

Shaping our future together

Our medium-term plan 2019-20 to 2021-22

Appendix 4 - Consultation report



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1. Introduction

This report summarises the main messages from our consultation on the proposals set out in Shaping our future together: Our medium-term plan 2019-20 to 2021-22. The public consultation period ran from 15 October 2018 to 6 January 2019 and in two phases.

The first part, beginning on 15 October 2018, was the People's Budget budget-setting challenge. This is an interactive engagement tool (www.letstalkbudget.org.uk) that enables users to take on the role of councillors and submit a balanced budget for the year ahead.

The second part, beginning on 9 November 2018, invited residents, organisations and other key stakeholders to provide feedback about proposals, with specific surveys created online for proposals that would impact on services in 2019-20, as set out in the integrated impact assessments.

This report presents the findings from both parts of the consultation, with the cumulative People's Budget and details of responses to proposals that will impact on services in 2019-20.

We promoted the consultation widely on social media, using animated videos, slideshows and Facebook posts. We also used non-digital communication channels, such as stakeholder meetings and events, public consultation meetings, letters, feedback forms and our residents' magazine, Citylife. We involved voluntary organisations representing communities of interest such as older people, younger people and disabled people. We also made a focused effort to engage with black, Asian and minority ethnic communities who have not traditionally engaged in our consultations.

This report presents the views of individuals and organisations gathered through the consultation. These have been used to reflect on our proposals and to update integrated impact assessments. This report should be read in conjunction with:

- Shaping our future together: Our medium-term plan 2019-20 to 2021-22
- Appendix 1: Revenue and capital plan
- Appendix 2: Summary of service proposals
- Appendix 3: Cumulative impact assessment
- Integrated impact assessments for proposals impacting on services in 2019-20

2. How many people took part?

We received 334 People’s Budgets and 382 individual pieces of feedback on service specific proposals – a total of 716 responses. To the best of our knowledge, 3,626 individuals and organisations took part, including 2,819 people who signed an online petition relating to the future of Brunswick Household Waste Recycling Centre.

It is possible for an individual to take part in the consultation multiple times through several channels, for example, they might complete a People’s Budget, attend a public consultation event and later complete a Let’s talk Newcastle online survey. We would not be aware of this unless they chose to tell us, so we can only estimate the number of individual people and organisations.

The table below shows how many responses were received for each proposal. The number of responses and individuals/organisations shown in the table adds up to more than 716 individual responses, as many of those responding commented on more than one proposal.

Proposal	No of people / organisations	No of responses
The People’s Budget - submitted	334	334
The People’s Budget - gave up	87	87
Parking Services - review of customer offer	156	134
Community hubs, libraries and Contact Centre	98	58
Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums	50	44
Council Tax and adult social care precept	42	22
Waste disposal costs - charitable organisations and an online petition	40 2,819	20
Financial services	9	9
Supporting Independence Scheme	7	7
General comments	110	105
Totals	3,752	820

In total 5,077 people started the People’s Budget Challenge, with 334 submitting budgets, and 87 clicking the official give up button. The service-specific proposal with the highest number of people and organisations commenting on it (156) was Parking Services.

3. How we engaged with residents, organisations and key stakeholders

Residents, partners and other stakeholders were able to have their say through various communication channels. This includes offline channels such as petitions, letters, printed forms, meetings and stakeholder events, and digital solutions such as the People's Budget tool, Let's talk Newcastle online, our website, and our social media accounts on Facebook and Twitter. This means that in addition to the people and organisations who sent us their views, many more will have seen information about our proposed medium-term plan through these different channels. For example, our Facebook videos have had 31,131 views, and 4,656 viewed the People's Budget tool without either completing a budget or clicking the official give up button.

4. The People's Budget

In October 2018, we relaunched our People's Budget online tool, which invites members of the public to take on the role of a councillor and set the council's budget (it can be viewed online at: www.letstalkbudget.org.uk).

We asked people to make savings of £20 million from our current £170 million net budget by reducing spending on service areas, putting up Council Tax, increasing income generation from various sources or a combination of all of these. We provided context information in pop-up notifications indicating the potential consequences of reducing spending, for example, reducing the adult social care budget from £83 million to £82 million provides the update: "Breaking News: Council cuts sparks care crisis."

The People's Budget closed on 6 January 2019.

