

## **2. GENERAL FUND 2024/25 BUDGET AND MTFS**

### **Forecast 2023/24 Outturn**

- 2.1 The latest estimated outturn position on the General Fund, shows a forecast underspend of around £3.5m.
- 2.2 Most of the underspend has been generated within corporate finance. This is due to similar reasons as in 2022/23, where an increase in the level of interest generated by the council's day to day cash investments continues due to higher interest rates and relatively high cash balances. In addition, a review of the council's Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) policy has also delivered savings in the year.
- 2.3 In the December 2023 update to the medium-term financial strategy, it was assumed that any underspend achieved within 2023/24 will be utilised to support the implementation of the council's change programme as it responds to the priorities of the Corporate Plan. This remains largely unchanged although some resources have been into the capital financing reserve to support capital investment in corporate plan priorities and the budget risk reserve.

### **Proposed 2024/25 Revenue Budget**

#### **Savings, growth and investment**

- 2.4 Permanent savings/additional income of £3.7m have been identified in 2024/25. Updates to the MTFS assumptions, such as a slower growth in the Housing Benefit Subsidy gap, means that the proposed budget shows a balanced position for 2024/25, with no requirement to draw down on general reserves. However, in the later years of the plan there is a cumulative gap indicated; no work has been done to mitigate this gap as the financial planning assumptions for those years' are being made in the absence of the next spending review information and so are highly speculative. The further uncertainties surrounding the outcome of a general election also serve to complicate those projections still further.
- 2.5 Included within the savings figure are amounts relating to updated assumptions on the council's cash investments (£0.4m additional in 2024/25 followed by a reduction of £1.2m in 2025/26). The Council also has two (HRA) £50m loans maturing in 2026 and 2028 but is operating on the expectation that they can be refinanced at similar rates, recognising that the economic outlook is forecasting falling interest rates in the medium term.
- 2.6 The focus for 2024/25 has been on the following themes, which are based around the council's journey to be a modern, efficient council:
- Delivery of the existing savings programme
  - Income optimisation and automation
  - Fees and charges
  - Asset management (include commercial rental income)
  - Corporate items: capital financing
- 2.7 Delivery of existing savings clearly underpins the viability of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy. whilst the other four themes relate to the overall

efficiency and effectiveness of the authority to deliver against in the corporate priorities.

- 2.8 Outcomes will be driven by the Corporate Plan and the results of the Corporate Plan consultation will help drive the allocation of resources across the authority. By linking the Medium-Term Financial Strategy to the Corporate Plan, assurance can be provided that the resources required to deliver the planned outcomes and benefits will be in place and that, as the Corporate Plan evolves, the Medium-Term Financial Strategy can be flexed to respond to any changes in priorities and/or the timing of outcomes.
- 2.9 The council undertook a public consultation in relation to the proposed budget and on the proposal for a council tax rise. An analysis of the results can be seen at Appendix 2 (E). The consultation found that most respondents supported the proposed council tax rise and the retention of the 100% council tax reduction scheme. There was also broad support for the approach taken to closing the estimated 2024/25 budget gap using the 5 thematic approach, rather than individual saving proposals from across the council.
- 2.10 The proposed 2024/25 budget currently includes provision for £1.4m of permanent budget growth (i.e. increases to the budget not arising from inflationary factors). The permanent growth has broadly been targeted towards additional resources to support economic growth and regeneration, environmental actions and to allow for capacity to address the Corporate Plan consultation outcomes. The additional resources are also intended to address statutory Health and Safety actions and known pressures in relation to elections and to support the provision of an in-house payroll service. Further details relating to these proposals can be seen at Appendix 2 (F) below.

### **Inflation**

- 2.11 The increasing inflation levels have placed additional pressures on the council's finances. There are £3.8m of contractual and energy inflationary pressures included within the lifetime of the MTFP as well as £4.4m payroll pressures and £1.0m Housing Benefit pressures, this is on top of £4.9m of inflationary costs which have already been incorporated into the 2023/24 budget across pay, gas, electric and other contract costs.
- 2.12 The council's pay structure is primarily based on national negotiating body pay spines and nationally negotiated settlements. The process has only recently been concluded for the 2023/24 financial year at a level greater than the budgeted figure. An estimate of payroll inflation has been included within the provisional budget for 2024/25. Given that pay costs form a significant proportion of the council's budget and the uncertainty over future pay awards, this is a key budget risk (see paragraph 2.28).
- 2.13 Many of the council's contracts have inflationary increases incorporated within them and therefore the significant increases in CPI and RPI measures has created a clear pressure on the budget position. Inflationary increases have been applied across the council's main contracts, although there remains a risk that further cost pressures emerge as contracts come up for re-tender. The provisional local government finance settlement seeks

to ensure that there is an increase in funding for all local authorities, not least by the means of the Funding Guarantee, but this has been set at a 3% increase relative to the 'Core Spending Power' (CSP) whereas many costs directly impacting local government, for example insurance premiums or postage have been increasing at significantly higher rates in recent times.

### **Council Tax & Business Rates**

- 2.14 Any increase in the level of council tax is limited by referendum principles, which for a district council have been set at a maximum of up to 3% for 2024/25. This referendum level was confirmed in the finance policy statement for 2024/25 which was published on 5<sup>th</sup> December 2023.
- 2.15 A 2.99% increase to the Band D rate is proposed in the 2024/25 budget figures (£0.483m additional income including changes to the taxbase). The proposed 2024/25 Band D rate is therefore £297.22 compared to the current year rate of £288.59 – an increase of £8.63.
- 2.16 This is for the Norwich City Council share of total council tax only and does not include the amounts required from preceptors - Norfolk County Council and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Norfolk. Appendix 2 (D) shows the proposed increases (for Norwich City Council only) by each Council Tax band.
- 2.17 The figures shown will be reduced, for qualifying council taxpayers, by the council's Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTR). Currently the total cost of the CTR scheme is £14.69m, of which the Norwich share is around £1.94m.
- 2.18 The current estimate of the Council Tax base is 38,773 which combined with the Band D rate gives an expected income of £11.524m in 2024/25.
- 2.19 The forecasts for retained Business Rates income for 2024/25 assumes income in line with the council's baseline funding level as set by government but uprated for the September CPI level of 6.62%. This is consistent with the updated modelling of the impact of changes made to the Business Rates system in the provisional local government finance settlement.
- 2.20 The Council is in a pool that shares the benefits of growth across Norfolk. The Medium-Term Financial Plan currently assumes that there will be no further changes to the business rate retention scheme for future years, due to long-term uncertainty regarding the government's plans for business rates. Overall, the council is better off from being in a pool than not. Collectively, Norfolk collects less resource from its business rate taxbase than its needs assessment suggests and therefore, retains the levy element.

### **Council Tax Premiums**

- 2.21 As a billing authority, the council must adopt policies for the application of discretionary Council Tax premiums.
- 2.22 The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 received Royal Assent in October 2023, which established discretionary Council Tax premium options on empty properties and second homes. The Act reduces the minimum period for the implementation of a Council Tax premium for empty premises from two years to one year with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024 and allows Councils to introduce a Council Tax premium of up to 100% in respect of second homes.

