

BUDGET CONSULTATION 2020

Consultation Report

Table of Contents

1	Introduction.....	3
1.1	Background and introduction	3
1.2	Methods.....	3
1.3	Response	4
1.4	Respondent data	5
2	Results	7
2.1	Corporate Objectives	7
2.2	Climate Change.....	9
2.3	Investments	10
2.4	Council Tax	11
2.5	Covid-19.....	12
2.6	Online Question and Answer Session.....	13
2.7	Any other comments.....	13
3	Conclusion.....	15
3.1	Response	15
3.2	Corporate Objectives	15
3.3	Climate Change.....	15
3.4	Investments	15
3.5	Council Tax	15
3.6	Covid-19.....	15
3.7	Online Question and Answer Session.....	16
3.8	Any other comments.....	16
3.9	Next Steps.....	16
4	Appendices.....	17
	Appendix A: Questionnaire.....	17

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and introduction

With reduced grants from central government, it is critical that we direct our resources in a way that benefits our communities and meets their needs and priorities.

Each year a consultation is undertaken on the following year's budget prior to it being set. Although there is no legal requirement to undertake this with our residents, we do have a legal obligation under the Local Government Act 1992 section 65 to consult ratepayers who are persons or bodies appearing to be representative of persons subject to non-domestic rates within the district and must be about the authority's proposals for expenditure.

This report summarises the views of residents that completed the survey which was distributed both online and through paper methods. West Lindsey residents, Parish Councillors, West Lindsey District Council Members and West Lindsey businesses were invited through either a direct invite, word of mouth, by visiting the website and on social media.

The objectives of this engagement were to:

- Raise awareness of the financial challenges
- Seek views on current priorities
- Identify how the respondents felt WLDC had performed during the Covid-19 pandemic.

1.2 Methods

The consultation was undertaken using both an online survey and a paper survey to gather responses and these were supported by an online video which explained the current situation of the council.

As our usual public consultation events were unable to be delivered due to Covid-19 restrictions, we encouraged respondents to raise questions.

Subsequently the Leader and Chief Executive of the Council, recorded short videos to answer the questions raised through the consultation exercise. These were published on social media.

Video

Following on from positive feedback from last year's budget consultation video, we again used this medium to help give people an understanding of the councils objectives and financial challenges, ensuring everyone was receiving the same information. This video was published online and links distributed through social media. The video received 3,458 views collectively through the different media ie the council's website, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube.

Surveys

All 1,626 members of the West Lindsey Citizen Panel received a copy of the survey. This was split with 1,064 being sent via email and 562 by post. Both versions of the survey had the same content and a copy of the survey distributed can be found at Appendix A.

1.3 Response

Invites were sent to all current members of the Citizens' Panel, Parish Councils and Parish Meetings and West Lindsey District Council Councillors. As no events were held this year and with the current pandemic ongoing it was expected that the response rate would be reduced this year. However there was a response rate increase of 18% (708 responses compared to 595 during 2019).

The breakdown of these responses are:

	Survey
Citizen Panel Member	594
Resident	425
Town or Parish Councillor	15
West Lindsey Councillor	2
Business	2

Please note that respondents were able to mark more than one of these boxes and therefore could be responding as both a Citizen Panel member and a resident of West Lindsey.

This is the highest response rate that we have had in the last 5 years. The total responses each year have been:

Year	Responses
2020	708
2019	595
2018	409
2017	368
2016	461

1.4 Respondent data

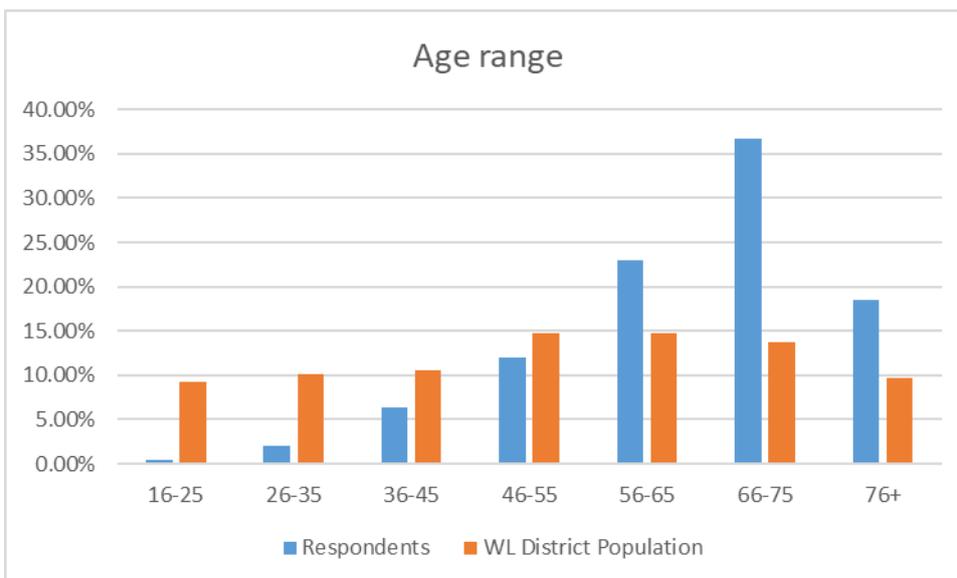
Respondents were asked at the end of the survey to answer some equality questions. These were not compulsory but 624 respondents did give a response and these have been broken down into gender, age, disability, ethnicity, faith/religion and sexuality.