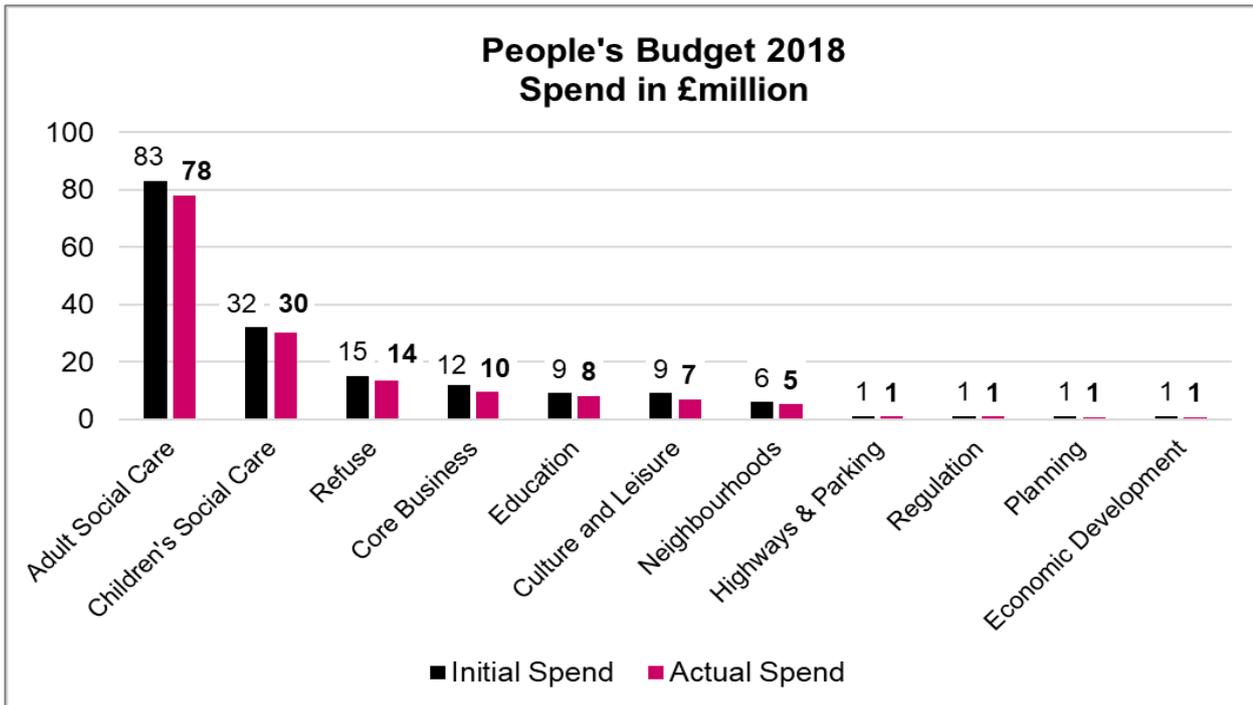
The tool aggregates responses into a single People's Budget, based on the 334 individually submitted budgets, this is:

- Total spend on services: £154.9 million
- Council Tax increase: 2.7%, so £2.7 million
- Income generation: £2 million
- When combined, this meets the savings target of £20 million:
 - £15.1 million in cuts to service spending
 - £2.7 million from an increase in Council Tax
 - £2.0 million from income generation from other sources
- People preferred to make:
 - Smaller cuts to adults and children's social care, and early years and education
 - Larger cuts to planning, economic development, culture, leisure and libraries, and core business functions.
- The largest percentage of money generated would come from Property and Assets: 77%. This is defined as '...increasing rents we charge to tenants of properties we own or selling more large-format and digital advertising space on our buildings and assets.'

5,077 people started the challenge and 87 clicked the official give up button (4,656 people closed the People's Budget tool without submitting a complete budget or clicking the give up button). 25 people shared their budgets online with others and on average people took 15 minutes to complete a budget.

