



**West
Northamptonshire
Council**

West Northamptonshire Council Draft Budget 2023/24 Consultation

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1. Executive Summary

- The Draft Budget 2023/24 Consultation received a total of 1203 responses. 1175 were received via West Northamptonshire Council’s online consultation platform, 1 has been received via post, 27 were received by email.
- Most of the responses received were from local residents (1042, or 89 per cent).
- 1 response has been received from a group of facilitators that wished to provide a response as a group or organisation.
- The consultation detail has been widely promoted using several means including local press, social media, and newsletters.
- Proposal to increase Council Tax by 2.99 per cent to address additional costs to statutory service provision: 31 per cent agree, 56 per cent disagree, 12 per cent neither agree nor disagree or don’t know. 417 comments received on proposal. 304 comments received on negative impacts and how these could be avoided.
- Proposal to increase Council Tax by a further 2 per cent to fund the increase in costs providing Adult Social Care: 34 per cent agree, 51 per cent disagree, 15 per cent neither

agree nor disagree or don't know. 326 comments received on proposal. 168 comments received on negative impacts and how these could be avoided.

- Proposal to maximise the income from certain discretionary services in order to support essential services: 30 per cent agree, 52 per cent disagree, 18 per cent neither agree nor disagree or don't know. 355 comments received on proposals.
- The invitation to comment on the Draft General Fund Capital Programme 2023-2027 received 148 comments.
- Proposal to review services: 26 per cent agree, 58 per cent disagree, 16 per cent neither agree nor disagree. 496 comments received on proposals.
- Additional comments on the Draft Budget were invited, 97 further comments were received.
- Draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget 2022/23 proposal to increase rent by 7 per cent across the councils housing stock: 42 per cent agree, 27 per cent disagree, 31 per cent neither agree nor disagree or don't know. 172 comments received on proposal.
- Draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget 2022/23 proposal to increase garage rents and commuter surcharges by 10 per cent: 50 per cent agree, 15 per cent disagree, 36 per cent neither agree nor disagree or don't know.
- Draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget 2022/23 proposal to increase general service charges by 10 per cent: 31 per cent agree, 38 per cent disagree, 31 per cent neither agree nor disagree or don't know.
- Additional comments on the HRA Capital Programme were invited, 34 further comments were received.
- 613 respondents that accessed the consultation questionnaire provided demographic information. 17 confirmed they were responding on behalf of an organisation, and 596 stated they were responding as individuals.

2. Introduction

2.1 Overview

At a meeting held on 20 December 2022, West Northamptonshire Council's cabinet approved for consultation its draft budget for 2023/24.

Our draft budget for 2023/24 includes proposals for the coming financial year which will ensure we continue to meet our statutory duties, protecting, as far as possible, the vital services we deliver to our communities in the most efficient and effective way possible.

An overview of the main proposals:

- To increase the average Council Tax by 4.99 per cent, comprising of 2.99 per cent core council tax and a further 2 per cent adult social care precept, which is the maximum amount permitted by Government. The increase is less than half the current rate of inflation.
- To protect funding to meet demands on critical services by increasing fees and charges for discretionary services, where people have a choice whether they use the service, such as garden waste collection and car parking. This will also align our fees with national averages and fairly reflect operating costs.

- A proposed Capital Programme including improvements to local roads, mending potholes, and schemes to improve residents' wellbeing, reduce health inequalities and support communities.
- To review services to make them more efficient and save taxpayers money including:
 - A review of the current Home to School Transport Policy, processes, and systems. A public consultation on this proposal will take place early next year
 - Introducing a three-weekly waste collection in the South Northants and parts of Northampton area to bring in line with the waste collections for Daventry
- To restructure service areas in the council, introducing new or reviewing and improving ways of working to generate savings without impacting the delivery of services and introducing tighter controls on spending across the authority.

Recognising the major pressures and demand for adult and children's services, the draft budget proposes to invest significant extra funding into these areas to improve preventative and cost-effective care for West Northamptonshire's most vulnerable residents and to respond to the significant increase in the demand for these critical services.

The council will also continue to deliver on plans to drive economic growth in West Northants with further progress expected on multi-million-pound plans to revitalise the centre of Northampton through the Government's Future High Streets and Towns Funds, starting in the new year with the Market Square transformation.

The council has also published a draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget for 2023/24. The HRA is a ring-fenced account which records the cost of managing the council's housing stock. These costs are funded by tenants' rents, and tenants/leaseholders' service charges. The council is proposing to increase rents by 7 per cent, an average increase of £6.79 per week, and to also increase service charges and garage rents by 10 per cent. This proposed increase in rent is critical in funding the maintenance and delivery of 'fit for purpose' housing. We recognise that this is a very financially challenging time for people and have therefore set aside a hardship fund to provide support to tenants who may be facing additional financial difficulties as a result of the increase.

This document sets out the summarised results to the consultation which took place from 21 December 2022 to 31 January 2023.

2.2 Related documents

- Cabinet Meeting [Draft Budget 2023/24 and Medium-Term Financial Plan report](#), and its appendices:
 - [Appendix A – Budget Summary](#)
 - [Appendix B1 to B5 – List of proposals](#)
 - [Appendix C – Draft 2023/24 Fees and Charges](#)
 - [Appendix D – Dedicated Schools Grant Budget](#)
 - [Appendix E – Draft General Fund Capital Programme 2023-27](#)
- [Draft Housing Revenue Account \(HRA\) Budget 2023-24 and Medium-Term Financial Plan](#) report, and its appendices:
 - [Appendix 1 – Draft HRA Revenue Budget and MTFP Summary](#)
 - [Appendix 2 – HRA Budget Proposals](#)
 - [Appendix 3 - Draft HRA Capital Programme](#)
 - [Appendix 4 – Draft Northampton Partnership Homes \(NPH\) Management Fee](#)
 - [Appendix 5 – Draft Schedule of Rents and Service Charges](#)

2.3 Cabinet decisions and formal consultation

The [Draft Budget 2023/24 and Medium Term Financial Plan](#) received approval from Cabinet on 20 December 2022, with the consultation on budget proposals commencing on 21 December 2022, and concluding 31 January 2023.

The public consultation was carried out by the council's Communications Team. The consultation gave as much detail on the areas that people would feel strongly about as well as encouraging the access to all the related documents. Comments were invited on any part of the budget proposals. The consultation followed nationally recognised best practice and allowed for responses to be received digitally and non-digitally.

2.4 Method

The consultation consisted of an online questionnaire which was made available through the council's consultation hub, Citizen Space at:

<https://westnorthants.citizenspace.com/cet/budget-2023-24>

Support in accessing the questionnaire online was made available at most council buildings, and all council libraries. Paper copies were made available where required. Alternatively, people could also respond via email at haveyoursay@westnorthants.gov.uk, or post using The Guildhall address. There was also an option to contact via phone.

Those who wished to hold a group discussion with others were able provide joint feedback by completing the online Group Facilitator's Feedback Form questionnaire or by downloading a PDF version to send via email or post, this form acted as a toolkit to assist these groups. Direction to this existed within the Draft Budget detail available through the council's consultation hub.

People were invited to contact the council by email, post or telephone should they have had any queries, comments or wished for a copy of the questionnaire in another format (including easy read or large print).

Throughout the consultation, respondents were provided with explanations around the reasoning for the proposals and additional links to relevant documents were positioned throughout the parts of the online questionnaire for ease of accessing this information.

2.5 Publicity

The consultation was publicised widely throughout the duration of the activity using different means including:

- Local press: A series of media releases that went to circa 370 newsrooms and individuals (including hyperlocal, local, regional, and national, print, digital and broadcast including the Chronicle and Echo and BBC Radio Northampton) from the council's Communications Team.
- Social media:
 - 7 promotions using Twitter, reaching a cumulative total of 7,153 accounts, prompting 202 engagements through clicks, likes and shares.
 - A Facebook advertisement was used for the launch through to 15 January 2023, reaching 20,481 accounts, prompting 2169 clicks. Additionally, the consultation was promoted through Facebook posts 7 times, reaching a

cumulative total of 32,991 accounts, prompting 2509 engagements through clicks, comments, reactions and shares.

