

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 North 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 7 December 2020 and consultation on the budget proposals began 11 December 2020. The consultation concluded on 29 January 2021.
3. Following the announcement of individual authority allocations in the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement on 17 December 2020, an [Update on Draft Budget 2021-22 and Medium Term Financial Plan](#) was presented to the Shadow Executive Committee Meeting on 7 January 2021.
4. 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?

5. 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.
6. 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 Northants Telegraph 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 923 people and the Twitter post was seen by 1,123 people.

How did consultees have their say?

7. 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, North Northamptonshire Shadow Authority, Sheerness House, Meadow Road, Kettering, NN16 8TL
 - Using social media by Tweeting (@futureNnorth) 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

8. During the draft budget consultation period, using the various means available to consultees, local people and organisations contributed to the consultation 376 times. Nearly all of the feedback received was via the questionnaire, with 374 respondents participating via the questionnaire and two respondents submitted a written response.
9. 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.
10. 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?

11. 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](#).
12. 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.
13. An [equality impact assessment for Council Tax Harmonisation](#) was published within the equality impact assessment area of the Future Northants North website and made available via the questionnaire.

Draft Budget 2021/22 Consultation Questionnaire

14. In total, 374 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.
15. Respondents were asked in what capacity they were responding to the consultation. There were 361 responses to this question, with respondents being able to select more than one option if applicable. Nearly three-quarters of respondents said they were local residents (71.19%), and just over a quarter (27.98%) said they were either a District, Borough or County Council employee. The following table details the various respondent types to the consultation questionnaire. Respondents who said 'Other' mostly identified themselves as volunteers or members of staff of partner and third sector organisations; taxi drivers; or a business owner/Director.

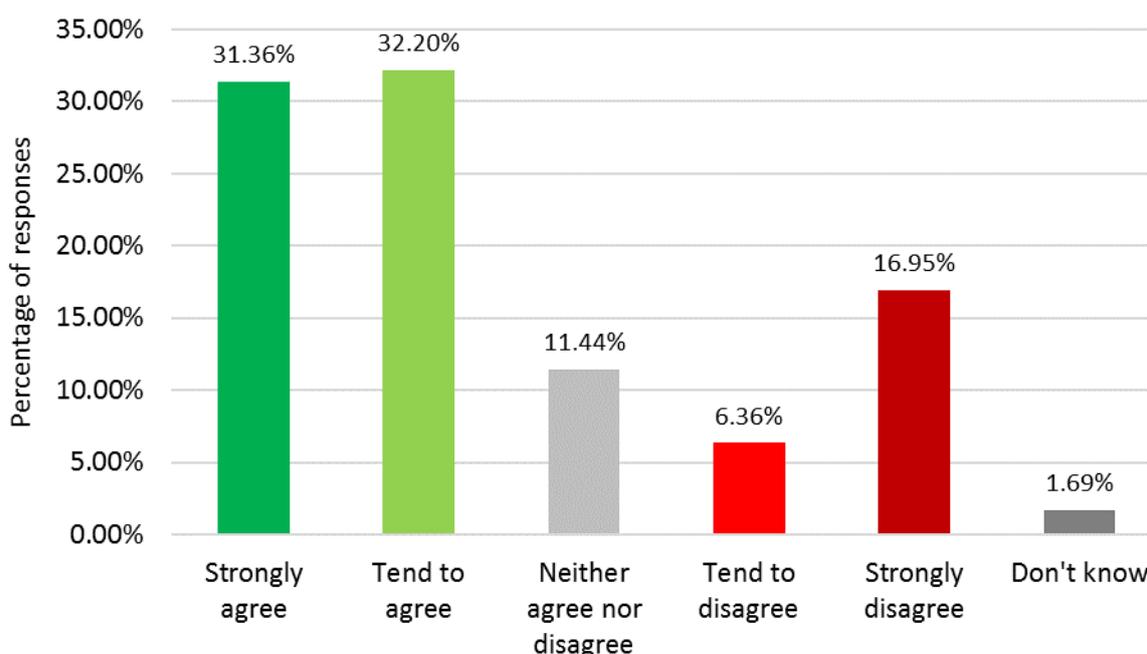
	Response number	Percentage (%)
A service user	47	13.02%
A local resident	257	71.19%
A District, Borough or County Council employee	101	27.98%
District, Borough or County Councillor	8	2.22%
A Town or Parish Councillor	14	3.88%
A representative of the voluntary sector or a community organisation	13	3.60%
A representative of the local business community	10	2.77%
A representative of a Town/Parish Council	3	0.83%
A representative of a health partner organisation	0	0.00%
A representative of a user group	3	0.83%
Other	11	3.05%

Proposed harmonisation in Council Tax

16. 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 North 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 four districts and boroughs of North Northamptonshire.
17. The proposed harmonised rate for Band D (before any annual increase) is £1,460.04, the composition of this being the weighted average of sovereign councils.
- Corby Borough Council £1,474.92
 - East Northamptonshire Council £1,434.07
 - Kettering Borough Council £1,490.81
 - Borough Council of Wellingborough £1,441.30

18. 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.
19. Respondents were presented with an explanation of the proposed harmonisation approach and provided with an example of how the new Council Tax precept for North Northamptonshire Council will be calculated based on a Band D property.
20. Respondents were asked to what extent they agree or disagree that all Council Tax Bands A–H should be harmonised for residents of North Northamptonshire. There were 236 responses to this question. Nearly two thirds of respondents (63.56%) said they strongly agree or tend to agree with the proposal, while just under a quarter (23.31%) said they strongly disagree or tend to disagree with the proposal.

