

Northampton Borough Council

Facing the challenge

Draft Budget Proposals for Northampton 2012/13

Consultation Results

Report author:

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report contains the results to the Draft Budget 2012/13 Consultation which took place between 22 December 2011 and 31 January 2012.

Key results

- 2/3 of respondents disagree with the proposed reduction in funding to the Police towards PCSOs;
- half agree with the proposed review of CCTV operations;
- just over half disagree with the introduction of a Councillor Empowerment Fund and over 2/3 disagree with the amount;
- around half of respondents agree with the Waterside Enterprise Zone additional costs;
- around half of respondents agree with the rat control hardship fund;
- over 2/3 agree with standardisation of car park charges;
- about half agree with continuing to improve the condition of the Council's housing stock to bring it to a recognised standard;
- nearly 3/5 agree with the council tax freeze and
- 9/10 agree with the reduction in management structure to protect front line services.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 Cabinet approved the draft budget proposals for 2012/13 and the forecast budgets for 2013/14 and 2014/15 for the General Fund Revenue Budgets, the Housing Revenue Account, the Capital Programme and the Capital Strategy for consultation on 21 December 2011.
- 2.2 The consultation process covering all these areas was carried out from 22 December 2011 until 31 January 2012. The aim of this consultation was to find out people's views on the draft budget proposals presented.
- 2.3 Completed questionnaires were accepted up to 31 January 2012.
- 2.5 The consultation period will formally close on the date the budget is approved in February 2012.
- 2.6 This consultation followed the principles set out in the Council's Consultation Toolkit and industry standard guidance on best practice in consultation.
- 2.7 The results of the consultation are contained in this report. They will be used to by the Council as part of the process of setting a balanced budget (including a capital programme).

3 METHODOLOGY

- 3.1 Residents, businesses, and other stakeholders were invited to provide feedback on the proposals for the draft budget during the consultation period and support was made available to maximise involvement and understanding of the proposals.
- 3.2 People were able to engage in a range of methods:
- Question Time Event -Open public meeting held at the Guildhall on 26 January 2012;
 - Council's budget proposals debated at Community Forums (Diverse Community Forum, LGB People's Forum, Pensioners and Disabled People's Forums);
 - On-line survey;
 - Questionnaires made available in public locations ;
 - The consultation proposals and questionnaire were available to download and complete on-line via the Council's website. An e-mail address, freepost address and consultation phone line were set up to receive comments/views etc.
 - Staff via [intranet](#);
 - Invitation for Residents Panel to participate;
 - Invitation to the business community via the Chamber of Commerce, their network and the Federation of Small Businesses;
 - Invitation to members of the Sounding Board (tenants);
 - Engagement with the voluntary and community sector via their various networks ;
 - Engagement with our key stakeholder and partners ;
 - Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 23 January 2012.
- 3.3 The consultation was advertised widely through the media including, mail shots, press releases and radio interviews to raise awareness.
- 3.4 Interim weekly consultation reports containing full details, including potential impacts and alternative proposals, were circulated to Senior Management and portfolio holders to maximise awareness and action in relation to issues and concerns arising during the consultation.

4 RESULTS

- 4.1 A total of 272 responses were received as at 31 January 2012. A further 1 was received after the closing date. (In 2011 we received 149 questionnaires for this phase).
- 4.2 Full consultation results can be provided upon request or viewed at http://www.surveymonkey.com/sr.aspx?sm=rqgX_2faNeMJdg_2b4lNHS2gOfGrFpSzGmjBEQm_2fJ4DVS28_3d

- 4.3 The profile of respondents by gender, age and ethnicity, available at Appendix 1, is representative of the wider community profile. This can be seen as an indicator of a fair survey.
- 4.4 It should be noted that additional activity relating to the budget was undertaken independently of this consultation during the period of consultation including local press, public meetings, forums, etc and that the views expressed during such events are not included in this report.

5 Draft Budget Proposals

5.1 Findings on Facing the challenge-Results and Analysis

- 5.2 Below are the questions asked, the response achieved and a summary of the key points arising;