- E-newsletters were sent on 3 different dates during the consultation, prompting a combined total of 355 clicks through to the online portal. Articles were also included in news bulletins to town and parish councils.
- Online council news pages: Internal communications and external public pages.

Detail about the consultation was also circulated via email to those registered on the council's Consultation Register and Residents Panel (over 500 contacts), as well as being sent to council members and parish councils. Wider promotion of the consultation was encouraged through these means.

3. Response to the consultation

A total of 1203 responded to the consultation. There were 1175 online responses to the questionnaire through the council's consultation platform, 1 paper copy of the questionnaire has been received, and 27 email responses. 1 response was received from a group that wished to respond together using the group facilitators form questionnaire.

The consultation questionnaire was structured in a way that respondents were able to comment on individual proposals. There was no requirement for respondents to answer every question, therefore the total of responses for each question may differ.

Regular summaries of the responses were circulated to Senior Finance Officers, and all responses received sent to decision makers following the conclusion of the consultation.

3.1 Response profile

Respondents were asked in what capacity they were responding to the consultation. This question allowed for more than one answer and based on the number of responders (rather than responses) therefore the percentage will not sum.

There were 1405 responses to this question. A majority of respondents were local residents (1042).

The following provides the respondent types to the consultation:

Table 1, About you

Respondent type	Count
A local resident	1042
A service user	113
A West Northamptonshire Council employee	95
A West Northamptonshire Council councillor	23
A town or parish council representative	9
A town or parish councillor	44
A voluntary or community organisation representative	31
A local business community representative	23
A health partner organisation representative	2
A user group representative	5
Other	18

One (1) group facilitator form was submitted; representing a group for Older People, no other information has been provided on this group's details.

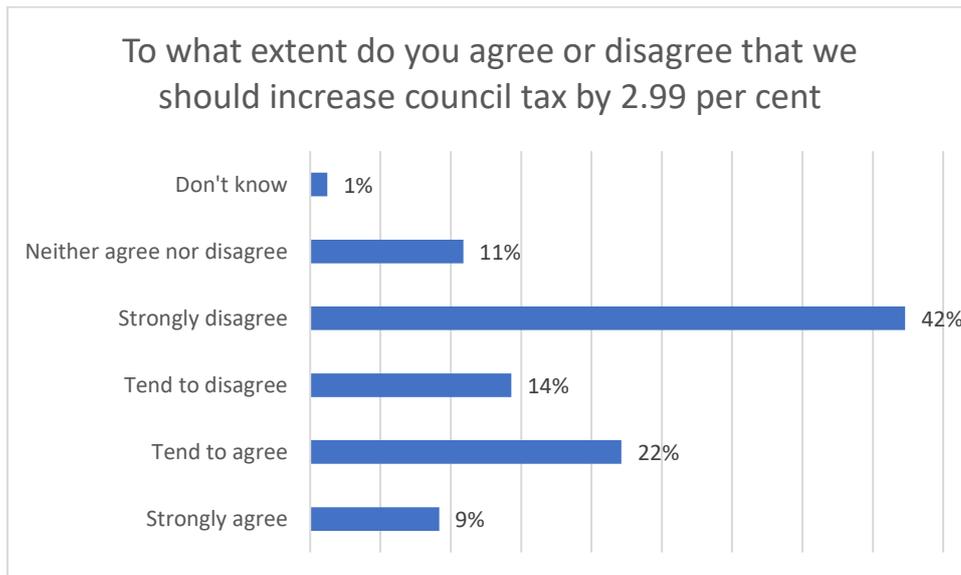
3.2 Proposed increase to Council Tax

- 3.2.1. The council is proposing to increase the average amount of council tax by 4.99 per cent (2.99 per cent plus 2 per cent for adult social care), in line with the limit set by Government, which allows for this increase without triggering a referendum.
- 3.2.2. The proposed increase is less than half the current rate of inflation.
- 3.2.3. The proposed Council Tax increase will result in an additional income of around £11.5m per year which will be used to protect existing services. Without the increase the level of services required to be cut to deliver a balanced budget would be greater than is currently the case in the draft budget proposals.
- 3.2.4. As an example, an average Band D level of Council Tax for West Northamptonshire Council of £1,693.73 in 2023/24 is equivalent to £32.57 per week. The average increase on a Band D property across the area is £80.50 or £1.55p per week. This Band D figure does 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.
- 3.2.5. A 2.99 per cent general increase would result in an increase of £48.24 per year (93p per week) for 2023/24 for the average Band D Council Taxpayer.
- 3.2.6. Respondents were asked to what extent they agree or disagree with the proposal to increase Council Tax by 2.99 per cent to address the additional cost of our statutory service provision. There were 818 responses to this question with 256 stating they strongly agreed or tended to agree, and 463 strongly disagreed or tended to disagree.

Table 2, To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should increase Council Tax by 2.99 per cent to address the additional cost of our statutory service provision?

Response	Count	Per cent (%)
Strongly agree	75	9%
Tend to agree	181	22%
Tend to disagree	117	14%
Strongly disagree	346	42%
Neither agree nor disagree	89	11%
Don't know	10	1%

Chart 1



3.2.7. Respondents were invited to provide comments on why they answered in the way that they did. 417 respondents chose to provide a comment. 86 of respondents that agreed with the proposal chose to provide comments and are summarised below:

- a) A high number of respondents express that they understand that increases need to happen due to inflation challenges, as there is little alternative, and is appropriate to ensure the continuation of services, and help those considered vulnerable.
- b) Several respondents voiced their concerns that services are currently being stretched or are lacking altogether and can agree to the proposal providing that cuts to services are not made and the council meets its statutory provisions.
- c) Some respondents that accepted the proposal indicated they are worried that the increases are not enough, or that more support should be provided from central Government.
- d) Other comments felt that greater transparency on proposals is required and that narrative around the consultation is misleading, and an approach to budget setting commencing at an earlier stage giving advance warning would be welcomed.
- e) There were also a small number of concerns around the authority generally being a lack of trust and inherited mismanagement, for those struggling financially, and for the council to be more efficient.

3.2.8. Of those respondents that neither agreed nor disagreed, 30 chose to provide comment:

- a) A number of respondents said they accept the proposal, commenting that it is reasonable, necessary, or expected.
- b) A small number of respondents felt that the proposal amount was not enough.
- c) Others felt misled about the proposed increase or wanted greater transparency on spending. There is again concern for people struggling financially with no access to assistance, and for services that are currently being stretched or lacking completely.
- d) A small number of comments were received reflecting a lack of confidence in the council, and that the council continues to suffer inherited budgetary issues.

- e) There were a couple of comments around the council needing to make efficiencies such as properly exploring the current budget and generating savings before proposing increases.

3.2.9. Of those respondents that disagreed with the proposal, 299 chose to provide comments, summarised as follows:

- a) Echoed throughout these comments is a sizable concern regarding financial difficulties with a feeling that the proposal will push families and individuals into a worse position than they are already experiencing, increasing the burden on statutory council services. Some respondents already noting hardship, felt that they are concerned they will not be able to pay bills including council tax, and this pressure felt should be dealt with sensitively. Some respondents in higher council tax banding need to express that despite a high band, they are not well off and unlikely to be able to afford. Many of these comments referred to bad timing in light of a 'cost of living' crisis, with some noting that they want support but do not qualify.
- b) Following the financial concern, comments have been received in respect of existing services being stretched, lacking, or reduced. Some voiced a need for a better balance of service and cost, noting that despite increases, historically the services have never improved and unlikely to. There is feeling that there is little to show from increasing council tax or little improvement. There is a call to protect services and a feeling that making people pay more for a reduced number of services is nonsensical.
- c) A number of respondents are concerned about money management and staffing and trusting the council. Some implied a failure to provide assurance on budget spends, lack of thinking behind budget setting, and spending on wasteful schemes. There are comments to consider residents' welfare. Some respondents questioned the cost of harmonisation and where the council's savings are and that reserves should be utilised.
- d) Some felt that greater efficiencies could be made, offering better value for money for example: making cuts, spending wisely, streamlining operations, and solving issues. There is a general consensus in these comments that cuts could be made elsewhere rather than adopt the proposal. Some felt that savings could be made through senior officer pay cuts or by removing options to outsource tasks such as consultancy.
- e) Comments relating to the amount being too much were received, further supporting issues highlighted through for the financial strain felt.
- f) Some respondents expressed that there is an imbalance in council provided services received by residents, dependant on where they live.
- g) Some comments called for the authority to make a case to Central Government, with a call to reset all funding locally and nationally, and a feeling that Central Government should be picking up increases to fund services as they have mishandled finances and caused a crisis. There was also comment that the council receive enough funding from Central Government, and that Governments should take measures against the council.
- h) A small number of comments noted that they needed greater transparency on how money is being spent.

