

Appendix 2

CONSULTATION ON THE COUNCIL'S BUDGET PROPOSALS 2021/22

FEBRUARY 2021

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Between December 2020 and February 2021, the Council undertook an eight-week period of consultation on its budget proposals for 2021/2022, prior to making the final decisions on its budget.
- 1.2. The Council reported on its priorities, the budget setting context and local financial position and gave an outline of the proposals to balance the Council's 2021/2022 budget. The Council asked for views on the proposed increase in Council Tax levels and its proposals for delivering services in the future while achieving the savings needed.

2. Consultation Process

- 2.1. The Council hosted a survey on its engagement platform Let's Talk Coventry asking for people's views on the budget proposals. This survey was publicised through the Council website, Facebook and Twitter pages. There was a total of 56 respondents as well as several emailed comments. The results of the survey are summarised in section 3.
- 2.2. The Trade Unions were also consulted on the draft budget proposals and the Council continues to consult with the Trades Unions on the impact and implementation of the Council's budget.

3. Outcomes of the Consultation on the Council's Budget Proposals

- 3.1. The main points that were raised through the public consultation on the Council's budget proposals are set out below. A table is included at the end of this report that provides a selection of the comments made during the consultation by key theme and the profile of respondents.
- 3.2. In addition to survey responses written responses were received from the Coventry Trades Union Council.
- 3.3. A full list of comments from the meetings, online survey and written feedback can be received by contacting paul.jennings@coventry.gov.uk.

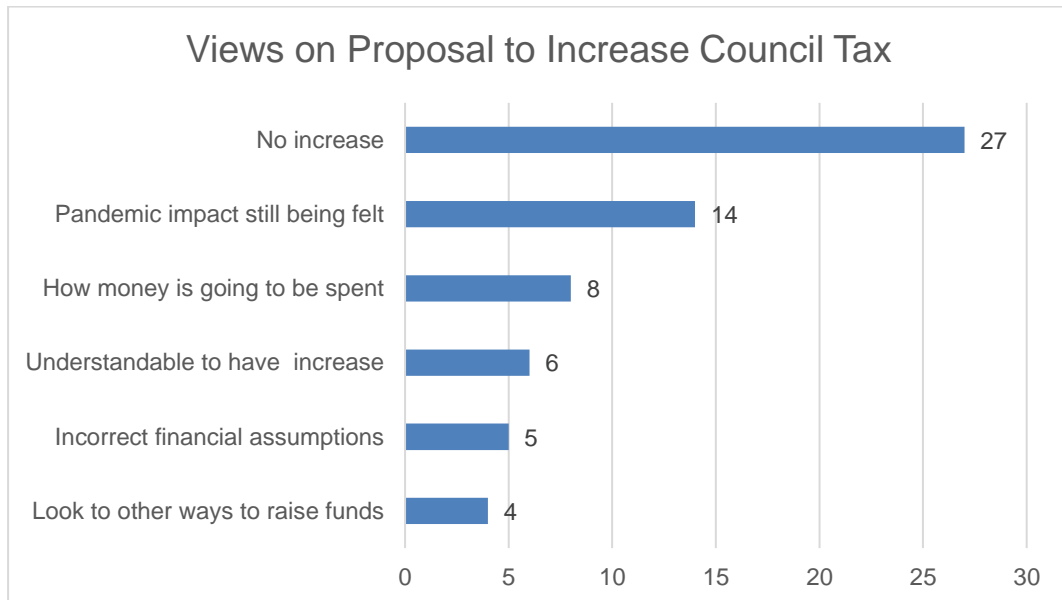
Feedback from the on-line survey and written feedback

- 3.4. Comments were received from respondents on the specific proposal of increasing Council Tax included in the pre-Budget Report. The graph below shows the comments received by theme. The majority of comments were against any potential increase, a large number of respondents also focused on the fact that the full impact of the pandemic is still being felt and that this increase would be unfair on those that have already been negatively impacted financially.

