

MEETING OF THE CABINET

TUESDAY, 31 JANUARY 2023

ADDITIONAL PAPERS

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CABINET – TUESDAY, 31 JANUARY 2023

ADDENDUM TO ITEM 5 – MINUTES OF THE COALVILLE SPECIAL EXPENSES WORKING PARTY

At its meeting on the 24 January 2023, the Coalville Special Expenses Working Party were asked to consider the 2023/24 Coalville Special Expense Draft Budget and provide any comments and feedback to Cabinet on the recommended level of Council Tax increase/savings to be achieved.

As noted in section 3 of the Coalville Special Expenses report, as the meeting took place after the Cabinet agenda had been published, an update would be provided to Cabinet with any recommendations of the working party for Cabinet to consider.

Following a briefing with finance officers the week before, at the meeting on the 24 January, the members of the working party considered the report again and provided comments on the recommended level of Council Tax increase/savings to be achieved. They also considered the comments made by Cabinet at its meeting on the 10 January 2023 and noted Cabinet's expectation of a balanced budget from the working party without any increase in precept.

The working party recommended to Cabinet that the Coalville Special Expenses precept be increased by the maximum allowed without triggering a referendum.

The minutes of the Coalville Special Expenses Working Party meeting held on the 24 January can be found at appendix 1 of this addendum and Cabinet are asked to consider the following amended recommendations:

THAT CABINET:

- 1. NOTES THE MINUTES OF THE COALVILLE SPECIAL EXPENSES WORKING PARTY FROM ITS MEETING ON THE 24 JANUARY 2023**
- 2. AGREES THAT THE COALVILLE SPECIAL EXPENSES PRECEPT BE INCREASED BY THE MAXIMUM ALLOWED WITHOUT TRIGGERING A REFERENDUM.**

MINUTES of a meeting of the COALVILLE Special Expenses Working Party held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Coalville on TUESDAY, 24 January 2023

Present: Councillor D Everitt (Chairman)

Councillors M B Wyatt, E G C Allman, A S Black, J Geary, J Legrys, J Windram and M French

In Attendance: Councillor S Sheahan

Officers: Mrs A Crouch, Mrs C Hammond, Mr P Wheatley, Mr G Hammons, Ms R Haynes and Ms S Thirkettle

24. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies received.

25. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor M Wyatt declared a registerable interest in all items as the owner of two businesses in Coalville.

Councillor J Legrys declared a registerable interest in all items as a volunteer at and Director of the Hermitage FM project.

Councillor J Geary declared a registerable interest as a supporter of Coalville Town Football Club and the Council's appointed representative on the Coalville Town Football Club Committee.

26. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Consideration was given to the minutes of the previous meetings held on 15 December 2022 and 3 January 2023.

A member requested further information regarding the footfall at the Newmarket during the Christmas in Coalville event, and asked for confirmation that the figure was 1,700 people and requested clarification on how this figure was captured.

It was moved by Councillor J Geary, seconded by Councillor J Legrys and

RESOLVED THAT:

The minutes of the meetings held on 15 December 2022 and 3 January 2023 be confirmed as an accurate record of the proceedings.

27. 2023/24 DRAFT BUDGET AND COUNCIL TAX

The Finance Team Manager presented the report to members.

A member expressed concern regarding the amount of the subsidy paid to the Owen Street recreation ground by the working party and suggested that by reducing the amount paid, savings could be made to the working party's budget. A member asserted that Coalville Town Football Club who use the ground are a profit making organisation which would be in a financial position to contribute more of their own income in order to maintain the ground's upkeep. It was suggested that the field could be used for events and that it was unfair to subsidise a financially successful organisation so heavily and it was suggested that the land could be sold to the club for the market value.

A member responded that the football club had many young people who play and train there and that this, alongside match days, bring in good value for money and business into the town. The importance of considering what value expenditures bring back to the community was noted.

The meeting was informed that the football club pay £2,000 per annum for the use of the Scotland's playing field, and a member suggested that they could be contributing more than this amount. Officers confirmed that they had arranged to meet with Mr Rennocks, Chair of the club, in order to discuss financial arrangements.