- i) A small number of respondents that selected that they disagree with the proposal, also noted that they understood and agreed in principle that it needs to be increased, as long as they see an improvement in services.
- j) A small number of respondents felt misled around the consultation narrative noting that the proposals around council tax should not sit separately, and they need further justification for the increases, and some felt that the increase should be higher than proposed, with one noting the increase should be more realistic and go to referendum.

3.2.10. Of the respondents that selected that they didn't know, 2 provided comment. One noted that the increase was too high, the other that details should be trusted as factual.

3.2.11. Respondents were asked that if they felt the proposal would have a negative impact, what they thought that impact would be, they were also invited to provide suggestions on how any potential negative impacts could be avoided. 304 comments were received for this question.

3.2.12. The majority of respondents to this question made comment referencing the current financial difficulties. Many stating concern that any increase is unfair and will push people into or further into poverty. Some expressed concern for those on low incomes or middle incomes and people considered as vulnerable, others felt they could not afford basic necessities and facing an impact on mental health. Others felt that they are being punished for trying to support the economy, and there is a lack of financial support for working families.

In comparison, a small number of comments were received noting a lack of confidence around money mismanagement, and how services will suffer. Some felt that the increase would reflect badly on general feeling towards the council, and that the financial burden should be taken on by the authority. Comments were received around lacking support, hidden funds, overpaid staff, and expensive consultants.

Some felt that the impact would be no improvement, that services are not proportioned correctly in areas, that statutory services are contracted out and not available and an increase to cost should not then afford a decrease in service which will be detrimental to service users.

There were some comments that felt the increase was acceptable and did not provide detail on impacts.

A few comments have been received that express that some services are lacking in certain areas of West Northants. There were also comments calling for the council to be more innovative, to be clear around the narrative of budget consultations and show tangible benefits, and the unfairness of funding through Central Government.

There were a number of comments providing suggestions or offering mitigation, several of these relate to the council reviewing costs and looking at other ways to

generate income. Further to this there were comments urging the council to be more efficient.

Some respondents felt that council staffing should be addressed, and some chose to provide an alternative suggestion to the proposal.

3.2.13. Respondents were asked to what extent they would agree or disagree that Council Tax should increase by a further 2 per cent to fund the increase in costs of providing Adult Social Care.

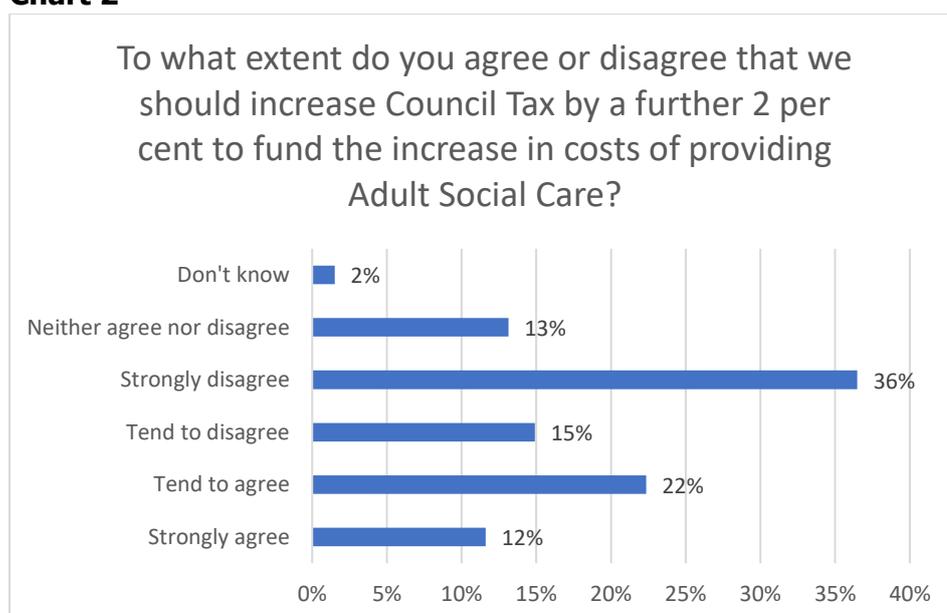
3.2.14. As an example, a 2 per cent adult social care precept increase would result in an increase of £32.26 per year (62p per week) for 2023/24 for the average Band D Council Taxpayer.

3.2.15. There were 792 responses to this question with 269 stating they strongly agreed or tended to agree, and 407 strongly disagreed or tended to disagree.

Table 3, To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should increase Council Tax by a further 2 per cent to fund the increase in costs of providing Adult Social Care?

Response	Count	Per cent (%)
Strongly agree	92	12%
Tend to agree	177	22%
Tend to disagree	118	15%
Strongly disagree	289	36%
Neither agree nor disagree	104	13%
Don't know	12	2%

Chart 2



3.2.16. Respondents were again asked if they would like to tell us why they answered the question in the way that they did, 326 provided comment. Of those that agree, 97 comments were received.

- a) A high number of respondents understand an increase is required to ensure Adult Social Care services are maintained. As well as general agreeance there was feeling that finances need to be ringfenced, invested in, and costs managed as it is recognised that Adult Social Care has been historically underfunded.
- b) Some of these respondents raised concern that Central Government should be providing more to fund Adult Social Care as they have caused issues. A comment that was also made that a review of the county split would be appropriate based on level of need.
- c) Some comments noted that they are concerned that Adult Social Care is underfunded and inadequate as a result, stating that it needs to be better supported noting that fair pay and staff retention was an issue as well as ongoing problems in care homes and the NHS, also that more should be done to allow people to stay supported in their own homes.
- d) Other comments where that the proposal is not enough, there are concerns around people struggling financially. A small number of comments related to the consultation, want greater transparency on the proposal, and some have concerns around the fairness of the council in respect of this proposal noting a broken system.

3.2.17. Of those who neither agreed nor disagreed, 33 provided further comment:

- a) A number of comments are concerned services are not improving, questioning how increase would make a difference. There were some comments regarding the Adult Social Care's ability to operate more efficiently, feeling that the service is broken, and financing should be addressed in a different way, with question around where money is being spent. Others felt that joined up working has been lacking since the formation of unitary, that there are elements of difficulty in accessing social care, and that the council has not managed finances well.
- b) Some of the comments noted they were either not affected by the increase, couldn't understand the increase, or were frustrated about underfunding, although also felt that Adult Social Care should be supported.
- c) A couple of comments noted they could not provide comment as they needed more information around what is being proposed or felt that they didn't know enough generally to be able to give a fair opinion.
- d) A small number of comments were also received in respect of Central Government needing to do more.
- e) Other comments included that everyone should contribute, not just those that have to pay council tax, that there are other ways to handle adult social care, and that positive ways to save should be explored rather than making cuts.

3.2.18. Of the respondents that disagreed, 196 chose to give further comment, as summarised:

- a) The most prevalent comments are related to concerns around Adult Social Care or the council. Comments reflect a feeling that the Adult Social Care system is broken, not providing the service it should, that the service requires a systematic review, reorganisation, and better focus. Comments relating to the council focus around the management of finances. Some also felt there has been no improvement over the years and feel it will not change.
- b) It was also felt that there is concern that finances do not go to where it is intended.
- c) Many concerned around financial stability of residents. Some respondents also commented that as they are unlikely to need this service or that they feel they wouldn't qualify yet are being asked to fund it when they are also suffering financial hardship.
- d) Some felt the council should do more in way of efficiencies such as reviewing staffing and controlling finances effectively. Comments also questioned the use of finances and that the majority of residents do not benefit from a service they are paying more and more into each year.
- e) A number of respondents felt that this proposal is something that should be funded by Central Government as it is a national priority and therefore Government's responsibility and should be funded in line with existing demands. They also felt that more should be done by Government noting that national budgets should be reviewed, or direct funding should be provided.
- f) A small number of comments were received that feel the increase is too much or wish for no increase as it could be sourced from elsewhere, and that it was unclear why an increase is being proposed.
- g) There was also a couple of comments that felt the proposal is not enough, that additional funding should be focused on other priority services not just adult social care, and there is disproportionate provision outside of Northampton town.