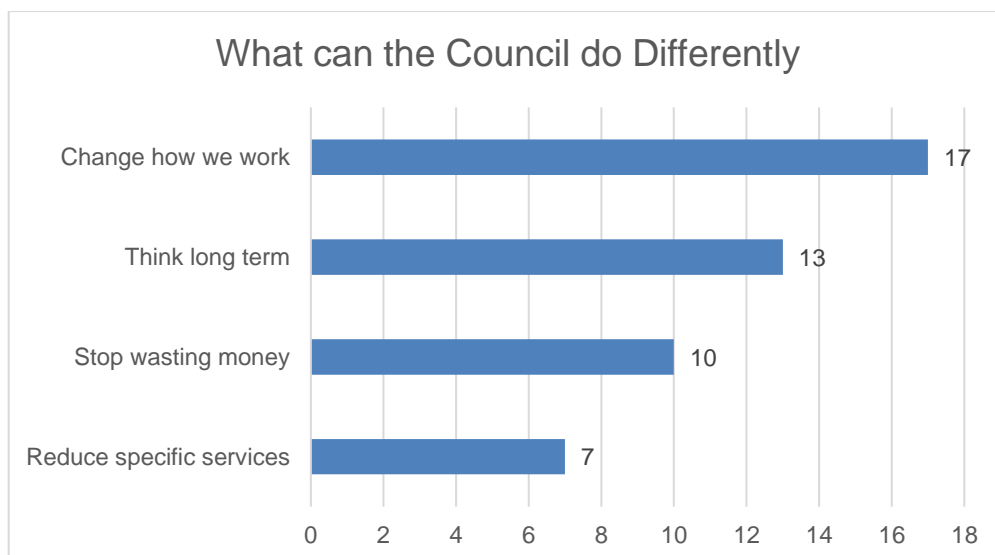
6 of the respondents did state that they felt that an increase was understandable,

although raising the concern that the most financially vulnerable needed protecting from falling into deeper poverty.

Those that stated that the calculations of the increase were based on incorrect financial assumptions focused on the rate of inflation and wage increases.



- 3.5. Respondents were asked what impact they thought the proposal might have on different equality groups. Forty-four responses were received to this question and overwhelmingly, they reflected a view that those residents experiencing financial hardship and deprivation as a result of the pandemic will be most negatively affected by the budget proposals. This was followed, in terms of frequency, by feedback that all residents in the city would be equally affected by the proposed budget.
- 3.6. Comments were requested on the Equality Impact Assessment, specifically on whether anything was missing, 23 responses were received. The responses varied widely in nature, with some commenting on the importance of being able to benchmark the impact on protected groups for evaluation in the future of continuing impact. Similarly, it was felt that greater understanding of those groups experiencing positive impacts during the pandemic would inform learning for the delivery of services in the future. However, primarily comments referred to the need for analysis of the geographical impact on communities, with a particular focus required on the impact of those living in the most deprived areas of the city.
- 3.7. Respondents were asked what they thought the Council could do differently to reduce costs. The majority of comments centred on changing how we work as a Council, a number of respondents suggesting that Council officers should continue to work from home and raise money by selling property, followed by a number of respondents suggesting reducing the number of Council staff.



3.8. Support was given to looking at preventative measures which would reap benefits later down the line, suggesting an invest to save model.

3.9. Finally, respondents were given an opportunity to add any other comments. The responses tended to reinforce comments made previously in the survey. The table below shows the themes that were raised.

Theme	Count
Suggestions of ways to reduce cost	13
Consider alternative solutions instead of raising council tax	7
Disappointment of council tax raise	6
Raising awareness	3
Covid-19	2

3.10. The response from Coventry TUC suggested the Council should contact other Labour authorities and convene a conference to campaign for higher funding settlements. They do not support that Council Tax increase and believe that the City Council should be seeking allies across other local authorities to jointly pressurise the government to fully fund essential local services. They welcome the use of the city council reserves to fund some of the pressures on its financial position, however, note that whilst the use of those reserves prevents certain further essential service cuts, there should be a strategy to campaign for greater government funding.

Examples of Comments by Theme – February 2021

A full list of comments is available on request.