Members queried the savings around planned preventative maintenance and were advised that some of this expenditure would be pushed back into the future financial years in order to make savings this year. Officers confirmed that the only statutory service would be for cemeteries and burials.

A member made enquiries with regards to deferring expenditure on the London Road cemetery wall and asked whether it would still be considered to be safe in a year's time. Officers responded that the wall was subject to close monitoring and that at present it would not be in imminent danger of collapse.

A member asked for clarification on the planned events and was advised that due to events planned for the King's Coronation and another significant event, Cinema in the Park would unlikely to be scheduled for 2023. It was asked how much Cinema in the Park cost, what it brought in and what the shortfall would be. Officers clarified that the income it brought in was around £14,000, the actual cost had been £41,000, £26,000 of which had been funded by Coalville Special Expenses ty and £15,000 of which had been funded from the general fund. Therefore it was clarified that the total net cost had been £27,000 of which the working party had picked up £16,000 of the cost.

It was asserted that the rental of pitches for stallholders had been relatively low however officers replied that the stallholders had a variety of options and therefore would have chosen to trade at other events which would have charged them lower rent.

A member suggested that ticket prices for this event had been low and that they had received feedback that people would be prepared to pay more to maintain the event. Officers reiterated that members had previously felt that certain events were more beneficial than others and that Picnic in the Park was valued more highly than the Cinema in the Park, therefore that it would be proposed to continue with the Picnic in the Park and the Coronation events, which would enable the preservation of the Christmas in Coalville event. Officers noted that the reserve from previous years to fund the Cinema in the Park event had been removed, as part of managing the financial position, however this did not mean that it would be cancelled as there would be the potential for the working party to choose to find the money for this event from the budget put aside for other events. It was noted that the general fund would not be in a position to subsidise this event and therefore should members wish to proceed with it, the full cost would have to be drawn from the working party budget.

Councillor Wyatt moved a motion to recommend to Cabinet that the subsidy of the grounds maintenance for Coalville Town Football Club be reduced by 30% per year over three years in order to reach a cost neutral. It was seconded by Councillor J Windram. Members voted 4 in favour and 4 against, the Chair held the casting vote and the motion failed.

The level of council tax increase or savings was discussed and a member suggested an increase of 30% in order to trigger debate at Cabinet around a potential increase and it was considered that such a large increase may be over the £5 maximum which would trigger a referendum.

A member asked what the percentage recommendation had been around the country, and officers responded that in their experience the inflationary pressures which councils were facing had forced decisions between increasing council tax or making savings, and that both of these must be considered as part of achieving a balanced budget.

A member asserted that they would be unable to support any increase in council tax at a time when people were reliant on food banks and facing difficulties in paying rent and council tax.

Councillor J Geary moved a motion to increase the precept by the maximum allowed without triggering a referendum. This was seconded by Councillor J Legrys.

A recorded vote being requested, the voting was as detailed below.

The motion PASSED

A member questioned where the information could be found on the savings made from the cancellation of the stage at the Christmas in Coalville event and it was clarified that this had been spent on other attractions for the event as opposed to being a saving. Officers also confirmed that as the cancellation of the stage and the fireworks had been made so late in the process some abortive costs had been conceded.

Members suggested that it would be beneficial to have the Corporate and Housing, Property and Customer Services Portfolio Holders present in meetings of the working party.

It was moved by Councillor J Legrys, seconded by Councillor J Geary and

RESOLVED THAT:

Comments on the draft budget (Appendix A) and feedback on the recommended level of council tax increase/savings be provided by the Coalville Special Expenses Working Party be considered by Cabinet.

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:

That the Coalville Special Expenses precept be increased by the maximum allowed without triggering a referendum.

