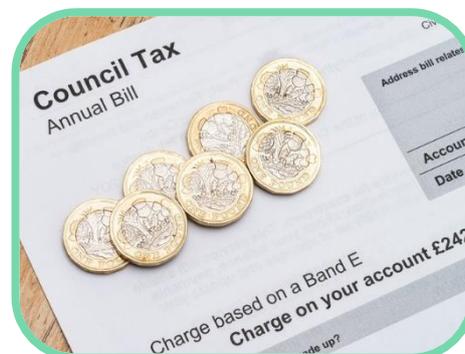


A summary of responses to Cheshire East Council's

Budget Consultation for 2024 – 2025



Executive summary

Introduction

The Budget Consultation was conducted between 8 and 28 January 2024 to gather feedback on council proposals for balancing its budget for 2024 to 2025.

Responses were invited from anyone who wished to respond – the consultation was not run as a referendum nor as a statistically robust random sample survey.

In total, there were 2,829 consultation engagements, including 1,351 survey completions, 1,105 social media engagements, 329 attendees at budget consultation events, and 44 webpage comments, emails and letters.

Feedback on the 29 MTFS proposals

Respondents completing the consultation survey were asked to indicate whether they supported or opposed 29 separate MTFS proposals included in the Budget Consultation for 2024 to 2025.

Net levels of support or opposition for the 29 MTFS proposals varied significantly, from 87% net support, down to -45% net opposition.

23 proposals with net support

23 of the 29 proposals received net support, with details of these presented in the table below.

Although these proposals had net support, feedback suggests they are complex issues which potentially impact on some of the most vulnerable residents in Cheshire East. Some also felt there was not enough information to give an opinion on proposals, some of which they felt were vaguely worded.

Respondent feedback for each proposal can be found in the main report.

Budget proposal that received net support	Net Support
CP1: Reduce leadership and management costs	87%
CP7: Reduce spending on staffing and agency costs	76%
CP5: Improved debt recovery and increased charges of costs	73%
CP3: Reduce election costs and increase charges where possible	70%
EC1: Refresh wholly owned company overheads and contributions	66%
CF7: Reduce growth in expenditure	66%
CF6: Other service reviews	66%
CF3: Review of structure to further integrate children and families services	65%

CP6: Other efficiencies and reductions across Corporate Services	65%
CF5: Achieve the Family Hub model	59%
CP4: Accelerate digital and other ICT transformation	50%
EG1: Service restructures within place based services	48%
EC6: Reduce revenue impact of carbon reduction capital schemes	45%
AH3: Working age adults - Prevent, reduce, delay	44%
EG2: Reduce opening hours for main offices	36%
AH4: Older people – Prevent, reduce, delay	32%
CF1: Discretionary offer to children with disabilities	31%
CF2: Remove school catering subsidy	25%
EC4: Fund libraries a different way	24%
AH2: Client contributions increase	17%
EC2: Strategic Leisure Review (Stage 2)	14%
AH1: Fees and charges	10%
CF4: Reduce discretionary post-16 travel support	7%

6 proposals with net opposition

The 6 proposals that received net opposition included:

HT1: Highway maintenance savings (-45% net opposition) – Respondents simply felt that highway maintenance and pothole repair should be a top priority for the council, and that the roads are already in a poor state as it is.

CP2: Close the Emergency Assistance scheme (-30% net opposition) – Some felt that for such a small saving this proposal wasn't worth it, given it would affect some of the most vulnerable residents in the borough. They suggested a reduction in funding here might have a knock-on effect onto other services. Others supported this proposal feeling people should be self-reliant. Some were unclear about what the scheme does, and what the implications of the proposal are.

EC7: Increase garden waste charges to recover costs (-28% net opposition) – Those opposed felt green waste collection should be free, and felt this is a stealth tax. Others felt this proposal is coming too soon after the charge was first introduced, that there is a lack of take-up of the scheme as it is, and that this will lead to increases in fly-tipping. They suggested introducing smaller bins at cheaper rates, reducing collection frequency and promoting bin sharing between neighbours.

EC5: Reduce costs of street cleansing operations (-20% net opposition) – Those opposed to the proposal suggested that keeping towns and streets well-kept and clean was also a high priority, that the streets are already a “disgrace” and that street cleaning should not be reduced.

EC3: Reduce costs of waste disposal and number of HWRCs (-20% net opposition) – Those opposed felt HWRCs are a key service the council must provide, that people need somewhere to dispose of their waste in an environmentally friendly way. They felt closing sites would be unfair on the towns that would no longer have a HWRC, that closures would be environmentally unfriendly by making people travel further, by impacting on recycling rates and by going against the council’s carbon reduction agenda. They felt it would lead to an increase in fly tipping, and an increase in people putting waste in black bins, and felt any savings would be outweighed by the costs of dealing with these issues. They felt also doing this at the same time as introducing a charge for green waste would further compound these issues. Respondents suggested closure of sites should be a last resort, and that alternative ideas should be considered to keep sites open, including by reducing opening hours, charging for site use, or by monetising waste streams better.

HT2: Introduce annual increases to car parking charges (-13% net opposition) – Those opposed felt that car parking charge increases would further kill off towns and highstreets, many of which are “dead” as it is, and that charges are already too high. They felt this would lead to an increase in illegal parking.

Feedback on the 10 extra budget saving ideas

Respondents completing the consultation survey were also asked to indicate whether they supported or opposed 10 extra budget saving ideas, which were suggested over and above the 29 MTFS proposals put forward.

Net levels of support or opposition for the 10 extra budget savings ideas varied from 83% net support, down to -48% net opposition.

8 extra budget saving ideas with net support

8 of the 10 extra budget saving ideas received net support, with details of these provided in the table below.

Budget saving ideas that received net support	Net Support
Seek further Government support	83%
Increase advertising income, by advertising on bus stops, roundabouts and other council property	79%
Share more services with other councils	72%
Lower the amount of Council Tax support available from 100% to pre-covid levels. Pensioners will remain on the national scheme as they do currently	56%
Review net spending and subsidy for tourism and place marketing services	44%
Transfer buildings and activities to Town and Parish Councils	36%
Review net spending and subsidy for the Arts and Culture Budget	33%

Reduce funding for Demand Responsive transport services (FlexiLink and Go-Too bus services) - consider a range of options including simplifying routes, changing days/hours of service and revising fares paid by passengers	18%
Increase charges for council services to ensure service users pay full costs, without any subsidy from taxation	9%
Reduce support offered to businesses	9%

2 extra budget saving ideas with net opposition

2 of the 10 extra budget saving ideas received net opposition, with details of these provided in the table below.

Budget saving ideas that received net opposition	Net Opposition
Cut subsidies to local bus services	-48%
Move to three-weekly Black Bin (residual waste) collections	-40%

General themes arising from feedback

A number of key themes arose throughout the consultation feedback, and these are summarised below:

The council is not delivering, not serving residents – There is a growing sense among some that the council is not delivering the essential and high priority services expected, and not delivering value for money for the amount of Council Tax paid, especially as it continues to cut back on services. Some simply cannot understand how the council has got into this situation nor where the money has gone, with others calling for the council to be abolished.

Some proposals will hit the most vulnerable the hardest – There is concern that many of the proposals put forward will hit the most vulnerable and most in need the hardest, especially those put forward in social care services. There is concern this period of transition will be a very difficult time for many, and that there will impacts on other council services in the long term. Some suggested that Council Tax and service charges should be means tested to a greater degree.

A lack of long-term planning – Respondents felt some proposals are short term and reactionary and couldn't understand how proposals fit into the bigger picture. They felt some proposals also contradict each other. They also suggested the lack of holistic planning may mean some proposals may have consequences that will cost the council more in the long run, and that the short-term savings being realised would be false economy.

Respondents called for impact assessments to be produced for proposals, to help understand their impact, and to understand how they fit into the bigger picture.

Closures or charges should be a last resort – A general sentiment within recent consultations has been that respondents felt reductions in services and site closures should only come as a last resort. They felt that wherever possible alternative funding and alternative service delivery should be explored as alternatives to service reduction. Respondents also stressed that operational efficiencies were strongly preferred to service cuts.

Alternative service delivery ideas included: charging for services, reducing opening hours, renting out space, improving services to generate more income, service transformation to make them more efficient, alternative delivery models, combining services together, combining services with neighbouring Local Authorities, and transferring services and assets to other organisations.

Make budget savings internally – Respondents suggested ways in which they felt the council could make budget savings internally, including: Reviewing staff structures and numbers; improving staff performance; reviewing staff pay and benefits; adopting more efficient ways of working; stop wasting money; reducing running costs; generating more income; recovering more money owed; reviewing the use of contractors, consultants and agency staff; selling off assets; and reviewing spending on non-essential services.

Staff reductions should be carefully managed – However, respondents were concerned that reductions in staff should be carefully managed, so as to ensure that key services continue to be delivered effectively. There was also concern that where staff reductions are made it should be the most efficient staff that are retained. Front line staff are also feeling vulnerable with the amount of change being seen within services.

Lack of information to give an opinion – For many proposals, respondents felt there was not enough information provided for them to give an informed opinion, and that the wording of some proposals was confusing and used too much jargon.

Conclusions

Frustration during a great period of change

The council is in the midst of one of the greatest periods of change, or transformations, in its history. This rate of change is being felt by stakeholders, with exasperation among many at the changes taking place, and at the perceived worsening performance of the council.

At the most extreme, some are stating the council is not fit for purpose and are calling for it to be abolished, and while this is a small proportion now, if the council continues to force through changes which residents are opposed to, and which seemingly make the borough a worse place to live in, those calls may only increase.

Stakeholders are willing to embrace savings

That said, stakeholders are not completely against change and budget savings – of the 39 proposals and money saving ideas put forward in this consultation, respondents provided net support for 80% of them (31 out of the 39).

This indicates a level of acceptance of the current financial situation and a willingness for stakeholders to agree to savings. The council should look to deliver these proposals and ideas with net support, but carefully so, as some of these proposals will impact on some of the most vulnerable in our community.

Opposition to key service cuts without alternatives being explored

There is strong opposition to proposals that impact key services, such as highways maintenance, street cleaning, Household Waste and Recycling Centres, and local bus services.

Respondents also seem strongly opposed to proposals when service reductions or site closures are put forward as the primary option, without alternative service delivery options being explored first.

It may be that respondents see service reductions and site closures as a last resort, and this may best be evidenced with the different levels of support for Library Service proposals in recent years – Last year's Library Service proposal set out service reductions in the form of reduced opening hours and the removal of the mobile library, and had net opposition of -58%, whereas this year's Library Service proposal set out to seek alternative funding for the service, explore partnership working and generate income to keep the service going, and this received net support of +24%.

Where the council is proposing to reduce key services, it must be extremely careful with how it does so, otherwise it may lose the goodwill of stakeholders and could destroy any remaining trust that remains between the council and its taxpayers. The council should consider carefully whether to proceed with any proposals strongly opposed by respondents in their current guise, and look to seek alternative solutions where possible.

Concern about the lack of long-term planning

Respondents are also concerned about the lack of holistic and long-term planning with budget saving proposals, including the compound effects of different proposals on each other.

For example they are concerned that the implementation of the green waste charge at the same time as the closure of Household Waste and Recycling Centres will lead to significant increases in fly tipping and in the amount of waste being deposited in

black bins, which they suggested would cost the council more to deal with in the long run, than the savings will realise in the short term. They also feel these proposals will lead to a worsening local appearance of the borough, particularly at the same time as cuts to street cleaning, as well as impacts on the environment with people travelling further to dispose of waste.

There are strong calls from respondents for the introduction of impact assessments for proposals, and for improved long-term planning during this period of enormous change, to ensure that changes are in the best interest of the borough long-term.

Taking residents with us

Finally it will be essential for the council to take residents and stakeholders with it as best it can through this huge transformation, ensuring stakeholders are engaged in the co-design of services, rather than the council forcing through proposals without listening stakeholders.

Contents

Executive summary	2
Introduction	10
Overview of feedback on the 29 MTFS proposals.....	13
Adults & Health Committee proposals.....	17
Children & Families Committee proposals	23
Corporate Policy Committee proposals	34
Economy & Growth Committee proposals.....	47
Environment & Communities Committee proposals	50
Highways & Transport Committee proposals	61
Overview of feedback on the 10 extra budget saving ideas	64
Making budget savings internally	67
Achieving a balanced budget in future	69
Final comments.....	71
Conclusions.....	74
Appendix 1 – Event feedback.....	76
Appendix 2 – Public comment, email and letter feedback	90
Appendix 3 – Social media engagement.....	118
Appendix 4 – Newspaper Articles	119
Appendix 5 – Council Committee feedback.....	120
Appendix 6 – Survey respondent demographics	121

Report produced 1 February 2024 by Ben Buckley of the Research and Consultation Team, Cheshire East Council. Email RandC@cheshireeast.gov.uk for further information.

Introduction

Purpose of the consultation

The Budget Consultation for 2024 to 2025 was conducted between 8 and 28 January 2024, and was conducted to gather feedback on council proposals for balancing its budget for 2024 to 2025.

[The full consultation material can be viewed here \(PDF, 394KB\)](#), and covered:

- Introduction setting out background to the consultation
- Making savings against internal spending
- 29 savings proposals put forward by each Committee
- Increasing Council Tax from April 2024
- Managing the council's financial challenges

Promotion

Responses on the consultation material were invited from anyone who wished to respond – the consultation was not run as a referendum nor as a statistically robust random sample survey. Results should therefore be interpreted within the context in which they were gathered.

The consultation was widely promoted, most notably though:

- [Media releases](#)
- Emails to key stakeholders including all local Town and Parish Councils
- Members Briefings
- Town and Parish Council meetings
- A Trade Union Budget Briefing
- Business and Schools forums
- [The council's Digital Influence Panel](#)
- Social media
- Internal council employee message boards

Giving feedback

People could respond to the consultation by:

- Completing an online survey
- Completing a paper version of the survey, made available at all libraries in Cheshire East
- Publicly commenting on [the Budget Consultation webpage](#)

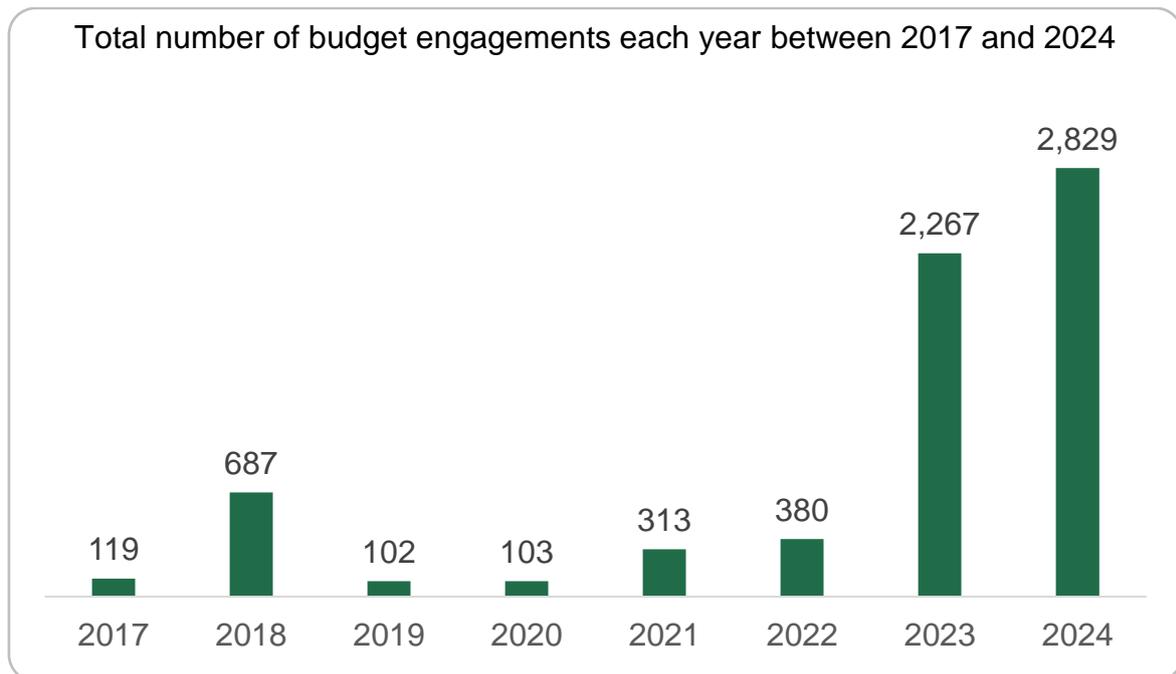
- Emailing the Research and Consultation Team at CEConsultation@cheshireeast.gov.uk
- Writing to Research and Consultation, Westfields, Sandbach, CW11 1HZ
- Telephoning 0300 123 55 00
- Tweeting @CheshireEast #CECBudget

Responses

In total, there were 2,829 consultation engagements, including:

- 1,333 online survey completions
- 1,105 social media engagements
- 329 attendees at budget consultation events
- 29 email and letter responses
- 18 paper survey completions
- 15 budget webpage comments

The number of budget consultation engagements in 2024 was similar to 2023 (2,267), and significantly higher than each year 2017 to 2022.



