

### North 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 North Northamptonshire Council's Budget for 2022/23.

#### Executive decisions and formal consultation

2. The [Draft Budget 2022-23 and Medium Term Financial Plan](#) was approved by Executive on 23 December 2021 and consultation on the budget proposals began later that day. The consultation concluded on 28 January 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 North Northamptonshire Residents' Panel (circa 600 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 38 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 25,637; the Twitter Impressions (i.e. the number of times any content from or about the consultation web page entered a person's screen) was 7,724; and LinkedIn impressions were 1,800.

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### 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 [CET@northnorthants.gov.uk](mailto:CET@northnorthants.gov.uk)
  - Writing to Budget Consultation Response, North Northamptonshire Council, Sheerness House, Meadow Road, Kettering, NN16 8TL
  - Using social media by Tweeting (@NNNorthantsC) 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 527 times. Nearly all of the feedback received was via the questionnaire, with 504 respondents participating via the questionnaire, five respondents submitted a written response, and 18 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 collate the views from the different consultation channels.
12. An [equality screening assessment for budget proposals](#) was published alongside the Executive papers and made available via the questionnaire.

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### Draft Budget 2022/23 Consultation Questionnaire

13. In total, 504 respondents filled out a questionnaire on the draft Budget proposals, either partially or fully. Respondents did not have to answer every question and so the total number of responses for each question differs and is shown in relation to each question.
14. Respondents were asked in what capacity they were responding to the consultation. There were 490 responses to this question, with respondents being able to select more than one option if applicable. Nearly all the respondents said they were local residents (91.2%). The second highest respondents were North Northamptonshire Council employees (16.7%), followed by service users (7.8%). The following table details the various respondent types to the consultation questionnaire.

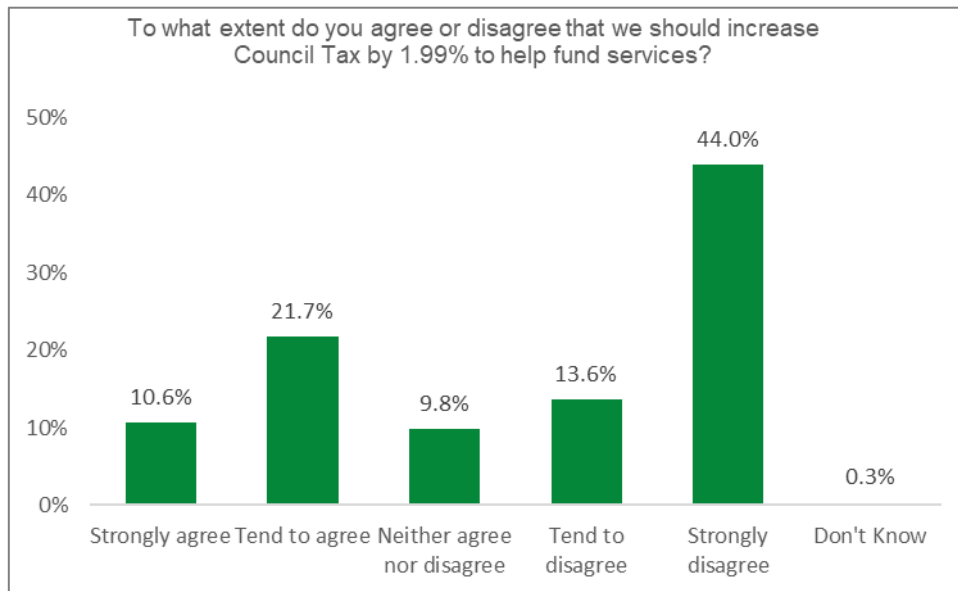
	Response number	Percentage (%)
A local resident	447	91.2%
A service user	38	7.8%
A North Northamptonshire Council employee	82	16.7%
A North Northamptonshire Council Councillor	3	0.6%
A representative of a Town/Parish Council	2	0.4%
A Town or Parish Councillor	10	2.0%
A representative of the voluntary sector or a community organisation	14	2.9%
A representative of the local business community	7	1.4%
A representative of a health partner organisation	0	0.0%
A representative of a user group	3	0.6%
Other	2	0.4%