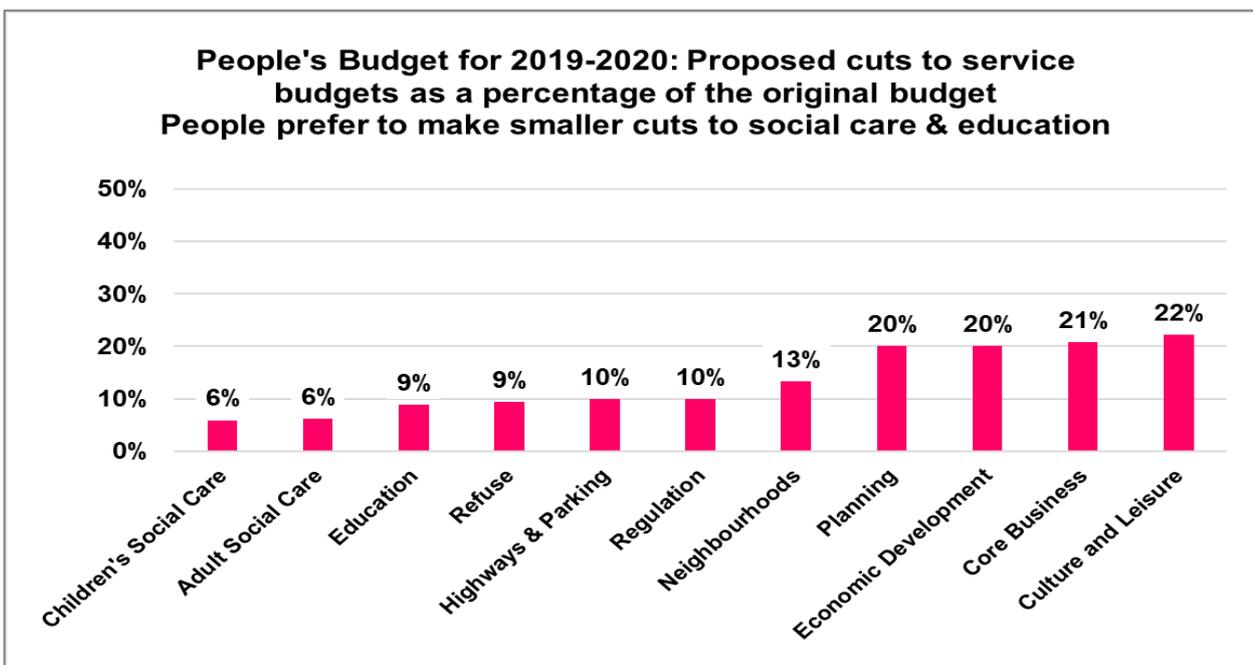
Comments from people setting a People's Budget indicated that - as in previous years - they tended to protect essential services (eg waste services) or services for vulnerable people (eg social care); or spread the cuts evenly across all services. The most common themes in comments left by people who gave up were, "this is a difficult task", "I stopped because I cannot justify making further cuts" and "I wanted to be able to cut staff wages."

The chart below shows the current spend on each service area, compared to the cumulative spend people proposed through the People's Budget:



Please note: Public health and capital spending budgets do not appear in the charts and tables in this report because they cannot be changed.

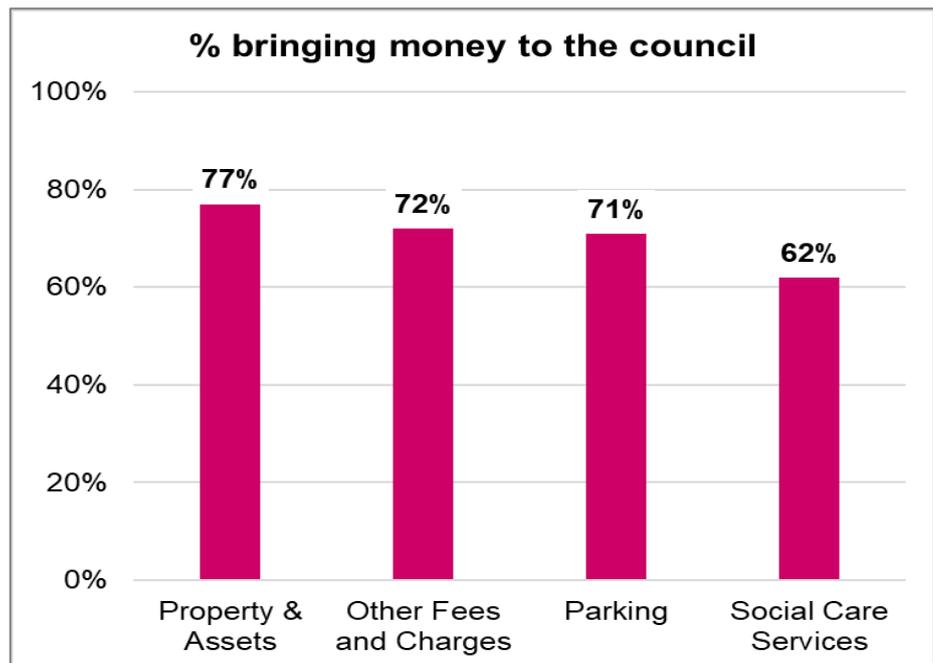
The chart below shows proposed cuts to spending on services from the People's Budget as a percentage of the current spend.