3.2.19. Respondents were also asked here if they felt the proposal would have a negative impact, what they felt that impact would be, and they were also invited to provide suggestions on how any potential negative impacts could be avoided.

There were 168 responses to this question. The most common comment being the impact on those struggling financially. Working households are struggling with income not increasing with inflation and the general cost of living. Additionally, many felt that increases, as well as the current financial climate, are negatively impacting on their mental health, adding to social care issues, with people barely affording essential necessities.

A number of comments focused on the increase being high and unsustainable, with others concerned or critical of the management of Adult Social Care, being that it is not value for money, not ringfenced, and a service that is unfair on those not using it. Some comments noted that some finances are not accounted for or used to fund employment related costs.

There are comments calling for efficiencies and reform. There is concern around services lacking, reducing or being unsupported or neglected, noting that that Adult Social Care is not fit for purpose.

There were also a small number of responses mentioning harmonisation of the council, that the proposal was not enough, that the service requires significant investment from Government, and better transparency.

There was some general feeling that wider services are being neglected, sometimes in favour of social care.

Respondents that provided alternative ideas, or mitigations to the increase, suggested costs should be reviewed, and income generated in different ways.

A similar number of comments focus on a review of staffing, and some comments suggested efficiency savings.

Other suggestions included that the amount paid should be proportionately based on income and exempting households less well off, not increasing council tax, cutting services, and ensuring care packages are afforded to the right people.

A small number of comments felt that Central Government should take action as the current way of financing this service is unsustainable.

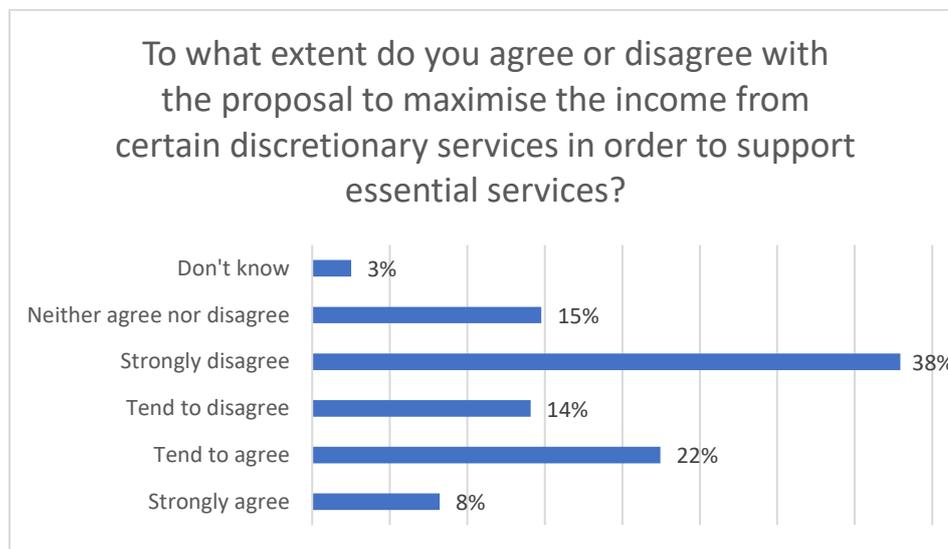
3.3 Fees and charges for discretionary services

- 3.3.1. Income from fees and charges represents an important source of funds to the council and enables a range of services to be provided within the area and beyond.
- 3.3.2. West Northamptonshire's Draft Budget generates Fees and Charges income in the region of £22.3m.
- 3.3.3. The council offers a number of discretionary services, where residents can choose if they wish to use the service such as garden waste collection, bulky waste collection, and car parking.
- 3.3.4. It is good practice each year to review, and where appropriate, increase fees and charges to cover any increasing cost of service provision. If Fees and Charges are not increased, it is likely that service cuts would need to be made to critical front lines services to balance the budget. Fees and Charges are levied where residents and businesses have a choice about whether they wish to have a service provided to them or not.
- 3.3.5. Due to the pressure on essential services, and the need to protect funding so that the ever-increasing demand can be met, the council is proposing to maximise income from certain discretionary fees and charges such as the above where residents and business have a choice about whether they wish to take that service or not.
- 3.3.6. Respondents were asked to what extent they would agree or disagree with the proposal to maximise the income from certain discretionary services in order to support essential services. There were 717 responses to this question with 220 stating they strongly agreed or tended to agree, and 373 strongly disagreed or tended to disagree.

Table 4, To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal to maximise the income from certain discretionary services in order to support essential services?

Response	Count	Per cent (%)
Strongly agree	59	8%
Tend to agree	161	22%
Tend to disagree	101	14%
Strongly disagree	272	38%
Neither agree nor disagree	106	15%
Don't know	18	3%

Chart 3



3.3.7. Respondents were invited to provide comments on the proposals for maximising the income for discretionary services. 733 respondents chose to provide a comment.

3.3.8. The most prevalent theme is around waste service charges at 52 per cent of all responses to this question. Despite the number the comments all had similar focus with the vast majority against the proposals. Many people commented on the green waste collection, some also commented on bulky waste. Most stated that increases of the amount proposed would lead to discouraging recycling and much more fly-tipping costing the council more, and that it wouldn't create income as many will choose not to have the services. There was general feeling that residents are already paying enough for green waste collections and are not getting value for money due to frequency of use. Some also felt it was disproportionate to areas being that they have seen a huge increase already which other areas have not. A small number of comments also stated that the service is classed as recycling and therefore not a discretionary service.

3.3.9. Parking made up 34 per cent of all comments made on the proposals. Indifferent to if the respondent selected, they agreed or not, the general feeling is that charging generally and more so increasing charges for parking should not be followed

through. Many felt that the proposed would discourage footfall in areas, at the detriment to retail and hospitality, therefore damaging the economy. A concern also that profit is being put before people and charging for public green/open spaces encourages isolation and could lead to (or enhance) health issues. There were a few responses from residents that have no option but to park in a council car park and felt they would be in a worse situation financially and note of inconsistency in applying charges over the West Northants area. Some of the comments made suggestions about encouraging sustainability should the charges come, creating incentives for visitors, and parking charges should not be outsourced.

3.3.10. The next theme, related generally to the proposals and received 5 per cent of all comments. The majority disagrees with this approach and question if people will still use the services covered in discretionary fees and charges. Concern is felt that the increase is in excess of inflation and unrealistic and unproportionate. Some respondents felt that the increase should be gradually introduced but also felt that it was justified and reflects the cost of providing services.

3.3.11. A small number of comments were received for areas of fixed penalties, many commenting that these are not increasing, and they should be as illegal practices are likely to be more prevalent considering other increases. Likened to fixed penalties, gambling charges features as being something that should be increased receiving a similar number of comments.

3.3.12. There were a handful of comments made around the charges for planning and building control, many feeling that the increase is too much.

3.3.13. Of the other comments received and not featured above, 30 per cent were not related to any of the fees and charges. There were a couple of comments for Houses of Multiple Occupancy noting no increase, and Pest Control stating too much of an increase. Comment has also been received encouraging parking enforcement, licensing generally being harmonised, and licensing remaining the same cost.

3.4 Draft General Fund Capital Programme 2023-2027

3.4.1. The Capital Strategy demonstrates how the council will make expenditure and investment decisions in line with the Corporate Plan which sets out the council's priorities. It sets out the key objectives and broad principles to be applied by the council when considering capital investment and its funding and provides the context for how the Medium-Term Capital Programme seeks to support the realisation of the council's vision and corporate priorities. The draft general fund capital programme has been developed to ensure a robust mechanism to deliver our priorities within the finances available and is our approach to effective, long-term planning and investment for the benefit of our residents.

