council Tax was increasing higher than average due to the Council's continued journey to harmonisation. Request was made that the timeframe for harmonisation be extended, especially considering the currently high cost of living increases. It was also commented that having a unitary local authority would save money, but charges are still increasing.

101. A few respondents mentioned the Council staff. It was commented that salaries were too low for many employees and were too high for senior management; that staff numbers should be reduced; and that more services should be provided inhouse.
102. A similar number of respondents took this opportunity to express their dissatisfaction with the Council and its current management and past decisions.
103. A few respondents expressed their desire for more and improved walking and cycling routes. It was felt the Council focusses too much on developing and widening roads and does not do enough to encourage active travel. Some responded wanted to see the Council focus more on supporting the green agenda. It was suggested a rights of way infrastructure plan be developed. There was also request for more parking available at country parks for all types of users.
104. Linked in with this were requests for improved rural bus services and out of county services. It was also commented that more should be done to make the roads and highways of satisfactory standard.
105. A few respondents mentioned school budgets. These respondents provided various comments. There were requests for more school funding, including SEND and for mental health support; for more secondary schools in Northampton to help meet demand; and for any additional school funding to cover all of West Northamptonshire and not be focused on Northampton.
106. The creation of a HS2 Marshall post was commented on by a small number of respondents. They all objected to this post being funded by the Council and felt it should be funded by either HS2 directly or central government.
107. A couple of respondents mentioned reserves, and it was felt that budgets should be balanced to match the current situation and that the amount of reserves should be set based on an informed assessment of the risks faced by the Council in the coming year.
108. A handful of respondents repeated comments regarding green waste.
109. Other comments included request for free parking; that libraries and country parks should be sponsored by local organisations; pensions to be reformed; and that the equality screening assessment should say the budget proposals have a negative impact instead of positive, as residents will need to be paying more in Council Tax.
110. The one group facilitator feedback form which was completed provided their collective feedback to this question. They specifically mentioned uplift in Contracts and Grants to the VCSE sector. They felt contracts were too short and there should be a commitment to longer-term future delivery and that contracts can be curtailed or ended at short notice. They also said the funding does not allow for inflation; contracts are often too widely

drawn; funding is often available for a short-term need with expectations that the delivery or service will be self-sustaining, although timescales for this are often unrealistic; and that contracting and funding is often too narrowly focussed.

Draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget 2022/23

111. Local housing authorities are required by law to keep a Housing Revenue Account (HRA).
112. A national policy that came into effect in April 2020 that allows annual rent increases on both social rent and affordable rent properties of up to the rate of inflation (Consumer Price Index - CPI) plus 1%. The CPI in September 2021 was 3.1%, and therefore the Council are proposing to increase rent from 4 April 2022 by the maximum 4.1% on average across the Council's housing stock in line with national government policy. This will increase the average rent from £93.66 to £97.50 per week. An increase of £3.84 per week.
113. This increase ensures the Council are able to invest in high/quality housing service for our tenants. Failure to increase the rents by the statutory amount will not only have a significant impact on income in the current year but also in each year going forward. It is estimated that a 1% reduction in the rent increase would reduce the rental income by approximately £0.5 million in the current year.
114. The Council is proposing a 3.1% increase in general service charges (in line with CPI at September 2021), and to increase garage rents and the commuter surcharge on garages by 3.1%. This will increase the average rent per garage from £9.66 to £9.96 (or £0.30p per week) and the commuter surcharge from £15.35 to £15.83 (or £0.48p) per week respectively.
115. Respondents were directed to view the Draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget and its appendices for further information, (agenda item 91) on [Draft Budget Reports 2022-23](#).
116. Respondents were asked to what extent they agree or disagree with the proposal to increase rent by the maximum 4.1% (an average increase of £3.84 per week) across the Council's housing stock in line with national government policy. There were 340 responses to this question. There was a mixed response to this proposal as 37.4% of respondents said they strongly agree or tend to agree with this proposal, whilst 35.6% said they strongly disagree or tend to disagree.