### Proposed Council Tax rate increase

15. 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%.
16. This 2.99% increase would result in a 2022-23 Band D Council Tax increase for North Northamptonshire Council of £45.83 per year, which is £0.88p per week.
17. It should be noted that these figures do not include the Council Tax for individual town and parish Councils or the Council Tax set for fire and police by the Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner. These are not within the scope of this consultation and these amounts are added afterwards before people receive their final bills.
18. 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 £30.50 per year (£0.59p per week) for the North Northamptonshire Council precept.

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19. 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 368 responses to this question. Approximately a third of respondents (32.3%) said they strongly agree or tend to agree with the proposal, while a little over half (57.6%) said they strongly disagree or tend to disagree with the proposal.



20. Respondents were then asked why they answered the previous question in the way that they did. There were 220 comments made in relation to this question.

21. A total of 46 respondents who agreed with the proposal provided comments. Over a third of these respondents frequently mentioned their views that public services need more funding, and they accepted a Council Tax increase was necessary to do this. Respondents said the increase was inevitable and necessary to provide good local services which everyone contributed too. Some added that the increase was inevitable because other living costs were rising and that it was the 'right thing' for the Council to do. However, others, while accepting the need to increase Council Tax, added they wanted to see more investment, an improvement in services and to be reassured that the additional funding would be used properly and appropriately. However, some accepted the increase reluctantly saying the Council should apply a small increase, with others saying the increase was too high.

22. A small number of respondents also commented about their concerns on the amount of precepts which were applied by other Council Tax raising authorities; and said they were concerned by the continued percentage increases to Council Tax year-on-year.

23. Some respondents felt that Council Tax increases should be ringfenced towards adult social care, care services, and to staff who work within care services.

24. Other comments cited 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 on households and the way in which the Council was using its reserve funds to pay for legacy Council issues.

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25. A total of 14 respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed with the proposal made a comment.
26. Just under half of the comments accepted the increase but mentioned the challenges to the household budget and the impact of increases to low-income households. They also felt the Council needs to demonstrate accountability of its spending and operate efficiently. It was also felt the Council should be lobbying central government for more local investment.
27. Other respondents said they want to see better financial investment decisions and questioned where the savings have been made from local government reorganisation. A few respondents raised questions around charging for green waste – either suggesting that they should not pay them or that all residents should have to pay for green waste.
28. There were 159 respondents that commented as to why they disagreed with the proposed increase.
29. About a third of these respondents felt the services they received or accessed are not satisfactory. These respondents made strong presentation on value for money, saying services had been reduced or diluted despite their Council Tax contributions being increased. Some mentioned the consequences of poor service delivery having an impact on them and their neighbourhood. Some respondents felt services were just too expensive and there was concern that vulnerable people and communities were being put at risk.
30. A fifth of respondents that commented stated they felt services had not improved, with some respondents questioning the financial decision making of the authority and where the savings of local government reorganisation were being seen. There were also concerns that issues of legacy Councils were being carried onto the new Council.
31. Several respondents said they felt residents were being penalised and made to pay for cost of local government when they have little control or choice in the matter. Some also felt residents were being charged for services unfairly.
32. A similar number of respondents believe the Council wastes public money on operational costs, management, and ‘vanity projects’ or programmes. They felt that they were being asked to pay for these which if stopped would mean that Council Tax did not have to increase.
33. Consistently, respondents mentioned that wages, salaries, pensions, and benefits were not rising; and that household costs were high and increasingly, so they felt it was unfair that the Council should be putting households in further financial jeopardy. Many said the Council should not be adding to the burden that many low-income families were facing. They added that they were concerned for people who were financially struggling and in hardship.
34. Others commented that they wanted to know what the increased money would be used for; and they felt the national government settlement would cover the increase being