Gender

Out of the 624 who took part, 55.4% of those were Male and 43.6% Female with 1% preferring not to say.

Age

To take part in the consultation it is requested that respondents should be 16 or over. The % age range of respondents is compared to the West Lindsey District age demographic in the graph below;



Disability

Of those who took part, 11.6% of those classify themselves as being disabled and 85.4% do not. 3% preferred not to say.

Ethnicity

The majority of respondents class themselves as White British, Irish or other with 94.9%. All other ethnic groups had responses but the percentage is 1% or under for each. This included Black or Black British, Asian or Asian British, Arab or Middle Eastern, Chinese, Mixed Race and other. 2.4% prefer not to say.

Religion/Faith/Belief

64.8% of respondents identified themselves as Christian, those with no religion option 29.5%. The other religions recorded as under 1% were Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu and Jewish, while other faith had 1.4% and prefer not to say had 3%.

Sexuality

The majority of responses came from heterosexual respondents at 92.2%, while those who classed themselves as Lesbian/Gay were 1.4% and Bisexual 1%. Other was 0.3% and prefer not to say came in at 5.1%.

2 Results

2.1 Corporate Objectives

Firstly we asked if the top five key corporate objectives should continue given the current situation with the Covid-19 pandemic. These corporate objectives are:

- Economy – to ensure that economic regeneration in West Lindsey is sustainable and benefits all of our communities.
- Finances – to remain financially sustainable.
- Public Safety and Environment – to create a safer, cleaner district in which to live, work and socialise.
- Customer – to put the customer at the centre of everything we do.
- Vulnerable Groups and Communities – to create strong and self-reliant communities and promote positive life choices for disadvantaged residents.

88.5% of respondents felt that these corporate objectives should continue. From the 2% which stated ‘no’ and the 9.5% which stated ‘partially’ we ask “what should our priorities be?” The comments received included:

- Ensuring that those affected by Covid-19 get prioritised. This included social isolation, finances, re-opening play equipment, ensuring shops and markets and supported and re-opened, ensure lost time on education is caught up, valuing those key workers, help to businesses
- Climate change including factors such as flooding, more use of environmentally friendly technologies, less waste
- Disadvantaged gap needs reducing in areas such as health, education, employment and leisure
- Finding ways to raise standards and inspire public pride in their environment
- Better Broadband
- Homelessness
- Heritage and Culture
- Mental Health services
- Problem families

In ensuring that we align our resources to delivering the Corporate Plan we asked how important initiatives in the business plan are to residents. The results are as follows:

Initiative	Very important - 5	4	Neither important nor	2	Unimportant - 1
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			unimportant - 3		
Neighbourhood Plans	240 (34.3%)	240 (34.3%)	159 (22.7%)	41 (5.9%)	19 (2.7%)
Community Safety measures	360 (51.1%)	252 (35.8%)	75 (10.7%)	10 (1.4%)	7 (1%)
Enforcement Activity	274 (39.5%)	278 (40.1%)	118 (17%)	18 (2.6%)	5 (0.7%)
Economic Growth	342 (49.4%)	247 (35.6%)	81 (11.7%)	17 (2.5%)	6 (0.9%)
Affordable housing	241 (34.4%)	213 (30.4%)	153 (21.8%)	52 (7.4%)	42 (6%)

The majority of respondents found all of these initiatives important with Community Safety measures coming highest with 86.9% marking them as important, followed by Economic Growth at 85%, Enforcement Activity at 79.6%, Neighbourhood Plans at 68.6% and finally Affordable Housing at 64.8%.