117. Respondents were then asked why they answered the previous question in the way that they did. There were 121 comments made in relation to this question.
118. A total of 40 respondents who agreed with the proposal provided comments.
119. The most frequent comments related to the market value of property and fairness of rents compared to the private sector. Several comments felt that it would be reasonable to increase rents to be comparable with rents in the private sector and to cover fees and costs to enable housing to pay for itself. It was added that the cost of living increases should be shared by all as some respondents felt they were subsidising rents. Some believe that social housing tenants do not make enough contribution and it was suggested that there needs to be better assessment of tenant's needs.
120. A few respondents agreed to the proposal but felt the increase would be unfair to people who are in work and who did not receive government support. Others felt that the increase was unfair to taxpayers in social housing who will have the burden of other tax increases as well as the rent increase and it was felt that those who do not receive help will be disproportionately affected compared to those that receive other levels of support.
121. Several respondents felt an increase in rent could support investment in the housing stock, services and in the local area. Some believed that current rents have been too low and should be increased to provide income. It was added that those benefitting should pay what's permissible.
122. Respondents highlighted the need for properties to be well maintained and that should be reflected in the rent.
123. A few comments felt those most in need should be supported and systems should be in place to be alerted of difficulties.

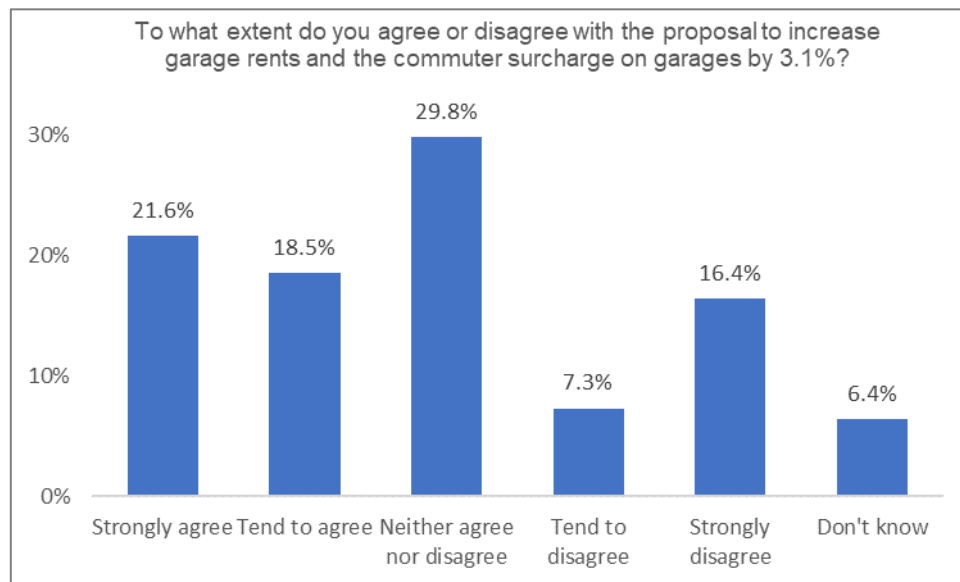
124. A small number said they were concerned about the level and timing of the increase. These respondents felt that there should be a two-year freeze, and increases should be incremental or in line with inflation or linked to benefits.
125. A similar number of respondents want to see a review of processes or systems in respect of length of tenancy, under-occupancy, and the right to buy scheme.
126. A total of 12 respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed with the proposal made a variety of comments.
127. Some respondents were concerned of the affordability by poorer households, and it was felt that an increase is acceptable if people on low income are supported. A respondent felt that the increase was too high.
128. A small number said they were unaffected by the proposal. Another respondent highlighted the difficulty accessing the housing register. Other comments include an opinion that social housing should be available and affordable to those eligible; and that there should be an end to housing being sold below market value.
129. A total of 66 respondents who disagreed with the proposal provided comments.
130. Respondents were concerned about struggling families and that the increase could cause debt and hardship to poorer families and respondents highlighted that incomes have not risen at the same rate as the increasing cost of living.
131. Several respondents felt that the tenants did not receive value for money, citing poor or lack of maintenance of properties, poor quality of housing and poor service received.
132. A few respondents suggested that processes should be reviewed. They mentioned that rents should not be supported by local taxes and raised their concerns about rent/buy schemes where the tenant has a mortgage to pay as well as rent. They also said that tenants should be assessed every five years and that the Council should ensure that subletting is not occurring; and the right-to-buy scheme should end. Although one respondent felt the Council should support people to buy property.
133. A small number of respondents took the opportunity to express their dissatisfaction with financial management in the Council. A few respondents said budgets could be managed better and that they were dissatisfied with senior management costs.
134. A similar number of respondents commented on fairness of social housing. They suggested that the fair rents act means that rents should be in line with the private sector and that they were unhappy at having to subsidise social housing. They felt no rise would be unfair to taxpayers and queried why garage rents are being increased at a lower rate than housing rents.

