

North Northamptonshire Council Draft Budget 2025/2026 – 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 North Northamptonshire Council's Budget for 2025/26.

Executive decisions and formal consultation

2. The [Draft Budget 2025/2026 and Medium-Term Financial Plan](#) was approved by Executive on 19 December 2024 and consultation on the budget proposals began later that day. The consultation concluded on 24 January 2025.
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 and Engagement Hub website, [Your Voice Matters](#), and promoted on the homepage of the Council's 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 North Northamptonshire Residents' Panel (circa 750 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 26 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 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 11,174; the X (formerly known as Twitter) impressions (i.e. the number of times any content from or about the consultation webpage entered a person's screen) was 2,026; and LinkedIn impressions were 1,274. Social media followers were directed to the consultation webpage to facilitate informed feedback.
6. Several reminders were distributed via various communications channels during the consultation period, including a further press release to the above newsrooms.

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. Access to the online questionnaire was also made available free of charge at any North Northamptonshire Council library
 - Emailing YourVoiceMatters@northnorthants.gov.uk
 - Writing to Budget Consultation Response, North Northamptonshire Council, Sheerness House, Meadow Road, Kettering, NN16 8TL
 - 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 204 times. Nearly all of the feedback received was via the questionnaire, with 203 respondents participating via the questionnaire, and one respondent submitting a written response. Google analytics recorded 599 unique visitors to the consultation overview page. It is unclear why many visitors to the consultation page did not respond to the consultation. Although we do not know why these respondents did not engage further, there is anecdotal evidence to suggest in these instances many of these stakeholders are likely to be apathetic towards the proposals and its subsequent consultation.
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 Members and are available to view on the [consultation webpage](#).
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 collate the views from the different consultation channels.

13. An [equality screening assessment for the budget proposals](#) was published alongside the Executive papers and made available via the questionnaire. The equality screening assessment found the proposals would have either a positive or neutral impact on the protected groups outlined within the Equality Act 2010.

Draft Budget 2025/2026 Consultation Questionnaire

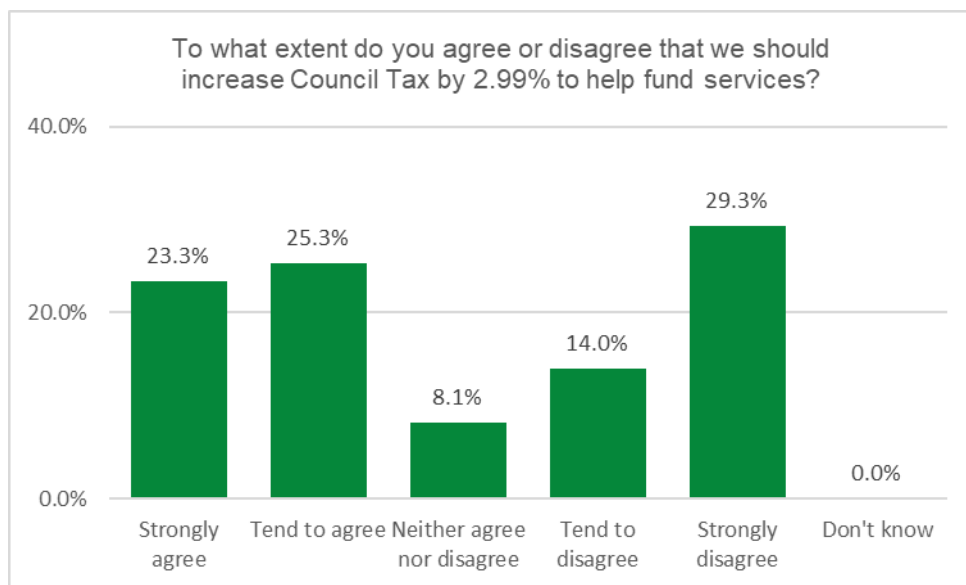
14. In total, 203 respondents filled out a questionnaire on the draft Budget proposals, either partially or fully. Respondents did not have to answer every question and so the total number of responses for each question differs and is shown in relation to each question.
15. Respondents were asked in what capacity they were responding to the consultation. There were 198 responses to this question, **with respondents being able to select more than one option if applicable**. The vast majority of respondents said they were local residents (85.4%). The second highest number of respondents were North Northamptonshire Council employees (32.3%), followed by service users (7.1%). The following table details the various respondent types to the consultation questionnaire.