- 2.23 Billing authorities that wish to adopt a second homes premium are required to make a Council resolution confirming their requirements at least 12 months prior to the financial year in which the changes will come into effect.
- 2.24 This report recommends an in-principle decision from Members to agree proposals in accordance with the Council Tax premium proposals set out within the Act.
- 2.25 Initial, high-level analysis shows that the application of a 100% premium on second homes within Norwich could generate around £1.37m in additional Council Tax revenue, with circa £0.18m retained by Norwich City Council.

### Grants

- 2.26 The publication of the provisional Local Government Settlement introduced some significant changes to the way in which grants were allocated nationally. The Services Grant was introduced in 2022/23 to provide funding to all tiers of local government in recognition of the vital services delivered at every level of local government. Originally it was a one-off grant but it has subsequently been extended into 2023/24 and now 2024/25. In 2023/24 Norwich City Council received £0.24 million from this funding source, but in 2024/25 this has been reduced to just £0.04 million as resources were diverted to support upper tier authority pressures. This loss has been offset to a degree by an increase in the Funding Guarantee, which equates to £0.14 million. There is no indication how the resources provided through the funding guarantee might be removed in future settlements.
- 2.27 This reflects the national decision to divert a significant proportion of the Services Grant towards social care and emphasises the current uncertainty in local government finance and the consequent challenges when trying to plan for the medium-term.

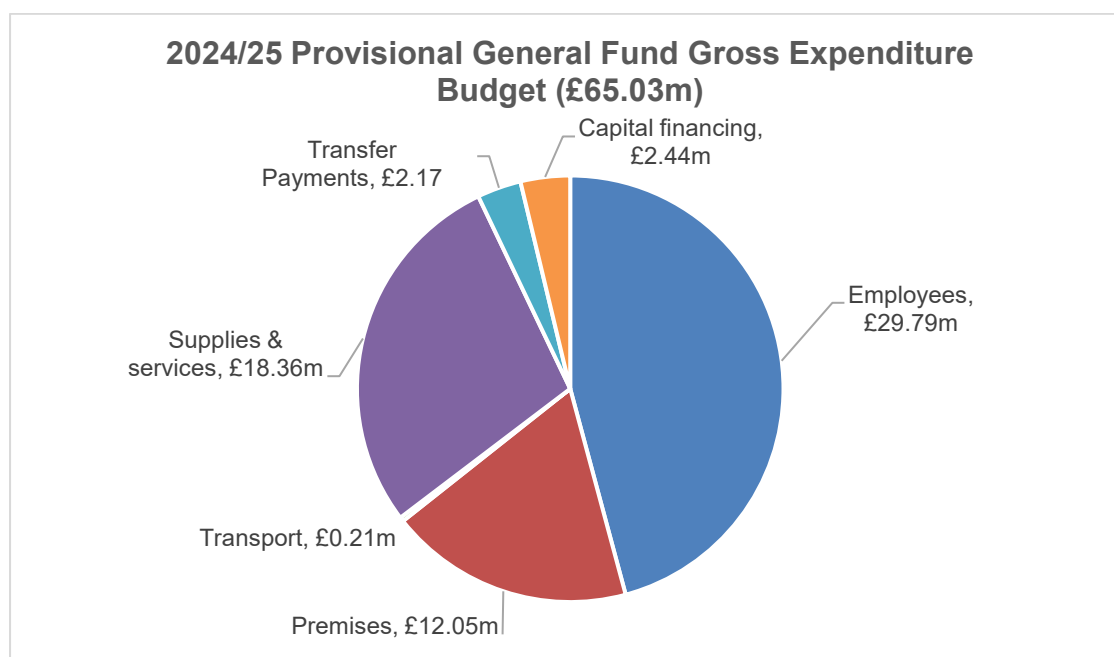
Grants	Provisional Settlement £000
Revenue Support Grant	523
New Homes Bonus	58
Services Grant	38
Funding Guarantee Grant	782
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,401</b>

### Budget Risks

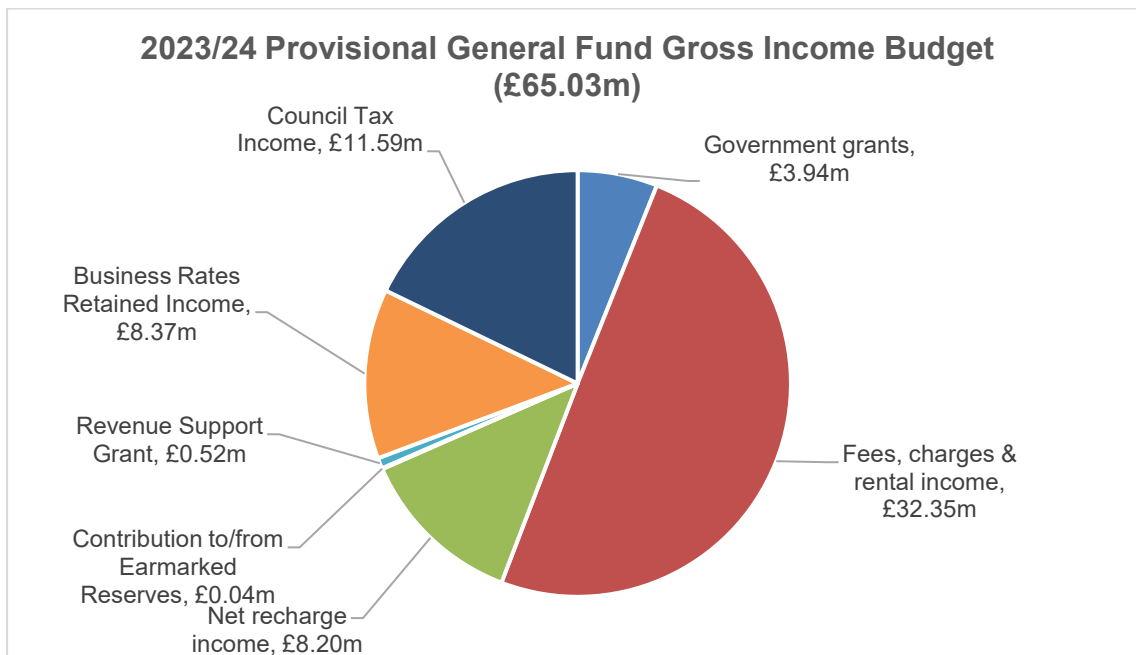
- 2.28 At this stage, the combination of uncertainty over the wider economic conditions means the level of risk associated with the provisional budget remains relatively high. Some of the key risks are outlined below which will continue to be closely monitored. The council holds a budget risk reserve (current balance £1.8m) to provide resilience against emerging pressures and delays in the delivery of savings and other unforeseen events. Given these uncertainties it is proposed to increase the level of the budget risk reserve from the anticipated 2023/24 revenue underspend.
  - **Savings delivery & cost of change.** The budget includes £3.745m of savings and income proposals for delivery in 2024/25. This is a significant undertaking and will require close monitoring of delivery.