Reduction of £100,000 funding of Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs)		Percent	Count	
Agree		26.70%	72	
Disagree		71.10%	192	
Don't know		2.20%	6	
Review of CCTV operations				
Agree		53.20%	140	
Disagree		33.80%	89	
Don't know		12.90%	34	
Introduction of a Councillor Empowerment Fund	Agree	Disagree	Don't know	Count
Do you agree with the Council's proposal?	42.4% (106)	50.0% (125)	7.6% (19)	250
Do you agree with the amount?	26.2% (60)	62.4% (143)	11.4% (26)	229
Enterprise Zone Additional Costs		Percent	Count	
Agree		53.50%	139	
Disagree		26.20%	68	
Don't know		20.40%	53	
Rat control- Creation of a hardship fund of around £40,000 to assist people with the costs of rat control		Percent	Count	
Agree		52.30%	135	
Disagree		35.30%	91	
Don't know		12.40%	32	
Standardisation of car park charges across the town		Percent	Count	
Agree		72.90%	191	
Disagree		14.50%	38	
Don't know		12.60%	33	
The Council is continuing to improve the condition of its housing stock to bring it up to a recognised standard		Percent	Count	
Agree		55.30%	145	
Disagree		31.30%	82	
Don't know		13.40%	35	
Council Tax Freeze		Percent	Count	
Agree		61.30%	160	
Disagree		23.80%	62	
Don't know		14.90%	39	
Reducing management to protect front line services		Percent	Count	
Agree		85.40%	223	
Disagree		5.70%	15	
Don't know		8.80%	23	

Table 1- Budget Consultation Summary Results

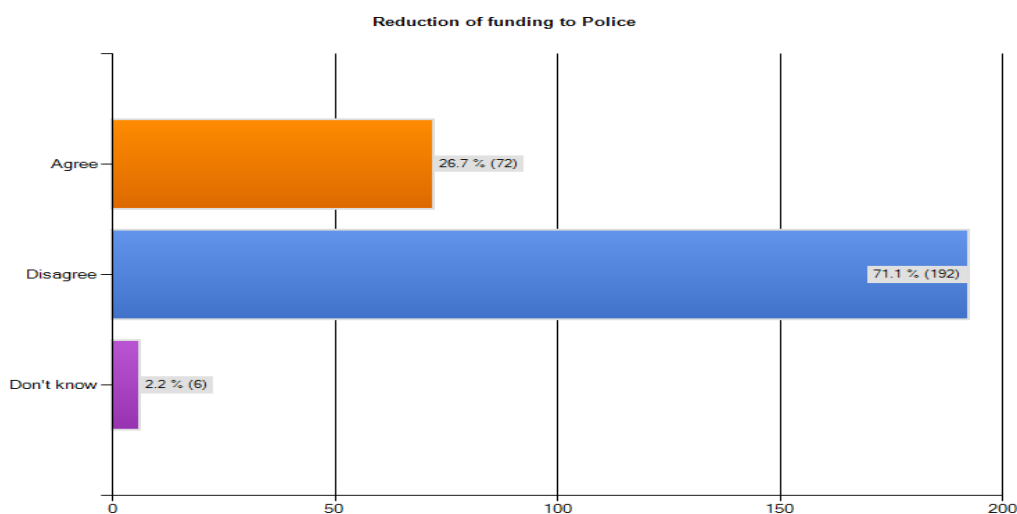
5.3 Consultation Questions

Q1. Reduction of £100,000 funding to the Police towards Police

Community Support Officers (PCSOs). Northampton Borough Council has previously given Northamptonshire Police funding of £100,000 per year for the provision of PCSOs in Northampton. Every other authority in Northamptonshire has already cut funding for PCSOs and Northamptonshire County Council is also proposing to do so. Northampton Borough Council strongly supports the work of PCSOs but in its current financial position, cannot continue this financial contribution. The Borough Council has neighbourhood coordinators, who work on community safety issues in partnership with other agencies. They will continue to do that, with a new emphasis and focus. Some of the impact of a reduction in PCSOs will be offset by the work of the re-launched neighbourhood wardens and the newly established park rangers. Both of these roles provide a lower cost and more flexible resource to address local issues in the town. Northampton Borough Council proposes to remove the funding for PCSOs. **Do you agree with the Council's proposal?**

Agree 26.7% (72)

Disagree 71.1% (192)



Number of additional free-form comments received: 163

Key points raised:

- People feel the presence of PCSOs make communities feel safer
- Concerns that crime rates may increase
- Neighbourhood wardens and park rangers do not have the same authority and powers as PCSOs

Some of the comments received included:

