

Budget consultation 2019/20

11 January 2019

Background

As part of its responsibility to inform, and involve the public and key stakeholders in policy and decision making processes Cumbria County Council has consulted on its 2019/20 draft budget to inform its development. The consultation began on 22 November 2018 and ended on 7 January 2019.

This year the consultation had two main questions:

Should we:

- 1) Increase Council Tax by 1.99% to avoid having to make even more savings on top of the £22.730 million that we currently need to find? This together with the government's 2% increase to help fund Adult Social Care will take the increase to 3.99%
- 2) Not increase Council Tax by 1.99% - which would mean an additional £4m of savings would need to be identified across council services.

This report is based on 208 budget survey responses (199 submitted online, 9 paper). Only data where respondents have opted to indicate to what extent they agree or disagree, in the budget consultation survey document, have been used to generate the quantitative data in this report.

The consultation **is not** designed to be a statistically representative sample of public opinion in Cumbria but a gauge of the opinions of those people and organisations that have chosen to participate in the process.

This report does not seek to make any recommendations: its purpose is to help inform decision makers of opinion expressed as part of this consultation. The consultation process conforms to the county council's consultation obligations.

Due to rounding, some totals in tables and charts may not add up to exactly 100%.

Main budget consultation activity

In relation to engagement to stakeholders a communications and engagement plan included:

- Launch of consultation on 22 November 2018 with release of documents including a dedicated web page and media release
- The document was available as a pdf download, interactive online version and online survey.
- Posted on homepage of internet, intranet and Your Cumbria news website.
- Engagement with Area Management Teams to ensure printed copies were available in localities

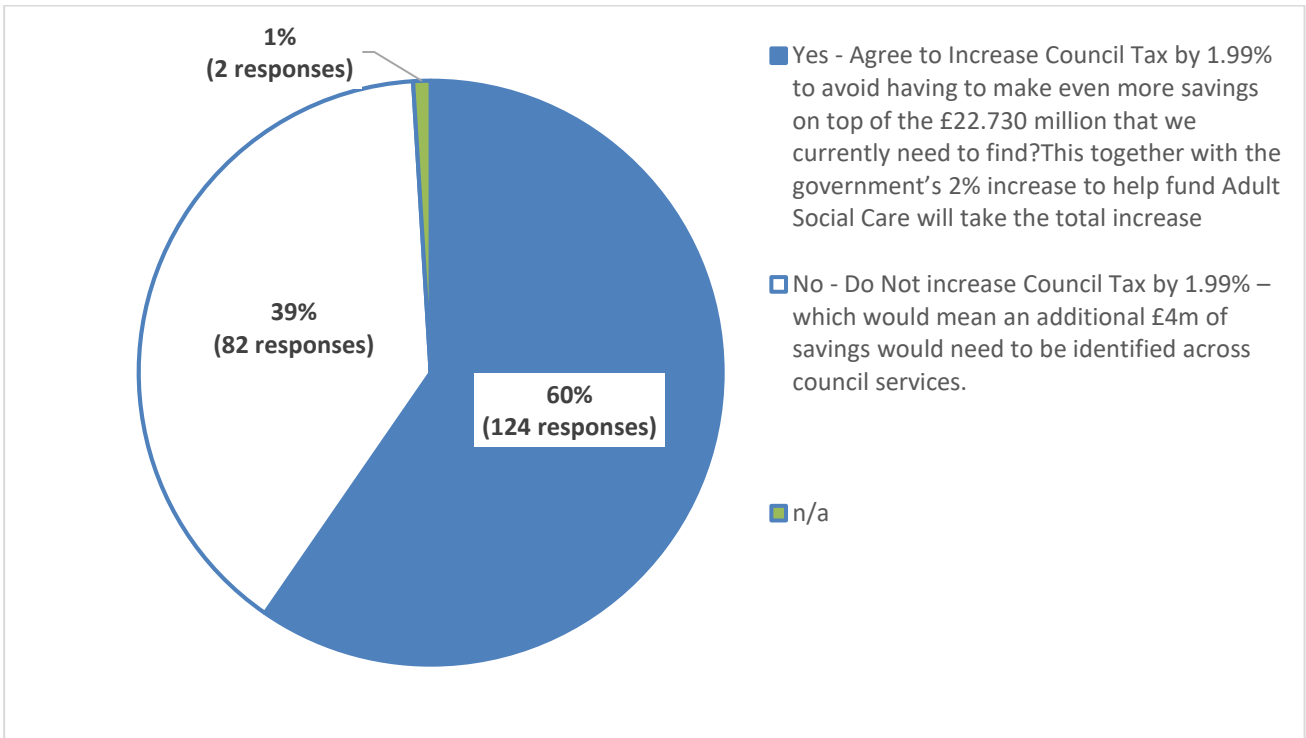
- Available as a paper copy placed in all main libraries.
- Communications to all staff and members
- Social media was used to generate interest via facebook and twitter.
- Discussion and emails to Trade Union representatives involving from the Senior Manager for People Management
- The following were also notified about the consultation:
 - All Chief Executives of the Cumbria Chief Executives Group
 - Cumbria Association of Local Councils (CALC)
 - Schools forum
 - Chamber of Commerce

