
APPENDIX 6 – Phase One Budget / MTFP (15) Consultation

Background

- 1 Between 20 September and 1 November 2024, we carried out a consultation with our residents and partners regarding proposals to balance the council's budget for the next financial year (2025/26) and Medium Financial Term Plan 2026-2029. During the period, we presented the proposals to the 14 Area Action Partnership Boards and contacted our key partners including the County Durham Partnership (CDP), County Durham Association of Local Councils (CDALC) and Durham Youth Council.
- 2 The questions posed were as follows:
 - a) Our continued approach to help balance the budget for 2025/26 includes progressing identified savings of £3.2 million that were consulted on last year from; savings from back office and making efficiencies (38%), raising additional income and considering third party contributions (20%) and changes to developing frontline services (42%) - Do you agree or disagree with this continued approach?
 - b) To help us to continue to prioritise areas for savings, please select three service areas (from a list provided) to target for savings.
 - c) Do you agree or disagree to pay more for your council tax next year to help us to protect services and reduce the need to make as much further savings?
 - d) If you have answered that you disagree with a council tax rise of 2.99%, or above if the government allowed, please select another three service areas to target for savings.
 - e) If you have any further comments to make, please provide your feedback. This could include additional ideas as to where we can raise further income or make further savings, how the proposals might impact you, your community or those you represent, comments in support of or to clarify any of your responses.

Promotion

- 3 The consultation was promoted via press release; social media posts, the Council's consultations website page, posters displayed in libraries and CAPs, and targeted emails sent to a range of organisations and partners with a request to provide their feedback by the closing date.

Participation

- 4 The approach enabled the council to engage with over 3,500 people. 237 survey responses were received. 89% of residents responding to the survey provided equality data. We have no disaggregated equality data for other engagement methods. Feedback on the online survey was received across the protected groups, although rates were not always directly comparable with population data for the County.
- 5 There is an almost even split between men (49.7%) and women (50.3%) responding to the online survey. In terms of age, 75.3% of respondents were between the age of 18-64, with 24.2% over the age of 65. Census 21 data releases show County Durham's 16-64 years population is 61.8%, demonstrating a disproportionately higher engagement rate with the 'working age' population. 1 online response was received from the under 18 age group however a targeted engagement session was carried out with members of Durham Youth Council to provide a more representative voice for younger residents.
- 6 The disability online respondent rate is 18.7%, which is lower than Census 21 population data of 22.4% (for the overall county population) and 20.5% (working age population, aged 16-65). The Disability Partnership were notified of the consultation alongside a range of partners and invited to take part. 2.6% of respondents were non-British which is lower than Census 21 ethnicity data for the County at 5.3%.
- 7 Respondents from the remaining protected groups were broadly representative of the population with 4.3% from the lesbian, gay and bisexual population and 36% having no religion or belief. There was a slightly higher response rate from Christians (62.4%) compared to the County wide rate of 54.6%.

| Method | Number |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Survey (online and paper returns) | 237 |
| AAP meeting attendance | 244 |
| Partner letters/emails | 7 |
| DYC member contribution | 42 |
| Total | 530 |
| Social media engagement | Post engagement reached 3,100 |

The outcomes from across the consultation have been recorded and analysed and key messages are identified below.

Summary of survey responses

8 237 people completed a survey either online or via a paper version.

Our approach to balancing the budget for 2025/26 and Medium-Term Financial Plan 2026-29

9 We received 229 responses to this question. 70% of responses either agreed or neither agreed nor disagreed, whilst 30% disagreed.

Areas for further savings

10 To help us prioritise where to make budget reductions, respondents were asked to select three service areas to target for savings. We received 708 responses to this question. The breakdown is as follows:

| | Frequency | Percent of respondents |
|--|------------------|-------------------------------|
| Culture | 98 | 41.5% |
| Environment and climate change | 74 | 31.4% |
| Planning services | 63 | 26.7% |
| Local community projects | 62 | 26.3% |
| Local council tax support | 56 | 23.7% |
| Welfare assistance and advice | 50 | 21.2% |
| Customer access and customer services | 47 | 19.9% |
| Council tax, benefits and other processing | 45 | 19.1% |
| Economic development | 40 | 16.9% |
| Leisure and wellbeing | 39 | 16.5% |
| Housing services | 30 | 12.7% |
| Street cleaning and grounds maintenance | 28 | 11.9% |
| Preventative services | 21 | 8.9% |
| Roads and transport | 20 | 8.5% |
| Waste collection, disposal and recycling | 18 | 7.6% |
| Community safety and protection | 17 | 7.2% |
| Total | 708 | 300.0% |

Council Tax increases of 2.99% (plus potential additional increase if the government allowed)

- 11 We received 232 comments relating to this question. Over 50% of responses agreed with the rise in council tax at either 2.99% or a higher amount. The breakdown is as follows:

| | Frequency | Percent |
|--|------------------|----------------|
| Yes - I agree to the 2.99% proposed increase for 2025/26 only | 83 | 35.8% |
| Yes - I agree to the 2.99% proposed increase for 2025/26 and I agree to a higher council tax amount above 2.99% if the Government allowed this | 41 | 17.7% |
| No - I don't agree with the proposed 2.99% increase or a higher amount if the Government allowed this for 2025/26 | 108 | 46.6% |
| Total | 232 | 100.0% |

- 12 Where respondents disagree with the proposal to raise council tax by 2.99%, they were asked to select another three service areas to target for savings, being mindful not to select any service areas they had already selected again. We received 324 credible responses to this question. The breakdown is as follows:

| | Frequency | Percent of respondents |
|--|------------------|-------------------------------|
| Culture | 35 | 32.4% |
| Planning services | 29 | 26.9% |
| Environment and climate change | 28 | 25.9% |
| Preventative services | 27 | 25.0% |
| Local community projects | 24 | 22.2% |
| Welfare assistance and advice | 24 | 22.2% |
| Economic development | 23 | 21.3% |
| Customer access and customer services | 22 | 20.4% |
| Housing services | 22 | 20.4% |
| Local council tax support | 21 | 19.4% |
| Council tax, benefits and other processing | 18 | 16.7% |
| Waste collection, disposal and recycling | 16 | 14.8% |
| Leisure and wellbeing | 12 | 11.1% |

| | Frequency | Percent of respondents |
|---|------------------|-------------------------------|
| Street cleaning and grounds maintenance | 9 | 8.3% |
| Community safety and protection | 7 | 6.5% |
| Roads and transport | 7 | 6.5% |
| Total | 324 | 300.0% |

Additional comments

- 13 242 comments were received.
- 14 The following has been generated by the Council's AI tool, Co-Pilot, using the prompt: Identify common themes in order of prevalence and summarise. Do not deviate from the content of the (responses) document.
- 15 This prompt produced a report detailing the top five themes as follows:
- (a) **Reduction of management and staff costs:** Reducing the number of managers and high-salary position. There were also calls to freeze or reduce Member expenses and their associated benefits, such as IT equipment and allowances.
 - (b) **Reform of Council Tax:** Charging student accommodations, revising council tax bands to reflect current property values, and reducing the exemptions and discounts that currently benefit landlords and students.
 - (c) **Service efficiency and automation:** Greater use of automation and technology to improve efficiency and reduce costs in various services. This included more AI integration in customer services, outsourcing non-essential services and merging back-office functions with other councils to save on overheads.
 - (d) **Preservation of community and cultural services:** Maintaining funding for local community projects, libraries, cultural events, and leisure activities. These services are viewed as crucial for the wellbeing of residents.
 - (e) **Reduction of Wasteful Spending:** Eliminating wasteful spending on projects, unnecessary infrastructure developments, and promotional materials and reallocating funds to essential services and community support.
- 16 In support of analysis regarding participation, additional AI summaries were generated on the basis of responses from:

- (a) Those living with a disability.
 - (b) Male and female responses
- 17 Regarding responses from those with a disability the most prevalent themes covered concern for unused city centre developments as a wasteful resource, wasteful practices regarding excessive Council buildings and the need to increase home working, the reduction in the number of Council staff, alongside the introduction of performance related pay practices, increased automation within services and boosting tourism through cultural events and ventures. Areas of feedback relating specifically to disability were in respect of disagreement with car parking charges for disabled badge holders.
- 18 In respect of male and female responses both female and male respondents expressed strong opinions on several key themes such as charging council tax on student properties, reducing council expenditures, and improving community and environmental conditions. While both gender groups shared many similar concerns, male respondents placed slightly more emphasis on the efficiency of council services and the reduction of senior management roles, while female respondents provided more detailed suggestions on specific cost-saving measures and community engagement. Both gender groups highlighted the need for greater transparency and accountability from the Council.
- 19 The summary has been cross referenced for due diligence through a process of manual coding of the open text comments and has found the AI summary to be accurate. This process also found that the main responses could be grouped into the following similar categories:

Areas of additional savings and efficiencies

- 20 Comments focused on a range of issues such as, staffing, covering the reduction in staff and salaries, introduction of performance related pay and amends to sickness pay arrangement as well as the reduction of Elected Members allowances, payments and equipment and generally making better use of technology including digital and online automation.
- 21 A further key area focused on opportunities to review a range of processes and practices across the Council and halt unnecessary projects and service provision. Areas highlighted for attention included street lighting practices, some school related services, large scale regeneration schemes, climate change related investments, cultural events, leisure and wellbeing provision, social commissioning practices, refuse collection practices, winter maintenance practices, recycling centre (tip) practices, use of paper and communication and promotional practices.

- 22 Within this area of feedback, comments support the view that the Council should firstly adequately fund all statutory services and secondly determine the provision of discretionary services based on affordability and need. Furthermore, regeneration project investment should only be made based upon commercial returns that will contribute to the Council's financial planning priorities.
- 23 Detailed feedback focused on specific service areas where efficiencies could be made through reform to delivery models including health and adult social care, community funding regarding Area Action Partnerships and Elected Members funding, and home to school transport as well as some support for large scale transformation in a whole system approach achievable through increased resident involvement. Fundamental change was also evident in comments within this category that focused on opportunities for local authority mergers as well as opportunities for adoption of a whole County Durham public sector budgetary approach, to optimise service delivery across all sectors and remove silo budgetary decision-making.
- 24 Another key area focused on opportunities for further efficiencies within working practices, highlighting the need for increased and/or permanent hybrid/home working for Council staff, co-location of Council staff providing collaborative services within key sites such as libraires and leisure centres. These comments complement feedback focused on opportunities to review Council buildings, reduce assets and office spaces.
- 25 There was also a range of comments that focused on the need to reduce sub-contracting and the use of consultants alongside doing more in-house, as well as a range of comments that focused on the need to outsource more efficiently, consider private sector provision and avoid duplication in service delivery to increase efficiency.

