



**West
Northamptonshire
Council**

West Northamptonshire Council Draft Budget 2023/24 Consultation

Group Facilitator's Feedback Form

Overview

Every year the Council plans for the money it will have available and how it should spend it in line with the priority objectives set out in its Corporate Plan. At a meeting held on 20 December, West Northamptonshire Council's Cabinet approved for consultation its draft budget for 2023-24 and we are now seeking views on these proposals.

The Council successfully delivered a balanced budget for its first year of operation within 2021/22 and set a balanced budget for the current year (2022/23).

However, like all councils up and down the country, there have been a number of unprecedented financial issues throughout this financial year which have significantly increased the cost of-service delivery.

The main financial issues include:

- Inflationary and cost of living pressures impacting directly on the cost of providing services.
- Ongoing financial impact of COVID allied with the withdrawal of significant COVID funds previously received.
- Continued additional demand led and inflationary pressures within the Children's Trust.
- Continued additional demand led pressures within the Adult Social Care.
- Additional operator costs in providing school transport for children.
- Cost of living pay award expected to be significantly greater than the amount included at the time of setting the budget based on the latest national pay award offer made by the employers' organisation.

With the financial, and demand challenges most evident around supporting children in care, vulnerable adults, and those needing temporary housing and transport to

school, the Council has acted quickly and early to identify a range of proposed measures to tackle the financial challenges in the short to medium term.

Our draft budget for 2023/24, continues this work and 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.

A broad overview of the main proposals:

- To increase the average Council Tax by 4.99 per cent, comprising of 2.99 per cent core 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%, an average increase of £6.79 per week, and to also increase service charges and garage rents by 10%. 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.

Your feedback on these proposals within this budget 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 at the West Northamptonshire Council Full Council meeting on 22 February 2023. This meeting is held in public.

Anyone wishing to submit a statement to the meeting must contact Democratic Services by email democraticservices@westnorthants.gov.uk or by post or in person at One Angel Square, Angel Street, Northampton, NN1 1ED by 6pm on 21 February 2023. 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 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](#)

All of the above documents are available on our website:

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

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-2023-24> (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 (including easy read or large print) 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' Square
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 **31 January 2023**.

Thank you for helping us by completing this questionnaire.

About you

Name of facilitator(s):

Name of organisation or group:

Date of meeting:

Number of participants:

1. 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 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.

The proposed increase is less than half the current rate of inflation.

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.

Example: Breakdown of cost for a Band D property

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.

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?

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 £48.24 per year (93p per week) for 2023/24 for the average Band D Council Tax payer.

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

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

4. 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:

- 5. 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?**

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 £32.26 per year (62p per week) for 2023/24 for the average Band D Council Tax payer

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

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

- 7. 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 for discretionary services

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 £22.3m.

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.

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.

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.

For further details please see the proposed [2023/24 Fees and Charges schedule](#) (Appendix C).

Details of the Council's [current fees and charges](#) are available on our website <https://www.westnorthants.gov.uk/finance/fees-and-charges>.

8. 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?

Answer	(Please tick (√) relevant answer)
Strongly agree	
Tend to agree	
Neither agree nor disagree	
Tend to disagree	

Answer	(Please tick (√) relevant answer)
Strongly disagree	
Don't know	

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

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

Comment:

Draft General Fund Capital Programme 2023-2027

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.

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.

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.

Details of the capital programme for 2023/24 are set out in [Appendix E](#). If you would like further details about any of the schemes, please contact us at haveyoursay@westnorthants.gov.uk

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

Name of scheme(s):

Comments:

Reviewing Services

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.

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.

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.

11. To what extent do you agree or disagree with these approaches?

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

12. If you have any comments on proposals to review services, please give us your views below:

Other comments

This questionnaire focusses on the proposals in the draft budget 2023/24 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 Draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget 2023-24 section of this questionnaire, is there anything else you would like to tell us about the proposals set out in the [Draft Budget 2023/24 and Medium Term Financial Plan](#) and it's 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](#)

- 13. 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 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.

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, Northampton Partnership Homes (NPH).

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.

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.

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.

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.

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).

For further information please see the [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](#)

14. **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?**

Example: What would a 7 per cent increase mean for a local authority tenant?

As an example, a 7 per cent increase would result in an average increase of £353.08 per year (£6.79 per week) for 2023/24 for the average local authority/NPH tenant.

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

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

16. 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:

17. 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?

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

18. 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?

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

19. If you 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, then please tell us here:

20. 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:

21. 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)	

Other:

The next steps

Once the consultation period closes on 31 January 2023, we will analyse the results and then final budget proposals will be developed before going back to the West Northamptonshire Council Full Council meeting on 22 February 2023.

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 2023/24.

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 (One Angel Square, Angel St, Northampton NN1 1ED) by 6pm 21 February 2023.

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
St Giles' Square
Northampton
NN1 1DE

The deadline for returning this questionnaire is **midnight on 31 January 2023**.