The risk levels incurred by this People's Budget are shown in the table below:

Spending area	Current spend £million	PB 'actual spend': £million at 7 January 2019	Percentage : actual / initial spend	Spending area risk
Adult Social Care	£83	£78	94%	Medium
Refuse, Waste Collection and Disposal	£15	£14	91%	
Core Business Functions	£12	£10	79%	
Culture, Leisure and Libraries	£9	£7	78%	
Children's Social Care	£32	£30	94%	Low
Early Years and Education	£9	£8	91%	
Maintaining Highways and Parking	£1	£1	90%	
Enforcement and Regulation	£1	£1	90%	
Maintaining Neighbourhoods	£6	£1	87%	
Planning and Development	£1	£1	80%	
Economic Development	£1	£1	80%	
Total	£170	£155	-	-

Income generation in the People's Budget: This chart shows the percentage of money each potential source of income would bring into the council's budget - with the largest percentage coming from Property and Assets: 77%.



316 people commented on how they set their budget and the most common themes were:

- Spread cuts across services: Made balanced measures to cut the budget across the board where possible, while protecting core services and leaving council tax rises as small as possible.
- Prioritise meeting the needs of the vulnerable: Tried to maximise protection for the vulnerable and those in need.
- Make efficiency savings: All areas of the council could benefit from process mapping and reviews, internal targets to cut spending and a review of every service with prioritisation scores.
- A difficult task: I have tried to spread the pain of the cuts, but it is an impossible task when any decisions made will adversely affect Newcastle residents.
- Adult social care has to be cut: No-one wants the vulnerable to suffer, but adult social care is the council's single biggest area of spend.
- Cut senior staff pay: Look at reducing senior and middle management posts and reduce wages.
- Generate income to protect services: Increasing the business rates (NNDR), or a push by business and economic development will be required to minimise cost savings by introducing additional income.
- Increase Council Tax to protect services: I feel increased Council Tax is justified to protect the budget as much as possible.

81 people commented on why they chose the give up option. Most common themes were:

- A difficult task: Difficult decisions because everyone wants the services that they use to remain.
- Stopped because I cannot justify making further cuts: I got to £11m, it is very hard to justify cuts any further as a lot of service areas don't have much to begin with.
- Cut senior staff pay: There should be a reduction in the number of councillors, the wages of the top people in the council should be reduced and there is no need for some of the spending that goes on.
- I feel I need more information: Did this as best as possible without having any deeper knowledge.
- Make efficiency savings: Need to look at ways to drive efficiencies such as investing in technology, having more efficient practices, renegotiating rents.
- Increase Council Tax to protect services.
- Make wage cuts: There was no option for reducing wages.

5. Feedback on integrated impact assessments

We received 382 individual responses to proposals that will impact on services in 2019-20, as set out in integrated impact assessments. The largest number of responses to a single proposal was on parking proposals, with 156 comments.

We received feedback from many individuals and organisations, including Newcastle Council for Voluntary Service (NCVS), Healthwatch, the Voluntary Sector Liaison Group, Newcastle Disability Forum, North East Chamber of Commerce (NECC), Elders Council and Youth Council.

Many of the responses from these organisations were detailed and consider both the cumulative impact of the cuts and possible ways in which local service delivery might be transformed in future.

6. Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums (TWAM)

The proposal is to reduce funding to Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums (TWAM) by £150,000 in 2019-20. This is the third year of reductions - totaling £450,000 and reducing our financial contribution to £1 million per annum. TWAM are also required to make additional savings of £200,000 to accommodate cost pressures. It includes the proposed closure of the Discovery Museum and Laing Art Gallery on Bank Holidays.