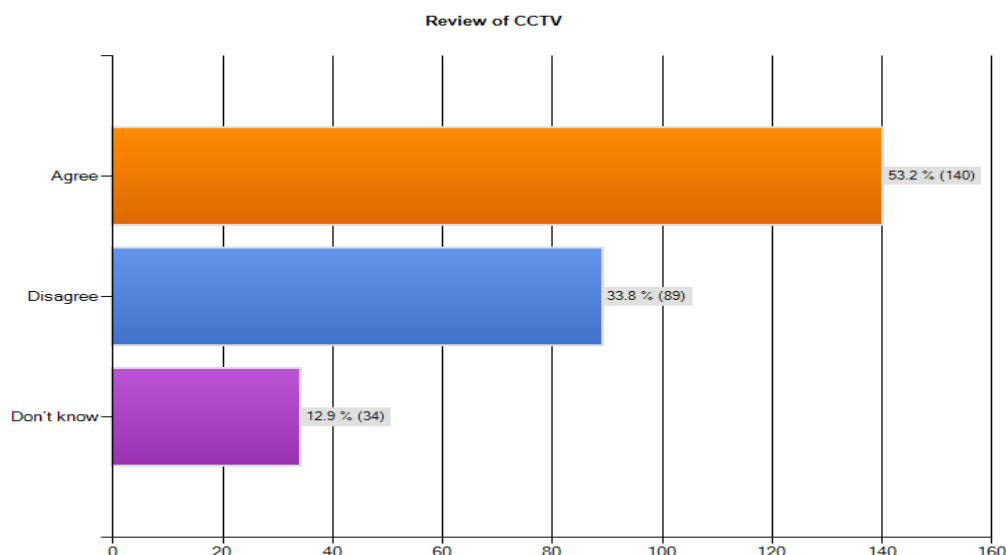
“PCSOs do a great job around the areas and it is folly to remove funding, surely the NBC,NCC & the police authority can come to an agreeable resolution”

“I hope that Northants Police will continue to resource the PCSOs where required. I also hope that Neighbourhood Wardens will be given more powers to assist prosecution of residents who act antisocially”

Q2. Review of CCTV operations. The Council is proposing to review how it could make savings by working smarter in how we use CCTV. We have identified times where the number of operators could be reduced due to low levels of activity. We have over 500 cameras at the moment and it is impossible to actively monitor them all, even when an operator isn't directly monitoring a camera it is recording footage that can be reviewed by Northamptonshire Police at a later date. Budget saving if approved: £39,000 in 2012/13 and £68,600 in future years. Year 1 impact of this proposal is minimal and entails a reduction in evening shift coverage from 2 people to 1 on Sun, Mon, Tue & Wed nights. The possibility of external funding for cameras will be explored during 12/13 which if available would enable more cameras to remain on. **Do you agree with the Council's proposal?**

Agree 53.2% (140)

Disagree 33.8% (89)



Number of additional free-form comments received: 87

Key points raised:

- Concerns that criminal activity will increase and/or be undetected
- Concerns that feelings of safety may be jeopardised

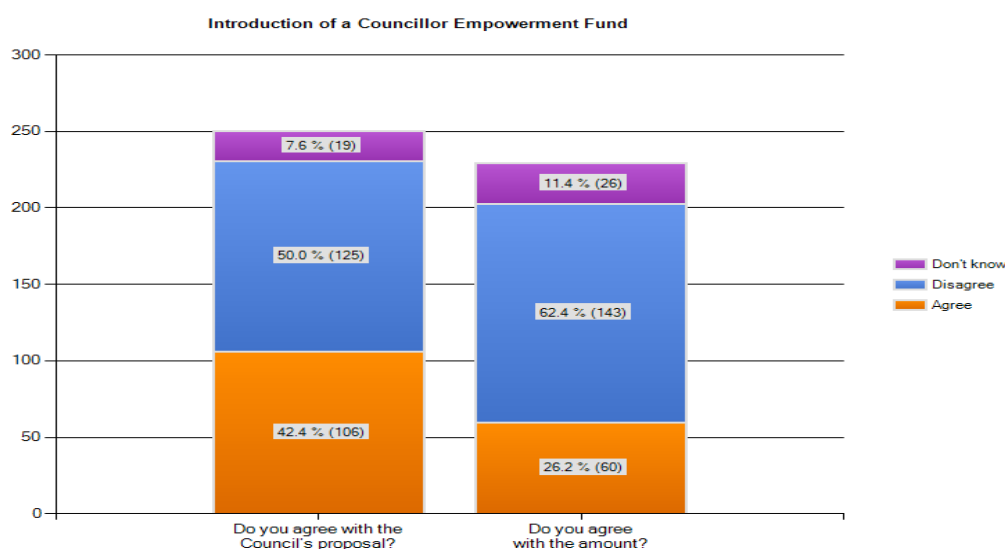
Some of the comments received included:

“Makes sense to concentrate on cameras that catch criminals rather than those that don’t”

“CCTV is an invaluable resource in the county’s fight against crime and disorder”