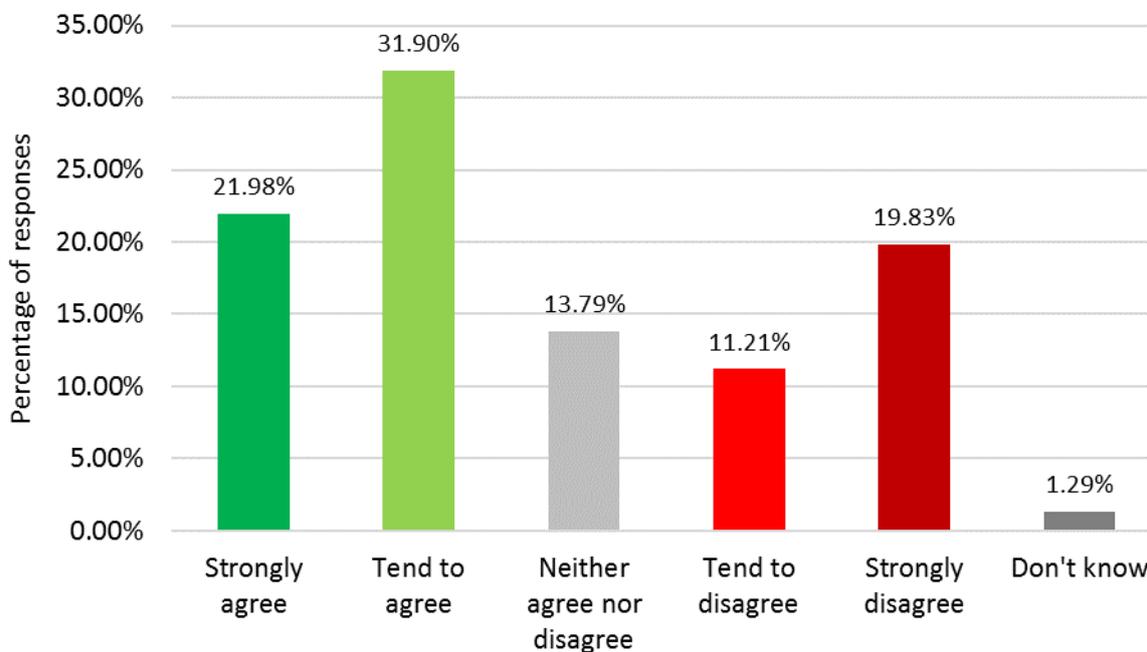
To what extent do you agree or disagree that all Council Tax Bands A–H should be harmonised for residents of North Northamptonshire?



21. The Council is proposing to use the Average Council Tax approach to harmonise Council Tax. This approach uses a weighted average of the current North Northamptonshire Authorities to calculate new Council Tax Bands from A–H. This is the preferred option as it maximises income for the new North 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.
22. 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 232 responses to this question. The majority of respondents (53.88%) were in favour of this approach and said

they strongly agree or tend to agree with the proposal, while 31.04% 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?

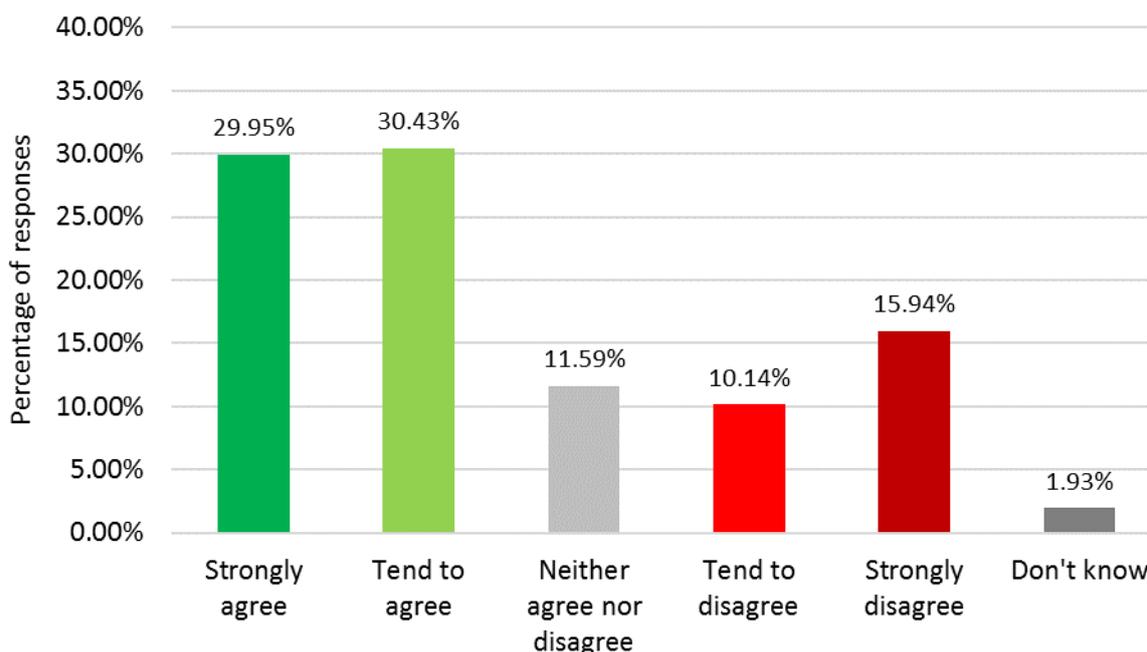


23. Respondents were then asked why they answered the previous question in the way that they did. There were 90 comments made in relation to this question.
24. A total of 43 respondents who agreed with the proposal provided comments. The majority of these respondents felt the approach being considered by the Council as one which was fair. Some qualified their comments by saying that the Council was setting out as a new and fresh authority and that Council Tax bands ought to be the same across all 'old' areas. Respondents acknowledged that there would be winners and losers in the beginning but felt over time this would even out. Some highlighted the differences between the local areas, with some respondents adding that Council Tax had been low for a long time.
25. Some respondents did expressed concern over the financial impact of the approach on families and low income groups, and this, coupled with the current economic times will have an impact on their ability to pay any increased Council Tax. Reference was also made to other Council Tax precepts potentially by other small councils and how this too may affect affordability and services.
26. Many respondents expressed their views about what they feel is a difference in services on offer between urban and rural areas. They said that the same services were not on offer in rural areas even though the Council Tax was the same. Some said it would be fairer for people to pay only for services that they used.