Priority / Theme	Comments
No increase in Council Tax	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5% is nearly double that of inflation and will simply push many households into debt. • This rise, unavoidable or not, will lead to more widespread household poverty, deeper household poverty and more difficult choices on fuel, food and other essential expenditures; unless more can be done to protect those that need help the most. One area in which help can be provided is through the continued, if not increased, support for the work of independent advice services. Such services ensure struggling families take up benefit entitlements and maximise their incomes while providing effective debt, housing and other advice; giving families the breathing space they need to make the best choices. • The council tax is higher enough and not sure how I or anyone else will afford the increase, I know i'm struggling now never mind the increase. It seems wrong when all the councillors get paid what they do while the rest of the population are struggling to keep afloat • It is becoming increasingly difficult to live with bills going up year on year and wages not increasing to match this. Maybe you should listen to the residents of the city before making preposterous decisions such as increasing council tax and then giving yourselves pay rises whilst other suffer financially
Impact of Pandemic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In a time of financial hardship, the rise in Council Tax is poorly timed. The strain this will put on families seems avoidable and will undoubtedly paint Coventry City Council in a negative light. • I realise that we are living pandemic, but the services provided by Coventry council has been at best shambolic. Whereas as we should morally paying less rates for the coming year, to actually think of raising the amount is abhorrant. • At a time when people are literally starving and unable to pay rent do you really think a council tax increase is acceptable? Or ethical? • Disgusting that you plan to increase council tax at time many residents of Coventry are losing their job, hours or just simply struggling.
Agreement with Council tax rise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The level is acceptable - it all depends on how it is spent • sounds only fair even in these tricky times
What council can do differently	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I feel the Council could do more to reduce expenditure/ review non essential service and subsequent demand post covid. How many people are funded for the service and does the Council need to provide a direct service or is there a cheaper alternative. Move staff over to other services or take them out of the budget if the service is not essential. Look at alternatives. • Stop wasting money on things that don't count. Wouldn't mind paying more if the things that are promised are actually done. • Simple, spend less pleasing the unis/students - spend more on the tax paying, lifetime residents of the City.

Priority / Theme	Comments
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage home working as a longer-term strategy and online staff meetings as a longer term strategy for efficiency. • Review services/ target resources/ offer direct payments/ trim overheads of real estate/ staff levels and stop carrying budgets on the basis of 'if we don't spend it we'll lose it.
More information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More should be achieved if public is informed in advanced of any changes through city councillors. • Be more open and communicate to each household and not rely on internet communications
Other Comments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look into ways of getting the citizens to comply with Covid regs and guidance. I see non-compliance all the time in my quiet street. Until we can enforce compliance we will be stuck in some form of restrictions which is clearly having a detrimental effect on the city's finances. • The council should stop more housing being built as it is placing a strain on services. They should definitely stop creating accommodation for students as they do not pay council tax. Capitalise on the two Universities' reputation for technology by promoting the City as a high-tech, sustainable and environmentally innovative centre. This is where the future of investment and economics is heading. • It is understandable in the current financial climate for local authorities that they should seek to increase Council Tax income; not least in response to the recent projected fall in collection rates. However, for those on low or no incomes (eg benefits) this increase will further add to their burden. One area in which help can be provided is through the continued, if not increased, support for the work of independent advice services. Such services ensure struggling families take up benefit entitlements and maximise their incomes while providing effective debt, housing and other advice; giving families the breathing space they need to make the best choices.

Profile of Respondents

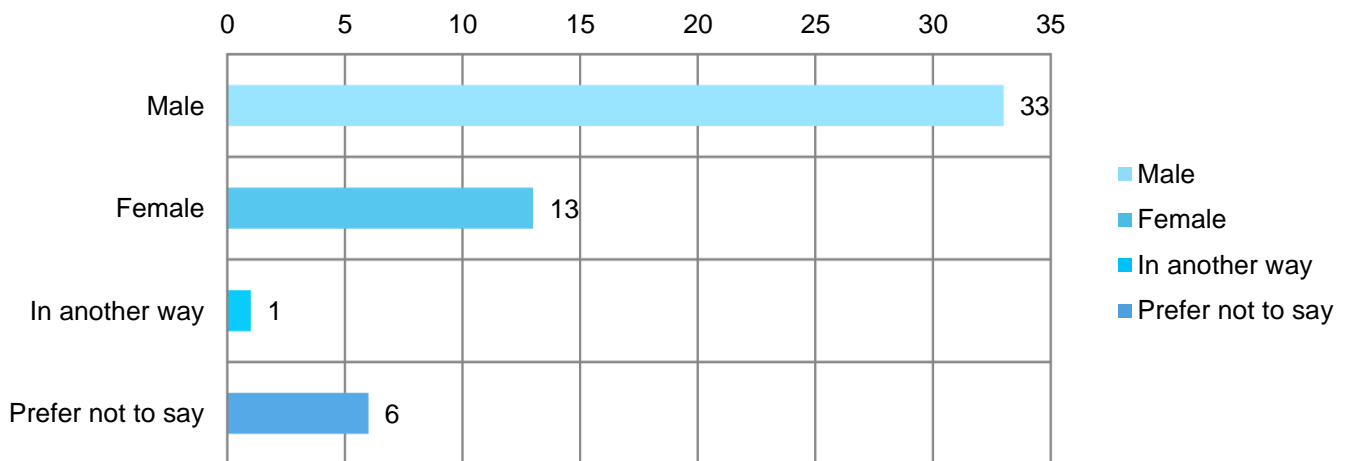
All charts show the number of respondents in each category