In 2024 there were a similar number of survey responses as in 2023, and a similar number of event attendees.

However, there were significantly more social media engagements in 2024 as compared 2023, and significantly fewer budget webpage comments, emails and letters. There were also no SUM ideas submitted in 2024 as the scheme was not run this year.

Feedback mechanism	'17	'18	'19	'20	'21	'22	'23	'24
Survey responses	47	436	97	99	291	264	1,452	1,351
Social media engagements	26	116	-	-	-	20	269	1,105
Event attendees	32	-	-	2	-	73	232	329
Budget webpage comments	-	-	-	-	14	6	170	15
Emails / letters	14	132	5	2	8	3	92	29
SUM ideas submitted	-	-	-	-	-	14	52	-
Petitions	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total engagements	119	687	102	103	313	380	2,267	2,829

There were also 17 newspaper articles published about the consultation, a list of these can be found in Appendix 4.

Reading this report

The main sections of this report contain an analysis of the survey responses received during the consultation.

Feedback received via email, letter, social media, and through events is summarised in the appendices.

Overview of feedback on the 29 MTFS proposals

Respondents completing the consultation survey were asked to indicate whether they supported or opposed 29 separate MTFS proposals included in the Budget Consultation for 2024 to 2025.

Net levels of support or opposition¹ for the 29 MTFS proposals varied significantly, from 87% net support, down to -45% net opposition.

23 proposals with net support

23 of the 29 proposals received net support, from “CP1: Reduce leadership and management costs” with 87% net support, down to “CF4: Reduce discretionary post-16 travel support” with 7% net support.

Details of the 23 proposals with net support are given in the table below.

Budget proposal that received net support	Cmte	% Support	% Oppose	% Not sure	No. survey responses	Net Support
CP1: Reduce leadership and management costs	CP	90%	3%	7%	978	87%
CP7: Reduce spending on staffing and agency costs	CP	85%	9%	7%	975	76%
CP5: Improved debt recovery and increased charges of costs	CP	82%	9%	8%	965	73%
CP3: Reduce election costs and increase charges where possible	CP	81%	11%	9%	973	70%
EC1: Refresh wholly owned company overheads and contributions	E&C	74%	8%	17%	988	66%
CF7: Reduce growth in expenditure	C&F	76%	10%	14%	968	66%
CF6: Other service reviews	C&F	74%	8%	18%	964	66%

¹ Net levels of support or opposition are calculated by subtracting the % of respondents that oppose a proposal, from the % that support a proposal. For example, if 76% of respondents support a budget proposal and 14% oppose it, the net level of support = 62%

CF3: Review of structure to further integrate children and families services	C&F	75%	10%	15%	973	65%
CP6: Other efficiencies and reductions across Corporate Services	CP	74%	9%	17%	946	65%
CF5: Achieve the Family Hub model	C&F	70%	10%	20%	966	59%
CP4: Accelerate digital and other ICT transformation	CP	68%	18%	14%	971	50%
EG1: Service restructures within place based services	E&G	63%	15%	22%	931	48%
EC6: Reduce revenue impact of carbon reduction capital schemes	E&C	63%	18%	19%	990	45%
AH3: Working age adults - Prevent, reduce, delay	A&H	61%	17%	22%	977	44%
EG2: Reduce opening hours for main offices	E&G	64%	28%	9%	962	36%
AH4: Older people – Prevent, reduce, delay	A&H	57%	25%	17%	985	32%
CF1: Discretionary offer to children with disabilities	C&F	56%	24%	20%	971	31%
CF2: Remove school catering subsidy	C&F	57%	32%	11%	991	25%
EC4: Fund libraries a different way	E&C	54%	30%	16%	1016	24%
AH2: Client contributions increase	A&H	47%	30%	22%	981	17%
EC2: Strategic Leisure Review (Stage 2)	E&C	48%	35%	17%	987	14%
AH1: Fees and charges	A&H	43%	33%	24%	989	10%
CF4: Reduce discretionary post-16 travel support	C&F	45%	38%	18%	982	7%

Committee key: CP = Corporate Policy, E&G = Economy & Growth, E&C = Environment & Communities, C&F = Children & Families, A&H = Adults & Health, H&T = Highways & Transport

6 proposals with net opposition

6 of the 29 proposals received net opposition, and these included:

- HT1: Highway maintenance savings (-45% net opposition)
- CP2: Close the Emergency Assistance scheme (-30% net opposition)
- EC7: Increase garden waste charges to recover costs (-28% net opposition)

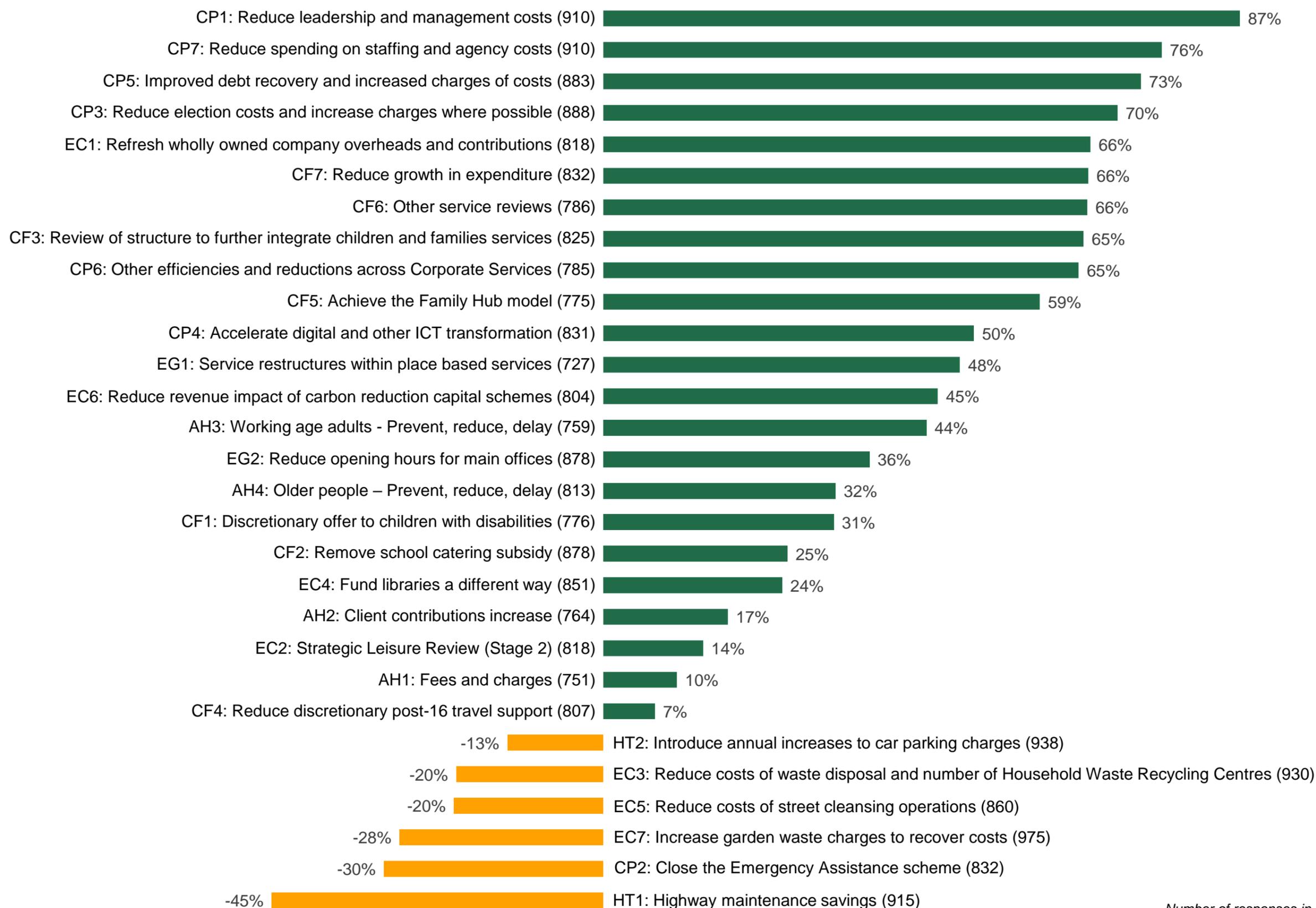
- EC5: Reduce costs of street cleansing operations (-20% net opposition)
- EC3: Reduce costs of waste disposal and number of Household Waste Recycling Centres (-20% net opposition)
- HT2: Introduce annual increases to car parking charges (-13% net opposition)

Details of the 6 proposals with net opposition are given in the table below.

Budget proposal that received net opposition	Cmte	% Support	% Oppose	% Not sure	No. survey responses	Net Opposition
HT1: Highway maintenance savings	H&T	22%	67%	11%	1024	-45%
CP2: Close the Emergency Assistance scheme	CP	28%	58%	14%	967	-30%
EC7: Increase garden waste charges to recover costs	E&C	33%	60%	7%	1045	-28%
EC5: Reduce costs of street cleansing operations	E&C	32%	52%	15%	1016	-20%
EC3: Reduce costs of waste disposal and number of Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRC)	E&C	35%	55%	10%	1032	-20%
HT2: Introduce annual increases to car parking charges	H&T	39%	52%	9%	1031	-13%

Committee key: CP = Corporate Policy, E&G = Economy & Growth, E&C = Environment & Communities, C&F = Children & Families, A&H = Adults & Health, H&T = Highways & Transport

Net support minus opposition for each of the proposals in the Budget Consultation 2024:



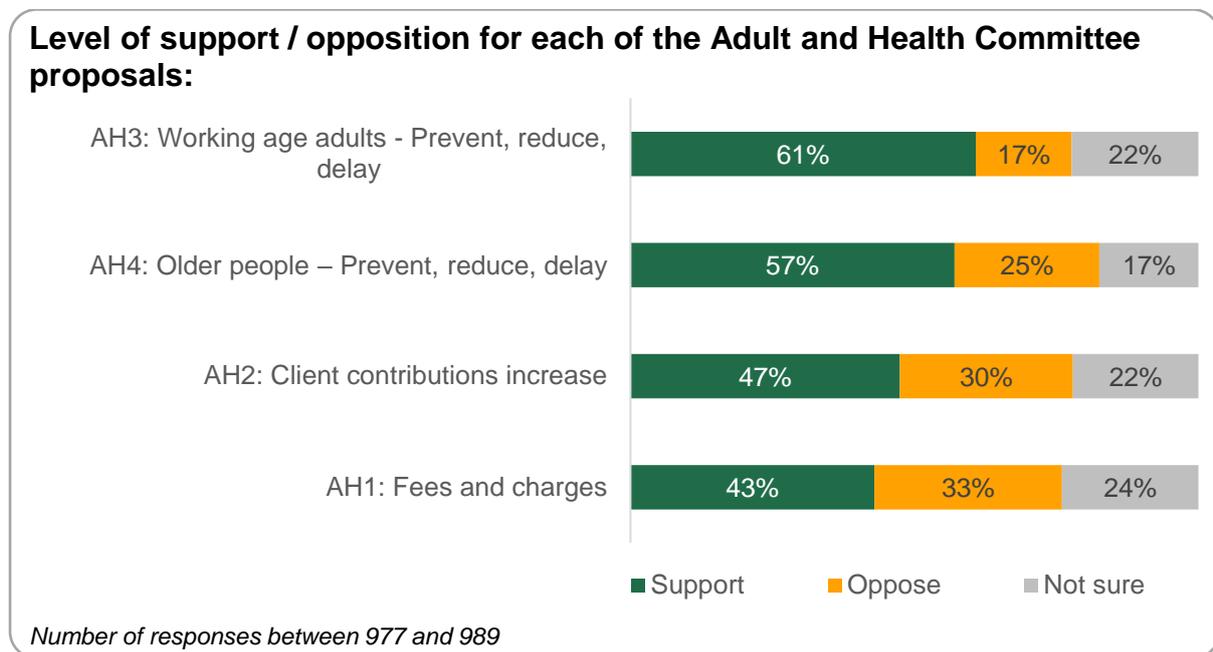
Number of responses in brackets

Adults & Health Committee proposals

Net support or opposition for each of the Adults & Health Committee proposals was:

- AH3: Working age adults - Prevent, reduce, delay (44% net support)
- AH4: Older people – Prevent, reduce, delay (32% net support)
- AH2: Client contributions increase (17% net support)
- AH1: Fees and charges (10% net support)

Levels of support and opposition for each of these proposals is shown in the chart below:



Comments about AH1: Adult Social Care fees and charges

Survey respondents were asked if they had any comments to make about the proposal “AH1: Adult Social Care fees and charges”.

In total, 229 comments made in response to this question have been analysed, and these comments have been grouped into categories and summarised below.

Opposition to the proposal	111
Care is already expensive, people will struggle to pay for it. This will cause them to lose all their savings, will cause deprivation and debt	32
This impacts the most vulnerable and most in need	21
General opposition to the proposal	12
This could mean people miss out on the care they need	10
People who have worked whole life and paid into system should be entitled to car, this is unfair on working people	10

This will burden the NHS and the system in long run if people can't pay for care due to increased charges	8
This will impact the mental health and stress of those struggling to pay	7
Just because people fund their own care doesn't mean they could afford more	5
Those who can pay shouldn't subsidise those who can't	2
This won't solve the problem	2
This could take away independence from people, we need to be supporting them	1
Staff won't be able to undertake the additional work if cuts made	1

Support for the proposal	18
General support for the proposal	12
People should pay for their own care	6

Applicants should be means tested	43
Applicants should be means tested to see if they should pay, and the system should not be abused. Ensure people are properly / fairly assessed	37
Everyone should have basic minimum support from the council	6

Funding comments	22
Save money from other areas, reduce senior management salaries, recover debts, have better budget management	6
Funding should come from central government	5
Stop building more houses if the council can't support the population increases	4
Review contracts with care homes and suppliers, review service charges and costs	4
Increase Council Tax to pay for this	3

Further information required	27
Don't know enough about this issue or the impact of this proposal. Not enough info to give an opinion	20
Don't understand the proposal, the wording is unclear	7

The whole social care system needs an overhaul	8
Needs a tiered system of charges	4
The whole system needs a radical overhaul	3
Immigrants receive more support	1

Comments about AH2: Client contributions increase

Survey respondents were asked if they had any comments to make about the proposal "AH2: Client contributions increase".

In total, 164 comments made in response to this question have been analysed, and these comments have been grouped into categories and summarised below.

Opposition to the proposal	81
Pensions are already low, people will struggle and lose all their savings. This will cause deprivation and debt	33
This proposal impacts the most vulnerable and in need	16
General opposition to the proposal	9
People have worked their whole life and paid into system, they should be entitled to support, this is unfair on working people	8
This could mean people miss out on the care they need	6
This will burden the NHS and the social care system in long run if people can't pay for care due to increased charges	3
Just because people fund their own care it doesn't mean they can afford more	2
Those who can pay shouldn't subsidise those who can't	2
The proposal won't solve the problem	2

Support for the proposal	14
General support for the proposal, if needs must	10
People should pay for their own care	4

Applicants should be means tested	31
Applicants should be means tested to see if they qualify for support	16
People should pay only if their income is in line with inflation	13
There needs to be a tiered system of charges	1
Everyone should have basic minimum support from the council	1

Funding comments	12
Look at other areas to save money - reduce senior management salaries, recover debts	7
There should be no increase in public sector pensions	2
This should be funded by central government	2
Review contracts with care homes and suppliers, review charges and costs	1

Further information required	26
Don't understand the proposal / wording	16
Don't know enough about this / the impact / this type of funding / not enough info	10

Comments about AH3: Working age adults – Prevent, reduce, delay

Survey respondents were asked if they had any comments to make about the proposal “AH3: Working age adults – Prevent, reduce, delay”.

In total, 191 comments made in response to this question have been analysed, and these comments have been grouped into categories and summarised below.

