

## CONSULTATION ON ROTHER DISTRICT COUNCIL'S REVENUE BUDGET 2017/18

1. This consultation opened on 11 November 2016 and closed on 6 January 2017. An invitation was sent out in 'My Alerts' on 11 November and was repeated three times over the eight weeks of the consultation period. 'My Alerts' emails go to over half the households in Rother. Personal invitations to consult were emailed and posted to over 500 residents in the Rother Citizens Panel and local business organisations including the Chambers of Commerce. A reminder was emailed before Christmas. A media release was distributed and there was an article in the Observer on 11 November. Notifications and updates were included on the Council's Facebook and Twitter accounts. Printed information and a response form, both in standard and large print versions, were distributed at the Customer Help Points including a small supply of reply paid envelopes.
2. By 6 January 2017, the Council had received 355 individual responses. Of those, one is from a local business, none from business groups and two are from local organisations. The remaining 352 are from local residents. In the last budget consultation, the Council received 326 responses in four weeks over January and February 2016, so we had a 9% increase in responses. Most submissions used the online response form or a printed response form. We received four emails from respondents and their responses are included in the following analysis.

### Responses on the Options for Council Tax

3. Overall 61.9% of the respondents supported raising Council Tax by £5 based on a Band D property (and proportionately to the other Bands). Both local organisations and the one responding business supported that proposal.
4. 28.2% of respondents supported freezing the Council Tax at the current level and just under 10% supported a rise in Council Tax but less than £5.
5. One email response supported a rise above £5. However, this was not an option offered so it has been counted with the other responses of those prepared to have the Council Tax raised by £5.

**Table 1: Savings option – all responses**

OPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Raise the Council Tax by £5 based on a Band D property?	219	61.9%
Freeze the Council Tax at its current level?	100	28.2%
Raise the Council Tax by less than £5 and find any shortfall from somewhere else?	35	9.9%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>354</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Why did the respondents choose their option?

6. As most people have chosen to raise Council Tax, those reasons dominate the comments received. Just over two out of five people who answered the question (41%) wanted to protect services and were prepared to raise their

Council Tax payment to do so. 9% of respondents gave general comments that it was the right or fair thing to do. Another 8% of respondents said that the rise was affordable for themselves or for most people.

7. However, 17% of people who answered the question had given their answer because of their low or fixed income, both pensioners and of working age. Nine percent of respondents felt the Council should make more savings instead of raising Council Tax. Most of these people selected to freeze Council Tax but a small number were prepared to pay more but commenting that the Council could make more savings as well.
8. A further 5% said they did not want Council Tax to rise because they paid too much already. An additional 5% of respondents said they were not prepared to pay more Council Tax because services were poor and not worth more money.
9. Four percentage of people had questions about the proposals or wanted more information. The consultation's website pages have been updated with more information where it was possible to provide it. It is worth noting at this point that there continues to be some respondents who wished to comment on all services funded by Council Tax, whether or not they are District Council services. This seems to be because they pay their bill to Rother and perhaps they only heard about this Council's consultation.

OPTION REASONS	FREQUENCY	ADJ. PERCENTAGE
Protect Services	123	41%
Council should make more savings	26	9%
Fairness/right thing	23	8%
Low personal income	48	16%
Pay too much already	16	6%
Affordable	27	9%
Services poor, not worth rise	15	5%
More information needed	18	6%
£2	1	0%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>297</b>	<b>100%</b>

#### **Sample comments from those that want to protect services:**

"There is no point sacrificing essential services in order to freeze Council Tax – the reality is that the cost of providing services increases year on year and it is therefore I feel only normal for the beneficiaries of those services to contribute to maintaining or improving the services – instead of forcing them to gradually atrophy through lack of funding."

"Raising the Council Tax by £5 (based on Band D) seems fair and reasonable to maintain the current level of services. I would be concerned if other services were to suffer as a result of a freeze or lower increase, which may well affect residents on lower incomes."

"The services Rother District Council (RDC) provides are important and, because of past cuts by Government, these services are already much diminished despite the efforts RDC has made to mitigate the impact of those cuts. We cannot have a situation where Council services are so diminished that they cease to be effective or are reduced to a token level. The mark of a civilised society is, to a great extent, seen in the quality of the public realm. We do not want a situation where there is public squalor amongst private affluence. The services RDC is responsible for are important to everyone and need proper funding."

**Sample comments from those that said it was affordable:**

"Because £5 is affordable for those who can, as long as there is a safety net for those who cannot or who are struggling."

"£5 is the equivalent of a cup of coffee and a cake or a pint of beer, or less than a packet of cigarettes. It is far less than most people pay to maintain a smart phone. Over a year, £5 is less than a penny a day. Even the poorest of residents can afford this increase."

"Because for each household it is a very small amount but adds up to a lot."

**Sample comments from those who said it was not possible on their income:**

"Zero pension/savings increase in recent years. Any increase in Council Tax would directly impact upon our weekly grocery spend/household energy/water consumption which are already carefully managed."