Income raising opportunities

- 26 Comments focused on opportunities to increase income via the introduction of tax derived from the likes of the tourist economy, tourist accommodation, night-time and hospitality sector within the county, increase or introduce new fines and charges in areas such as pest control, the planning application process, large household item removals, car parking and dog fouling. Comments also advocated the pursuit of economic growth and profit making from venues and ventures such as cultural events, music events, hospitality areas in the City Centre and housing development opportunities. Finally, it was commented that income could be generated via central government lobbying in pursuit of increase financial support.

Council Tax specific

- 27 Comments focused on disagreement with council tax increase proposals due to the negative financial impact this will have on residents and due to comparisons drawn against other local authorities. Comments also focused on the need to review the council tax bands and the Council Tax Reduction Scheme to ensure universal contribution and to reduce perceived fraud within the system.
- 28 A number of comments also showed support for practices to increase council tax income by imposing council tax payments on those currently exempt such as students, student landlords, private landlords, reviewing HMOs, stopping HMO applications, pursuing tax in this area and tackling uncollected council tax and business rates. There were also some comments that showed support for council tax increases in an effort to improve and protect service provision.

Service protection, preservation, enhancement.

- 29 Comments focused on the need to ensure some service areas received protection from future savings and/or received additional funding and provision including:
- (a) front line and visible services such as recycling services, libraries, grass cutting services, leisure and community projects
 - (b) environmental protection related services such as climate change services, ecology and wildlife
 - (c) back-office services
 - (d) services that support vulnerable and homeless residents
- 30 In review of all comments the top five most frequent responses across the above categories concerned:
- (a) **Areas for additional savings and efficiencies:** covering the need to review a range of processes/schemes/projects/services. (30)
 - (b) **Council tax specific:** regarding opportunities to increase council tax income by imposing council tax on students/student landlords/private landlords. (18)
 - (c) **Areas for additional savings and efficiencies:** covering reduction in staffing/manager roles. (17)
 - (d) **Service protection, preservation, enhancement:** covering the protection of front line/visible services (libraries, grass cutting, leisure, community projects). (14)

- (e) **Areas or additional savings and efficiencies:** covering salary reductions, performance related pay, sickness pay review. (11)

Variation in survey responses

| Are you responding as: | Number of people |
|--------------------------------|------------------|
| Resident | 218 |
| Durham County Council Employee | 25 |
| Elected Member | 4 |
| A business | 2 |
| An organisation | 6 |
| Other | 1 |
| Total | 256 |

- 31 Respondents were able to select multiple responses to this identifier question. Residents provided the majority of the responses to the survey (93%).
- 32 Known organisational survey responses were received from County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service, Ferryhill Town Council, an unnamed VSCE organisation, Durham Police and Crime Commissioner and an unnamed Local Authority organisation. Specific comments from these respondents are noted within the feedback from partners section of this report.
- 33 Durham County Council employee responses were more favourable regarding the Council's continued approach to savings proposals and proposals regarding council tax increase when compared to residents. Feedback from business owners showed similarities in responses as they disagreed with the Council's approach to savings proposals and proposals regarding council tax increases.
- 34 The majority of Elected Members either agree, or neither agree nor disagree with the Council's continued approach to savings. The majority also agree with council tax increase proposals at 2.99% or higher, areas for further savings highlight *Culture* as most prominent, followed by, *Environment and Climate Change*. Additional comments from Members emphasised the need to increase council tax and the need to improve some services areas as well as create efficiencies, looking for example at staffing levels.

Summary of additional feedback – AAP Board Meetings

35 A presentation was delivered to each AAP Board where they could ask questions and provide feedback. The key areas of feedback which are detailed below.

Our approach to balancing the budget for 2025/26 and Medium-Term Financial Plan 2026-29

36 Feedback on this area was limited therefore it was difficult to achieve a consensus. Comments regarding this area however indicated a view that the proposals are a continuation of austerity rather than economic growth. A variety of comments also centred around the impact of statutory services on income in that a significant budget allocation is made to services that for the wider public are unseen and to meet the needs of a relatively small number of people.

Areas for further savings

37 Where feedback aligned to the itemised service list provided, areas to prioritise for further budget reductions covered:

- (a) **Culture:** including focusing on non-essential spending on arts, Lumiere, DLI
- (b) **Leisure and wellbeing:** including change to delivery model as a non-statutory provision.
- (c) **Community Safety and protection:** including a review of the Safety Advisory Group.
- (d) **Customer access and customer services:** including improvements to online services/portal to enable the reduction in face-to-face sites and joint utilisation of sites.
- (e) **Street cleaning and grounds maintenance:** including partnership working with VCS and improved management.

Council Tax increases of 2.99% (plus potential an additional increase if the government allowed)

38 The feedback covered the following key common areas:

- (a) **Council tax banding:** the need to review the banding system to ensure fairness and address lack of understanding and transparency.
- (b) **Opportunities to increase council tax income:** including income generation from empty properties, new building developments and

student/student landlords and amends to Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

- (c) **Understanding re: council tax increase:** including imperatives in the provision of non-statutory services which offer wider benefits to residents.
- (d) **Concern re: council tax increase:** appreciation regarding the financial impact proposals will have on residents and vulnerable people given the wider context of rising household budgets, alongside the need to retain the Council Tax Reduction Scheme.
- (e) **Improved understanding and perceptions re: council tax income:** better awareness and communication needed regarding the direct use of council tax funds in service provision.

Additional comments and feedback including ideas or suggestions as to areas where we can raise further income or make more efficiencies.

39 Feedback brought a variety of responses covering:

Income generation questions, ideas and suggestions

40 Comments included income generation from Council buildings, car parks, facilities and assets such as the redevelopment of County Hall site, the sale of the new HQ and other local facilities, the hiring out of Council buildings for events and the closing of some CAP sites if improvements were made to online provision. Comments also included the position of central government and potential to increase funding at a national level with support for lobbying of central government. There were also comments concerning the potential for Northeast devolution to provide additional funding for the county.

Areas for improved efficiency

41 General comments included the need to improve efficiency in all services areas to ensure better VFM. Back-office efficiencies should also be made even if this includes smaller scale efficiencies in use of paper and printing costs.

42 Specific areas where efficiencies should be found covered:

- (a) **Children and young people's services:** including high-cost specialised care and SEN provision. Investment in earlier intervention and support via community services to reduce larger costs associated with support requirements at a later stage.
- (b) **Home to School Transport:** including attention to taxi contracts, empowering parents to make own arrangements.

- (c) **Adult Social Care:** including change to delivery model and costs linked to hospital care situations.

Views on how proposal will impact people

- 43 Comments focused on the impact in the reduction of non-statutory provision such as leisure services, as crucial to health and wellbeing of local communities, and the negative impact on the VCS in terms of additional pressure on this sector to provide services.

Overall position and financial approach

- 44 Additional comments also covered observations regarding the Council's general successful management and approach to budgeting. Feedback included views that the Council are in a better position than other local authorities, awareness that the challenging financial position is due to reduced funding and rising costs and recognition that core services are a priority with the need for strong corporate governance and financial oversight. There were also some comments specifically regarding the Council's use of reserves with caution related to this practice and also the Council's borrowing practices and funding including the need for fairness in the allocation of funding based on population of areas and need.

Importance of the consultation exercise

- 45 Comments focused on the importance of this consultation exercise including the need to ensure the consultation is available in accessible formats and endeavour to make it as inclusive as possible. There were also comments made on the need to provide information in an easy-to-understand way given its complexity.

Summary of additional feedback from residents and partners

- 46 A range of feedback from partners was received via letter, email and the consultation survey. A resident provided feedback via direct email which aligned to the majority survey response regarding the need to review a range of processes, projects and service provision focusing on mandatory provision.
- 47 Overall feedback from partners showed appreciation for the challenging financial situation the Council face, agreement regarding the Council's continued approach to savings proposals and council tax increase, although expressed empathy and awareness of the impact of savings on communities. Partners also highlighted areas for the Council to explore to make efficiencies including collaborative and integrated approaches to service provision through continued partnership approach. There was evidence within the partners feedback regarding support for further lobbying on key issues at central government level.

Town and Parish Councils

- 48 **North Lodge Parish Council:** Feedback received via email, confirms the Parish Council is concerned at the proposed budget savings and the proposed increases in council tax combined with the prospect of lower service standards.
- 49 **Winston Parish Council:** Feedback received via email, confirms appreciation for the challenging financial position the Council faces. The Parish Council support activity in lobbying the government on key issues. The Parish Council agree with the approach to savings as identified for 2025/26 but are concerned that changes to the front line in using more technology may disadvantage some and encourage alternative approaches to maintaining face to face services where appropriate.
- 50 Regarding areas for further savings the Parish Council encourage the Council to work with community representatives to identify options for community led service delivery in areas such as Culture, Street Cleaning and Grounds Maintenance and Leisure and Wellbeing services. The Parish Council is reluctant to agree the 2.99% council tax increase for 2025/26 only, requesting a fuller understanding regarding any increase above this level. The Parish Council also highlighted the key role they play in communities, potential to explore further devolution to Parish level and consideration of their funding arrangements.
- 51 **Ferryhill Town Council:** Feedback received via the consultation survey confirmed the Town Council agree with the Council's continued approach to savings proposals. Areas to prioritise for future savings are listed as Council Tax, Benefits and Other Processing, Planning Services and Roads and Transport. The Town Council do not agree with proposals to increase council tax at 2.99% or higher selecting additional services to prioritise for future savings covering *Leisure and Wellbeing, Preventative Services and Waste Collection, Disposal and Recycling*.

Pioneering Care Partnership – health and social care NE charity

- 52 Feedback received via email, highlighted appreciation regarding the challenging financial position the Council faces but urged the Council to seek opportunities to do things differently. Suggestions included avoiding duplication by considering alternative delivery models, utilising the PCP's Pioneering Care Centre / Community Health hub model which would look at alternative partnerships to deliver community services in a manner that supports the VCSE section. A similar suggestion was also made in respect of the delivery of leisure services regarding third party operation.

County Durham Partnership –member response

- 53 Feedback received via email, from a member, showed favour towards council tax increase to the maximum 2.99% or more, if flexibility was given from central government, as vulnerable residents are supported by the Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service

- 54 Feedback received via the consultation survey and email, confirms appreciation for the challenging financial position the Council faces and is broadly supportive of the Council's approach to making future savings. Areas of future savings are noted as *Council Tax, Benefits and Other Processing, Customer Access and Customer Services and Local Community Projects*. The Service agree with the Council's council tax proposals concerning 2.99% or a higher amount. The Service are however mindful of the impact of further reductions in the Council's budget and spending could have on the incidence of fire and the number of fatalities in the County. More integrated working is a key priority for the Service therefore they welcome the opportunity to work with the Council to minimise the impact which further budget reductions may have on vulnerable adults.