West Lindsey is a rural district and therefore have a number of challenges around supporting our rural communities. We asked respondents to pick 2 key challenges out of a list of five. The results are:

Challenge	Result	Key challenge position
Transportation	401 (29%)	1
Job Opportunities	323 (23%)	2
Broadband	263 (19%)	3
Isolation	229 (16%)	4
Housing	154 (11%)	5

This shows that the 2 highest priorities for respondents are Transportation and Job Opportunities.

Following on from this we asked if they believed we had missed any key challenges and the results highlighted the following challenges:

- Community events and activities for all age groups

- Road safety/Community Safety/Crime/Policing
- Climate Emergency
- Wildlife protection
- Voluntary sector work and building resilience in local communities
- Childcare provision
- Rural economy/amenities
- Health services
- Support for those with difficulties such as mental health
- Communication especially elderly and those without access to internet
- Homelessness
- Waste/Fly tipping/Littering

2.2 Climate Change

The impact of climate change has now been deemed by the UK Government to be a major national and international issue. The Council has recognised the importance of tackling climate change and has recently consulted the public specifically on initial ideas for our Sustainability, Climate Change and Environment Strategy.

For the budget consultation we asked out of 6 possible actions which the respondents felt might be best achieved in West Lindsey.

The results were:

Action	Result	Priority
Reduce waste through recycling and reuse initiatives	187 (26.9%)	1
Better use of land to mitigate climate change impact and nature loss	75 (10.8%)	5
Reduce emissions from transport and support more sustainable transport solutions	81 (11.6%)	4

Support the growth and use of renewable energy	160 (23%)	2
Ensure the most vulnerable to the effects of climate change e.g. flooding are protected	74 (10.6%)	6
Encourage energy efficiency in private-owned homes and new developments	119 (17.1%)	3

These results show the action that the respondents felt would be best achieved in West Lindsey is the action to reduce waste through recycling and reuse initiatives.

2.3 Investments

The council's budget requirement of £14.357m represents the cost of running of the council's services and administration. Commercial income contributes circa £2m towards the running of our services. With ongoing reductions in government funding against increasing cost and demands for services, we need to invest in initiatives that will provide future efficiencies, generate additional income or look at reducing service provision to save money to ensure that we continue to be sustainable. Respondents were asked out of 4 approaches which they thought would be the best approach for West Lindsey.

The results are:

Approach	Results	Priority
Invest in new technology to achieve efficiencies and cost savings	302 (43.8%)	2
Identify commercial projects which will generate additional income	335 (48.6%)	1
Reduce provision and performance of services to reduce costs	21 (3%)	4
Stop delivering some services	31 (4.5%)	3

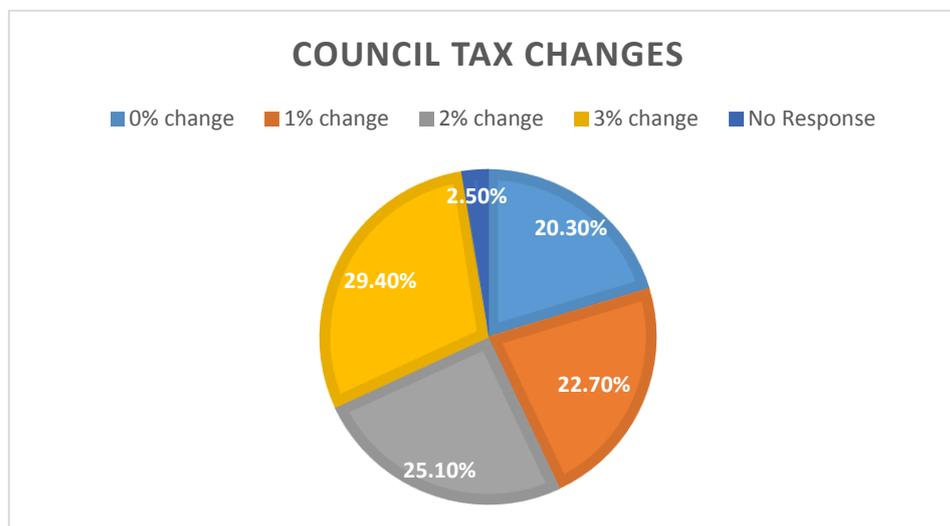
These results show that the respondents would prefer West Lindsey to look at ways to generate more income or achieve efficiencies and cost savings rather than seeing a reduction in, or stopping services to residents.