How are you responding to this consultation?	
As a member of the public	53
A representative of an organisation (please state the name of the organisation)	2

What age group are you in?	
16-24	1
25-34	9
35-44	8
45-54	11
55-64	12
65-74	9
75-84	2

None of the respondents indicated that they were care leavers

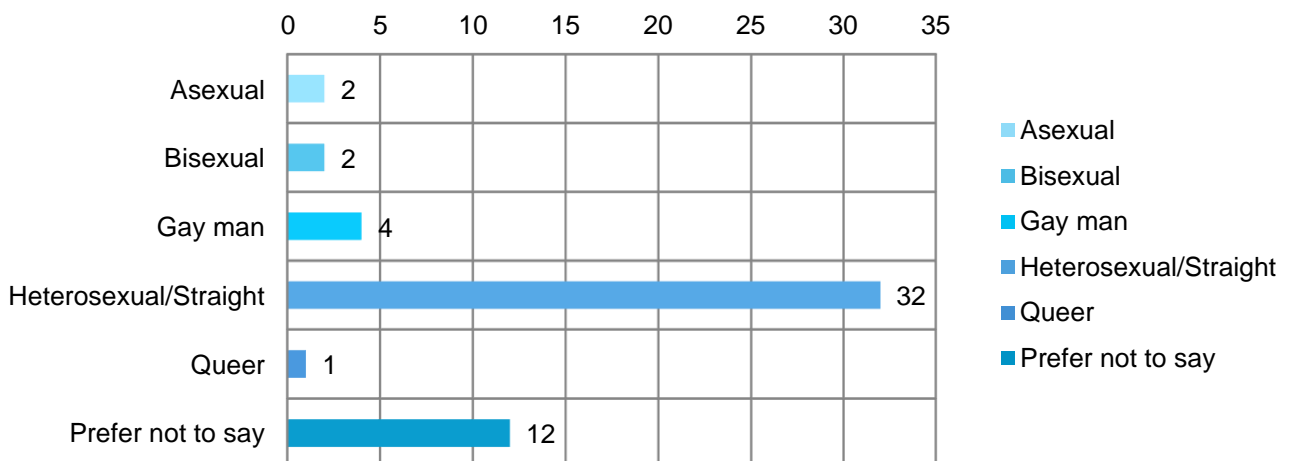
How would you describe yourself



Is your gender different from the gender you were assigned at birth, or are you in the process of reassigning it?

