



BUDGET CONSULTATION 2021

Consultation Report

October 2021

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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 we have a legal requirement 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 or by visiting the website.

The objectives of this engagement were to:

- Raise awareness of the financial challenges
- Seek views on current priorities
- Identify further support the respondents felt WLDC could provide following on from the Covid-19 pandemic.

1.2 Methods

To undertake this work we usually undertake multiple routes to consult with our stakeholders. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic again this year we have been unable to use methods such as the events. Therefore the consultation was undertaken using an online survey and a paper survey and through having stalls within the Markets at Gainsborough and Caistor (Market Rasen unfortunately did not go ahead due to weather) to gather the responses. These were supported by an online video to explain the current situation for the council.

Video/Leaflet

Following on from feedback from last years budget consultation the decision was made to continue with an online video which helps give more people the same message. This is the third year that a video has been used and the feedback is positive that it helps respondents understand the situation and ensure they all get the same message. This video was used through social media but also supported by a leaflet which was distributed with the surveys and available online.

Surveys

All 1587 members of the West Lindsey Citizen Panel received a copy of the survey. This was split with 1027 being sent via email and 560 by post. As a district which is rural and has some broadband issues there are a number of residents who are on the West Lindsey Citizen Panel who receive a paper copy of each survey. 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

All current members of the Citizens’ Panel were sent an invite as well as Parish Councils and Parish Meetings and West Lindsey District Council Councillors. Public events where held in Gainsborough and Caistor (Market Rasen having been cancelled due to weather). The survey had 513 responses compared to 708 during 2020. This is however closer to the normal level of responses for this consultation. The breakdown of these responses are:

	Survey
Citizen Panel Member	440
Resident	507
Town or Parish Councillor	3
West Lindsey Councillor	1
Business	2

Table 1: Breakdown of respondents

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.

Out of these responses 257 were received electronically, 234 were postal and 22 were from copies of the questionnaire handed out at the Market events (14 (28%) Gainsborough, 8 (14%) Caistor).

The total responses each year have been:

Year	Responses
2021	513
2020	708
2019	595
2018	409
2017	368

Table 2: Yearly response numbers

1.4 Respondent data

Respondents were asked at the end of the survey to answer some equality questions. These were not compulsory but 469 respondents did give a response and these have been broken down into gender, age, disability, ethnicity, faith/religion and sexuality.

Gender

Out of the 469 who took part, 53.9% of those are Male and 45% are Female and 1.1% preferred not to say.

Age

To take part in the consultation it is requested that they need to be 16 or over. Age data is available for the 469 members who took part and the ages are grouped as:

Age range	Percent
16-25	0.4%
26-35	1.9%
36-45	3.6%
46-55	8.8%
56-65	22.5%
66-75	39.8%
76+	22.1%
Prefer not to say	0.9%

Table 3: Age ranges

Disability

Out of those who took part, 13.2% of those classify themselves as being disabled and 83.3% do not. 3.4% preferred not to say.

Ethnicity

The majority of respondents class themselves as White British, Irish or other with 96.6%. 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. 1.5% prefer not to say.

Religion/Faith/Belief

Which the Christian religion came up with the majority of responses with 67.2%, the no religion option had 27.4%. The other religions which came in under 1% were Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu and Jewish while other faith had 2.6% and prefer not to say had 2.8%.

Sexuality

The majority of responses came from heterosexual respondents with 93.4%, while those who classed themselves as Lesbian/Gay were 0.6% and Bisexual with 0%. Other was 0.6% and prefer not to say came in at 5.4%.

2 Results

2.1 Corporate Plan Priorities

Last year the respondents to the Budget consultation 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.

This year we asked that after taking into account the recent Covid-19 pandemic if they agreed that these services should continue to be our key priorities. Out of the responses, 90% believed that these should still be the key priorities. Only 1.4% believed no and 8.6% stated partially. The comments on other priorities were suggested as:

- Climate emergency
- Rubbish
- Road Surfaces
- Transport
- Health care/health and well-being
- Anti-social behaviour

2.2 Valued Services

The Council delivers both statutory and non-statutory services for the benefit of our residents, businesses and communities.

We asked the respondents how important the following services were to them.