2.4 Council Tax

The results relating to options for increases in council tax were as follows:

Option	Results	Last years total
0% change	144 (20.3%)	127 (21.3%)
1% increase	161 (22.7%)	144 (24.2%)
2% increase	177 (25%)	155 (26.1%)
3% increase	208 (29.4%)	139 (23.4%)
No response	18 (2.5%)	30 (5.0%)
Total	708	595

The graph below illustrates the % responses for 2020.



These results show that whilst a 3% increase has achieved the highest individual result at 29.4%, 68.1% of respondents would prefer a lower or no increase

2.5 Covid-19

Due to the current situation with the Covid-19 pandemic we felt it would be useful to find out how our communities felt we performed in certain areas. From the respondents who offered an opinion, the results are as follows:



47% of respondents did not know how we performed and are assumed to have not required our support, and were therefore omitted from the analysis above.

From the respondents who were able to give a view, it can be deduced that beneficiaries of our support were not comparably represented in the consultation responses. To give this context, 708 consultation responses were received which included 2 businesses. We communicated directly with over 17,000 vulnerable people offering our support in addition to over 1,600 businesses issued with grant funding. In addition we provided up to date information on our website and regular social media posts.

However, an average of 45% of respondents considered our responses as above average to excellent, 29.36% average and 22.15% below average to poor.

To further this data we asked what could we have done better during the Covid-19 pandemic and the following was highlighted:

- Communication from West Lindsey was not seen
- Communication was wanted on what support was available to residents

- Paper communication was wanted to all households
- Notices on local boards updating on the situation
- Reduction in red tape around volunteering
- Issues around the opening of tips (Lincolnshire County Council Service)
- Don't know what the council has done
- Issues around stopping Planning Meetings which either stopped decisions or decisions given not agreed with
- Praise given for the waste collection during this pandemic
- Given a weekly status update for WL on cases/recoveries/deaths
- More support for local businesses
- Provision of skips to stop fly tipping

2.6 Online Question and Answer Session

A number of questions were submitted both through the questionnaire and through Facebook and Twitter for the question and answer sessions.

These questions were put to the Chief Executive and the Leader of The Council to answer due to the fact we could not hold a regular face to face event due to Covid-19. The answers to the videos were published on YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, in 11 different videos to make it easier for people to watch and view online via subject matter.

The videos were watched by;

- 88 on YouTube,
- 410 on LinkedIn,
- 90 on Twitter
- 601 on Facebook

2.7 Any other comments

At the end of the survey there was an option for respondents to add any additional comments. The summary of comments received are:

- Thank you to the waste service during this pandemic
- Investment should only be within Lincolnshire
- Continue with consultations as a good way to find out what is happening and have a say

- Thank you for the good service from WLDC
- Video very informative and well put together
- Too much focus on Gainsborough and not the rest of the district
- Connectivity is key. Mobile and broadband connection very poor.
- Reduce the number of Parish Councils to save money
- How much Council Tax goes on pensions?
- Give free green waste collections
- Remember not everyone has the internet
- A reduction in Council Tax
- Services need to be easier to access
- More litter and dog waste bins needed
- More consultation please?

There were a number of comments which focused on the responsibilities of other organisations such as Lincolnshire County Council and Lincolnshire Police which included:

- Social care needs more support
- Pot holes to be focused on
- Why is public transport in villages so poor
- More police needed
- Police should give feedback to WL on what the money is spent on which WL collects on their behalf
- Can we consult on the Police budget?

3 Conclusion

3.1 Response

Response rates this year were higher than ever this year with 708 responses which is 19% higher than the previous year. Work has also been undertaken this year to monitor the equalities questions in regard to respondents.

3.2 Corporate Objectives

88.5% of respondents felt that the current corporate objectives should continue and that the initiatives shown are all important but Community Safety measures coming highest priority with 86.9%.

As a rural district the top 2 main challenges highlighted from the list are Transportation and Job Opportunities.

3.3 Climate Change

These results show that the action that the respondents felt would be best achieved in West Lindsey is the action to reduce waste through recycling and reuse initiatives.

3.4 Investments

These results show that the respondents would prefer West Lindsey to look at ways to generate more income or achieve efficiencies and cost savings through routes which do not reduce or stop services to the residents.

3.5 Council Tax

These figures show the favoured option is a 3% increase albeit 68.1% of respondents would prefer a lower or no increase.