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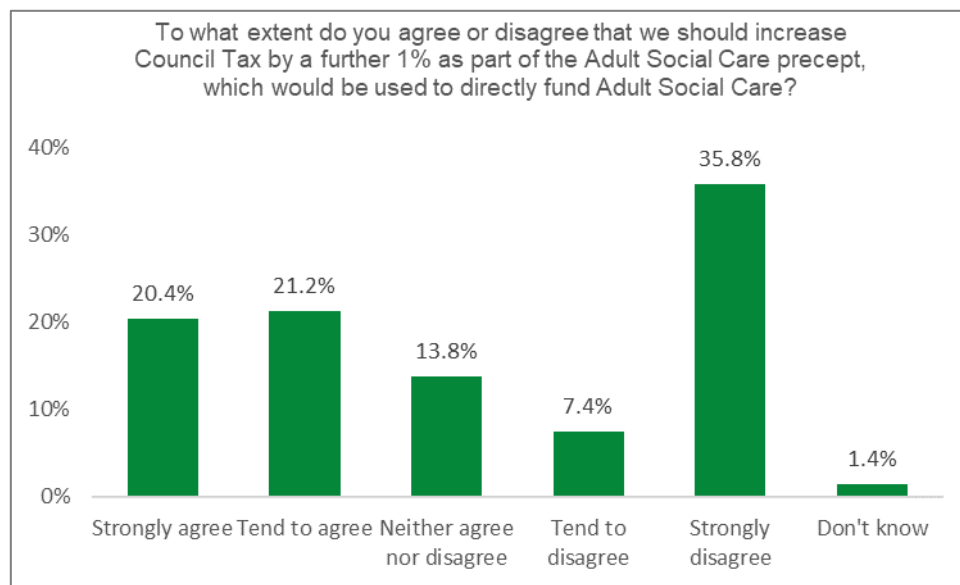
imposed. Respondents also took the opportunity to vent concerns about a legal case compensation settlement paid due to a legacy Council matter, and how this would be funded.

35. No comment was received from the respondent who said, 'Don't know'.
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 146 respondents provided comment.
37. The issue of affordability and rising costs of living dominated the comments. Many respondents said that with wages and incomes not rising, married with increases in fuel and other household costs, that many households would be struggling to make ends meet. Others added that many people were not in jobs or were working under various pressures such as fewer hours. It was also felt that a weak economy would have lasting impacts and pressures to all households, especially low-income ones. Respondents said the Council should not be burdening households with a Council Tax increase, rather it should be doing things which helped people. A few commented that these pressures would manifest in issues of social and mental health, which the Council would have to pick up and effectively would cost more.
38. Many respondents said they felt they paid too much Council Tax already and could not simply afford the rise and others expressed the concern that they had had a high rise the previous year and could not see what savings were being made by local government reorganisation.
39. Several respondents cited their opinion that the Council wasted money and want to see improved scrutiny and accountability of public spending. They said the Council should review its own practice, reduce management, rationalise some job functions, employ fewer agency staff, and ensure that services are equitable across the area.
40. Other comments included negative views on the way in which Council Tax bands are set; that the Council needs to build trust with its residents and business stakeholders; requests for more investment in the voluntary and community sector; the Council's financial support afforded to international crisis over local issues; and the continuing financial effects of the Covid pandemic and its wider impact on society.
41. Several alternative suggestions were made to the proposal to increase Council Tax by 1.99%. Some respondents simply wanted no increase, where others suggested increase based on services used or based on income/ means tested. A few respondents want the harmonisation of green waste charges across the whole authority. Others cited introducing better local transport infrastructure and reaping the rewards that came from a vibrant locality, also respondents suggested the charges for planning development be increased, and that more in-house professions should be established for roles which are currently expensive for the Council to procure. Another commented that investing in community and voluntary organisations would help ease some services allowing the Council to concentrate and prioritise its efforts on issues that it could be solely responsible for. One

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respondent said that adult social care and police should be separated from current arrangement in Northampton and fall under the geographical jurisdiction of North Northants. Another suggestion asked the Council to enable more transparent dialogue opportunities so that people could have a say on matters. Specific mitigation issues that were stated focused on the Council and the need to provide more public messaging on health and wellbeing.