The results were:

Service	Important	Neither important nor unimportant	Unimportant
Neighbourhood Plans	64.6%	27.9%	7.4%
Community Safety measures	82.1%	13.5%	4.4%
Enforcement activity	81.8%	13.4%	4.8%
Economic Growth	84.5%	11.6%	3.9%
Affordable Housing	67.5%	22.2%	10.3%
Culture (Arts, Heritage and Sport)	51.3%	31%	17.7%
Operational Services (Waste and Street Cleansing)	95%	3%	2%
Environmental Services	87.5%	10.5%	2%
Planning	69%	23.8%	7.2%
Housing (other including Benefits)	55%	32.3%	12.8%

Table 4: Valued Services

These results show that our services are all considered important with Operational Services being of greater importance than any of the others.

2.3 Investment

Our corporate priorities and activity to support delivery are outlined in the Executive Business Plan which was summarised in the information leaflet. This leaflet was available online and sent out with paper copies of the survey. We asked respondents to outline any suggestions they could see which would benefit our communities. These suggestions were grouped into the following sections:

Regeneration and job creation:

- More bus routes
- Fund CBT licences for those on Job Seekers
- Invest in properties in WL
- Encouragement of small businesses
- Cinema in Market Square
- Invest in green infrastructure
- More apprenticeships
- Encourage small start ups
- Encourage more large stores in Gainsborough
- Business grants to be available past the first year of trading
- Improve transport links
- More developers to build more facilities on new estates
- Broadband for all
- Regeneration spread across the District
- More facilities for Young people
- Help with re-training
- Reduce shop rents

Housing – new housing, maximising existing housing and social housing:

- Rent caps
- Convert empty buildings into flats/businesses
- Improve existing housing stock
- More social housing needed
- New housing to be future proofed (climate change)
- More neighbourhood plans
- Real affordable housing
- Create new villages
- No housing on Flood plains
- Improve health facilities
- Rebuild Council housing stock

Cultural – Heritage, arts, leisure and sport:

- More heritage events
- More swimming pools (separate to schools)
- Sport and social clubs for teenagers
- Marina needed
- Free classes for weight loss
- Community Arts projects
- More cycle-ways
- Indoor Bowls

Environmental – Climate reduction, recycling and enforcement:

- More on fly-tipping
- Information on recycling
- New builds to be sustainable
- Open the tip more
- Park and ride
- Higher car parking fees
- Greater enforcement of Planning
- Address issues such as flood
- More bins in district
- More dog bins

Other suggestions:

- Put street lights back on
- More Police on the street
- Improve transport
- Use Partnerships more
- Abolish District councils
- Reduce Parish councils
- Those running businesses at home should not pay business rates as well as Council Tax
- More litter picking
- Mental Health support
- Central notice board in town for use by local businesses

Following on from this we asked how the respondents would prioritise investment decisions (1 being highest priority):

Investment decision:	1	2	3	4	5	6
A commercial return	33.7%	23.4%	21%	11.7%	6%	4.2%
An environmental return	28.9%	22.4%	20.9%	12.4%	7.3%	8.1%
An economic return	40.4%	28%	15.7%	7.4%	5.6%	2.8%
A social return	30.1%	26.3%	17.4%	12.3%	8.3%	5.7%
Deliver efficiencies	27%	25.8%	18.3%	7.9%	16.1%	4.9%
Meet corporate priorities	15.3%	17.9%	25.5%	11.2%	9.6%	20.6%

Table 5: Prioritised investment decisions

To look at these figures the following table shows the mean figures for these investment decisions to show how these could be prioritised. The lower the number the higher the priority.

Investment decision:	Mean figure
A commercial return	2.46
An environmental return	2.71
An economic return	2.18
A social return	2.59
Deliver efficiencies	2.75
Meet corporate priorities	3.44

Table 6: Mean figure for investment decision

These results show that the respondents would prefer West Lindsey to look at an economic return (creation of jobs and business growth) being the highest priority with a commercial return (generation of income) coming second.

Comments were also made in regard to this section:

- Investment in low-carbon housing within rural hubs

- Prioritise the population and the environment
- Climate Change is nonsense
- Off load what you can to County and Parish councils
- Stop using consultancy
- Fund essential services and then see what is left
- This is all very challenging
- Good governance needed

2.4 Council Tax

The results relating to the level of council tax were as follows:

Option	Results	Last years total
0% change	78 (15.2%)	144 (20.3%)
1% increase	120 (23.4%)	161 (22.7%)
2% increase	135 (26.3%)	177 (25%)
3% increase	164 (32%)	208 (29.4%)
No response	16 (3.1%)	18 (2.5%)
Total	513	708

Table 7: Council Tax data

These figures show the favourite option is a 3% increase. This can also be seen in figure 1.