27. Respondents commented on the new council bringing services together and that this should see efficiencies in both services, i.e. reduction of duplicated services, and staffing costs. They said quality services needed to be kept and protected and that services should be improved and not to reduced.
28. Other comments made included that the consistent rises in Council Tax for social care over the years had occurred but it was felt there was still a deficit to meet the social care costs; that there were no other reasonable viable alternatives; and that the council was offering the 'least worst' option. It was commented that the option presented was the best way to keep the Council's funding as high as possible; and that harmonisation was the right way but that it should be phased in over time. They stated that what was considered as a 'postcode lottery' of services should be stopped to achieve equity and that large (physical house size) should pay more i.e. have higher band levels.
29. A total of five respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed with the proposal and made comment. Most felt that affordability was a big issue, in particular those with limited income. Another acknowledged that consistency was needed however they said the impact of increase on their monthly bills was of concern. Another said they thought the information presented was maybe too simple. They felt the impacts of changes in each band would be different and would have different impacts on people which was not comparable.
30. A total of 41 respondents who disagreed with the proposal provided comments. Many of these commented on the general policy of Council Tax, with some saying that it was out of date and that it was too cumbersome to be accurate and that the rates were also outdated.
31. Many comments were made about how to apply fairness as they felt not all services were received or provided fairly across the area and said how they felt rural locations were in receipt of fewer services compared to urban areas. Others commented that they were being asked to pay more for services and were not sure what extra services they were funding.
32. A few respondents stated the proportion of income that low income families would have to pay out of their living expenses would be high compared to those from higher income households. They felt this would be unfair. A few respondents commented on their own affordability to pay.
33. A similar number said they thought the new authorities had been created to save money and expressed their concern at Council Tax increases. Some respondents wanted to introduce harmonisation over a number of years.
34. Other respondents commented on trust and integrity issues. They stated their concerns about past practice and felt that monies had been badly managed in the past. Other comments made included the thought that local information was lacking so they were not able to provide their views as they could not understand the direct impacts the proposal would have on their personal circumstances; another stated they needed time to pay.

35. There was one respondent who answered 'don't know' and made comment. They said they were unsure if the effect would change their Council Tax banding.
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 65 respondents provided comment. The issue of cost dominated these comments, especially regarding low-income communities. Respondents commented on financial impacts of Covid 19 and the struggles of making ends meet for some families. Some respondents commented on their perception that rural areas would be impacted more than urban areas as they felt rural communities have access to less service.
37. Residents again expressed the differences in their views of creating a new council, with some respondents stating that their area would be worse off. Some took the opportunity to state their dissatisfaction with Northamptonshire County Council and its historic financial management. A council employee responded saying they had not had a cost of living pay rise yet were expected to pay a 5% Council Tax increase.
38. A few respondents agreed with the proposal and said that the process was positive and this would mean the Council has to 'live within their present income levels'.
39. Other comments included suggestions such as to freeze Council Tax increases for a year due to Covid 19; that a more favourable Council Tax Reduction scheme be implemented to ensure those on lower incomes are not impacted upon, and that the new Council should be prepared to write off the short fall for those who cannot afford. Further suggests included to keep local tax increases within referenda thresholds (freezing taxes in the areas already highest) until equity is achieved over time; to remove funding from cultural/art projects and divert to other crucial areas; to freeze staff pay and review higher salaries with a view to reducing them; and to ring-fence the health and social care Council Tax element.
40. The Council has a statutory requirement to harmonise Council Tax rates for North Northamptonshire. The new Council is proposing to do this in its first year. The rationale for harmonising being that all residents pay the same Council Tax rate for the same services from day one. If the harmonised rate is not implemented in the first year then there would be different rates of Council Tax in all of the four areas of North Northamptonshire.
41. Respondents were asked to what extent they agree or disagree with the proposal to harmonise Council Tax rates for North Northamptonshire in the first year of the new council. There were 207 responses to this question. The majority of respondents (60.38%) were in favour of this approach and said they strongly agree or tend to agree with the proposal, while just over a quarter of respondents (26.08%) said they strongly disagree or tend to disagree with the proposal.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal to harmonise Council Tax rates for North Northamptonshire in the first year of the new council?



42. Respondents were then asked why they answered the previous question in the way that they did. There were 50 comments made in relation to this question.
43. A total of 23 respondents who agreed with the proposal provided comments. Many of these respondents said how they felt the approach is fair and it is better than taking a protracted approach. They wanted equity in the process for the whole of the new authority from the outset. Some respondents said that services should be harmonised as well as the Council Tax.
44. Other respondents said that whilst they tended to approve their preference is for a phased approach, with some adding that a blanket approach was not the right approach to adopt. Respondents also raised their concerns about residents' ability to pay, and that the new Council ought not to use aggressive ways of obtaining non-payment.
45. Other comments included questioning whether there was a truly democratic elected body to make the decisions; highlighting historical financial management; and an enquiry as to why taxes/systems need to change as they felt they have previously worked well.
46. The three respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed with the proposal and made comment said they felt there was a disparity in the levels of services; that they were not sure what services were provided in each area; and that residents would require full notice of any changes being bought in to services.
47. The 23 respondents who disagreed with the proposal and provided comment had concerns around the people's ability to afford the Council Tax and any associated increase. Several commented about having a phased approach to harmonisation especially in those geographical areas which would experience a higher increase in rate. Some respondents questioned again the

equity and parity in the services provided between areas. Respondents wanted to make sure that the services which they felt were good were not diluted and opportunities are taken to improve services. Some felt that they would be paying more for less services. Others felt that they could not understand the difference in the services either because there was not enough time to understand or that services had not been disaggregated fully in order to see the impact.