42. 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, means an average (Band D) Council tax payer’s rate would increase £15.33 per year (£0.29p per week) for the North Northamptonshire Council precept.
43. 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 363 responses to this question. There was more of a mixed response to this proposal compared to the previous question, as 41.6% of respondents said they strongly agree or tend to agree with the proposal, whilst 43.3% said they strongly disagree or tend to disagree.



44. Respondents were then asked why they answered the previous question in the way that they did. There were 165 comments made in relation to this question.
45. A total of 54 respondents who agreed with the proposal provided comments.
46. The majority of these said they accepted this because it as an area that needs investment, and that extra funding would help provide services to vulnerable people. Some added that they felt the amount was reasonable considering the cost of living rises; and that it was an inevitable rise which they expected to pay for.
47. A few respondents were happy to accept an increase but wanted to be assured that the money would go to adult social care and not be used for other purposes. Several

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comments were made asking for improved pay for social care employees and for the increase monies to be directed to front line services and not be spent on management costs.

48. A couple of respondents mentioned the growth in the older people population and the requirements this sector must be met. Others added the Council should be making better financial decisions and be prepared to tackle the issue of adult social care. Although some felt adult social care should be managed by national government and not local government.
49. A total of 15 respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed with the proposal made comment. Some of these respondents accepted the increase but felt financial support should come from elsewhere and not via local taxation; or that the increase should be a lower amount. Whereas a couple of comments felt the contribution should be means-tested to determine the amount to contribute. Respondents stated the Council should lobby national government for more support. Another couple of respondents requested the Council to review adult social care services with a view to improve the service and ensure that resources were aligned properly and not wasted.
50. A total of 94 respondents who disagreed with the proposal provided comments. These responses mostly fell into three distinct areas. There were comments about the way in which the Council operated its services, the use of the national government taxation and issues of affordability.
51. On Council operations, respondents questioned the effectiveness and efficiency of services with many saying that they were of poor quality. Some felt the Council could spend its money more effectively and that funds and financial decision making were not transparent. They felt the Council was an over-reliant on private sector providers compared to in-house provision, and that cost to the public purse were too high. Some said they had not seen a difference in the care service provision for the extra amount they were being asked to pay yearly. Some respondents felt that services were fragmented, which contributed to poor service provision and access to services. Others wanted the Council to reconsider other ways and different options to income generate with the income being invested back into social care.
52. Respondents also pointed out the forthcoming national government increase in National Insurance. With this increase coming, they said the Council should not be increasing Council Tax collection for adult social care locally. A few said that the financial resources for this should come from national funding with local Councils managing it accordingly to meet the need for their locality. Others said they felt caught between local and national government with little to no choice but to pay. Some said they felt that they were having to pay twice for social care.
53. Again, respondents took the opportunity to voice their concerns about financial hardships for those who were struggling to manage current household bills considering increased 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, which would, said one respondent, have a detrimental effect on health and wellbeing.



