



# Northumberland County Council

Council

21 February 2024

## Budget Engagement Report

**Report of Councillor(s)** Cllr Glen Sanderson, Leader of Council

**Responsible Officer(s):** Jan Willis, Executive Director for Resources & Transformation (S151)

### 1. **Link to Key Priorities of the Corporate Plan**

The Council's Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) are aligned to and indeed critical to delivering the three priorities outlined in the Corporate Plan 2023-26: Achieving Value for Money; Tackling Inequalities and Driving Economic Growth.

### 2. **Purpose of report**

This report provides a summary of engagement on the Council's Budget which commenced in July 2023 and included a Budget Survey which closed on 26<sup>th</sup> January 2024. This engagement helps to inform the Council's Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan.

### 3. **Recommendations**

Council is requested to:

- Consider and note the Budget engagement activities and the summary results of the Budget Consultation Survey undertaken between December and January 2024.

### 4. **Forward plan date and reason for urgency if applicable**

This report first appeared on the Forward Plan on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2024. The online Budget engagement survey closed on 26<sup>th</sup> January 2024. This was to enable a six-week consultation, which is considered good practice, following the Cabinet meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> December and the commencement of the Budget Consultation Survey.

## **5. Background**

- 5.1 The Council continues to ensure its Budget and MTFP reflects services and investments that are most important to residents and businesses in all communities across the County.
- 5.2 The Budget engagement commenced with an all-Member 'Policy Conference' in July 2023. The aim of this was to equip Members with background and technical information to participate more fully in the budget-setting process.
- 5.3 This was followed by a further 'Policy Conference' in September 2023, where the Executive Director, Transformation and Resources and the Director of Finance and Procurement shared with Members detailed assumptions and projections for the Council's 2024-25 Budget. The session included questions, answers and comments from Members.
- 5.4 A detailed Budget Engagement document was developed. This provided: detail on the background to the Council's finances; options open to the Council to set a balanced Budget; and directorate summaries of Budget proposals. The Engagement document was considered by Corporate Services and Economic Growth Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 27<sup>th</sup> November. Following this, the document was formally launched at Council's Cabinet on 12<sup>th</sup> December, alongside the Council's Budget Consultation Survey. The Survey was open to the public, online and in libraries until 26<sup>th</sup> January 2024. Appendix 1 of this report sets out the summary results of the consultation survey.
- 5.5 In November, the Leader and Officers met with business representatives to present an overview of the Budget. In that discussion, some of the key themes and priorities from businesses included:
- Understanding how the new Combined Authority will work and how businesses can engage in that;
  - Overall, businesses are supportive of the levels of regeneration investment into the County;
  - Investment in transport infrastructure; and,
  - Attracting talent to the County / region and ensuring businesses have access to the right skills.
- 5.6 The S151 Officer offered Budget briefing sessions to all of the Council's political groups. The following group sessions took place:
- Labour Group - 6 December 2023.
  - Independent Group - 11 December 2023.
  - Lib Democrat Group – 30 January 2024.
  - Green Group - 18 December 2023 and 15 January 2024.
- 5.7 During January, the Leader and Deputy Leader presented an overview of Budget proposals to the five Local Area Committees (LAC), taking questions and listening to Members' thoughts. The LAC meetings took place on the following dates:
- 10 January - Ashington and Blyth.
  - 15 January - Castle Morpeth.
  - 16 January – Tynedale.

- 24 January - Cramlington, Bedlington and Seaton Valley.
- 25 January - North Northumberland.

This was followed by a recorded ‘question & answer’ session on 31<sup>st</sup> January where anyone could submit questions on the Budget to the Leader and S151 Officer.

## 6. Options open to the Council and reasons for the recommendations

- 6.1 Whilst the Council is not legally required to consult residents during the Budget setting process, this would not be considered good practice and runs counter to openness and transparency. We therefore do not consider this a viable option.

## 7. Implications

<b>Policy</b>	Budget Engagement helps to inform the Council’s Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan.
<b>Finance and value for money</b>	Whilst there are no financial implications arising directly from this report. Engagement helps to inform the Council’s Budget which is detailed in a separate report to Cabinet.
<b>Legal</b>	Whilst there are no legal implications arising directly from this report, engagement helps to inform the Council’s Budget which is detailed in a separate report to Cabinet.
<b>Procurement</b>	There are no specific Procurement implications within this report.
<b>Human resources</b>	There are no specific HR implications within this report.
<b>Property</b>	There are no specific Property implications within this report.
<b>The Equalities Act: is a full impact assessment required and attached?</b>	There are no specific Equalities implications within this report, although this helps to inform the Council’s Budget which is detailed in the separate report to Cabinet.  No EIA is required for this report as no change of services is proposed.
<b>Risk assessment</b>	There are no specific risk implications within this report.
<b>Crime and disorder</b>	There are no specific crime implications within this report.
<b>Customer considerations</b>	There are no specific customer implications within this report.
<b>Carbon reduction</b>	There are no specific carbon reduction implications within this report.

<b>Health and wellbeing</b>	There are no specific health and wellbeing implications within this report.
<b>Wards</b>	(All Wards);

**8. Background papers**

Not applicable

**9. Links to other key reports already published**

[Budget 2024-25 and Medium Term Financial Plan 2024-28](#)

**10. Author and Contact Details**

Philip Hunter, Director of Strategy and Communications  
Email: Philip.Hunter@northumberland.gov.uk