Q3. Introduction of a Councillor Empowerment Fund. It is proposed to create a Councillor Empowerment Fund to give each councillor £3,000 per year to spend on community projects in their ward. This would support the councillor’s role of community leadership and allow them to invest in innovative and creative schemes for the benefit of their community and allow small scale initiatives that directly benefit local neighbourhoods to go ahead when they might otherwise struggle for funding. **Do you agree with the Council’s proposals and amount?**

Agree with proposals 42.4% (106) Agree with amount 26.2% (60)
Disagree with proposals 50.0% (125) Disagree with amount 62.4% (143)



Number of additional free-form comments received: 141

Key points raised:

- Concerns about accountability and transparency
- Concerns that sum would not make significant impact
- Concerns that funding will be at the expense of other valuable services

Some of the comments received included:

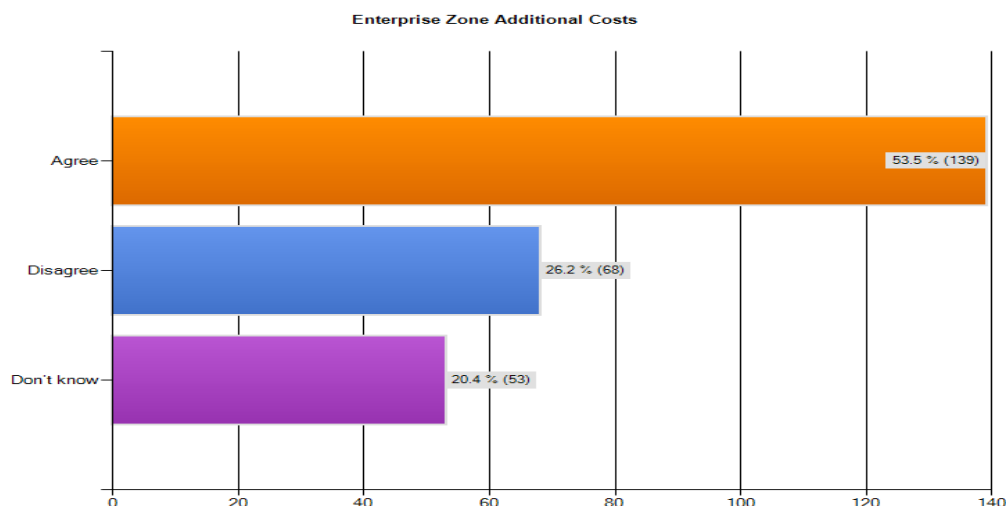
“This would be beneficial for the local community projects.”

“Amount is far too small to make any significance to the council ward.”

Q4. Enterprise Zone Additional Costs. This option relates to funding of £430,000 next year to support the delivery of the Northampton Waterside Enterprise Zone. Northampton Borough Council successfully mounted a bid, as part of the South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership (SEMLEP) for national status as an Enterprise Zone for Northampton Waterside. Enterprise Zone status was granted in August 2011 and the Borough Council is now planning, along with partners, how the Zone can be created. It is vital to invest the right skills and resources in getting the Enterprise Zone off the ground so that we attract good quality businesses to invest in Northampton and bring with them jobs and other opportunities. The funding for this investment would come initially from the New Homes Bonus reserve, reward funding from Government for delivering housing growth - the funding is to help authorities develop the local economy and communities in which people live and work. It is anticipated that this would eventually be repaid through additional revenue from business rates. **Do you agree with the Council's proposal?**

Agree 53.5% (139)

Disagree 26.2% (68)



Number of additional free-form comments received: 77

Key points raised:

- Concerns about expenditure in difficult financial times
- Concerns about future funding

Some of the comments received included:

"I agree in principle that new growth, improvements and making the best of the positive aspects of which there are many, of Northampton, are a very good thing. I hope that it will not prove to be at the expense of the lower paid and lower-end of the business sector"

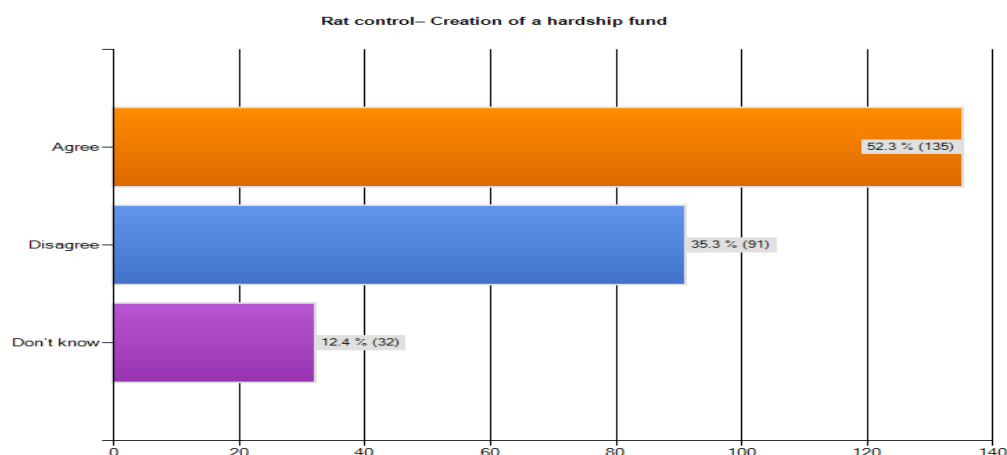
"We need to develop the town for its future progress and utilise the land and monies to our best advantage. Wasteland is a wasted opportunity."