Scrutiny

There was also effective engagement with Scrutiny. Engagement in the 2019/20 Strategic Planning process has been ongoing over the past year with Members engaging through the Scrutiny Advisory Boards in a range of discussions about changes to services and new ways of working. In addition to this, two focused sessions to consider the strategic policy and financial context for the Council have taken place. The first of these was on the 25th July 2018 at which Members had the opportunity to receive presentations and question the Deputy Leader, the Chief Executive, Directors and Assistant Directors about the challenges facing the Council and direction of travel required. Members attended workshops on the new ways of working set out in the Council Plan which provided an opportunity to explore the opportunities for doing things differently in the future. The second session took place on the 3rd December 2018. Members received an update on the financial context for the Council and the proposals for delivering a balanced budget for 2019/20. An update was also provided on the Council's financial position and work underway to support the financial sustainability of the Council. Members discussed their views with senior officers on three issues: the approach to finding the savings of £23 million in 19/20; how future savings can be made; and how Scrutiny can be engaged in the future.

Views on Increase in Council Tax

Over half (60%) of respondents agreed with increasing council tax by 1.99%.



A summary of the responses to “Do you have any comments about the proposed approach to meeting the challenges ahead and building a financially sustainable future?” These have been grouped in line with the Council Plan themes as follows:

Working Together	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build better, stronger partnership working - use partners to help deliver shared services • Involve Third Sector organisations when designing and delivering new services • Have ‘better ways of working’ at all levels • Listen to Frontline Staff • In Adult Social Care, focus on staff retention and continuity of service • Spending to be approved by the public • Significant concerns over cuts to funding to Third Sector organisations • The consultation didn’t provide an opportunity to comment on specific services; supporting information wasn’t clear; and savings need to be defined • Transparency: be more transparent about spend; be clear about the implications/impact of the budget • Significant changes and reductions in services are not always appropriately consulted on
Enterprise & Efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be clear about our priorities

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be better at generating income: better use of assets/buildings/libraries; charge for resident parking • Be better at procurement and contract management • Have an effective review of services and targeting of services; carry out more detailed reviews; review with potential cuts to non-statutory services • Joined up lobbying to central government for funding • Identify value for money • Reductions in expenditure: salaries (Senior staff/Management); the number of Councillors and their expenses; pensions • Reduction in expenditure: contracts and consultants • Reductions in constant overspend (Children’s Services/Looked After Children) – review the budget allocated and increase accordingly • Reductions in expenditure: funding to public health; Adult Education; events; leisure centres • Risks of not achieving future savings due to overspend • Reductions in expenditure: by considering a Unitary Authority • Review of service provision: not consistent/the same across Cumbria in particular in rural areas compared to urban areas • Review and prioritise roads/highways maintenance • Prioritise funding for travel for older people – supporting health and wellbeing and independence • Council Tax charges should reflect income and assets/land; holiday homes • Council Tax increase should be higher • Personal income concerns in relation to affordability of rising Council Tax
Digital Transformation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • n/a
Prevention & Early Intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritise preventative services • Invest in Education • Prioritise services and funding allocation to those who are most vulnerable i.e. older people; children; and children with special educational needs

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Invest in Extra Care Housing to reflect the increasing demand/numbers of older people
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Additional written responses were received from the following:

- Cumbria Third Sector Network
- Adrian Waite Independent Consultancy Services
- Members of the Public

**There was no written feedback received from the Trade Unions*

The following is a summary of the written feedback received from:

Cumbria Third Sector Network response – Summary

Their response recognised the financial pressures that Cumbria County Council face and they support the Council's approach to supporting the most vulnerable. In particular they noted that this year's budget consultation did not include proposals on any specific saving proposals but recognised that this was because consultation on services changes will take place on a rolling basis throughout the coming year(s), as has happened previously. They reiterated the need for effective engagement with the Third Sector stressing that involving a wide range of local organisations would be key to the successful redesign of services in the future. They flagged specific concerns over reductions in funding to Third Sector and as a result the pressing need to build stronger partnerships in the future, building on the event "Working Together for Cumbria" which was held in September by Cumbria Third Sector Network and Cumbria County Council and the council's commitment to refresh the Cumbria Compact.

Adrian Waite Independent Consultancy Services - Summary

This was an extensive response. A large section focused on the Children' overspend but in summary the feedback was that there is a need to ensure that Children's services are funded adequately, and that enough provision is made in the budget for 2019/20 and future years. This was similar feedback on Adult Social Care with recognition of the pressures the council are facing but a clear message regarding the need to ensure that Adult social care services are funded adequately and that enough provision is made in the budget for 2019/20 and future years. There was the suggestion that central budget should be reviewed and reallocated appropriately. This response also identified the risk that planned future savings may not be met and that a programme of service reviews would be a welcome and sensible good approach. Other comments related to reducing layers of management and making further reductions to the reserves. On Council tax they suggested increasing it even further.