	Response number	Percentage (%)
A local resident	169	85.4%
A service user	14	7.1%
A North Northamptonshire Council employee	64	32.3%
A North Northamptonshire Council Councillor	5	2.5%
A representative of a Town/Parish Council	2	1.0%
A Town or Parish Councillor	4	2.0%
A representative of the voluntary sector or a community organisation	4	2.0%
A representative of the local business community	2	1.0%
A representative of a health partner organisation	1	0.5%
A representative of a user group	1	0.5%
Other	1	0.5%

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 – 4.99%. This increased rate includes a general increase of 2.99% and the allowable Adult Social Care precept increase, which is 2%.
17. This 4.99% increase would result in a 2025/2026 Band D Council Tax increase for North Northamptonshire Council of £86.84 per year, which is £1.67p per week.

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. The Council’s proposal to increase the core Council tax rate by 2.99% in 2025/2026 means an average (Band D) Council Tax payer’s rate would increase £52.04 per year (£1.00p per week) for the North Northamptonshire Council precept.
20. Respondents were asked to what extent they agree or disagree with the proposal to increase Council Tax by 2.99% to help fund services. There were 150 responses to this question. A total of 48.6% said they strongly agree or tend to agree with the proposal and 43.3% said they strongly disagree or tend to disagree.



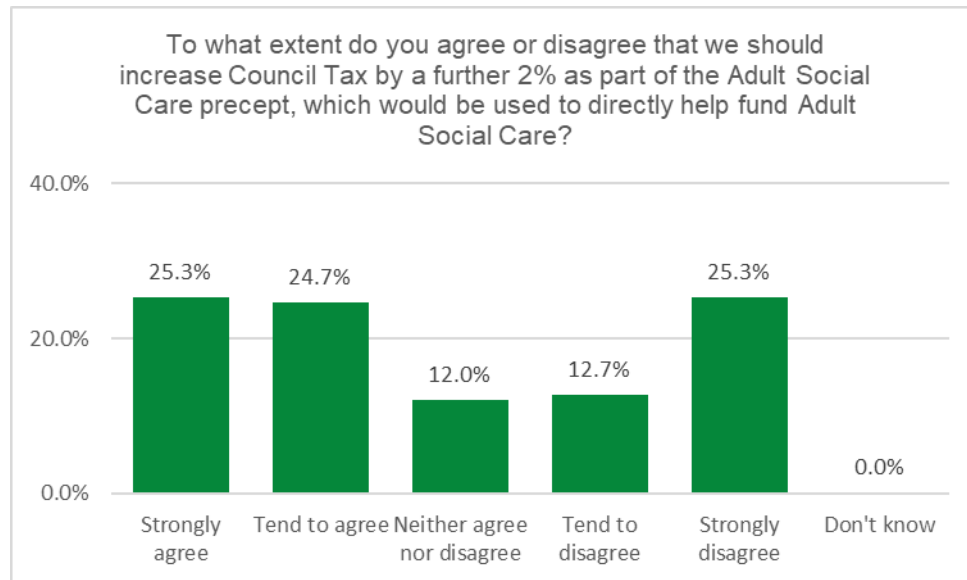
21. Respondents were then asked why they answered the previous question in the way that they did. There were 85 comments made in relation to this question.
22. A total of 34 respondents who agreed with the proposal provided comments. Approximately three quarters of these respondents said they recognised the increase was required to protect and improve current services. They felt services were stretched and council revenue was under pressure due to inflation and the current economic climate.
23. It was also commented that a low level of Council Tax means a low level of service, and this should not be something to be proud of. The preference was for the Council to aim for middle/upper levels and work towards service excellence.
24. About a quarter of respondents expressed frustration at a perceived reduced or inferior level of service from the Council. Particular reference was made to several services and/or areas, including street cleaning, costing contracts with suppliers (road maintenance) and service efficiencies. It was felt urban areas need more investment, with a particular reference made to Corby. There was also frustration that a green waste collection fee had

been implemented in those legacy council areas where there had not previously been a green waste charge.