Northeast Chamber of Commerce

- 55 Feedback received via letter, confirms appreciation for the challenging financial position the Council faces and is broadly supportive of the Council's approach to making future savings whilst maintaining a commitment to deliver a high level of basic services. In terms of potential future savings, they highlight the importance of planning services and economic development services to creating local growth in the area. As a Chamber they will continue to work in partnership to secure the best possible conditions for businesses and employers in County Durham and the wider Northeast.

Durham Police and Crime Commissioner

- 56 Feedback received via the consultation survey shows agreement with the Council's continued approach to savings proposals and believe areas for further savings should prioritise *Culture, Customer Access and Customer Services and Leisure and Wellbeing* service areas but expressed that they would not want these services to disappear as there still needs to be face to face support for older and vulnerable residents. Collaboration, joint funding bids and co-commissioning with other organisations is crucial. The PCC agree with the Council proposals to increase council tax to 2.99% or a higher amount. The PCC also expressed that they have been lobbying Government regarding more flexibility in the precept.

Local Authority organisation - unnamed

- 57 Feedback received via the consultation survey confirmed the organisation agreed with the Council's continued approach to savings proposals. Areas for future savings should prioritise *Culture, Customer Access and Customer Services and Leisure and Wellbeing service areas*. The organisation agrees with the Council proposals to increase council tax to 2.99% or a higher amount. They also wish to express the importance of identifying shared opportunities for maximum collaboration, joint commissioning and partnership funding bids.

VCSE organisation

- 58 Feedback received via the consultation survey confirmed the VCSE organisation agreed with the councils continued approach to savings proposals. Areas for future savings should prioritise *Culture, Local Council Tax Support and Street Cleaning and Grounds Maintenance service areas*. The organisation agrees with the Council proposals to increase council tax to 2.99% or a higher amount.

Tees Esk and Wear Valley NHS Foundation Trust

- 59 Feedback received via letter, confirms appreciation for the challenging financial position the Council faces. The Trust are supportive of activity in lobbying the government to reform local authority funding. The Trust support the Council's approach to savings as presented in the consultation exercise. They support the Council's overall approach to seek where possible to preserve front line services.
- 60 Areas of concern for the Trust include, provisions for children and young people and the public health (grant) funded provision, for example substance misuse services and social care provision. They appeal for early engagement with partner organisations to enable them to impact assess any new proposals. The Trust appreciate the Council's proposals regarding council tax increase and note it is difficult to propose an alternative approach. Regarding areas for additional savings the Trust welcome approaches that target back office, digital/automation, site rationalisation and income generation. The Trust also reinforce their commitment to continued working with the Council as they seek to optimise shared resources and mitigate worse consequences for our population.

Durham Youth Council - DYC

- 61 DYC received a presentation by the council's Finance Manager and Consultation and Engagement Team Leader. Discussion at the meeting highlighted concern that savings made within the back office may impact negatively on the front-line, placing strain on the overall functionality of the

Council. Following the meeting DYC submitted a comprehensive consultation report. It is DYC's view that priority areas for future savings should focus on:

- (a) Council tax and benefits
- (b) Welfare assistance and advice
- (c) Local council tax support

62 Rationale regarding Council Tax Benefits savings include, understanding that the Council provides many services for families and support to young people more broadly therefore personal responsibility is required and contribution should be expected across the board. Regarding Welfare Assistance and Advice, DYC feel that more could be done to combine support and utilise other organisations and services that provide similar provision. Regarding Local Council Tax Support, DYC believe there is an argument to reconsider the level of support available to empower people to be more independent.

63 Additionally, it is DYC's view that the further three service areas require protection against further savings as follows:

- (a) Waste Collections, Disposal and Recycling
- (b) Local Community Projects
- (c) Culture

64 Rationale regarding Waste Collections, Disposal and Recycling include, within the context of climate change and the importance of recycling in particular, the current service requires improvement and protected. Regarding Local Community Projects, DYC believe savings in this area would have a negative impact particularly on younger people in light of previous cuts in youth services across the board. Regarding Culture, DYC believe being able to access facilities such as theatres and museum is very important to the development of young people and ensuring these venues are appealing and accessible is therefore essential.

ANNEX 1

Equalities Breakdown

Approximately 89% of residents responding supplied protected equality monitoring information as set out in the tables below:

Are you:

| | Frequency | Percent |
|--------------|------------------|----------------|
| Male | 95 | 49.7% |
| Female | 96 | 50.3% |
| Total | 191 | 100.0% |

What is your age?

| | Frequency | Percent |
|--------------|------------------|----------------|
| Under 18 | 1 | 0.5% |
| 18-24 | 4 | 2.1% |
| 25-34 | 11 | 5.8% |
| 35-44 | 40 | 21.1% |
| 45-54 | 36 | 18.9% |
| 55-64 | 52 | 27.4% |
| 65-74 | 37 | 19.5% |
| 75+ | 9 | 4.7% |
| Total | 190 | 100.0% |

Do you consider yourself to be a disabled person?

| | Frequency | Percent |
|--------------|------------------|----------------|
| Yes | 35 | 18.7% |
| No | 152 | 81.3% |
| Total | 187 | 100.0% |

What is your religion or belief?

| | Frequency | Percent |
|--------------|------------------|----------------|
| Christian | 113 | 62.4% |
| Buddhist | 1 | 0.6% |
| None | 64 | 35.4% |
| Agnostic | 1 | 0.6% |
| Pagan | 2 | 1.1% |
| Total | 181 | 100.0% |

What is your ethnicity?

| | Frequency | Percent |
|------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| White British | 177 | 97.3% |
| White non-British | 3 | 1.6% |
| Black or Black British | 1 | 0.5% |
| Travelling Community | 1 | 0.5% |
| Total | 182 | 100.0% |

How would you describe your sexual orientation?

| | Frequency | Percent |
|-----------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Heterosexual/straight | 156 | 95.7% |
| Gay or lesbian | 6 | 3.7% |
| Bisexual | 1 | 0.6% |
| Total | 163 | 100.0% |

ANNEX 2

AI generated reports

Summary of Common Themes in Budget Survey Responses

All responses

1. Reduction of Management and Staff Costs

Many respondents suggested reducing the number of managers and high-salary positions within the council. They believe that cutting unnecessary staff positions and focusing on front-line services would save money. There were also calls to freeze or reduce councillor expenses and their associated perks, such as IT equipment and allowances.

2. Reform of Council Tax

A significant number of responses focused on reforming council tax. Suggestions included charging council tax on student accommodations, revising council tax bands to reflect current property values, and reducing the exemptions and discounts that currently benefit landlords and students.

3. Service Efficiency and Automation

Respondents recommended greater use of automation and technology to improve efficiency and reduce costs in various services. This included more AI integration in customer services, outsourcing non-essential services, and merging back-office functions with other councils to save on overheads.

4. Preservation of Community and Cultural Services

Many responses emphasized the importance of maintaining funding for local community projects, libraries, cultural events, and leisure activities. These services are viewed as crucial for the wellbeing of residents, particularly during economic hardships.

5. Reduction of Wasteful Spending

Numerous comments were made about eliminating wasteful spending on vanity projects, unnecessary infrastructure developments, and promotional materials. Respondents suggested reallocating these funds to essential services and community support.

6. Increase in Charges for Services

There was support for increasing charges for certain council services such as parking, waste collection, and large item removal. Respondents believe that

these charges could generate additional revenue without significantly impacting residents' daily lives.

7. Environmental Initiatives

Several responses highlighted the need to protect environmental and ecological initiatives from budget cuts. Suggestions included investing in green energy solutions, supporting wildlife conservation, and maintaining green spaces.

8. Transparency and Accountability

Respondents called for greater transparency and accountability in council spending. They suggested public audits, better communication about budget decisions, and involving residents in financial planning processes.

9. Social and Health Services

A number of responses stressed the importance of maintaining funding for social and health services, especially those supporting vulnerable populations. There were calls to bring certain privatized services back under public control to improve quality and reduce costs.

10. Encouragement of Local Economy

Respondents suggested initiatives to boost the local economy, such as hosting more events to increase tourism and supporting local businesses through reduced rates and grants.

11. Transportation and Infrastructure

Some responses focused on transportation and infrastructure improvements. Suggestions included reviewing home-to-school transport funding, maintaining street cleaning services, and improving road conditions.

12. Reduction of Red Tape

Finally, several respondents recommended cutting down on bureaucratic processes to save time and money. This included streamlining services, reducing paperwork, and implementing more efficient practices in council operations.

Themes Raised by Disabled Respondents in Budget Consultation

Summary of Responses

1. City Centre Developments and Housing

The respondents expressed concerns about unused city centre developments, which are seen as an embarrassment and a waste of resources. They suggested

that the County Hall site and Aykley Heads be repurposed for housing, particularly near amenities and within walking distance to Durham City.

2. Employment and Office Expenses

There were multiple comments regarding the need to stop wasting money on council buildings and to allow staff to work from home. The office at Aykley Heads was viewed as an unnecessary expense.

3. Council Spending and Efficiency

Several respondents called for reductions in council staff, particularly senior management, executives, and councillors. Suggestions included reducing salaries, removing councillor expenses, and eliminating unnecessary staff positions.

4. Public Services and Charges

The introduction of performance-related pay and automation in legal services was suggested to improve efficiency. Additional themes included increasing charges on school transport, prosecuting those who evade council tax, and stopping support for Parish and Town Councils unless they provide substantial ROI.

5. Community and Tourism

The respondents advocated for more events to boost tourism, such as music events and markets. They also supported the creation of local community hubs for job searching and health condition management.

6. Cost-Saving Measures

Suggestions included merging HR and other services with regional councils, cutting vanity projects, reducing project funding, charging council tax for students, and stopping unnecessary mailings about postal votes.

7. Waste Management

There were concerns about the increased cost of refuse and recycling leading to fly-tipping. The respondents disagreed with charging disabled badge holders for parking in Seaham coast car parks and suggested removing unnecessary staff positions.

8. Contribution from Students and Businesses

Some respondents proposed that students, bar owners, and takeaway outlets should contribute to the upkeep of Durham City, possibly through an evening tax.

9. Legal Compliance and Enforcement

Respondents called for stricter enforcement against those breaking the law and evading council tax reductions, as well as improving the quality of road resurfacing materials to avoid cheap, inferior products.

10. School Transport Funding

A review of home to school transport funding was suggested, with a focus on efficiency and necessity.

Summary of Public Responses to Budget Consultation

Comparison of Themes Raised by Female and Male Respondents

1. Student and Landlord Council Tax

Female Responses:

- Many suggested charging council tax on student properties and landlords.
- Concerns that students use local services but do not contribute financially.

Male Responses:

- Strong emphasis on charging council tax for student accommodations and landlords.
- Criticism about financial loss due to exempted student properties.

2. Reducing Council Expenditures

Female Responses:

- Suggestions to turn off street lighting during late hours to save money.
- Proposals to reduce council staff and management salaries.
- Recommendations to sell unused council buildings.

