



**Thriving Council
Committee**

30 July 2026

Subject: Budget Consultation 2026

Report by:

Head of Finance (Deputy Section 151 Officer)

Contact Officer:

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Executive Summary:

To present the proposed Budget Consultation process for 2026.

Appendices to Report

- A. Proposed Timeline
- B. Proposed Questionnaire

RECOMMENDATION:

- (a) That Thriving Council Committee are asked to review the proposal and approve the budget consultation process, timeline and questionnaire for 2026.

1. Background

- 1.1 Each year a consultation is undertaken on the following years' 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.
- 1.2 West Lindsey District Council (WLDC) are members of the Consultation Institute and in accordance with best practice, we ensure that all consultations are legal and appropriate processes are in place to lower the risk of a judicial review. Consultation is the dynamic process of dialogue between individuals or groups, based upon a genuine exchange of views, with the objective of influencing decisions, policies or programmes of action.
- 1.3 Before 1985 there was little consideration given to consultations until a case (R v London Borough of Brent ex parte Gunning). This case sparked the need for change in the process of consultations when Stephen Sedley QC proposed a set of principles that were then adopted by the presiding judge. These principles, known as Gunning, were later confirmed by the Court of Appeal in 2001 (Coughlan case) and are now applicable to all public consultations that take place in the UK. These outline the principles which all consultations must abide by and are:
 - **When proposals are still at a formative stage**
Public bodies need to have an open mind during a consultation and not already made the decision but have some ideas about the proposals.
 - **Sufficient reasons for proposals to permit 'intelligent consideration'**
People involved in the consultation need to have enough information to make an intelligent choice and input in the process.
 - **Adequate time for consideration and response**
Timing is crucial – is it an appropriate time and environment, was enough time given for people to make an informed decision and then provide that feedback, and is there enough time to analyse those results and make the final decision?
 - **Must be conscientiously considered**
Think about how to prove decision-makers have taken consultation responses into account.

The risk of not following these principles could result in a Judicial Review.

2. Proposal

- 2.1. To undertake this consultation, it is proposed that multiple routes are taken to consult with our stakeholders.

We will be holding face to face events, producing an online and paper survey and accepting any written submissions. The responsible officer for this work is Sue Leversedge, Head of Finance and Deputy Section 151 Officer with the accountable officer being Katy Allen, Corporate Governance Officer.

- 2.2. The objectives of the engagement are to:
- Raise awareness of the financial challenges.
 - Raise awareness of the diversity of services the Council provides.
 - Provide some feedback on the level of increase for Council Tax that residents are prepared to pay.
 - Provide some feedback on the level of fees and charges.

3. Who and how to involve

- 3.1. This year we would like to consult with the following stakeholders:

- Business Rate payers
- Residents
- Citizen Panel members
- Community Leaders
- County Councillors
- Significant employers
- Education sector
- Parish and Town Councils

Data from this consultation will go on to inform Councillors of West Lindsey District Council who will take this information into consideration when setting the 2027/28 budget.

- 3.2. To ensure we are as inclusive as possible and allow as many residents as possible to take part we run a number of different routes to take part. These routes include events, online and paper questionnaire and written submissions.

- Online and paper questionnaire –To ensure there are as many views on the consultation as possible we would have an online and a matching paper questionnaire which would be available to those on the citizen panel and any other resident that wishes to take part through requesting a questionnaire, completing a questionnaire on our website or through an invite from the Citizen Panel.
- Events –Market Stalls in Gainsborough, Market Rasen and Caistor.
- Written Submissions – Although written submissions are not advertised as being accepted we would accept them. They are not

advertised due to the amount of time analysis of these submissions take compared to other routes.

3.3. The communications strategy will include;

- Social Media – we would advertise the consultation on Facebook to try to spread the chance for residents to take part as wide as possible.
- Citizens' Panel members will be contacted and asked to participate
- Parish/Town Council e-brief
- Subscribed Residents Newsletter e-brief
- WLDC Councillor e-brief
- Business e-brief
- Public Events - face to face attendance at market stalls in the three market towns
- Press release
- Minerva

4. Timescales

- 4.1. The timescale for the consultation and future reporting is included as **Appendix A.**

5. Questionnaire contents

- 5.1. The proposed questionnaire has been attached as **Appendix B.**

ASSOCIATED IMPLICATIONS

Legal:

This consultation complies with legislation including The Local Government Act 1999, The Equality Act 2010, The Localism Act 2011 and the Data Protection Act 2018 as well as legal case law as appropriate for consultation. This includes the Gunning Principles as established in case R v London Borough of Brent ex parte Gunning 1985.