Opposition to the proposal	71
Families will be under more pressure, families are already struggling to care	15
This will affect the mental and physical health of families due to the increased pressure, they will in turn need support	9
This impacts the most vulnerable and in need, leaving them at risk of missing out on care	8
What about those who have no family, who have elderly parents or where it's unsuitable for families to care for them	8
Disagree with the proposal, it's not feasible	6
This is an abdication of CEC responsibility, these should be statutory services, which we pay for through council tax	6
Families are already struggling financially and this will further impact them	5
These services are vital, a delay in service is not acceptable	4
The direct payments process is complicated and does not work	4
Unmet needs will impact the NHS and services later on	2
Support is already lacking	2
This could result in carers needing to give up work	1
This does not support those with complex needs, Shared Services is not suitable for everyone	1

Support service comments and suggestions	43
There needs to be full and thorough assessments to ensure care is appropriate and needs are met	11
The focus should be on prevention of future care needs	7
There should be strict auditing on needs and should only be for those who really need support. Support needs should be means tested, including financial need	6
Can this replace one to one care competently? What safeguards are in place? Where is the evidence that statutory services will be provided?	4
Sell assets, reduce top tier salaries, find the money from somewhere else and lobby the government	4
As long as this is person-centred and is the individual's choice, it's important to give people choice and autonomy	4
Younger adults are better amongst their peers	3
Look at other successful councils and models	2
As long as the level of care and service is not compromised or reduced	1
The PeoplePlus and any future provider contracts should be reviewed for value for money and fit for purpose	1

Support for the proposal	46
It is important to keep families together	26
Families should have the responsibility of caring for their own	10
Agree with the proposals	8
Disabled adults receive benefits to pay for these services	2

Other comments	31
Comments related to the proposal: do not understand it, unsure of the implications and more information is needed to make a choice	24
Other	5
The questionnaire wording is unclear	2

Comments about AH4: Older people – Prevent, reduce, delay

Survey respondents were asked if they had any comments to make about the proposal “AH4: Older people – Prevent, reduce, delay”.

In total, 264 comments made in response to this question have been analysed, and these comments have been grouped into categories and summarised below.

Opposition to the proposal	156
Volunteers are already stretched, at breaking point and couldn't provide the support needed	30
Families are already stretched, already caring, as well as working	21
Leaves people vulnerable, at risk of isolation and missing vital care	15
Volunteers are already financially stretched and rely on grants which will likely be cut	11
Care support is already lacking	10
Could be unsafe and risky using untrained and unskilled volunteers	10
Unacceptable for elderly in need to rely on volunteers and charity, they are entitled to receive statutory care	9
Elderly may not have any family, or local family and could miss out on necessary care	9
Volunteers and charity is not a reliable alternative	8
Families health and well-being could be impacted if more pressure on to care	8
Older people want to be <i>at home</i> not <i>in a home</i> , it's important to support this, and not be forced into a care home	5
The 'most cost effective' is not the same as the most appropriate or safest, the individual's care is the priority	4
Strongly oppose	3
Volunteers tend to be older, who won't be able to care as well or as much, there aren't many young volunteers	3
It is unfair to rely on the voluntary sector	3
Families may not be appropriate to help, if poor relationship, or possible abuse and neglect	3
Volunteers may not be who they say they are, are volunteers governed?	2
We are paying more in taxes for fewer services	1
Since Covid volunteer groups have scaled back or disappeared, they have struggled to recruit	1

Care support and process comments	68
--	-----------

Proper and thorough assessments of care needs would need to take place, on an individual basis	11
The council should be providing a statutory minimum level of care to all	9
As long as the quality of care is of standard and not compromised	9
People should be paid to provide care, you can't expect families to give up work for free to care for a relative, carers need support too	5
Save money elsewhere, for example review top salaries, sell assets	5
Carers pay is too low, there won't be enough of them or they will be poor quality carers	4
The process needs to be robust, properly thought out and needs thoroughly testing	4
The current technology is inadequate	4
There's a risk of digital exclusion, a lot of elderly people won't know how to use it, this could leave them at risk	4
Care support should be means tested, charge more for those can afford it, support those who can't	3
Families would need proper training and support	3
Technology will require capital expenditure and investment	2
Technology is not suitable for everyone, a minority	2
What happens if the technology fails? It could leave the person at risk	2
Widely promote the community support available, which may reduce the need for NHS services	1

Partnerships and working with others	5
---	----------

Work with the NHS to reduce care need	2
Work with charities	2
Work with and encourage the parish councils to become involved	1

Support for the proposal	23
---------------------------------	-----------

Families should want to and should contribute to the support and care of their families	9
Agree / support the proposal	8
Agree with re-using equipment, is this not already done?	5
Technology should be more wisely utilised	1

Other comments	12
-----------------------	-----------

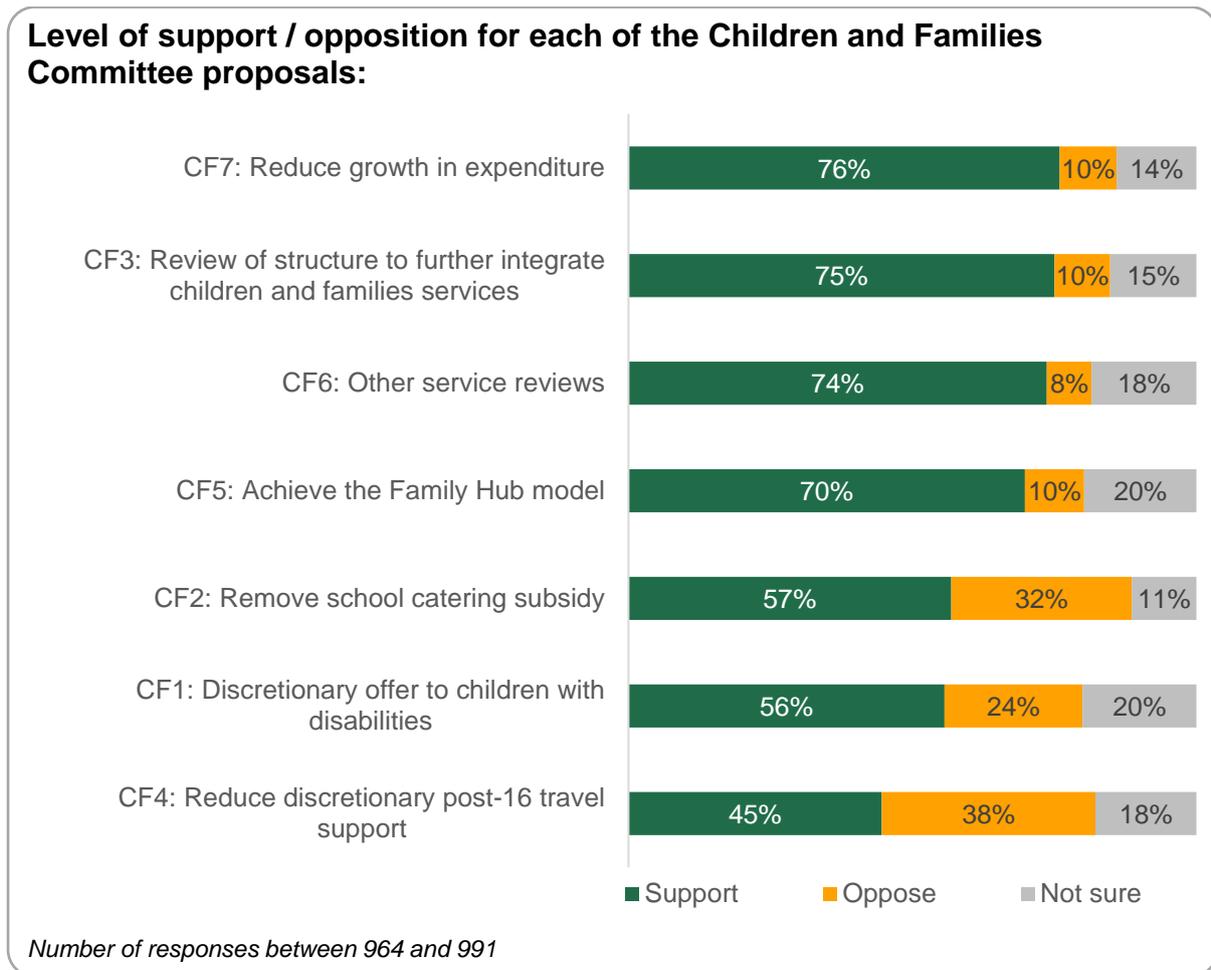
Other	6
Comments related to the questionnaire, lack of detail and lack of clarity	5
What is the cost saving?	1

Children & Families Committee proposals

Net support or opposition for each of the Children & Families Committee proposals was:

- CF7: Reduce growth in expenditure (66% net support)
- CF3: Review of structure to further integrate children and families services (65% net support)
- CF6: Other service reviews (66% net support)
- CF5: Achieve the Family Hub model (59% net support)
- CF2: Remove school catering subsidy (25% net support)
- CF1: Discretionary offer to children with disabilities (31% net support)
- CF4: Reduce discretionary post-16 travel support (7% net support)

Levels of support and opposition for each of these proposals is shown in the chart below:



Comments about CF1: Discretionary offer to children with disabilities

Survey respondents were asked if they had any comments to make about the proposal “CF1: Discretionary offer to children with disabilities”.

In total, 155 comments made in response to this question have been analysed, and these comments have been grouped into categories and summarised below.

Opposition to the proposal	74
Disabled / SEND children and their parents need all the support they can get	20
The service is already inadequate, there should be fewer cuts, not more	17
Any cuts will impact the vulnerable and most in need	10
This will compromise outcomes	9
Cuts will be more costly in the long run as their will be more demand on services, including from parents who will struggle to support	6
No more cuts, make savings elsewhere	5
The council should provide a minimum statutory service	3
Cuts may result in tribunals and challenges under the equalities legislation	2
Cuts will have a negative impact (general comment, impacts unspecified)	1
Long term impacts need to be properly assessed	1
Support for the proposal	36
As long as the standard of care is maintained and outcomes are not compromised	13
Agree with the proposed budget cuts	12
Parents should contribute to the discretionary support	4
The disabled and carers receive an allowance to fund the support required	4
The use of taxis to take children to school should be scrapped	2
Parent should be responsible for their children	1
Comments and suggestions	16
Needs should be properly assessed and support given only for those truly in need	11
Needs should be means tested, only provided to those on low incomes	5
Other comments	29
Need more information, there isn't enough detail in the proposal	12
Comments related to not understanding the proposal / wording / jargon	7
Unable to comment as don't use these services	5
Other comment	5

Comments about CF2: Remove school catering subsidy

Survey respondents were asked if they had any comments to make about the proposal “CF2: Remove school catering subsidy”.

In total, 221 comments made in response to this question have been analysed, and these comments have been grouped into categories and summarised below.

Support for the proposal	49
The council should not subsidise school meals except Free School Meals, this should never have been subsidised. If parents want their child to have a school meal then they should pay the full cost or provide a packed lunch, parents should feed and look after their families - those who take packed lunches are subsidising free school meals. Parents probably spend money on TV, cigarettes, drink, junk food, and this isn't fair on working parents who provide packed lunches, this is an unfair tax.	28
Support the proposal, as long as those who need Free School Meals get them and are not affected. It is a lifesaver to some.	10
If it's not working financially, then remove the service. It's fair to ask the going rate, and not to subsidise meals. If enough income isn't generated there is an obvious need for change.	8
Support the proposal, as long as any savings go to children and is not wasted.	1
Cut free school meals, close all school canteens, take a packed lunch. The nanny state must end.	1
If not statutory, remove the service.	1

Opposition to the proposal	100
All children should receive (free) school meals as part of their statutory attendance. Good food and good nutrition is important and key to learning. For some it may be the only hot cooked meal they get. Food education is important. Hot meals for kids at schools is vital. Those that can afford should help as long as low income families are not affected.	29
Many families that don't receive free school meals are the ones that need the help more, some families are just over the threshold, on low incomes, and as working parents are struggling. There are many in need of cheap nutritious meals who don't receive Free School Meals.	28
Given the current cost of living crisis this could have an impact on the health of children and on their education. School meals are a service not a money making machine. Kids are starving.	11
Morally unthinkable, this is a vital service. Low earning families will be worst affected, increasing inequalities. School meals have a social value beyond free school meals. This is an unnecessary austerity proposal. This country has always supported schools and the NHS, this is untouchable.	10
School catering is already struggling! Schools are already struggling for funding and this is likely to result in a decrease in the quality of food available for children at schools. Schools can't afford this.	10

Make cuts elsewhere. Look Internally. Why is it always services that go first?	4
This proposal just moves the spending from one pot to a different one, or pushes shortfall onto families or school budgets.	3
This could result in a reduction in number of pupils paying for meals which will need to be factored in, a reduction in income but the same number of staff could cause a financial impact. How will you fund the Free School Meal requirement if the catering service suffers a reduction in parental take up?	3
Not receiving this service will add to neglect and more pressure on other services (CHECS), storing up more complex and expensive problems for the future.	2

Service transformation suggestions	42
Scrap the catering unit. Enable schools to develop own approach to school meals independently of the council, or create a small business unit to support schools in procuring the right catering solutions for them instead. Have schools make the meals on site, surely it's cheaper to buy produce and cook. Offer freedom for catering to offer own ideas and include all dietary requirements. There are many ways to save money in catering one of which is not using all this ready to cook products, cooking from scratch can reduce the costs massively.	13
Review the whole service and publish the results. If the school catering service is not delivering an appropriate service then the whole service needs to be reviewed and lessons taken from regions where effective, healthy and value driven services are provided.	8
School catering should be made more appealing to its target audience to increase the uptake - pay a decent amount, get a decent meal.	7
This should be an income stream for the council and schools, not a cost centre. Make the service profitable. Some schools have taken over the service and improved the food provided, and for a small profit too. Cooking from scratch can reduce costs massively.	5
Find better providers, consider local non profit firms as providers. School meals should be catered by local firms that have a local reputation to maintain.	3
Introduce a free/reduced/full cost school meal model.	1
Consider models used in other Local Authorities.	1
Deliver the service jointly with another Local Authority.	1
School meals should be means tested.	1
Remove the choice element of school meals, have one main dish/meal to cut costs and reduce staffing levels.	1
Find commercial sponsorship.	1

The quality of school meals is poor	12
Current school meal provision is already terrible, not fit for purpose. The pigs on farms eat better than the slop served at most schools. Children's meals have gone down on quality over the last few years. Parents are paying for these meals and children are receiving unhealthy and sub-	8

standard food. We need to feed our children good, healthy, quality food. The standard of cooking of some of the meals is atrocious - over cooked, dry, burnt and low portion control.	
School meals are already too expensive, so no wonder they are not generating income.	4

Comments regarding Free School Meals	5
Not all families that receive Free School Meals need them. Schools locally have been encouraging people to claim school meals even if their child doesn't use them because they said funding could them be used in the school general budget. This type of accountancy is wrong. Stop allowing families to claim Free School Meals when family circumstances change and improve.	3
Should all those who receive Free School Meals be doing so?	1
Protect those on Free School Meals from stigmatisation.	1

More information required	13
Not enough information to give a view	7
Unclear about what is being proposed - Are you increasing costs to schools or asking parents to pay more per child's meal?	4
What is causing this issue?	1
Why is the service not profitable now?	1

Comments about CF3: Review of structure to further integrate children and families services

Survey respondents were asked if they had any comments to make about the proposal "CF3: Review of structure to further integrate children and families services".

In total, 202 comments made in response to this question have been analysed, and these comments have been grouped into categories and summarised below.