"Crucial to kick start delivery of Enterprise Zone."

Q5. Rat control– Creation of a hardship fund of around £40,000 to assist people with the costs of rat control. Northampton Borough Council ended the pest control service from June 2009. In the last year in which the service operated, the Borough Council carried out more than 800 treatments to control rats. The Borough Council retained powers to deal with serious problems in the town and has taken enforcement action on seven occasions (giving advice or informal action on many more occasions) in the past year but has not carried pest control on behalf of individuals. If approved, the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be asked to review and develop a scheme to ensure that the funding was used as effectively as possible and meets the needs of local people. **Do you agree with the Council's proposal?**

Agree 52.3% (135)

Disagree 35.3% (91)



Number of additional free-form comments received: 80

Key points raised:

- Focus should be on prevention
- Concerns about other forms of pest infestation

Some of the comments received included:

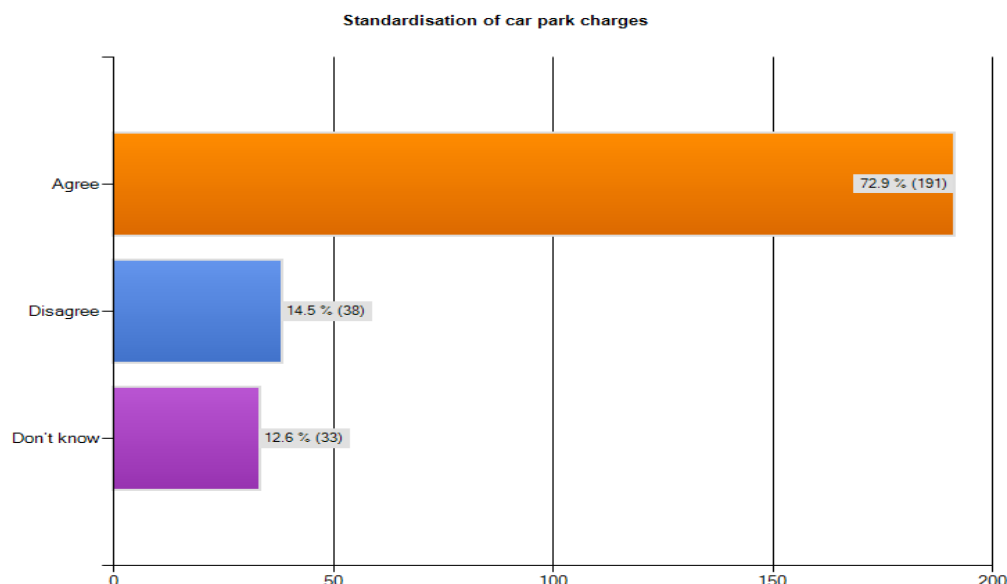
“We need to look after vulnerable residents as this is a serious problem”

“More work needs to be done on the issue of waste and rubbish, either domestic or manufacturing, especially shops and supermarkets.”

Q6. Standardisation of car park charges across the town. Northampton Borough Council car parks are currently designated as either ‘premier’ or ‘standard’. Whilst the majority of car parks are designated ‘premier’, seven car parks – Chalk Lane, Doddridge Street, Marefair, Horsemarket, Market Street, Melbourne Street & Midsummer Meadow are designated ‘standard’. Standard car parks (599 spaces) account for 11.8% per cent of the total parking 5,070 spaces in the town. They are located very close to the town centre but have the same facilities and benefits as our premier car parks, but for historic reasons they have different prices to other town centre car parks. The purpose of this proposal is to achieve greater fairness in car park charging. It is also intended to remove the incentive to park on the fringes of the town centre and to encourage people into the heart of the town to support the town’s retail offer. This proposal would bring all council car park charges into line in a bid to standardise prices, making them more straightforward and fairer for customers. It will also mean that the reduced parking charges that were introduced in October will now apply, including an hour of free parking.
Do you agree with the Council’s proposal?