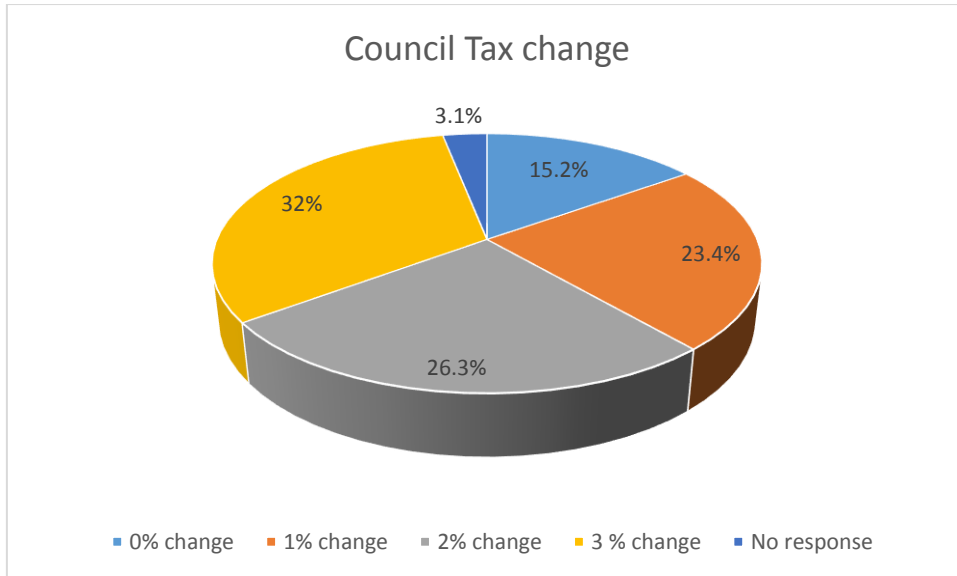


Figure 1: Council Tax change

Following on from this we asked if respondents thought that local councils should have the ability to determine council Tax without the need for a referendum if the level was above the Governments Cap.

Option	Results
Yes	37.9%
No	62.1%

Table 8: Council Tax data

The following comments were also made in regard to this section:

- Wages are not increasing
- Council Tax already too high
- Rural communities not getting much for the same amount of Council tax charged
- Cap salaries
- CT rises but the services aren't improving
- Need a fairer system of collecting
- With so many new houses being built you shouldn't need to increase council tax
- Council Tax needs reviewing to stop people cheating

2.5 Fees and Charges

Our fees and charges have seen a reduction of over £800k during the covid-19 pandemic. Our policy is set to ensure total cost recovery, but it will however take

time for our fees to reach pre-covid levels. We therefore asked respondents their views on the following options for 2022/23.

Increase fees to take into account the current demand projections	13.2%
Increase fees to assumed recovery demand projections with pricing increased in stages over a 2 year period	25.8%
Increase fees by inflation only and review next year	61%

Table 9: Fees and charges options

From these results it can be seen that more than half of the respondents opted for the increase in fees to be by inflation only and to be reviewed next year.

To further this data we asked what comments they wished to make and the following was highlighted:

- Don't raise anything in the current climate
- There should be a reduction option
- Use reserves instead of putting up charges
- Don't charge the less able

2.6 Green Waste subscriptions

The Council has charged £35 for this annual subscription which includes 18 collections per annum for the past 3 years. The actual cost of running the service is now in excess of this on a cost recovery basis.

The respondents were given 3 options and asked which they felt would be best for West Lindsey.

