

**REPORT OF THE DEPUTY LEADER AND CABINET MEMBER FOR
TRANSFORMATION**

ANNUAL BUDGET SURVEY 2023 – ANALYSIS

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide the results of the 2023 budget survey to Cabinet, for consideration in the development of setting the Council's annual budget in early 2024.

Budget Survey – Rising to the Challenge

2. The Nottinghamshire Plan, approved in November 2021, sets out the County Council's 10-year vision for a healthy, prosperous and greener future for everyone. The Plan places an emphasis on:
 - Improving health and wellbeing in all our communities
 - Growing our economy and improving living standards
 - Reducing the County's impact on the environment
 - Helping everyone access the best of Nottinghamshire.
3. These themes are underpinned by strategies and plans developed across Departments, including our Annual Delivery Plan (available on the Council website), which sets out the actions we will take in year to further our progress towards meeting our targets.
4. We have made positive progress against our Annual Delivery Plan (as evidenced in our latest Annual Report) and continue looking to the future and finding ways we can deliver the best for Nottinghamshire's communities, whilst ensuring value for money. Our budget is built on a foundation of solid financial management over many years.
5. Set against the backdrop of increased inflation and energy costs, additional demands on our services, an increase in complex and specialist health care needs, a national shortage of social care staff and a need for more Government funding, the 2023 annual budget survey set out how the Council spends its allocated budget, and asked Nottinghamshire residents for their views about our services, their priorities, and opportunities to reduce spend or raise additional revenue.
6. Building on the positive response from last year's survey, consideration was given as to how the 2023 budget survey could be further developed, this included a thorough review by Overview Committee. The full report ([29 June 2023](#)) is available on the Council's website, with recommendations having been considered in the design of this year's survey.

7. Further details on the design principles of this year’s survey can be found in the [21 September 2023](#) report presented to Cabinet, which outlined the proposed approach prior to launch.

Outreach and Responses

8. The budget survey launched on 29 September 2023 and closed on 12 November 2023. Building on last year’s budget survey, which at the time saw the highest number of responses received for a budget consultation run by the County Council in recent years; the latest 2023 budget survey has continued this positive uptrend, with this year’s survey having been completed by 3,911 respondents.

9. This is a significant improvement of 59% over the 2,454 responses received last year, and particularly noteworthy against comparable budget consultations conducted in recent years, which had not exceeded 1,400 responses.

10. The below showcases Nottinghamshire County Council’s response rate when compared against other local authorities, who have also recently conducted a budget consultation ¹ - for 2023, this equates to one in every 211 of Nottinghamshire residents having completed the survey.

(Financial) Year of consultation	County Council	No. of responses	Population ²	Response Rate
2023/24	Nottinghamshire	3911	826,257	1 in 211
	Hampshire	2935	1,406,199	1 in 479
	Kent	2620	1,578,519	1 in 602
2022/23	Hertfordshire	2935	1,200,620	1 in 409
	North Yorkshire	2654	618,847	1 in 233
	Suffolk	2617	763,375	1 in 292
	Essex	2434	1,506,345	1 in 619
	Derbyshire	2431	796,847	1 in 328
	Cambridgeshire	1458 ³	680,407	1 in 467
	Norfolk	805 ⁴	918,369	1 in 1141
	Gloucestershire	621	646,627	1 in 1041
	Oxfordshire	559	726,530	1 in 1300
Surrey	358	1,205,616	1 in 3368	

11. To achieve this latest response rate, Nottinghamshire County Council’s survey was publicised through a number of platforms, including:

- a dedicated space on the Council’s website, hosting background information and linking through to an online survey that was open to all Nottinghamshire residents.

¹ the table accounts for the total number of responses as a comparison against a county’s total population, it does not account for the different selection/ sampling methods other authorities may have adopted.

² source: LGInform.

³ combines findings from a door-to-door survey and website survey; potential overlap in respondents.

⁴ respondents could choose to comment on 4 different proposals; please note this number reflects responses rather than individual respondents.

- Emailme bulletin, sent to all 141,931 subscribers to the Council's emailme system. The initial email, sent on 29th September 2023 with a further reminder email, sent on 6th November 2023.
- Targeted communications to encourage completion were also sent to:
 - i. 178 Parish Councils
 - ii. Members of the business community - 14,245 recipients
 - iii. Citizen's Panel - 1714 recipients
- The Council also utilised social media to promote survey completion. 39 posts were published (19 on X, 19 Facebook and 1 LinkedIn) from 5 September 2023 through to 12 November 2023. In total these reached 24,900 residents, with 48,100 impressions and resulted in 21 comments, 40 likes and 54 shares/reposts.
- Polls were run on Instagram and X that were seen by over 900 people.
- Printed posters and survey booklets produced and distributed to 60 Libraries across the county. Completed copies of the survey could either be handed in at the library or posted back to the Council using the provided freepost address. Seven hard copy returns were received.
- Electronic versions of the posters and booklets were emailed to all elected members and children's centres, to promote and encourage survey completion.
- For residents needing support with completing the survey, there was also the option to phone the Council's Customer Service Centre, where the operative would assist and fill the survey out on the resident's behalf.
- A press release and newspaper column were sent countywide on 29 September, with the consultation link included in a number of press releases from across Departments, during October and November.
- The Cabinet Budget report on 9 November 2023 led to a number of interviews on TV, radio and in print with residents being encouraged to fill in the consultation. The Cabinet Member for Finance did a number of 1:1 interviews and discussed the consultation with regards to how it helps with budget planning.
- For examples of the types of digital material used to promote the survey, see **Appendix B**.

12. Although there is little evidence that the budget consultation specifically was a topic of discussion on social media, the issues consulted on i.e. highways, recycling, adult social care, libraries were discussed across all social platforms and there is a direct correlation with our social media posts and chats on community Facebook & X platforms.