3.4.2. The draft budget only includes additions to the current capital programme where the new schemes are fully funded and therefore where there is no financial impact for the Authority. A further review will be undertaken of all other proposals to agree prioritisation of schemes before they are submitted for final budget.

- 3.4.3. During the financial year 2023/24 the council proposes to carry out a total capital programme of £83.6m which includes new capital schemes totalling more than £12.2m to improve local roads. This includes £4.7m for mending potholes and using some public health funding for the year ahead to progress a range of schemes aimed at improving residents' wellbeing, reducing health inequalities, and continuing to support communities through financial difficulties around the cost of living.
- 3.4.4. Respondents were asked if they had any comments to make on these proposals. There were 153 comments received on the Draft General Fund Capital Programme 2023-2027.
- 3.4.5. Investment in road maintenance received 57 per cent of all comments and is highly accepted, many commenting that some areas are in dire need of this investment however feel that it should not be completed in the way it has been historically calling for investment in better materials.
- 3.4.6. Investment in health was also mainly supported although received less comments.
- 3.4.7. Other comments that were received were mainly around how the council manages money, and investment could be spent on more meaningful projects.
- 3.4.8. A number of respondents felt that the detail on schemes is lacking detail or not easy to understand, noting that more information is required to provide an informed response.
- 3.4.9. Some comments were made that were not relevant to the budget consultation.

3.5 Reviewing Services

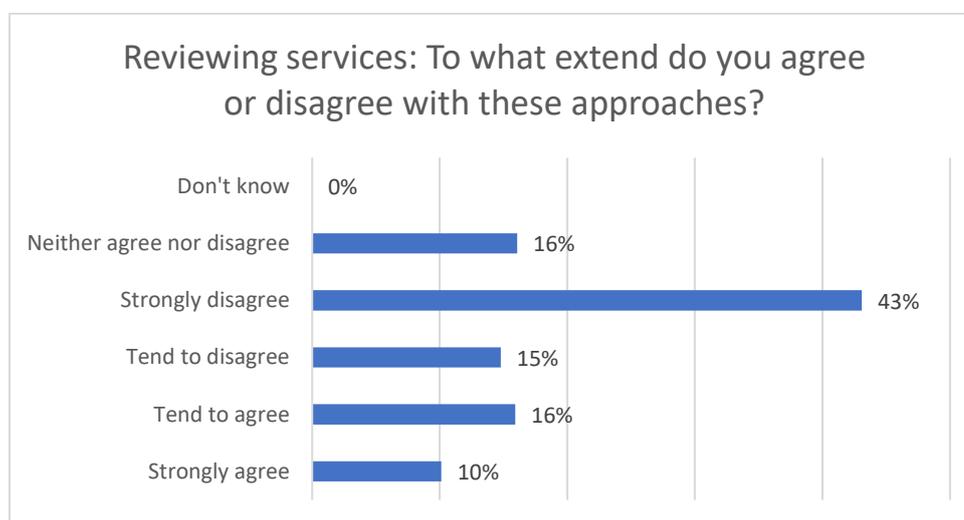
- 3.5.1. The council is constantly striving to make services more efficient whilst saving taxpayers money and protect critical services by ensuring we apply good practice to the delivery of our services.
- 3.5.2. We are seeking to minimise spare capacity, review some services that are currently operating above statutory minimum standards and maximise the efficiency of services such as waste collections rounds.
- 3.5.3. These proposals include:
- A plan to review the current Home to School transport policy in the new year to determine the level of service that should be determined over and above the statutory minimum level. This will be subject to a separate consultation exercise once the review concludes with recommendations.
 - Implementing a three weekly residual household waste collection service in some parts of Northampton and across the South Northants area to align it with the approach taken in the Daventry area of West Northants in order to reduce costs and take a more efficient approach to the collection of Household Waste.

3.5.4. Respondents were asked to what extent they would agree or disagree with the proposal to review services. There were 622 responses to this question with 162 stating they strongly agreed or tended to agree, and 360 strongly disagreed or tended to disagree.

Table 5, To what extend do you agree or disagree with these approaches?

Response	Count	Per cent (%)
Strongly agree	63	10%
Tend to agree	99	16%
Tend to disagree	92	15%
Strongly disagree	267	43%
Neither agree nor disagree	100	16%
Don't know	0	0%

Chart 4



3.5.5. Respondents were asked to provide any comments on the proposals to review services. 482 chose to provide comment. 70 comments were received from those respondents who said they strongly agree or tend to agree.

- a) Many of these comments said that they had experience of 3 weekly waste collection, and this worked for them, and after a while they had got used to it; some said that this helped reduced landfill and encourage more recycling.
- b) Respondents mentioned that bin size need to be bigger for some families; and a couple mentioned giving residents a choice in paying for extra black bin collections if 3 weeks was not enough. A few respondents wanted the service to be equitable namely the same bin collection service across the whole of the authority welcoming a review of the service. They said the present system meant that Daventry area was not getting the same service and in effect was paying for other areas to have more of a service. Others expressed that a 3-week bin collection could help pay for a better and cheaper green waste service.
- c) Respondents also commented on home to school transport, mainly they recognised the importance of making sure children access education, especially in rural

communities. However, some said that transporting children to schools was a parental choice, and the cost should be borne by parents. Some felt in cases where the council must assist it was up to council to find the most efficient way to fund the service. Several respondents noted that some children are vulnerable and therefore it was important for the council to help. A few respondents mentioned the role of the school within this and suggested that they could use their own school transport to assist. Respondents also said that children should be placed at their nearest school and therefore reducing travel journeys.

- d) Respondents also commented that they would be interested in more information about the council manages money, for example, how is public finance allocated and how spending is scrutinised and reviewed.
- e) Other comments included using the service review savings to help in areas of need; that any service reviews should be transparent with all facts and evidence presented before decisions are made.

3.5.6. 45 Respondents who said that they neither agree nor disagree provided comment. These centred mainly on waste collection and school transport.

- a) Those commenting on waste collection expressed concern over reduced services, suggesting that this would see increase in fly tipping, vermin and the use of the household waste recycling centres. They added that they were paying more Council Tax and charges for less services. They mentioned that this type of policy making would harm reputation and trust in the council. They also voiced that families with children and those that care for others; would have full bins, noting that this is a concern both for families but wider for the community and may lead to concerns in public health. Some suggested that the council should be harmonising the service in Daventry area aligning it with the rest of the authority.
- b) On home to school transport policy, respondent comments included the need for it to cover rural areas; also noting that it affects those with special educational needs more and the council should not be adding to pressures experienced by these families. Some suggested that support should not be given to those living in towns who may have access to other forms of transport.
- c) Some commented that the consultation information was confusing or too long, reducing their opportunity to participate.

3.5.7. The majority of the 360 comments received for respondents who strongly disagree or tend to disagree were regarding the 3-weekly black bin waste collection.

- a) Whilst some commented that this may impact on improving the recycling rate and reducing carbon impact on the environment, it would significantly impact families, public health, and other waste services. Most of the responses did not support a 3-week bin collection. They noted concerns about vermin, bins would overflow, and therefore an increase in public health issues. Many comments again mentioned the size of bins and that some households require larger ones. Some mentioned concern in built up areas where waste could stagnate. The highest concern was the increase of fly-tipping, leading to unkempt neighbourhoods. Some raised concern around accessing Household Waste Recycling Centres for those without access to a car or those that live a distance from the centres.

- b) Many felt that they were paying extra in council tax and green waste yet were having their services severely reduced. With concerns about value for money and a feeling that the council would have to increase costs in other waste areas such as street cleaning, or illegal dumping of waste. Respondents from South Northamptonshire area felt that they were paying more for the new council but getting less services year on year. Some respondents said that Daventry scheme was only working because the previous arrangement was very poor.
- c) Other comments voiced confusion for residents knowing when to place out various bins. A few said they were unsure as to what would happen to the green waste bin, considering there was increase in charge proposed, would this be a three-week collection; or would food waste get taken weekly or fortnightly and what would happen to mixed recycling. Others felt that summer months would be challenging with more vermin and pests, the smell of rubbish and potential to contract infection. Some said that the council should not be reviewing the waste service as it already works well and does not need fixing.
- d) Home to School transport policy comments note the critical need for the service, which is provided to vulnerable children and their families. They felt that the council should show compassion by supporting children in this situation. Others felt that the council should operate a fair and proportionate policy.
- e) Other general comments received requested no further reductions in library services as they have been reduced to a minimal, that service should be reviewed; however, some challenges faced by council were huge like such as the demand for social care and as such the council would not be able to fill financial gaps required by increasing costs in other areas; another commented the council needs to be more open and transparent.