Agree 72.9% (191)

Disagree 14.5% (38)



Number of additional free-form comments received: 70

Key points raised:

- Pricing strategy needs to be designed to attract shoppers

- Concern that application of standard fees may result in higher charges for some

Some of the comments received included:

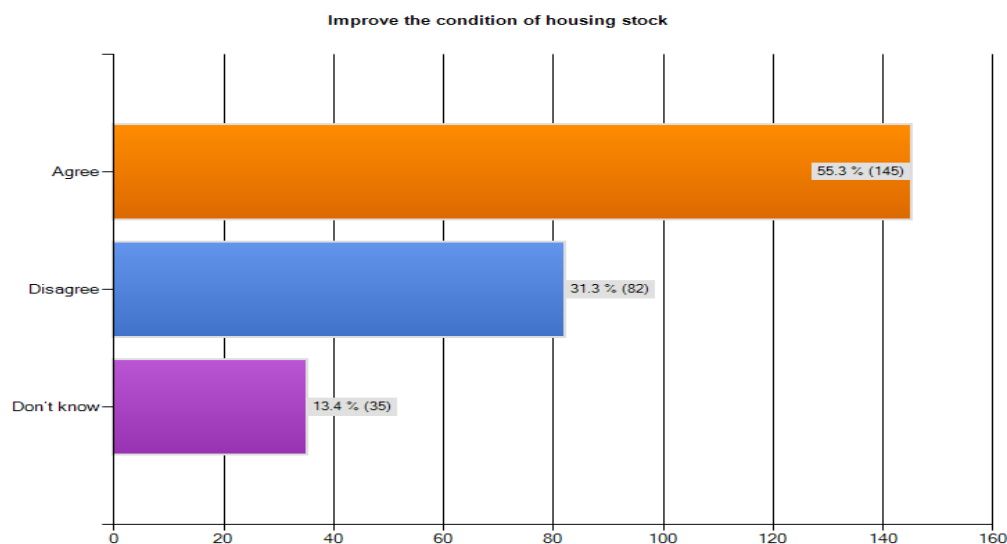
“Anything to encourage people and life back into the town should be supported”

“More thought should be given to creating a Park and Ride service to draw traffic away from the town centre”

Q7. The Council is continuing to improve the condition of its housing stock to bring it up to a recognised standard. We want to make sure all our homes meet the national standard of ‘decent’ by 2015. This means that some of our 12,500 homes would be updated with new kitchens, bathrooms and other general refurbishments. This would mean an investment of £64 million over three years in our Decent Homes programme-£10 million in 2012/13 with a further £54 million in the following 2 years, subject to confirmation of Government funding. **Do you agree with the Council’s proposal?**

Agree 55.3% (145)

Disagree 31.3% (82)



Number of additional free-form comments received: 91

Key points raised:

- Concerns that costs may be too high in the current economic climate
- Important to look after the Council’s assets but must promote individual responsibility

Some of the comments received included:

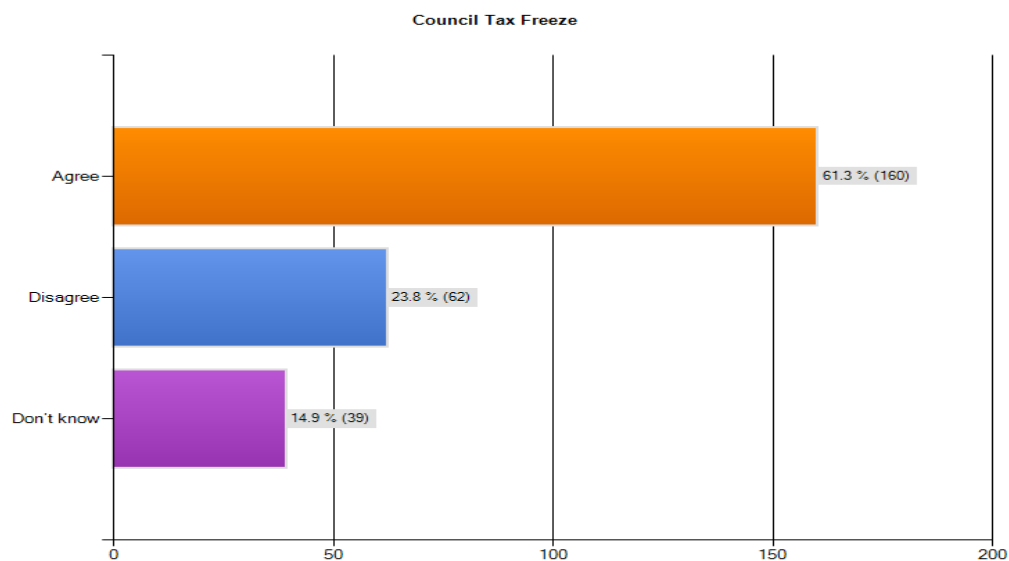
“Invest-provided Government funding is available”

