

Newsletter January 2019

Welcome to the latest West Lindsey Citizen Panel newsletter.

In this issue we are reporting on progress from the surveys undertaken in 2018 which includes the budget consultation, the Local Council Tax Support Scheme updates and how the council communicates with its residents.

Many thanks for your time and effort in completing surveys or attending focus groups. I hope this newsletter shows that this is a valuable tool for the council and that it helps our councillors make the important decisions.

General Data Protection Regulations

West Lindsey District Council is committed to protecting your privacy when you use our services. The information you provide in response to our surveys will not be linked to your personal information in anyway and will be anonymous. Your personal information is held in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulations and will not be shared with any third parties. Your panel reference will only be used to indicate who has taken part in each survey and therefore most surveys will not hold any personal information. The council will only ever publish results to surveys in an anonymous manner and sensitive personal data will not be disclosed.

To find out more about how your personal data is used in regards to the Citizen Panel including who we share it with, how long we will keep it and what rights you have, please read the more detailed version of this privacy notice on our website: www.west-lindsey.gov.uk/citpan-privacy

Budget feedback

With reduced budgets from central government it is critical that resources are directed in a way that benefits residents and meets your needs and priorities.

All 1,430 current members of the Citizens' Panel as well as parish councils and a number of businesses were given a chance to take part in the budget consultation for 2018.

As a member of the Citizen Panel you were invited to attend one of the focus groups which were held in September and October 2018 and if you were not able to attend there was either a paper survey or online budget allocator. All of these covered the same topics and in total 409 responses were received.

From these results you said:

- Nearly two fifths of you voted for a 3% increase in council tax. Some comments which went with these results asked why there was no option for a Council Tax freeze. This is because in the current climate having a council tax freeze is not an option for the council and therefore could not be included in the consultation.
- Where we asked people to prioritise the services this showed that the top 4 services in order of priority to you are Waste, Environmental, Housing and Economic Development services.
- When we asked people about the New Homes Bonus and how it should be utilised, nearly half of those who responded wished it to be used to support growth and regeneration across the district rather than an allocation or bidding process and 57% felt that it should not be used to support the revenue budget for the council. Respondents felt that the support needed to be across the whole district and not focused on the towns.
- While looking at the current Fees and Charges Policy respondents had a positive attitude in the comments to the policy being in place and some felt that it is important to ensure the fees and charges policy remains in place. Additional services which were mentioned were mostly around pest control and enforcement including enforcement of fly tipping and dog fouling.
- The results that came back from the section on joint working with 3rd party organisations outlined that nearly 2 thirds (73.6%) of respondents felt that WLDC should work with other organisations and these included any adjoining council, Fire, Police, NHS, RAF and environmental organisation.

Further details on the results of this survey can be found at:

www.west-lindsey.gov.uk/previousconsultations. These results have gone to committee during December 2018 and will now feed into the proposals for the 2019/20 budget. Work has already started on the consultation for 2019 and we look forward to hearing your views.

Local Council Tax Scheme

Council Tax Benefit was a national scheme providing means-tested financial help to households to pay their Council Tax liability. This was abolished on 31 March 2013 and every Local Authority was tasked with designing a local scheme of financial support to replace Council Tax Benefit.

West Lindsey District Council consulted with the residents of the district and the precepting authorities and adopted a local scheme approved by full Council in January 2013. This scheme was re-adopted for 2014/15 and for 2015/16 and, following further consultations in 2015, minor amendments to the scheme were agreed for 2016/17. No changes were made to the scheme in 2017/18 but amendments were made in 2018/19 in anticipation of Universal Credit implementation. As at 1 October 2018 the amount of Council Tax being collected from claimants this year has increased by 2.74% compared to last year proving the success of the changes.

Part of the consultation process also included two technical changes to council tax; considering abolishing the empty property exemption currently payable for up to 2 months and increasing the long term empty property premium from 150% to the maximum amount determined by Government (currently 200%).

Recommends that full council adopt Option 1 of the report for the Local Council Tax Support Scheme for West Lindsey District Council for 2019/20:

- To cap council tax support to Band E
- Award 100% council tax support to care leavers on a low income until they reach the age of 25 years
- to apply any new legislative requirements and the uprating of the nondependent charges (these are detailed at 3.4 option 4), applicable amounts and household allowances and deductions, used in the calculation of the reduction in accordance with the Department for Works and Pensions (DWP) annual up-ratings.

Recommends that full council adopt Option 2 of the report for the empty property charges for council tax for West Lindsey District Council for 2019/20:

- In accordance with new government legislation increase the amount charged in respect of properties that have been empty for 2 years or more from 150% to the maximum amount determined by Government (currently 200%).

To see the full report please visit: <https://www.west-lindsey.gov.uk/my-council/have-your-say/consultations/previous-consultation-results/local-council-tax-support-scheme-consultation-2019-20/>

Next Steps – 2019

The West Lindsey Citizen Panel has now been in place for over ten years and has been extremely successful in helping us obtain the views of local people on public services and other issues affecting residents of West Lindsey.

Over the next six months we will be refreshing and recruiting new members onto the panel. The refreshment is to ensure that all members of the community are given an opportunity to become members at some point and to ensure that the panel itself remains an accurate reflection of the makeup of the West Lindsey community. Currently we have just over 1400 members on the panel which compared to the population of the district is a very small percentage. To ensure we are getting a wide view we hope to increase this number to around 2000.

We will however be retiring a number of panel members in early 2019. If however you are a member who is to be retired we would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your contribution and support whether or not you continue to be a member of this panel.

If you know of anyone who would like to join the panel, please ask them to get in touch with the Corporate Governance Officer using the contact details below or by completing the new member form on our website at www.west-lindsey.gov.uk/citizenpanel. Taking part in consultations can be fun and gives you a voice in local decision-making.

If for any reason you would like to be removed from the panel, at any stage, please do not hesitate to contact the Corporate Governance Officer at West Lindsey District Council on 01427 675149 or by emailing engagement@west-lindsey.gov.uk. When communicating with us over any aspect of your membership, e.g. informing us of a change of address, it is helpful if you quote your panel reference ID, printed at the top of the enclosed letter or email.

**If you would like a copy of this in large, clear print, audio,
Braille or in another language, please telephone
01427 676676**