We received 44 responses from 41 residents and three organisations; the Disability Forum, NCVS and the Elders Council. The most common comment about what people think will be the consequences and impact of the proposal was that families - especially those on low incomes - will be negatively affected. People suggested that the impact could be minimised by ensuring any changes are properly communicated to avoid the risks of people visiting facilities when they are closed. Another common suggestion was to remain open on Bank Holidays but close on one day during the week.

15 people said they thought the proposal was not fair because it would disproportionately affect groups including families on low incomes, older people and communities living near these facilities. However, 11 people thought that it was fair and that spending on other services, such as schools, should be a higher priority.

When asked about other ways to save money or generate income, the most common suggestion was to support museums to fundraise for themselves (five people said this), charging a nominal entrance fee, or generating income through retail outlets such as cafes and shops. People also said that the facilities managed by TWAM are an asset to the city, both in terms of promoting people's wellbeing and generating income. Three residents said they did not find the proposal to be clear.

7. Community Hubs, Libraries and Contact Centre

The proposal is to offer services from the same number of locations across the city. However due to budget pressures, there will be changes in the size of the spaces used, a change in opening hours, a review of back-office staff delivering the service and a small reduction in the stock fund. The City Library is currently open seven days a week and we are proposing to close it on a Sunday and reduce the number of late nights from four to two. This represents a closure of 2.9% of total library network opening hours.

We received feedback on this from 98 people and organisations, including NCVS, the Elders Council, the Youth Council and the Disability Health Forum. Staff held 12 consultation events and meetings, including five public events within libraries and meeting partners such as Newcastle College, CaterLeisure and PFI partners. We received 30 responses via these events and meetings.

Most of those who commented thought the proposal was clear, although some would have liked more information about library usages on different days. When asked about consequences and impacts, most respondents were concerned about the potential impact on vulnerable groups such as families and older people on low incomes, and people needing IT access to search for work and apply for benefits. Others were concerned that the service will deteriorate - that the libraries will be closed in the evening when working people want to use them and that children will find it harder to do their homework.

Many respondents said that the proposals were not fair and reasonable, because they felt that the impacts would be heaviest on people who are more disadvantaged, such as those on low incomes. Some were concerned that staff could lose their jobs. When asked about how the impact of the proposal could be minimised, people asked if it would be possible to keep evening opening hours and close on Sundays, whether using volunteers could help to keep the libraries open and to shift existing opening times so that the libraries open later and close later. Other suggestions for saving money or generating income were to promote library buildings as venues for external events, even when library services are closed, and reduce management roles or senior staff pay.

8. Waste disposal costs - charitable organisations

The proposal is to work with charitable organisations who use waste transfer sites without paying the appropriate disposal costs. We will assist the charities to ensure they get the right waste to the right place and work with them to identify the least costly and most appropriate disposal option. This provides a consistent and fair approach to waste disposal in all our facilities across the city.

We received 20 responses from residents and organisations including NCVS and Jesmond Labour Group. The most common view on possible consequences and impact were that charities will have increased costs and the proposals could limit what they are able to do. A lot of people also provided more general comments about waste and recycling, broader than the scope of this proposal. People mentioned that they wanted to recycle more items, that they felt better education and information about waste and recycling was needed and that they were concerned about fly-tipping.

Suggestions about other ways to save or generate income included a slight increase in Council Tax to maintain these services, stricter enforcement of fines for littering, fly-tipping and incorrect disposal of waste and learning from other local authorities about their best practice in delivering these services. Both residents and NCVS stressed the importance of involving stakeholders, including people on low incomes, people living in areas affected by high levels of litter and fly-tipping, and charitable organisations, in designing how services are delivered.

Eight respondents said they did not find the proposals clear; four said that they did. Five felt they were not fair, although some commented that they felt they needed more information about them. General comments received were less related to the proposals and more about specific waste-related issues such as assisted lifts and disposal of excess waste at Christmas.

Although the proposals set out in the integrated impact assessment 2019-2020 do not refer to the possible closure of Brunswick Household Waste Recycling Centre, this is part of the medium-term plan. There is a petition, Save Brunswick Household Waste and Recycling Centre, created on the www.change.org petition site, which asks people to sign up to show their support for keeping this facility open. As of 7 January 2019, it had 2,819 signatures. Several respondents made comments about this, many expressing concern that if the facility closes there will be increased fly-tipping, less recycling and longer queues at other household waste and recycling centres.