A few comments were provided by respondents who did not answer whether they agreed or disagreed. They commented on the state of the waste not being collected leading to an unkempt environment, the constant increase in taxes, their lack of knowledge on the subject area, and finding too many questions to answer in the consultation.

3.6 Other comments

Respondents were asked if they had any other comments that they wished to make about the proposals in the draft budget that they had not already told us, including any alternative ideas about how we could save the same amount of money or generate the same amount of income as outlined in the proposals. 108 provided further comment. The following provides an overview of the comments made:

- a) Respondents commented on a range of proposals. Most mentioned waste, highway maintenance, parking, active travel, prudent use of public finances, social care, the local economy and local government reform.
- b) Respondents to this question wanted the council to be more efficient and review its own operational budget costs, including back-office and staff costs. Some felt that services are disproportionate based on where they live.
- c) Comments about waste services they wanted the council to carefully consider. Changing waste collection to three weekly they felt would lead to more fly tipping and environmental concerns, therefore costing the council more to manage.

Respondents commented on use of household waste recycling centres, noting an essential amenity to help manage waste.

- d) Respondents wanted the council to listen to sentiments of how people feel about proposals. They asked that the council considers residents rather than non-residents and wanted the Councillors not to fund schemes which offer little value to all.
- e) Some respondents commented that the consultation information was confusing for them to truly engage with, asking for better detail on current expenditure which would have helped to consider alternatives. They indicated that the council needed to be transparent and prepared to have meaningful conversations with citizens and stakeholders.
- f) Respondents wanted to see improvements in retail economy, which much feeling that the town centres were struggling, and the council was not helping the retail sector to survive and flourish.
- g) Respondents suggested increasing fines and penalties for some services, such as developer costs, or encouraging better use of the personal social care budget to reduce the council's service provision.
- h) Respondents who mentioned parking charges expressed concern for the effect on retailers and local town centres. Many felt that access to parks and open spaces would become restricted and that street parking around parks would increase, causing issues and tensions with local residents.
- i) Respondents mention the lack of climate and environmental proposals, seeking assistance from central government, of increased costs and local taxation but reducing services and therefore not providing value for money.

4. Draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget 2022/23

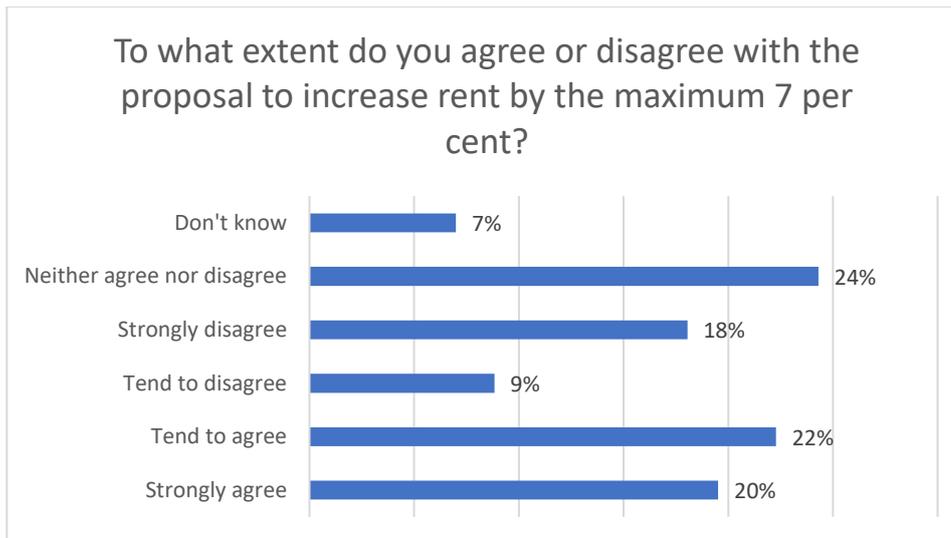
- 4.1. Local housing authorities are required by law to keep a Housing Revenue Account (HRA).
- 4.2. This HRA shows the accounts for the council's housing provision, identifying the major elements of expenditure and how these are funded, mainly from rents. Any money that enters the HRA, can only be spent on social housing and it is the council's responsibility to set a balanced HRA and avoid financial shortfall.
- 4.3. There are strict rules surrounding the costs and income that can be charged to this account. Much of the income and expenditure is dictated by legislation and regulation leaving the council with limited direct control over a number of these budgets.
- 4.4. The council has a housing stock which is managed by its arms-length management organisation, Northampton Partnership Homes (NPH).
- 4.5. The Rent Standard 2021 which is a national policy ordinarily allows annual rent increases on both social rent and affordable rent properties of up to the rate of inflation (Consumer Price Index - CPI) plus 1 per cent. The CPI in September 2022 showed an increase of 10.1 per cent due to the high levels of inflation.

- 4.6. In order to help manage the current situation, Government went out to consultation and later announced in their Autumn Statement that rent increases would be capped at 7 per cent this year rather than at what would have been the higher level of 11.1 per cent.
- 4.7. The council and NPH are proposing to increase rent from 3 April 2023 by 7 per cent, on average across the council's housing stock in line with national government policy. This will increase the average rent from £97.00 to £103.79 per week, or £6.79 per week. This increase, which is substantially below the current level of inflation, will help to manage the increasing costs that are also being experienced in this area.
- 4.8. This increase ensures we are able to continue and invest in a high-quality housing service for our tenants and any income generated will go back into the council's housing pot to be spent on maintenance and building new homes. Failure to increase the rents by the statutory amount will not only have a significant impact on income in the current year but also in each future year. It is estimated that a 1 per cent reduction in the rent increase would reduce the rental income by about £0.5 million in the current year.
- 4.9. The council and NPH are also proposing an increase of 10 per cent for tenant and leaseholder service charges, (in line with CPI at September 2022), and to increase garage rents and the commuter surcharge on garages by 10 per cent. This will increase the average rent per garage from £9.96 to £10.96 (or £1 per week) and the commuter surcharge from £15.83 to £17.41 (or £1.58 per week).
- 4.10. Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed in the proposal to increase rent by the maximum standard. There were 543 responses to this question with 227 stating they strongly agreed or tended to agree, and 146 strongly disagreed or tended to disagree.

Table 6, To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal to increase rent by the maximum 7 per cent (an average increase of £6.79 per week) across the Council's housing stock managed by Northampton Partnership Homes (NPH) in line with national government policy?

Response	Count	Per cent (%)
Strongly agree	106	20%
Tend to agree	121	22%
Tend to disagree	48	9%
Strongly disagree	98	18%
Neither agree nor disagree	132	24%
Don't know	38	7%

Chart 5



4.11. Respondents were invited to provide comments on why they answered in the way that they did, 172 comments were received.

- a) 57 respondents that agreed with the proposal chose to provide comments. Respondents who strongly agree or tend to agree said that social rents are very low and needs to level up with the private sector. Some noted that everyone is affected by the cost of living and that social renters should be contributing a share to the public purse. Some said that should the stock be better managed, and that if the properties were up to a decent standard, then rent increase would be fair. Another commented that housing stock should be bought back into the council for cost effectiveness. A few agreed with the increase but were concerned how affordable the rent would be for those on low to no incomes. It was difficult to ascertain if any of these respondents had direct experience of being social housing tenants.
- b) 25 comments from respondents who neither agree nor disagree cited issues of cost of living and affordability. They commented on the struggle felt by all in the current financial climate. A few commented on maintaining good quality homes; and that the council needed a decent stock to rent. If homes were up to standard, then increasing rent could be justified. Others noted they could not comment due to not being social housing tenants. Some questioned whether the council had a contingency plan, or that if rents needed to increase then they should be by taking into everyone's personal situation and not use a blanket approach.
- c) Many of the 84 comments from respondents disagreed with the proposal as they thought residents, especially social housing tenants, were already struggling financially with the cost of living and that the proposed increase would affect those more vulnerable. They said that the rent was already too high and this along with increases in other areas would cause greater hardship. Some were concerned in finding money to cover the rent increase, fearing arrears, eviction, and court proceeding would increase the use of statutory housing services provided by the council.
- d) Respondents said the 7 per cent increase was unreasonable and would be happy to contribute a smaller 2 per cent or 3 per cent increase. They felt the council would be pushing them into poverty.
- e) Respondents also expressed concern about delay in repairs/maintenance, and the quality of service provided by NPH. They said due to this poor service they should be

paying a higher rent. A few respondents mentioned that they wanted to be able to move out of the social housing sector but could not get deposits together, indicating that increase in rent would not aid them to move into the private sector.