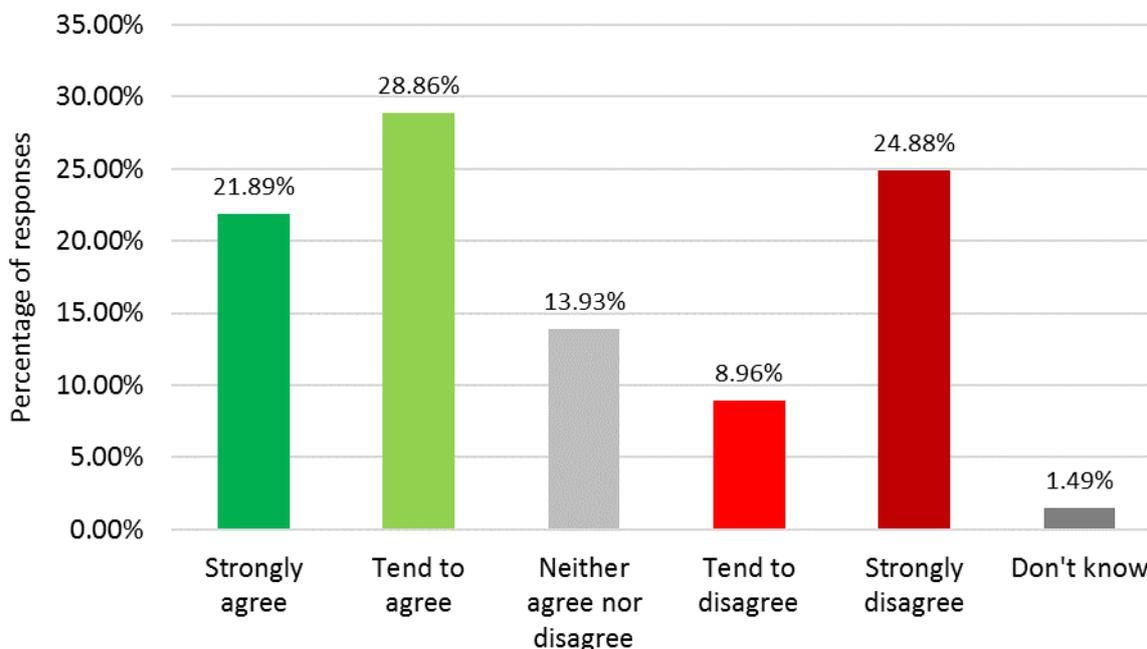
48. The one respondent who commented having said 'don't know' said that not enough information had been provided for them to consider how it would impact them individually. They further added that they were concerned presently about their finances and felt that other residents would be too.
49. Any respondents 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 25 respondents provided comment. Several respondents mentioned the negative impact in relation to the economic times in a pandemic. The financial implication on low and medium income households was also mentioned, with a suggestion that those on low incomes must be offered extra support.
50. Some respondents said the areas with the largest tax increase will begrudge adjoining other areas. The perceived difference in services between urban and rural areas was also mentioned again. It was commented that if harmonisation calculations are not applied fairly then this would cause issues for future calculations, especially where the previous authority had provided a different approach to rural taxation.
51. Other comments included a suggestion that national government should help and offer support for those areas which were previously performing well but whose residents are now being asked to pay more; the need to ensure that services are effective and efficient; and that clear communications were made once the final budget is agreed upon to creative positive media messages rather than negative.

Proposed Council Tax rate increase

52. 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%.
53. This 4.99% increase would result in a 2021-22 Band D Council Tax increase for North Northamptonshire Council of £72.86 per year, which is £1.40 per week.
54. 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 £29.06 per year (£0.56 per week) for the North Northamptonshire Council precept.

55. 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 201 responses to this question. Half of respondents (50.75%) said they strongly agree or tend to agree with the proposal, while a third (33.84%) 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?

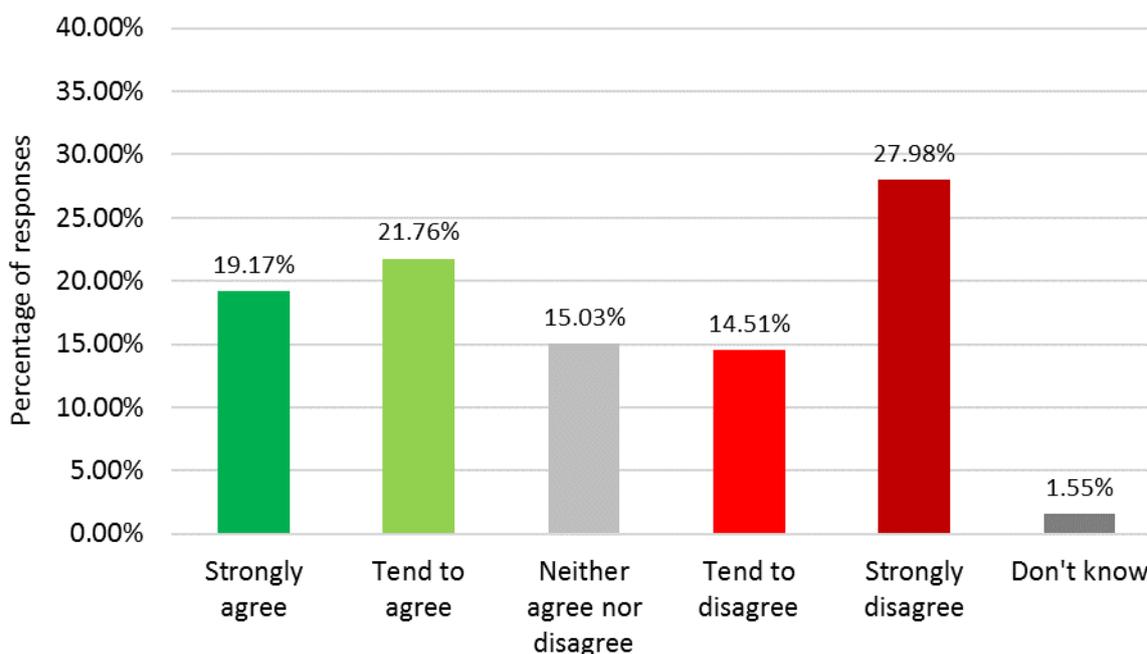


56. Respondents were then asked why they answered the previous question in the way that they did. There were 74 comments made in relation to this question.
57. A total of 35 respondents who agreed with the proposal provided comments. The most frequently mentioned reason for people agreeing with the proposal was that they acknowledged that services need more funding and that they accepted a Council Tax increase was necessary to do this.
58. Others, while accepting the need to increase Council Tax, added that they would want to see more investment, an improvement in services and to be reassured that the additional funding would be used properly.
59. Some respondents felt that Council Tax should have been increased sooner, and that the Council might not be in the same financial situation it is in now if it had done so. Some respondents mentioned what they felt were poor previous financial decisions made and added that they hoped better financial decisions and accountability would be made in future.
60. A small number felt that the increase was too much too soon, and a gradual increase and harmonisation programme and process over a number of years was fairer.