135. One comment queried why extra funds are needed as they believe all renovation and maintenance works have been completed on Council properties. They also queried why ex-Council properties were not offered a discount to have the works done at the same time.
136. Other comments included an opinion that there was a lack of support for disabled people and difficulties claiming PIP; that larger properties should incur higher taxes; deprived areas should receive more funding for wealth creation e.g. public transport; and a view that the sale of housing stock has heightened the property market.
137. The three respondents who commented having said 'don't know' said the matter was not relevant to them.
138. 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 56 respondents provided comment.
139. The majority of respondents raised concerns of affordability by tenants. Many referred to hardship, poverty, struggling families, lack of increase in incomes and they were concerned about the impact of an increase alongside rising household bills. Respondents expressed concern that tenants will be unable to afford the rent and may be evicted, which in turn would lose money for the Council.
140. A few respondents expressed their dissatisfaction with services and mentioning poor maintenance.
141. A similar number of respondents felt that there could be better administration of Council funds/ resources with a criticism of the city status bid and a suggestion of better budgeting and looking at senior team cost management.
142. Other comments included the view that while the Council are paying benefits and increasing rents, they are moving funds from one department to another; concern that rising costs would stop people from getting on the property ladder; that increases would affect people disproportionately who do not receive benefits and that the increase is unfair to people who own or rent in the private sector; that pensioners should receive a reduction; that a lower level of increase may be more acceptable; and an opinion that there has been a lack of interaction between staff/tenants.
143. Several respondents provided alternative suggestions. They said development need could be based on the number of houses being built; the Council could buy development land and become a leaseholder; and the Council could reduce its own costs and refurbishment projects. On rent recovery, respondents suggested implementing current policies and improving the rent recovery processes. They mentioned a review of tenancies to avoid under-occupancy; having better communication of need for increases;

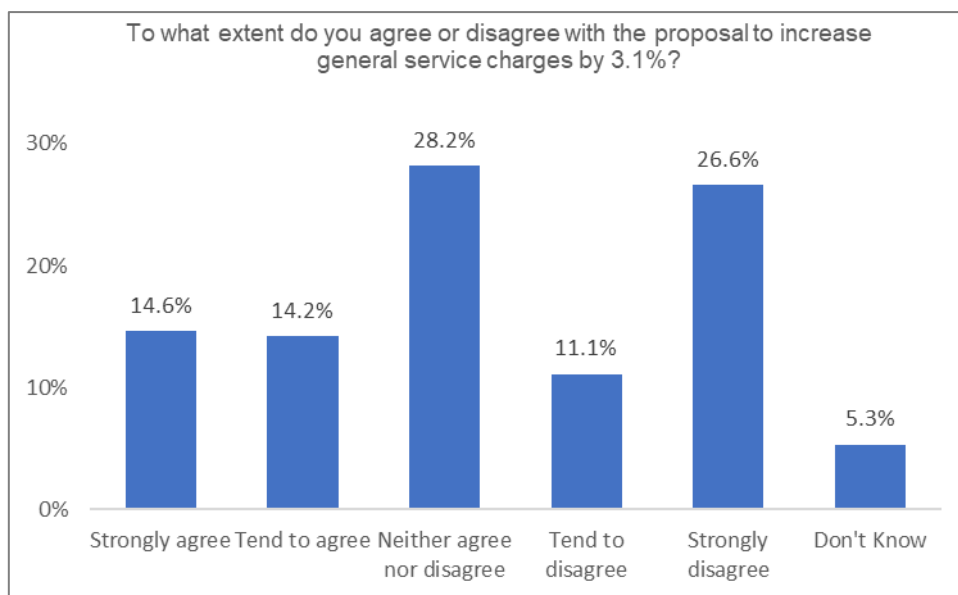
undertaking energy efficiencies in properties; lobbying Government for increased funding and making the Government aware of hardships faced by many tenants.