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54. The one respondent who said, 'Don't know' and made comment said they did not know enough about the subject but felt the Council has other areas of concern to focus on.
55. One respondent who had not indicated if they agreed or disagreed with the proposal but still made comment said the amount raised through the increase would not make a sufficient difference, and they felt the Council relied too much upon family and friends to provide care to those in need.
56. 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 mitigated. A total of 83 respondents provided comment and provided a range of comments.
57. The most common theme was affordability and the cost of living. Again, respondents stated their concerns of low wage increases and the stagnant nature of household budgets with less coming into the home and more demands being made through local and national taxations. Respondents felt family budgets were stretched, and they were not sure where they would find the money to pay for tax increases and thought low-income families were being hit the hardest. Some respondents pointed out that they were on the tipping edge of going into debt or losing their homes.
58. A handful of respondents said they thought the Council Tax was already too high and that the Council should use national government funds rather than keep asking residents to pay. Respondents also wanted more clarity and communication on what the money was exactly going to be spent on.
59. Several respondents felt the Council waste resources and want the Council to rethink its own operations. They mentioned previous legacy Council mismanagement and trust issues which they felt had transferred into the new Council. They questioned whether the service provided was of value and thought service quality was often being compromised. Others mentioned that not all services were provided equitably across the new Council area, and again the green waste management charge was mentioned as was the legal settlement cost for legacy Council litigation matters.
60. A few respondents said they accepted the charges as an inevitable consequence of providing local services and that they provided value for money.
61. A few respondents provided suggestions and mitigation comments. These respondents said adult social care increases in Council Tax should be funded more fairly through a means tested approach for high income earners to pay more whilst those on lower income paid less. Another suggestion was to increase the parameters of the local Council Tax Reduction Scheme so 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 bring savings which could be redirected back to social care. This included charging for waste services across the whole of the authority area to help bring in additional income.

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### Draft Capital Programme 2022-25

62. The Draft 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.
63. 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.
64. The Draft Capital Programme has been developed to ensure a robust mechanism to deliver our priorities within the finances available.
65. Respondents were given the above explanation and provided with the draft [Capital Programme 2022-25](#) and its appendices, and were invited to contact us if they would like further details about any of the schemes.
66. Respondents were asked if they had any comments on any of these schemes. A total of 38 comments were received about these schemes, covering a range of different services.
67. Many respondents said they felt the contents of the Draft Capital Programme papers were either confusing or that there was a lack of detail. Respondents felt these should be in plain English with less jargon to make them easier to understand. Some respondents also felt the programme was lacking detail and was vague in places.
68. A similar number of comments were opinions that the programme was not cost effective and not a good use of public resources. Respondents believed it would not provide value for money and it was unnecessary as they thought aspects of it either did not come underneath the responsibilities of the Council or benefitted only a few and would be hard for the Council to obtain income generation.
69. A few respondents focused on the development of North Northamptonshire within the Draft Capital Programme. Respondents were keen to ask why certain areas were prioritised, such as Corby Town Centre and questioned their perceived lack of infrastructure resulting from new housing developments. Environmental factors were also highlighted, specifically the continued need to be aware of the impact of green space and the Flood Alleviation scheme.
70. A handful of respondents mentioned their concerns about what they perceived to be poor local transport infrastructure, community leisure provision, the population growth of the area, and the use of Council finances to pay for previous legacy Council issues.
71. The small number of respondents who were positive of the Draft Capital Programme said they thought it was well considered, appropriate, and think the delivery of various projects would have a positive impact on the community once completed.

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### Alternative suggestions and other comments

72. 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 2022-23 and the ongoing financial impact of those plans, together with the longer-term estimates of funding and spending requirements.
73. Respondents were reminded 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.
74. 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 45 comments made in relation to this question and respondents made a variety of comments.
75. Some respondents wanted to see more savings within the budget, with requests to reduce the number of Council employees as well as reducing their pay. Reducing the number of managers and the amount of office space was also mentioned.
76. Other respondents believed that the budget was unrealistic. They mentioned the current rise of inflation and thought the budget does not mention or take this into account. Respondents also referenced their previous lack of trust which developed from actions of legacy Councils, including financial management and a recent legal dispute.
77. A few respondents felt there was a need to increase funding, with education, adult social care and highways being highlighted as areas which they felt needed more investment in order to satisfactorily fulfil statutory duties.
78. A few respondents also took the opportunity to highlight the variance in refuse collection costs across North Northamptonshire. Residents were keen to highlight different areas have different costs for different bins and want to ensure that in the near future this is harmonised across the authority.
79. A couple of respondents felt more should be done to bring services in-house. They said that contracting out posts and hiring interim staff raises costs and enabled performance to decline.
80. Development of the North Northamptonshire area was mentioned by a couple of residents, specifically a desire for Rushden getting a train station and Kettering upgrading their swimming pool to help drive income in both areas.
81. Respondents also wanted to see how this budget compared to budgets pre-Covid, specifically how this is impacting residents by becoming one unitary authority and what efficiency improvements are being implemented within the new authority.