Support for the proposal	117
Support avoiding duplication as there is too much and too many departments that do not speak to each other. Merge duplicate services together and avoid doubling up on management structures. Departments in Social Services as a whole do seem to have multi departments repeating the same functions. The approach of "do it right, do it once" should be taken. It's impossible to find the 'right' person to talk to so streamlining services sounds like a sensible plan. Some departments are fairly pointless for example family support workers don't provide a great deal of support and often do more harm than good, giving bad advice etc.	45
General agreement, any efficiency is welcomed as long as it delivers the same level of service. If staffing costs are over 75% of the budget then there are too many staff. If it can be shown by research or information from other	34

councils that it is possible to achieve the good results required we support the proposal.	
This should have been happening anyway.	13
There are too many managers, too much deadwood. There is ineffectual management whose sole purpose appears to be obstructing support rather than providing it. Middle management is easily capable of reduction with limited (to no) impact on front line service delivery.	13
A restructure needed - There are too many managers, and not enough front line social workers. Look at how teams are structured and how many layers there are between the Chief Executive and front line workers - There shouldn't be as many as are currently in place. There are too many project managers and business managers, heads of service etc.	6
There are parts of the children and families service that don't currently work well at all. It is hard to see how reducing the money available is going to make them more efficient. Children's services haven't got a clue what they are doing.	4
The most inefficient staff should be removed and not given a nice handout!! Have more robust staff appraisal and performance monitoring.	1
The bureaucracy and its consequential cost is mind boggling.	1

Opposition to the proposal	47
Front line staff are under pressure as it is, they are over worked, with many long-term illnesses due to stress etc. Staff are having to absorb extra work to ensure statutory duties are kept up, but without receiving payment to cover all these additional hours. By cutting staff even more we are likely to see a lot of staff choosing to leave CE, meaning more recruitment and training costs. High staff turnover is a problem, and we have good, experienced staff. Recruitment needs to take place to ensure workloads are manageable, as services are very stretched. There is currently a backlog of cases as it is.	22
Cutbacks in Children and Family services is having a detrimental affect on the outcomes for our children. Cutbacks in the 0-18 service have demonstrated that there has been a significant increase in Child Protection, domestic abuse, mental health in both adults and children. We need investment not divestment. The situation was deteriorating pre-covid and has only carried on worsening. It would be likely service levels would decrease to an unthinkable level. Families will suffer more than they do now. SEND children are already being impacted.	10
Restructure concerns – Children and Families services have just had a restructure in 2023 which was delayed from the previous year. How much money, time and resources are spent restructures? Moral is already low and has not recovered from the last restructure this will impact it further. Currently the work being done in C&F directorate is spread way too thin after the last round of MARS and no replacements have been put in. Restructures only result in pay outs for staff and loss of experience. CEC has been restructuring year on year. Restructures cause job uncertainty and wider concerns about delivery.	7
Make savings elsewhere, why is it always services that go first?	5

Heads of Service currently have unachievable workloads and this needs a review. Pressure already very high for senior managers covering wide areas of responsibility, this leads to a lack of supervision and leadership for team managers and wider teams.	3
---	---

Comments about the MARs scheme and voluntary redundancy	7
The MARS scheme discourages staff from sharing retirement plans ahead as could disadvantage them if wish to go for MARS. MARS can happen too quickly meaning that cover is not fully considered and then there is a gap placing significant pressure on the team left behind.	2
If the MARS scheme is going to cost money to implement then I am opposed to it as the council cannot afford it as I'm assuming there will be compensation payable to the individual. Relying on MARS (e.g. redundancy on the cheap) will only retain older staff due to pension reductions.	2
Offering voluntary redundancies can create culture behaviours of staying in roles longer in the hope for this in future. It can affect natural (free) attrition of staff. Reducing and offering redundancy would create more problems and add to the already strained services.	2
Many applications for MARS are declined.	1

Further information required	26
More information is needed, what does this mean at the delivery front end to families.	13
The proposal is poorly worded without sufficient detail. It is deliberately vague, the description is a word salad. I don't understand all of the "buzz words" and acronyms that have been used.	10
What is the Mutually Agreed Resignation Scheme?	1
How much will this cost?	1
£1 million seems a large savings target, is this possible?	1

General comments	5
Remove taxi fees for families as most of them have vehicles. Stop sending children to and from school in taxis.	2
Please ensure you work with outside agencies such as the NHS to ensure a joined-up approach.	1
Stop paying for learning differences like ADHD – this is being abused by some parents who are extremely well off.	1
This is clutching at straws.	1

Comments about CF4: Reduce discretionary post-16 travel support

Survey respondents were asked if they had any comments to make about the proposal “CF4: Reduce discretionary post-16 travel support”.

In total, 190 comments made in response to this question have been analysed, and these comments have been grouped into categories and summarised below.

Opposition to the proposal	102
-----------------------------------	------------

This proposal impacts the most vulnerable in society, those who are already disadvantaged, and those who rely on the support/service	36
This will impact children going to school, impact their education and development and integration into society	19
This will impact on families finances, some will struggle to pay	17
Children have to be in education until 18 so the support should be provided	10
Suitable education settings aren't local, therefore transport is needed to get them to the required setting. Either that or more local SEND setting should be provided	10
The proposed savings would be negligible	6
This will cause long term issues, and be a burden on NHS and social care services	4

Support for the proposal	32
General support for the proposal, agree with reducing discretionary services	13
Support the proposal, as long as those affected aren't disadvantaged	10
Benefits received should cover travel expenditure	9

Applicants should be means tested	22
Review SEND transport need, and eligibility. People should be means tested to see if they need the service	22

Funding comments	6
Make savings elsewhere	4
Lobby central government for funding for this	1
Increase involvement from voluntary sector	1

Other comments	28
Stop SEND taxis - use alternative travel e.g. buses	12
What are the alternative arrangements?	8
Why is there an increase in SEND children? What's the root cause? Solve the root cause instead.	3
Comments around the consultation questions and wording	3
SEND transport is not free, it costs £450 per year	1
Any policy needs to be consistent across the service	1

Comments about CF5: Achieve the Family Hub model

Survey respondents were asked if they had any comments to make about the proposal "CF5: Achieve the Family Hub model".

In total, 81 comments made in response to this question have been analysed, and these comments have been grouped into categories and summarised below.

Support for the proposal	23
---------------------------------	-----------

Generally support family hub model, sounds sensible, special schools definitely required	11
Support if families do not have to pay more, service is not reduced, if provides a better service. If it saves more than it costs - should generate both short-term cash and ongoing savings	7
Support partnership, better to work together, removing duplication, more efficient - buildings however need to be fit for purpose, still need to be funded	5

Further information required	23
-------------------------------------	-----------

Not a lot of information, not sure what this is	19
Unclear which buildings will close, will a family hub be available in each town, where do people go and what do they do instead?	4

Opposition to the proposal	12
-----------------------------------	-----------

This is false economy and pushes problem elsewhere – These prevent early intervention, sounds a big scheme for not much savings	7
General opposition, people rely on these centres, this is a backwards step, the council must not close local childrens centres, there are not enough hubs at present	5

Suggestions	18
--------------------	-----------

Resources should be allocated equally, make sure nobody is left out. Make sure they are in the right areas, cater for individual requirements, continually review	9
Could co-locate in other buildings, reduce the number of buildings that are open, further engage & share premises with NHS service, partner with neighbouring councils, staff could work at home or hybrid working.	5
Use council space, libraries, merge into school control	4

General / other comments	5
---------------------------------	----------

General negative comment / statement	5
--------------------------------------	---

Comments about CF6: Other service reviews

Survey respondents were asked if they had any comments to make about the proposal “CF6: Other service reviews”.

In total, 124 comments made in response to this question have been analysed, and these comments have been grouped into categories and summarised below.

Opposition to the proposal	40
-----------------------------------	-----------

Oppose this being reduced, children will suffer from any cuts, we already have to fight for SEND support, the service is already on its knees, this affects the most vulnerable and increases burdens on families	24
This service needs more funding not less, council should prioritise support for them, this is a lifeline for many people, target elsewhere	9

Reducing services to children rarely results in long-term savings, it will cost more in the long run than you will save, early intervention is an effective tool	6
EHIPS shouldn't be affected	1

Support for the proposal	45
Support removal of discretionary elements, provide essential services to those that need them, services should be means tested, parents should contribute to any excessive costs above a basic provision	16
Happy to support if doesn't affect outcomes, people don't have to pay for support, suitable transition arrangements need to be put in place to manage the savings with families	15
General support, sounds sensible, needs streamlining especially if we don't have the budget	14

Further information required	27
Not clear what is being proposed, it doesn't make sense, insufficient information provided	22
There is no transparency on the council's costs, where is the saving coming from, why have increasing fuel costs been mentioned?	5
Not sure what elements are statutory and what are discretionary.	1

Suggestions	9
Have firm boundaries, review spending on taxis for SEN children, review why there has been an increase in this area and on claimants	7
Support struggling families in a better way, look at how new technologies can be leveraged for back-office savings	2

General / other comments	3
General negative comment / statement.	3

Comments about CF7: Reduce growth in expenditure

Survey respondents were asked if they had any comments to make about the proposal "CF7: Reduce growth in expenditure".

In total, 131 comments made in response to this question have been analysed, and these comments have been grouped into categories and summarised below.

Support for the proposal	63
General support, it makes sense	18
Support bringing services back in house, having more local options is good - local facilities should reduce costs, external placements are costly	16
Support if children still get the support they need. This needs trialling to establish whether the children are genuinely better cared for. Outcomes need to be protected. Need to review initial schemes on a regular basis.	15

Having children's homes is a good idea, agree with use of residential homes. It has to be well thought through, cost effective and adequately funded. See if old care homes can be adapted instead of building new.	8
Support a reduction in agency and contractor staff, and a reduction in court and legal costs	6

Opposition to the proposal	24
Residential children's homes are a backward step, they are too costly. Children's homes have not proven to be the best option for all - instead grow the foster/adoption schemes.	14
General opposition. This will impact the most vulnerable. Reducing services to children rarely results in long-term savings.	8
The staff required would have to be qualified to an acceptable level therefore costing the council a substantial expenditure. This is not the right time to increase capital expenditure to open residential children's homes.	2

Further information required	17
Would need to see more detail, there is not enough detail	8
What will happen to the children without this support? What is the impact on the children? What are you going to do to support children before they go into care? Is this achievable without compromising standards?	6
What is the evidence that the external placements have LOW outcomes? What funding & resources will be used to open the residential children's homes? How many residential homes? At what cost? How long will they take to be in place?	3

Suggestions	13
The whole system is flawed, look into early intervention and look into why issues occur in the first place. Take fewer children into care and provide support at home. Target efficient and reliable social work.	9
More foster carers are needed, with good training and a variety of placement settings. The council needs to expand on those who are allowed to be a foster carer, promote fostering better, offer more emotional and financial support to foster carers.	4

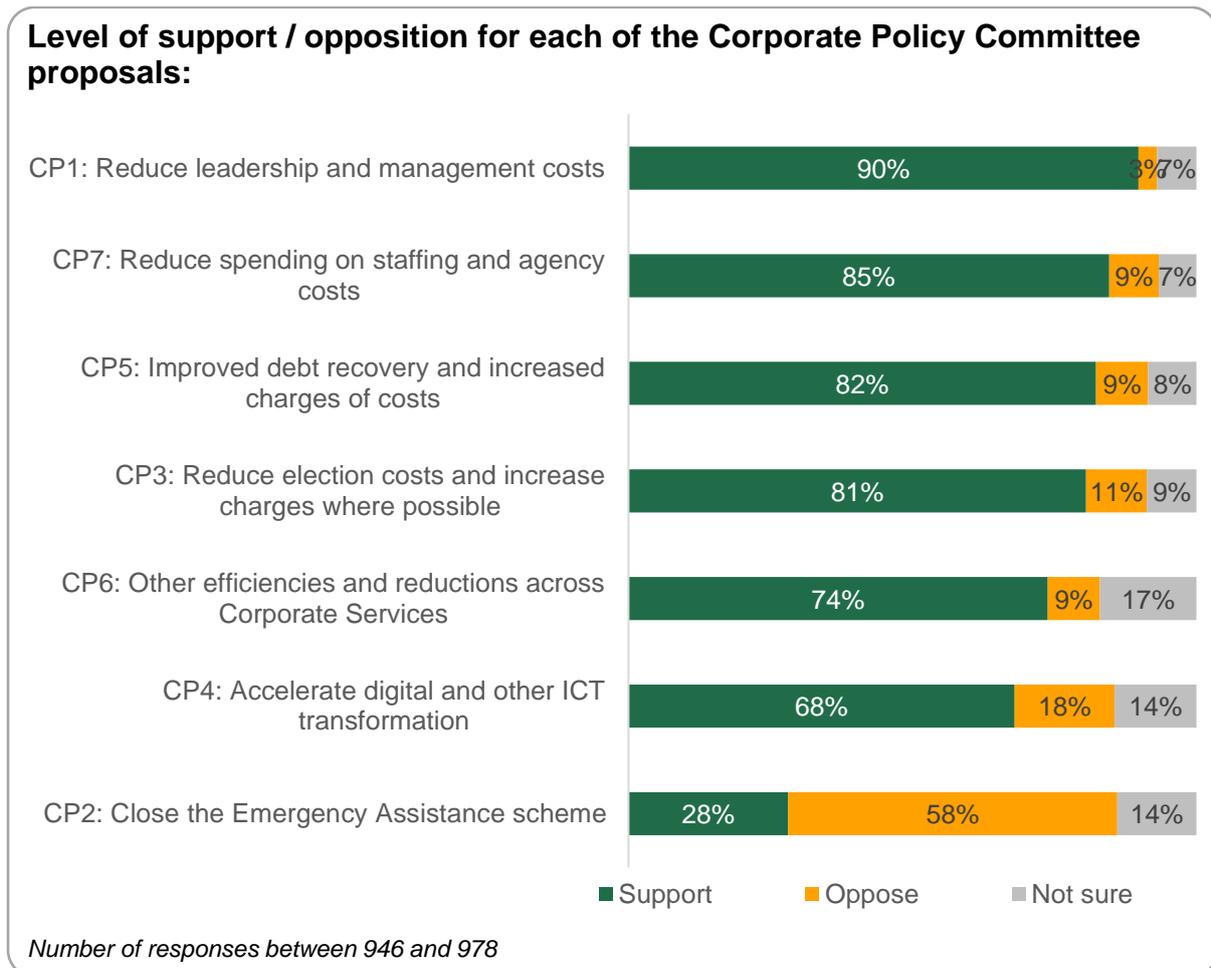
General / other comments	14
General negative comment / statement	7
Don't actually believe you can achieve this, it will take a long time to achieve. Current funding does not allow adequate outcomes in this area, the money won't go far	5
Don't believe recruiting more foster carers is a benefit. Review costs given to foster carers as it seems a lot	2

Corporate Policy Committee proposals

Net support or opposition for each of the Corporate Policy Committee proposals was:

- CP1: Reduce leadership and management costs (87% net support)
- CP7: Reduce spending on staffing and agency costs (76% net support)
- CP5: Improved debt recovery and increased charges of costs (73% net support)
- CP3: Reduce election costs and increase charges where possible (70% net support)
- CP6: Other efficiencies and reductions across Corporate Services (65% net support)
- CP4: Accelerate digital and other ICT transformation (50% net support)
- CP2: Close the Emergency Assistance scheme (-30% net opposition)

Levels of support and opposition for each of these proposals is shown in the chart below:



Comments about CP1: Reduce leadership and management costs

Survey respondents were asked if they had any comments to make about the proposal “CP1: Reduce leadership and management costs”.

In total, 295 comments made in response to this question have been analysed, and these comments have been grouped into categories and summarised below.

Support or the proposal	129
There are too many senior managers, these should be reduced	36
Senior management pay is too high, these salaries should be cut	28
Current managers are ineffective and underperforming, the CEC has not had good leadership	13
Agree, support the proposal overall	12
The (interim) CEC salary was scandalous	7
Salaries need addressing	7
Benefits such as bonuses, pension contributions and sick pay should be cut or frozen	6
Some roles and positions aren't necessary, for example the Director of Change position	5
Residents do not receive value for money, residents are disappointed in the services received	5
Too many managers are doing admin roles and lower grade staff roles	3
Council pay is more than in other sectors	3
Managers stay for a while then move on	2
Cut the number of committee members	2

Concerns and suggestions on the proposal and savings	104
This could mean expertise is lost, there needs to be robust staff in place	24
Roles should be reviewed for need, duplicity and whether they can be incorporated into other teams	17
More investment is needed in frontline staff, already overstretched	10
More savings could be made, more than £0.5m	10
Senior pay should reflect performance and outcomes	9
The whole structure, root and branch needs reviewing. Staff numbers and roles should be under constant review	8
Concerns that frontline staff will feel the pressure of reduced management, which could impact service quality and impact staff well-being	7
Improve efficiencies within the council, cut bureaucracy and over-complicated models	6
If a post is left vacant then leave it vacant, is it needed if it hasn't been filled?	4
Use fewer consultants and contractors and ensure those who are used deliver	4
As long as service delivery and quality is not compromised	3
This will lead to a decline in services and quality of services	2

Disagree with proposal	54
Save money elsewhere, sell assets	31
Managers are needed to support frontline, lower grade staff, but properly and effectively	23
Other	8
Other comments	6
More information is needed	2

Comments about CP2: Close the emergency Assistance scheme

Survey respondents were asked if they had any comments to make about the proposal “CP2: Close the emergency Assistance scheme”.

In total, 199 comments made in response to this question have been analysed, and these comments have been grouped into categories and summarised below.