144. There were a few comments on how negative impacts could be mitigated. Responses stated that rising costs will focus people on priorities, such as food, warmth, family; and that support ought to be in place for people in need with excellent customer care being provided.

145. Respondents were then asked to what extent they agree or disagree with the proposal to increase garage rents and the commuter surcharge on garages by 3.1%. There were 329 responses to this question. Respondents were more in favour with this proposal, with a total of 40.1% saying they strongly agree or tend to agree with this proposal, while 23.7% said they strongly disagree or tend to disagree.



146. Respondents were then asked to what extent they agree or disagree with the proposal to increase general service charges by 3.1%. There were 323 responses to this question. Again, respondents were more supportive of this proposal than against, with a total of 37.8% saying they strongly agree or tend to agree with this proposal, while 28.8% said they strongly disagree or tend to disagree.



147. Respondents were then invited to tell us any comments they may have regarding the HRA Capital programme and indicative budgets for 2023/24 to 2026/27 as summarised in the Draft Housing Revenue Account Budget 2022-23 report , Appendix 2, within agenda item 91 , [Draft Budget Reports 2022-23](#) A total of 26 respondents made comment.
148. It was commented that service improvement would mean people were less averse to the increase. The sale of properties should be used to upgrade housing rather increase rents. They said the budget should encompass better infrastructure, rights of way protection and disabled provision. One respondent queried the outcome of the £6.08m Wave 1 bid and suggested the implementation of energy efficiency measures across West Northamptonshire.
149. Other comments included a query about the Council owning housing, a suggestion that housing is more important than garages although they are an asset; that there should be no increases; and that there should be a clearer explanation of proposals.
150. Several respondents referred to previous proposals and said they felt that the increase is acceptable if people on low income are supported. Some felt that tenants already pay enough. One respondent queried whether the rise reflected inflation and that it should reflect the cost of provision.
151. Respondents were asked if they have any other comments they would like to make about the details within the Draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget report and its appendices. There were 12 comments made in relation to this question.
152. Respondents who commented on fairness queried why housing rents are rising more than garage rents; the need for more affordable housing along with infrastructure; and another said that social housing tenants should contribute to rising costs due to Covid.

153. Respondents who commented on the system and process felt a regional housing provision programme is needed to address homelessness, inequality, and the environment. Another response said they thought the planning process needs improvement; whereas another respondent felt that a service review of management was required.

154. Other comments mentioned included a request for new public transport infrastructure outside the Council's operational area; a query about the possibility of people being attracted to move to neighbouring areas; that green initiatives be adapted for existing housing and be incorporated for new builds; a request for clearer explanation of proposals for people whose first language is not English; and for feedback on the outcome of this consultation be shared.