- **Inflation.** The volatility in inflation continues to pose a risk, which will need to be kept under review, however current forecasts from the Bank of England and the Office for Budget Responsibility indicate that the peak may now have passed. Recent experience of impacts upon inflation driven by international events suggests that there may be a risk of some further volatility in the short-term.
- **Housing Benefit.** In recent years the council has seen reducing level of Housing Benefit subsidy recovery against its housing benefit expenditure, attributable to continuing growth in rent levels against fixed subsidy caps. The projection is this will continue to worsen over the life of the MTFs. Whilst every council is seeing increased natural migration to Universal Credit, Department of Work & Pensions (DWP) rules mean cases that attract 100% subsidy return are lost to councils, whilst DWP's strategy is to continue to leave temporary, exempt and supported accommodation cases with councils and it is these cases that are subject to punitive subsidy rules. The pressure in relation to exempt accommodation is approximately £1.0m and is projected to grow further over the life of the MTFs. Along with increased demand and rental market pressures, councils are therefore seeing increased subsidy loss.
- **Service Pressures.** The economic situation is continuing to put significant financial pressures on local businesses and residents, particularly the most vulnerable. It may also impact on all council income streams including fees and charges and the levels of council tax and business rates collected.

**Chart 2.1: 2024/25 Provisional General Fund Gross Expenditure Budget**



**Chart 2.2: Provisional General Fund Gross Income Budget**



## Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)

- 2.29 The MTFS is a forecast of the estimated cost of delivering current services over the next five years, compared to the anticipated funding streams to support council services. This results in a projected budget gap from which the future savings requirements are estimated.
- 2.30 The July 2023 MTFS update identified a savings requirement of £8.194m over the four-year period to 2028/29 (Table 2.1). The updated MTFS is showing a savings requirement over the same period of £8.819 million, of which £8.106 million has been identified and incorporated into the budget proposals. This leaves a forecast overall deficit over the whole MTFS period of £0.713 million (Table 2.2).

**Table 2.1: July 2023 Medium Term Financial Position – Figures are in £000s**

Medium Term Financial Strategy	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
<b>Revised Base Budget Requirement</b>	<b>22,683</b>	<b>21,823</b>	<b>22,761</b>	<b>22,254</b>	<b>22,894</b>
less available resources (grants, Council Tax, Business Rates etc.)	19,802	20,308	20,829	21,365	21,918
<b>Budget Gap/(Surplus)</b>	<b>2,881</b>	<b>1,515</b>	<b>1,932</b>	<b>889</b>	<b>976</b>
less Savings Identified	2,200	1,748	1,298	42	0
plus savings yet to be identified to balance 2024/25	-	681	-	-	-
<b>Remaining Budget Gap/(Surplus)</b>	<b>681</b>	<b>-233</b>	<b>634</b>	<b>847</b>	<b>976</b>

- 2.31 Since, July 2023, the Council has updated its projections for the changes attributable to inflation, pay, council tax, business rates and interest rate projections. The savings have also been reviewed for deliverability and been re-profiled where appropriate. Table 2.2 reflects the detailed implication of those changes. Table 2.2 is prior to existing savings being incorporated into the net gap.

**Table 2.2: Updated Medium Term Financial Position – Figures are in £000s**

Medium Term Financial Strategy	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000	2028/29 £000
Base Budget Requirement b/fwd	19,041	20,487	20,827	21,330	21,944
Net Budget Movements (inflation, growth etc.)	5,191	1,745	2,147	1,617	1,620
<b>Revised Base Budget Requirement</b>	<b>24,232</b>	<b>22,233</b>	<b>22,973</b>	<b>22,947</b>	<b>23,564</b>
less available resources (grants, Council Tax, Business Rates etc.)	20,487	20,827	21,330	21,944	22,542
<b>Budget Gap/(Surplus)</b>	<b>3,745</b>	<b>1,406</b>	<b>1,643</b>	<b>1,004</b>	<b>1,021</b>
less Savings Identified	3,745	714	2,295	797	555
plus savings yet to be identified from previous year	0	0	691	40	247
<b>Remaining Budget Gap/(Surplus)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>691</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>247</b>	<b>713</b>

2.32 The council has identified a range of potential future savings of £8.106m against the revised cumulative target of £8.819m (residual savings £0.713m). These are provisional options and are still subject to a full budget validation process. All options will continue to be refined as part of finalising budget papers for February 2024 and future corporate business planning processes.

**Table 2.3: Savings Plan to deliver on Gap – Figures are in £000s**

Savings identified: Revised Dec 2023 Cabinet report	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000	2028/29 £000
Savings Re-profiled	1,921	2,250	2,391	310	0
HRA savings element	-161	-80	-32	0	0
Fees and Charges Add'l	823	-450	-154	153	155
MRP & Treasury Add'l	962	-1,206	-110	-66	0
Income Maximisation & Automation	200	200	200	200	200
Asset Management & Commercial Rents	0	0	0	200	200
<b>Total estimated savings</b>	<b>3,745</b>	<b>714</b>	<b>2,295</b>	<b>797</b>	<b>555</b>
less: Savings Gap	3745	1406	1643	1004	1021
<b>Residual Gap</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>-692</b>	<b>-40</b>	<b>-247</b>	<b>-713</b>
Cumulative Savings	3745	4460	6754	7551	8106

2.33 It should be noted that, as the options are still subject to a full validation process it is likely that the savings figures may evolve and change as this work is completed. There is also a high degree of risk associated with the MTFs projections especially around government funding from next year (2025/26) onwards in light of the fiscal challenges outlined in the Autumn Statement. It is therefore important the council has plans that can flex to the financial position as a clearer view emerges.

### MTFS Risks & Uncertainties

2.34 There are number of significant financial risks and uncertainties over the period of the medium-term financial strategy. These include:

- Future funding levels given the clear message in the Autumn Statement about the need to increase public sector productivity and the fiscal drag that is likely to impact upon unprotected public sector spending.
- Uncertainty over future inflationary levels and impacts on council expenditure.
- Quantum of the savings to be delivered and the associated costs to enable the required changes.
- Capital requirements arising from the ongoing strategic review of the council's asset portfolio.
- That a General Election will be held at some point during 2024/25.

### General Fund Reserves Position

## **General Fund Unallocated Reserve**

- 2.35 The prudent minimum level for the general fund reserve was set at £5.400m by full Council in February 2023 as part of the budget approval. This will be reviewed as part of the main budget report in February 2024 but is not expected to move significantly. The General Fund unallocated reserve, subject to delivering on savings is expected to remain at £8.248m over the life of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy, which remains above the prudent minimum level.

## **General Fund Earmarked Reserves**

- 2.36 Taking account of the council's expected surplus in 2023/24, the overall general fund reserves (including earmarked reserves) are expected to increase to £27.164m. However, much of these resources are earmarked for specific purposes. It is only through tight fiscal management that the council can deliver services and reinvest in the city.
- 2.37 On the basis that provisional options have been identified to significantly close the budgetary shortfall in the years 2024/25 to 2028/29 no further drawn downs from general reserves are currently forecast to be required, although given the uncertainty over funding levels further work will be required to address this and any remaining funding shortfalls once financial planning totals become available.