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82. Other comments included request of more funding for local trading standards; feelings of inequality within the care system; and a suggestion to increase the Council Tax for those in 'wealthier' homes.

### **Demographic information**

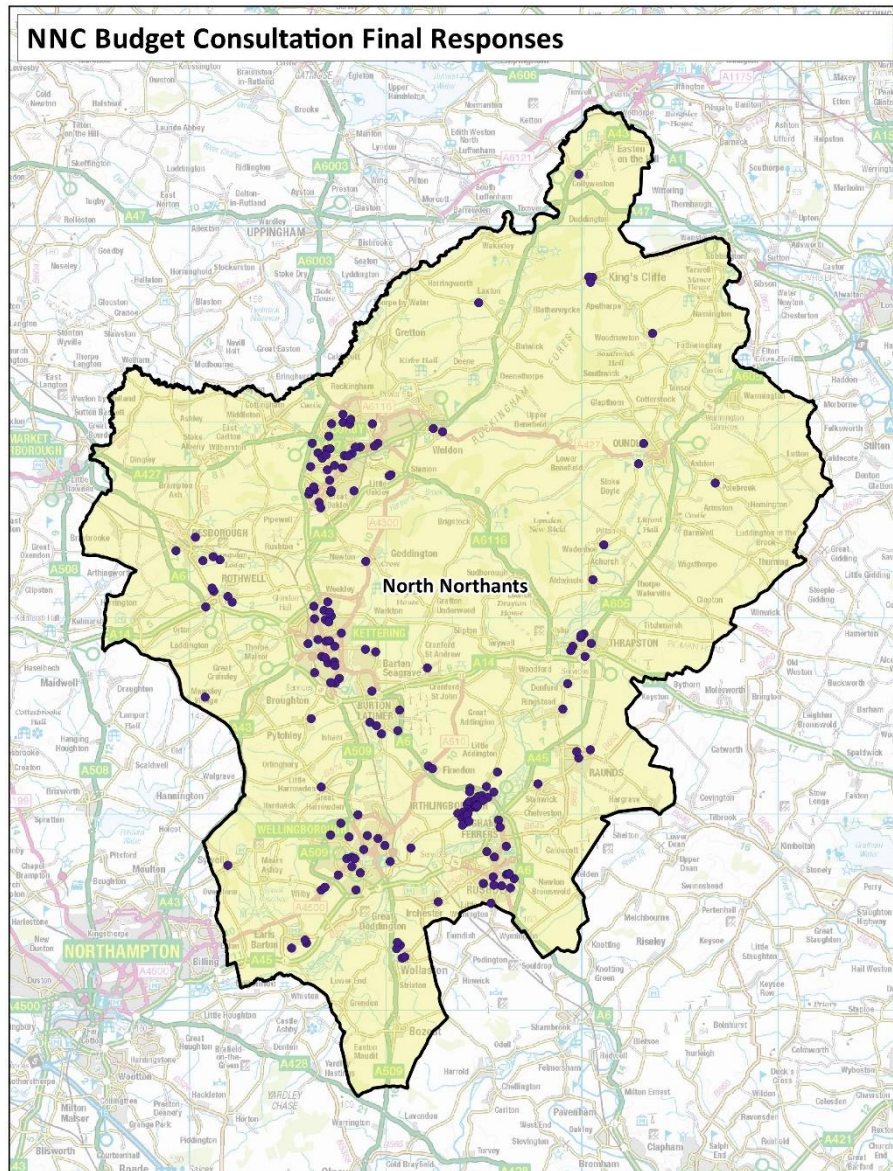
83. Within the demographic section of the questionnaire organisational respondents were asked to provide more detail about their organisation by providing their organisations name and their job title/ role. The four respondents who provided this information identified themselves as a Parish Council;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