A motion to increase the precept by the maximum allowed without triggering a referendum. (Motion)	
Councillor David Everitt	For
Councillor Michael Wyatt	Against
Councillor Elliott Allman	For
Councillor Angela Black	Against
Councillor John Geary	For
Councillor John Legrys	For
Councillor Jake Windram	Against
Councillor Marie French	Against
Councillor David Everitt	For (Casting Vote)
Carried	

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm

The Chairman closed the meeting at 7.52 pm

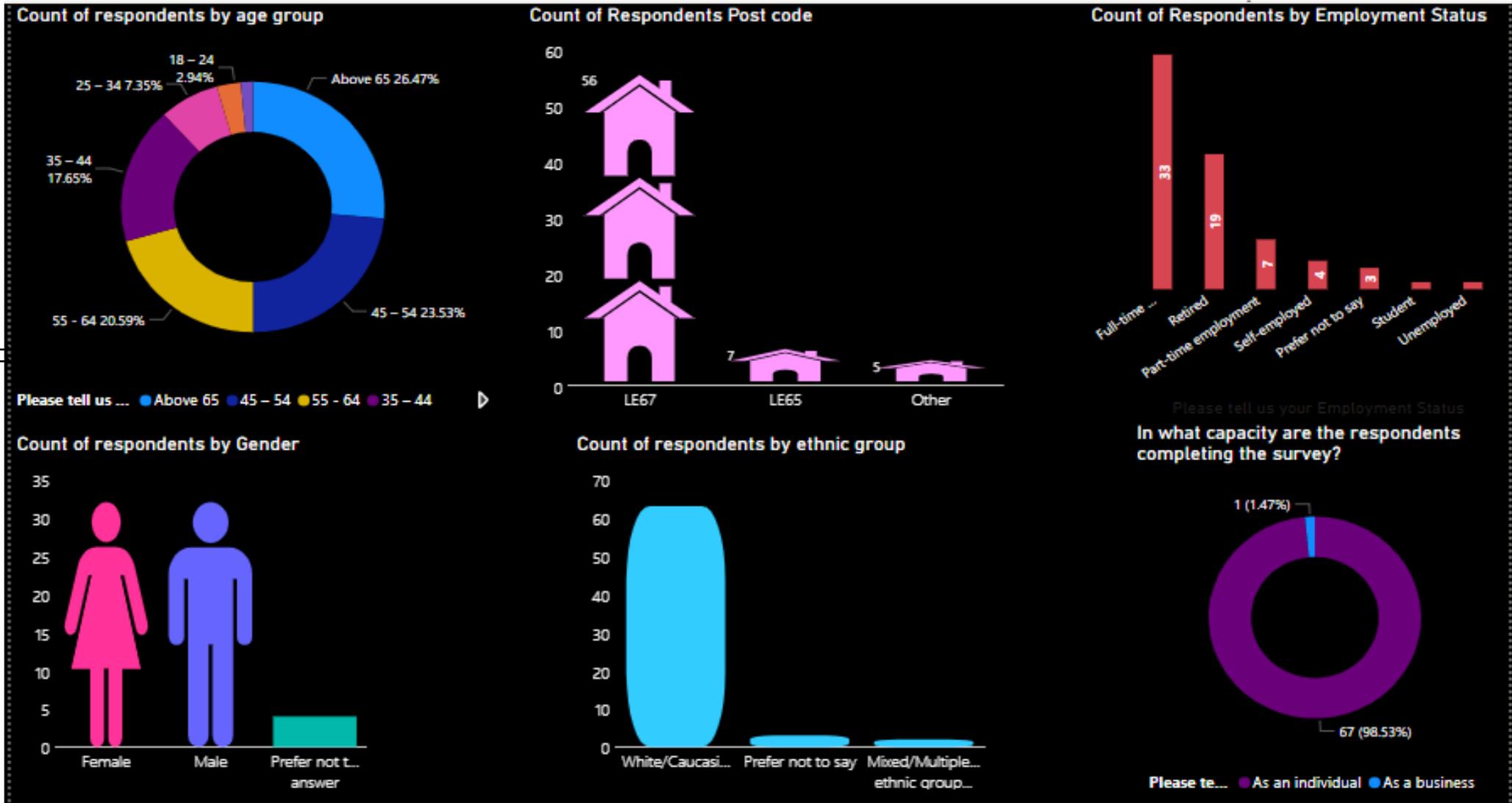
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Budget Consultation Survey - Responses as at 28/1/23

Demographics

In total there were 68 responses to the Budget Consultation Survey, how does this breakdown in terms of demographics?



In terms of age breakdown of respondents, the majority (48 respondents, equating to 70.58%) were aged 45 or above.