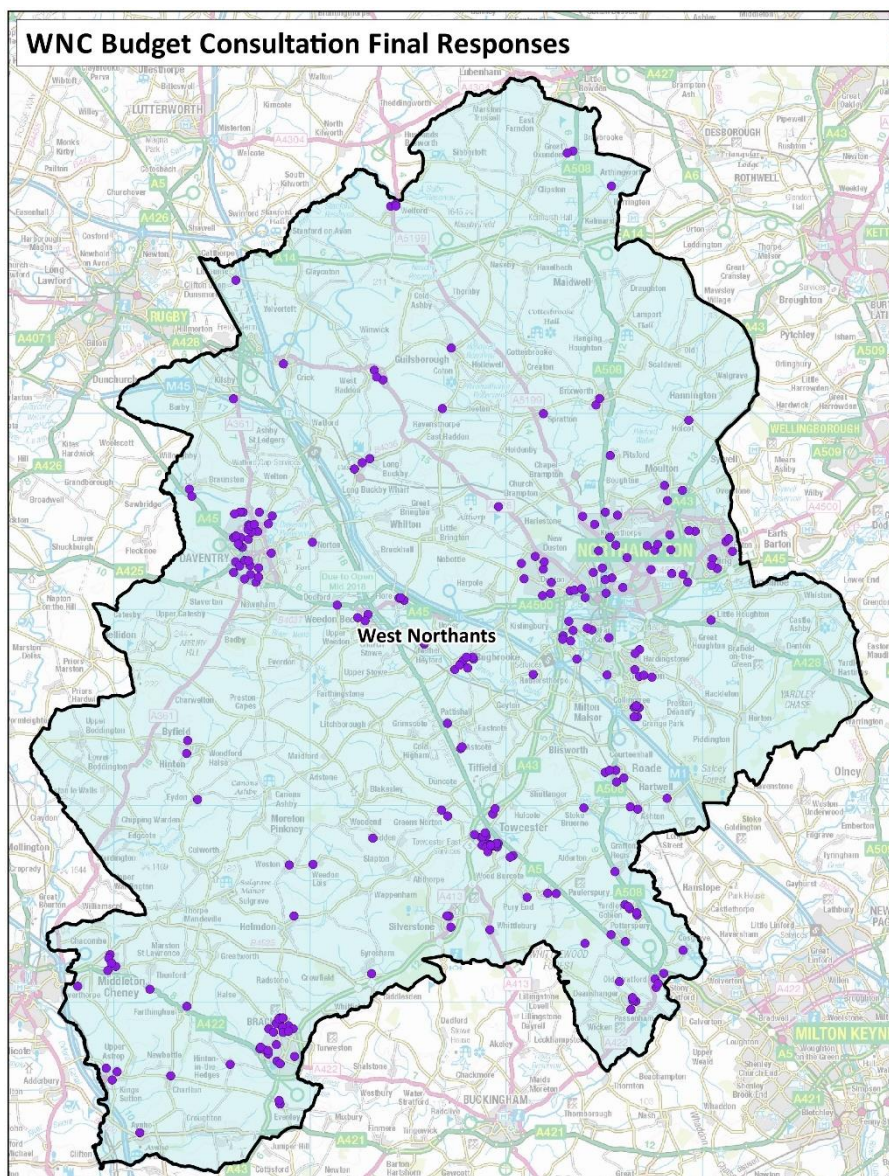
Demographic information

155. Within the demographic section of the questionnaire organisational respondents were asked to provide more detail about their organisation by providing their organisations name and their job title/ role. The three respondents who provided this information identified themselves as Parish Councils and a third sector representative organisation. We have not listed the job titles/ roles of respondents within this report to ensure respondents' anonymity is retained.

156. 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.

157. 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 highlight the age of respondents is unaligned with known population statistics, as there were only 4.9% respondents identifying themselves as under thirty, as well as a lower than expected response rate by respondents from a Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) background. The following is a brief summary of the data received.

158. Individual respondents were asked to provide their postcode to give us an understanding of where respondents live. There were 270 valid postcodes provided for West Northamptonshire. The below map broadly shows where many of the respondents reside.



© Crown copyright and database rights 2021 Ordnance Survey licence no. 0100063706
 Created by Business Intelligence, West Northamptonshire Council



- 159. The majority of respondents were female (47.7%), with 43.2% being male, 0.8% saying 'Other', and 8.3% saying 'Prefer not to say'. The most frequent age given by respondents were those aged between 30 to 49 years (32.1%), closely followed by 50 to 64 (28.6%).
- 160. A total of 54.3% of respondents were married, with 0.3% in a Civil Partnership; 10.5% co-habiting / living together; 12.2% being single; and 2.8% being widowed.
- 161. Other identified demographic information provided by respondents demonstrated that 15.1% were disabled, with physical disability being highlighted as the most frequent disability and mentioned by 32 of the 59 respondents who stated their disability. Predominantly respondents identified themselves as White British (83.7%), with 5.5%

saying they were from another ethnic background and 10.7% saying 'Prefer not to say'. The most frequent religion identified was Christian (40.5%) with 39.9% of respondents choosing 'None'.

162. The final question within the questionnaire asked respondents how they found out about the consultation. A total of 148 respondents answered this question. The majority of respondents said they were made aware of the consultation via social media (67.6%). Other awareness raising channels included via the local media i.e. newspaper/ radio (10.7%); closely followed by an email alert from the Council (10.5%); as a member of the West Northamptonshire Residents' Panel (6.4%); and from a voluntary sector organisation (0.8%). Most of the 8.3% respondents that said 'Other' explained they found out about the consultation via internal Council communications; local social media; word of mouth; or were informed of it by their Council or local MP.