3.6 Covid-19

From the results on how WLDC did with the Covid-19 pandemic it was recorded that a significant number of respondents may not have required our support as 47% of respondents did not actually know how we did during the pandemic. The analysis of those that were able to provide a view, highlighted that these respondents were not comparably representative of those provided with support. However 45% considered our response above average or excellent.

3.7 Online Question and Answer Session

The Question and Answer video's increased the level of engagement across the district with regards to the Budget consultation and demonstrated that this was worthwhile, as you can see from the figures mentioned previously. Regeneration, Council investments, fly tipping and Council Tax were among the most viewed question and answer responses.

3.8 Any other comments

Other comments received mostly are around:

- Residents do not like being called a customer
- A thank you to the Waste service for keeping a good service during the Covid-19 pandemic
- Highlighting that communication needs to be undertaken in different ways as not everyone has the internet
- Asking for consultation to not only continue but for more to be undertaken.

3.9 Next Steps

The results and responses collated from this survey will be considered when developing the budget 2021/22.

The following actions are recommended for 2021 budget consultation:

- To continue with the use of a format which gives those which took part the same message.
- Continue to undertake the consultation earlier in the year to miss school holidays and allow time for consideration of responses in the budget setting process.
- Due to the low representation from the business community, we carry out a specific consultation with Business Rates Payers, as required by Section 65 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, on the proposals for expenditure (including Capital Expenditure) for 2021/22. This is likely to take the form of an online consultation, with a summarised version of the Revenue and Capital Budgets with links to the Draft Budget and MTFS papers which will be presented to CP&R in February.
- That the consultation for Business Rates Payers, be also issued directly to those Businesses which registered with us during Covid-19.

Appendix A: Questionnaire



West Lindsey District Council Budget Consultation 2020

HELPFUL HINTS FOR COMPLETING THIS QUESTIONNAIRE

- Please read each question carefully. In most cases you will only have to tick one box but please read the questions carefully as sometimes you will need to tick more than one box, or write in a response.
- Once you have finished please take a minute to check you have answered all the questions that you should have answered.
- If you have any questions about this survey please email the Engagement Team on engagement@west-lindsey.gov.uk.

Please insert your name or Citizen Panel reference:

1. Last year you told us that the top five key corporate objectives were;
 - Economy* - to ensure that economic regeneration in West Lindsey is sustainable and benefits all of our communities.
 - Finances* - to remain financially sustainable.
 - Public Safety and Environment* - to create a safer, cleaner district in which to live, work and socialise.
 - Customer* - to put the customer at the centre of everything we do.
 - Vulnerable Groups and Communities* - to create strong and self-reliant communities and promote positive life choices for disadvantaged residents.

Taking into account the recent Covid-19 pandemic do you agree that these should continue to be our key priorities? **Please tick one box only**

- Yes
- No
- Partially

2. If you ticked partially or no, what should be our priorities?

3. In ensuring we align resources to the deliver of our Corporate Plan objectives, our Executive Business Plan details the actions we will take to deliver these initiatives. We are committed to supporting our communities by spending a net £3.7 million annually on our Place initiatives. How important are the following factors to you?

	Very important 5	4	Neither important nor unimportant 3	2	Unimportant 1
Neighbourhood Plans	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Community Safety measures	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Enforcement activity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Economic Growth	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Affordable Housing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

4. As a rural district we have a number of challenges around supporting rural communities. Below is a list of key challenges.

From this list which are the two key challenges you find living in a rural location? **Please tick two boxes only**

- Broadband - We are currently investing in a Rural Broadband Officer to help improve connectivity in rural locations.
- Transportation - In conjunction with transport providers we grant fund or work in partnership to deliver better transport connections.
- Job Opportunities - We are working with schools and businesses to create apprenticeships and we continue to support schemes which attract inward investment and create jobs.
- Housing - We enable housing through working with landowners, developers and registered providers to attract funding to deliver key housing sites with others to deliver a better housing choice.
- Isolation - We assist and encourage communities to support vulnerable residents and ensure their well-being.

5. If you think we have missed out a key challenge, please detail below:

6. The impact of climate change has now been deemed by the UK Government to be a major national and international issue. A target of 100% reduction in emissions by 2050 has been set. Out of the following actions, how do you consider this might be best achieved in West Lindsey?

