



**West
Northamptonshire
Council**

West Northamptonshire Council Draft Budget 2024/25 Consultation

Group Facilitator's Feedback Form

Overview

Every year West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) plans for the money it will have available and how it should be spent on delivering services in line with the priorities and objectives set out in its Corporate Plan. At their meeting on 12 December 2023, the Council's Cabinet approved plans to consult the public on WNC's draft budget for 2024-25 and we are now seeking views on these proposals.

Our plans and budget proposals make sure that resources are prioritised and allocated so that the most vulnerable in our local community continue to be supported, in the most cost-effective way possible.

Like all councils up and down the country, we continue to experience the financial impact of both increasing costs for the services we buy and provide and the rising demand from people who need our help and support.

Our main financial issues include:

- Inflationary and cost of living pressures impacting directly on the cost of providing services,
- Continued additional demand-led and inflationary pressures within Children and Adult's Social Care services,
- Increasing costs and demand for the services we provide to Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)
- Increasing costs and demand for providing home to school transport,
- Increase in demand for temporary accommodation and increased levels of homelessness.

Our draft budget for 2024/25 aims to address these issues, whilst protecting the vital services we deliver to our communities in the most efficient and effective way possible.

Here is a broad overview of our main proposals:

- To increase the average Council Tax by 4.99 per cent, comprising 2.99 per general increase and a further 2 per cent specifically for adult social care in line with the limit set by Government.
- To increase fees and charges, where possible, broadly in line with inflation to ensure they reflect and address operational cost and service demand.
- To increase fees associated with planning services to align with recently introduced national guidance,
- Continuing to review services and restructure teams within the organisation, introducing new, more efficient ways of working to make back office savings without impacting on how services are delivered to residents.
- A General Fund Capital Programme proposing a £28m increase for the 24/25 financial year.

The Council has also published a draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget for 2024/25. The HRA is a ring-fenced account which records the cost of managing the Council's housing stock.

Within the HRA are proposals to invest £54m in social housing during the next financial year, which will form part of a total five year capital programme amounting to £279m.

The Council is proposing to increase rents by 7.7%, in accordance with the Government's amended Rent Standard – equating to an average increase of £8.00 per week, and to also increase service charges and garage rents by 7.7%. This proposed increase in rent is critical in funding the maintenance and delivery of 'fit for purpose' housing.

In the light of the ongoing cost of living pressures on residents, any underspend from the previous 2023-24 hardship fund will be rolled forward into 2024-25 to provide support to tenants who may be facing additional financial difficulties as a result of the increase.

Your views on all our draft budget proposals are really important to us. All consultation feedback will be analysed and considered to help councillors make a final decision on the budget, this will take place at WNC's Full Council meeting on 22 February 2024.

This meeting is held in public and anyone wishing to submit a statement to the meeting must contact Democratic Services by 6pm on 21 February 2024.

You can do this by email democraticservices@westnorthants.gov.uk or by post or in person at West Northamptonshire Council, The Guildhall, St Giles' Street, Northampton, NN1 1DE.

Up to three members of the public are permitted to speak for up to three minutes each on any agenda item, although this may be extended at the Chair's discretion.

Related Documents

Please read the related documents for a better understanding of the budget proposals before you comment on them.

- [Cabinet Meeting Draft Budget 2024/25 and Medium Term Financial Plan report](#), and its appendices:
 - [Appendix A – Draft Revenue Budget and MTFP Summary](#)
 - [Appendix B – Draft Budget Proposals](#)
 - [Appendix C – Fees and Charges](#)
 - [Appendix D – Draft Dedicated Schools Grant](#)
 - [Appendix E – Draft Capital Programme](#)
- [2024-25 Draft Housing Revenue Account \(HRA\) Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan](#)
 - [Appendix 1 – Draft HRA Revenue Budget 2024-25 and Medium-Term Financial Plan](#)
 - [Appendix 2 – Draft Growth, Efficiencies, and Investment Proposals](#)
 - [Appendix 3 – Draft HRA Capital Programme](#)
 - [Appendix 4 – Draft Northampton Partnership Homes \(NPH\) Management Fee](#)
 - [Appendix 5 – Draft Schedule of Service Charges](#)

Have your say

This form is to help assist a group of respondents to record and provide their feedback as a collective group (for example a community group) to one or more of the consultation proposals.