Opposition to the proposal	133
These are the most vulnerable people, including those recovering from homelessness, why would the council even consider this? Money shouldn't come into it, this assistance must be kept. The local authority needs to be there in times of crisis to help and support the most vulnerable in the community. What makes us a civil society is how we look at the vulnerable. What an appalling suggestion.	82
For the sake of such a small amount, this is a draconian measure, and not worth it. If we are unable to support vulnerable members of the community but pay for mayoral paraphernalia etc, you really have to wonder we bother. Lessen the amount of savings to be made from this proposal.	20
This proposal will cause a knock on effect to other services, including Adult Social Care, the NHS, police and fire services. This could lead to people being admitted to care homes or delayed discharges from hospital because their needs cannot be met in the community without the basics such as whiteware etc. This proposal is short-sighted, cancelling this will lead to problems for people further down the line.	19
Opposed to this proposal, especially during a cost of living crisis, post pandemic.	4
Find savings elsewhere: Reduce management instead; sell the B&Q carpark in Crewe; tax the rich more.	4
If central government doesn't support these people, we can't remove that safety net - we must provide a safety net for people.	3
This service has already been slimmed down to a minimum.	1

Support for the proposal	14
If we don't have the budget, then this service needs to be withdrawn. The council can't support this without central government assistance. We need to stop giving money to people if we have not got it, there are so many other benefits that vulnerable people can access and this is not what Council Tax should be used for.	5

People need to be self-reliant and self-sufficient. Too many individuals expect too much from services without helping themselves, they expect everything to be provided for them but don't always help themselves. The majority of these people bring problems upon themselves through drug and alcohol abuse and have no incentive to change. It is a waste of money which should be spent on older people who have contributed to society all their lives.	3
Reluctant support for the proposal.	2
There are many other organisations that can provide this support (white goods), so the council doesn't need to and this scheme no longer needs to be funded by tax paying residents.	2
It needs to be made absolutely clear that it is central government who have removed funding for the service and that CEC can't afford to pay for it.	1
This service is not needed with all the charities now helping out with white goods etc.	1

Further information required	31
Is there alternative help available, if so where? The council should provide details of other means of support available. Many CEC staff do not know where or how to signpost to alternatives.	20
There is not enough info to be able to comment. E.g. How many people access the service? What form does this "emergency help" take? The saving of £0.2m is based on what total budget for this area?	9
What risk assessments have been done to assess the implications and impact if it is scrapped? Are consequential costs considered? Is there an impact assessment on proposals?	2

Improve the service	14
Rather than withdraw the support, review the qualifying criteria for it. The service should not be closed, but should be targeted very stringently, and genuinely vulnerable people should be supported.	7
Improve the service efficiency, as the service isn't run efficiently, there needs to be a change in how scheme is administrated and managed. The service doesn't keep track of who has received goods. It should be changed to a completely internal referral process for the council whereby individuals cannot make their own application but must be referred by a member of Cheshire East Council. Review the demand for the service and the type of things being funded before making decision on ending the scheme.	4
Rather than withdraw the support review more efficient ways to support those in need. The council must be able to tie in with local retailers & charities to continue providing some level of support, rather than withdrawing it altogether. Can the council work with other Local Authorities or organisations to provide this support? Could large local employers in the area support through their social responsibility work?	2
Promote the service better, make it easier to access.	1

Other comments	7
A shame central government funding was removed, the council should re-seek government funding.	4

We can't rely on the third sector to pick things up like this, the third / voluntary sector is not a long term solution, they are stretched as it is. Reduce the reliance on political pressure groups such as The Trussell Trust.	2
This service should be picked up by the commercial / voluntary sector.	1

Comments about CP3: Reduce election costs and increase charges where possible

Survey respondents were asked if they had any comments to make about the proposal “CP3: Reduce election costs and increase charges where possible”.

In total, 157 comments made in response to this question have been analysed, and these comments have been grouped into categories and summarised below.

Support for the proposal	50
Makes sense	21
There are too many poll clerks at stations, many sitting doing nothing	8
Council Tax payers should not be funding elections, we already pay too much for too little, the government should be funding elections	8
Parishes should be charged	3
All costs from Town and Parish Councils should be recovered	3
Make sure charging is sensible	3
As long as not to the detriment of services	2
As long as no increase in Council Tax	1
This may encourage people to vote and stand for elections	1

Concerns and suggestions	50
Our democratic rights must not be compromised, elections are critical to society	11
Stop wasting money at elections, for example stationery and signs, review station hire costs	8
Make efficiency savings	7
Move to online and postal voting to reduce the number of stations needed	6
Use volunteers for poll clerks	5
Reduce the number of Councillors and expenses	4
Poll clerks should not be paid in addition to their salaries	3
Combine the smaller, less used stations into one larger station	3
Scrap smaller / local elections, e.g. the Police and Crime Commissioner	2
Reduce the number of high-level staff	1

Oppose to the proposal	33
Residents will still have to pay, via precept, if charge Town and Parish Councils are charged	11
This is unfair on Town and Parish Councils, they are already struggling financially, they have not budgeted for this and will be impacted	10
Town and Parish Councils receive precept, no need to recover costs	2

This is just passing the buck, robbing Peter to pay Paul	6
This is unachievable	2
Poll clerks will be busier with the new ID checks	1
This will be an obstacle for recruiting future Councillors	1

Other comments	24
There isn't enough information or detail in the proposal	9
Why is this not already done, why has this taken so long?	5
Other	5
Town and Parish Councils should be scrapped, there are ineffective	2
The returning officer role should be part of an existing role	1
Learn from other areas	1
What about the implementation costs?	1

Comments about CP4: Accelerate digital and other ICT transformation

Survey respondents were asked if they had any comments to make about the proposal "CP4: Accelerate digital and other ICT transformation".

In total, 240 comments made in response to this question have been analysed, and these comments have been grouped into categories and summarised below.

Opposition to the proposal	107
I want to speak to people not AI, personal contact more is effective, we will lose the personal touch, it will generate incorrect information and cause more problems than it solves.	52
Don't introduce commercial advertising, it will put people off using the website especially for people with visual impairments or low digital skills, it would make it harder to use, the council should not be endorsing a private company.	22
General opposition – It will not go well (think Horizon!), systems don't work and cost too much.	16
Need to sort IT – You can't get your IT sorted now, IT equipment for staff is not good. Need to update ICT, ensure staff are well trained before further changes are made, don't minimise spend on ICT devices.	13
Unlikely to save costs in next financial year, will cost to implement. Will incur additional costs.	4

Support for the proposal	100
As long as it works, as long as it's tested, as long as it is safe and secure, as long as it doesn't mean spending more long term or spending more on agency staff. Strong leadership is needed on this, work in partnership with an identified successful private company who have got this right.	30
General support, you should have been doing this already, it should be an expectation.	26

Support for the proposal, however, need to be mindful of those digitally excluded inc. older residents – some still need some customer service. Conduct impact assessments of proposals.	28
Support advertising – Advertise on the website but not too much, will need to be monitored carefully, limit to local businesses.	16
Support for the proposal, however not at the expense of modern ICT, staff/ front line staff. Needs to be a compromise between cost and quality. ICT support also needs to be adequate.	12

Further information required	7
Unclear, have not detailed the spend, cost savings this will deliver nor the timetable.	7

Suggestions	16
Reuse equipment rather than issue new, reduce expenditure on unnecessary mobiles & laptops, replace equipment when necessary and not on an automatic rolling basis.	8
Review contracts, look at a long-term strategy to move to Open Software, merge the client ICT team with the client ICT team at Cheshire West and Chester.	7
Advertise on bus shelters, litter bins, as well as other council assets.	1

General / other comments	10
Surprised savings are so small, doesn't seem cost effective.	6
General negative comment / statement.	4

Comments about CP5: Improved debt recovery and increased charges of costs

Survey respondents were asked if they had any comments to make about the proposal “CP5: Improved debt recovery and increased charges of costs”.

In total, 147 comments made in response to this question have been analysed, and these comments have been grouped into categories and summarised below.

Support for the proposal	46
This should be made a priority, debts should be recovered	16
Why should council tax payers cover the cost of debtors?	11
Too many people get away with not paying	10
Agree / This makes sense	9

Suggestions and comments	50
As long as this doesn't impact the vulnerable and put people into further debt, the vulnerable should be dealt with sensitively and be protected	29
As long as it's cost effective and the cost to recover doesn't exceed the debt amount	8
Current administration and debt recovery staff needs reviewing	6

Focus on businesses	2
Improve the process, including issuing invoices on time	2
Recover debts through benefits	1
If people don't pay then withdraw their services	1
Set a bigger target	1

Opposition to the proposal	27
This will make it worse for the vulnerable, there's a reason they can't pay and will end up worse	19
Do not trust automation	4
This will not save money	3
Sell assets	1

Other comments	24
Is this not already done, why is this not already done?	13
Need more information, unsure of the implications or numbers	7
What about small mistakes, if a fine has been wrongly enforced	2
Outsource the debt recovery to an external supplier	1
Is this achievable?	1

Comments about CP6: Other efficiencies and reductions across Corporate Services

Survey respondents were asked if they had any comments to make about the proposal "CP6: Other efficiencies and reductions across Corporate Services".

In total, 173 comments made in response to this question have been analysed, and these comments have been grouped into categories and summarised below.

General support for proposals	29
Support all proposals. More efficiency is long overdue. Cut costs where possible.	22
This should all be being done anyway.	5
Proposed savings here are too small, a more ambitious target should be set. Work closer with other councils to get advantage of bigger savings. Savings can easily be double this.	2

Comments on "Remove school subsidies through price increases or service reductions"	43
Oppose generally	27
Oppose - Schools are struggling too much already & need more support	10
Oppose - A lot of vulnerable families are dependant upon these. This impacts children.	5
General support	1

Comments on "Savings through additional hybrid working practices"	36
--	-----------

Support - CEC has the opportunity to lead the way on this. Increasing hybrid working will reduce travel costs, heating costs of buildings and can be more efficient. There is no reason why staff cannot work full time at home and just come in for meetings.	15
Oppose - Hybrid work costs the council, does not make savings. Hybrid working is not a saving as outputs are less from each staff member and onboarding takes far longer. People do less work at home. Hybrid working practices are increasingly becoming less efficient and desirable with staff, through a lack of cohesion of teams, reduced oversight and supervision etc. The council functions better when staff are in the office. Losses to efficiency will completely outweigh any short term savings. The council still has to be accessible by the public, it feels disjointed now.	14
Hybrid working should be voluntary only	1
As long as there is a council wide policy for all staff as it currently differs for services	1
Staff should be encouraged to work from both home and the office for a healthy work life balance	1

Comments on “Cease all external design and printing”	11
General support. If design can get done in-house, using talents of existing staff, this should be the way forward.	5
Oppose - External design and print is often cheaper. The way it's procured is the problem, having to use suppliers on a framework with a percentage added on means the council doesn't get a competitive cost. The internal service can't meet the need for all design and print requirements. Tatton Park specifically has needs that often extend beyond current internal capabilities.	2
If we cease external design and printing do we have resources to cover this as the need for design and printing will still exist?	2
External design and printing can be done by CWAC, they do a great job	1
Surely not a large enough cost to worry about?	1

Comments on “Across the board efficiencies from procurement and income generation including introducing more venues for registrar services”	9
General support	5
Support for more venues for registrars. Won't introducing more venues for registrar services increase costs?	3
Procurement for all councils should be done on a national level which would dramatically reduce costs and staffing	1

Comments on “Review of current provision across workforce and organisational development to deliver differently with reduced costs”	5
General support	2
A reduction in staff training will have an impact on council effectiveness	2
Consider having less Councillors too. Maybe less Councillors with stronger portfolio positions of all parties would make a more robust decision making process.	1

General comments	14
Cheshire East Council is inefficient, the council has to provide value for money at all times.	7
Reviews are a delaying tactic to avoid making decisions. How much do these reviews cost?	2
Need to be careful not to reduce services to the public too much, this is damaging to the council's reputation	2
Pulling as many services as possible back in-house would increase savings.	1
Bring Highway maintenance back in house. Ringway Jacobs' priorities will focus on profitability before road maintenance. Examine all contractors! Their profits are council tax payments giving us nothing.	1
CEC should encourage a review of the national pension scheme with a view to replacing it with a defined contribution scheme. This would save millions.	1

More information required	26
Proposals are vague, more detail is required about the impacts of these to be able to make an informed comment. What are the implications of these proposals?	18
There are too many different proposals to say whether agree or disagree. Difficult to say if I support this or not. All items have different outcomes. This is a strange listing to lump together.	7
Are there still many schools still with CEC?	1

Comments about CP7: Reduce spending on staffing and agency costs

Survey respondents were asked if they had any comments to make about the proposal “CP7: Reduce spending on staffing and agency costs”.

In total, 319 comments made in response to this question have been analysed, and these comments have been grouped into categories and summarised below.

Support for the proposal	193
General support, agencies cost a fortune and should be avoided at all cost. Everybody knows the large mark up and charge that is involved, and how big a cut agencies take. The use of agency staff needs to be the last resort, often these staff have an inflated salary and offer a below par service	101
Move towards having permanent in-house staff and increase the numbers of permanent staff. Ensure the right people are employed in the first place. Invest more in permanent staff – people are your greatest asset and this must be done while ensuring they feel valued and motivated. Make permanent staff feel better valued. There has been no investment in CEC growing their own staff, i.e. social workers, therefore it is necessary to use agency staff at inflated rates in order to meet the statutory requirements in children and adult services. To retain good staff the council do need to have a good pay and other benefits package. Give permanent staff extra hours rather than pay agency staff	24
Support the proposal, as long as there are no reductions in service delivery	22

Why are so many agency staff used anyway? £3.2 is an incredible amount! What is the cultural cause of use of agency staff – that needs investigating. Is this achievable without understanding why agency costs and overtime are so high? Why not disclose the total spend on agency costs?	10
This should have happened already	10
Have a bank of casual staff you can call on as and when needed, where they are paid the same as other staff. Agency staffing is useful for short term gaps in the workforce, but an expensive long-term solution to fill posts. Have a pool of staff that can be sent to cover some gaps e.g. long-term sickness rather than buying expensive agency staff, perhaps people who cannot work full-time continuously but appreciate the work for a few weeks or months	7
The council needs to improve on resource management and staffing, be more efficient to increase headcount vs paying overtime. Manage staff better, staff cost management has been poor since the authority was set up. CEC has been totally incompetent for years in allowing this situation to exist, and needs to look at recruitment to see if it is recruiting the right people. There should be no need for extra agency staff or even overtime if management are efficient and have planned correctly. The council needs a plan for how it will ensure it retains the right skills and experience.	7
Support for a reduction in overtime. Overtime is not paid in private sector professions, and it is madness that it was ever allowed in the public sector.	5
As long as it is communicated to service users that lead times might be increased, and which services will be impacted	2
Agency spending has become an essential part of staffing within some depts over recent years, which tends to provide a substandard consistent service to residents at a much higher cost. Unfortunately some permanent employees have left Local Authority to become agency staff and returned to work in the same practise on better terms as their 'own boss'. This is not tenable in the long term as it impacts on both residents and staff	1
Appalled to hear how much the stand in Chief Executive was being paid – it was obscene	1
Comensura is expensive – not only do we also pay the agencies, we pay Comensura too. The quality of candidates on Comensura is poor	1
Consultants are a false economy	1
There are too many agency staff in social care teams	1

Concerns about reductions in use of agency staff	36
The impacts on staff of these measures need to be considered as this will increase workloads. Permanent staff will struggle to do their own jobs and take on that work the agency staff were doing or that was covered by overtime. This will impact on care staff, we can't rely on overtime instead. As foster carers, if we hadn't had agency workers during 2023, we would have struggled to get support. We had so many social workers leaving, so many experienced staff on medical leave mainly due to burn out. Agency staff are always going to cost more, but a reduction in a workforce already working more than is good for their mental, emotional and physical health is not helpful. This needs carefully looking at...weigh up the pros which are saving money against the pros; burnt out employees who are doing their best in	21

difficult circumstances with insufficient resources. Look after your staff and they will have your back when the going gets tough! Social services etc should not be expected to do unpaid overtime to support a financially struggling council	
Agencies should only be used when it is vital to do so not as routine. Agency/contractor workers should always be a last resort and should only be at, not above, market rates. In some areas it is impossible to recruit staff directly, agency staffing is often the only way to undertake essential services	7
Agencies may be more cost effective than having permanent staff as you can flex up or down as needed, agencies provide flexibility	5
Agency staff are needed to supplement skills and resource shortages and to deliver statutory services	2
Agency employment should be time limited: 12 months to cover maternity/long term sickness etc; 3 months to cover additional head count. Anything outside of these parameters would mean there is need for a permanent role and should therefor be applied for in the usual manner.	1