Other responses

163. There were 90 written responses received in relation to the draft budget consultation, including some from organisations and the South Northants Labour Party.

164. The vast majority of people who submitted a written response mentioned the harmonisation of the green waste. Their comments closely matched those mentioned by questionnaire respondents (outlined earlier in this report). Many of these written responses contained duplicated or very similar text to that submitted by other respondents. Again, it would appear that many of these written respondents are residents from the former South Northamptonshire Council legacy district. Many respondents felt the cost should continue to be included within their existing Council Tax, with several saying it appears they would now be paying for this service twice as their Council Tax has not been reduced by the same amount. Other comments included those previously reported upon earlier in this report, especially concerns that the fee would result in increased fly tipping within the south of West Northamptonshire area and disposal of green waste at landfill. Many of the respondent cited the higher than anticipated central government funding and felt this should be offset against the green waste collection fee, and that collection of green waste should be a zero additional cost to all residents of west Northamptonshire. It was suggested the Council convert green waste into compost for retailing to help cover the cost of the service. A handful of respondents said they supported the fee.

165. Several written respondents commented on Council Tax. These respondents made various comments. Some felt the cost of Council Tax is too high, with some saying that their increase will be higher than 2.99% due to the Council's ongoing journey to harmonisation which, for some areas, puts it beyond the limit set by government. There was also some dissatisfaction as it was felt by a few respondents that their Council Tax is increasing higher than the average due to previous poor financial management of the legacy Northamptonshire County Council. It was commented that Council Tax should not increase as it was felt services have not improved to reflect this, and that all other cost of

living is increasing, and some families would not be able to afford the increase as well as pay for basics such as food and heating.

166. It was felt that as National Insurance will shortly be increasing – Health and Social Care Levy – the further 1% Council Tax increase for Adult Social Care feels like double taxation.
167. A small number of respondents mentioned the draft Housing Revenue Account and felt the proposed rent and charges increases were too high. They raised their concern that as energy and fuel prices continue to rise much higher than salaries tenants may not be able to afford to pay the proposed increases.
168. Several respondents, including a representative of Climate Action – West Northamptonshire, Living Streets Northampton, and the Yelvertoft Environmental Group commented on the green agenda and climate change. They said they felt the budget paper is lacking sufficient commitment to tackling climate change. It was felt there is not enough specific provision to meet the Council's obligations, and high-level statements should be substantiated with more detail. It was felt the Council should do more to meet its carbon neutral target, including supporting households, schools and educating businesses. It was commented that all Council projects should be subject to an environmental impact assessment. It was also commented that the Council should do more to encourage residents to travel by means of transport other than cars. Respondents also requested improved safety measures and provision for cyclists and pedestrians. Implementation of a Clean Air Zone and Low Traffic Neighbourhoods; an action plan for Air Quality Management; the creation of more bus lanes; and accessing more Active Travel funding were also mentioned.
169. Other written comments included expressions of dissatisfaction with Council services and its financial management; and the understanding that being a unitary would reduce financial burden on residents regarding their Council Tax and fees and charges. Plus a request for free parking in Northampton town centre; that more should be done to improve Northampton and keeping footways clean and safe; improved rural bus routes; greater support for households on low incomes and rural areas; that any increase in housing stock should include south of West Northamptonshire area as well as in Northampton; for the Council to be a Real Living Wage employer; that the budget is too Northampton centric; and to ensure that social services receives adequate funding.
170. The Northampton Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition submitted a nine page alternative 'No cuts budget proposal'. This document made various suggestions and observations across several areas within the Council, which the Coalition said was not fully costed but wished to be put forward for discussion. This response has been shared with senior Finance officers and Councillors.
171. There were 11 comments made directly to our social media channels regarding the consultation. Several of these comments included general criticism of the Council and felt the budget decisions had already been made regardless of consultation feedback. Other

comments covered a variety of subjects including the thought that services are too Northampton centric and are not delivered equally across West Northamptonshire; that frontline services should be protected; contract management should be improved; and that people should have a choice if their Council Tax contribution helps fund foreign aid. One respondent said they are being asked to pay more Council Tax, but their level of service has not increased. Another said they were against paying extra for their green waste collection.