If you would like to respond to the consultation as an individual, or if you are responding on behalf of an organisation, then we would encourage you to complete the online questionnaire at <https://westnorthants.citizenspace.com/cet/budget-2024-25> (paper copies available upon request).

The following sections provide further details of the budget proposals that residents and service users may have the strongest views on, however, you can comment on anything within the Draft Budget in the comment boxes. Please tell us your views by completing this questionnaire. You do not have to answer all of the questions or give us your feedback on every section.

Your feedback will be part of a report with other people's feedback, so you will not be personally identified.

You can also access this questionnaire online free of charge at any West Northamptonshire Council library. Please visit <https://www.westnorthants.gov.uk/libraries> or telephone 0300 126 7000 to check opening times.

Alternatively, you can email or send your comments in by post using the contact details below, or by handing this questionnaire in to one of West Northamptonshire Council's libraries.

If you have any queries, comments or would like a copy of this questionnaire in another format you can contact us by email, post, or telephone. Our contact details are as follows:

Email address: haveyoursay@westnorthants.gov.uk

Telephone: 0300 126 7000

Postal address: Budget Consultation Response
West Northamptonshire Council
The Guildhall
St Giles' Street
Northampton
NN1 1DE

For information about how consultation and engagement responses are managed, please see the consultation and engagement privacy notice available at: <https://www.westnorthants.gov.uk/service-privacy-notices/consultation-and-engagement-privacy-notice>

The deadline for completing this questionnaire is midnight on **Tuesday 23 January 2024.**

Thank you for helping us by completing this questionnaire.

About you

1. Please tell us the following:

Name of facilitator(s):

Name of organisation or group:

Date of meeting:

Number of participants:

2. Which of the below customer categories best describes the participants?

Participants	(Please tick (√) all that apply)
Older people	
Younger adults	
People with learning disability	
People with physical disability	
People with mental health condition	
Carers	
Black or Minority Ethnic Group	
Prefer not to say	
Other (Please specify)	

Proposed increase to Council Tax

The Council is proposing to increase the average amount of Council Tax by a total of 4.99 per cent (2.99 per cent general increase 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.

The proposed Council Tax increase will result in an additional income of around £14.9m 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.

Example: Breakdown of cost for a Band D property

As an example, the Council Tax for a Band D property in this year is £1,693.737 for West Northamptonshire Council services.

This will increase by 4.99 per cent to £1,778.25 in 2024/25 for all Council services for the whole year. An increase of £84.76 for the year.

3. 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 service provision?

Example: What would a 2.99 per cent increase mean for a Band D property?

As an example, a 2.99 per cent general increase would result in an increase of £50.64p per year on a band D property.

Answer	(Please tick (✓) relevant answer)
Strongly agree	
Tend to agree	
Neither agree nor disagree	
Tend to disagree	
Strongly disagree	
Don't know	

4. If you would like to tell us why you answered the previous question in the way that you did, please do so here:

5. If you feel this proposal would have a negative impact, please tell us what you think that impact would be, along with any suggestions on how any potential negative impacts could be avoided:

6. 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?

More information

The Adult Social Care Levy was introduced by the Government as a way of funding social care in light of a growing national funding shortfall due to rising costs and demand.

In recent years councils like us, that are responsible for adult social care, have been allowed to raise an additional amount through council tax, provided this is spent directly on the care of the most vulnerable adults and older people.

Example: What would a 2 per cent increase mean for a Band D property?

As an example, a 2 per cent adult social care precept increase would result in an increase of £33.88p per year on a band D property.