61. Other comments, were around concern for the financial impact on people who are already struggling and their ability to pay, along with the view that peoples' wages and income have not increased in the same way.
62. A total of four respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed with the proposal made a comment. Responses centred around making improved financial decisions in the future; a feeling that the increase was inevitable and too fast; and around greater investment/ efficiencies. One respondent raised their concern over how the proposed increase may impact pensioners.
63. There were 35 respondents that commented as to why they disagreed with the proposed increase. The most common reasons were between the increase being too much and too soon, and the concern that financial decision making has not improved. Further common responses centred around concern that the increase would impact those struggling financially, especially given the Covid 19 situation.
64. A small number of comments mentioned the increase being so big now because it was not increased enough in years' prior; that residents were being penalised by the increase; and that many people's wages and family income have not increased at the same rate. One respondent said they felt the increase was not being applied fairly, and another called for a referendum to be held.
65. No comments were received from the respondents who said 'Don't know'.
66. 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 33 respondents provided comment. The most common response by far was that the increase would impact those struggling financially, especially given the Covid 19 situation, which was mentioned by over a third of the respondents to this question.
67. A handful of comments were regarding improved financial decision making required in the future, followed by a small number of responses around the need for greater financial transparency and openness around financial decisions.
68. Other comments included concern that the increase is too much too soon; the opinion that service decision making was not improving; and an opinion that the Council offered poor value for money.
69. 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, means an average (Band D) Council Tax payer's rate would increase £43.80 per year (£0.84 per week) for the North Northamptonshire Council precept.

70. 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 193 responses to this question. There was more of a mixed response to this proposal compared to the previous questions, as 40.93% of respondents said they strongly agree or tend to agree with the proposal, whilst 42.49% 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?



71. Respondents were then asked why they answered the previous question in the way that they did. There were 63 comments made in relation to this question.

72. A total of 29 respondents who agreed with the proposal provided comments. The most common responses were around acceptance of the proposals and that Adult Social Care needs sufficient funding. Many respondents also said they felt there was scope for better financial planning in the future. There were strong comments around more funding still being required for Adult Social care and the current situation regarding how the service is performing.

73. A handful of comments were based around more funding still being required, and requests for greater support from Central Government.

74. A total of seven respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed with the proposal made comment. A little over half of these respondents accepted the proposals but said they also wanted to see more investment and the finances used properly. Other comments included acceptance of the proposals but a request for improved decision making; an opinion that the increase is too much, too quickly; concern that people would struggle financially; and the need for greater support from central government to support Adult Social Care funding.

75. A total of 27 respondents who disagreed with the proposal provided comments. The most common responses were around requests for better financial planning in the future and opinions that the increase is too much and too soon.
76. A few comments centred around concerns for people that would struggle with the proposed changes.
77. Other comments were based around the need for greater transparency; the need for greater financial support from central government; for improvement to be made when it comes to service expenditure decision making; and that as a larger authority there should be greater economies of scale.
78. No comments were received from the respondents who said 'Don't know'.
79. 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 25 respondents provided comment. By far the most frequently mentioned responses centred on a concern for those that would struggle financially with the increase.
80. A small number of responses continued to cite service and financial decision making as an issue, and wanted to see the benefits of the tax increase. A similar number of respondents felt there should be more transparency as to why the increase is needed.
81. Other comments included a request for more funding in order to deliver quality services.

Fees and charges

82. Respondents were provided with a new [Draft Fees and Charges Policy](#) that has been written to establish a framework by which fees and charges levied by the North Northamptonshire Council are agreed and regularly reviewed.
83. Due to this being the first year of setting this policy and its first budget process, fees and charges within the previous District & Borough Councils were reviewed as to whether harmonisation is required based on statute, recharging and revised costs from an aggregated team.
84. Respondents were provided with the [Draft Harmonisation 2021-22 Fees and Charges schedule](#) outlining a list of proposed fees and charges and were advised where these District & Borough fees and charges have not been harmonised for Vesting Day separate rates between areas of North Northamptonshire will remain in place and these will be reviewed at a later date with a view to harmonise where possible over the next 2-3 years. It is proposed that the District & Borough fees and charges that will not be harmonised within 2021-22 will have an inflationary increase of 2%. There were no proposed changes to the previous County Council fees and charges.