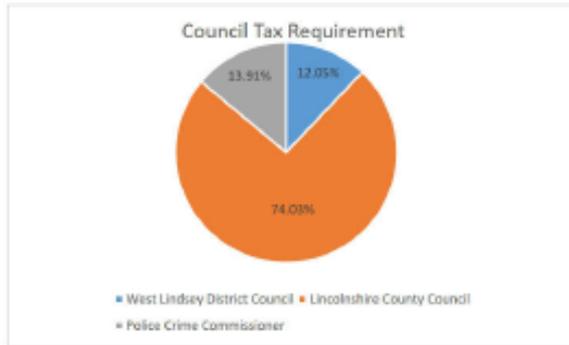
Please tick one box only

- Reduce waste through recycling and reuse initiatives.
- Better use of land to mitigate climate change impact and nature loss.
- Reduce emissions from transport and support more sustainable transport solutions.
- Support the growth and use of renewable energy.
- Ensure the most vulnerable to the effects of climate change e.g. flooding, are protected
- Encourage energy efficiency in private-owned homes and new developments.

7. The running of the Council and its commercial activities costs £5.9 million per annum. We need to invest in initiatives that will provide future efficiencies, generate income or look at reducing service provision to save money to ensure that we continue to be sustainable. What do you think would be our best approach? **Please tick one box only**

- Invest in new technology to achieve efficiencies and cost savings
- Identify commercial projects which will generate additional income
- Reduce provision and performance of services to reduce costs
- Stop delivering some services

Local Councils, the Police and Fire Authorities fund their services through government grant, fees and charges, Business Rates and Council Tax. There is one council tax bill for each domestic dwelling whether it is a house, flat, mobile home or houseboat. We collect the council tax on behalf of Lincolnshire County Council, the Police and Crime Commissioner and Parish and Town Councils. West Lindsey District Council share of your overall Council Tax is 12.05% (excluding Parish/Town Council Precepts) and funds around 50% of our overall budget.



8. With annual increases in costs of around 3%, what level of council tax increase would you support for 2021/22? **Please tick one box only**
- 0% change - A 0% change would give West Lindsey a total level of council tax income of £6.529m.
 - 1% increase - A 1% increase would mean a 4 pence per week increase for a band D property on the West Lindsey proportion of council tax and would give West Lindsey a total level of council tax income of £6.594m.
 - 2% increase - A 2% increase would mean a 8 pence per week increase for a band D property on the West Lindsey proportion of council tax and would give West Lindsey a total level of council tax income of £6.659m.
 - 3% increase - A 3% increase would mean a 12 pence per week increase for a band D property on the West Lindsey proportion of council tax and would give West Lindsey a total level of council tax income of £6.725m.

9. How do you consider West Lindsey District Council, as a leader of our communities, has performed during the Covid-19 pandemic within the following areas? **Please tick one per row**

	Excellent 1	2	3	4	Poor 5	Don't know
Communications	<input type="radio"/>					
Those individuals needing support through this crisis	<input type="radio"/>					
Support for businesses	<input type="radio"/>					
Support for communities	<input type="radio"/>					

10. How do you feel the Council could have done better during the Covid-19 pandemic?

11. We are hoping to host an online question and answer event during the consultation period. If you have a question which you would like to be answered please state here?

12. Any other comments you wish to make regarding this consultation:

Equalities questionnaire

By answering the equalities questions you will help us to understand how different groups of people from different areas feel about the budget consultation. All responses are anonymised and you do not have to answer these to take part in the budget consultation.

13. Are you?
- Male
 - Female
 - Transgender
 - Prefer not to say
14. Do you consider yourself disabled?
- Yes
 - No
 - Prefer not to say
15. What age are you?
- 16-25
 - 26-35
 - 36-45
 - 46-55
 - 56-65
 - 66-75
 - 76 or over
 - Prefer not to say
16. Which of these ethnic groups do you consider you belong?
- White - British, Irish or other
 - Black or Black British - Caribbean, African or other
 - Asian or Asian British - Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi or other
 - Arab/Middle Eastern
 - Chinese
 - Mixed Race
 - Other
 - Prefer not to say
17. Which of the following best describes your faith/religion/belief?
- No religion
 - Christian (all denominations)
 - Muslim
 - Buddhist
 - Sikh
 - Hindu
 - Jewish
 - Other faith
 - Prefer not to say
18. Which of the following statements best describes your sexuality?
- Heterosexual/Straight
 - Lesbian/Gay
 - Bisexual
 - Other
 - Prefer not to say

Thank you very much for your time completing this questionnaire.
Please return in the enclosed pre paid envelope. The closing date for this consultation is 9am on Monday 27th July 2020.

**If you would like a copy of this document in large print, audio, Braille or in another language:
Please telephone 01427 676676 or email
customer.services@west-lindsey.gov.uk**



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