Answer	(Please tick (√) relevant answer)
Strongly agree	
Tend to agree	
Neither agree nor disagree	
Tend to disagree	
Strongly disagree	
Don't know	

7. If you would like to tell us why you answered the previous question in the way that you did, please do so here:

8. If you feel this proposal would have a negative impact, please tell us what you think that impact would be, along with any suggestions on how any potential negative impacts could be avoided:

Fees and charges

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.

West Northamptonshire's Draft Budget generates Fees and Charges income in the region of £27.5m.

It is good practice each year to review, and where appropriate, increase fees and charges to cover any increasing cost of service provision, the impact of any inflationary increases and align with national benchmarks, and nationally set fees (in the case of planning related services). We do not raise fees and charges where the charges are set by Government. Some of our fees such as our car park fees are not increasing.

For further details please see the proposed [Appendix C - Fees and Charges](#)

Current fees and charges are available on our website <https://www.westnorthants.gov.uk/finance/fees-and-charges>.

9. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the council should put up some fees and charges in line with inflation, in order to help fund services?

Answer	(Please tick (√) relevant answer)
Strongly agree	
Tend to agree	
Neither agree nor disagree	
Tend to disagree	
Strongly disagree	
Don't know	

10. If you have any comments to make about fees and charges, please give us your views below:

Name of fee(s) or charge(s):

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Comment:

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Draft General Fund Capital Programme 2024-2028

The Draft General Fund demonstrates how the Council will make expenditure and investment decisions with the finances available in line with the Corporate Plan which sets out the Council's objectives and 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.

The Draft Budget includes additions to the current capital programme which have been assessed and recommended for inclusion in the budget.

Details of the capital programme for 2024/25 are set out in [Appendix E](#) and [Appendix E1](#). If you would like further details about any of the schemes, please contact us at haveyoursay@westnorthants.gov.uk

11. If you have any comments on these proposals, please give us your views below:

Name of scheme(s):

Comments:

Other comments

This questionnaire focusses on the proposals in the Draft Budget 2024/25 that residents and service users may have the strongest views on. However, you can comment on anything within the Draft Budget.

Before moving on to the 2024-25 Draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan

section of this questionnaire, is there anything else you would like to tell us about the proposals set out in the [Cabinet Meeting Draft Budget 2024/25 and Medium Term Financial Plan report](#), and its appendices:

- [Appendix A – Draft Revenue Budget and MTFP Summary](#)
- [Appendix B – Draft Budget Proposals](#)
- [Appendix C – Fees and Charges](#)
- [Appendix D – Draft Dedicated Schools Grant](#)
- [Appendix E – Draft Capital Programme](#)

12. If you have any other comments you would like to make about the proposals in this draft budget that you have 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, then please tell us here:

Name of proposal(s):

Comments:

Draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget 2023/24 and Medium Term Financial Plan for housing rents in Northampton

Local housing authorities are required by law to keep a Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

This HRA holds the budget 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.

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.

The Council has a housing stock which is managed by its arms-length management organisation, Northamptonshire Partnership Homes (NPH).

The Rent Standard 2023 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 at September (Consumer Price Index - CPI) plus 1 per cent. The CPI in September 2023 showed an increase of 6.7 per cent due to the high levels of inflation.

The Council and NPH are proposing to increase rent from 1 April 2024 by 7.7 per cent, on average across the Council's housing stock in line with national government policy. This will raise the average rent from £103.79 to £111.79 per week, which is an increase of £8.00 per week. This increase will help to manage the increasing costs that are also being experienced in this area. We continue to provide support to tenants facing difficulties with the increase in rent, by rolling over any unspent funding from the previous year's hardship fund.

This increase ensures we are able to continue to 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, improvements in energy efficiency, 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 £0.6 million in the current year.

The Council and NPH are also proposing an increase of 7.7 per cent for tenant and leaseholder service charges, (in line with CPI at September 2023), and to increase garage rents by 7.7 per cent. This will increase the average rent per garage from £10.96 to £11.80 (or 84 pence per week).