“If it is mandatory, do it. If not, don’t”

Q8. Council Tax Freeze. Despite the significant financial pressures that the Council is facing, we are not proposing to increase the level of council tax. For 2012/13 the Government is offering a one off grant (equivalent to a 2.5% increase in council tax) to subsidise a council tax freeze. The £350k from this grant would not form part of the authority’s funding in subsequent years. The loss of funding in 2013/14 would have to be compensated for through additional savings or income. **Do you agree with the Council’s proposal?**

Agree 61.3% (160)

Disagree 23.8% (62)



Number of additional free-form comments received: 73

Key points raised:

- Concerns that whilst a council tax freeze will help people this year (whilst an incentive is received from the Government) no such guaranteed protection exists in the future.
- Some people would be prepared to pay more to preserve essential services

Some of the comments received included:

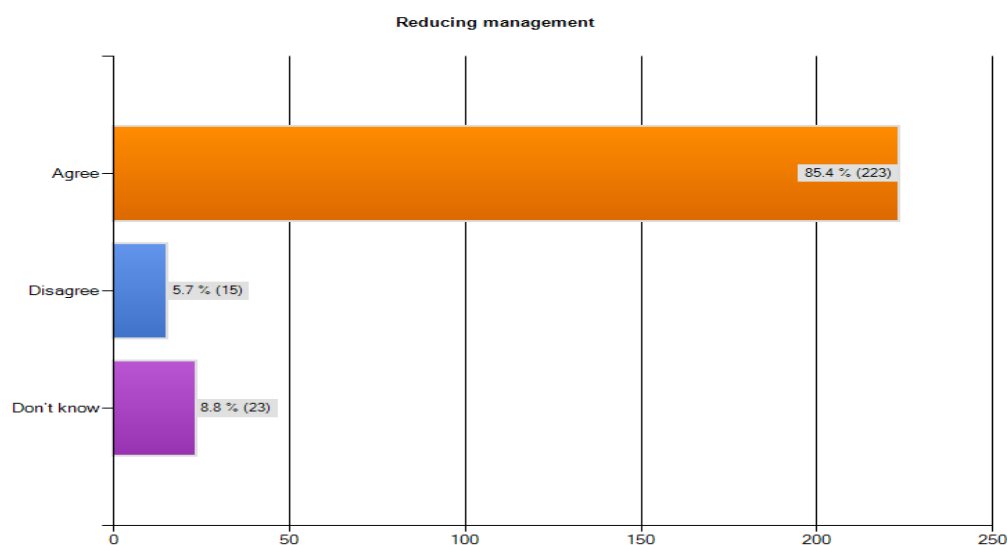
“All this delays a larger increase further down the line...”

“In the current economic climate this would benefit all council tax payers”

Q9. Reducing management to protect front line services. A review of senior management structure is currently under way to save at least £640,000 by restructuring Northampton Borough Council departments and services. We want Northampton Borough Council to be a well-run and efficient council so that council taxpayers get the best value for their money. It is proposed to restructure a number of departments to ensure that we make savings on back office costs and achieve efficiencies. We are also looking to reduce senior management posts to ensure we remain fit for purpose and can focus on funding frontline service delivery. We are constantly looking at ways to reduce the cost of our support services and will need to continue to do so for the foreseeable future. **Do you agree with the Council’s proposal?**

Agree 85.4% (223)

Disagree 5.7% (15)



Number of additional free-form comments received: 87

Key points raised:

- Concerns about the impact on the workforce
- Concern that legacy and skills will be lost or diluted

Some of the comments received included:

“...try not to get rid of experienced people. Someone has to run the place”

“Front line services should be protected at all times”

6 Additional findings

- 6.1 Respondents provided in excess of 1041 comments, including details about specific proposals, concerns about potential impacts that were considered to affect various sectors of the community and also about alternative proposals for efficiencies. These have been circulated to Senior Managers and to Cabinet members for their input and consideration.

7 How will comments received and results be used

- 7.1 Where comments relate to service specific issues that relate to the usual business of the organisation, these will be forwarded to the relevant service area.
- 7.2 Where issues raised are not our responsibility, such as street lighting, the state of the roads or about school provision, the comments received will be forwarded to the relevant organisation as appropriate.
- 7.3 In relation to the budget, the Cabinet will consider all responses alongside the need to set a balanced budget. Any changes arising from the consultation will be detailed in the Council Wide General Fund Revenue Budget 2012/13-2014/15 Report.
- 7.4 Findings have been used to inform priorities for the Council's Corporate Plan.