Concerns about reductions in use of overtime	32
Opposed to cutting overtime. Overtime is necessary when a recruitment freeze is on, due to capacity of the teams. Removing overtime could reduce flexibility and goodwill from employees. Front line work crews need to be doing over time to correct faults, potholes, fly tipping etc. These should not be prevented from doing over time. Many employees have to rely on overtime to make ends meet.	17
Pay overtime it if essential, for statutory services or frontline services. A reduction in overtime cannot happen in adult social care as services are already very close to being unsafe. We have agency staff in Social Care to plug the gaps because the council can't fill staff vacancies with permanent staff – probably because permanent staff are not paid enough	14
Contracts for people working shift patterns needs to be changed, so that people can do 12 hour shifts, and not 8 hours shifts + overtime.	1

Other concerns about the proposal	21
An impact assessment of this proposal is needed to understand how this proposal will affect service delivery. Concern about the compound effect of 1) a recruitment freeze 2) cancellation of premium overtime and 3) a reduction of agency staff. There needs to be a careful balance. The delivery of this proposal relies on thoughtful, gifted leadership. How does this proposal tie in with other proposals?	13
The only reason we use agency recruitment is because HR Services do not work. Onboarding in Cheshire East is the worst I have seen. Delays are caused by new staff not having contracts and offer letters, meaning agency have to stay longer than required	3
This does not look achievable. If staff are reduced, it just seems like it would take even longer to get the job done	3
Address the fact that teams are working with many interim arrangements in place causing uncertainty and staff turnover.	1
Response times are already poor. We should not be planning for them to get worse.	1

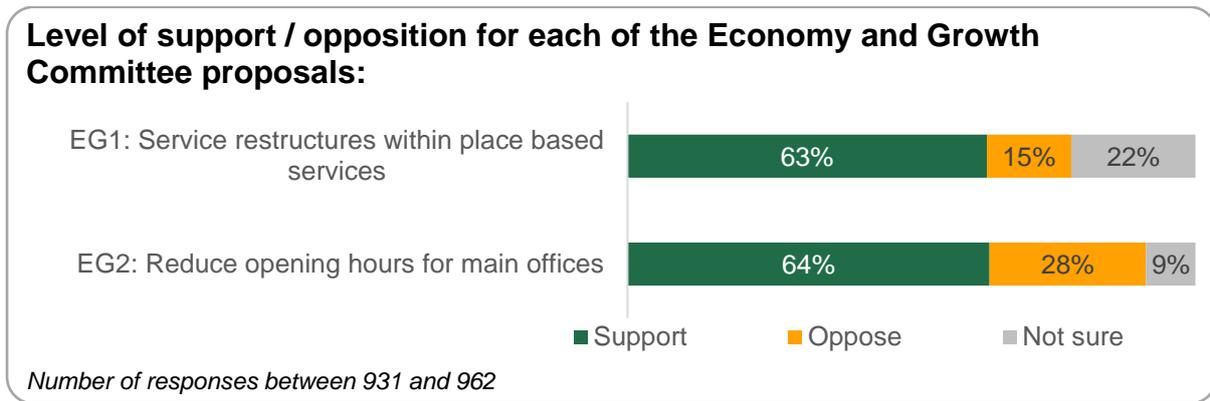
Other ideas	33
Increase the productivity of current staff. Manage performance better so that you are not having to carry people without having the benefit of their work. Pay should be performance based. Stop people working from home.	11
Review sick pay. Most companies do not pay for one or two days absence. Reduce the amount of sick day absences. Be more stringent over sickness. The council / NJC occupational sickness scheme is very good and a new employee has access to occupational sick pay from day one. The sickness absence scheme is a very long process, so the cost of covering sickness is expensive	6
Employer pension contributions should be cut to be closer to those in the private sector	2
Take on more apprenticeships and intern opportunities	2
Quality staff want permanent contracts, stop offering 12 month contracts, they don't attract a good calibre of candidates	2
Reduce all senior Council workers wages	2
Use a flexitime type concept rather than overtime	2
Bring pensions and contracts in line with private sector	1
Cut golden handshakes and golden goodbyes	1
Offer more placements to the unemployed	1
Offer voluntary redundancy	1
Retain only essential spending	1
Stop or pause the Gemini Programme which is splitting ICT Services – The Gemini programme increases the spending on staffing and external consultancy to delivery the programme	1
More information required	4
The proposal is not explained sufficiently clearly to have a view	2
How does this fit with the freeze on employment? Without explaining to residents how and when overtime or additional hours payments are made how could we comment meaningfully on how this would impact and whether it is something to support or oppose	1
Why are so many staff having to work overtime, can the council not employ enough staff?	1

Economy & Growth Committee proposals

Net support or opposition for each of the Economy & Growth Committee proposals was:

- EG1: Service restructures within place based services (48% net support)
- EG2: Reduce opening hours for main offices (36% net support)

Levels of support and opposition for each of these proposals is shown in the chart below:



Comments about EG1: Service restructures within place based services

Survey respondents were asked if they had any comments to make about the proposal “EG1: Service restructures within place based services”.

In total, 100 comments made in response to this question have been analysed, and these comments have been grouped into categories and summarised below.

Support for the proposal	37
Support for the proposal, however, changes need to be carefully managed so as not to increase existing pressures. It shouldn't be a blanket policy, the aim must be cost reduction whilst maintaining service levels. Ensure delays in recruitment and failure to retain staff does not lead to needing expensive interim cover. The council must maintain or improve disabled access and support.	17
In support, seems reasonable, in favour of centralisation regarding staff	8
Stop all recruitment, stop all budget increases, offer voluntary redundancy, remove unnecessary posts, review management structures	7
Should only be undertaking statutory services, statutory posts should be prioritised, prioritise front line staff	5
Opposition to the proposal	27

Staff are valuable assets, waiting times are already long enough, this will impact the most vulnerable, reduction in service is unacceptable, this is misguided, a false economy	15
Cuts to place services should be minimised, don't reduce staff, place based services are what the public values the most. Many staff in support roles cover at least another role already, there are already pressures due to loss of staff, the directorate we won't be able to meet targets	12

Further information required	20
Unclear, what are the implications, what are place based services, which posts specifically?	19
What is the long-term plan?	1

Suggestions	10
Give Tatton park to National Trust to run, generate revenue from Tatton park and events, generate external funding	6
Increase productivity in the staff you have, increase overtime working	2
Should limit multiple applications for the same project, decentralise staff to gain savings & more effective local responses. Make better use of CEC real estate. Give funding to partnerships and commissioned services to do the job.	2

General / other comments	6
General negative comment / statement	4
This is vacancy management rather than restructure, it is not an efficient way to restructure a service	2

Comments about EG2: Reduce opening hours for main offices

Survey respondents were asked if they had any comments to make about the proposal "EG2: Reduce opening hours for main offices".

In total, 236 comments made in response to this question have been analysed, and these comments have been grouped into categories and summarised below.

Opposition to the proposal	100
Staff are not as productive at home should be in offices, remote working leads to inefficiencies, the buildings are there use them	29
Impact on service provision compared to the savings not worth it, more customer complaints. Too much will need to be invested in remote working infrastructure, counterproductive. Negative impact of the environment	22
You must be accessible, especially to the elderly, most vulnerable e.g. the homeless. Staff are hard enough to contact as it is, service is already poor	18
Staff should have the option to go into offices when they need to, ICT equipment provided for working from home is insufficient, it impacts mental health and wellbeing. Where are teams and staff going to work from, there is not enough space in buildings	17

Closed offices give the wrong impression, don't agree with closing buildings on a rota, some services need to be available at both locations daily, not everyone can go on certain days	9
General opposition, this is unattainable	5

Support for the proposal	74
In support, seems sensible – working from home is the new norm, working from home will reduce costs with access to office on some days. Buildings could open less	30
Support closure of council buildings between the hours of 6pm and 8am.	16
Supportive, but only if the services are still available when required, when open services are fast and efficient> People should be able to access support at other CE buildings / central hubs. Ensure disabled people have access and support. Impact assessments are required	10
Prefer / support Option 1	8
Prefer / support Option 2	7
Support as long as reduced building hours doesn't impact staff pay. Staff utilise buildings on the days they are open to minimise wastage (heating bills etc)	3

Suggestions	26
A further review is needed what the busiest days are, there need to be alternative suggestions on the options e.g. centralise offices, use smaller premises, close the Crewe office or reduce it to 3 days per week, operate Macclesfield 5 days per week, close on a Friday, close between 5.30 and 7.30, consider 10am to 2 pm, avoid Friday closure, go to a 4 day week	17
Review use of electricity, gas, heating, lighting, rent out office space, review the offer of alternative (digital) services	9

Further information required	11
Will salaries be reduced accordingly if partial weeks are being worked, people are working from home. Will staff have a WFH allowance, what's the cost of moving between the buildings	5
Unsure if this could impact services or availabilities, would emergency cover be available, unsure what impact closing Westfields will have	4
Not explained sufficiently, is this consistent with the other objectives	2

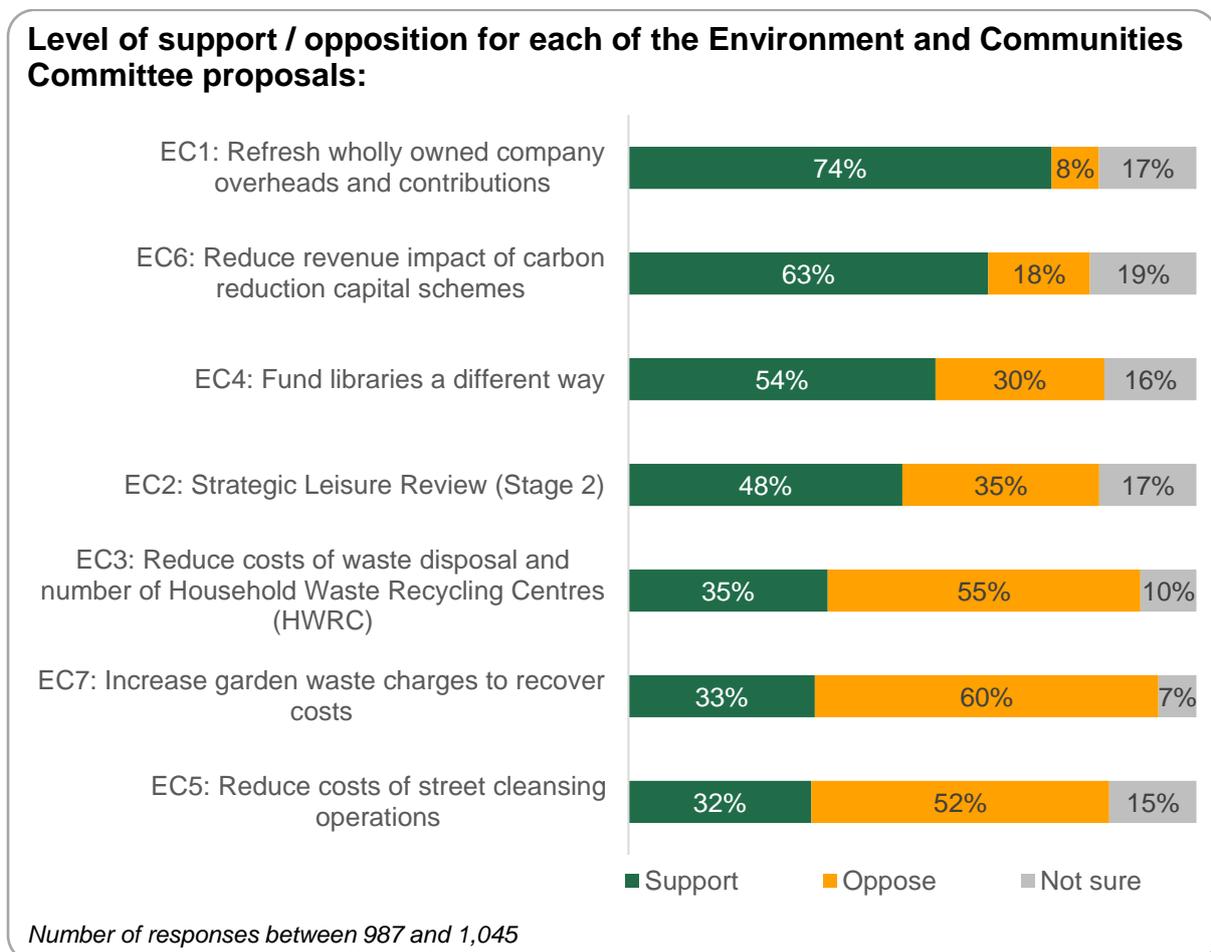
General / other comments	25
Surprised savings are so small, may cost more to implement	12
General negative comment / statement.	8
Options have pros and cons for staff and residents, go with the option staff most prefer, not all costs end because a building is closed, ensure you don't generate mileage claims. Consider homeworking compensation to the employees	5

Environment & Communities Committee proposals

Net support or opposition for each of the Environment & Communities Committee proposals was:

- EC1: Refresh wholly owned company overheads and contributions (66% net support)
- EC6: Reduce revenue impact of carbon reduction capital schemes (45% net support)
- EC4: Fund libraries a different way (24% net support)
- EC2: Strategic Leisure Review (Stage 2) (14% net support)
- EC3: Reduce costs of waste disposal and number of Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRC) (-20% net opposition)
- EC7: Increase garden waste charges to recover costs (-28% net opposition)
- EC5: Reduce costs of street cleansing operations (-20% net opposition)

Levels of support and opposition for each of these proposals is shown in the chart below:



Comments about EC1: Refresh wholly owned company overheads and contributions

Survey respondents were asked if they had any comments to make about the proposal “EC1: Refresh wholly owned company overheads and contributions”.

In total, 151 comments made in response to this question have been analysed, and these comments have been grouped into categories and summarised below.

Support for the proposal	41
General support - This makes sense and it is always good to review. Why hasn't this already been done, this should be the norm	25
Wholly owned companies should be subject to scrutiny and challenge and be performance managed. The council needs to improve existing services, review profitability, any profit should be clearly identified and shared with the council	7
Yes review as long as it doesn't impact the service or improves it. Don't cut where good changes have been made in carbon neutral and recycling. Don't use highly paid external "business consultants". This should be an independent, external review	5
Good idea, a review of management is needed. Decrease any agency staff and overtime. Avoid large redundancy payments to senior staff in ANSA or Orbitas	4
Suggestions	35
Bring the service back in house or outsource fully. Wholly owned companies should be phased out if not delivering value for money. The revenue generation aspects of these companies should be done as a council department to avoid duplication	12
Needs to be efficient, query the efficiency of council owned businesses, provide a first classed service, services should help council finances. Needs to be done at minimal cost, costs should be reduced in line with good practice	9
Become more commercial, increasing additional revenue streams must be encouraged. Put contracts out to tender	5
Sell advertising on waste collection vehicles, look at developing a commercial waste collection service, charge more to NT properties	5
Would work more efficiently if CEC left it alone, do not interfere, necessary profit driven ethos is inconsistent with the Local Authority	4
Opposition to the proposal	2
Oppose waste services being outsourced / too many services have been outsourced	2
Further information required	36
The proposal and wording is not clear and not explained sufficiently. Unsure of the proposal implications	15

Doesn't make sense - if the number of households has increased the income from Council Tax will have also increased. Stop building new houses, this will reduce demand for this service	12
What is the cost of the review? What is the cost versus benefits? What is the £1 million to be made up of?	9

General / other comments	37
Comment about bin charges / collections / HWRC sites e.g. disagree with charge for green waste bins / lack of take up could be due to lack of advertising / no cuts to bin collections / look at how waste is operated In Europe with community bins. Reopen local waste centres.	12
General negative comment / statement	11
Service is poor / bad experience of Ansa or Orbitas / Orbitas charges are excessive.	11
Service is good / good experience of Ansa	3

Comments about EC2: Strategic Leisure review (Stage 2)

Survey respondents were asked if they had any comments to make about the proposal "EC2: Strategic Leisure review (Stage 2)".

In total, 236 comments made in response to this question have been analysed, and these comments have been grouped into categories and summarised below.