There was a significantly lesser response from the younger age group (in the 18-24 age group there were only 2 respondents and in the 25-34 age group there were 5 respondents). It may be that the younger age groups who are working, have less time to fill in surveys like this one or it could be that we may need to explore other ways to reach these groups, for example how the survey is advertised, if we want to obtain their views.

In terms of postcode, the majority of respondents (56 - equating to 82.35%) were residents in the LE67 postcode area, which covers the Whitwick and Coalville area with 7 respondents from the LE65 postcode area (which covers Ashby-de-la-Zouch, Calke, Smisby, Willesley and Worthington). Of the remainder 4 respondents had a Derby (DE11, DE12 or DE74 postcode) and one was resident in an LE12 area.

In terms of employment status, the majority of respondents (44 respondents equating to 64.7 %) stated that they are in employment - either part time, full time or self-employed, with the next largest group (19 respondents, equating to 27.94 %) telling us they are retired with 3 respondents preferring not to answer.

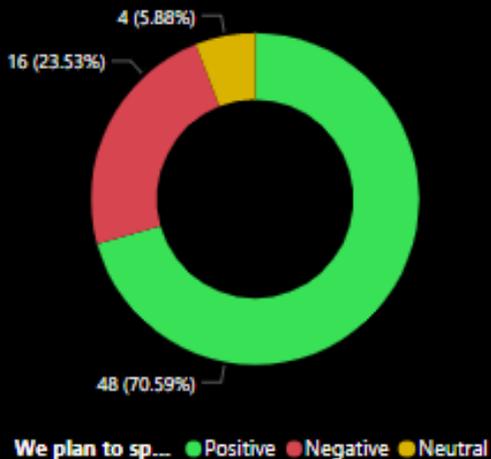
When responding to a question about gender, there was an even split between those identifying as male and those identifying as female (32 respondents for each category) and only 4 respondents preferring not to answer.

In terms of race, the overwhelming majority of respondents (92.64%), told us they from a White/Caucasian background, of the remaining respondents 3 preferred not to answer and 2 identified as being mixed race/ethnicity)

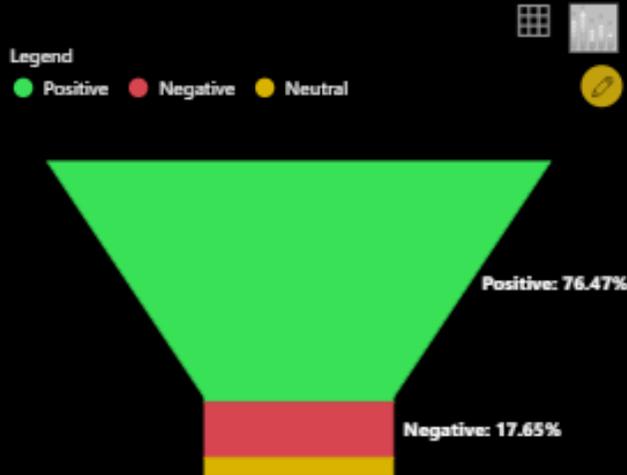
The primary capacity in which respondents were completing the survey was as an individual (this applied to 67 respondents with the remaining one undertaking the survey on behalf of a business)

Responses to focussed budget questions

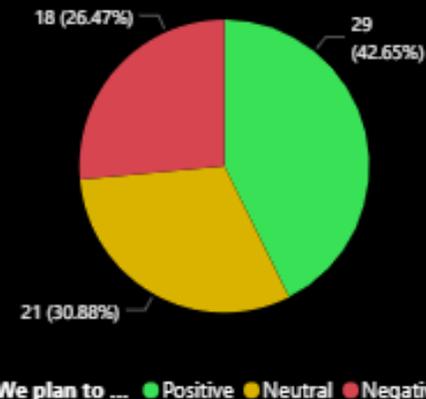
We plan to spend £195,000 in 2023/24 to increase the number of solar panels on our leisure centre buildings at Whitwick and Ashby de la Zouch. Do you ...