## **Earmarked Reserves**

- 2.38 The General Fund holds several earmarked reserves which are held for specific purposes. The balances held in earmarked reserves are regularly reviewed to assess whether the funds are held at an appropriate level, in particular at the financial year end, as part of the preparation of the statements of accounts the balances reflected within the Balance Sheet will be reconciled including to the final General Fund outturn position. The key reserves and their current balances are summarised in Table 2.4.

**Invest to Save Reserve:** To support the delivery of savings and efficiencies through the Future Shape Norwich Programme over the next 2-3 years.

**Budget Risk Reserve:** To manage the financial risks associated the delivery of the budget savings identified.

**Business Change Reserve:** To fund costs linked to the council's change programme which are not delivering specific savings, for example project management, benchmarking and potential redundancies. It will also support training and development of our workforce to ensure we have the skills required to deliver the ambitions of the Council.

**Commercial Property Reserve:** Established to reduce the risks associated with holding commercial property by providing funding for any future void and rent-free periods as well as repairs and upgrades to the investment portfolio.

**Insurance Reserve:** This is to cover the excesses carried in respect of claims under various insurance policies and is subject to annual review.

**Lion Homes Reserve:** Originally established to smooth any fluctuations in net income received by the Council from lending to Lion Homes. The reserve level was increased to mitigate against any potential future



Minimum Revenue Provision charges required to cover for estimated non-recovery of the loan balance.

**Collection Fund Equalisation Reserve:** Unutilised balance of S31 grant monies received in prior years from Central Government to fund Business Rates reliefs.

This will be used to manage the volatility in Collection Fund movements due to timing issues of Section 31 Grants and weakening of the business rate base over the early period of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

**Revenue Grants Unapplied:** Holds grants and contributions received which have yet to be applied to meet expenditure. The use of the balance is restricted and can only be used to fund the specific service area awarded the grant income.

**General Fund Repairs Reserve:** To provide future funding for required maintenance on general fund properties.

**Business Rates Pool Reserve:** This reserve is to support future spend in line with the economic development objectives of the fund.

**Capital Financing Reserve:** A reserve to hold the resources necessary to manage any additional voluntary revenue provision requirements or to fund future capital expenditure.

**Table 2.4: General Fund Earmarked Reserve Balances – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023**

General Fund Earmarked Reserves	Balance as at 31 March 2023 £000	Estimated Balance as at 31 March 2024 £000
Invest to Save	1,660	1,660
Budget Risk	1,800	2,500
Business Change	4,178	4,121
Commercial Property	2,041	2,041
Insurance Reserve	311	311
Lion Homes	1,700	1,700
S31 Grant	629	1,229
Revenue Grants Unapplied	3,860	3,860
General Funds Repairs	530	530
Business Rates Pool	110	110
Capital Financing	0	700
Other Minor Reserves	154	154
<b>Total</b>	<b>16,972</b>	<b>18,916</b>

**Appendix 2 (A): Movements from the approved 2023/24 base budget**

	£000
<b>2023/24 Budget Resources</b>	<b>(19,041)</b>
<b>Budget movements:</b>	
Increase in business rates income	(895)
Increase in council tax income	(519)

Movement in revenue support grant	(32)
<b>2024/25 Budget Resources</b>	<b>(20,487)</b>
<b>2023/24 Budget Requirement</b>	<b>19,041</b>
<b>Budget movements</b>	
Reversal of one-off items in the 2022/23 budget	(18)
MTFS movements	390
Inflation	2,681
Reduction in grant income	73
Other movements and recharges	679
Permanent Savings & Additional Income	(3,745)
Permanent growth	1,386
<b>Revised 2023/24 Budget Requirement</b>	<b>20,487</b>

#### Appendix 2 (B): 2024/25 provisional budget by subjective group

Subjective group	Budget 2023/24 £000	Budget 2024/25 £000	Movement £000
Employees	28,865	29,790	(1,359)
Premises	11,744	12,053	1,255
Transport	209	209	(40)
Supplies & services	18,598	19,226	819
Transfer Payments	41,639	40,430	147
Capital financing	4,016	2,442	(361)
<b>Gross expenditure</b>	<b>105,071</b>	<b>104,150</b>	<b>461</b>
Government grants	(44,037)	(42,181)	808
Fees, charges & rental income	(32,558)	(33,237)	(4,875)
Net recharge income	(8,606)	(8,201)	1,445
<b>Gross income</b>	<b>(85,201)</b>	<b>(83,619)</b>	<b>(2,622)</b>
Contribution from General Reserves	0	0	2,100
Contribution to/from Earmarked Reserves	(829)	(44)	1,389
<b>Total Budgetary Requirement</b>	<b>19,041</b>	<b>20,487</b>	<b>1,328</b>

#### Appendix 2 (C): 2024/25 provisional General Fund budget by service

	Gross Expenditure £000	Gross Income £000	Net Expenditure £000
<b>Chief Executive</b>	<b>267</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>267</b>

<b>Corporate Financing</b>	<b>4,410</b>	<b>(5,784)</b>	<b>(1,374)</b>
Corp & Commercial Services Management	476	0	476
Finance, Audit & Risk	1,931	(1,146)	785
HR & Organisational Development	1,207	(514)	693
Legal & Procurement	3,153	(1,378)	1,775
Revenues & Benefits	43,417	(39,733)	3,684
<b>Total Corporate &amp; Commercial Services</b>	<b>50,184</b>	<b>(42,771)</b>	<b>7,413</b>
Community Services Management	407	0	407
Customers, IT & Digital	7,796	(3,041)	4,755
Strategy, Engagement & Culture	3,623	(1,462)	2,161
Housing & Community Safety	6,845	(5,615)	1,230
<b>Total Community Services</b>	<b>18,671</b>	<b>(10,118)</b>	<b>8,553</b>
Development & City Services Management	556	0	556
Environment Services	17,994	(14,820)	3,174
Planning & Regulatory Services	4,439	(2,257)	2,182
Property & Economic Development	7,628	(7,868)	(240)
<b>Total Development &amp; City Services</b>	<b>30,617</b>	<b>(24,945)</b>	<b>5,672</b>
<b>Total General Fund</b>	<b>104,149</b>	<b>(83,618)</b>	<b>20,531</b>
Contribution from General Reserves	0	0	0
Contribution from Earmarked reserves	0	(44)	(44)
Contribution to Earmarked reserves	0	0	0
<b>Budget Requirement</b>	<b>104,149</b>	<b>(83,662)</b>	<b>20,487</b>
Revenue Support Grant		(523)	(523)
Business Rates Retained Income		(8,374)	(8,374)
Council Tax Income		(11,590)	(11,590)
<b>Budget Resources</b>		<b>(20,487)</b>	<b>(20,487)</b>