Male Responses:

- Suggestions to reduce the number of council staff, especially senior management.
- Calls for selling off underused council properties.
- Ideas to merge redundant roles and abolish unnecessary positions.

3. Housing Developments

Female Responses:

- More housing in Durham City Centre, particularly near the river.
- Stop the creation of new buildings and focus on utilizing existing ones.

Male Responses:

- Calls for more city housing and utilizing existing buildings rather than creating new ones.
- Proposals to convert County Hall and other locations into residential properties.

4. Environmental and Community Improvements

Female Responses:

- Initiatives like planting perennial plants.
- Improving street cleaning and tackling dog fouling through fines.

Male Responses:

- Emphasis on maintaining community projects and green spaces.
- Suggestions to increase tourism through events and cultural activities.

5. Service and Infrastructure Efficiency

Female Responses:

- Encouragement to use video conferencing to reduce costs.
- Combining refuse and recycling collections to save time and money.

Male Responses:

- Implementation of more automated systems to cut down on administrative costs.
- Suggestions to merge services with neighbouring councils for efficiency.

6. Management of Council Resources

Female Responses:

- Criticisms on the management and allocation of council funds.
- Suggestions to audit council services and reduce unnecessary expenses.

Male Responses:

- Arguments for better management of council resources and cutting down on wasteful spending.
- Recommendations to halt vanity projects and focus on essential services.

7. Community Involvement and Accountability

Female Responses:

- Calls for more transparency and accountability from the council.
- Suggestions to involve local residents in decision-making processes.

Male Responses:

- Emphasis on resident involvement in council decisions and initiatives.
- Suggestions for community-led projects and pride in local areas.

Conclusion

Both female and male respondents expressed strong opinions on several key themes such as charging council tax on student properties, reducing council spending, and improving community and environmental conditions. While both groups shared many similar concerns, male respondents placed slightly more emphasis on the efficiency of council services and the reduction of senior management roles, while female respondents provided more detailed suggestions on specific cost-saving measures and community engagement. Both groups highlighted the need for greater transparency and accountability from the council.

Annex 3 Survey results - Budget Consultation 25/26

Format of response

| | Frequency | Percent |
|--------------|------------|---------------|
| PC | 92 | 38.8% |
| Tablet | 10 | 4.2% |
| Mobile | 125 | 52.7% |
| Paper | 10 | 4.2% |
| Total | 237 | 100.0% |

Do you agree or disagree with this continued approach?

| | Frequency | Percent of respondents |
|----------------------------|------------|------------------------|
| Agree | 105 | 45.9% |
| Neither agree nor disagree | 56 | 24.5% |
| Disagree | 68 | 29.7% |
| Total | 229 | 100.0% |

Please select three service areas to target for savings.

| | Frequency | Percent of respondents |
|--|------------|------------------------|
| Culture | 98 | 41.5% |
| Environment and climate change | 74 | 31.4% |
| Planning services | 63 | 26.7% |
| Local community projects | 62 | 26.3% |
| Local council tax support | 56 | 23.7% |
| Welfare assistance and advice | 50 | 21.2% |
| Customer access and customer services | 47 | 19.9% |
| Council tax, benefits and other processing | 45 | 19.1% |
| Economic development | 40 | 16.9% |
| Leisure and wellbeing | 39 | 16.5% |
| Housing services | 30 | 12.7% |
| Street cleaning and grounds maintenance | 28 | 11.9% |
| Preventative services | 21 | 8.9% |
| Roads and transport | 20 | 8.5% |
| Waste collection, disposal and recycling | 18 | 7.6% |
| Community safety and protection | 17 | 7.2% |
| Total | 708 | 300.0% |

Do you agree or disagree to pay more for your council tax next year to help us to protect services and reduce the need to make as much further savings?

| | Frequency | Percent |
|--|------------------|----------------|
| Yes - I agree to the 2.99% proposed increase for 2025/26 only | 83 | 35.8% |
| Yes - I agree to the 2.99% proposed increase for 2025/26 and I agree to a higher council tax amount above 2.99% if the Government allowed this | 41 | 17.7% |
| No - I don't agree with the proposed 2.99% increase or a higher amount if the Government allowed this for 2025/26 | 108 | 46.6% |
| Total | 232 | 100.0% |

As you disagree with a council tax rise, please select another three services to make further savings.

| | Frequency | Percent of respondents |
|--|------------------|-------------------------------|
| Culture | 35 | 32.4% |
| Planning services | 29 | 26.9% |
| Environment and climate change | 28 | 25.9% |
| Preventative services | 27 | 25.0% |
| Local community projects | 24 | 22.2% |
| Welfare assistance and advice | 24 | 22.2% |
| Economic development | 23 | 21.3% |
| Customer access and customer services | 22 | 20.4% |
| Housing services | 22 | 20.4% |
| Local council tax support | 21 | 19.4% |
| Council tax, benefits and other processing | 18 | 16.7% |
| Waste collection, disposal and recycling | 16 | 14.8% |
| Leisure and wellbeing | 12 | 11.1% |
| Street cleaning and grounds maintenance | 9 | 8.3% |
| Community safety and protection | 7 | 6.5% |
| Roads and transport | 7 | 6.5% |
| Total | 324 | 300.0% |

Please provide any further comments you wish to make.

| | Frequency |
|---|------------------|
| Additional savings: Stop/review inefficient/processes/schemes/projects/services | 30 |
| Council tax: Impose council tax on students/student landlords/private landlords | 18 |

| | Frequency |
|---|-----------|
| Additional savings: Staff/manager reduction | 17 |
| Service protection/increase: Protect/increase front line/visible services (libraries, grass cutting, leisure, community projects) | 14 |
| Additional savings: Salary reduction (performance related pay/sickness pay cuts) | 11 |
| Additional savings: Joint/collaborative services/provision (libraries/leisure providing additional services) | 10 |
| Council tax: Change/remove council tax reduction scheme | 10 |
| Miscellaneous | 10 |
| Raising income: Increase/new charges/fines | 10 |
| Raising income: Pursue economic growth/profit making venues/ventures (events, hospitality venues, housing development) | 10 |
| Additional savings: Efficiency savings using technology/digital/online/automation | 9 |
| Additional savings: Reduce members/members' allowances/additional payments/equipment | 8 |
| Additional savings: Reduce sub-contracting, use own workforce/inhouse | 7 |
| Council tax: Agree with council tax increases to help services | 7 |
| Council tax: HMO review (stop applications, pursue tax) | 7 |
| Council tax: Disagree due to comparisons in CT to other areas | 6 |
| Raising income: Central government financial support/lobbying | 6 |
| Raising income: Review/selling of assets (buildings/offices) | 6 |
| Council tax: Review council tax bands | 5 |
| Additional savings: AAP funding specific savings (change to practice/model) | 4 |
| Additional savings: Children in care specific savings (change to practice/model) | 4 |
| Additional savings: More efficient ways of working (increase/permanent hybrid working, shared space) | 4 |
| Raising income: New tax opportunities (tourists/accommodation/hospitality industry/University) | 4 |
| Service protection/increase: Protect/increase climate change/wildlife/ecology | 4 |
| Additional savings: Home to school transport specific savings (change to practice/model) | 3 |
| Additional savings: Outsource council services/private sector provision | 3 |
| Additional savings: Transformational countywide approach (budgeting, focus on statutory services, increased resident involvement) | 3 |
| Consultation process issue | 3 |
| Council tax: Disagree to increase due to cost of living/personal financial impact | 3 |

| | Frequency |
|---|------------------|
| Additional savings: Local authority merger options | 2 |
| Service protection/increase: Protect/increase back-office staff | 2 |
| Council tax: Tackle uncollected council tax/business rates | 1 |
| Service protection/increase: Protect/increase services that help vulnerable | 1 |
| Total | 242 |

Are you responding as:

| | Frequency | Percent of respondents |
|----------------------------------|------------------|-------------------------------|
| A County Durham resident | 218 | 93.2% |
| A Durham County Council employee | 25 | 10.7% |
| An elected member | 4 | 1.7% |
| A business | 2 | 0.9% |
| An organisation | 6 | 2.6% |
| Town councillor | 1 | 0.4% |
| Total | 256 | |

If an organisation, please specify.

| | Frequency |
|--|------------------|
| Local Authority | 2 |
| County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service | 1 |
| Ferryhill Town Council | 1 |
| VCSE | 1 |
| Total | 5 |

Are you:

| | Frequency | Percent |
|--------------|------------------|----------------|
| Male | 95 | 49.7% |
| Female | 96 | 50.3% |
| Total | 191 | 100.0% |

What is your age?

| | Frequency | Percent |
|--------------|------------------|----------------|
| Under 18 | 1 | 0.5% |
| 18-24 | 4 | 2.1% |
| 25-34 | 11 | 5.8% |
| 35-44 | 40 | 21.1% |
| 45-54 | 36 | 18.9% |
| 55-64 | 52 | 27.4% |
| 65-74 | 37 | 19.5% |
| 75+ | 9 | 4.7% |
| Total | 190 | 100.0% |

Do you consider yourself to be a disabled person?

| | Frequency | Percent |
|--------------|------------|---------------|
| Yes | 35 | 18.7% |
| No | 152 | 81.3% |
| Total | 187 | 100.0% |

What is your religion or belief?

| | Frequency | Percent |
|--------------|------------|---------------|
| Christian | 113 | 62.4% |
| Buddhist | 1 | 0.6% |
| None | 64 | 35.4% |
| Agnostic | 1 | 0.6% |
| Pagan | 2 | 1.1% |
| Total | 181 | 100.0% |

What is your ethnicity?

| | Frequency | Percent |
|------------------------|------------|---------------|
| White British | 177 | 97.3% |
| White non-British | 3 | 1.6% |
| Black or Black British | 1 | 0.5% |
| Travelling Community | 1 | 0.5% |
| Total | 182 | 100.0% |

How would you describe your sexual orientation?

| | Frequency | Percent |
|-----------------------|------------|---------------|
| Heterosexual/straight | 156 | 95.7% |
| Gay or lesbian | 6 | 3.7% |
| Bisexual | 1 | 0.6% |
| Total | 163 | 100.0% |

Residents

Do you agree or disagree with this continued approach?

| | Frequency | Percent |
|----------------------------|------------|---------------|
| Agree | 95 | 45.2% |
| Neither agree nor disagree | 53 | 25.2% |
| Disagree | 62 | 29.5% |
| Total | 210 | 100.0% |

Please select three service areas to target for savings.