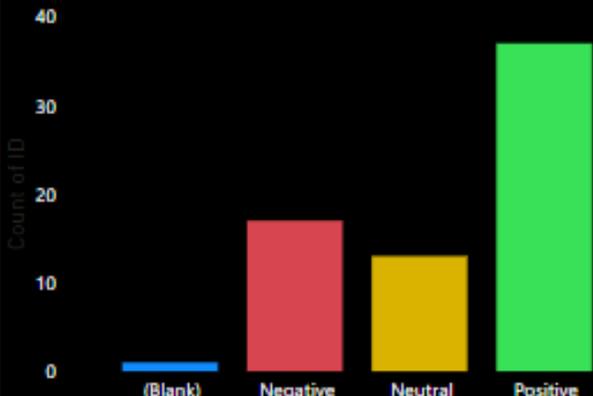
We're earmarking £650,000 for improvements to our sheltered housing schemes over the next 5 years. Do you agree with this proposal?



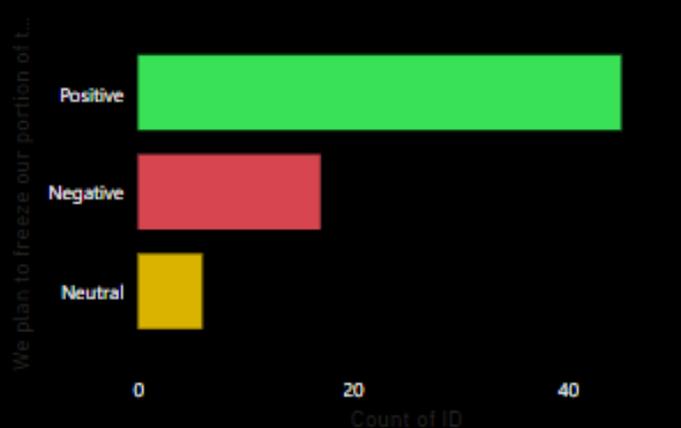
We plan to spend £130,000 in 2024/25 on a new surface and new fencing for the 3G sports pitches at Hermitage Recreation Ground. Do you ...



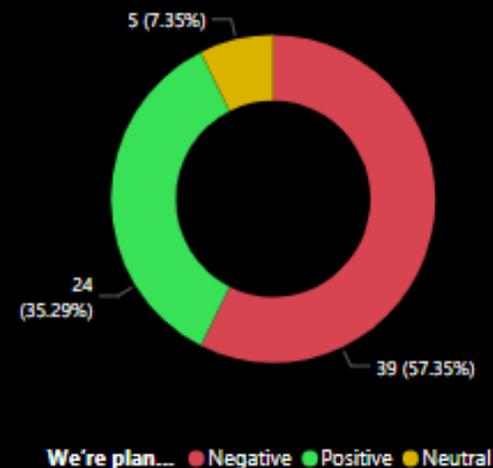
We're planning to spend £100,000 in 2023/24 replacing CCTV units in Coalville town centre and Coalville Park. Do you agree with this proposal?



We plan to freeze our portion of the council tax bill (bills will likely still go up, depending on the decisions of the county council, police service, fire service and parish / t...



We're planning to spend £50,000 on a professional assessment of regeneration plans for Coalville, to see how feasible they are. Do you agree with this proposal?



The majority of respondents (70.59%) were positive about the proposal to spend £195,000 increasing the Solar Panels at the Whitwick and Ashby Leisure Centre with only 23.53% responding negatively to the concept and 5.88% remaining neutral.