25. A couple of respondents expressed concerns that the additional burden of increased outgoings, not only of Council tax, would negatively impact residents.
26. A similar number indicated their frustration at central government over what they felt were low funding and pension levels and the financial settlement process.
27. A few respondents offered suggestions which included having a higher level of Council Tax Support Scheme; increasing funding for road repairs and street cleaning; and that the Council should fund an inhouse design and construction service of council housing, as they believe this is a proven more cost-effective way of providing housing.
28. A total of five respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed with the proposal made a comment. Just over half of these respondents said they recognised the increase is necessary as costs of services have increased. Although they also raised their concerns over the potential burden of additional costs to household's expenditures. It was commented that most wages had not increased to the same degree.
29. Additionally, frustration was shared for those who may not be able to access government benefits due to their income level being outside of the benefits threshold and may be pushed into poverty.
30. There were 46 respondents that commented as to why they disagreed with the proposed increase. Approximately three quarters of these respondents indicated frustration at a perceived reduction in services and/or inferior services, with some citing a perceived inferior service for disabled residents. Respondents also want the Council to review how it spends funds and reduce perceived waste, including a review of the staffing budget and councillor fees/expenses. Respondents felt there should be better value for money on outsourcing services, particularly from private landlords. A small number of these comments also indicated a perception of unethical council behaviour.
31. Approximately a third of respondents indicated concern about the stretch on household budgets or that the potential increase was too high. About a third of these comments referred to pension increases not being in line with household bill increases resulting in them having to cut back on other spending. It was also commented that not everyone pays the same level of Council Tax, and that everyone should make some level of contribution regardless of their financial position.
32. Other comments included historic frustration from previous legacy local authority decisions and request that more details to be shared regarding council finances and expenditure.
33. 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 reduced or avoided. A total of 45 respondents provided comment.

34. Approximately half of these respondents indicated their concerns regarding adding an additional cost onto household budgets. They said residents may struggle to heat their home and/or buy food. It was commented that wages are not going up by the same degree and residents could be pushed into poverty or into claiming benefits, which they said would be counterproductive.
35. About a quarter of respondents to this question indicated their frustration at a perceived reduction in services and/or inferior services, with both Special Educational Needs (SEN) and schools and highway maintenance being specifically cited.
36. It was felt that more investment is required for local towns to make them more appealing and for residents to feel safe, this time with Rushden being highlighted as an area which would benefit from improvement.
37. A quarter of respondents mentioned their frustration at Central Government, and felt their failures are being passed on to local authorities and ultimately the public. The removal of the Pensioners Winter Fuel Allowance was mentioned by some as having a negative financial impact on many households.
38. A small number felt issues including mental health and potentially crime could be increased. They felt this may put greater demand on services, which would be a false economy. One business owner felt that if they could secure more work, they could afford the office business rates and be able to employ more local staff.
39. Other comments included a request for private landlords not to increase rents and be held to account to maintain standards of maintenance and repair; to work with the voluntary sector to have warm spaces all year round, offering dignity in crisis; to focus on areas most in need with preventative maintenance to keep costs down; and to restructure the Council and review salaries for top earners to provide more value for money to service users.
40. Approximately a third of respondents offered some mitigations or suggestions. They included reviewing how the Council can support residents who have no disposable income to pay the proposed increase, before they fall into poverty, with financial planning advice; to increase the Council Tax Support Scheme and means test payments; reduce the proposed percentage or have no increase at all. Additionally, it was suggested that larger households should pay more because they use more services. It was also commented that there should be a requirement for voluntary work for those who don't pay Council Tax to help keep service costs down.
41. The questionnaire then outlined the Council's proposal to increase the Council Tax rate by a further 2% in 2025/2026 as part of the Adult Social Care precept, which would be used to directly help fund Adult Social Care, meaning an average (Band D) Council Tax payer's rate would increase £34.80 per year (£0.67p per week) for the North Northamptonshire Council precept.
42. Respondents were asked to what extent they agree or disagree with the proposal to increase Council Tax by a further 2% as part of the Adult Social Care precept, which would be used to directly fund Adult Social Care. There were 150 responses to this question.