## Appendix 2 (D): Calculation of Retained Business Rates Income & Council Tax

### A. Business Rates Retained Income

	£000
Total Business Rates Income	(26,119)
Tariff	25,501
Retained surplus S31 Grant & Multiplier Cap Adjustment	(7,860)
Levy to the Pool	104
<b>Total Business Rates Income 2023/24</b>	<b>(8,374)</b>

### B. Council Tax Calculation 2024/25

	£
<b>Budgetary requirement</b>	<b>20,487</b>
- Revenue Support Grant	(523)
- Business Rates Distribution	(8374)
<b>= Council tax requirement</b>	<b>11,590</b>
- Surplus on collection fund 2022/23	(65)
<b>=Total Council tax income</b>	<b>11,525</b>
Band D Equivalent properties	38,773
<b>Council tax (Band D)</b>	<b>297.22</b>

### C. Proposed Norwich City Council tax increases 2023/24 to 2024/25, Bands A to H

Band	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
<b>2023/24</b>	<b>£192.39</b>	<b>£224.46</b>	<b>£256.52</b>	<b>£288.59</b>	<b>£352.72</b>	<b>£416.85</b>	<b>£480.98</b>	<b>£577.18</b>
Increase	£5.76	£6.71	£7.68	£8.63	£10.55	£12.47	£14.39	£17.26
<b>2024/25</b>	<b>£198.15</b>	<b>£231.17</b>	<b>£264.20</b>	<b>£297.22</b>	<b>£363.27</b>	<b>£429.32</b>	<b>£495.37</b>	<b>£594.44</b>

## **Appendix 2 (E): Consultation responses on the proposed budget for 2024/25**

### Consultation and engagement approach

The consultation, which ran from 21 December 2023 to 15 January 2024, was hosted on the council's consultation and engagement website 'Get Talking Norwich' (GTN).

To help inform people's views, key documents were made available on Get Talking Norwich: the council's provisional budget and medium-terms financial strategy 2024-25; Norwich 2040 City Vision; Corporate Plan progress report 2023.

The response rate was 281 completed surveys. This compares with an average response rate of 1,140 over the past 6 years.

This year's engagement focused on five main areas:

1. Continuing to deliver the savings that were agreed in the 2023-24 budget and medium-term financial strategy.
2. Collecting all money that is owed to the council in the most efficient way possible.
3. Ensuring we charge the right amount of money for our services, so it covers the cost of providing them and includes inflationary increases.
4. Managing the properties that we own to the best effect including maximising income generation.
5. Use the money we have in the bank in a way that helps us generate more money.

Direct engagement was encouraged from colleagues, elected members, residents, partners/key stakeholders, and wider service users.

The budget consultation was promoted widely throughout the 26 days it was live via a number of channels and methods. These included publishing a news article on the council's website, social media posts, issuing a news release to the local media, text message bundles and internal colleague-wide promotion.

### Part 2: detailed analysis

#### Key findings

Feedback from the consultation indicates broad support for the council's intended approach to managing its budget and meeting its forecasted budget gap of £3.7 million for 2024-25.

The majority of respondents supported the council's proposal to increase the city council's share of council tax by up to 2.99% per cent to safeguard council services (53% somewhat or strongly support this proposal, compared to 39% who strongly or somewhat oppose the increase).

There was strong support (59%) for the council providing up to 100 per cent council tax relief to those on low incomes, despite only 11% of respondents receiving this support at present. 35% of respondents somewhat or strongly oppose retaining this scheme.

The majority of respondents (52%) somewhat or strongly support the council raising fees and charges to safeguard service provision, while 36% somewhat or strongly oppose this proposal.

The top-rated council services in order of preference were as follows: parks and open spaces, waste and recycling and housing services.

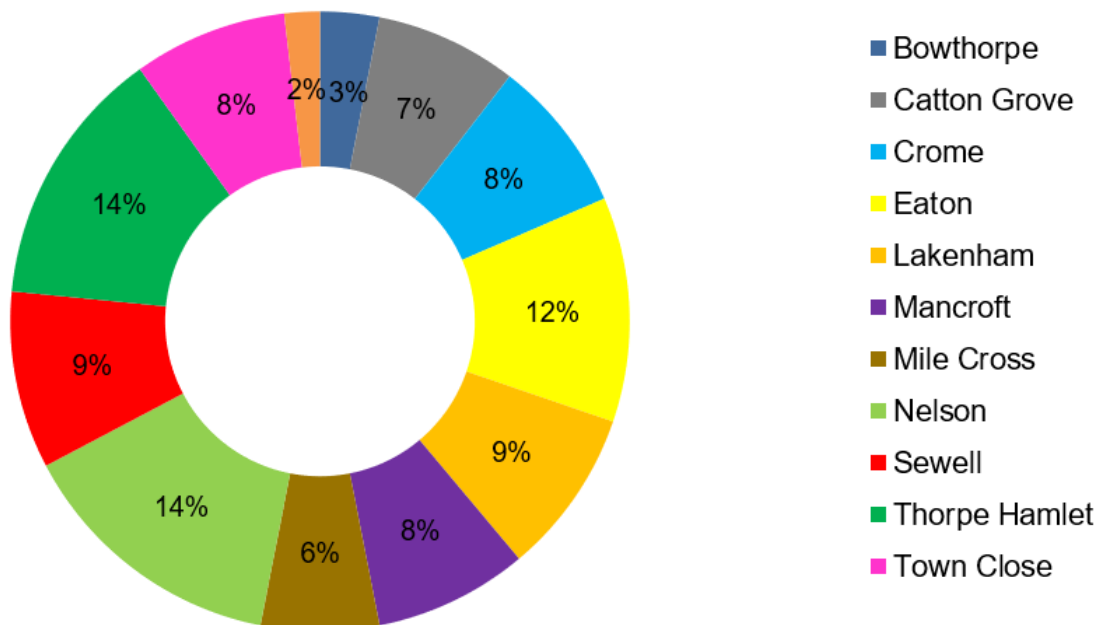
### Respondents' profile

The following section of the report outlines demographic data about the respondents who completed the budget consultation survey via Get Talking Norwich. All percentages throughout the respondent's profile section, quantitative analysis and qualitative analysis section are rounded to the nearest whole number, e.g. 8.6% is presented as 9% and 19.3% is presented as 19%. This may result in some percentages not totalling 100 for some questions.

The majority of those who completed the online survey responded as an individual (94%), compared with 6% who responded as an employee of Norwich City Council.

While responses from the VCSE sector were low, it is worth noting the extensive corporate plan consultation and engagement activities that took place across November and December 2023, which were well attended by key city stakeholders and partners across the public, private and voluntary sector.

Q11. What is your full postcode?



Q12. What age group are you in?

The majority of respondents (58%) were aged 45 and over, and over a third were aged 25-44.