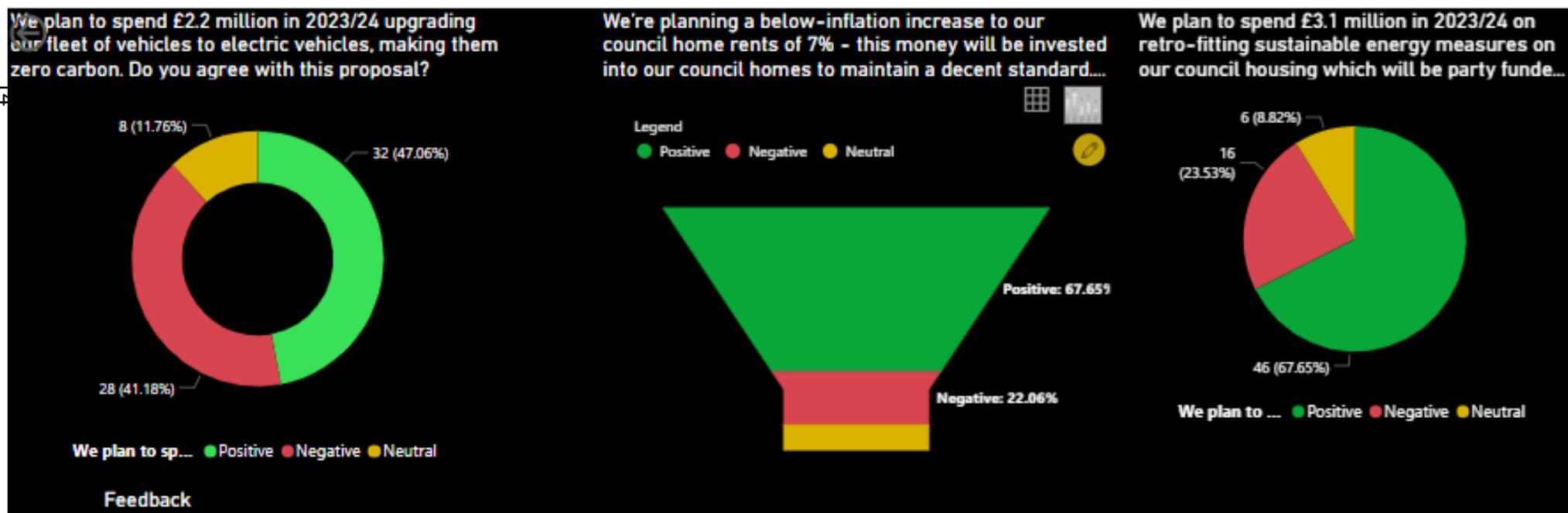
In respect of the plan to allocate £650,000 for improvements to sheltered housing schemes over the next 5 years, again the response was predominantly positive - with respondents (76.47%) in agreement with the proposal. Only 12 respondents reacted negatively towards the plan, and 4 were neutral towards the concept.

Opinion was much more divided over the proposal to allocate £130,000 in 2024/25 on a new surface and new fencing for the 3G sports pitches at Hermitage Recreation Ground – 21 respondents (30.88%) were neutral towards the plan, 18 respondents (26.47%) disagreed with this proposal and 29 respondents (42.65%) were in agreement with the proposal.

By far the strongest negative reaction was to the proposal to spend £50,000 on a professional assessment of regeneration plans for Coalville - 39 respondents (57%) were in disagreement with the proposal with only 24 respondents (35%) responding positively. The remaining 5 respondents were neutral about the proposal.

A proposal looked on far more favourably was the plan to freeze the District Council’s portion of the Council tax bill - 45 out of 68 respondents (66%) were in favour of this plan, with only 17 people reacting negatively to the idea.

The proposal in respect of allocating £100,000 to replace CCTV cameras in Coalville was another popular proposal - 55% were in support of this plan with 25% responding negatively and the remainder having a neutral opinion on the issue.



There was divided opinion over the proposal to allocate £2.2 million in 2023/24 upgrading the Council’s fleet of vehicles to electric vehicles, making them zero carbon - 47% were in support of this plan with 41% responding negatively and the remainder choosing to remain neutral.

There was a greater level of support for the proposal of a below-inflation increase to council home rents of 7% and investment of the money into council homes to maintain a decent standard – 67.65% of the responses being positive and only 22.06% of the responses being negative.

A further proposal in respect of council housing pertained to the plan to spend £3.1 million in 2023/24 on retro-fitting sustainable energy measures on our council housing which will be partly funded by £1.4 million in Government grant funding - this was widely supported by the respondents with 67.65% in agreement with the proposal and 23.53% against, with the remainder being neutral on the issue.

We had 28 individual pieces of feedback on the budget proposals overall:

Instead of using Homes bonus to prop up your election commitments that you never increase the rates. You should be more honest with the electorate how you do it.

You can spend all the money you like but can't even put the street lights on at night-Disgrace.

Need a new bin.... Have to wait 6 weeks. Disgrace.

Planning Dept - Disgrace.

Pensions you are all on - Disgrace.

Dealing with NWLDC is an absolute Public Sector couldn't give a toss nightmare.

Spending money on consultations then disagreeing with them, aka: the old leisure centre for instance, is a very bad look.

