

Scrutiny committee

Supplementary Agenda

Date: **Thursday, 02 February 2023**
Time: **16:30**
Venue: **Council chamber City Hall, St Peters Street, Norwich, NR2 1NH**

All group pre-meeting briefing – 16:00

This is for members only and is not part of the formal scrutiny committee meeting which will follow at 16:30. The pre-meeting is an opportunity for the committee to make final preparations before the start of the actual meeting. The public will not be given access to the Council Chamber before 16:30.

Committee members:

Councillors:

Wright (Chair)
Brociek-Coulton (Vice chair)
Carlo
Driver
Fulton-McAlister (M)
Galvin
Huntley
Osborn
Padda
Stutely
Thomas (Va)
Thomas (Vi)
Young

For further information please contact:

Committee officer: Alex Hand
t: (01603) 989398
e: alexhand@norwich.gov.uk

Democratic services
City Hall
Norwich
NR2 1NH

www.norwich.gov.uk

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For information about attending or speaking at meetings, please contact the committee officer above or refer to the council's website.



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Agenda

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	Purpose: To consider the the public consultation on the budget.	

Date of publication: **Tuesday, 31 January 2023**

Appendix 2 (I): Consultation responses on the proposed budget for 2023/24

Item 4

This appendix summarises the responses to Norwich City Council's budget consultation for the financial year 2023/24.

Summary

- Feedback from the consultation indicated stakeholders, businesses and residents broadly support the council's approach to how it intends to manage its budget and meet the forecasted budget gap in 2023-24.
- The majority supported the council's proposal to increase the city council's share of council tax to just under 3 per cent (50% strongly support or somewhat support), compared to 38% who strongly or somewhat oppose.
- There was strong support (61%) for the council to retain its scheme to provide up to 100 per cent council tax relief to those on low incomes, despite only 17% of respondents receiving this support at present.
- The top-rated services were as follows: housing services, waste and recycling collections and the provision of parks and open spaces.

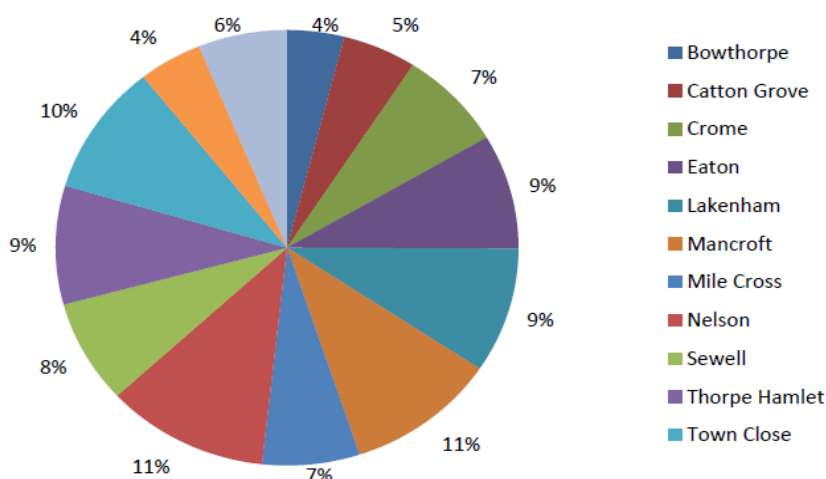
Part 1: Consultation and engagement approach

- The consultation, which ran from 15 December 2022 to 20 January 2023, was hosted on the council's new consultation and engagement website 'Get Talking Norwich'. To help inform people's views, a number of key documents were made available on Get Talking Norwich – the council's provisional budget and financial strategy 2023-24; its corporate plan for 2022-26 and the Norwich 2040 City Vision.
- The 2023-24 survey was hosted online via the Get Talking Norwich website, with a total of 2,654 responses.
- This year's engagement focused on two main sections – one seeking quantitative data, the other seeking qualitative data. Direct engagement was sought from residents, partners/key stakeholders, local businesses and wider service users.
- 10 community groups were also approached with an offer of funding to host community conversations with their user groups and community members regarding our proposed budget for 2023/24. Two of these groups responded to our invitation and hosted face-to-face sessions with their client base to gather their feedback on behalf of Norwich City Council. Their feedback from these sessions is included in the analysis presented below.
- The budget consultation was promoted widely throughout the 37 days it was live via a number of channels and methods, including text messages, emails to local businesses, social media promotion and engagement through the community enabling team's networks.

Part 2: detailed analysis

Respondents' profile

The following section of the report outlines demographic data about the respondents who completed the budget consultation survey via Get Talking Norwich.