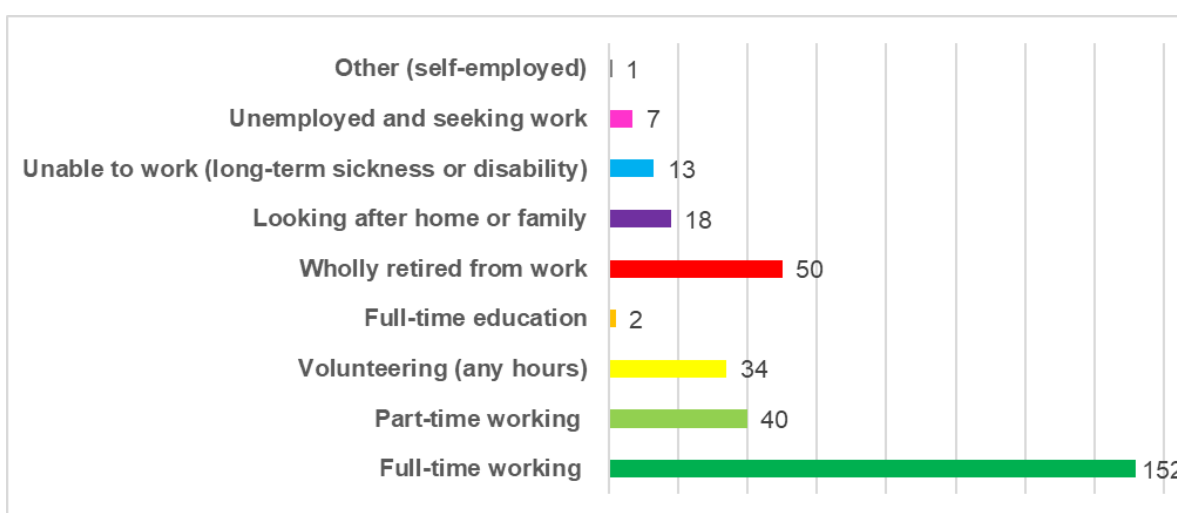
Age group	Number of respondents	Percentage
Under 14	0	0%
14-16	0	0%
17-24	8	3%
25-44	94	34%
45-64	106	38%
65 and over	56	20%
Prefer not to say	13	5%
Total responses	277	

Q13. Do you consider yourself as having a long-term health condition and/or disability?

26% of respondents identified as having a disability, while 69% did not. 6% of respondents did not disclose this information.

Category	Number	Percentage
Yes	72	26%
No	190	69%
Prefer not to say	15	6%
Total responses	277	

Q14. Which, if any of these activities describe what you are doing at present? Only tick 'looking after home or family' if this is your main activity and none of the other options apply.



Category	Number
Full-time working (30+ hours per week)	152
Part-time working (<30 hours per week)	40
Volunteering (any hours)	34

Full-time education (including government training programmes)	2
Wholly retired from work	50
Looking after home or family	18
Unable to work due to long-term sickness or disability	13
Unemployed and seeking work	7
Other (self-employed)	1

Q15. If you work full or part-time, do you currently have more than one job to make up your income?

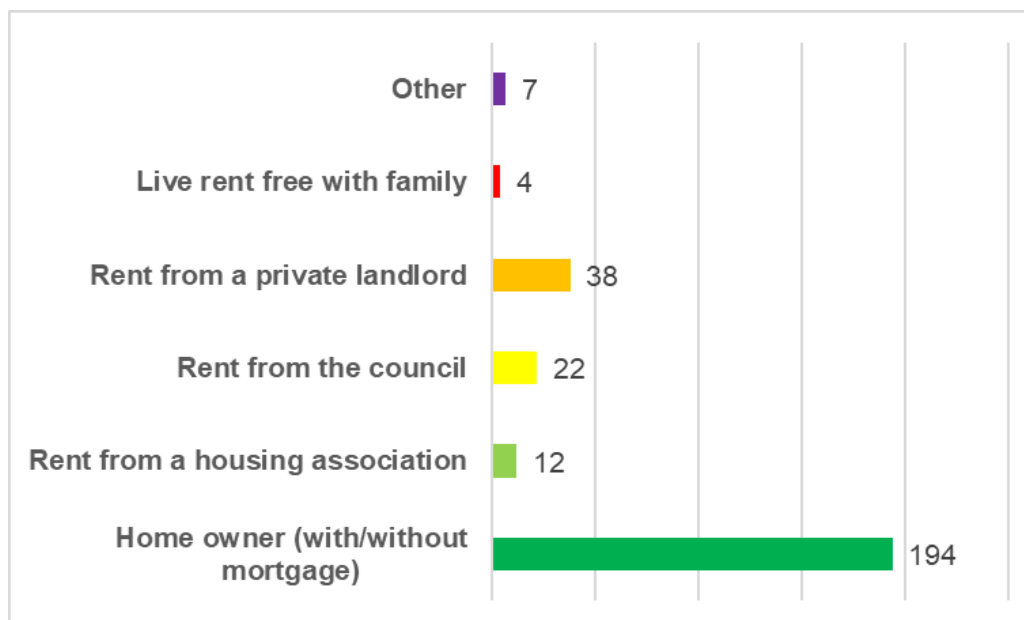
87% of respondents work more than one job to make up their income, compared with 14% who only work one job.

Q16. Do you receive help from the council to pay your council tax (the council tax reduction scheme?)

87% of respondents receive support from the council via the council tax reduction scheme, while 11% do not. 2% of respondents were unsure if they receive this support at present.

Category	Number	Percentage
Yes	30	11%
No	238	87%
I'm unsure	6	2%
Total responses	274	

Q17. Which of these statements, if any, describe your housing situation?



Category	Number
Own own home (with or without mortgage)	194
Rent from a housing association	12



Rent from the council	22
Rent from a private landlord	38
Live rent free with family	4
Other, including: - Shared ownership (own 50% of property and rent the remaining 50% from housing association) - Living with family (paying rent)	7
Total responses	277

#### Q18. What is your ethnicity?

The majority of respondents (88%) identified as White, 8% preferred not to disclose this information and 1% identified their as Mixed or multiple ethnic groups. 2% of respondents identified their ethnicity as Other, 1% of respondents identified as Asian or Asian British and 0% of respondents identified as Black, African, Caribbean or Black British.

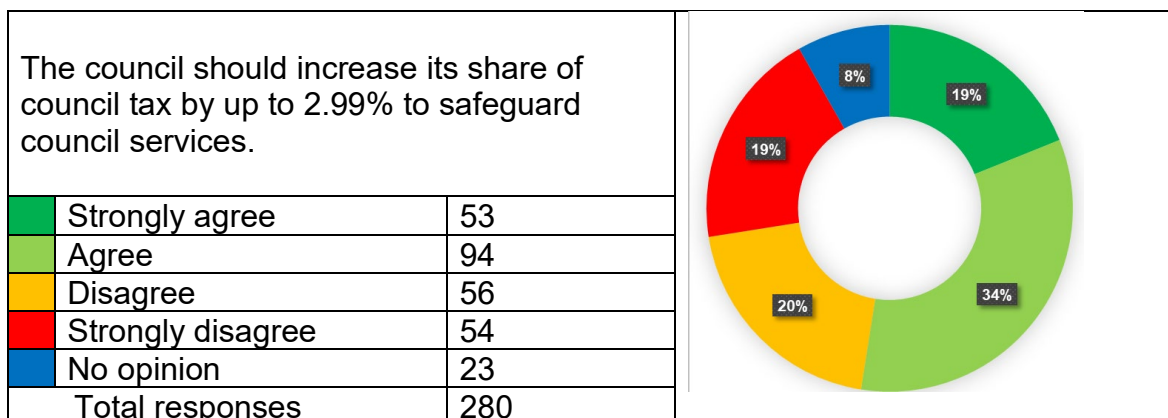
Category	Number
White	243
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	3
Asian or Asian British	4
Black, African, Caribbean or Black British	0
Prefer not to say	22
Other	5
Total responses	277

#### Quantitative survey results

The following section of the report breaks down the quantitative survey responses by question. A short paragraph supplements the graphs and tables provided to highlight notable trends.