Analysis

13. A high-level summary of the survey results can be seen below, with **Appendix A** providing a further overview of the data and information returned.

Living in Nottinghamshire

14. The first few questions were designed to help the Council understand residents' feelings about living in Nottinghamshire and how the Council supports people. When referring to 'local area', this meant anywhere within 15-20 minutes walking distance from the respondent's home.

15. The majority of respondents were positive about their local area as a place to live, with 69% specifically saying that they are 'very or fairly satisfied'. With regard to how satisfied respondents are with the way the Council runs things, 43% were 'very or fairly satisfied'.

16. When asked whether respondents agreed or disagreed that they can influence decisions affecting their local area, 15% had a positive view (strongly agree / agree) in their ability to influence decisions affecting their local area.

Budget Priorities

17. Asking respondents the extent to which they and their family access County Council services (frequently, occasionally, rarely, never, don't know), environmental services (waste and recycling, flooding and climate change) were the most frequently used by people who completed the survey, with 84% of respondents identifying that they make use of this either 'frequently', or 'occasionally'.

18. When ranking the three Nottinghamshire County Council services in order according to the services that benefit respondents the most, community and public transport was the service area most often identified by respondents as benefitting them and their communities, with 57% of respondents identifying this as one of their top three services. The other two services identified were environmental and care and support for vulnerable adults and older people.

19. When respondents were asked to what extent do you agree or disagree that the Council should reduce spend in a range of services to help meet the financial challenge (question 7), the majority of respondents did not agree or strongly agree with reductions to any of the services outlined in the survey document. Most respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with reductions.

Council Tax

20. In line with the maximum permissible Council Tax increase at the time of the survey, we asked respondents if they would support an increase in council tax, either up to the current referendum limit of 2.99%, or by a lower limit. Overall 63% of respondents would support an increase in council tax – 44% up to the current referendum limit and 19% would support an increase by lower than the referendum limit.

Adult Social Care Levy

21. In line with the maximum permissible increase at the time of the survey, respondents were also asked if they would support an increase in the Adult Social Care levy, either by the level currently permitted by Government (2%), or by a lower limit. 70% of people completing the survey would support an increase in the Adult Social Care Levy – 48% by the maximum level currently permitted, whilst 22% would support an increase by a lower level permitted.

Saving money and/or raising revenue

22. Question 9 offered respondents an opportunity to give suggestions about how the Council could save money or raise additional revenue, as a free text box option. The comments received as part of this were broken down as part of our analysis, into 14 specific themes, detail of which can be found in Appendix A.

Other Options Considered

23. Not to consult stakeholders – this would not enable the views of residents and other key stakeholders to be considered when Members make decisions as part of the budget setting process. Therefore, this option has not been pursued.

24. To conduct a different type of survey – this was considered by Members of the Overview Review Group who discussed the potential that, in future years, the questions and their format

could be amended to make them even more accessible, in a more interactive way. Members agreed that whilst there could be some potential benefits of large-scale changes to the format of the survey, making such changes would take considerable time and put significant demands on resources given the Council does not have a dedicated team for the management and delivery of consultation and engagement activity. Therefore, this option has not been pursued.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

25. To allow Cabinet the opportunity to review the results of the 2023 budget survey, when considering and developing the Council's annual budget in early 2024.

Statutory and Policy Implications

26. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Financial Implications

27. In addition to officer time in production of the survey, the approximate cost for the design and distribution of paper items is £922. This has been met from existing budgets.

Data Protection and Information Governance

28. A summary Data Protection Impact Assessment was completed and submitted to the Information Governance Team, detailing the tools that were to be utilised to run the consultation itself. Appropriate advice was taken regarding any impacts identified, prior to the survey launching.

Public Sector Equality Duty implications

29. In coming to a decision, Cabinet must have regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010. Efforts were made to address potential accessibility issues in the design of the survey.

30. A summary Equality Impact Assessment specific to the budget consultation, was also completed.

Implications for Sustainability and the Environment

31. There was a reduction to the number of paper copies produced for this year's survey. This reflects our commitment to being sustainable and environmentally friendly and that the vast majority of respondents are now completing the survey online. Printed posters and booklets were sent to libraries to ensure the survey was accessible. Electronic versions of the posters and booklets were emailed to all elected members and children's centres, whilst paper copies were also available on request, via our Customer Service Centre.

RECOMMENDATION/S

1) That Cabinet considers the results of the 2023 budget survey in the development of the 2024-25 budget proposals.

COUNCILLOR BRUCE LAUGHTON

DEPUTY LEADER AND CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSFORMATION

For any enquiries about this report please contact:

Isobel Fleming, Service Director Transformation and Change –
0115 854 6184, isobel.fleming@nottscc.gov.uk

Constitutional Comments (GR 24/11/23)

Pursuant to the Nottinghamshire County Constitution, the cabinet has the delegate authority to receive this report.

Financial Comments (PA 17/11/23)

There are no specific financial implications arising directly from the report.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

- [The Nottinghamshire Plan, 2021-2031: Our plan for a healthy, prosperous and greener Nottinghamshire](#)
- [The Nottinghamshire Plan Annual Delivery Plan 2023-2024](#)
- [The Nottinghamshire Plan Annual Report 2022-2023](#)
- Outcomes of the Scrutiny Review of Council Consultations and Resident Engagement – Report to Overview Committee ([29 June 2023](#))
- Annual Budget Survey 2023 – Report to Cabinet ([21 September 2023](#))
- High-level survey results – **Appendix A**
- Digital material used to promote the survey – **Appendix B**
- 2023 Budget Survey booklet/ leaflet – **Appendix C**

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

- All.