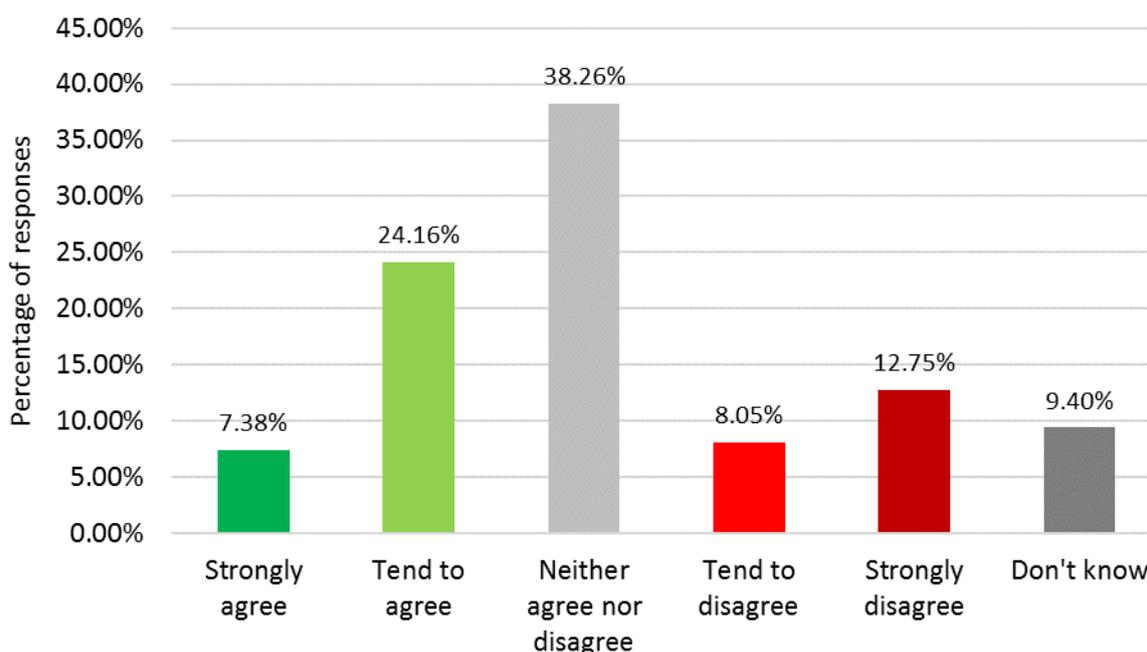
85. Respondents were asked if they had any comments on any of the proposed fees and charges increases. A total of 29 comments were made about fees and charges, covering a range of different services. Named fees or charges included:
- Bulky Waste Collection
 - Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO)
 - Interments-Public & Purchased Graves
 - Taxi Licensing
86. Over a third of respondents did not name a specific fee or charge but instead offered general thoughts on the proposals. A respondent thought that all fees should be based on cost.
87. Several respondents made comments about the harmonisation of fees and charges. Respondents thought that fees and charges should be harmonised from day one/as soon as possible with all areas of North Northamptonshire paying the same to make it fair and equal for all residents. One respondent highlighted the differences in Interments-Public & Purchased Graves fees/charges between current authorities and thought they should be harmonised on day one. One respondent thought that all fees and charges not subject to open market competition should be harmonised from day one.
88. A third of respondents commented on Taxi Licensing charges. Some of these respondents identified themselves as taxi drivers and Directors of taxi/ Private Hire firms. Several respondents said they felt the proposed increase in charges were too high and questioned how such an increase could be justified, especially with the impacts of the Covid 19 pandemic. Three respondents specifically thought the proposed increase in charges in Wellingborough (with one also referring to Kettering) were too high.
89. A respondent stated that Taxi fees need to remain cost neutral and so cannot be changed and another thought that the charges should not be subject to a blanket increase as they are based on 'cost recovery'. A respondent thought that small, limited company, businesses had not received government support and are 'surviving by the skin of their teeth' and that the proposed increase would have a negative impact.
90. Two respondents suggested alternatives to the taxi licencing proposals. One suggested that the increase be deferred for a year to allow time for businesses to financially recover and for Covid 19 restrictions to be eased and another respondent suggested reducing fees for a year as taxi drivers had not been eligible for Covid 19 support.
91. One respondent suggested that Wellingborough introduce a dual badge system (as used in East Northamptonshire) for Hackney Carriage and Private Hire vehicles, rather than continuing with two driving licences and a payment for each. One respondent questioned why fees/charges for Private Hire vehicles should be the same as Hackney Carriage vehicles as they have different rights (e.g. use of bus lanes).

92. A respondent thought that many communities are not adequately served by buses and suggested that taxi licensing be part of a community travel programme with fees moderated.
93. A few respondents raised concerns that an increase in waste collection/disposal fees could result in an increase in fly tipping, especially in rural areas, and subsequent removal costs if collection was not affordable. One respondent thought that collection fees were expensive for one item when compared to multiple items. A couple of respondents felt it is necessary to ensure harmony of waste disposal fees across North Northamptonshire.
94. Two respondents thought that Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) fees should increase, one of these respondents thought that increases would be passed on to tenants and suggested increasing landlord fines to ensure properties are fit for purpose.
95. Respondents also offered miscellaneous comments. A respondent felt that they continue to pay for council mistakes, another criticised the current system, and two respondents said that inflation is not 2%.
96. Other comments included that brown bin collection was a lot of extra money each year and would negatively impact pensioners; that social housing in Corby was not mentioned in the proposals; and a request for parking to remain free in the old Wellingborough area as charges may be detrimental to town centre business. Although these items were not listed in Appendix D – Draft Harmonised 2021-22 Fees & Charges.

Draft Capital Programme 2021-25 and Capital Strategy 2021-22

97. 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.
98. The Capital Strategy sets out the key objectives and broad principles to be applied by the Council when considering capital investment and its funding. It provides the context for how the Council's Medium Term Capital Programme seeks to support the realisation of the Council's vision and corporate objectives.
99. Respondents were given the above explanation and provided with the draft [Shadow Executive Committee meeting Draft Capital Programme 2021-25 and Capital Strategy report](#) and its appendices.
100. Respondents were then asked to what extent they agree or disagree with the proposals put forward within the North Northamptonshire Council Capital Strategy 2021-22. There were 149 responses to this question. This question generated a mixed response as 31.54% of respondents said they strongly agree or tend to agree with this proposal, while 20.80% said they strongly disagree or tend to disagree with this proposal. A total of 38.26% said they neither agree nor disagree with the proposals put forward.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposals put forward within the North Northamptonshire Council Capital Strategy 2021-22?



101. Respondents were then asked why they answered the previous question in the way that they did. There were 38 comments made in relation to this question.
102. A total of nine respondents agreed with the proposal provided comments. They commented on wanting their local area to thrive based on its local needs and that this would help to avoid repeating past mistakes. Another respondent felt that the proposals were based on a sound foundation. Whilst another made reference to the carryover of projects from the old councils. Respondents mentioned the new Council needs to have robust and transparent and accountable financial systems.
103. Comments were received on the financial struggle faced by many and that even though the increase in local taxation is a small and isolated cost, the overall cost to the family living budget is increased and may cause financial hardship.
104. Other comments included Covid 19 having a negative impact on the area and the country and that this needs to be factored into the Council's thinking; to see improvements for the local area to aid tourism; and that staff should be awarded regularly a pay rise which captured the cost of living.
105. A total of 13 respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed with the proposal made comment. A few of these respondents said that the information provided and presented was complex and not easy to understand.

