

We would like to thank everyone that took the time to complete our online budget survey. This year we have adjusted our approach to consultation by introducing a budget simulator, making our consultation document more visual and engaging and seeking more specific service-related feedback.

The media coverage and commentary prior to Christmas, as well as the responses to the budget simulator, confirmed that this refreshed approach had raised greater awareness of the challenges faced when setting a balanced budget. There was an appreciation of the difficult decisions required as part of this process, for example, when considering continuing to provide services such as social care to a rising population and raising council tax during a cost-of-living crisis. There was also a greater understanding of the breadth of services the council provides and how a large proportion of the budget is spent on providing statutory services.

Although the interest and feedback received has been greater than in previous years it still only represents 0.1% of our population. We will commit again to re-visiting our approach, and building on the positive steps made this year. We will explore how we can reach different community groups, service users, residents, and businesses. We'll do this by having discussions with these groups to understand what you would find beneficial and how you feel you can be a part of this process. We'll also look at what other local authorities do to identify what works well.

The following sections provide a response to the feedback received as part of this consultation.

1. Our [Sustainable Future City Council](#) document sets out our priorities for the next three years. To what extent do you agree with this approach?

It is encouraging to see that 38% agree with the approach, but there is a significant proportion of people that either did not know or disagree. The council will consider how we gain an understanding from those residents so we can take those views on board, and how we better communicate the strategy to reach more people.

2. One of the options to help us protect and invest in services is to increase Council Tax. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should increase Council Tax?

The response to this outlines that 62% of respondents disagreed with raising Council Tax supporting investment into services, but when residents completed our Budget Simulator, earlier in the year and were faced with the challenge of balancing the budget themselves, the average response included an increase in council tax over 7%.

We can now confirm that this budget includes a 4.99% increase in Council Tax, which is in line with the expectations set out by the Government. We know that residents are also facing their own financial challenges, but we cannot deliver a balanced budget and continue to provide the services that people want and need without doing so. By not increasing Council Tax this would also have a detrimental impact in our future years funding position, especially when the band D rate of Council tax in Peterborough is already one of the lowest in the country.

Given the difference in views around this in future consultations we can look to provide a split of where Council Tax is spent and draw out feedback which indicates which of these areas are most important to resident and considered alongside our Corporate Strategy.

- 3. We spend half our net budget on adult's and children's social care services. Children's social care services support children in the greatest need – children who are disabled, who have to be protected from harm or need to be looked after in residential or foster placements. Adult social care provides support to older people, and to adults with either physical or learning disabilities, or physical or mental illnesses. How important is it to you that we continue to prioritise spending in these areas?**

The response to this indicates that 86% of respondents thought it was either 'very important' or 'fairly important' that we continue to prioritise spending in these areas. However, when residents completed our Budget Simulator, earlier in the year and were faced with the challenge of balancing the budget themselves, there were suggestions that we should look at opportunities to reduce adult social care expenditure.

As a local authority, we have legal responsibilities to protect the welfare of children and deliver children's social care; ensuring we safeguard children at risk against harm. This includes making sure looked after children, who are the responsibility of the council, have a safe place to live that meets their needs. Around 50% of the children's social care budget is spent on care placement costs for looked after children. Furthermore, the range of early help and preventative services we provide supports families to prevent the escalation of needs, and the unnecessary removal of children from their family home.

In terms of adults, we have legal duties under the Care Act 2014 to ensure we provide services to support the eligible needs of vulnerable adults and to safeguard people against the risk of harm. This includes ensuring services are in place to prevent needs escalating. Around 80% of the adult service's budget is spent on care placement costs for vulnerable adults who cannot afford to pay for their own care. This includes for example, regular care coming into someone's home or residential placements. The reality is, without this support people would not be able to complete basic tasks such as getting up, washing, dressing, and eating.

Cutting services and spend is not as straightforward as reducing budgets in adults and children's services. We still must deliver on our legal duties, and we can't stop delivering services to people who have an assessed need. To do so would open us up to legal action and non-compliance with Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission.

Where we can have an impact and is the approach we continue to embed across services, is providing prevention and early help which aims to 'prevent, reduce or delay' the onset of long-term care services. Although, only a small percentage of our budgets are spent on prevention and early help services, these are crucial to help us manage demand into more expensive, long term care alternatives

- 4. The council works hard to recruit foster carers but with the number of children needing placements being greater than our number of carers, we have to use private fostering agencies, placing children away from the local area. What could the council do to make fostering a more attractive offer for residents?**

Recruiting foster carers in a national problem and in that context, we intend to review and transform our fostering service. This work will in part, be informed by asking carers and families to help us understand where we can make improvements.

5. National data suggests that there could be a 25% increase in the number of people at risk of becoming homeless. Do you have ideas as to how the council could better support residents to avoid them becoming homeless?