9. Parking Service - Review of Customer Offer

This proposal is to introduce parking charges for Blue Badge holders, with a one-hour grace period at the end of the paid parking time, close the Grainger Town multi-storey car park between midnight to 6am, revise the Shopmobility service to three days a week (from six) and remove free parking for Shopmobility members.

We received 134 responses on this, from 156 individuals and organisations including Jesmond Labour Group, NCVS, the Newcastle Disability Forum and the Elders Council. Parking Services staff also provided printed forms to Shopmobility scheme members asking them for their views and to indicate their preferred days for the service to remain open. 30 people and organisations commented on whether the proposal was clear and easy to understand, with most (20) saying that they thought it was. Four thought it was not, and others wanted more information on what costs would be for an individual.

128 people and organisations commented on the possible consequences and potential negative impact of the proposals. Comments included Shopmobility members willing to pay extra (36 responses), an increase in social isolation (29 responses), disabled people will be negatively impacted (23 responses), please do not implement the parking proposals (17 responses), risks driving people away from the city centre (17 people) and people's health varies so they need the service seven days a week (14 people). Many thought the Shopmobility and Blue Badge proposals would disproportionately affect people who are already disadvantaged, including increasing financial hardship. Some felt it would give Newcastle a reputation for being unfriendly to disabled people.

Some people felt the Blue Badge proposal would increase congestion in the city as more people will park on-street. Others were worried about the health and safety implications of disabled people trying to access parking ticket machines, and whether this would lead to parking problems at hospitals. Some people did feel it was fair that Blue Badge holders should pay for parking, or that charging Blue Badge holders for parking would help tackle the issue of abuse of Blue Badges. Several were concerned about whether disabled people had been properly consulted.

Several respondents who work in the night-time economy were concerned at the implications of closing the Grainger Town multi-storey car park overnight - saying that they need safe overnight parking and public transport is not an option for them.

When asked about minimising the possible negative impact of the proposals, or other ways we could save money or generate income, the most common suggestion was to ask us not to implement the proposals as they will have a disproportionate impact on vulnerable people. Other comments were that the grace period at the end of paid parking time was a good time, that perhaps Blue Badge holders could be allowed three hours free parking or a fixed daily parking rate, that Blue Badges should be limited to wheelchair users, and that perhaps we could raise income to keep the Shopmobility scheme open on more days by increasing the membership cost and publicising it better to increase membership numbers.

Suggestions in relation to the Blue Badge scheme were to allow people transporting disabled children and those on low incomes to be exempt from charges, to have reduced parking rates for people who have to make regular journeys and introducing higher fines

for misusing disabled parking spaces. The Pay by Phone app was mentioned as a way of making these proposals work.

People commenting on closing the Grainger Town multi-storey car park overnight asked if people working in the night-time economy could apply for fobs to enable them to access parking there or pay a fee to park overnight.

General comments included suggestions that charges for parking should be higher at times of peak demand, that the proposals could deter people from visiting Newcastle, and that some people wanted stricter enforcement to stop taxi drivers parking in disabled bays.

10. Supporting Independence Scheme (SIS)

This proposal is to continue to provide the supported independence scheme (SIS) with a reduced budget by ceasing the routine provision of lower priority household items, such as rugs, microwaves, toasters, dining sets. This proposal will cut the SIS budget by 5%, £24,073.

Seven individuals and organisations responded to the proposal, including residents, NCVS, and Jesmond Labour Party, most of whom thought it was clear.

They felt that the consequences would be felt most by the people in financial crisis who were eligible for the scheme and were concerned at this, although one people commented that the proposal would ensure that more essential items were still provided. They thought it important to clearly communicate to people what is still available and asked if it was viable to provide people with secondhand goods either from charity shops or via donations of unwanted goods from the public.

11. Financial Services

This proposal is to save £345,000 from a range of budgets through sundry income and debt recovery, treasury management, reduction in external audit fee, inflationary increase to income, greater use of apprenticeship and staffing and income savings.

The proposal includes a significant reduction in face-to-face interviews for housing benefit by signposting customers to digital and self-service channels and only providing face-to-face interviews through a triaged service once a month in Customer Service Centres.