106. A respondent said he felt that the Council had not agreed a corporate plan from which it could set its direction and priorities. It was commented that the Council should be using public monies with integrity and accountability, and any spending should be closely monitored.
107. Comments on affordability for local taxation was expressed, these highlighted variances on where people lived within North Northamptonshire with a respondent believing it is unfair for those living in villages as they do not benefit from all services that a town receives. The other variances highlighted for consideration was age and that it was unfair to have a blanket approach for all.
108. There were 11 respondents who disagreed with the proposal who provided comment. Comments included an opinion that the Tithe Barn Phase 2 water feature was not necessary; that rural communities in East Northamptonshire or in general, the rural North, were not sufficiently mentioned; that the development pathways were continuation from the sovereign councils and there was nothing new in the strategy. Other comments included that contributions from each council into the budget should be of an equal amount with benefits fairly distributed to residents; that spending could not be fair until there is a democratic elected body which could be held accountable for allocation of the funds; and an opinion that services were being diminished due to mismanagement.
109. The four respondents who answered 'don't know' said either that there are too many unknowns and very little detail had been provided or that they had not read the full documentation.
110. Respondents were then advised the Council wants to invest in regeneration and economic development schemes, as outlined within the strategy. With further work on the strategy planned alongside the development of overall council priorities and objectives after vesting day.
111. Respondent were then invited to give their comments on these schemes. A total of 42 respondents provided comment. These ranged from lack of information presented, saying that it was too vague to give feedback on to comments of thematic issues or to specific programmes and schemes.
112. Some commented that they did not think Councils should be directing their time and financial resources to economic regeneration and that it should be left to others to do i.e. spending initiatives should be left to market forces without the direct intervention of the Council. Whilst another said regeneration and investment was of vital importance, however any investment must be made with integrity and without interference from outside parties who may benefit unduly.
113. Thematic issues were mentioned such as climate, biodiversity and energy as well as town centres, rural areas and urban brown field sites. 'Green' issues mentioned were regarding a future maintenance fund for the landscape, for cycle and pedestrian access, and funding for natural heritage assets such as waterways, wetlands, nature reserves and country parks. Respondents also expressed the need to fully use technology in order to limit environmental and

climate impacts and that the Council should utilise opportunities for generating zero carbon energy.

114. Respondents expressed concern about the current assets owned by the Council and how they are maintained and any future upgrade of them. They were concerned about the environmental impacts of not maintaining key public buildings.
115. A respondent said developers should be charged a levy and the income from such a levy ought to be redirected into projects such as those to develop local health care in the local hospital and that spending initiatives should be left to market forces without the direct intervention of the Council. One respondent commented that any investments should be put on hold due to Covid 19.
116. Respondents want to keep general council and councillor expenses low; and said that the Council should not have expensive schemes/ projects; and that the Council should be managing and scrutinising contracts and contractors appropriately. They asked for accountability for any spending so that the public could effectively measure progress and appropriate distribution of spending across services/ areas.
117. Respondents mentioned that more houses should be built on the urban brownfield and the greenbelt should be left alone.
118. It was also commented that investment was required in town centres to make them more attractive and they felt there were sufficient number of retail parks within the locality. It was suggested that recreation was important as well as shopping and that transport infrastructure such as a railway station at Rushden be considered. It was requested that good examples of regeneration should be followed and cited Corby as a positive example.
119. A respondent mentioned the benefits of greenways opening connectivity between places for leisure/ wellbeing and retail. They wanted the Council to consider budgeting for maintenance and future extensions to greenways. Another said they wanted investment in the area that attracted different job skills rather than the present skill; another wanted more information on financial investment schemes.
120. Other comments included making sure that the Council followed its duty to consult on development; making documents available in an accessible format; that a corporate vision and direction was required; and ensuring early prevention work with families takes place (with support workers) which would help to maintain positive structures for family life which would contribute to economic regeneration.

Alternative suggestions and other comments

121. 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 North Northamptonshire Council's financial plans for 2021-22 and the

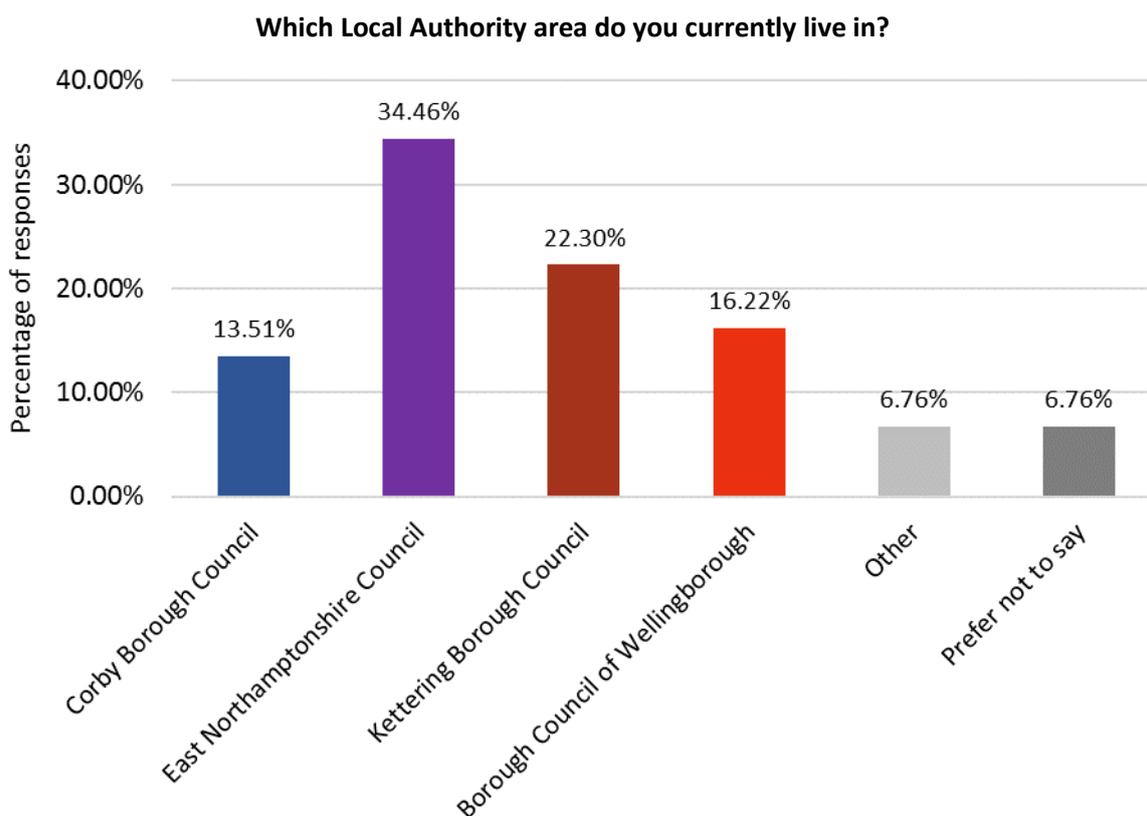
ongoing financial impact of those plans, together with the longer term estimates of funding and spending requirements.