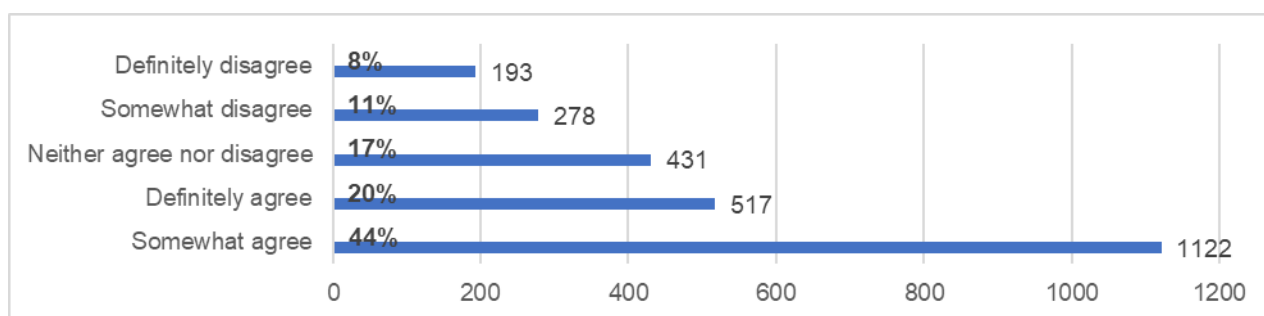
- 20% of respondents identified as having a disability, while 74% did not. 6% of respondents preferred not to say.
- 79% of respondents do not receive council tax relief, while 17% of respondents do. 4% of respondents were not sure whether they received this support.
- 61% (1,591) of the respondents own their own home (with or without a mortgage), while many rent from the council (17%), from a private landlord (14%) or from a housing association (6%).
- The majority (51%) of those who responded work full time, with 14% also working part-time and 18% wholly retired from work. Only 1% (8) of the respondents are in full-time education.

Quantitative survey results:

The following section of the report breaks down the quantitative survey responses by question. Supplementary commentary is only presented alongside the graphs to draw out trends where this provides additional value to the figures provided.

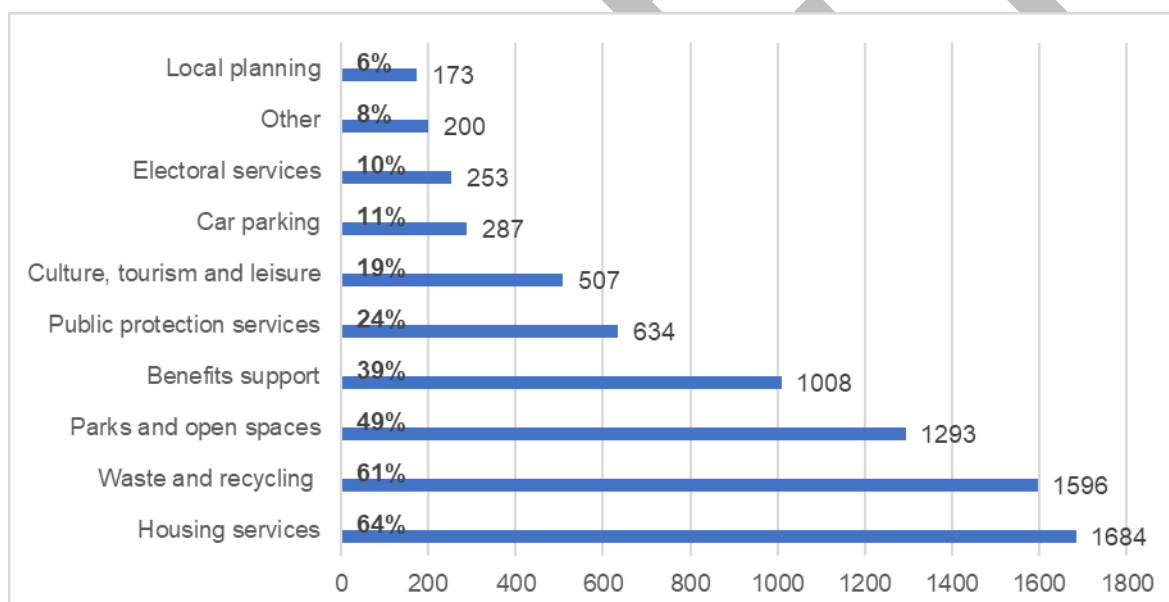
To note, percentages will not add up to 100 where respondents are asked to provide their top three choices (Q2, Q5, Q6 and Q11).

Q1. Looking at the above themes and examples of what they do, to what extent do you agree with our approach to help us bridge our budget gap?