"Because people on a low income or fixed income do not have an increase over £5 year on year, each year we are losing more income and do not have the spare capital to keep on paying more each year for council tax and in these uncertain time, it's becoming more difficult. We should be giving less to East Sussex County Council."

"Because since 2008 my income after tax has only increased due to increases in the tax-free allowance. In fact, in real terms my salary is less than what I was earning in 2003."

"I think most council tax payers are in the same position."

**Sample comments from those that said the Council should make more savings:**

"There are many ways of saving money from other services or expenses, like buffets laid on and paid for by us. Buffets for training courses, meetings, etc. could all be cut and would save thousands of pounds."

"Somehow the Council needs to raise more money to cover increased costs. So we agree with raising the Tax by £5/Band D. But obviously the Council must try to save money by improved use of technology and making sure there is no money wasted on "jollies" for Council members. The Council must begin to work like the Private Sector where there are no extras for Councillors or employees."

"Where is the incentive to maintain or even improve services if you just increase the tax? Other funding streams are available and should be explored first. They may need finance to begin with, hence my response. As an example I would like the

Council to address the appalling parking situation throughout their area. Ticketing illegal parking would create significant income apart from making the area more attractive to visitors and residents."

### How Should Council Tax be Spent?

10. We asked respondents how they would like Council Tax to be spent. Just under half of all respondents (46%) named some specific services. A further 10% of all respondents said that only essential or mandatory or statutory services should be provided by the Council (but did not list those services they considered essential). One in 10 respondents said Council Tax should be spent either maintaining existing services or improving the services. In addition, 6% of respondents said that Council Tax should be spent wisely or carefully as a general principle. Five percent of respondents said that the Council should cut Council Tax or use any additional funding to find new savings or ways to raise income in the long term. Four percent of respondents felt that Council Tax should be spent directly on residents or only locally as a general principle.

HOW SPENT CATEGORIES	FREQUENCY	ADJ. PERCENTAGE
Listed Services	163	46%
Only essential or mandatory services	31	9%
Maintain/improve services	34	10%
Vulnerable	11	3%
Council to decide	10	3%
Services that help majority	6	2%
Make cuts/savings	19	5%
Directly and locally	14	4%
Carefully/wisely	21	6%
Other	0	0%
No response	45	13%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>354</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Important Services to Residents and Businesses

11. The consultation also asked which services were important to the respondent. The most named service was waste and recycling. In general, most people prioritised services that contributed to their health and the general wellbeing of the population as well as the appearance of their environment, for example street cleaning. Half of all respondents mentioned a service provided by the Community and Economy department and 11% mentioned a service provided by Environmental Health. A further one in 10 listed a service provided by Strategy and Planning. Only 8% of all respondents listed services by Finance and Welfare, 1% mentioned ICT and Customer Services and only one person mentioned a service by Corporate and Human Resources. Finally, 13% of all respondents said that all services or all current services were important and that they had no priority. Some people gave us some general principles for

important services without being specific about a named service, for example services that support the vulnerable or improve the environment. Please note that we have not included analysis of services not provided by RDC.

<b>IMPORTANT</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>	<b>ADJ. PERCENTAGE</b>
Community and Economy	181	51%
Environmental Health	39	11%
Strategy and Planning	36	10%
Finance and Welfare	29	8%
ICT and Customer Services	5	1%
Corporate and Human Resources	1	0%
All	46	13%
No response	17	6%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>354</b>	<b>100%</b>

<b>IMPORTANT: PRINCIPLES</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>	<b>ADJ. PERCENTAGE</b>
Vulnerable	5	1%
Environment	3	1%
Visible	1	0%
Cut services/costs	2	1%
Across all of district	2	1%
Wide range of people	2	1%
Council to make decision	1	0%
No response	338	96%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>354</b>	<b>100%</b>

### **Services That Could Be Stopped**

12. The consultation asked respondents if there were any services they were prepared to see stopped or reduced. One in four of all respondents gave a general answer of 'none' or that they were not prepared to see any services reduced. Other people did comment that they would rather not lose services but went on to mention services they were prepared to see reduced or where they had lower priorities. Those people are included in the count by department, as following. One or more of the Community and Economy services were listed by one out of five respondents and these tended to be in the leisure and cultural areas. That was followed by services provided in Corporate and Human Resources (8%) but included in this number are suggestions such as cuts or freezes to staff pay and reducing management. In third place was services provided by Finance and Welfare by 4% of respondents. One person said to cut all services.

<b>STOP</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>	<b>ADJ. PERCENTAGE</b>
Community and Economy	75	21%
Corporate and Human Resources	30	8%
Finance and Welfare	16	4%
Strategy and Planning	9	3%
ICT and Customer Services	8	2%
Environmental Health	2	1%
No response	126	36%
Do not stop any services	88	25%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>354</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Conclusion

13. In conclusion, this year there was a higher response from residents and this is probably because of the way the 'My Alerts' service helps inform residents. There is a clear majority for raising Council Tax by £5 based on a Band D property. Tables of all comments for each question will be made available as usual in the Members' Room and responses on specific service areas have been sent to the appropriate Service Managers.