Financial: FIN/57/27/TC/SL

None from this report although the outcomes from this proposed consultation may have financial implications and will feed into the delivery of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

Staffing:

None arising from this report.

LGR implications:

None arising from this report.

Equality and Diversity including Human Rights:

An equality questionnaire will be available to complete at the end of the survey and an EIA will be completed for any projects or changes coming from the consultation.

Data Protection Implications:

The residents and businesses to receive directed invitations have agreed by registering to receive Council information.

Climate Related Risks and Opportunities:

None arising from this report.

Section 17 Crime and Disorder Considerations:

None arising from this report.

Health Implications:

None arising from this report.

Risk Assessment:

None arising from this report.

Title and Location of any Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:

n/a

Call in and Urgency:

Is the decision one which Rule 14.7 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules apply?

Yes

☐

No

☒

Key Decision:

Yes

☐

No

☒

Appendix A – Proposed Timeline

Thriving Council Chairs brief	16 July 2026
Group Leaders Meeting	TBC
Thriving Council	30 July 2026
Final Questionnaire	31 July 2026
Write cover letter and mail merge	4 August 2026
Survey/cover letter to print	4 August 2026
Survey out	10 August 2026
Email to businesses	31 August 2026
Caistor Market Stall	12 September 2026
Market Rasen Market Stall	15 September 2026
Gainsborough Market Stall	22 September 2026
Final cut off	30 September 2026
Input of surveys	9 October 2026
Analysis	30 October 2026
Report due	30 November 2026
Thriving Council	February 2027
Full Council	February 2027

Appendix B – Proposed Questionnaire



West Lindsey District Council Budget Consultation 2026

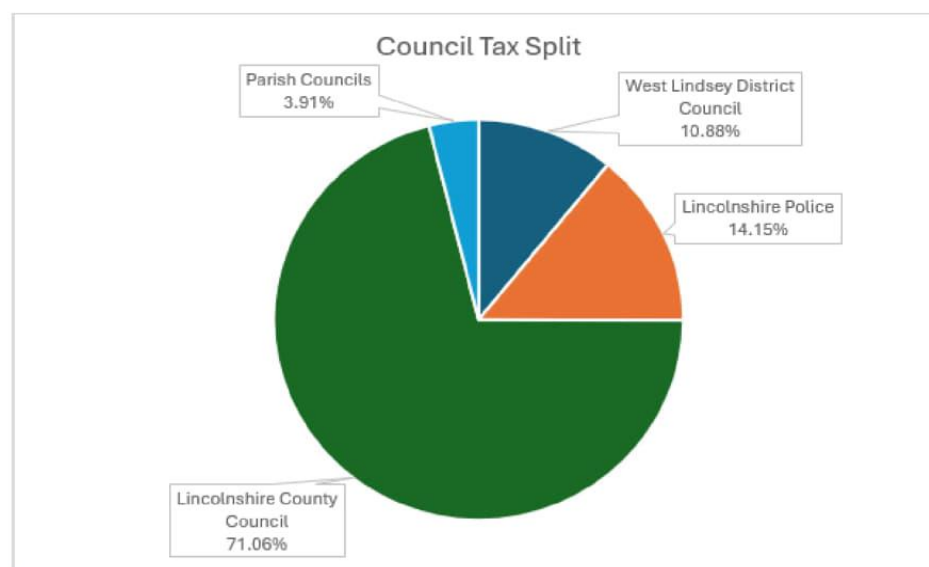
HELPFUL HINTS FOR COMPLETING THIS QUESTIONNAIRE· Please read each question carefully. In most cases you will only have to tick one box but please read the questions carefully as sometimes you will need to tick more than one box, or write in a response. Once you have finished please take a minute to check 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.