Respondents wanted the council to consider the financial situation of social renters before introducing this high rent increase.

- f) The remaining number of comments where respondents who responded 'Don't know' commented that they are not directly affected and therefore could not offer a comment. One commented that increases should be felt equally. Another respondent who wished to comment said that there was not enough social housing.

4.12. Respondents were asked that if they felt the proposal would have a negative impact, what do they think that impact would be, they were also invited to provide suggestions on how any potential negative impacts could be avoided.

4.13. The most frequently mentioned impact is that the increase would put additional financial pressure on residents including those that are vulnerable, already struggling with the cost of living. The proposal would enhance negative impacts faced by low-income families. Some felt that it was a short-term approach, others referred to it hyper-inflation which will cause pressure within wider society including an increase in crime and community tension. Many thought that it was not sensible proposal as it would cause tension forcing people into unaffordable long-term renting and that it could cause homelessness. Some respondents felt that rent was cheaper and below market rent; but this is for a reason as it about helping those that most hard pressed.

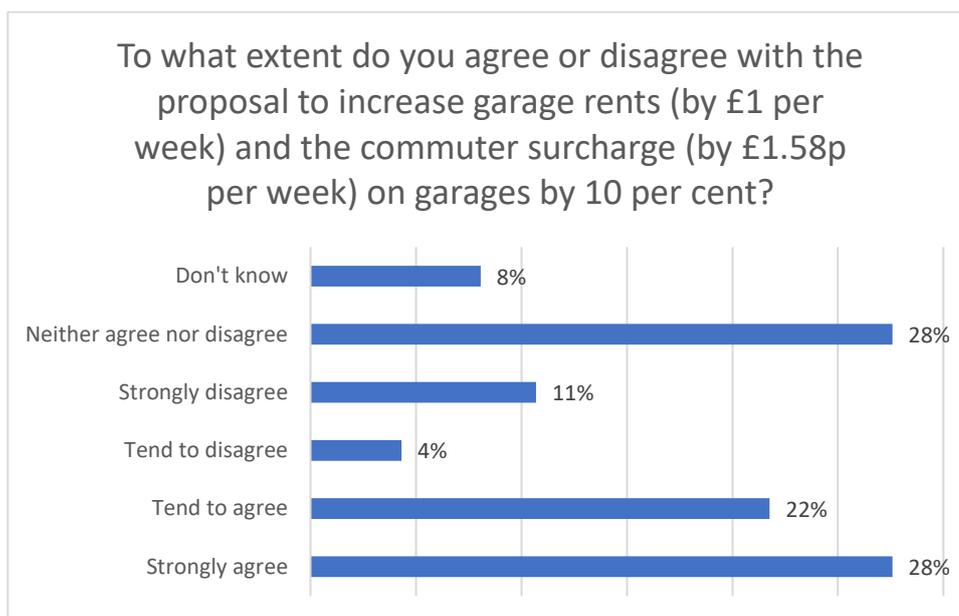
Some suggested introducing the increase in a more managed and stepped way over a longer time period.

4.14. Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed in the proposal to increase garage rents and commuter surcharges by 10 per cent. There were 533 responses to this question with 263 stating they strongly agreed or tended to agree, and 80 strongly disagreed or tended to disagree.

Table 7, To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal to increase garage rents (by £1 per week) and the commuter surcharge (by £1.58p per week) on garages by 10 per cent?

Response	Count	Per cent (%)
Strongly agree	147	28%
Tend to agree	116	22%
Tend to disagree	23	4%
Strongly disagree	57	11%
Neither agree nor disagree	147	28%
Don't know	43	8%

Chart 6

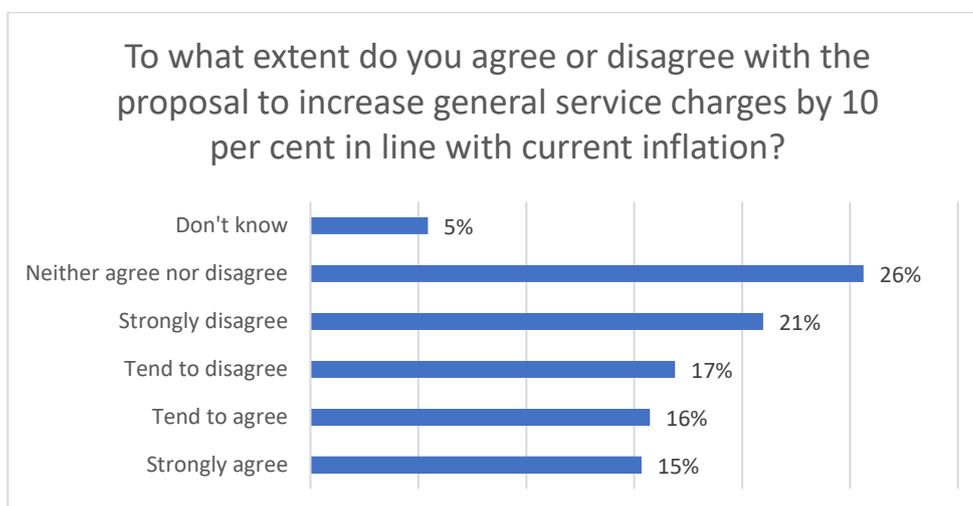


4.15. Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed in the proposal to increase general service charges by 10 per cent. There were 515 responses to this question with 160 stating they strongly agreed or tended to agree, and 195 strongly disagreed or tended to disagree.

Table 8, To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal to increase general service charges by 10 per cent in line with current inflation?

Response	Count	Per cent (%)
Strongly agree	79	15%
Tend to agree	81	16%
Tend to disagree	87	17%
Strongly disagree	108	21%
Neither agree nor disagree	132	26%
Don't know	28	5%

Chart 7



4.16. Comments were invited should respondents have any comments regarding the HRA Capital programme and indicative budgets as summarised in the Draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget 2023-24 and Medium-Term Financial Plan report, and Appendices. A total of 34 comments were received.

- a) Most of the comments on this question were made by residents about the garage rents, cost of living, and affordability.
- b) With reference to garage rents, comments received noted that garages are not a necessity, and the land could be put to better use. Others expressed the proposed increases are not in line with other increases. Some suggested that garage rent should come free with the rented property and the council should make any charges.
- c) Respondents again repeated comments about the cost of living and affordability with some noting unsound financial decision making.
- d) Other comments included discontent with property maintenance, and comments about increased penalties for social providers who do not maintain homes to an adequate standard. A few people also wanted the rents to be in line with market rents.

4.17. Further comments were invited on the Draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget report and its appendices. A further 11 comments were received.

Respondents who responded here made general comments and are not related to the HRA budget report.

On housing issues, they expressed concern about new homes being built are too large, and that the council should lobby the central government for more funds. Other comments were about the negative public sentiments about the council proposing increases in cost of services; that the council would lose the support of the public. Further comments were expressed again on the cost of living and pressures on household budgets.