In broad terms, responses fell into three key areas that respondents felt we should focus on: (i) increasing the supply of affordable social housing; (ii) supporting households to cope with the challenging economic conditions; and (iii) work with organisations in the voluntary sector to support people with, for example, mental health or substance misuse issues that might impact on a person's ability to live independently. To respond to each of these in turn:

- *Increasing the supply of affordable social housing: this is very much something we are committed to supporting and have created a forum where the council and social landlords can meet to discuss opportunities for building new homes, and to unblock any barriers. The council will be starting a full review of the Local Plan in April – this is a key document which sets out land available for homes as well as employment, and also sets the conditions under which development should take place in Peterborough, including the minimum amount of affordable housing we expect to see on housing development sites. We have also set aside a significant budget in our capital programme to buy properties ourselves and have recently launched a scheme whereby privately owned properties can be leased to the council to support our housing challenges in return for a long-term rent to the owner.*
- *Supporting households to cope with the challenging economic conditions: this is an issue we are also concerned about, and we are running a range of schemes and projects to help people who are struggling to cope financially. We have funded 20 organisations to run local support hubs where people can get help and advice as well as a hot drink and food, we continue to provide supermarket vouchers to families with children in receipt of free school meals, and we are about to launch a pilot scheme from some of our libraries where people can access advice and help from a range of different council services who will be working more smartly together, including sharing information and intelligence where it is appropriate to do so.*
- *Work with organisations in the voluntary sector: we do already benefit from some very good relationships with voluntary and faith sector partners, who work tirelessly alongside us to support some of the most vulnerable people in our city. We also commission specialist services that support people with, for example, drug and alcohol issues. There is always more we can do with our partners across the voluntary sector, and the comments submitted in the budget consultation will be shared with the lead officer who will be asked to develop new, and expand existing, initiatives to help address the concerns raised.*

6. The council has launched a network of community hubs to help those who are struggling with the cost-of-living crisis. What services would you benefit from being able to access at these hubs?

There was a mixed response to this question, with some people saying they didn't need any help right now, but many others offering suggestions about the sort of support that people might need. The ideas for practical help – including food, pet food, and sanitary products – will be shared with our lead officer to make sure that these items are widely available through the network of support arrangements in place across the council and our voluntary, community and faith sector partners.

Many respondents to this question also thought that offering quality advice on matters such as household income, debt, benefits, employment, mental health, and physical wellbeing was essential, and these ideas will be incorporated into our support hubs model.

We will work closely with Citizens' Advice and other accredited advice services to make sure that people that need help can access it, and we will also work with our Public Health colleagues to identify ways to introduce support for good health and wellbeing. One person commented that we should be encouraging self-reliance – again, this is something we recognise as it reduces reliance on long-term support and helps to maintain dignity and control. An important feature of our support hubs will be advice and provision of adult skills training, to help people into work or better paid work.

Finally, some comments related to who could access support from the hubs. Anybody in need of practical help, advice or support will be able to access the hubs regardless of circumstances. It is important that we provide a friendly, accessible, and local service that helps people at the earliest opportunity, and access will not be restricted to, for example, only households in receipt of benefits.

7. We are committed to helping Peterborough become a net zero carbon city over the next few years and will be launching an action plan to help us get there. We can't deliver this on our own though - everyone needs to play their part. What ideas do you have for things you and your community can do differently to help achieve this target? What support do you think you would need from the council?

We have been encouraged by the breadth and depth of responses to this question, and the ideas it has generated. A number of people commented that working towards Peterborough becoming a net zero carbon city should not be a priority for the council at this time. However, this is something we remain fully committed to as we recognise the improvements in the health and wellbeing of our population far outweigh the likely costs to achieving this target. In fact, we anticipate that much of the investment needed to achieve net zero carbon will come from private sector or government funded initiatives, leaving the council to create the right conditions to attract and deliver the outcomes associated with that investment.

A number of comments related to alternatives to travelling by car, including improving bus services and walking and cycling routes. The council is working closely with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority which has responsibility for commissioning bus services, to make sure that the needs of our residents are factored into those plans, and we have recently contributed to its Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan, again to ensure Peterborough's unique needs and opportunities are recognised.

Several people commented that we needed to increase recycling rates – as part of our budget proposals, we are recommending that we invest in a small waste and recycling education team whose role will be to work with residents and organisations in areas where recycling is not at levels we would expect. Every 1% increase in recycling generates a c.£70k improvement in our budgets, as well as contributing to our climate targets. Suggestions in the responses about how we can make recycling easier will also be shared with the lead officer for consideration.

All other suggestions, including supporting even more effectively voluntary action, increasing renewable energy sources, and working more closely with schools and business, will all be taken into the relevant services for discussion.