Within the HRA there are plans to invest £54m in social housing during the next financial year, which forms part of a total five year capital programme amounting to £279m. Also built into the plans is investment in decarbonisation which is estimated to impact on 500 homes.

The investment in 2024-25 includes:

- £7m on external improvements
- £11m on internal works improvements
- £2.3m on disabled adaptations
- £24m on new build programmes and major projects; and
- £10m on buying back social housing and for spot purchases of suitable properties.

For further information please see

- [2024-25 Draft Housing Revenue Account \(HRA\) Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan](#)
 - [Appendix 1 – Draft HRA Revenue Budget 2024-25 and Medium-Term Financial Plan](#)
 - [Appendix 2 – Draft Growth, Efficiencies, and Investment Proposals](#)
 - [Appendix 3 – Draft HRA Capital Programme](#)
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 - [Appendix 5 – Draft Schedule of Service Charges](#)

13. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal to increase rent by 7.7 per cent (an average increase of £8.00 per week) across the Council’s housing stock managed by Northampton Partnership Homes (NPH) in line with national government policy?

Example: What would a 7.7 per cent increase mean for a local authority tenant?

As an example, a 7.7 per cent increase would result in a rise on average rents from £103.79 to £111.79 per week (an increase of £8.00 per week) for 2024/25 for the average NPH tenant.

Answer	(Please tick (✓) relevant answer)
Strongly agree	

Answer	(Please tick (√) relevant answer)
Tend to agree	
Neither agree nor disagree	
Tend to disagree	
Strongly disagree	
Don't know	

14. If you would like to tell us why you answered the previous question in the way that you did, please do so here:

15. If you feel this proposal would have a negative impact, please tell us what you think that impact would be, along with any suggestions on how any potential negative impacts could be avoided:

16. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal to increase garage rents (by £0.84p per week) by 7.7 per cent?

Answer	(Please tick (√) relevant answer)
Strongly agree	
Tend to agree	
Neither agree nor disagree	
Tend to disagree	
Strongly disagree	
Don't know	

17. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal to increase general service charges by 7.7 per cent in line with current inflation?

Answer	(Please tick (√) relevant answer)
Strongly agree	
Tend to agree	
Neither agree nor disagree	
Tend to disagree	
Strongly disagree	
Don't know	

18. If you have any comments regarding the HRA Capital programme and indicative budgets as summarised in the [2024-25 Draft Housing Revenue Account \(HRA\) Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan](#) report, and Appendices, then please tell us here:

19. If you have any other comments you would like to make about the details within the Draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget report and its appendices, that you have not already told us, then please tell us here:

20. How did you find out about this consultation?

Answer	(Please tick (√) all that apply)
From the local media (i.e., newspaper, radio)	
From social media	
As a member of the Councils Residents Panel	
As a member of the Councils Consultation Register	
From an email alert from the Council	
From a voluntary or community sector organisation providing me with support and advice	
Other (please specify below)	
From my parish council	
From a West Northamptonshire Councillor	

Other:

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The next steps

Once the consultation period closes at midnight on 23 January 2024, we will analyse the results and then final budget proposals will be developed before going back to the West Northamptonshire Council's Cabinet Meeting on 13 February 2024 and Full Council meeting on 22 February 2024.

Your feedback on this consultation is really important to us. All consultation feedback will be analysed and considered and will help councillors make a final decision on the budget for 2024/25.

The Full Council meeting is held in public. Anyone wishing to submit a statement to the meeting must contact Democratic Services by email (democraticservices@westnorthants.gov.uk), by post or in person (The Guildhall, St Giles' Street, Northampton, NN1 1DE) by 6pm 21 February 2024.

Up to three members of the public are permitted to speak for up to three minutes each on any agenda item although this may be extended at the Chair's discretion.

Thank you for helping us by completing this questionnaire.

On completion, please return to:

Email address: haveyoursay@westnorthants.gov.uk

Postal address: Budget Consultation Response
West Northamptonshire Council
The Guildhall
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The deadline for returning this questionnaire is **midnight on 23 January 2024.**