Phoneline service for housing benefits, Council tax and business rates to be reduced one day per week so that officers can carry out proactive recovery work to increase collection rates and better manage peaks in tenancy changes and student work.

Nine individuals and organisations commented on this, including residents and NCVS. Most comments on the consequences and impact of the proposal were from people who felt that it would negatively affect people on low incomes, people who are not digitally skilled and people who do not have easy access to the internet.

Other themes in comments were concerns about the cumulative effect on vulnerable people of this proposal and the proposals for library opening hours, community hubs and the contact centre. However, some people felt it would lead to better debt collection, and that it was important to pursue all money owed to the council in the interests of fairness to people who pay the money they owe, such as Council Tax. One concern was whether this proposal would increase costs in the long-term if people go into debt and the council has to pursue them for payment.

When asked about other ways to save, one person asked whether it is possible to make cuts elsewhere in the council and perhaps have lower working hours for staff and put the savings into preserving these services. Others wanted to ensure that all debts were collected effectively to maximise income and to ensure fairness to people who pay them, and one person asked if a cost-benefit analysis of the proposal in the long-term was available.

12. Council Tax and Social Care Precept

The proposal is to increase Council Tax by 2.95% and increase the government's precept for adult social care by 1% to help fund the rising cost of providing adult social care services.

22 people and organisations commented on this, with the most common theme in their feedback on consequences and impact being concerns it would negatively affect vulnerable people and that people's wages are not rising but Council Tax is. Some felt that, to minimise impact, some groups of people such as those on very low incomes and on certain types of benefits should not have to pay more Council Tax.

Several people felt that this was not a fair proposal, but others felt that this is was the fairest solution to the situation the council is in, as everyone will have to contribute more. Some asked whether reserves could be used to fund service delivery and whether it is possible to have students or landlords of properties occupied by students pay Council Tax.

When asked about other ways to save or generate income, some respondents asked about the possibility of reducing senior staff pay and councillors' allowances, restructuring the council and changing the council's pension scheme. Others wanted the council to maximise income by ensuring all debts are collected, and stricter enforcement of fines for littering and fly-tipping. Suggestions specifically about Council Tax included removing the single person's discount and having higher taxes on empty properties and second homes. One person asked it is possible to review the Council Tax bands, so that owners of very large properties contribute more.

13. General

105 people and organisations made general comments relating to the budget proposals and documents. Several agreed that the proposals were clear and easy to understand, whilst others said that the proposals presented the facts about the proposals, but they felt that they would like more background information on the rationale for why we are proposing to make changes to the services in question.

Several people and organisations commented on the potential consequences and impact of the proposals, with the most common topics raised was not to close Brunswick Household Waste and Recycling Centre and concern at the potential cumulative effect of all the proposals on vulnerable people. When asked about how to minimise the potential impact of the proposals, people asked the possibility of merging North East local authorities, making service delivery more efficient, introducing a tourist tax and the need to work closely with the NHS and voluntary and community sector partners to deliver services. Several commented that they did not think the proposals were fair, often referring to what they saw as the potential negative cumulative impact on vulnerable people.

When asked about other ways to save, the most comment suggestions were that we need to be efficient and make savings on internal costs wherever possible, including hospitality. Other suggestions included using reserves to mitigate cuts, extending contracts with suppliers from three to five years to save on commissioning costs, and ensuring the city is a unique and fascinating place to visit.

Other issues raised were wanting to see senior staff pay reduced, not happy with recent changes to cycle paths and roads, people felt the cuts had been going on for a very long time and that people are paying more Council Tax for fewer services. Some people felt that central government is responsible for cuts and the council should work to challenge this.

NCVS, Newcastle Disability Forum and Changing Lives were keen to work with us to support the most vulnerable in society. The North East Chamber of Commerce (NECC) commented that they supported the devolution agenda and wanted to work with the new North of Tyne Combined Authority to support the regional economy and promote tourism. In relation to devolution, Newcastle Disability Forum asked about plans to provide affordable and accessible housing. Adult Education was raised as a priority by both Healthwatch Newcastle and NECC. The Elders Council raised the issue of how to mitigate any possible negative effects of changes to the distribution of national non-domestic rates (business rates) and ensure that information and support is provided to people who do not access the internet. The Voluntary Sector Liaison Group were concerned about possible funding reductions to the Newcastle Fund and Active Inclusion Newcastle.