Yes	2
No	44
Prefer not to say	6

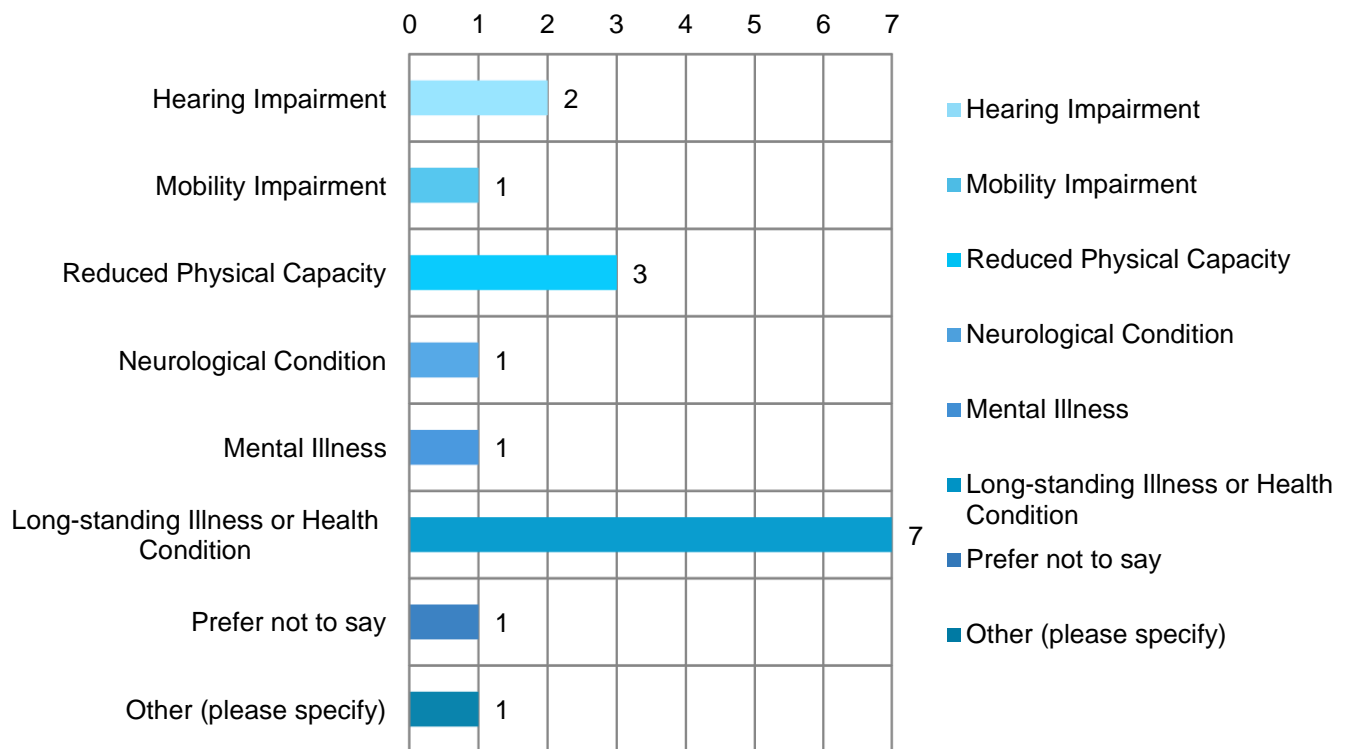
What is your sexual orientation



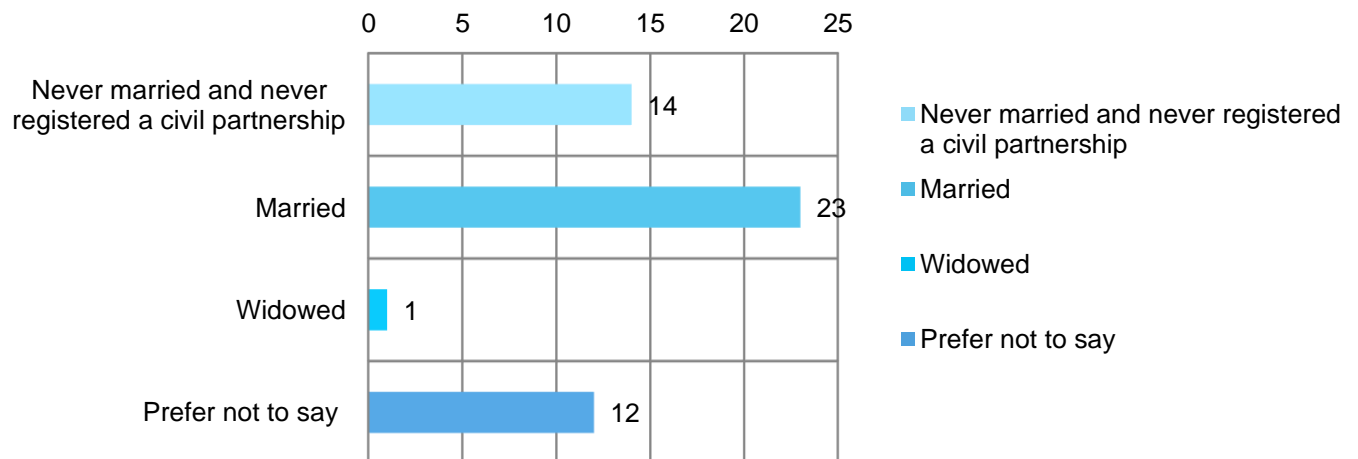
Do you consider yourself to be?	
Christian	20
Muslim	1
Sikh	2
No Religion	15
Atheist	3
Prefer not to say	9
Other	3

Do you consider yourself to be a disabled person?	
Yes	12
No	39

How would you describe your impairment



What is your legal status



Which of the following best describes your ethnic background?	
White British	36
White Irish	2
Other White Background	3
Asian or Asian British Indian	2
Asian or Asian British Pakistani	1
Prefer not to say	8

Do you, or a member of your immediate family, currently serve, or have previously served, in the armed forces?	
Yes	6
No	37
Prefer not to say	7