Opposition to the proposal	77
Leisure services are essential for mental and physical health and wellbeing, and their removal / reduction will have a negative impact on this	35
This will have a knock on effect on council social care services and the NHS if access to health and fitness is reduced	25
Don't price out, people will go to private gyms. Leisure fees should be means tested	10
Do not make any cuts	4
Do not sell or transfer leisure service assets	3

Support for the proposal	17
The proposal makes sense, cut leisure services funding	13
Close underused or close proximity leisure centres	3
Sell underused leisure centres	1

Car parking comments	71
Don't charge for parking at Leisure Centres or in town centres, we need to draw people in and not deter them. Town centres are dying	37
Don't put barriers (e.g. car parking charges) in way of health and fitness. The council should be encouraging a healthy population	24
Charge for parking across all sites	9
Have a small charge for residents annual parking permit	1

Fund leisure centres in different ways	23
Look at income opportunities e.g. rent out space / rent to clubs / NHS facilities	10
Increase membership fees	6
Explore public-private partnerships e.g. with private gyms / schools	4
Sell / transfer leisure service assets	3
Improve the leisure centre offer	10
Invest in leisure centres where viable	6
Have better offerings and more swim times at leisure centres, it's currently too restrictive with school bookings etc	4
Town and parish council comments	9
Do not shift burden of their management onto town and parish councils	6
It's a double taxation if moved to town and parish councils	3
Other comments	29
Proposals are unclear, mashed together, needs separating out. It's confusing and needs clarifying	18
Review leisure service providers and the contracts with them	4
Comments related to Leisure Trust and how that could or couldn't work	2
Comments related to council incompetencies	2
Access grants for energy saving measure	1
Public health / grants will also be cut – Don't rely on those	1
Why hasn't council tax income increased in line with increase in population?	1

Comments about EC3: Reduce costs of waste disposal and number of Household Waste Recycling Centres

Survey respondents were asked if they had any comments to make about the proposal “EC3: Reduce costs of waste disposal and number of HWRCs”.

In total, 501 comments made in response to this question have been analysed, and these comments have been grouped into categories and summarised below.

Opposition to the proposal	279
This will encourage fly tipping, and the costs to deal with that will outweigh the savings made from closing sites. Fly tipping is already bad and getting worse, the county already looks dirty and run down, please don't make it any worse!. Has a risk assessment been conducted on the impact on fly tipping – Congleton and Arclid sites closures have led to an increase in fly tipping. Increased fly tipping will lead to rodent and health problems, as well as being a blight on the area for residents and the CEC Authority. It's not fair on local farmers to make them take responsibility for fly tipping because there are too few centres.	186
General opposition – this proposal makes me furious, this is a complete and utter scandal. A crazy proposal! This is an unnecessary austerity proposal.	26

We need tips, where will people go to get rid of their waste? HWRCs are essential services, it is a basic Local Authority duty to collect waste and facilities should be available locally. This is a statutory requirement. 4 sites are too few, especially given the increasing size of the population. It is important for the community to get rid of waste properly, to help recycling - removing barriers to proper waste disposal should be encouraged. It is becoming increasingly difficult to dispose of waste as it is.	23
Congleton has no HWRC and needs one, we already lost that one. Congleton residents pay more Council Tax than areas and has no tip.	15
Opposed to the closure of Bollington HWRC, it is well run and well used.	10
This doesn't represent Council Tax value for money, and is unfair on those who pay Council Tax and don't live in Alsager, Crewe, Knutsford or Macclesfield. At what point is the cost effectiveness of the Authority is called into question? Surely more housing results in more Council tax, which is additional revenue that should be spent on such services.	8
Opposed to the closure of Middlewich HWRC, it is a good site and always busy.	4
Enforcement against fly tippers seems very weak in CEC. Increase environmental crime fines to the maximum.	3
Why did you give planning permission for new developments if we don't have the infrastructure to deal with it? Increased housebuilding will only make this even worse.	3
Opposed to the closure of Knutsford HWRC.	1

Impacts of closures	166
Environmental impacts - Pollution will increase with people having to travel further, millions more unnecessary road trips will be created, increasing pollution and wear and tear on the roads, which you're already failing to maintain. This goes against council carbon and green environment pledges. The council declares a climate emergency and then expects people to drive miles to the recycling centres.	58
This proposal is short sighted – It won't save money overall, it will cost more to sort out the problems it causes. This is a false economy, it will cause more knock on effects than it is worth. Where is the impact assessment for these proposals? The proposals will affect future generations and are very selfish.	38
Brown bins – This combined with a charge for green waste collection will lead to big problems, doing both these at the same time is unbelievable – you encourage people to use these centres if they do not wish to pay for green waste and now you wish to close the centres. Score 1 for foolishness, 0 for council intelligence. Residents are already disaffected with the green waste bin charge, this will only make things worse.	33
Black bins – This proposal means more waste will be put into black bins, and will lead to less recycling. More people will disguise their waste in black bins. This will then raise costs on sorting mixed waste. People won't go to the tip if it is too far away.	18
There's already a shortage of HWRCs, this will only create more congestion at other sites. Other sites already have long queues, this will only create more and make it harder to get to sites. Can other sites handle an increase in	16

traffic? Won't more staff be needed at the sites that stay open to cope with the increase in usage?	
This will lead to more queues on roads and worsening road conditions.	2
This puts additional costs onto residents.	1

Support for the proposal	19
General support for the proposal, 4 sites should be enough.	12
Support, as long as the 4 sites and staff can cope with an increase in usage.	2
Support, but savings won't be realised this year - Due to likely termination costs with the existing provider this proposal is unlikely to deliver the required level of savings in 2024/25 with the following financial year being more realistic.	1
People don't use sites often and so can travel further.	1
Alsager residents are supportive, as long as Alsager HWRC stays open.	1
Support, as long as public transport to sites is improved.	1
Support, as long as the sites that stay open are open for longer.	1

Alternatives to closures	29
Reduce opening hours or days across all sites instead	5
Charge people to use these sites instead, perhaps a low fee such as £1 or £2 per visit would help keep sites open.	5
Monetise waste streams – Produce energy from waste.	4
Follow the Swedish model of collecting things for repair and reuse.	2
Encourage better recycling to reduce need for HWRCs.	2
Complete closure is the worst option, there needs to be a compromise.	2
Have a monthly auction to sell off stuff dumped at tips that is easily resaleable.	1
Look at Guildford HWRC as a model on how CEC site could be improved	1
Sub-contract the services to avoid the loss.	1
Sell the B&Q carpark you spent £21million purchasing in 2019.	1
Ensure only CEC residents are using sites.	1
Fund through local employers or fund raising.	1
Ask central government for more funding – MPs seem passionate about keeping the sites in election discussions.	1
Find savings elsewhere.	1

Other	8
Not enough information to give an opinion	4
Has an impact assessment been done for this proposal?	3
Comment on the decommissioning process: The proposed retained sites require a backlog of capital maintenance of hundreds of thousands of pounds which should be delivered first ahead of the proposed closures, as it is likely temporary closures will be needed at major HWRC sites. Ideally each of the retained sites would be upgraded on a phased basis ahead of decommissioning other sites so they are to cope with additional traffic and tonnage throughput. Decommissioned sites are likely to attract	1

decommissioning costs as well as implications for third party staffing at the sites and waste tonnage implications.	
---	--

Comments about EC4: Fund libraries a different way

Survey respondents were asked if they had any comments to make about the proposal “EC4: Fund libraries a different way”.

In total, 331 comments made in response to this question have been analysed, and these comments have been grouped into categories and summarised below.

Opposition to the proposal	160
Don't cut library services, they are vital and should be protected. They should be accessible in all areas, and the service has already had too many cuts.	74
Libraries are safe, warm communal places, used by all walks of life.	32
Libraries are crucial for low income people and those accessing IT and online services.	26
Libraries are essential for learning, literacy and education.	23
Save money elsewhere, and stop wasting money as a council.	3
Cuts will increase health / education demands	2

Service transformation suggestions	94
Maximise revenue opportunities - Charge a membership fee, have a café, make them more of a community hub.	50
Combine other services into libraries.	19
Extend opening hours to allow more users to access them.	5
Reduce opening hours to suit demand.	5
Seek external funding, sponsorship or commercial partnerships.	4
House council staff in libraries.	3
Close libraries that are underused.	3
Close Alderley Edge library.	3
Close mobile library services.	2

Support for the proposal	34
Agree with external funding but not service cuts.	16
Support proposal as everything is available online anyway e.g. kindle etc.	10
General support for the proposal.	6
Support the proposal, depending on the 3rd parties involved.	2

Town and parish council comments	27
Town councils have already been asked for support and won't support anymore. They haven't got the money to provide more support.	10
Transfer libraries to Town Councils to run (for £1).	5
Don't transfer libraries to Town Councils to run.	4

Transfer to Town or Parish Councils would ultimately mean a charge to residents via the precept.	4
It would be deceitful to charge Parish Councils.	1
Parish councils could make more suitable use of them.	1
Town and Parish Councils have reserves that should be invested instead of saving.	1
Town and Parish Councils should contribute more.	1

Other comments	16
The proposal is unclear, more information about the proposal is needed.	9
This won't make a difference, and is short-sighted.	4
What about the library staff?	2
How does safeguarding fit in with libraries?	1

Comments about EC5: Reduce costs of street cleansing operations

Survey respondents were asked if they had any comments to make about the proposal "EC5: Reduce costs of street cleansing operations".

In total, 391 comments made in response to this question have been analysed, and these comments have been grouped into categories and summarised below.

Opposition to the proposal	330
CE streets are already a disgrace, we don't see any cleaning anyway, if street cleaning is reduced any more it would be non-existent.	137
We already have a problem with flooding and blocked drains, do not cut drainage services. Gutters need cleaning as it is.	52
It's important that towns and streets are well kept / kept clean.	31
This is a false economy, and will incur costs elsewhere e.g. flooding.	24
This proposal will attract more rubbish, there'll be no pride, people won't care.	23
If areas are not clean and tidy it will deter people and businesses.	15
The proposed savings are negligible.	15
This will attract rats and vermin and be hazardous for public health.	10
This is a statutory service.	8
What do we get for our Council Tax?	8
Unkept streets and roads causes problems with cars and pot holes.	7

Support for the proposal	22
Supportive of the proposal, as long as it means improving efficiencies and not scaling back.	22

Alternative service provision suggestions	27
Improve current service efficiencies: Improve bins, utilise cleaning machines you have, don't do grass cutting in winter.	8

Encourage residents to take more responsibility and take pride of their local areas.	7
Encourage and support voluntary groups to help clear litter.	6
Charge local businesses and takeaways to contribute to street cleaning.	3
Town Councils could contribute to fund this service.	3

More information needed	12
Does scaling back mean cuts?	6
Need more clarity, what are the implications?	4
What are the costs to change?	2

Comments about EC6: Reduce revenue impact of carbon reduction capital schemes

Survey respondents were asked if they had any comments to make about the proposal “EC6: Reduce revenue impact of carbon reduction capital schemes”.

In total, 130 comments made in response to this question have been analysed, and these comments have been grouped into categories and summarised below.

Support for the proposal	47
General support, it makes sense. It was a pointless project and a waste of time and money	31
This is important but not a priority if funds are low, it shouldn't be a driving priority for the council	11
Support prioritising funding, why hasn't this been done already. Get funding support from Government	5

Opposition to the proposal	29
Carbon reduction has to be a priority, we need to protect the environment, we have a climate emergency	23
If truly beneficial this project needs to continue, we still need to focus on decarbonisation, we need a climate adaptation strategy and to work towards greener targets	5
General opposition – This is not thought through	1

Further information required	36
What does this actually mean, what is 'capitalisation of the carbon team'. More information needed	27
Not sure, does this mean delay or not do it at all, how will this impact net zero targets? The council need to ensure this is deliverable ahead of cutting the budget	9

Suggestions	9
Encourage active travel, staff into the office, stop felling trees, place solar panels on buildings, consider community energy schemes etc	7

Work with voluntary organisations / private businesses	2
--	---

General / other comments	9
General negative comment, hypocrisy considering closure of HWRC sites which should be kept open	9

Comments about EC7: Increase garden waste charges to recover costs

Survey respondents were asked if they had any comments to make about the proposal “EC7: Increase garden waste charges to recover costs”.

In total, 352 comments made in response to this question have been analysed, and these comments have been grouped into categories and summarised below.

Opposition to the proposal	281
General opposition = Won't pay to use it, there is a lack of take-up as it is, the service should be free, charge increases achieve minimal savings	79
This will lead to fly tipping, burning of waste, waste placed in black bins, and will impact climate change	74
The charge is already higher than neighbouring councils, already too costly, we pay enough already. This will reduce the number of subscriptions, the council needs to reduce fee if they want to increase take-up	58
Only just started charging for green waste, haven't even met original subscription target, review uptake and impact first before increasing charges	38
Council Tax should cover it, this is a stealth tax. Already paid in 2023 council tax for the service.	32

Support for the proposal	29
Generally support the proposal, support a small increase and charging for actual costs. Would rather increased charges than reduced services. Base the charge on council tax bands	19
Encourage home composting, responsibility to take to the tip (need sufficient HWRC sites)	10

Suggestions	20
Introduce smaller bin for a cheaper rate, introduce alternate free of charge food waste pick up, reduce collection frequency, go back to one bin for all waste, remove bin altogether, promote garden bin sharing between neighbours	10
Save money in other areas, make efficiencies elsewhere	4
Only if service is guaranteed, service should be offered all year, consider pro-rate rata for part year collection	3
Price should be fixed for a few years	2
Work with neighbouring authorities to see if efficiencies can be made	1

Further information required	15
-------------------------------------	-----------

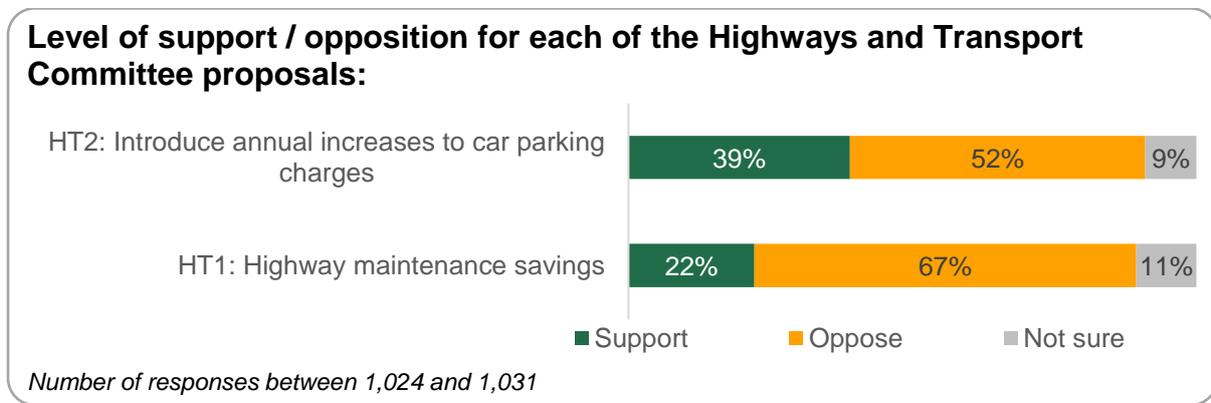
Not explained sufficiently, need more comms, how does food waste collection factor in?	7
Is it worth doing, will savings outweigh costs, how was the figure decided?	8
General / other comments	7
General negative comment	7

Highways & Transport Committee proposals

Net support or opposition for each of the Environment & Communities Committee proposals was:

- HT2: Introduce annual increases to car parking charges (-13% net opposition)
- HT1: Highway maintenance savings (-45% net opposition)

Levels of support and opposition for each of these proposals is shown in the chart below:



Comments about HT1: Highway maintenance savings

Survey respondents were asked if they had any comments to make about the proposal “HT1: Highway maintenance savings”.

In total, 540 comments made in response to this question have been analysed, and these comments have been grouped into categories and summarised below.