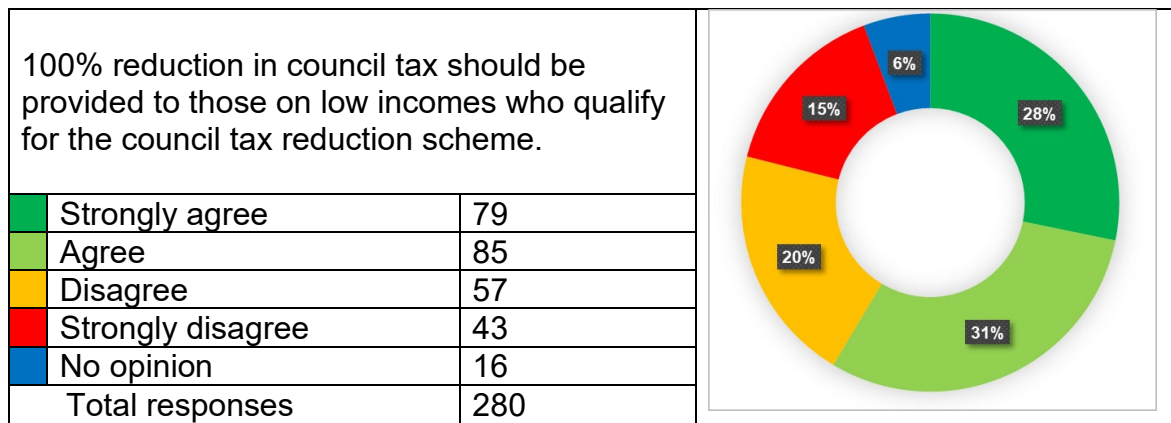
#### Q1. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the council increasing its share of council tax by up to 2.99% to safeguard council services?

The majority of respondents (53%) somewhat or strongly support the council increasing council tax by up to 2.99%, while 39% somewhat or strongly oppose this increase. 8% of respondents have no opinion on this proposal.



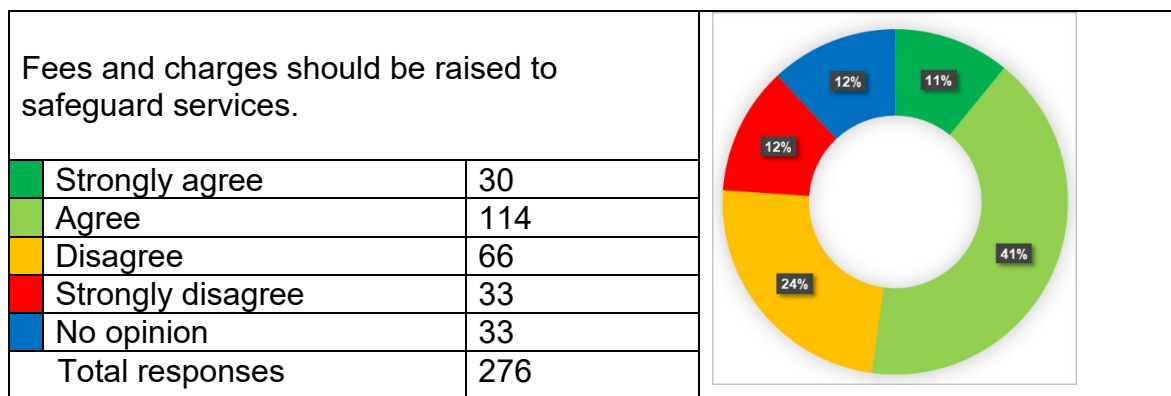
Q2. To what extent do you agree or disagree with providing up to 100% reduction in council tax to those on low incomes who qualify for the council tax reduction scheme?

The majority of respondents (59%) somewhat or strongly support the council continuing to provide up to 100% reduction in council tax to those on low incomes who qualify for the scheme, compared with 35% of respondents who somewhat or strongly oppose this.



Q3. To what extent do you agree or disagree with us raising fees and charges to safeguard services?

52% of respondents somewhat or strongly support the council raising fees and charges to safeguard service provision, while 36% somewhat or strongly oppose this. 12% of respondents have no opinion on this proposal.

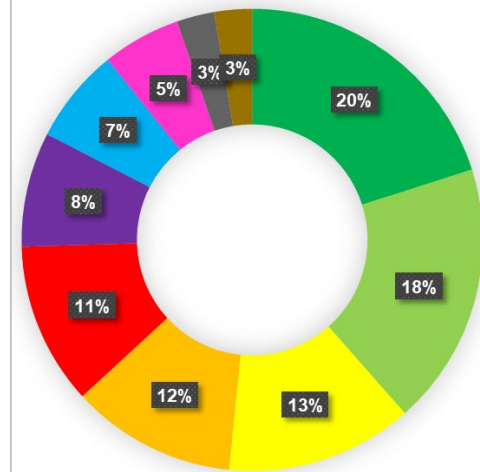


Q4. If we increased fees and charges it would help fund valued services. Please tell us below which services you value most. Please select up to five.

The top three most valued council services are parks and open spaces, waste and recycling and housing services.

The services which are most valued by respondents are:

Parks and open spaces	214
Waste and recycling	197
Housing services	138
Leisure facilities	123
Events and culture	118
Benefit support	85
Local planning	70
Car parking	58
Election services	28
Other	28
Total responses	281

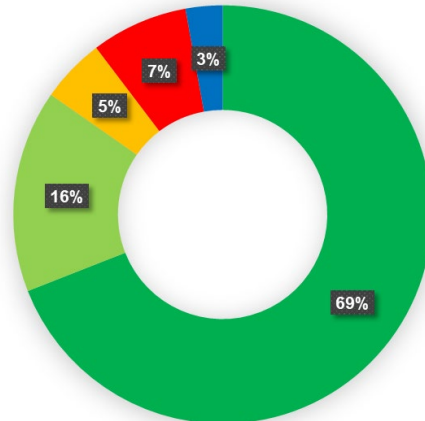


Q5. To what extent do you agree or disagree that where a second home has been empty and unfurnished for over one year, we should charge a 100% council tax premium?

A significant majority (85%) of respondents somewhat or strongly support the proposal to charge a 100% council tax premium on second homes that have been empty and unfurnished for over one year, compared with only 12% who somewhat or strongly oppose this. 3% of respondents have no opinion on this proposal.