Are you responding as: (Please tick all that apply)

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

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 10.88% (excluding Parish/Town Council Precepts) and funds around 40% of our overall budget.



1. With the customer price index 2.8% and the retail price index at 3.1% (as at 30.6.26), what level of council tax increase would you support for 2027/28? **Please tick one box only**
- ☐ 0% change - A 0% change would give West Lindsey a total level of council tax income of £8.59m.
 - ☐ 1% increase - A 1% increase would mean a 5 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 £8.68m.
 - ☐ 2% increase - A 2% increase would mean a 10 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 £8.76m.
 - ☐ 3% increase - A 3% increase would mean a 15 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 £8.85m.
2. Any comments you wish to make around the level of Council Tax:

Fees and Charges

Historically the Council has adjusted its non-statutory (e.g. locally set) fees and charges on a cost recovery basis, in accordance with the Fees, charges and Concessions Policy Framework.

Where inflationary increases are applied, this has been the lower of September Retail Price Index (RPI), September Customer Price Index (CPI) or the Local Government Pay Award for the current financial year.

This is the lowest level possible which will enable the Council to cover increases in costs, driven by the pay award for 2026/2027 as a minimum, with employee costs and officer time being the main cost driver for the majority of the proposed fees. This ensures that services remain accessible to all our residents.

Where fees don't cover the full cost of a service, the remainder is funded by local taxpayers through Council Tax rather than by service users.

3. Which of the following options do you feel would be the best for 2027/28? **Please tick one box only**
- ☐ Increase fees by lower than inflation at an amount of 1% and review annually
 - ☐ Increase fees by the lowest option out of September RPI, September CPI or the Local Government Pay Award for the current financial year. The lowest option is currently forecast to be 3.0% and review annually
 - ☐ Increase fees at the Local Government Pay Award for the current financial year – currently forecast to be 3.3% and review annually. This would ensure employee costs are covered, being the main cost driver for services.
4. Any comments you wish to make regarding the fees and charges options:

Car Parking

Car parking in West Lindsey District Council car parks in Gainsborough is currently free for the first 2 hours. A trial has taken place and has been extended for a further 6 months to assess its long-term impact on the town centre, local businesses and visitors. Two hours free parking in the Gainsborough car parks would reduce the income for the service by around £40,000 per annum.

5. Do you believe that free parking should be subsidised by other council services to support town centres and businesses or costs of providing parking should be recovered from users only?

Please tick one box only

- ☐ Car parking should be subsidised by other council services
☐ Car parking should be recovered from users only
☐ Not sure

6. Are there any comments you wish to make on this subject?

Other comments relating to this consultation

7. 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.

8. Are you willing to answer these questions?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

9. Are you?

- ☐ Male
☐ Female
☐ Transgender
☐ Non-Binary
☐ Any other gender
☐ Prefer not to say

10. Do you have any long term illness, health problems or disability which limits your daily activities or the work that you do?
- ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
 - ☐ Prefer not to say
11. What age are you?
- ☐ 16-25
 - ☐ 26-35
 - ☐ 36-45
 - ☐ 46-55
 - ☐ 56-65
 - ☐ 66-75
 - ☐ 76 or over
 - ☐ Prefer not to say
12. Which of these ethnic groups do you consider you belong?
- ☐ White
 - ☐ Black, Black British, Caribbean or African
 - ☐ Asian or Asian British
 - ☐ Mixed or multiple ethnic groups
 - ☐ Any other ethnic group
 - ☐ Prefer not to say
13. Which of the following best describes your faith/religion/belief?
- ☐ No religion
 - ☐ Christian (all denominations)
 - ☐ Muslim
 - ☐ Buddhist
 - ☐ Sikh
 - ☐ Hindu
 - ☐ Jewish
 - ☐ Any other religion/faith/belief
 - ☐ Prefer not to say
14. Which of the following statements best describes your sexuality?
- ☐ Heterosexual/Straight
 - ☐ Lesbian/Gay
 - ☐ Bisexual
 - ☐ Any other sexual orientation
 - ☐ Prefer not to say

Thank you for taking part. Once submitted you will be taken to our website.