122. 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 31 comments made in relation to this question, covering a wide range of subjects.
123. Some respondents felt that services could be cut back to a core service to decrease costs. They requested a reduction in the Council Tax and questioned whether in the current climate local taxation was affordable to residents. Others spoke about ways in which the Council could stop wastage and create and operate more efficiently.
124. Respondents wanted to increase transport links; introduce new ways to levy extra money from planning development opportunities and redirect monies back into specific areas such as highway maintenance.
125. Respondents suggested ways in which the Council's democratic process could work. Some felt that efficiencies could be made by reducing the number of councillors; looking at fees and expenses of officers and councillors and ring-fencing income from business rates and redirecting it into care in the community projects. Respondents also wanted all contracts and council spend to be appropriately scrutinised. Some respondents felt the changes to local government and costs associated with them should be borne at a national level and not funded through local taxation.
126. Other suggestions included introducing charges for all council owned car parks; using ways to invest and renovate in large buildings; to use a local lottery to raise funds; and to be more robust with checking the finances of social care applicants.
127. Respondents were then asked if they had any other comments they wanted to make that they have not already told us. There were 15 comments made in relation to this question, covering a range of subjects with few common themes.
128. Respondents pointed out the need to strengthen local democracy in the new Council; and mentioned the opportunities with having a new structure of local government. However, they also mentioned what they felt was previous poor financial management. A respondent said that they did not want to lose or have diluted local services. Comments made reference to openness, transparency and accountability (both financial and democratic) with a request that spending be measured against impact on services.
129. A few comments were made about road infrastructure and public transport. Including a request to recognise the need to invest in public transport as they felt it was currently disjointed in some areas; and wanting to see improved connectivity between where people live, work and shop.

130. Other comments included the impact and experience of Covid 19 and the issues arising from it were mentioned both in terms of pressure on the public purse as well as the pressure for staff, and a request for them to be appropriately rewarded.

Demographic information

131. 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. These respondents identified themselves as partner organisations; community groups; and taxi/ Private Hire firms. We have not listed the job titles/ roles of respondents within this report in order to ensure respondents' anonymity is retained.
132. 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.
133. 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 North Northamptonshire. However, the data does show some areas where demographic data is unaligned with known population statistics, such as the majority of consultation respondents are aged 50-64 years, which is higher than the North Northamptonshire locality average of 39. Full statistical data of the responses is available within the Appendix. The following is a brief summary of the data received.
134. Individual respondents were asked in which Local Authority area they live in. There were 148 responses to this question. Most respondents identified themselves as living within East Northamptonshire (34.46%), followed by Kettering (22.30%). The fewest responses came from Wellingborough (16.22%) with Corby being the lowest percentage (13.51%). Nearly all of the respondents who said 'Other' stated they live in the west of the county, with one respondent saying they work in Kettering.



135. The majority of respondents were male (52.03%), with 37.84% being female and 10.14% saying 'Prefer not to say'. The most frequent age given by respondents were those aged between 50 to 64 years (36.49%).
136. A total of 54.48% of respondents were married, with 1.38% in a Civil Partnership; 11.03% co-habiting / living together; 11.03% being single; and 5.52% being widowed.
137. Other identified demographic information provided by respondents demonstrated that 18.92% were disabled, with physical disability being highlighted as the most frequent disability and mentioned by 17 of the 29 respondents who stated their disability. Predominantly respondents identified themselves as White British (86.43%), with 4.98% saying they were from another ethnic background and 8.57% saying 'Prefer not to say'. The most frequent religion identified was Christian (43.75%) with 36.81% of respondents choosing 'None'.
138. 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 an email alert from their local council (42.47%). Other awareness raising channels included being notified as member of the Northamptonshire Residents' Panel (21.23%), via social media (20.55%), and via the local media i.e. newspaper/ radio (4.79%). Most of the 10.96% that said 'Other' explained they found out about the consultation via an internet search. A few respondents said they were informed of it by either a colleague/ friend or via an internal staff email. A couple of respondents said they felt it was poorly advertised. One respondent received notification via their Parish Council.

Other responses

139. Two written response were received in relation to the draft budget consultation.
140. One email was from a Town Council, who outlined their concerns about lower income residents, and said they felt some had likely experienced reduced income over the last 12 months. The Town Council said they felt East Northamptonshire residents would be subject to a higher than average percentage rise under the budget proposals. They commented on how they had postponed their own discretionary spending programmes and agreed a zero precept rise for 2021-22, and felt the budget proposals under consultation should do similar. They added that the transition to a unitary authority should mean reducing costs and not increasing them.
141. The other email was from an individual who said that due to the current financial situation of the country a large increase in Council Tax would put additional pressure on family's finances.
142. No comments we received via social media or the group discussion facilitator feedback form.