

CORPORATE AFFAIRS AND LOCAL ECONOMY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

19 JANUARY 2023

CONSULTATION WITH RATEPAYING BUSINESSES IN THE DISTRICT ON THE COUNCIL'S FINANCIAL STRATEGY: SUMMARY OF RESPONSES

1. RECOMMENDATION

- 1.1 That panel members consider the responses to the Business Rate Payer Budget Consultation.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Council is required under the Local Government Finance Act 1992 to ensure that business rate payers are consulted on its proposed budget.
- 2.2 Through an introduction to the consultation, rate payers were provided with a link to the September published Medium Term Financial Plan ([click here](#)) and were advised that the forecast for the Council demonstrated a budget deficit to 2026/27 of some £3.353 million. It was confirmed that the Council's financial Strategy over the medium term includes actions to crystallise savings within services, increase income generation, and utilise accrued reserves to support the delivery of a balanced budget.
- 2.3 On 23 November 2022 the Council opened an online consultation with its business rate payers, and the membership organisations that represent them, to gather their views as to the priorities for the Council's budgets. The consultation was open for a period of three weeks, closing at 12 noon on Wednesday 14 December 2022.
- 2.4 The context, wording for the consultation and questions were agreed with the Financial Strategy Task and Finish Group, with the final wording and process overseen by the Council's Strategic Director Corporate Resources & Transformation / Section 151 Officer.
- 2.5 The survey was administered by the Economic Development team.
- 2.6 Responses were anonymous unless the business/business support organisation choose to provide their businesses name.
- 2.7 Response rate was very low with just 20 responses received.
- 2.8 Respondents were also encouraged to sign up to Economic Development's dedicated business support e-newsletter and social media accounts.

3. PROMOTING THE CONSULTATION

- 3.1 The consultation and link to the survey were extensively promoted through economic development's business enews and social media accounts. In addition, corporate communications promoted the survey via the main NFDC communication channels.
- 3.2 **Promotion through the Business Support e-newsletter:** the economic development business enews has 3,600 subscribers although not all are business rate payers. The first article on the consultation generated 233 subscriber click-throughs to the consultation

eform. Subsequent articles generated a further 178 click-throughs to the consultation webpage.

- 3.3 **Promotion through Facebook:** posts about the consultation were reshared and reached 1,588 people.
- 3.4 **Promotion through Twitter:** using both the corporate twitter account and the economic development account, tweets about the consultation were seen 776 times.
- 3.5 The consultation was also promoted through liaison with business membership organisations including New Forest Business Partnership.

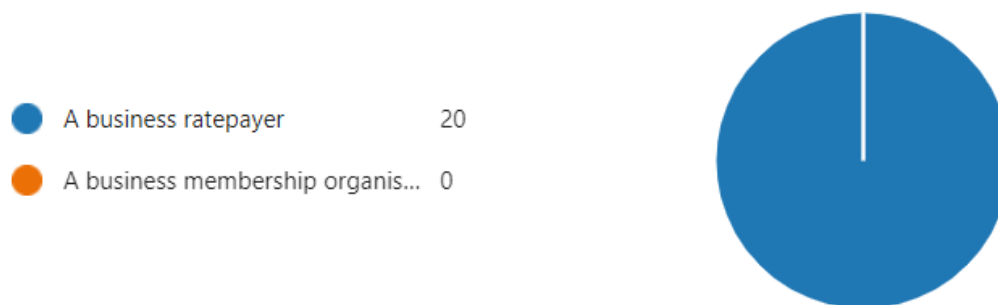
4. THE CONSULTATION

4.1 In total there were 20 responses to the consultation:

Question 1: 'Business/organisation name' (optional question), 11 respondents provided their business name. This included one Parish Council.