| | Frequency | Percent of respondents |
|--|------------------|-------------------------------|
| Culture | 89 | 41.0% |
| Environment and climate change | 66 | 30.4% |
| Planning services | 60 | 27.6% |
| Local community projects | 59 | 27.2% |
| Local council tax support | 51 | 23.5% |
| Welfare assistance and advice | 48 | 22.1% |
| Council tax, benefits and other processing | 40 | 18.4% |
| Customer access and customer services | 40 | 18.4% |
| Economic development | 38 | 17.5% |
| Leisure and wellbeing | 35 | 16.1% |
| Housing services | 29 | 13.4% |
| Street cleaning and grounds maintenance | 26 | 12.0% |
| Preventative services | 20 | 9.2% |
| Waste collection, disposal and recycling | 18 | 8.3% |
| Community safety and protection | 16 | 7.4% |
| Roads and transport | 16 | 7.4% |
| Total | 651 | 300.0% |

Do you agree or disagree to pay more for your council tax next year to help us to protect services and reduce the need to make as much further savings?

| | Frequency | Percent |
|--|------------------|----------------|
| Yes - I agree to the 2.99% proposed increase for 2025/26 only | 76 | 35.7% |
| Yes - I agree to the 2.99% proposed increase for 2025/26 and I agree to a higher council tax amount above 2.99% if the Government allowed this | 34 | 16.0% |
| No - I don't agree with the proposed 2.99% increase or a higher amount if the Government allowed this for 2025/26 | 103 | 48.4% |
| Total | 213 | 100.0% |

As you disagree with a council tax rise, please select another three services to make further savings.

| | Frequency | Percent of respondents |
|--------------------------------|------------------|-------------------------------|
| Culture | 32 | 31.1% |
| Planning services | 28 | 27.2% |
| Environment and climate change | 27 | 26.2% |
| Preventative services | 26 | 25.2% |
| Local community projects | 23 | 22.3% |

| | Frequency | Percent of respondents |
|--|------------------|-------------------------------|
| Welfare assistance and advice | 23 | 22.3% |
| Customer access and customer services | 22 | 21.4% |
| Economic development | 21 | 20.4% |
| Housing services | 21 | 20.4% |
| Local council tax support | 19 | 18.4% |
| Council tax, benefits and other processing | 18 | 17.5% |
| Waste collection, disposal and recycling | 15 | 14.6% |
| Leisure and wellbeing | 11 | 10.7% |
| Street cleaning and grounds maintenance | 9 | 8.7% |
| Community safety and protection | 7 | 6.8% |
| Roads and transport | 7 | 6.8% |
| Total | 309 | 300.0% |

Please provide any further comments you wish to make.

| | Frequency |
|---|------------------|
| Additional savings: Stop/review inefficient/processes/schemes/projects/services | 28 |
| Council tax: Impose council tax on students/student landlords/private landlords | 18 |
| Additional savings: Staff/manager reduction | 16 |
| Service protection/increase: Protect/increase front line/visible services (libraries, grass cutting, leisure, community projects) | 13 |
| Additional savings: Joint/collaborative services/provision (libraries/leisure providing additional services) | 10 |
| Additional savings: Salary reduction (performance related pay/sickness pay cuts) | 10 |
| Raising income: Pursue economic growth/profit making venues/ventures (events, hospitality venues, housing development) | 10 |
| Council tax: Change/remove council tax reduction scheme | 9 |
| Raising income: Increase/new charges/fines | 9 |
| Additional savings: Reduce members/members' allowances/additional payments/equipment | 8 |
| Miscellaneous | 8 |
| Council tax: Agree with council tax increases to help services | 7 |
| Council tax: HMO review (stop applications, pursue tax) | 7 |
| Additional savings: Efficiency savings using technology/digital/online/automation | 6 |
| Additional savings: Reduce sub-contracting, use own workforce/inhouse | 6 |
| Council tax: Disagree due to comparisons in CT to other areas | 6 |
| Raising income: Review/selling of assets (buildings/offices) | 6 |

| | Frequency |
|---|------------------|
| Raising income: Central government financial support/lobbying | 5 |
| Additional savings: AAP funding specific savings (change to practice/model) | 4 |
| Council tax: Review council tax bands | 4 |
| Raising income: New tax opportunities (tourists/accommodation/hospitality industry/University) | 4 |
| Additional savings: Children in care specific savings (change to practice/model) | 3 |
| Additional savings: Home to school transport specific savings (change to practice/model) | 3 |
| Additional savings: Outsource council services/private sector provision | 3 |
| Additional savings: Transformational countywide approach (budgeting, focus on statutory services, increased resident involvement) | 3 |
| Consultation process issue | 3 |
| Council tax: Disagree to increase due to cost of living/personal financial impact | 3 |
| Service protection/increase: Protect/increase climate change/wildlife/ecology | 3 |
| Additional savings: Local authority merger options | 2 |
| Additional savings: More efficient ways of working (increase/permanent hybrid working, shared space) | 2 |
| Service protection/increase: Protect/increase back-office staff | 2 |
| Council tax: Tackle uncollected council tax/business rates | 1 |
| Total | 222 |

Are you responding as:

| | Frequency | Percent |
|----------------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| A County Durham resident | 218 | 100.0% |
| A Durham County Council employee | 15 | 6.9% |
| An elected member | 3 | 1.4% |
| A business | 2 | 0.9% |
| An organisation | 1 | 0.5% |
| Town councillor | 1 | 0.5% |
| Total | 240 | |

Residents and council staff

If both then classified as Durham County Council staff.

Do you agree or disagree with this continued approach?

| | Resident | DCC staff |
|----------------------------|------------|-----------|
| Agree | 42.9% | 66.7% |
| Neither agree nor disagree | 26.5% | 16.7% |
| Disagree | 30.6% | 16.7% |
| Frequency | 196 | 24 |

Please select three service areas to target for savings.

| | Resident | DCC staff |
|--|------------|-----------|
| Culture | 41.1% | 32.0% |
| Environment and climate change | 30.7% | 40.0% |
| Planning services | 27.2% | 28.0% |
| Local community projects | 25.2% | 36.0% |
| Local council tax support | 24.3% | 16.0% |
| Welfare assistance and advice | 23.3% | 12.0% |
| Council tax, benefits and other processing | 19.3% | 16.0% |
| Customer access and customer services | 18.3% | 24.0% |
| Economic development | 18.3% | 8.0% |
| Leisure and wellbeing | 16.8% | 8.0% |
| Housing services | 13.4% | 12.0% |
| Street cleaning and grounds maintenance | 12.9% | 4.0% |
| Preventative services | 7.9% | 20.0% |
| Waste collection, disposal and recycling | 7.4% | 12.0% |
| Community safety and protection | 6.9% | 12.0% |
| Roads and transport | 6.9% | 20.0% |
| Frequency (responses) | 606 | 75 |

Do you agree or disagree to pay more for your council tax next year to help us to protect services and reduce the need to make as much further savings?

| | Resident | DCC staff |
|--|------------|-----------|
| Yes - I agree to the 2.99% proposed increase for 2025/26 only | 34.3% | 60.0% |
| Yes - I agree to the 2.99% proposed increase for 2025/26 and I agree to a higher council tax amount above 2.99% if the Government allowed this | 15.7% | 20.0% |
| No - I don't agree with the proposed 2.99% increase or a higher amount if the Government allowed this for 2025/26 | 50.0% | 20.0% |
| Frequency | 198 | 25 |

As you disagree with a council tax rise, please select another three services to make further savings.

| | Resident | DCC staff |
|--|-----------------|------------------|
| Culture | 31.3% | 40.0% |
| Environment and climate change | 27.3% | 0.0% |
| Planning services | 25.3% | 60.0% |
| Preventative services | 24.2% | 40.0% |
| Welfare assistance and advice | 23.2% | 0.0% |
| Customer access and customer services | 22.2% | 0.0% |
| Local community projects | 22.2% | 20.0% |
| Housing services | 21.2% | 20.0% |
| Economic development | 19.2% | 60.0% |
| Council tax, benefits and other processing | 18.2% | 0.0% |
| Local council tax support | 18.2% | 20.0% |
| Waste collection, disposal and recycling | 14.1% | 20.0% |
| Leisure and wellbeing | 11.1% | 0.0% |
| Street cleaning and grounds maintenance | 8.1% | 20.0% |
| Community safety and protection | 7.1% | 0.0% |
| Roads and transport | 7.1% | 0.0% |
| Frequency (responses) | 297 | 15 |

ANNEX 4

MTFP 2025/26 Phase one - AAP feedback Sept – Oct 2024

Do you agree or disagree with this continued approach?

Limited direct feedback from AAP meetings re: direct views on continued approach to savings proposals. A relevant comment suggested that the proposals show a continuation of austerity rather than economic growth which is what the new Government has stated needs to drive things forward. We cannot simply keep on cutting services down to nothing. (Derwent Valley) One Board member also commented that they noted that the proposals are not savings but cuts to services. (Durham)

Further comments acknowledged that the council are limited re: consideration of statutory services. (3TP) 70% of budget is allocated to services that are of statutory responsibility and mostly unseen afforded to on a relatively small amount of people in the county allocated to Adult and Childrens social care, needs and education. For most residents their interaction with the council is litter, neighbourhood issues, safe footpaths etc. Therefore, it is difficult for people to see expenditure as it goes on 'hidden services. (Weardale) There was also dismay amongst the feedback that there has been a steady reduction in services when hard working people are paying tax. (TAP)

We need to make further savings of £21.7 million in 2025/26, £23.7 million in 2026/27 and a forecasted £64.1 million in total over the next four years. As in previous years we have asked you which services you would like us to prioritise for further budget reductions. To help us to continue to prioritise areas for savings in this way please select three service areas to target for savings.

Overall feedback did not necessarily align to the itemised service list provided however services noted as areas to prioritise for further budget reductions cover:

Community Safety and protection: Safety Advisory Group for instance needs to be looked at fully. (Stanley)

Customer access and customer services: could they generate income from hiring out their space/interview rooms when they are not open. How can they be cut further? Do it Online needs an overhaul as it isn't user friendly. If the online portal worked better, CAPs could be shut altogether, and their buildings utilised by other frontline key service areas and hired out to key partners/VCS organisations. Tried to sell Old Stanley CAP, then turn it back into a DCC Office base, now at a standstill with no clear plan. Needs addressing for the sake of Stanley Town Centre. (Stanley special meeting following AAP Board meeting (Stanley)

Street cleaning and grounds maintenance: We still need and have civic pride in communities, so could VCS be approached to help with this? Gully cleaning doesn't get done properly. Also, grass cutting has been a particular issue this year with machines not maintained and then Council grassed areas and football pitches left to overgrow and become unusable. This needs to be better managed. (Stanley special meeting following AAP Board meeting) (Stanley)

Leisure and wellbeing: As Leisure Centres are not a statutory provision, could this delivery be done differently as the costs for these centres are high and keep increasing. (Derwent Valley)

Culture: Perceived massive capital budget and nothing being delivered. Consideration needed on this e.g. DLI museum. (CLS) (Stanley) Culture activities need to be better linked in with local communities (Stanley) DCC are not looking enough at non-essential spending, arts, Lumiere, etc. they only benefit a small amount of people. (BASH & GAMP).