8 EQUALITIES

- 8.1 The Cabinet will consider the results of this consultation and of all relevant impact assessments which were developed to make an informed decision regarding the Council's budget.
- 8.2 Equality and Diversity were considered as part of the budget build process and an equality impact assessment or screening was completed as part of each option submitted.
- 8.3 Where issues have been identified and the option is approved, the detailed equality impact assessment will be used to inform the implementation of the budget option.
- 8.4 An Equality Impact Assessment for this consultation process is available as Appendix 2.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 Demographics**
- Appendix 2 Consultation Equality Impact Assessment**
- Appendix 3 Questionnaire**

Appendix 1

Demographics

Gender			
Options	Response %		Response Count
Male	59.8%		147
Female	40.2%		99
Age			
Options	Response %		Response Count
Under 16	0.4%		1
16-24	5.3%		13
25-34	20.7%		51
35-44	26.4%		65
45-54	15.4%		38
55-64	19.5%		48
65-74	9.3%		23
75 or above	2.8%		7
Ethnicity			
Main categories	Response %		Response Count
White	80.4%		197
Asian/Asian British	5.7%		14
Mixed	1.2%		3
Black/Black British	4.5%		11
Other	1.6%		4
Prefer not to say	6.5%		16
About Respondents			
Options	Yes	No	Response Count
I live in Northampton	82.1% (192)	17.9% (42)	234
I work in Northampton	69.9% (135)	30.1% (58)	193
I study in Northampton	20.9% (31)	79.1% (117)	148
I have a business in Northampton	12.3% (18)	87.7% (128)	146
I am employed by Northampton Borough Council	10.1% (15)	89.9% (133)	148
I am responding on behalf of an organisation/group	11.6% (16)	88.4% (122)	138

Organisational responses were received from:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CAN • Rectory Farm Residents Association • Semilong Community Forum • Northants Police • Duston Parish • Northampton Volunteering Centre 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stanion Parish Council • Corby Old Village and Stanion • Kilsby Parish Council • Yelvertoft Village Hall • Cottingham Parish • Somali Women
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Appendix 2

Equality and Community Impact Assessment

Facing the challenge Consultation Programme

What are we looking to achieve in this activity?

This consultation was designed using the principles established in our Consultation Toolkit to make sure that it was accessible to local people, to businesses, to partners, to the voluntary and community sectors and to any other interested parties and that all groups can participate and respond meaningfully.

How will the decision be made?

Cabinet will consider the results of this consultation and of all relevant impact assessments to help it make an informed decision regarding the Council's budget and priorities. The Council will agree its Corporate Plan and set its Budget for the forthcoming 2012/2013 in February 2012.

What information exists already to assist with making the judgments above? Has any consultation been undertaken on this or any other related issue? Are any reports or relevant documents available internally or from partners or other sources?

Screenings and Impact assessments have been carried out for all options developed.

Who is/ will be the main beneficiaries/people affected by this activity?

Everybody living, working, studying or otherwise engaged with the town or its people may be potentially affected by the choice of priorities and budget plans. This includes businesses, employees of the Council as well as, partners and contractors. Some efficiency savings will impact on staff and could lead to redundancies and changes in service provision, not the level of service received by the public. Where this is appropriate, consultation will be undertaken in accordance with council policy and all those affected will be able to have a say in the process.

Does the activity have the potential to cause adverse impact or to discriminate against different groups in the community or to make a positive contribution to equalities?

The testing challenges caused by the general economic environment, and the credit crunch in particular, are already having a significant impact on our communities and also on our budget, creating added pressure and increase demand for our services.

With limited resources, service provision will need to be reviewed and this may affect the services we provide, the people who deliver them and those who receive them. It is critical when making decisions that may affect people that their views are sought and considered so that we can understand what

matters to them, what they consider priority and what areas are in need of improvement and how the choices made may impact on their lives.

Impact

Proposals that will lead to efficiency savings have been screened for impact against the protected characteristics groups. Where proposals involve staff changes and rationalisation, appropriate consultation in line with council policy will be followed and outcomes monitored for any disproportionate and adverse impacts on individual groups.

Any savings with impact on services will have the issues and risks raised through their individual assessments and evaluations taken into account in the implementation and monitoring of the options.

Issues and concerns identified during this consultation have been used to inform priorities for the Council's Corporate Plan.