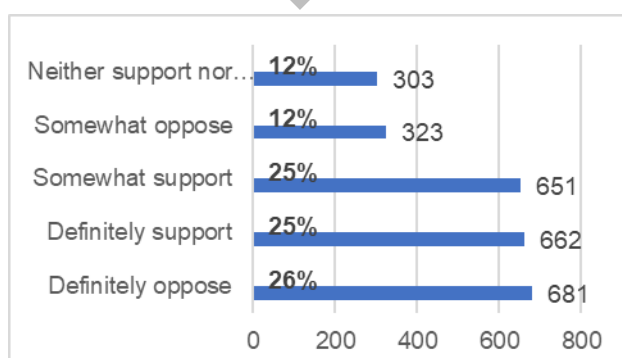


A strong majority of respondents support the council's approach to bridging its budget gap. 64% of respondents somewhat/definitely agree and 19% of respondents somewhat/definitely disagree.

Q2. Please take a look at some of the core council services we provide and choose the top three that you value most.



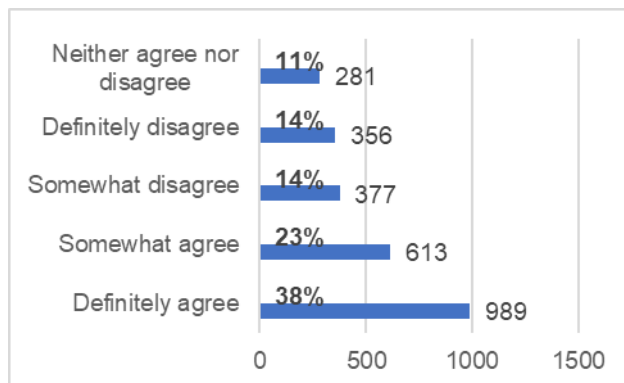
Q3. To what extent do you support the council increasing its share of council tax by up to 3 per cent in 2023-24 to help towards paying for council services?



The majority of respondents support the council increasing its share of council tax by up to 3 per cent:

- 50% of residents either strongly support or somewhat support
- 38% of residents either strongly oppose or somewhat oppose

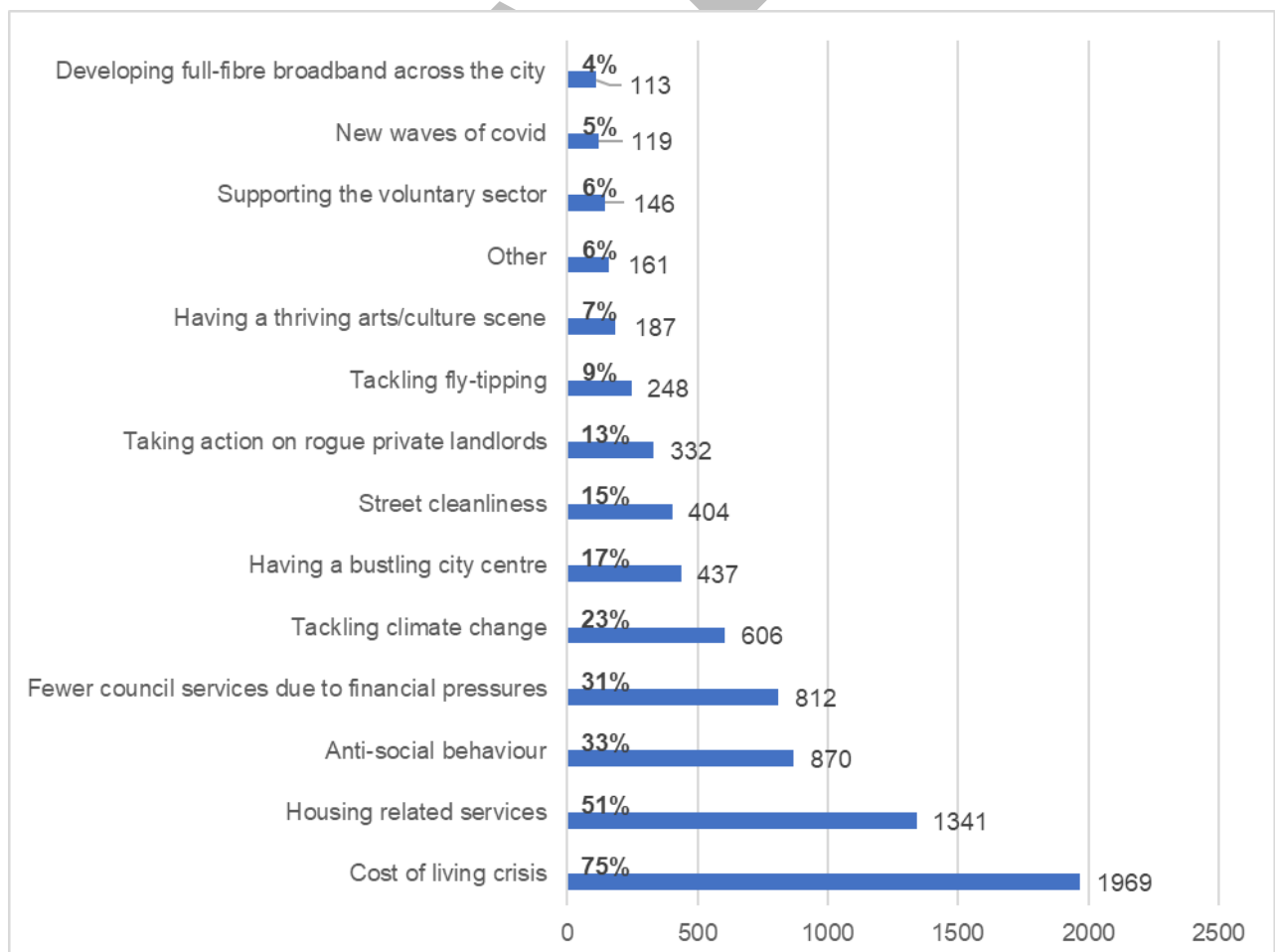
Q4. To what extent do you agree with providing up to 100 per cent to those who qualify for the Council Tax Reduction Scheme?