Whilst another freeze in council tax is welcome, the level of council tax is still relatively high compared to other districts in the county/ country, so perhaps you should consider a cut rather than just a freeze, to help hard-pressed residents?

Freezing Council Tax for 14 years has led to funding shortfalls elsewhere. With inflation at ~10% what is hidden in this survey are the real (and possibly otherwise unnecessary) cuts to services. Council Tax is quite a fair tax, albeit that there maybe should be an extra Band for Mansions. For most people's incomes it is not a particularly significant Tax, this "zero increase" has become a NWL Conservative Party mantra, which now appears to be more about ego than care in the community.

As for the zero carbon vehicle upgrades, this should only be done when the vehicles NEED replacing as any new vehicle even if it is electric will have a larger environmental cost (in its manufacturing) than using old ones until they can go no more.

Both these policies have a "look at us" vanity air about them.

It is important to install energy saving measures for environmental purposes but you do need to publish the saving made on energy bills so residents can see the cost benefit as well.

Coalville needs a complete rethink of the centre area, Home Bargains leaving the Belvoir will gut the place and mean a lot less footfall. Ignore vanity projects like a cinema and bowling alley, Meridian is close enough,

The District Council have not increased their part of the Council Tax at all in the last 14 years, due in the main to New Homes Bonus & extra Council Tax from all the new development. Inflation compounded over that period based on consumer price index shows an increase of more than 35%. A modest increase in council tax over that period would have provided additional funds for council services, including much needed additional car parking in Ashby, as recognised in the Council's Future Provision for Parking Services 2020 to 2023. The Council Delivery Plan states "Our commitment to promote a 'shop local, support North West Leicestershire ethos" is not being met for Ashby if additional parking is not provided. The planned car parking provision on the Money Hill development funded by developers is too far out and inaccessible for those shopping in or visiting the town centre. There is too much disparity between the planned future expenditure on services and community and cultural facilities for the Coalville Urban Area in comparison with the needs in Ashby (Key Service Centre in the Local Plan).

The freezing of the Council Tax for another year is unacceptable in that funding for any improvements to the locale have to be sourced from reserves or "private" funding which needs paying back. This is equivalent to robbing Peter to pay Paul. The switching to electric vehicles in an effort to make them zero carbon there's no concrete evidence to suggest that they have no impact on the environment since the metals and materials for the batteries are mined. Also there is still, particularly in NWL, very little effort to install charging stands has been made in easy accessible locations ie town centre carparks

You really need to think about the vulnerable and everyone is struggling. Maybe next year when hopefully things are on the up you can think about increases in rent, council tax.

1. Coalville cctv. Is there any quantifiable evidence that the spending will actually reduce crime / keep people safer? Would better lighting perhaps be more effective?

2. £50 k consultation on regeneration is a huge sum. This program has been ongoing for years now. Surely we know what needs to be done and what's most likely to give the best payback? Is it going to tell us anything new?

3. Agree with increasing council rents. I'm inclined to think they should go up by inflation. Hard one.

4. Completely disagree with freezing council tax. We can't make improvements or maintain service without investment.

5. I assume vehicles will only get replaced with electric vehicles when they are at the end of their life and not early?

Repairs to homes need sorting because some of us are waiting months for things or over a year for outside repairs it's not right.

It's like the repairs are done with a sticking plaster and that will do, people are sick of it.

It's not about the allocation of funds but the actual budgets is crazy - these costs per item need interrogating to a fine detail and local tradespeople should be contacted for honest quotes - Not overinflated estimated

Some good ideas. Personally I think it's too early and expensive to go fully electric but would be interested to see the roi. Also difficult to back the council housing proposal without more detail.

Nothing to support small businesses?

Subsidies in public transport are needed instead of isolating people in villages etc. people cannot travel to work or other appointment, social reasons.

Wasting vast sums of money on consultations for regenerating Coalville- yes regeneration is needed and to attract retailers but people (councils) have been talking about it for decades and nothing ever changes

The pavements in some places are awful, not good for elderly or those with disabilities ie past the library towards hotel street .

Do vehicles need upgrading, can we put this off for 12/24months and spend on more urgent things.... time to invest in the town and make people proud.... from someone who recently moved back.