Where a second home has been empty and unfurnished for over one year, we should charge a 100% council tax premium.

Strongly agree	194
Agree	44
Disagree	14
Strongly disagree	21
No opinion	8
Total responses	281

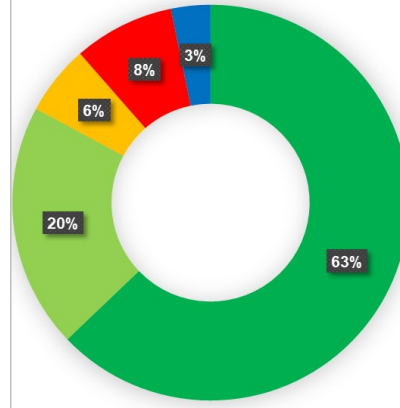


Q6. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the council should charge a 100% council tax premium for second homes and other properties that are unfurnished but unoccupied?

83% of respondents somewhat or strongly support a 100% council tax premium being charged on second homes and other properties that are unfurnished but unoccupied, while 14% somewhat or strongly oppose this. 3% of respondents have no opinion on this proposal.

The council should charge a 100% council tax premium for second homes and other properties that are furnished but unoccupied.

Strongly agree	176
Agree	56
Disagree	16
Strongly disagree	23
No opinion	9
Total responses	280

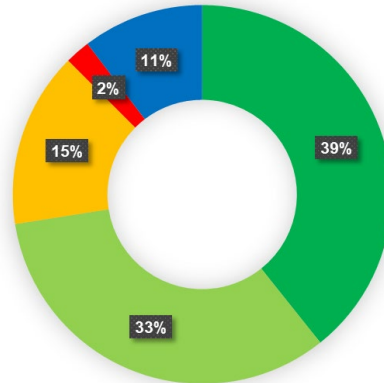


Q7. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the council should manage its property portfolio in a way that maximises income, to ensure the council can continue to deliver services that residents value most.

72% of respondents somewhat or strongly support the council managing its property portfolio to maximise income and allow services to continue being delivered, compared with 17% of respondents who somewhat or strongly oppose this. 11% of respondents had no opinion on this proposal.

The council should manage its property portfolio in a way that maximises income, to ensure the council can continue to deliver services that residents value most.

Strongly agree	110
Agree	93
Disagree	42
Strongly disagree	6
No opinion	29
Total responses	280

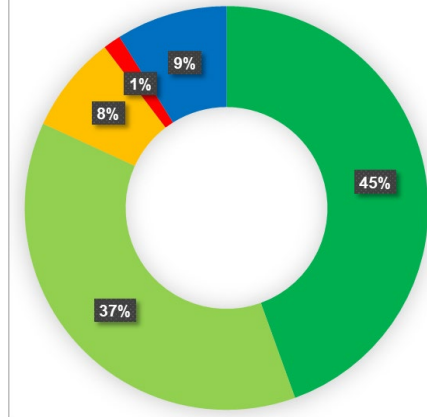


Q8. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the council should try to protect frontline services by doing all it can to reduce its running costs and embrace new technologies to help save money.

A strong majority of respondents (82%) somewhat or strongly support the council embracing new technologies to reduce running costs and protect frontline services, while 9% of respondents oppose this. 9% of respondents have no opinion on this proposal.

The council should try to protect frontline services by doing all it can to reduce its running costs and embrace new technologies to help save money.

<span style="color: green;">■</span> Strongly agree	125
<span style="color: lightgreen;">■</span> Agree	105
<span style="color: yellow;">■</span> Disagree	22
<span style="color: red;">■</span> Strongly disagree	4
<span style="color: blue;">■</span> No opinion	25
Total responses	281



### Qualitative survey results

Q8. Is there anything else you think we should do to increase income, save money or improve value for money?

Question 8 provided an open-ended text box for respondents to provide additional detail in response to the above question. 161 resident responses have been coded into the below key themes using content analysis as a research tool, with the most common theme appearing first:

41 (25%) responses mentioned reducing the council spend on staffing. This included reducing management layers, reducing council salaries and the number of council employees, and limiting the use of agency staff and interim consultants as a means of delivering savings.

32 (20%) responses mentioned reducing the operational costs of running Norwich City Council by harnessing new technologies, implementing more efficient and joined up ways of working and adopting flexible working practices such as home working and hot desking.

18 responses (11%) mentioned housing provision including private sector housing regulation and improving council housing services. This included building more council homes, reducing void/repair turnaround times and enforcing fines on rogue landlords in the private rented sector.

13 responses (8%) mentioned changes to council tax rates as a means of generating income. This included support for council tax premiums on second homes, council tax increases being made in line with inflation and some opposition to 100% council tax relief being offered to some residents while others experience year-on-year increases in their council tax.

10 responses (6%) mentioned contract management of procured services to ensure value for money for the taxpayer and tendering for external contracts as a means of generating income.

Eight responses (5%) mentioned fees and charges as a means of generating income. This included increasing fees and charges such as car parking or general comments in support of making increases to fees and charges in line with inflation or to ensure cost recovery at a minimum. One response suggested increases to fees and charges should be applied to some discretionary services which would allow residents to choose whether they deem the service necessary rather than proposing council tax increases which affect all by default.

Seven responses (4%) provided comments in relation to the prioritisation of statutory services versus discretionary services. The majority of comments suggested consideration should be given to whether non-statutory services should continue where statutory services are not being fulfilled, with one comment suggesting that non-statutory services should only continue where they recover delivery cost at a minimum. One comment highlighted that investment in culture and leisure services could make the city more desirable, create new jobs and encourage highly skilled graduates to continue to live in the city after their studies.

Seven responses (4%) mentioned enforcing fines as a way to maximise income generation. This included enforcing parking fines and Fixed Penalty Notices for offences including littering, fly-tipping and dog fouling.

Six responses (4%) mentioned employment support schemes and stricter monitoring of benefit fraud as a means of saving money. This included encouraging those who are unemployed but fit to work back into employment.

Six responses (4%) mentioned the management of council-owned assets. This included comments in relation to reducing empty office space at City Hall, which could be rented out to other organisations and ensuring all council properties and empty garages are in a rentable condition as a means of maximising income generation. One comment opposed the sale of council-owned assets.

Six responses (4%) mentioned reducing spend on physical infrastructure projects, with one comment indicating that such projects should take a lower priority during a cost of living crisis.

Five responses (3%) mentioned more proactive approaches to debt recovery as a means of generating income. This included more robust recovery of overdue council tax, council rent and business rates.

Five responses (3%) mentioned investing in the council's climate change and sustainability agenda. This included comments in relation to investing in green spaces and renewable energy solutions for council-owned property which could create green jobs and reduce the council's operating costs in the long-term.

Four responses (2%) mentioned waste and recycling services, with two comments indicating better value for money would be delivered by keeping the city's streets clean, while two comments suggested waste charges for the collection of large household items should be reduced to prevent cases of fly-tipping, which may incur higher costs to the council to remove.

Three responses (2%) mentioned seeking central government funds and grants to increase council income and deliver better value for money to the taxpayer.