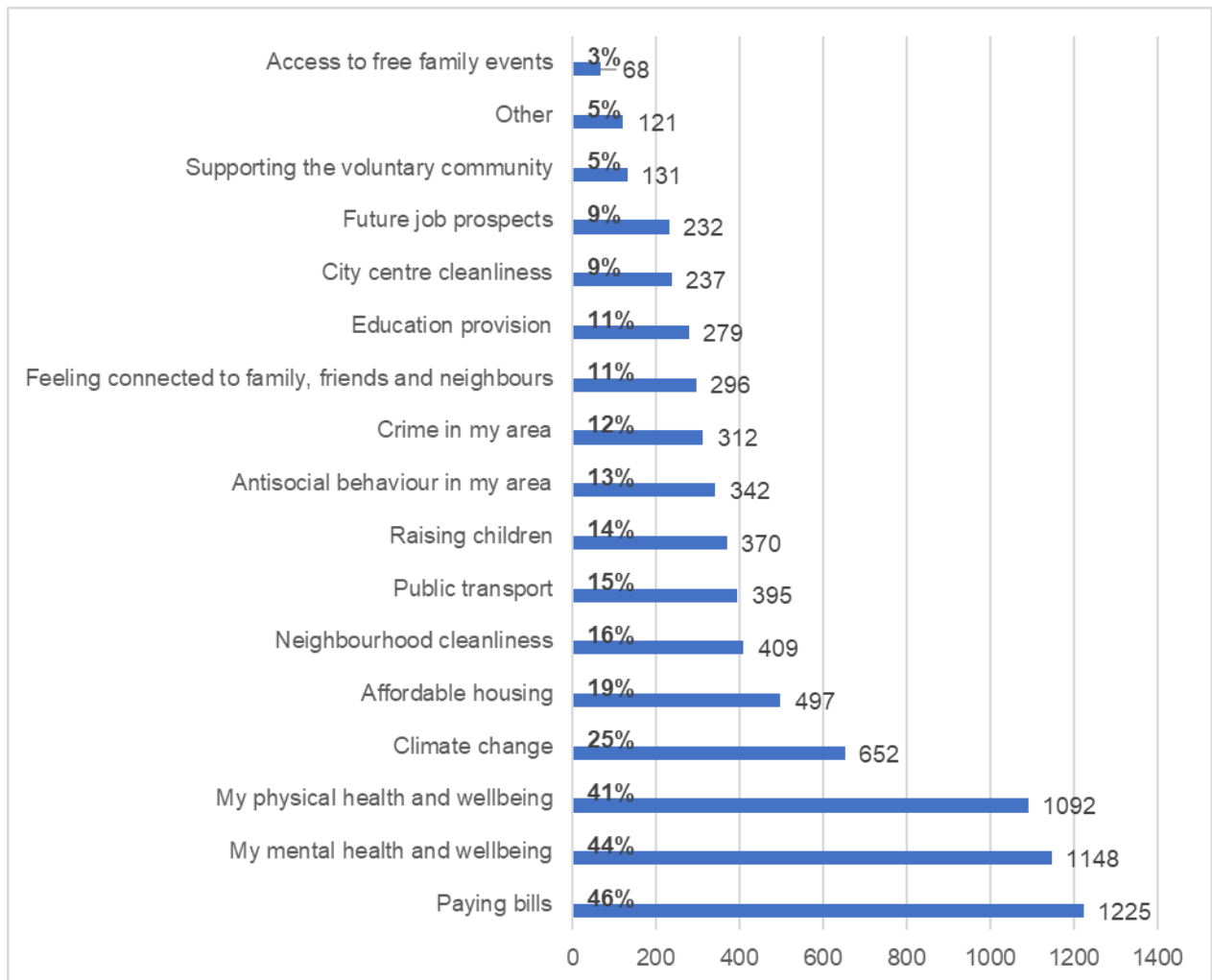
A strong majority of respondents **support** the council retaining its scheme to provide up to 100 per cent council tax relief to those on low incomes.

