

# Budget Engagement

## Council Tax

Respondents were asked three questions through either online survey application SurveyMonkey, or during group conversations, as follows:

### **Q1 *Are you supportive of local councillors raising Council Tax by up to 3% to support the delivery of services within Aberdeenshire?***

Out of a total of 1,244 respondents, 1243 answered this question. 53.4% answered 'Yes' and 46.6% 'No'.

### **Q2 *Are you supportive of local councillors raising Council Tax by up to 3% to support the delivery of services within Aberdeenshire? If you have said 'No' please provide your suggestions on how else we could fund essential local services in the future.***

319 people responded to this question, including a small number who had answered 'Yes' to Q1. Many submitted comments rather than suggestions. The **key themes** included:

- **Service delivery** – 37% wanted the council to be more efficient through improvement in service delivery and budget preparation, including making better use of resources (staffing and buildings). Comments included suggestions to review pay and staffing requirements at senior and middle manager levels, closing underused offices and repairing/refreshing existing schools.
- **Charging** – 17% raised proposals based on charging. Suggestions included minimal charging for some services, including car parks, libraries and sports centres, and to increase developer obligations. It was felt the council could raise additional income through provision of services such as pest control and cleaning services. Some respondents resented paying for services they don't use.
- **Council Tax** – 17% wanted recognition that if there is to be an increase in Council Tax it has to be equitable and fair across all bands and not just the highest bands E to H. Any increase should be phased in with a starting level of 1%. Respondents wanted to see this money spent locally, i.e. in their own localities, and that a local income tax might work.
- **Funding sources** – 16% wanted money to come from other sources, suggesting the authority should go back to the Scottish Government and ask for a fair and equitable block grant. Several responses voiced concerns they were 'just about managing' and that any increase in Council Tax would put them in financial hardship. Some said the current valuation of housing in Aberdeenshire is out of date and needs to be revisited.
- **Clarity** – 6% wanted more information from the authority, stating a lack of clarity about the breadth of services respondents receive from Council Tax contributions and what statutory functions the council has to provide.

**Q3 Please provide us with any general comments that you would like to make which relate to Council Tax**

546 respondents provided a response to this question. A number of **key themes** emerged as follows:

- **Conditional Support** – Respondents generally expressed support for a rise in Council Tax. Many said they understood the ‘tax freeze’ could not continue indefinitely, and that service delivery would have to be paid for somehow.

However, a large proportion of respondents provided conditional support. The main caveats were:

- **Spend locally** – These respondents said any monies raised locally through an increase in Council Tax should be spent locally. Those who cited this generally believed that a proportion of the monies raised would potentially fund projects in other parts of Scotland, principally in the Central Belt.
  - **Improve Service Delivery** – Respondents said any rise in Council Tax should be accompanied by a commensurate rise in the quality of service delivery.
- **Review Council Tax bands/overhaul the Tax system** – Many respondents (both for and against a Council Tax increase) expressed a view that the Council Tax system itself was unfair or in need of a review. Respondents felt that it didn’t necessarily follow that those who lived in a ‘nice area’ or a ‘bigger house’ had more money or a better job. Many respondents believed tax rates should be based on the ability to pay. Some respondents felt that any rise to Council Tax should have been increased slowly over the previous few years. Others felt that if a rise is implemented it should be phased in gradually.
  - **Generally make the Council more efficient** – A proportion of those who supported a rise wanted Aberdeenshire Council to apportion resources more effectively and efficiently. Those opposed to a rise also noted that removing inefficiencies in the council would be a better way to fund services than increasing Council Tax, believing the council was generally over-staffed and/or wasted money.
  - **Communication re Council spending/initiatives** – Some respondents were keen to learn where money raised through Council Tax was being spent. In some cases, this led to a belief that they were not receiving value for money and therefore tended to oppose any increase. However, others felt that if pertinent information was released, or if they better understood where and how much money was spent, they may support an increase.
  - **Financial hardship/strain** – Some respondents referenced the downturn in the oil and gas sector as a reason for current financial difficulties, while others noted the rising cost of living. These people felt a Council Tax rise would only exacerbate their situation and as such tended to oppose any rise in Council Tax.

- **Perception** – Some respondents thought Aberdeenshire Council was suggesting it would be reducing services and collecting more money, rather than than funding existing provision with an increase in Council Tax.