

## Peterborough City Council

### Appendix O- Response to the Budget Consultation

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We would like to thank everyone that took the time to complete our online budget consultation survey. After last year's success in the introduction of a budget simulator and new style consultation document we decided to keep using this approach, with additional emphasis placed on our methods of engagement such as adding videos online explaining services and impact, going out to visit community groups and parish councils and increased social media coverage.

The media coverage and commentary prior to Christmas, as well as the responses to the budget simulator, confirmed that this approach had again 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.

This year we have received 132 responses to the Budget Consultation, which is almost a 200% increase compared to previous year (50 responses). Although the response has been greater than in previous years it still only represents 0.1% of our population. We will commit again to building on the positive steps made this year and we'll 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. The council is meeting its budget challenge in a variety of different ways as outlined below. Place in order of priority (1-6) the measures outlined below. 1 being the most important and 6 being the least important.**

The results from this question outlined that residents would rather the Council look to generate additional income or charge for some services, before looking to increase Council Tax or reduce services. In the 2024/25 budget the Council has invested in vital services such as Childrens and has increased income generation in a number of areas such as Sales Fees and Charges, Treasury Management (Investment) and Property income. The Council also sets its budget by operating within a set of principles, which are available for residents to view on our website: [Our budget principles - Peterborough City Council](#). These Principles echo the feedback received by residents and outline that, where possible, we will protect services that support the city's most vulnerable, including adults and children's social care services.

- 2. The council is maximising its use of technology and digitalisation and transforming working practises to make the council more efficient. To what extent do you agree with this approach?**

It is welcoming again to see that residents are keen for us to maximise the use of technology and digitalisation to become more efficient. Over 73% agreed or strongly agreed with our approach to this. This is one of our aims outlined within our corporate strategy and the Sustainable Future City Council board is overseeing the delivery of this programme. This will see us look at how we get the

most out of our systems, maximise the use of data to inform decision making and create efficiencies in our processes so your assured we're making the most of our resources.

**3. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should protect services that support the city's most vulnerable, including adults and children's social care services and education, even if this means some other services will have to be delivered differently or reduced?**

65% of respondents agreed with this approach, which also reflects the feedback we received as part of the budget simulator exercise in Autumn. The budget proposed aims to protect these services as far as possible, in line with our budget principles. As already mentioned there is investment into a range of services, particularly within Children's Social Care. with Appendix J setting out the schools budget for 2024/25, which highlights an additional £19m of funding to provide education across the city. This is in addition to investment within the capital programme to improve our schools and build a new school at Great Haddon.

**4. To what extent do you agree or disagree with our approach to increase council tax in line with the maximum referendum limit (4.99 percent) to ensure the council is best placed to continue providing the same range and quality of services?**

Understandably the response to this question was varied with 59% of people disagreeing with the maximum council tax increase. The budget proposed within this report does include 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.

**5. 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?**

Some of the feedback from this question highlighted that people thought the process was onerous and could be reviewed. There could be more work around the promotion and advertisement of fostering to raise awareness and attract new carers. A review of the foster service is underway and this feedback will be considered as part of this review.

**6. Do you have any other comments to make about the council's spending, service delivery or this budget consultation?**

The responses to this question were varied and covered a wide range of services and ideas. Some of the topics raised include:

- Doing more to boost tourism in the city
- Pay scales (set nationally) and councillor Allowances (independently reviewed)
- Reducing Council Tax

- Ideas for savings or efficiencies across a number of services
- Areas where residents feel services are valued or should be prioritised.
- Use of Council assets

All of these responses will be reviewed in detailed and considered as part of ongoing discussions around transformation and the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

A number of the responses have reflected that residents want transparency, 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 continued to be 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 Corporate Strategy, which sets out four key City Priorities, which we have been reporting against on a quarterly basis, 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. We have also reviewed the DLUHC Best Value framework which was consulted on in 2023. We have worked with officers from across the Council and members to raise awareness of this and embed this and start embedding this framework within our council practises.

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