- 61% of residents either strongly agree or somewhat agree
- 28% of residents either strongly disagree or somewhat disagree

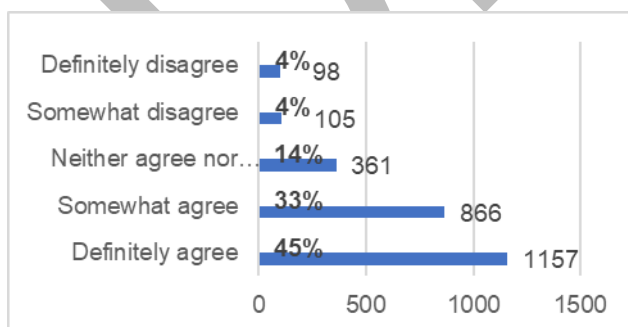
Q5. What do you think will be the three most important issues facing Norwich in the next year?



Q6. Which three things are the most important to you at the moment?



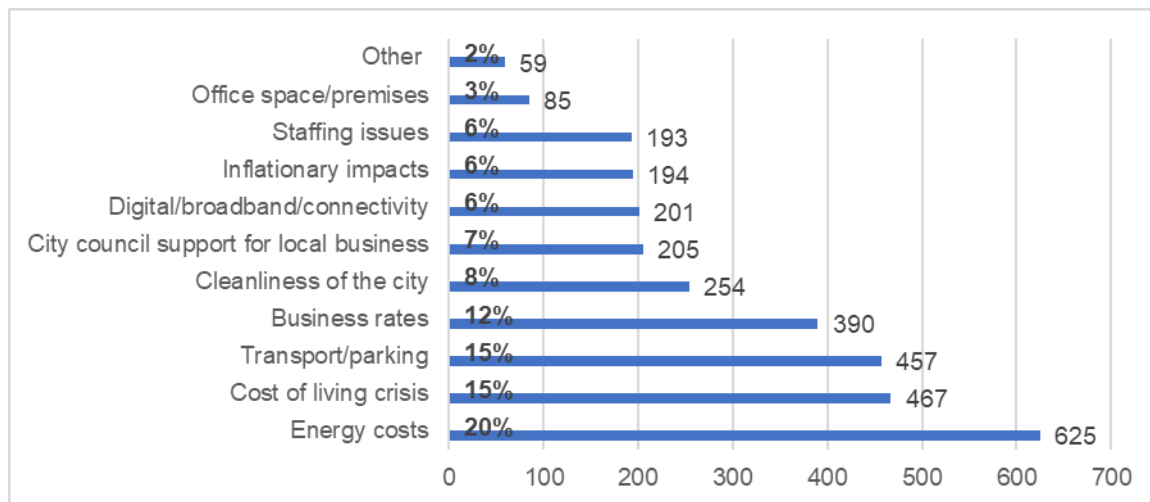
Q8. To what extent do you agree that we should continue to review our assets by assessing which ones to sell or finding ways of generating additional income from letting out our assets?



A strong majority of residents **support** the council's approach to asset management:

- 78% of residents strongly/somewhat agree
- Only 8% of residents strongly/somewhat disagree