Similar to the core Council Tax increase there was more support for an Adult Social Care precept increase than opposition. A total of 50.0% of respondents said they strongly agree or tend to agree with the proposal, whilst 38.0% said they strongly disagree or tend to disagree.



43. 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.
44. A total of 28 respondents who agreed with the proposal provided comments. Approximately two thirds of these respondents said they recognised that an increase in funds was needed to protect adult social care services. They also said they recognised growing pressure on the service and the Council's duty to protect the service. They stipulated the funds must be ringfenced and spent on the service in an effective way.
45. About a quarter of the comments received indicated the respondents' frustrations at services from what they perceived to be inefficiencies within policies and service delivery, with examples given of a lack of cross team working and dissatisfaction with the computer system.
46. There was also a handful of comments airing frustration at Central Government and felt the level of available funding was too low and that NHS infrastructure could be improved.
47. A couple of suggestions were also shared recommending more services to be delivered inhouse to improve cost and service delivery, with teams to design and construct council run care homes and hospices given as an example.
48. A total of three respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed with the proposal made comment. One indicated they had no direct knowledge or experience to be able to add a comment and the other two indicated that someone has to pay for Adult Social Care as not everyone could afford to be a self-funder.
49. A total of 31 respondents who disagreed with the proposal provided comments.

50. Approximately half of the comments received indicated a perception of current services being less than satisfactory, or they already receive sufficient funding and are not managed as efficiently as they should be. It was felt the current system is open to financial abuse and that the Council is too reliant on paying private companies for Adult Social Care services, who have different charge rates and aim to make a profit.
51. About a quarter of comments indicated respondent concern regarding the additional financial pressure the proposed Council Tax increase could put on some households during a continued cost of living crisis, with wage increases for many falling behind increasing cost of household expenses.
52. Other comments included an opinion that the spend on Adult Social Care was too high, and other preventative methods should be used; an opinion that the responsibility to pay for social services should come from Central Government instead of Local Authorities; and that more families should be caring for their family members so Adult Social Services are only accessed as a last resort.
53. Any respondents who felt the proposal would have a negative impact were then asked to say what they thought the impact would be, along with any suggestions on how any potential negative impacts could be reduced or avoided. A total of 27 respondents commented.
54. About a third of these respondents mentioned disappointment at poor quality public services, both those provided by the Council as well as other public sector bodies. Some felt there was a lack of infrastructure to support new appropriate housing and that Adult Social Care services should be prioritised with more council run care homes. It was commented that residents' health would deteriorate if there was not a well-run Adult Social Care service.
55. Approximately a third of comments indicated their concern regarding the additional financial pressure a Council Tax increase could put on some households for reasons previously mentioned within this report. A few of those comments also indicated a feeling that some people are actually worse off financially now, particularly if they are not eligible for any benefits, and this proposal could result in a counterproductive increased demand on services.
56. Other comments included an opinion that the Central Government at the time should have supported the Northamptonshire County Council rather than create new unitary councils inheriting debt; and that a local Council Tax increase is not a solution to the national issue in social care.
57. A handful of alternative suggestions were made, including a recommendation that efficiencies should be focussed on before considering an increase in Council Tax, and to fully review other options too before any final decision is made; that the Council's decision making needs to be empathic and not just based on the finance; and that the Council needs to ensure it is run efficiently and to look into increasing other revenue streams.