84. 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.

85. 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 highlight the age of respondents is unaligned with known population statistics, as there were only 3.2% respondents identifying themselves as under thirty. Full statistical data of the responses is available within the Appendix. The following is a brief summary of the data received.

86. Individual respondents were asked to provide their postcode to give us an understanding of where respondents live. There were 191 valid postcodes provided for North Northamptonshire. A total of 28 postcodes were incomplete and three were from outside of the area. The below map broadly shows where many of the respondents reside.

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87. There was a fairly even split between male (46.4%) and female (44.6%) respondents, with 8.6% saying 'Prefer not to say', and 0.4% saying 'Other'. The most frequent age given by respondents were those aged between 50 to 64 years (32.9%).
88. A total of 57.1% of respondents were married, with 1.1% in a Civil Partnership; 9.1% co-habiting/ living together; 14.9% being single; and 4.4% being widowed.
89. Other identified demographic information provided by respondents demonstrated that 18.2% were disabled, with physical disability being highlighted as the most frequent disability and mentioned by 27 of the 59 respondents who stated a disability. Predominantly respondents identified themselves as White British (82.6%), with 9.3% saying they were from another ethnic background and 8.1% saying 'Prefer not to say'. The most frequent religion identified was Christian (42.5%) with 35.5% of respondents choosing 'None'.

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90. The final question within the questionnaire asked respondents how they found out about the consultation. A total of 287 respondents answered this question. The majority of respondents said they were made aware of the consultation via social media (43.9%). Other awareness raising channels included via the local media i.e. newspaper/ radio (18.8%); from an email alert from the Council (16.4%); and as a member of the North Northamptonshire Residents' Panel (12.2%). Most of the 12.2% respondents that said 'Other' explained they found out about the consultation via internal Council communications. Some respondents said they were informed of it by their Parish Council or local MP. Others heard about the consultation as from its promotion on the Council's website; via an internet search; word of mouth; and via a third sector organisation.

### Other responses

91. There were five written response received in relation to the draft budget consultation.
92. Individuals who wrote in mostly commented about the proposed Council Tax increase. They raised their objection to the proposal for various reasons, including affordability due to cost of living increases and impending National Insurance increase; and a feeling that services have reduced. One respondent said they wanted to see more amenities in rural locations. Another said they wanted to see more support for families living in private accommodation.
93. A written response was submitted by a Parish Council. It noted the elements of the budget proposals which it felt had direct relevance to its Parish.
94. It was pleased the Council has been able to set a balanced budget, and has additional funding from central government, but raised its concern that this may change in the near future. It also noted there were no apparent funding increases for rural services and hoped this did not mean there would be reductions.
95. The Parish Council was also keen to have its Neighbourhood Plan adopted. It also wanted to see more funding allocated to the Bus Service Improvement Plan, street lighting, and highways.
96. There were 18 comments made directly to our social media channels regarding the consultation. Several of these comments were general criticism of the Council and its elected Councillors. A couple of posts were against the proposed Council Tax increase, with one saying the adult social care increase feels like a double-taxation as National Insurance will shortly be increasing too. There were a couple of requests for harmonisation of green waste across the locality, and for all areas to receive the same level of services. Other specific comments included a request to provide more help to disabled young people to become independent in their own Council accommodation.