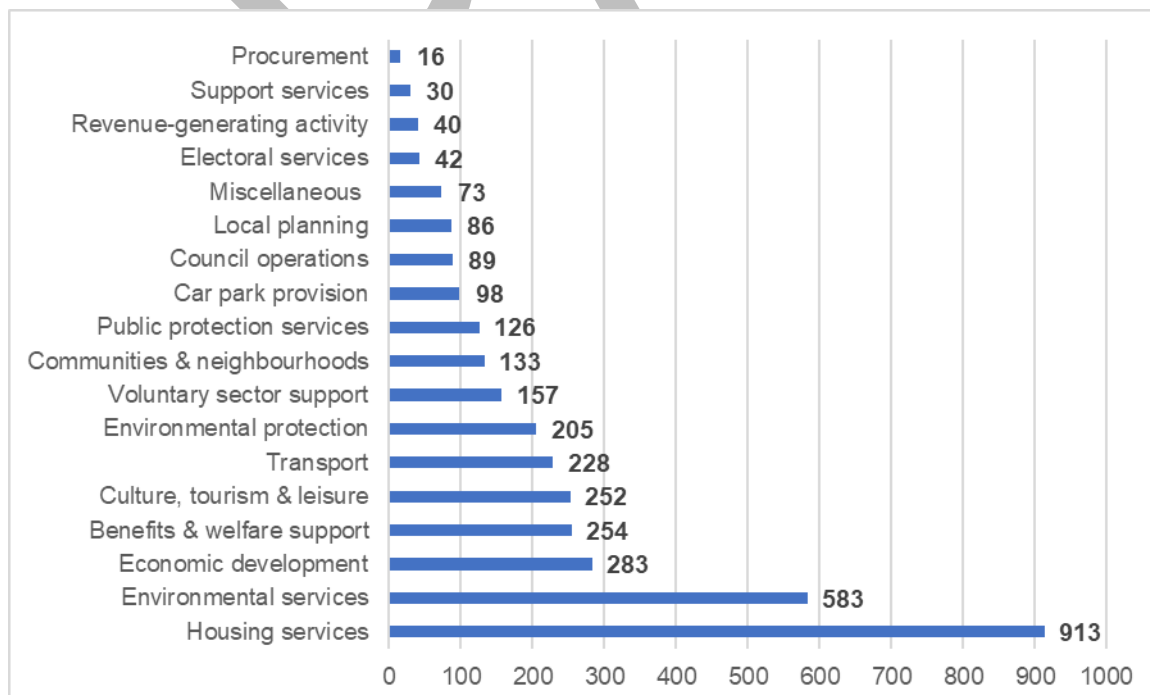
Q11. If you own or run a business in Norwich what are three things that most concern you from a business perspective?



Qualitative survey results

Q7. With these key aims and services in mind, if you had £1m to invest in Norwich, what would your spending priorities be?

Question 7 provided an open-ended text box for residents to provide additional detail in response to the above question. Out of the 2121 responses received, 2072 of these provided additional comments. Resident responses have been grouped into the below key themes are shown in the graph below. To note, comments often touched upon various themes, so the percentages for each theme will not equate to 100. Further analysis and example comments are provided for the top themes.



44% (913) of responses focused on **housing services**, including increasing and improving council housing stock as well as promoting the development of affordable housing through planning policies. Comments included:

- *“Ensuring housing can deliver the service required to residents through support to sustain tenancies and providing high quality repairs and maintenance”*
- *“Social rent housing and quality temporary accommodation stock would save money going forward on hotels and bed and breakfasts”*
- *“Providing accessible, safe, long-term housing for the homeless and other vulnerable or low-income communities”*
- *“Building quality homes like the ones at Goldsmith Street and Trinity Gardens in Bowthorpe”*
- *“Housing is the most important to city, keeping in mind many can’t and won’t be able to pay for the high price of private houses rent”*
- *“Housing services, the number of people homeless and insecure tenancies needs to be addressed”*

28% (583) of comments mentioned investing in **environmental services** such as waste collections and recycling. The comments below reflect the wider tone of responses captured by this theme:

- *“Make the streets cleaner, over the last 12 months the bins are overflowing with rubbish”*
- *“Keeping streets and parks clean from litter, to protect wildlife and make them safe places for children and adults. Recycling is very important and something that is done well here in Norwich I think. Our parks and open spaces are lovely, make Norwich special, and we should carry on investing in making them wildlife friendly and nice places for everyone to be in”*
- *“More recycling bin options and collections including food waste”*

The maintenance of green spaces featured as a prominent response type within this theme. Many residents highlighted their importance in providing free leisure options for families with children, as well as the mental and physical health benefits of being outside in nature. A selection of these comments included:

- *“Norwich is outstandingly attractive and these green spaces help inhabitants enjoy a good quality of life with no charge at the point of use. Good for fitness and mental health support.”*
- *“Keeping parks and such areas clean and inviting. Everyone needs somewhere cheap and safe for their days out at the moment and places to entertain children when money is tight. People need open safe spaces to walk and breathe and escape for while”*

14% (283) of responses focused on **economic development**. This theme captured comments including supporting local business, job creation, regeneration projects, workforce upskilling and attracting inward investment. A selection of these comments are detailed below:

- *“Creating more jobs or more assistance/opportunities for people to find work”*
- *Supporting local, independent businesses, especially when redevelopment of areas is being considered (e.g. Anglia Square)”*

- *“Building the economy to attract inward investment, through new businesses, new employment opportunities, and new shops/attractions so that the council tax base is funded more through commercial activities than residents”*

A subsection of comments within this theme put forward ideas for the city centre to be redeveloped with a view to providing a space for community engagement and leisure, as opposed to being predominantly geared towards retail.