What about the rest of the Area. Why is it always Coalville?

To carry on doing good rather than the useless crap coalville can are trying to do

2 million changing vehicles!?! I'm sure that money could be put to better use elsewhere. With the rising cost of electricity and lack of charging points I'm not sure how much this will benefit the community & council budgets

£100,00 for CCTV how much of that gets spent in brides? The white leisure centre should have been designed with energy saving measures, everyone active should pay for more improvements. Potentially the designers who signed off lack of solar panels should pay for them. Cars, all NWLDC staff/visitors should be charged for parking if they do not have an electric car?

Irresponsible to not increase council tax for as long as it has been. It would have been a preferred option to have increased council tax for all last year than charging for an extra green bin.

Although below inflation, if council home rents are being increased then the standard of repairs and maintenance must be higher.

Some costs may be too low for investment, for example solar panels. Will there be any additional funds to support from the council.

↳ I think there should be some increase in council tax to fund services and minimise any additional charges.

It's great to see all the initiatives proposed for Coalville and I am sure it will improve the town centre but there seems to be nothing for towns and villages in NW other than Coalville. What about Ashby? The town centre, which is a night life hot spot, could really do with additional money being spent on CCTV. There is no community centre on Ashby. I appreciate Ashby is the cash cow for NWLDC so isn't it time to start investing in this town too - cycle lanes, better footpaths, money towards events etc.

Spend money that will alleviate poverty

Freezing the council tax year on year for the past 14 years has reduced the budget by over 25% during this time, therefore significantly reducing services by over a quarter. It's applying austerity at a local level and it has simply resulted in diminished public services. It sounds like a vote-winning approach but in the long-term the reduction in services has resulted in great dissatisfaction with local services and politicians. And the public is totally unaware that NWLDC has frozen council tax for 13 years, if you ask anyone on the street they won't be aware, as the increases in tax for LCC/police/parish councils has increased the overall tax they pay. So the NWLDC portion is a drop in the ocean and totally missed. False economy, need to stop underinvesting in our public services and start delivering more local projects that help local people in a tangible way.

The solar panels should have been considered when the new sports centre was designed. It will now cost more to retrofit. How many years will the energy saved take to recoup the cost?

Vehicles should be replaced at end of life with electric/ hybrid and not before.

No money being spent in Moira, the Woulds Court land is an absolute disgrace. Do something with it while you wait to build social housing. The flats nearby are also a disgrace to NWLD, do you care?

Why do none of the recently build warehouses have solar panels? To late now should have been a planning condition, still possible for those still in the planning stage.



North West Leicestershire District Council
PO Box 11051
Coalville
LE67 0FW

27 January 2023

Sarah Thirkettle - Finance Manager
North West Leicestershire District Council
PO Box 11051
Coalville
LE67 0FW

Dear Sarah

BUDGET CONSULTATION 2023/24

Thank you for circulating the budget consultation for 2023/2024 and link to the documentation.

We have received no comments from members relating to the detail of the report and proposed spending on leisure facilities improvement and regeneration projects within the district and these are welcomed.

However, comments regarding the freeze on Council Tax raises concerns. We recognise we are in unprecedented times of hardship, and we understand the cost of living is difficult for many people across the country, however we must highlight the concern of not raising council tax for the 14th year in a row. While as you state there are reserves to evidence that it is not necessary to raise council tax this year, we do wonder how the choice to raise council tax even by the minimum amount year on year will affect the district councils' position and delivery of services in future years to come.

There is no doubt that our contractors, service providers and those we enlist to provide vital equipment and supplies to keep the district council running are increasing their prices year on year, but it appears the authority will absorb the cost. While future central government funding is uncertain, services are finding it difficult to recruit on salaries offered, teams being asked to find saving in everything they do, which will ultimately have an effect on the quality and quantity of service the residents of North West Leicestershire receive and should expect.

It is the staff on the frontline who in the long run will be paying the price for potential losses in income generated from a minor increase. In the long term does this mean we won't have the reserves and staff cuts will have to be made because of this consistent decision to not increasing council tax? Is this really in the best interests of the community?

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Cat Ridgway". The signature is written in a cursive style with some loops and flourishes.

Cat Ridgway
UNISON Branch Secretary

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