Do you agree or disagree to pay more for your council tax next year to help us to protect services and reduce the need to make as much further savings?

This question / topic generated the most feedback with comments and questions covering:

Banding:

- The banding system needs review - the communities that need the most get the least benefit in services from the system and the council do not obtain enough income though the system. (Mid Durham)
- Now that we have a mayor, is it in the pipeline that council tax bands may be done on the county's average band? (BASH & GAMP)
- The public may not fully understand the implications on council tax bands in the income that the council receive. Are we paying higher Council Tax than other Local Authorities? (3TP)
- There is little that could be done about Council Tax bands but there should be improved clarity, transparency and information for residents. (3TP)

Support/understanding re: raising Council Tax and utilising it to protect services:

- We need the ability to raise Council tax without a referendum as we cannot lose non-statutory services which offer wider benefits to our local residents. (Derwent Valley)
- Better communications needed on council tax – DCC provide excellent services. If public had to pay privately it would be more expensive and

DCC do provide excellent services. People may criticise less due to the value for money we get if awareness was higher. (CLS)

- Yes, agree to the 2.99% proposed increase for 2025/26 only. (Stanley special meeting following AAP Board meeting)

Suggestions on where to make additional income from Council Tax:

- Can we impose charges on those with empty properties. (Derwent Valley)
- What is happening with 22,000 empty properties currently across the county (4Together and EDRC)
- Has DCC put in their forecast for all new builds concerning council tax? - £500k has been put in already along with the new home's bonus (Spennymoor)
- With new building developments across the county, will that not have the effect of increasing the income generated through council tax? (BASH&GAMP)
- Students/student landlords who pay no council tax should be looked into (4 Together & EDRC)
- Around 33,000 households across the County are not paying council tax. Should DCC not be looking at capping this, do all of those 33,000 really need a 100% reduction. (BASH&GAMP)
- Following up on council tax arrears. (East Durham)
- Are we considering reducing the Council Tax Reduction Scheme, understand this costs £40m per year? (TAP)
- Attention needed re: properties occupied by students where council tax isn't paid (TAP)

Concern re: Council Tax rise and public understanding/perceptions:

- There are difficult decisions to be made but people will struggle with the increase, and this will hit vulnerable people and people in deprived areas across the North East. (3TP)
- Within the context of concerns re: inflation, food prices and heating costs and this will create even tighter household budgets. Although the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme is available, there are concerns for fixed income homes where financial support may not be available. (3TP)
- Better communications needed:
 - DCC provide excellent services. If public had to pay privately it would be more expensive and DCC do provide excellent services. People may adjust their views if awareness/understanding was higher. (CLS)

- Communities see council tax going to bins being emptied and cutting the grass and don't see the rest of it and they don't realise where it goes. A breakdown on the council tax bill would be really useful for residents (Weardale)
- Council Tax Reduction is a mainstay in supporting vulnerable people. (3TP)
- It is important to keep the Council Tax Reduction Scheme (East Durham)
- Wouldn't want council tax to be raised ideally at all, but not above amount absolutely necessary and particularly not over 2.99% if government make that an option. Hopefully there will be more guidance from government on this soon and better commitment for more funding centrally. (BASH&GAMP)

If you have any further comments to make, please provide your feedback below. This could include, for example: Additional ideas as to where we can raise further income or make further savings

Income generation and additional funding:

- **Income from buildings/facilities/assets:**
 - Have activities concerning DCC assets such as the sale of the new HQ and redevelopment opportunities for CH enhanced DCC'S budget? (Spennymoor) (4 Together & EDRC) (Weardale)
 - Can we maximise the use of local facilities to generate more income i.e. Consett Empire Theatre could be used for other functions for example. (Derwent Valley)
 - Income generation opportunities need to be looked at within local areas for example Chester-Le-Street facilities and services including Riverside Park need to be maintained and improved as it can generate income (CLS)
 - DCC assets should be looked. Buildings which are dormant in CLS, need to look at surplus properties due to a large complex estate. (CLS)
 - Has the introduction of new car parking charges generated income (4 Together and EDRC)
 - **Customer access and customer services:** could they generate income from hiring out their space/interview rooms when they are not open. Do it Online needs an overhaul as it isn't user friendly. If the online portal worked better, CAPs could be shut altogether, and their buildings utilised by other frontline key service areas and hired out to key partners/VCS organisations. Tried to sell Old Stanley CAP, then turn it back into a DCC Office base, now at a standstill

with no clear plan. Needs addressing for the sake of Stanley Town Centre. (Stanley)

- **Central Government funding allocation:**

- The overall funding formula set by central Government needs to be changed and there needs to be lobbying for this change. (Derwent Valley)
- A lot of funding historically was allocated to central government on levels of deprivation – wish something in central government would bring this back. The northeast has an aging population, inequalities in health and until we do something to counterbalance the inequalities it becomes a bit of a talking shop. Quite a good opportunity. (CLS)
- Could concerns be expressed to the current Government? Would any further help be forthcoming from the Government? DCC (3TP)
- Budget pressures are real and if the chancellor puts a tax on employers NI the costs will come back to the council for care providers etc. (Weardale)
- There is a need to be more open and transparent with our residents around spending and particularly in relation to the pressures linked to increasing social care responsibilities where the Government allow local authorities to 'bear the brunt' in relation to this. (4 Together and ECRD)
- Devolution specific:
 - We have just elected a Northeast Mayor, regions with a regional mayor have access to additional streams of funding. Will there be any further funding going forward from this source? (3TP)
 - As we are now part of the North-East Combined Authority and in terms of interaction, does this have any promise that will help us as a local authority? (Durham)

More efficient / areas of inefficiencies:

General comments covering:

- Inefficiencies in the way services are currently delivered need to be identified so we are achieving better value for money across all areas. (Derwent Valley)
- Communication within some departments is currently very poor and they should be held accountable. Reducing non effective back-office staff and look at smaller activities such as reducing the amount of paper at meetings and printing costs can help save money. (Derwent Valley)
- Capital programme should be reviewed. (East Durham)

- Back-office savings, this should start with top management and work down. (East Durham)
- DCC is a responsible council, but there is waste. Neighbourhoods includes community safety, and it would be good to look at youth provision. (East Durham)

Specific areas to consider:

Children and Young People (high-cost specialised care):

- Impact on austerity, meaning that Durham went from 45 children's centres to 15, negatively impacted youth service provision and the range of early support and presence in communities that enabled Children and Young People to be identified early and prevent escalation. As a result, more and more money being invested in high cost highly specialised care, where if we continue to intervene at crisis, it will never change. DCC therefore needs to consider earlier intervention with families as the priority through more community services, earlier help to provide support earlier on with investment in early help and support critical in turning the tide. (CLS)
- It is important to get the budget for Childrens Social Care right as this could incur further costs in the future as a result of lack of support for children during their early years. (3TP)
- SEN:
 - It was suggested that there should be a consultation linked to the amount of funding for SEN provision to try and help reduce costs in that area. (Derwent Valley) There are increased pressures with more and more children in care and more with SEND.
 - DCC are however doing some great work retaining social workers (i.e. not paying extra costs) and getting their own residential homes. (BASH&GAMP)

Home to school transport: Concerns re: the extent of the Home to School Transport budget, including spend on children travelling in separate taxis rather than together, suggesting the taxi contracts are extortionate. A more holistic approach should be taken, parents should be enabled to make their own taxi arrangements and where parents also receive mobility financial support and have transport of their own, they should use this to take their children to school. (Derwent Valley) Feedback re: this service was caveated that often change requires a change in national policy, as decisions made may be subject to a legal challenge. (CLS) Additionally in terms of standard home to school transport (i.e. not where there is an additional need) could parents contribute a small amount to this? Would this help to raise funds. (BASH & GAMP).

Adult social care: Feedback focused on lack of clarity covering what is included within this service provision and concern that funding may not be being spent correctly, particularly in hospital to care situations. There could be waste or different ways services could be delivered in social care. (Mid Durham)

□ How the proposals might impact you, your community or those you represent

Leisure centres: Whilst leisure centres are not a statutory provision, they are crucial to the health and wellbeing of local communities which saves costs linked to other services (i.e. leisure centres can be viewed as a preventative measure leading to overall public sector savings in the long-term). (Derwent Valley)

Impact on VCS: The VCS service are picking up the slack on mental health and various other activities. There is a concern we are going to get less funding and left to pick up the slack for services that are not being considered. They are struggling for money to keep things going in the background. Services that used to be there, no longer exist. (CLS)

□ Comments in support of or to clarify any of your responses.

Position of DCC:

Various comments re: DCC's general budgeting position covering:

- **Observations re: DCC's general management/approach:**
 - Although the scale of the savings to be made is huge, the County Council is in a better position than some local authorities.
 - The problem is rising costs against reduced funding. (Derwent Valley)
 - DCC has managed budgets well. Moving to a Unitary Authority meant it was possible to manage budgets in a way, other Local Authorities have been unable to do. (3TP)
 - Gone are the days where Neighbourhood Budget was for niceties – it is funding core services that should be offered by the local authority. (CLS)
 - A common thread in the number of high-profile failures in other LA's was the absence of a strong corporate governance to say no. The role of the finance lead is to say no and to be listened to by the members using the motivation that the council is using other people's money. (Weardale)
- **Use of reserves:**
 - Is DCC at risk of the government taking from its reserves (Weardale)

- Council reserves have been used extensively in the last 3 years and this is a concern. It is a very difficult exercise/balance to make savings how is this achieved? (Mid Durham)
- **Borrowing:**
 - Regarding borrowing - what plans are in place to repay debt? (Weardale)
 - Do we usually borrow from Public Loans Board? (Weardale)
- **DCC approach to funding:**
 - DCC should consider Hallam University study who made a saving of £56m annually through provision of the right leisure services that could house services, centring things around activity. Overall DCC should have fairness in allocating services based on population of areas and need. (CLS)
 - Also, questions asked to clarify DCC approach to funding re: funding split for capital and revenue budget. (Spennymoor)
 - Some elements have been lost due to the end of funding e.g. European Social Fund. Academisation has had a big effect economically. Alternative provision costs a lot, but better facilities are needed. It is about trying to prioritise things which will make the longer-term difference. (East Durham)

Importance and approach to this consultation:

Various comments were made in respect of the consultation process/information itself covering:

- Getting this consultation out to communities in hard copy is key as some of these groups and individuals don't have access to the internet. (CLS)
- People are disillusioned as we are feeding back, and it is not being picked up. (CLS)
- Those who make the decisions, never known consultation to change a decision. (CLS)
- There is a fundamental lack of understanding by residents as to how councils are run and what their statutory obligations are. Suggestion to look corporately at making this easier for the public to understand and appreciate what the Council spends its money on and how difficult the decisions are that need to be made. (Weardale)
- All the proposed front line service areas need a better breakdown for future budget consultations. By doing this, particular service areas could be highlighted for a saving over others in the same service area, as it is

difficult to choose three overarching service areas for potential cuts/savings. Services could also be explained/broken down more. (Stanley)

- Will further consultation be undertaken with communities. It is important to get out to into the community on this. There are a lot of community partners who could help with this. (East Durham)

ANNEX 5

Additional feedback

Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the County Council's budget proposals for 2025/26. County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service recognises the particularly difficult financial position the County Council faces and is broadly supportive of the approach the Council is taking towards making future savings. The Service is however mindful of the impact that further reductions in the Council's budget and spending could have on the incidence of fire and the number fire fatalities in the County.