12% (254) of responses focused on providing **benefits and welfare support**. As demonstrated by the data from questions 5 and 6, the cost of living crisis and the ability to pay bills are regarded as the most important issues affecting the city and its residents. Comments included:

- *“The cost of living crisis is the most immediate pressure and difficulty facing Norwich residents, so I would invest most of the money in supporting the most vulnerable through housing services and benefits”*
- *“Council Tax Benefit as cost of living has increased and people are struggling”*
- *“Investing in early intervention support to prevent people getting into debt or more serious problems”*

A subsection of comments within this theme also touched upon improving benefits administration with regards to means testing, as well as expanding benefits eligibility criteria to account for low-middle earners. Comments included:

- *“Ensure council tax benefits are appropriate- not everyone in a certain ‘group’ needs the same benefits or reductions”*
- *“Support for middle earners who are above threshold help and don’t earn enough”*
- *“Investigating benefit fraud”*
- *“Council tax should be means tested. It would be well worth surveying communities as to income of households so that council tax could be implemented on a sliding scale. Those on the highest incomes would be taxed the most. A blanket rise in each tax band will annoy those on low incomes when wages have not risen in line with inflation”*

12% (252) of responses mentioned investing in **culture, tourism and leisure** including council-run events, with the vast majority of these highlighting their place-making value and importance in promoting a sense of community. Comments included:

- *“The more you can invest in tourism the more money will be spent in the city and more money will be able to be spent on the above services”*
- *“Promotion of our city to encourage both tourism and people moving to our city. Both will increase revenues for the city, businesses and make our city even more desirable. Yes, it’s an expenditure but one that will be recouped many times over. Let’s make Norwich a destination”*
- *“Retaining the amazing feeling of civic pride the council has created via events such as art trails, Christmas lights etc”*

With the budget shortfall in mind, it is worth noting that a small minority of responses within this theme opposed council budgets being used to fund these services instead of funding core, statutory services.

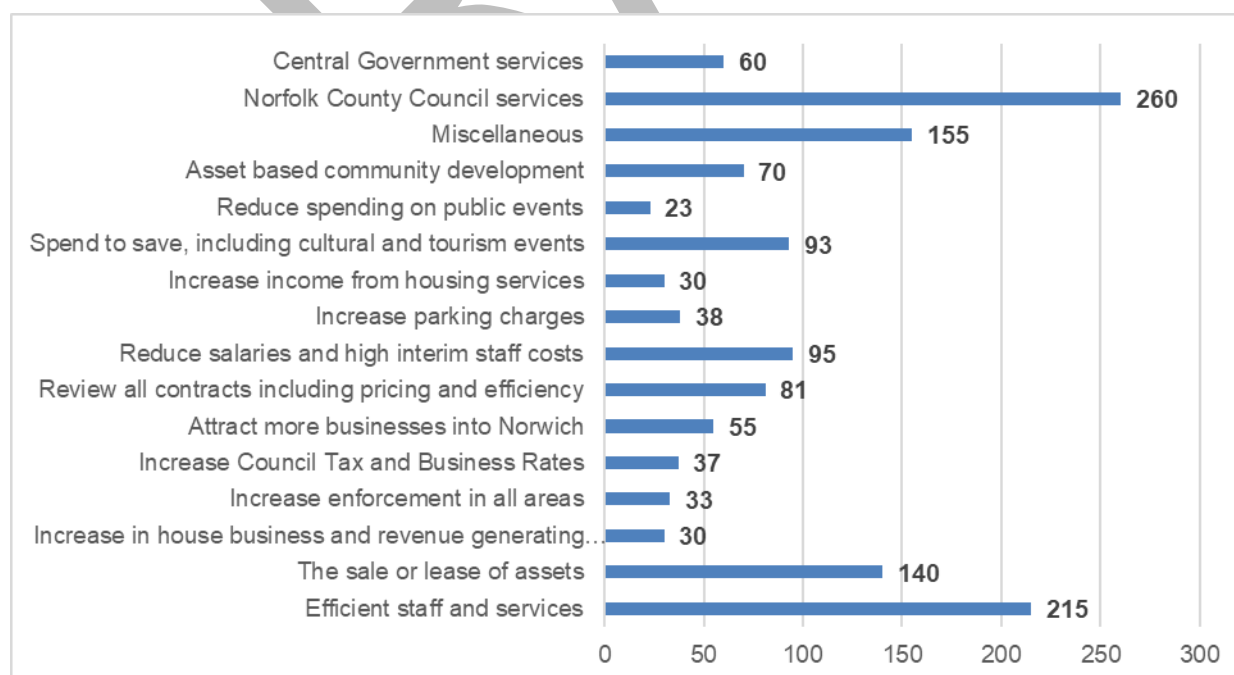
11% (228) of the survey responses focused on **transport** investments. Although Norfolk County Council is predominantly responsible for this, Norwich City Council has a role in influencing plans and policies for local transport and associated infrastructure through partnerships such as Transport for Norwich.