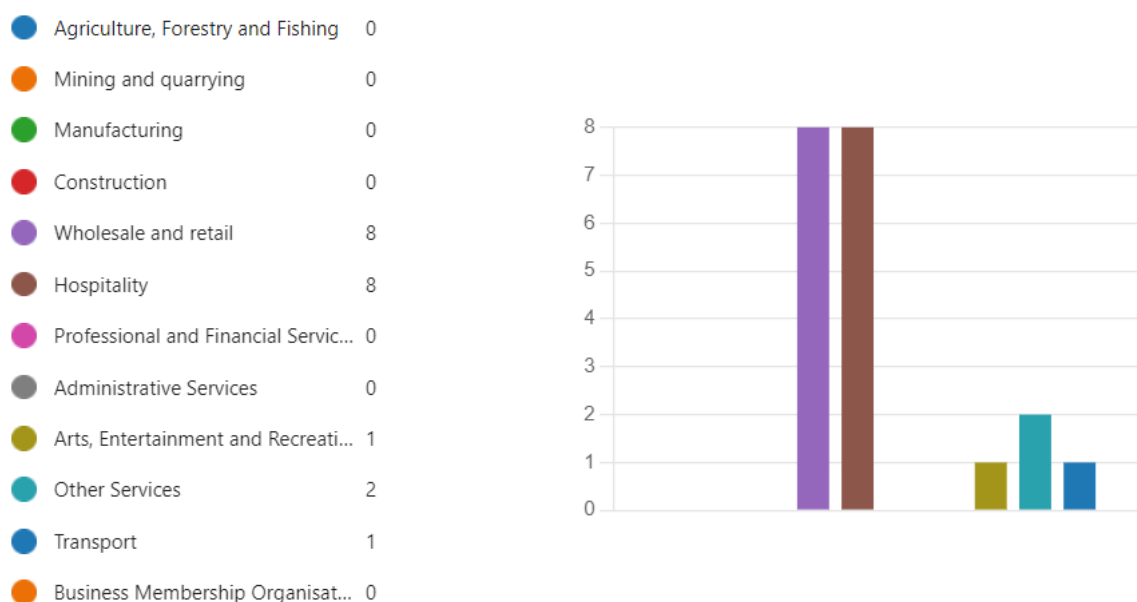
Question 2: 'Are you responding as a business ratepayer or a business membership organisation?'

Responses were received from:



Question 3: 'What is your main business activity?'

Responses were received from:



Question 4: 'What is the postcode of the business?' (Optional question)

Responses (based on the first four digits of the respondent's postcode) were received from across the district as shown below:

Post Code	Area Covered by Postcode	Number of responses
BH25	New Milton	2
SO40	Totton, Lyndhurst, Cadnam, Marchwood,	4
SO41	Milford-on-Sea, Pennington, Boldre, Hordle, Sway	2
SO42	Beaulieu	2
SO43	Lyndhurst	3
SO45	Hythe, Fawley, Blackfield, Calshot, Hardley	2
Not stated		6

Question 5: 'Do you believe there are any specific areas that the Council should focus on in its search for revenue savings or income generation proposals?'

There were only 17 responses to this question, and each gave a different response as to the specific areas that the Council should focus on in its search for revenue savings or income generation. As such, no conclusions can be drawn from this question.

Question 6: 'Are there any council services that you consider should be protected from any reductions?'

There were only 15 responses to this question, as such no conclusions can be drawn.

The following were most frequently cited by the respondents, relevant to activities undertaken by NFDC:

- Provision and maintenance of public toilets and litter collection/street cleanliness
- CCTV

Question 7: 'What do you think the Council could be doing to further support the business community, and how should this be funded?'

There were only 18 responses to this question, as such no conclusions can be drawn.

The following were most frequently cited by respondents, relevant to activities undertaken by NFDC:

- Business rates reduction/ rebate
- Street cleaning

5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1 New Forest District has 9,110 businesses (source: New Forest Economic Profile 2022). As such, the 20 responses to this consultation equate to a response rate of 0.2% of businesses within the district.

5.2 The consultation does not therefore provide statistically significant data and as such, no credible conclusions can be drawn.

- 5.3 The consultation was widely promoted through the Council's dedicated business communication channels and engagement with this communication, as stated above, was high.
- 5.4 However only 20 businesses completed the consultation. This suggests that businesses were dissuaded from completing the form for some reason.
- 5.5 The 2024/25 rate payer budget consultation, to be carried out later in 2023, will consider alternative methods for conducting the consultation, and will include guidance for respondents as to the services that are the responsibility of the Council as well as providing a summary of Council budget priorities. We would hope to achieve a larger response rate than achieved for the 2023/24 budget consultation.

For further information contact:

Alan Bethune
Strategic Director Corporate Resources &
Transformation

Section 151 Officer

alan.bethune@nfdc.gov.uk

Background Papers:

New Forest Economic Profile 2022