Recently the Service has seen a significant increase in the number fire deaths which has been linked to individuals with health and dementia issues. To help to address this issue, the Service proactively targets vulnerable people through our approach to home fire safety visits and more integrated working with partner agencies. We firmly believe that by working together to provide more joined up services we can reduce demand and deliver improved outcomes to those individuals most at risk of death or injury as a result of fire.

More integrated working is a key priority for the Service therefore we would welcome the opportunity to work with the Council to minimise the impact which further budget reductions may have on vulnerable adults living in the County.

Winston Parish Council:

We acknowledge the huge challenges faced by Durham County Council in being able to secure such significant levels of savings from 2025-29 and would like to provide the following constructive feedback to the current consultation.

Firstly, we strongly support the County Council in lobbying the government to reform how local authorities are funded, and to develop a fair formula that reflects the diversity of local authorities in terms of their community dynamics, rurality and levels of deprivation. If local authorities are to be effective in delivering front line services, they require certainty of funding over a 3–5-year period.

Secondly, we are aware that some of the increasing costs to local authorities have been subject to review under the previous Conservative leadership. One such example is the SEND review and resulted in the development of an action plan which encompassed how spiralling costs and demand for provision would be addressed. This review does not appear to be a priority and therefore costs to local authorities will continue to increase and contribute further to unmanageable expenditure.

We would urge Durham County Council to lobby government for an update on the status of key reviews and timescales for implementation e.g. SEND, Home to School Transport

Consultation Questions

1. Proposed Savings Identified for 25/6 and subject to consultation last year which include:

- Savings from back office and making efficiencies
- Raising additional income and considering third party contributions
- Changes to delivering front line services

We agree with this approach but are concerned that changes to front line services eg using more technology may disadvantage certain sectors of the community if they have limited or no access to IT or lack confidence in its use. It is essential that members of the community can have the option of direct communication with a person as required. We would urge the Council to consider alternative approaches to maintaining face to face services where appropriate e.g. the use of trained volunteers from communities.

Similarly, the use of direct payments is currently available for those that wish to manage their own levels of care within the Learning Disability Service and therefore it is unclear how this is expected to produce further efficiencies.

2. Further Savings

We would urge the Council to work with community representatives to identify options for community led delivery of services in specific areas such as:

- Culture e.g. libraries and theatres
- Street cleaning and grounds maintenance
- Leisure and Wellbeing

We have identified these 3 priorities as an opportunity for transformation and not reduction of services. We are aware that North Yorkshire Council has adopted a similar approach with some libraries being led and managed by volunteers and this may be worth further exploration.

3. Council Tax

It is with reluctance that we agree to the 2.99% increase to the Council Tax for 2025/26 only. We are aware that Councils can currently request a higher percentage increase, but this is subject to referendum and national government approval. Therefore, we would require further understanding of the parameters made by the Council to autonomously raise amounts above this level, if the Government agreed.

4. Further Comments

Areas for additional savings

A) Parish Councils have a key role to play in their communities and there is further potential to explore the possibility of further services being devolved to Parish Councils to ensure they remain community focussed and responsive to local need. We would be interested in jointly exploring a revised role for Parish Councils with broader responsibilities for devolved local services. It would also be the ideal opportunity to consider the revision of the funding formula for Parish Councils into the future.

B) Review funding arrangements from the Council for the annual Appleby Fair

Kind regards,
Winston Parish Council

Northeast Chamber of Commerce – Response to budget consultation 2025-26 and Medium-Term Financial Plan 2026-2029:

The North East Chamber of Commerce represents over 2,000 businesses, employing 40% of the region's workforce. By supporting, connecting and representing our members we ensure businesses and other employers are at the heart of building a thriving economy, continuing to make the North East the best place to live and work. The Chamber has launched [Stronger, fairer North East](#), our new plan for driving more inclusive economic growth: our comments reflect the tenets of that plan and our conversations with our members across your county.

We recognise that there are a challenging set of financial circumstances, with inflationary pressures persisting and the cost-of-living crisis continuing to affect a significant proportion of households across the North East. Members have frequently highlighted the importance of strong public services as a central component of a healthy North East economy and it is positive to see the council prioritizing essential services making County Durham a place where everyone thrives.

We understand the significant cost and pressures around adult and children's social care with 47% of the budget being spent on social care and this has led to a proposed increase in council tax.

Our Durham based members at our recent area meeting all highlighted recruitment as one of the key challenges facing their business and preventing growth. Housing was also highlighted as a key issue with the need to retrofit old housing stock and ensure new stock is meeting net-zero standards.

In terms of potential future savings outlined in the consultation we would like to highlight the importance of planning services and economic development services to creating local growth in the area. These are both essential for our members and help to improve our local economy.

Overall, we are broadly supportive of the approach being taken to deliver a balanced budget for 2024-25 whilst maintaining a commitment to deliver a high level of basic services.

As a Chamber we will continue to work in partnership to secure the best possible conditions for businesses and employers in County Durham and the wider North East.

Yours sincerely,
North East Chamber of Commerce

Pioneering Care Partnership:

Like all public sector bodies DCC will have some difficult decisions to make over the next few years. However, in times like this I would urge DCC to see the future as an opportunity to think and do things differently.

Pioneering Care Partnership is a large charity based in County Durham working in the health and social care sector across the northeast, I'd urge you to explore how to avoid duplication of services, how DCC uses the 'Durham Pound' to support key services being delivered by the VCSE and how we can maintain services in the community via a different delivery model. For example, we have successfully operated the Pioneering Care Centre (a community health hub) for over 20 years, how could you use our experience to operate similar facilities within County Durham. Like all VCSE organisations we couldn't take on the liability of huge staff costs, but we can look at alternative partnerships to deliver a community service that is better value for money and supports the VCSE sector. Also, with regard Sports Centres and Leisure Service, could these be contracted out to a third party to operate?

I hope that the consultation process goes well, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Best wishes

CDP – member response

Good Afternoon

Many thanks for the reminder - my principal comment is that you should definitely increase Council Tax for 2025/26 by the maximum of 2.99%, and indeed if you were given more flexibility from central government, you should consider raising

council Tax beyond the current allowed maximum amount. Why do I say this? Because those that are not able to pay their full share of Council Tax are already able to have the exemptions that the Council allows; we all need to pay for services for those that are more vulnerable than ourselves - this is a given for any democratic society, and it is a tax that the Council can receive quickly and doesn't require any changes to the present system for collecting the tax.

I note your consultation dates for AAPs to have the public attend their meetings - I should think views will become clearer at future County Durham Partnership Meetings and of course through the public consultations -, it is a most difficult task and you are to be commended for the trouble you have taken with your public consultations and your desire to get as many points of views on this most difficult of decision-making.

Durham University:

Thank you. I have made enquiries in the University, and they feel it is not appropriate for the University to offer comment on this.

With best wishes,
Durham University, UK.

North Lodge Parish Council:

Good afternoon,

This Parish Council is deeply concerned at the proposed budget cuts and the proposed increases in Council Tax combined with the prospect of lower service standards.

Kind Regards,
North Lodge Parish Council

Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust:

Thank you for seeking comments on the council's financial budget through the ongoing consultation. I respond on the Trust's behalf.

As a close and valued partner, we would want firstly to assure you that we have some appreciation of the very difficult operational and strategic decisions facing council executive and member colleagues, many of which must feel like 'least-worst' scenario planning. We send our support as you navigate inevitably difficult decision-making.

We also wanted to relay our practical support for all our local authority partners, and to assure that we have lobbied, and will continue to lobby, via our wider Executive and Finance Director networks. This includes representations into

national NHS England and NHS longer term plan mechanisms, and through our representative bodies, for a review of the funding of local authorities, including:

- national review of the funding of social care and related pressures,
- fair funding review of authorities, the most financially disadvantaged of which have some of the greatest health inequalities, and
- impacts of the two former issues on public health grant funded expenditures.

We hope that the new government's focus on a 'health' rather than 'NHS' plan, will afford opportunities for more aligned Health and Social Care policy nationally that will serve as enablers regionally. We have responded briefly to each of the questions posed:

- the approach we are continuing to use to find savings as shown in next year's proposal totalling £3.2 million for 2025/26

We recognise the challenging current, and decade and longer, impacts from successive governments' failure to address social care funding nationally, or the fair funding of individual local authorities, most notably in some of our most deprived and needy communities.

We support the council's approach of aiming to optimise back office and income generating approaches that seek, where possible, to preserve frontline services.

We would be concerned about proposals that reduce support to children and young people (whose early years play such a significant part in their prospect of living long and healthy lives) and for whom coinciding adverse childhood experiences are a clear indicator of future and serious mental illness.

We would have concerns should new proposals be considered that reduce public health (grant) funded provision, including for substance misuse services and with voluntary sector agencies, given the obvious economic case for this (whilst understanding the obvious and significant tension of wider council budget pressures) and longer-term health impacts.

We would especially want to better understand any (new) proposals, including for social care provision, which had potential to adversely impact the discharge of adults or older adults from a mental health or learning disability hospital admission once ready for discharge, and work with colleagues to mitigate risk. The Trust has, in aggregate, faced significant challenges across the range of local authority partners with which we collaborate, with average beds occupied having risen from c 2-3 to in excess of 40 beds at any point in time (across both Integrated Care Systems and all authorities).

We would ask that the council's helpful engagement with partner organisations continues, including to impact assess any new proposals well ahead of a formal budget consultation process.

- our proposal to increase Council Tax for 2025/26 by the maximum of 2.99% We understand that budget pressures, including for SEND, have led to very difficult proposals for council tax and citizens. It seems inevitable that, in the absence of any national review of their funding, many local authorities will need to adopt similar policies to mitigate the widening gap between demand and inflationary pressures and revenue that is achievable from business rates and council tax in our communities. Other than proposing further, and even more challenging, expenditure reductions it is difficult for us to propose an alternative approach.