A significant proportion of comments within this theme supported initiatives to pedestrianise the city and prioritise greener forms of travel such as cycling and walking over car access to the city. However, recent road closures, increased traffic congestion and reduced public transport services were highlighted as negatively impacting respondents' access to the city centre.

10% (205) of the consultation responses focused on **environmental protection** across a broad range of issues such as sustainability, carbon reduction, and biodiversity. A subsection of comments within this theme specifically highlighted investing in initiatives to improve the energy efficiency of the city's housing stock as a means of reducing cost of living pressures for residents.

Q9. Do you have any other ideas about how we can balance our budget by doing things differently, finding additional ways to bring in more money or make savings?

Question 9 provided respondents with the opportunity to express their own ideas about how Norwich City Council might balance its budget via an open text box. Out of the 1509 responses received, 963 provided additional comments in response to question 9. These responses have been grouped into key themes to facilitate effective analysis, as shown in the graph below.



The following section provides an overview of responses across each of the above themes. To note, comments often touched upon various themes, so the percentages for each theme will not equate to 100. Further analysis and example comments are provided for the top themes.

27% (260) responses mentioned **Norfolk County Council services**. Comments included:

- *“Be more careful with money spent on road repairs”*
- *“Introduce a congestion charge”*
- *“Build a light railway network (similar to DLR) - this would reduce traffic congestion - it's impossible to travel outside of the city centre without a car - and earn ongoing revenue”*
- *“Invest in young people. Their education and their wellbeing - they have done nothing to deserve this misery you put them through”*

22% (215) of the responses mentioned **efficient services and council staff**. Comments included:

- *“Use technology to allow your teams to work more efficiently together rather than duplicating work”*
- *“Make sure jobs on council properties are done efficiently so no one has to have a job redone. Employ people who work properly and quickly so work is not dragged out costing more money”*
- *“Improve networking between departments therefore improve time constraints on projects”*
- *“Looking at efficiency in each department and eliminating duplication”*

15% (140) of the responses mentioned **the sale or lease of council assets**. Comments included:

- *“Enable more staff to work from home so office space can be sold off”*
- *“A better use of city hall, if less office space is needed these spaces could be used for other income generating or charitable purposes”*
- *“Let out rooms in city hall for other agencies to work in or for private functions”*
- *“Further rationalising the number of office buildings you own and renting out surplus space to other organisations”*

10% (95) of the responses mentioned **reducing salaries** and high interim staffing costs. Comments included:

- *“Have less high paid managers and red tape would be a good start”*
- *“Less wastage on agency staff salaries”*
- *“Make temporary senior positions permanent and pay a fair salary. Too many senior management staff are receiving unrealistic wages. This money could be saved or put back into services by employing more officers for teams that are short staffed”*
- *“Look at staff costs and aim to reduce these and get people back into city hall to increase their spending in local services”*

10% (93) of the responses mentioned **spending to save** including cultural and tourism events. Comments included:

- *“Solar farms on council properties to generate income”*
- *“Make more of opportunities to bring more cultural investment to the city by collaborating with educational & cultural institutions”*
- *“Leverage the incredible tourist potential of our medieval city”*
- *“Increase city events. Make more revenue from tourism”*

Q10. Do you have any other ideas about which capital expenditure projects would make a difference to our residents or businesses?

Question 10 provided respondents the opportunity to express their own ideas about possible capital expenditure projects that would make a difference to residents and businesses across the city. Out of the 986 responses received, 818 provided additional comments.

The findings from this data conclude that the majority of responses did not directly relate to capital expenditure projects. Instead, responses put forward suggestions that included broad themes related to the sale/use of assets, cutting services and reducing spending on all services that are non-statutory.