To increase subscriptions annually to recover total cost of the service	27%
To fix the fee for the next 2 years taking into account future cost projections	30.5%
Inflationary increase only	42.3%

Table 10: Green waste options

Garden waste charges throughout Lincolnshire are set between £35-£52 with between 18-26 collections per annum included. Respondents were asked what the optimum charge would be that they are willing to pay:

331 figures were supplied by respondents with these ranging from no charge to £90. The figures were as follows:

Cost	Number
£0	11
£2	1
£20	2
£35	73
£35.50	1
£36	4
£36.50	1
£37	10
£37.50	1
£38	6
£40	134
£42	2
£45	41
£50	30
£52	8
£60	5
£90	1

Table 11: Maximum possible charge

The most popular charge was £40

If more collections were added it was noted that these would increase the charge by £2 per collection. Respondents were asked if they would agree to more collections being added:

Option	Results
Yes	36.3%
No	63.7%

Table 12: Extra collections

Following on from this we asked how many collections they would like to see added and the when they would like to see these collections:

Option	Results
1	47.8%
2	30.9%
3	21.2%

Table 13: number of extra collections

Option	Results
November	59%
December	17.7%
January	11.5%
February	18.4%
March	59.7%

Table 14: Months for extra collections

Whilst 63.7% of respondents do not agree to additional collections, should additional collections be implemented then November or March were the most popular choice.

2.7 Further support and any other comments

Respondents were asked if there is any further support that they feel the council should be providing due to the Covid pandemic. The comments were:

- Support communities
- Stop blaming Covid
- Ensure the elderly are cared for
- More opportunities needed for children
- Start a back to work scheme
- The council have done an excellent job
- Waste sites have been a pain
- Grants for places of worship
- Council Tax rebate, rent payment extensions
- Business support
- Need better broadband
- More community engagement needed
- Debt counselling
- Help for those with Long covid

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

- Stop homeworking as it is not VFM

- Cut the amount of Committee meetings
- Chase up unpaid accounts
- Reduce the salaries of the highest paid employees
- Stop using consultants
- Things go up but don't use Covid as the excuse
- Remember West Lindsey is more than Gainsborough
- Thank you for the opportunity

There were a number of comments which focused on the responsibilities under 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
- Put street lights back on
-

3. Conclusions

3.1 Response

Response rates this year (513) were not as high as last year (708) with a return rate of 30%. It is unclear why this may be the case, however this may be due to the amount of people now going back into work.

3.2 Corporate Plan Priorities

90% believed that these should still be the key priorities of the council.

3.3 Valued Services

95% of those who responded feel that operational services is an important service. This was the highest percent out of all the services mentioned.

3.4 Investment

Respondents gave a lot of examples for how we might invest for the benefit of our communities. Whilst ranking the priority of how we should make investment decisions an economic return was highest ranked.

3.5 Council Tax

These figures show the favoured option is a 3% increase with 32% of the votes and nearly two thirds of the respondents said that the council should not have the ability to determine the level of council tax without a referendum.

3.6 Fees and Charges

Nearly two thirds of respondents felt that we should only increase fees by inflation this year and then review again next year.

3.7 Green Waste Subscriptions

An inflationary increase only was the most popular option for the Green Waste subscriptions. The most popular charge was £40 from a range of £0-£90. Two thirds of respondents did not agree to additional collections.

3.8 Further support and Any other comments

Other comments received mostly are around the changes to tips during covid, extra support needed for the young and elderly and the focus on how difficult everyone is finding it financially at the moment.

3.9 Next Steps

The following actions are recommended for 2022 budget consultation:

- To continue with the use of video/leaflet which helps put the same message across
- Continue to undertake the consultation and ensure the message is spread across as many residents as is possible
- Investigate the reason for the low return
- Consider methods of engaging the wider public and businesses

4 Appendices

Appendix A: Questionnaire



West Lindsey District Council Budget Consultation 2021

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:

Are you responding as:

- a citizen panel member
- a resident
- a Parish or Town Councillor
- a WLDC Councillor
- on behalf of a business

Corporate Plan Priorities

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 services 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?

Valued Services

3. In ensuring we align resources to the delivery 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"/>

Investment

4. Our corporate priorities and activity to support delivery are contained in the Executive Business Plan which have been summarised within the information leaflet. Are there any suggestions where you see investment should be made to benefit our communities? Please list within the relevant categories:

Regeneration and job creation	<input style="width: 380px; height: 20px;" type="text"/>
Housing - new housing, maximising existing housing, social housing	<input style="width: 380px; height: 20px;" type="text"/>
Cultural - Heritage, arts, leisure, sport	<input style="width: 380px; height: 20px;" type="text"/>
Environmental - Climate reduction, recycling, enforcement	<input style="width: 380px; height: 20px;" type="text"/>