- whether, if we were given more flexibility from central government, we should consider raising Council Tax beyond the current allowed maximum amount. Other than proposing further, and even more challenging, expenditure reductions it is difficult for us to propose an alternative approach. We appreciate that the Council has continued to apply the original Council Tax Reduction Scheme, seeking to minimise the impact of an increasing Council Tax burden on some of our most financially precarious families, and would hope that this remains. We continue to lobby for fairer funding of our local authorities, especially in respect of the rising disparity between the poorest and most affluent areas of England – the latter being less reliant on grant funding and better able to generate council tax revenues. We understand the inequitable pressure this imposes on the council's financial outlook.

- what other services we should continue to prioritise for savings, to cover the remaining gap for next year (to meet the overall £21.7 million total for 2025/26), and longer term, to achieve the remaining £64.1 million in savings needed over the next four years. We would welcome approaches that target back office, digital/automation, site rationalisation (including through collaboration with the Trust) and income generation, however we appreciate that the prospect of delivering the stretching £64.1m target from those areas is limited. We would request that partner organisations are engaged in impact assessing proposals well ahead of formal budget consultations. We will continue to lobby nationally, through our representative bodies, national consultation, and networks, for a fairer deal for local authorities as we understand the impacts on our communities of the combined health and social care offer.

We support the council's overall approach to seek, where possible, to preserve frontline services. Our responses noted above apply equally here:

We would be concerned about proposals to reduce support to children and young people (whose early years play such a significant part in their prospect of living long and healthy lives) and for whom adverse childhood experiences are a clear indicator of future and serious mental illness.

We would have concerns should new proposals be considered that reduce public health (grant) funded provision given the obvious economic case for this (whilst understanding the obvious and significant tension of wider council budget pressures) and longer-term health impacts.

We would especially want to better understand any (new) proposals, including for social care provision, which had potential to adversely impact the discharge of adults or older adults from a mental health or learning disability hospital admission once ready for discharge, and work with colleagues to mitigate risk.

We would ask that the council's helpful engagement with partner organisations continues, including to impact assess any new proposals well ahead of a formal budget consultation process. We sincerely hope that this week's budget and additional funding for social care and SEND will mitigate at least some of the near-term spending pressures but understand that this is dwarfed by the huge challenge outlined in the budget consultation document.

We look forward to continuing to work with you as we, each separately, and jointly through our system collaboration, seek to optimise our shared resources and to mitigate otherwise worse consequences for our populations.

Yours sincerely,
Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust

Resident email

Acknowledged but not included in the appendix.

ANNEX Durham Youth Council Report



Budget Consultation Report October 2024
Consultation led by Durham Youth Council Durham Youth Council
Tel- 03000 262719 Stanley Education Centre Stanley DH9 0HQ
www.durham.gov.uk/youthvoice youthvoice@durham.gov.uk

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Disclaimer: percentages have been rounded to one decimal place for easy of understanding, this does not mean that they have been altered in any way and a results table is given at the bottom of each question that is multiple choice which can be referred to for total accuracy.

Background

Durham Youth Council: Durham Youth Council are a group of Young People aging from 11-19 based across County Durham.

The Youth Council are supported by our Participation and Engagement Officer within the Education Department of Durham County Council. Its purpose is to give Children and Young People a 'collective voice' that is listened to and acted upon by the important decision makers. We want Young People to be more involved in making decisions about issues and services that affect Young People and we want to support Young People in making positive changes. Youth Council members come from a range of different schools, colleges and youth provisions.

Our Young People come from a range of different areas and backgrounds, and we pride ourselves on being a diverse, accepting group. Our Council Members are expected to develop different ways of gathering the voices of Young People across the County, exploring the things that matter to them. They're responsible for helping develop new projects, events or campaigns to gather opinions, raise awareness and support with key issues impacting on Children and Young People.

The Youth Council also support the elected members of the Youth Parliament to campaign on issues affecting Young People both locally and nationally. The Youth Council are also given the opportunity to work with other organisations to explore what's available for Young People to access and how these services could be made better and best work for Young People.

Overview: Durham Youth Council met with representatives from Durham's Consultation team, and Finance Team, in October to discuss Durham's budgets and forecasts, as part of a County wide public consultation to gather opinions of where money can be saved.

Process Purpose and aims of the consultation were discussed with Libby Ward and Joanne McMahon. The Youth Council were given their task to be carried out internally. The consultation was carried out over the period of two weeks, starting from 16th October and a discussion was had between Youth Councillors to produce this document.

Durham Youth Council were asked to look at a list of 16 front line services that could potentially have their budget cuts, or ways of delivering programs changed, to find the savings Durham County Council needs to balance their budget.

This was following a session with representatives from consultation and finance who explain to the youth council what the Durham County Council budget was, what the forecasts were, where income came from, where money had already been saved and what cuts had already been made and what the budget is spent on. The Youth Council had the opportunity to discuss these things with the representatives and ask any questions before being told about the 16 areas.

The Youth Council were then asked to take some time looking at the 16 areas and the types of things those areas cover to determine what areas would areas could be appropriate to make savings or changes in. The Youth Council members discussed it and decided to poll the list and select 3 areas that they believed should be prioritised.

The 16 areas were:

- 1.** Community safety and protection – environmental health, trading standards, taxis and events, neighbourhood wardens, emergency planning, road safety and school crossing patrol services.
- 2.** Council tax, benefits, and other processing – processing of House Benefit, Council Tax Benefit and other Council Tax and Business Rates account changes etc.
- 3.** Culture – council owned museums and theatres, libraries, and support to cultural events.
- 4.** Customer access and customer services – customer access points, call handling and contact arrangements to report issues or access services.
- 5.** Economic development – support for businesses, projects, and support services to improve the county's economy, creating jobs and wealth.
- 6.** Environment and climate change – reduction of carbon emissions for the council, residents, and business to tackle pollution and nature conservation.
- 7.** Housing services – homelessness, home adaptations for vulnerable people and housing advice.
- 8.** Leisure and wellbeing – leisure centres, parks, lay areas, playing pitches and allotments and associated activity programmes.
- 9.** Local community projects – support for community development including AAP and the voluntary sector.

10. Local council tax support – provided working age people. We could cut current levels of support in future years.
11. Planning services – provision of planning and building control services.
12. Preventative services – community-based Early intervention support for people with their mental and physical wellbeing to maintain their quality of life and live independently, this helping to reduce future statutory social care spending.
13. Roads and transport – road and footpath maintenance, pothole repair, gully cleaning, street lighting, winter maintenance, parking services, subsidised transport e.g. bus routes and bus passes.
14. Street cleaning and grounds maintenance – including parks, cemeteries and open spaces, litter picking, fly tipping, dog fouling, grass cutting, flower beds and trees.
15. Waste collections, disposal, and recycling – household and business bin collections and recycling centres.
16. Welfare assistance and advice – advice and financial support provided to vulnerable people to help address poverty especially during the cost-of-living crisis.

Of the 16 areas, the youth councillors agreed the following 3 needed to be considered priority areas when looking for savings.

Council Tax and Benefits – the youth council discussed this at length, and decided that in some cases, people need to take more responsibility in keeping County Durham ‘afloat.’ The Council provide lots of things for families, including Early Help, Leisure Centres, Libraries and supporting young people with things like transport, accessing education and services, and all of this is done at either no cost, or subsidised cost for children, families and young people. The youth council recognises how much money goes into supporting these causes and we take them for granted, more money should be saved/raised by increasing council tax and reviewing benefits.

Welfare Assistance and Advice – young people feel that more could be done to combine support and utilising other organisations and services that do similar things. Some schools offer support in the form of parent liaison officers, local community centres offer support with similar things. It is possible that a directory of others providing similar advice and support should be created and vulnerable people could be sign posted to more local support. Those areas without local support would then be a priority for the remaining DCC service.

Local Council Tax support – for similar reasons youth council voted council tax and benefits, there is room to cut or cap support and reduce the support available, this induces responsibility in people and makes people more independent and more wary of their incomes and outcomes.

Last year, Durham focused on the top 3 priorities they felt should not be considered for cuts, or should be protected to an extent, we've done the same this year and identified 3 out of the 16 we feel should be prioritised last for cuts and caps.

Waste collections, disposal, and recycling – Durham Youth Council supports Durham County Council's Single Use Plastic Pledge and has done a lot of work around waste collection, recycling and disposal already. There was a discussion about whether we should focus on Environment and Climate change, or Waste collections and recycling and it was determined that this is a bigger issue in County Durham.

Many organisations are focusing on climate change, but people in Durham aren't great at household waste. Young people are worried about the frequency that bins are emptied, the unclarity of what can and can't be recycled, the difficulty of recycling items that can't be put in household bins and need to be taken elsewhere (which a lot of people, adults included, just can't do). The time between bins being emptied means that some general waste bins are left 2 whole weeks between emptying, causing the bins, especially in bigger families, to overflow, attracting rats and other wildlife, which can lead to injury and illness and, high levels of animal abuse and cruelty. Our current waste collection, disposal and recycling offer isn't good enough, cutting budgets and reducing services is just not an option. We need to do better.

Local community projects – the projects our local communities run are important to young people, what's left of our youth service, relies on grant money and support from the council, charities and AAPs, without that money they would struggle to maintain anything close to what is needed. Services are already at the threat of losing support from Councillors and AAPs with the looming restructure of area partnerships. These projects also tend to focus on local needs, and so, a one size fits all approach does not work across different areas, which is why the money used to support them is so important.

Many young people access these projects for support, somewhere safe to go, to learn and be provided with opportunities they won't get anywhere else. These services need more support, not less and if they are cut any more, young people will suffer and in turn, more communities will suffer, anti-social behaviour is already high, it will get higher and it will be harder to resolve the problem.

Culture - the youth council agreed is important to young people, and being able to access things like the theatre, libraires and museums is very important to the development of young people. Just recently, we took some young people to see a production of Othello with a partner organisation called Elysium, it was incredible, but some of us were shocked and saddened to hear that for 4 of the 13 young people that attended, this was their first time in a theatre.

Discussions following this highlight that few young people actually access the current things DCC have to offer, the theatres don't show many young people friendly productions, so they tend to visit larger venues like The Royal Theatre. Libraries are open at inconvenient timings so young people are unable to attend and they don't offer young people friendly events or activities and young people don't think the museums are used as much as they could be. Where talking about cuts and caps, because of the lack of young people accessing these venues anyway, introducing subsidised costs or fees, or shortening opening hours will not impact on young people as much as we initially thought, however, in order to have more people using these venues, and utilising what is on offer, it's suggested that the opening times etc. are reviewed.

Conclusion

All the potential areas for development or budget reviews are important, and in some ways, all impact on young people and their families. We could talk at length about all 16 points, but too much time is spent discussing and not enough time is spent taking action. The young people at Durham Youth Council understand that difficult decisions need to be made, but we also know that they impact on young people, and the futures of children need to be considered. In summary, Council Tax and Benefits, Welfare Assistance and Advice, and Local Council Tax support should be prioritised to make savings. Waste collections, disposal, and recycling, Local community projects, and Culture should be looked at last when considering tightening budgets, increasing pricing and closing venues.