5. Demographic information

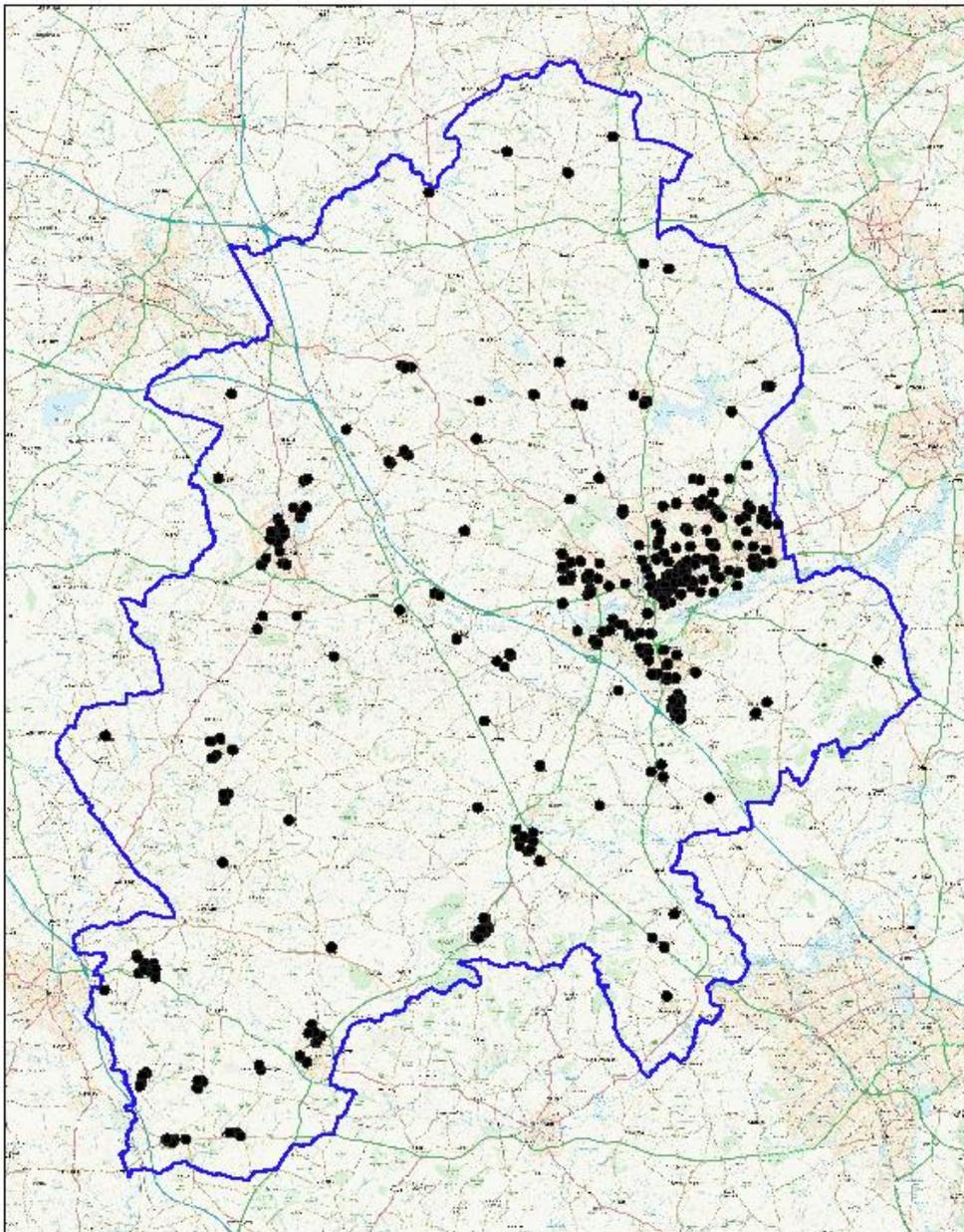
Out of a total of 1176 that accessed the consultation questionnaire or completed a paper copy, 613 completed the demographic section. 17 were responding on behalf of an organisation or community group and 596 responded as individuals.

5.1. Organisations or community groups

Those who identified that they were responding on behalf of an organisation were asked to provide detail namely their organisation name and job role. Of the 17 that responded, they identified as West Northamptonshire Parish Councils, country and community groups, businesses, and third sector organisations and interest groups. Job roles of respondents has been omitted from this report to protect anonymity.

5.2. Individuals

- 5.2.1. Those who responded as an individual were asked a series of questions to assist us to build an accurate understanding of the characteristics and communities responding. 48 per cent of those who accessed the survey, completed all or some of this part.
- 5.2.2. As identified in section 3.1., many of the respondents are local residents within West Northants. The demographic detail asked for a postcode to provide an understanding of where people were responding from. The following map broadly shows this information:



Title: **WNC Budget Consultation 2023/24 responses**

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Date: 01-02-2023

Scale: 1:250,000 @A4

Drawn: Simon Hume

- 5.2.3. Of those that chose to answer, 254 were female (47 per cent), 243 were male (43 per cent), 12 per cent stated they would 'Prefer not to say'.
- 5.2.4. The most frequent age given by respondents were those aged from 30 to 49 followed by those aged from 50 to 64.
- 5.2.5. Of those that chose to complete this section; other demographic detail provided demonstrated that 11 per cent were disabled, with physical disability as the most prevalent. Respondents identified themselves as White British (69 per cent), 7 per cent stated they were another ethnic background. The most frequent religion identified was Christian (41 per cent).
- 5.2.6. The last question sought detail about how the respondent heard about the consultation. There were 607 responses to this question, and respondents could choose more than one answer. The most prevalent method of hearing about the consultation was via social media (47 per cent of all selections), this was followed by email alerts from the council (19 per cent), and then local media such as radio or newspapers (16 per cent).

6. Written responses

There were 27 written responses received by email. They included responses from both individuals, community and third sector organisation, parish, and town councils; local newspaper and a member of Parliament. The following provides an overview of the comments provided in this way.

Comments received were mainly related to waste collection charges/arrangements, council tax increases, and parking charges.

Many understood the financial pressures faced by the council but also felt the council could look to its reserves to assist and not increase fees and charges. Some said that the services were not equitable with rural areas that are experiencing high rates of increase for Council Tax and waste collection but seeing a reduction in services. Many individuals did not want to have to pay more for waste collection or move to a 3-weekly cycle for bin collection. They felt that they were paying for service through the council tax which they did not receive.

Some suggestions were made about introduction discounts or payment plans for vulnerable resident for discretionary services.

On car parking charges they said that the proposal was an unjustifiable and short-sighted with the town centres facing challenging times. Introducing increase in parking charges would disincentivise people from coming into the town centre. The local newspaper ran a campaign on parking charges and from their own feedback expressed that the council needs to listen to the views of many who did not want the proposal to go ahead. Other businesses said that the car parking proposals would cause further issues for reduced footfall, that people would not come to the town centres to shop but go to other places where parking was free or at a reduced rate. They also commented on tickets machines and related infrastructure being poor, with them not working or not being able to take card payments. Many said that income generation from car parking was counterproductive, especially in

enabling people to access health and wellbeing opportunities in country parks. People who attended regular popular events at parks were also expressing concern about the increases in charges being unnecessary, they added that offering extended concessions to volunteers such as longer, reduced or free parking would be important.

On the waste proposals they mentioned concern about 3 weekly bin collections citing any of same issues are already outlined in this report. On green waste charges again, similar issues emerged. Overall, they mention that the green waste cost punishes people for being environmentally aware, that for some areas the cost was a higher percentage increase year on year. A couple of responses wanted the increases to bulk items withdrawn.

Comments on council tax again reflected earlier comments in the report. In particular, town and parish councils stated that their areas were not getting value for money, that they would like to see how much of the council tax collected in their localities is spent on their residents, and that services were not equitable.

Other comments included:

- Reviewing capital programmes spend that benefit vulnerable residents in all geographical area.
- Improvements in housing stock but concerns about proposed increase in rents, service charges and garage rents.
- Using reserve funds and contingency funds to help residents in specific locations.
- Making set times or service levels for council staff to respond to public enquiries.
- Welcoming the proposal to make community fund contributions to the voluntary sector and to aim for external funding to support the community fund.
- Citing partnership with the third sector which could facilitate community-based work and help address the council's cost pressures and to reduce the increasing demand for services.
- The council to consider investment in the voluntary sector organisations that are providing early support to prevent escalation of problems for families.
- Rural communities should not be seen as the "cash cow" for Northampton; understanding rural poverty within the West Northants.
- Shortage of staff is difficult challenge.
- Grateful for what the council does.