Capital Programme 2025-2029

58. The Capital Programme and its appendices includes all capital expenditure and income, including the acquisition, replacement and enhancement of assets financed from government grants, external contributions, revenue contributions, capital receipts and borrowing.
59. 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.
60. The Capital Programme has been developed to ensure a robust mechanism to deliver our priorities within the finances available.
61. Respondents were given the above explanation and provided with the [Capital Programme 2025-2029](#) and its appendices, and were invited to contact the Council if they would like further details about any of the schemes.
62. Respondents were asked if they had any comments on any of these schemes. A total of 19 comments were received about these schemes, with responses to this question covering a range of different subjects.
63. One of the most frequently mentioned subject matter was regarding highways, making up nearly a quarter of the comments. These respondents wanted to see improved maintenance for roads, cycleways and pathways. It was commented that the monies invested in the Isham bypass could be better spent elsewhere. There was also a request for more off-street car parking in Desborough to help reduce on-street parking, and a request for more information as to what investment works are due to take place at the Wellingborough multi-story car park.
64. A similar number of respondents also mentioned the Council's housing stock. Requests were made for more Council housing to be available. One respondent added the Council should look into increasing its property rent and invest the additional income into property maintenance and building more homes.
65. A couple of respondents mentioned housing. One wanted to see fewer new builds of houses and warehouses on green spaces and wanted redevelopment of brownfield sites to be a priority. The other said more infrastructure is required to support the building of new housing estates.
66. Other comments included a concern that not enough is being invested to help regenerate the towns with the lowest levels of deprivation; a call for more investment within rural areas; a request for larger civic centres within our towns; for more money to be spent on school sufficiency; and more investment in maintaining council leisure centres. It was also commented that a request for more children's services, including the Children's Trust, should be delivered inhouse; concern that the amount of Capital borrowing is too high; and

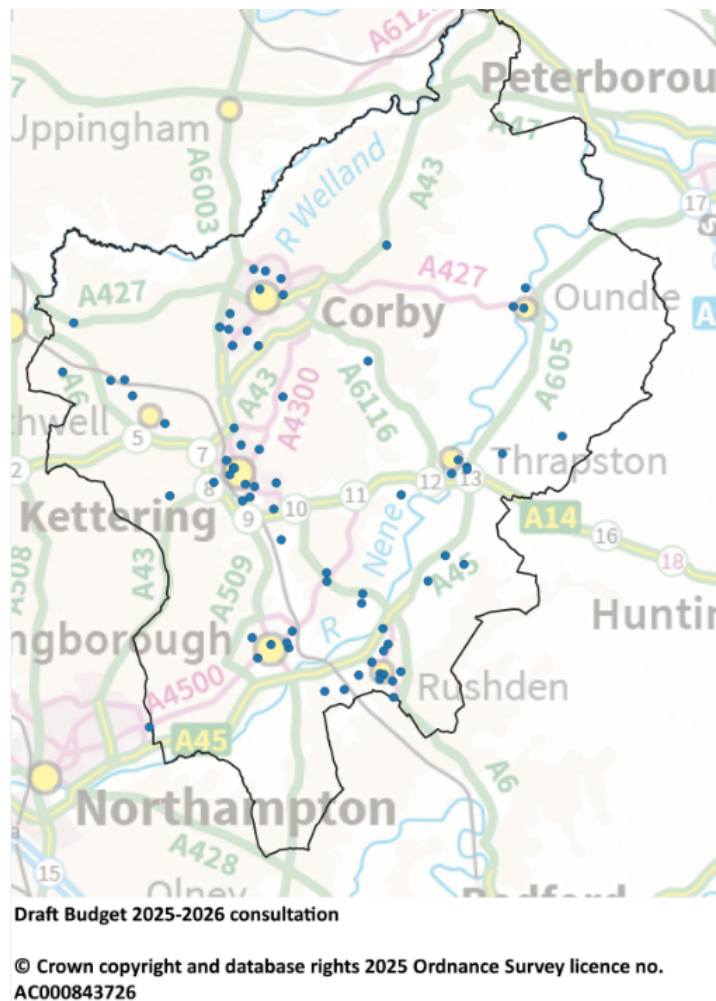
questioning how the household waste figure could be reducing if more houses are being built.