8. What ideas do you have for how the council could reduce spending?

There was a wide variety of responses to this question and a number of consistent themes mentioned. The following points outline some of these key themes and the council's current position on these:

- **Reducing the use of agency staff and consultants:** The council has a workforce planning board in place which considers proposals to use agency staff and consultants. In the main these are used where there is a statutory duty such as social care, where there are workforce issues making recruitment in to permanent posts challenging or where the council requires specific expertise.
- **Reducing the pay of council senior officers:** Senior officer pay has been fully job evaluated and is reflective of the skills, experience and knowledge needed to complete these roles. The Corporate Leadership Team has recently been restructured, with this now filtering down into the next layer of management. This restructure will ensure the council has the appropriate skills and capacity to lead the organisation, rise to the challenges faced in Peterborough and provide good quality services. It should also be noted that some members of the Corporate Leadership Team hold statutory roles, which the council must have in place. This includes:
 - The Chief Executive- as head of paid service
 - Executive Director of Corporate Services- the Section 151 officer (Chief Finance Officer)
 - Director of Law and Governance- The Monitoring Officer
 - Director of Childrens Services- 'DCS'
 - Director of Adults services - 'DASS'
- **Reducing pension contributions:** contributions are set by the Local Government Pension Scheme and the pension fund is reviewed by an actuary on a tri-annual basis. The council has limited control over changing these commitments.
- **Reducing councillor allowances and expenses:** These have been subject to external independent review. The scheme is available [here](#).
- **Reducing MP expenses:** The council has no control over these, this is a function of Central Government.
- **Revisiting the elections decision:** The council considered the feedback received as part of the consultation to change election cycles and at the Full Council meeting on 12 October, members did not agree to move to a scheme for whole (or 'all out') elections, therefore it will remain with the current electoral system of voting by thirds. The option of revisiting this in the future has not been ruled out.
- **Sticking to essential spend only:** Over recent years the council has had in place additional controls to restrict expenditure including a spending moratorium which delivered an underspend position at the end of 2021/22. We have maintained a high level of control on revenue expenditure and a culture of budget responsibility is beginning to take root and grow within the council. Due to the effective controls in place, and despite the challenging economic climate, we are only reporting a small overspend of £0.8m. This is outlined within the December Budgetary Control Report, also presented to Cabinet at this meeting (13 February 2023).
- **Preventative activity:** The council has, for some time, been investing in preventative and early intervention services to support even more people to remain independent for as long as possible. This includes the successful Adults Positive Challenge Programme. The council is continuing to increase this provision, it has done so in the 2022/23 budget, and proposes to increase this further in the 2023/24 budget. This includes increasing the levels of technology enabled care, reablement services and supporting households in economic difficulty or facing other challenges through our network of community hubs.
- **Bus routes:** The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) is the responsible transport authority for Peterborough and therefore has responsibility for operating the bus routes across Peterborough. The council has representation on its board for decision making and we will ensure that the feedback relating to bus operations is fed back to the CPCA for consideration.

Other suggestions which will be explored by the council include:

- Increasing multi-agency collaboration
- Reviewing the frequency of road maintenance
- Investing in zero net carbon and energy efficiency

9. What ideas do you have for how the council could generate income?

It is encouraging to see that a number of the responses to this question cited suggestions which the council has already factored into the budget or is already exploring further. This includes:

- *Selling surplus assets – Asset Disposal and Review plan agreed by Cabinet at its meeting on 20 September 2022.*
- *Increasing sales, fees, and charges- Review approved by the council at its meeting on 7 December 2022.*
- *Income from Selective Licensing and enforcement activity (dog owners, cyclists on pavements, littering etc)- our budget proposals include the full transformation of housing enforcement and we're already in the process of redesigning our enforcement services, to maximise income.*
- *Parking income- included within the review approved by the council at its meeting on 7 December 2022.*

Other suggestions included increasing the levels of sponsorship income and events and implementing a congestion zone, which will all be explored in more detail by council departments.

10. Do you have any other comments to make about the council's priorities or any other aspect of the council's spending, service delivery or this Budget Consultation?

The responses to this question were wide and covered a vast number of topics. A high number of responses focussed on council tax, with comments providing support for increasing this, recognising the need to balance the budget and others disagreeing with the proposal to increase Council Tax, with the main reason for this being due to the current cost-of-living crisis.

There were also arguments both for and against pursuing net zero carbon/sustainability status, with some people commenting that the council's priority should be on balancing the budget rather than achieving this target.

Some people questioned the availability of the Carbon Impact Assessments and the Equality Impact assessments - these were published alongside the budget report and can be accessed on the following links:

- [Equality Impact Assessments](#)
- [Carbon Impact Assessments](#)

A number of the responses have reflected that residents want transparency, honesty about the position, published performance data and delivery of value for money services. These are all things the council is working hard to improve and deliver. Transparency and honesty have been a key focus for the council this year, with the additional quarterly Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) updates being published, reports from the Independent Improvement and Assurance Panel providing external assurance on the council's progress and the additional scrutiny taking place in our Audit Committee.

We have also published a new Corporate Strategy, which sets out four key City Priorities. From March we will begin to report performance against the identified KPIs, to demonstrate to members and the public that we are delivering against our targets.

Lastly in terms of value for money, the council has conducted a thorough review of its budgets, contracts, and outsourcing arrangements over the course of this year, some of which is still ongoing. Where identified we have actioned recommendations to ensure we are providing services which reflect value for money for the taxpayer and deliver the best services and outcomes for residents.

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