5. If you have any suggestions which do not fit into these categories, please detail below:

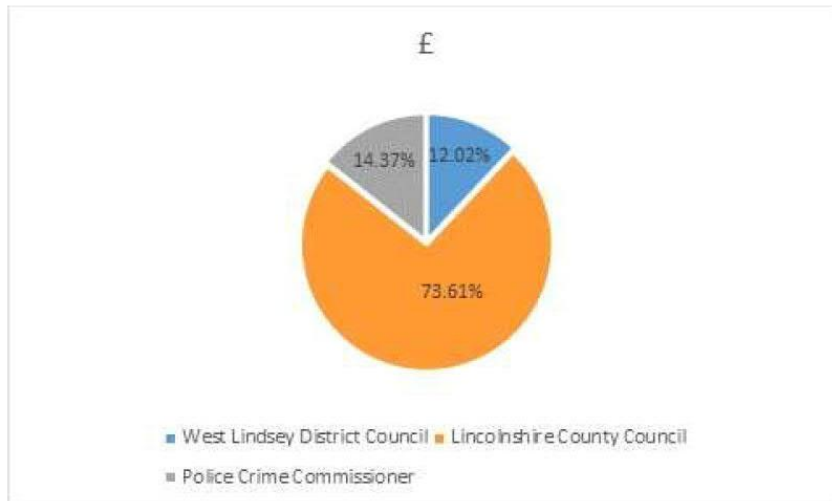
6. How would you prioritise investment decisions? **Please rank in order from 1-6 (1 being highest priority)**

	1	2	3	4	5	6
A commercial return - provides additional ongoing net revenues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
An environmental return - provides a reduction in CO2	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
An economical return - provides job creation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A social return - improves health and wellbeing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Investments which deliver efficiencies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Investments which meet the corporate priorities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

7. Any comments on these priority rankings:

Council Tax

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 12.02% (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 2022/23? **Please tick one box only**
- 0% change - A 0% change would give West Lindsey a total level of council tax income of £6.711m.
 - 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 £6.778m.
 - 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 £6.845m.
 - 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 £6.912m.
9. Do you think that local councils should have the ability to determine Council Tax without the need for a referendum if above the Governments Cap? **Please tick one box only**
- Yes
 - No
10. Any comments you wish to make around the level of Council Tax:
-

Fees and Charges

11. Our fees and charges have seen a reduction of over £700k during the covid-19 pandemic. Our policy is to set fees and charges to ensure total cost recovery, but it will however take time for our fees to reach pre-covid levels. We would therefore welcome your views on the following options for 2022/23. **Please tick one box only**
- Increase fees to take into account the current demand projections
 - Increase fees to assumed recovery demand projections with pricing increased in stages over a 2 year period
 - Increase fees by inflation only

12. Any comments you wish to make regarding the fees and charges options:

Green Waste Subscriptions

13. The Council has charged £35 for this subscription which includes 18 collections per annum for the past 3 years. The actual cost of running the service is now in excess of this on a cost recovery basis. Which of the following options do you feel is the best for West Lindsey? **Please tick one box only**
- To increase subscriptions annually to recover total cost of the service
 - To fix the fee for the next 2 years taking into account future cost projections
 - Inflationary increase only

14. Garden waste charges throughout Lincolnshire are set between £35-£52 with between 18-26 collections per annum included. What is your optimum charge you would be willing to pay?

15. If more collections are requested this would increase the WLDC subscription charge by £2 per collection. Would you agree to more collections being added? **Please tick one box only**
- Yes
 - No

16. How many collections would you like to see added? **Please tick one box only**

- 1
- 2
- 3

17. When would you like to see these additional collections? **Please tick all that apply**

- November
- December
- January
- February
- March

Further support

18. Is there any further support that you feel the Council should be providing due to the Covid Pandemic?

19. 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.

20. Are you willing to answer these questions?

- Yes
 No - If you answer no you will be take straight to the end of this consultation

21. Are you?

- Male
 Female
 Transgender
 Prefer not to say

22. Do you consider yourself disabled?

- Yes
 No
 Prefer not to say

23. What age are you?

- 16-25
 26-35
 36-45
 46-55
 56-65
 66-75
 76 or over
 Prefer not to say

24. 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
25. 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
26. 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 click submit to ensure we receive your responses. You will then be taken to our website.

**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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