Alternative suggestions and other comments

67. 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 North Northamptonshire Council's financial plans for 2025/2026 and the ongoing financial impact of those plans, together with the medium-term estimates of funding and spending requirements.
68. Respondents were reminded that the consultation questionnaire focusses on the new proposals for the draft budget 2025/2026 that will likely affect residents. However, respondents were welcome to comment on anything within the Draft Budget.
69. Respondents were asked if they had any other comments they would like to make, including any alternative ideas about how the Council could save the same amount of money or generate the same amount of income as outlined in the proposals. There were 15 comments made in relation to this question. A variety of comments were received to this question, with no clearly defined themes emerging.
70. The most frequently mentioned topic, being mentioned by three respondents, was regarding the development on local towns. Wellingborough and Kettering were referenced as areas which respondents felt required more investment. A request was made that more be done to raise the image of town centres, especially in areas containing empty retail units. There was also a concern raised regarding building new properties on greenfield sites, with a view this is harmful for the environment and could contribute towards a greater risk of flooding.
71. A couple of respondents felt the council should review its non-statutory spend and identify areas where it can reduce its non-essential expenditure.
72. A couple of respondents requested for more financial information to be shared to help inform their feedback, including comparable data to last year's 2024-25 budget and a more detailed breakdown of council expenditure.
73. A respondent praised the children's outreach services, with request for further investment to support children outside of school. There was also a request for more funding to help support Third Sector organisations, especially those who support children's services.
74. Other comments included a request for more investment in road maintenance; that the Council should have an inhouse architecture team; and that the council should reduce its staff expenditure and improve its efficiency. There were also a couple of comments expressing the opinion that feedback provided won't be taken onboard.

Demographic information

75. 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. However, no organisational respondent provided this information.
76. Individual respondents were asked to provide their postcode to give us an understanding of where respondents live. There were 73 valid postcodes provided for North Northamptonshire. The below map broadly shows where these respondents reside. A total of 16 postcodes were incomplete.



77. Respondents who were not responding on behalf of an organisation were asked to complete the Council's equality monitoring form to help us understand the characteristics of people who have taken part in the consultation.
78. The vast majority of respondents chose not to provide their demographic information. Full statistical data of the responses is available within the appendix to this report. The following is a brief summary of the data received.

79. The majority of respondents who completed the equality monitoring form identified themselves as female (55.6%), with 33.3% being male and 11.1% being non-binary. The most frequent age given by respondents were those aged between 50 to 64 years (33.4%), with 44.4% being younger and 22.2% aged 65 or older.
80. A total of 66.7% of respondents who completed the equality monitoring form were married, with 22.2% being widowed and 11.1% not living with a partner.
81. Other identified demographic information provided by these forms demonstrated that 22.2% were disabled; all respondents who completed the equalities form identified themselves as White British; 77.8% said they were heterosexual; and the most frequent religion identified was Christian (44.4%) with 33.3% saying they have no religion.
82. The final question within the questionnaire asked respondents how they found out about the consultation. A total of 116 respondents answered this question, **with respondents being able to select more than one option if applicable**. The most frequent answer given was from respondents who said they were made aware of the consultation via social media (21.6%). Other awareness raising channels included council staff receiving notification via internal communication channels (20.7%); being notified as a member of the North Northamptonshire Residents' Panel (15.5%); via an email from the Council (12.9%); from the Council website (12.1%); by being a member of the Council's Consultation Register (11.2%); via local media i.e. newspaper/ radio (4.3%); and the Leader's update (3.4%). Other responses included service users being told by council staff; hearing from a Councillor; and via word of mouth.

Emailed/written responses

83. There was one emailed/written response received in relation to the draft budget consultation.
84. The response was from an individual who said they did not agree with the proposal to increase Council Tax, as they felt many household finances were already under too much pressure due to rising costs of utilities and groceries.
85. A copy of the email is available to view along with the full consultation results on the [consultation webpage](#). Unredacted copies of the feedback received has been shared with senior officers.