Opposition to the proposal – The service is already poor	262
The service and state of the roads generally is already poor. How can this be cut further, roads would become unsafe. The services needs more funding not less	146
Current issue with potholes inc. damage to cars, repeat repairs	53
Current issue with flooding due to blocked drains / gullies	42
Current issue with lack of green maintenance inc. weed control, tree maintenance, grass cutting	13
Rural areas are neglected	6
Current issue with lack of winter gritting	2
Opposition to the proposal – Roads should be a top priority / Future concerns	121

Roads need to be maintained for safety, a reduction in funding would lead to unsafe roads, with more accidents, worse potholes, flooding, overgrown areas & accessibility issues for people using wheelchairs/pushchairs	43
Highways should be a priority, service funding should not be reduced, they are critical to everyone. The council must fix potholes, empty gullies all year round, maintain verges, and maintain pavements	40
It will cost more money to fix issues than to keep them maintained in the first place, a reduction in funding will lead to increased complaints and claims for damage	28
Concern over untidy streets, crime, deteriorated areas, and the quality of environment	10

Suggestions	91
Improve equipment, management, quality of repairs (to save money in the long term). Bring the service back in house	66
Prioritise major roads, winter repairs & maintenance, and urgent repairs	8
Other suggestions: Reduce spending on CCTV, speed cameras and street lights instead; Charge new builds more; Work with volunteers & schools.	7
Improve public transport / active travel	5
Allocate money to Parish Councils to support, work with Parish Councils, work with local communities & volunteers	5

Support for the proposal	34
Support reduction in grass cutting, weed maintenance (especially in winter), more wild areas as long as safety is maintained	23
Support the need for a review generally as long as it doesn't increase the risk of flooding, that changes are safe, and it doesn't lead to a reduction in service	9
Support a reduction in winter maintenance	2

Further information required	15
What about the increase in government funding, get levelling up money, review s1206 spending	12
Not clear how savings will be achieved, where is the longevity in this	3

General / other comments	17
General negative, loss of faith, cultural shift needed, save money elsewhere	16
Spend needs to be fairly allocated across the borough	1

Comments about HT2: Introduce annual increases to car parking charges

Survey respondents were asked if they had any comments to make about the proposal “HT2: Introduce annual increases to car parking charges”.

In total, 373 comments made in response to this question have been analysed, and these comments have been grouped into categories and summarised below.

Opposition to the proposal	201
This will kill of towns and highstreets, deter people from towns, impact businesses and cause loss in business rates. Towns are dead as it is – the council needs to encourage more people into towns, not deter them	134
General opposition – This is a revenue raising con, prices shouldn't be increased, all car parks should be free, save money elsewhere	34
People will park in residential areas and side streets, illegally, instead of paying to park	17
Charges are already too high, residents are struggling financially as it is	16

Support for the proposal / support if	82
Only fair if all areas have parking charges, consistency is needed – Residents should pay the same across all areas	44
Parking is fairly cheap, support the proposal	14
Charges should increase in line with inflation, that sounds fair, small increases each year are ok, but not large increases	12
Council staff should have to pay car parking too	6
Depends on which car park, and on the proposed price increase	6

Suggestions	49
Car parking should be free for a period of time e.g. first 30 minutes free, 1-3 hours free, free after 3pm, reduced costs at weekends	13
Improve the transport network, encourage more active travel and improve bike storage	12
Reduced permits for residents and staff who live / work in town centres	10
Keep small village car parks free, health centre parking free, parking free for blue badge holders, further away car parks free	6
Are all car parks needed, could some of the land be sold. Ban parking in town centres apart from disabled parking	4
Introduce electric vehicle charging facilities and charge for this	2
Hand car parks over to Town Councils	2

Further information required	24
A balance needs to be struck, what is the cost impact vs. savings e.g. loss of business rates, cost of updating machines. Has an impact assessment been conducted?	19
Where does all the money go, what potential charges, how much will the increase be?	3
Need to see impact of introducing charges before increasing further	2

General / other comments	17
General negative comment	12
A blanket approach not suitable	3
Make sure parking / ticket machines are easy to use e.g. tap and go, and passes that can be used across car parks machines	2

Overview of feedback on the 10 extra budget saving ideas

Respondents completing the consultation survey were also asked to indicate whether they supported or opposed 10 extra budget saving ideas, which were suggested over and above the 29 MTFS proposals put forward.

Net levels of support or opposition² for the 10 extra budget savings ideas varied from 83% net support, down to -48% net opposition.

8 extra budget saving ideas with net support

8 of the 10 extra budget saving ideas received net support, from “Seek further Government support” with 83% net support, down to “Reduce support offered to businesses” with 9% net support.

Details of the 8 extra budget saving ideas with net support are given in the table below.

Budget saving ideas that received net support	% Support	% Oppose	% Not sure	No. survey responses	Net Support
Seek further Government support	89%	6%	5%	1026	83%
Increase advertising income, by advertising on bus stops, roundabouts and other council property	87%	8%	5%	1040	79%
Share more services with other councils	80%	9%	11%	1032	72%
Lower the amount of Council Tax support available from 100% to pre-covid levels. Pensioners will remain on the national scheme as they do currently	70%	14%	15%	1017	56%
Review net spending and subsidy for tourism and place marketing services	64%	20%	16%	1019	44%
Transfer buildings and activities to Town and Parish Councils	56%	20%	25%	1019	36%
Review net spending and subsidy for the Arts and Culture Budget	59%	26%	15%	1026	33%

² Net levels of support or opposition are calculated by subtracting the % of respondents that oppose a proposal, from the % that support a proposal. For example, if 76% of respondents support a budget proposal and 14% oppose it, the net level of support = 62%

Reduce funding for Demand Responsive transport services (FlexiLink and Go-Too bus services) - consider a range of options including simplifying routes, changing days/hours of service and revising fares paid by passengers	50%	33%	17%	1028	18%
Increase charges for council services to ensure service users pay full costs, without any subsidy from taxation	43%	34%	23%	1008	9%
Reduce support offered to businesses	42%	34%	24%	1019	9%

2 extra budget saving ideas with net opposition

2 of the 10 extra budget saving ideas received net opposition, and these included:

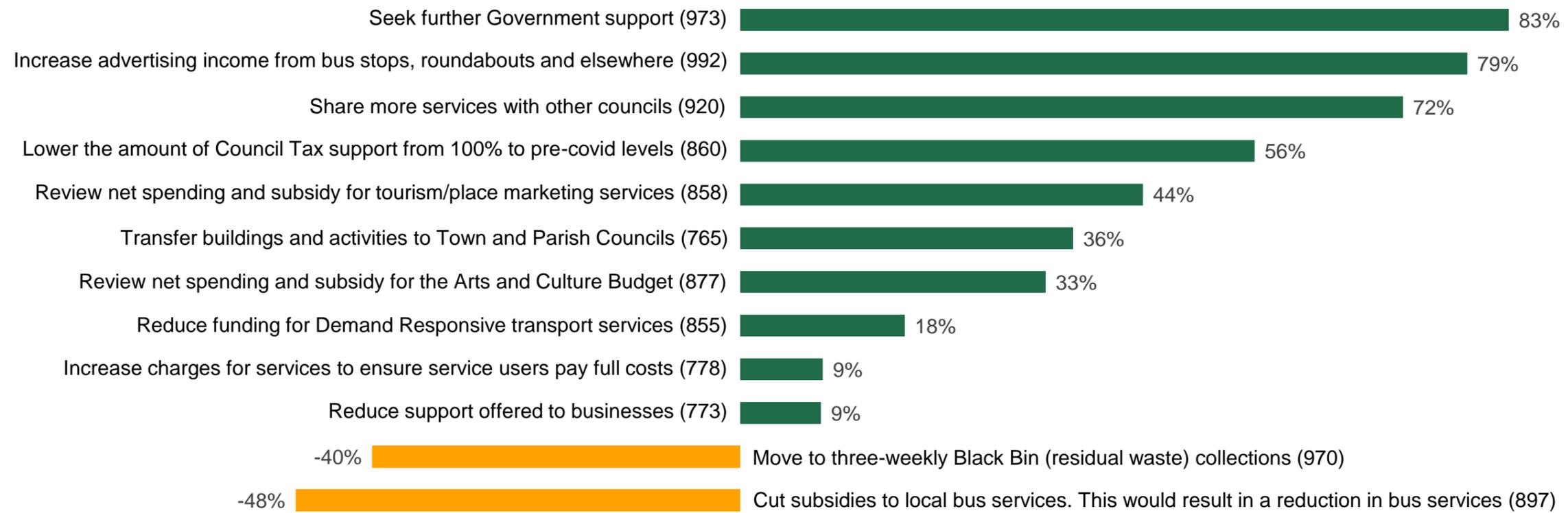
- Cut subsidies to local bus services. This would result in a reduction in bus services (-48% net opposition)
- Move to three-weekly Black Bin (residual waste) collections (-40% net opposition)

Details of the 2 extra budget saving ideas with net opposition are given in the table below.

Budget saving ideas that received net opposition	% Support	% Oppose	% Not sure	No. survey responses	Net Opposition
Cut subsidies to local bus services. This would result in a reduction in bus services	20%	68%	12%	1021	-48%
Move to three-weekly Black Bin (residual waste) collections	27%	67%	6%	1035	-40%

Net support minus opposition for each of the extra budget savings ideas in the Budget Consultation 2024:

Number of responses in brackets



Making budget savings internally

Survey respondents were asked if they felt there was anything else the council could be doing to save money or to generate extra income internally.

In total, 1,136 comments made in response to this question have been analysed, and these comments have been grouped into categories and summarised below.

Review staff and staff performance	434
Top level management – Review top level management and Councillor need, roles, performance, salaries, and value for money	181
Cut / reduce all expenses – All allowances, mileage and refreshments	84
Improve staff performance – Ensure staff are working the hours they should, working efficiently and are capable / meetings KPIs	78
Review staff pay and benefits – Freeze pay, restrict pay reviews, allow more annual leave to be purchased, reduce pension scheme contributions, review the redundancy threshold	49
Review staff numbers and hours – There are too many in some areas / teams, review the numbers, reduce hours, remove duplicity of roles	29
Offer early voluntary redundancy without reduced pension	8
Reduce staff costs – Have compacted hours or 4 day weeks	5
Be more efficient	257
Adopt more efficient ways of working – Have more Teams meetings, overhaul admin heavy tasks and processes, digitise, have meetings in council offices not off-site	64
Stop wasting money on: Unnecessary emails, meetings, licences, magazine and paper subscriptions, training and mobile phones	57
Stop wasting money on vanity projects and other projects such as HS2 and net zero	50
Reduce running costs - Allow staff to work from home, close unused offices, close offices on a Friday, close the 2nd floor of Macclesfield, close during school holidays	50
Reduce energy costs - Lighting, electricity, heating, recycling, re-use	29
Have more efficient use of building space, combine provisions into one place (e.g. children's centre and library)	7
Increase income, reduce spending	131
Generate more income - Rent out office space, generate private sector sponsorship/advertising, increase charges on services, sell services	48
Recover debts and enforce fines, collect unpaid fines, charges and Council Tax	25
Reduce spending - Reduce spending thresholds, the number of cardholders. Have stricter spending parameters.	25
Introduce parking charges - Charge equally across sites, have more pay & display	25

Control spending - Don't start projects until funds are in or other projects are finished	8
Review contractors and consultants	142
Review contractors - Review costs, performance, value for money. Have quality control	89
Review consultants and agency staff - Cut / reduce use of, train and use council staff to do the work	44
Bring more services in-house	9
High level ideas	92
Sell off council assets and land	33
Only spend on statutory services, give us what we pay for. Review spending on non-essential services	29
Regenerate town centres, attract more businesses	10
Hand over more services to Town and Parish Councils	7
Share procurement and services with neighbouring authorities	7
Merge with other councils	3
Lobby central government for more funding	3
Don't reduce staff recruitment or training	24
Do not freeze staff training, this is short sighted with longer term impacts and reduces morale	16
Do not freeze staff recruitment, this impacts on service and will lead to impacts later down the line	8
Council Tax comments	10
Increase council tax but have means tested Council Tax charge,	7
Do not increase Council Tax, we can't afford it	3
Engage more	7
Involve staff and ask frontline staff for ideas and suggestions	4
Have honest conversations with the public about the need for cuts	3
Other comments	39
SEND taxi and school transport provision - Review and find cost savings	12
Bin collections - Make more efficient, don't cut the service, reduce fly tipping, recycling facilities are needed	10
Benefits - Ensure the system is not abused	7
Stop staff working from home	6
Improve the consultation	4

Achieving a balanced budget in future

Survey respondents were asked if they any other ideas as to how the council could increase income or reduce spending to help achieve a balanced budget in future.

In total, 516 comments made in response to this question have been analysed, and these comments have been grouped into categories and summarised below.

High level comments	63
Lobby central government for more funding	19
Bigger picture / long term strategies	7
Provide for those most in need	7
Consider the longer term impacts of cuts	6
Look at other successful models / councils	6
Do not cut services or subsidies	6
Council Tax is poor value for money, we don't get much in return	4
Merge with Cheshire West	3
Think out of the box, think innovatively	3
Adopt S114 notice	1
Stop building new houses	1

Improve council efficiency	129
Stop wasting money on non essentials, focus on the basics, stop all capital expenditure	34
Work more efficiently, have online meetings	18
Better council management	17
Stop wasting money generally	12
Make energy saving comments e.g. turn lights off	12
Have a full review of spend versus value, get good accountants in to review finances and conduct an audit, employ commercial financial expertise	10
Simplify and review processes, reduce bureaucracy and red tape	10
Have a full review of services	9
Outsource some departments e.g. HR, Legal	3
Incentivise each department to look at better ways of working, to save target amount of £	2
Streamline / combine ICT	2

Staff & Councillor comments	110
Review performance and salaries of management, councillors and employees	53
Review and reduce staff numbers, merge jobs, remove duplication of roles, have a root and branch review of structure	28
Reduce allowances for councillors and management	11
Review pensions	8
Offer voluntary redundancy	3

No staff working from home	3
Freeze wages	2
Have more working from home, reduce the running costs of buildings	2

Generate more income	85
Lease office space, sell services	24
Improve town centres, attract more people, improve access to towns, improve public transport	11
Enforce fines	10
Increase parking charges	8
Means test tax payers, charges and subsidies, tax the wealthy more	8
Levy builders and developers to contribute more to communities / Obtain S106	7
Ensure everyone eligible is paying council tax, chase debtors	6
Get sponsorship and sell advertising	4
Attract more businesses, reduce business rates	3
Increase leisure charges	3
Raise the Council Tax precept by 1%	1

Save money	36
Sell assets	17
Encourage volunteering to help the community e.g. litter picking and hedge tidying	9
Transfer assets to Town and parish Councils	5
Stop spending money on Crewe	3
Stop subsidising businesses	2

Consultants	37
Stop using consultants	5
Stop contracting out, remove agency workers and the ad-hoc employed	10
Improve standard of work from contractors, get things right first time	14
Negotiate better contracts with providers, get better deals, use local providers	8

Specific proposal comments	45
Comments around SEND services / taxi use / save money here / review SEND budget	9
Comments about black bin collection / fly tipping	27
Comments around bus services	9

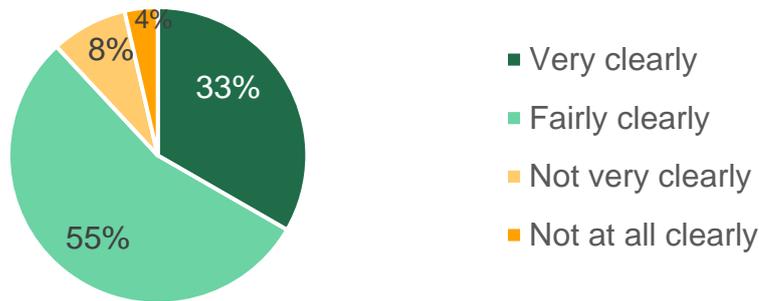
Comments on the consultation	11
Communicate to residents why there are cuts, be honest and transparent	6
Improve the consultation, the questions need improving and more information about proposals are needed	5

Final comments

Understanding of the council's current financial situation

88% of survey respondents felt they clearly understand the councils current financial situation.

Generally speaking, how clearly do you feel you understand the council's current financial situation?



Number of responses = 1,172

Final comments

Survey respondents were asked if they wanted to comment on any other aspect of this budget consultation, including detailing how the proposals may affect them.

In total, 351 comments made in response to this question have been analysed, and these comments have been grouped into categories and summarised below.

The council is not delivering, proposals affect the most vulnerable	131
Cheshire East Council not serving us, not delivering the essential services we need, not delivering value for money for the amount of Council Tax we pay.	46
Increases in charges or taxes will impact me, I already struggle to pay and couldn't afford to pay more	38
These proposals hit the most vulnerable and the most in need	32
Front line and grass roots staff have very low morale, these proposals affect them and put front line staff under immense pressure	10
Hard working people are being penalised	5
How has the council got in this mess	26
The council has gambled on projects that have cost the public, these are self inflicted mistakes which the council must learn from	14
What is the council spending money on? How has the council got into this mess? The council has plenty of money, where has it gone?	6

Make clear to residents the reasons for the cuts and for the government austerity cuts	6
--	---

Long term planning and the impact of proposals	42
These plans are short-sighted and not long term, council planning is too last minute and too late	14
Invest in towns, infrastructure, services and roads, make Cheshire East more attractive	10
Good health care and social care is vital and an essential service	8
These proposals will impact council services and the NHS further down the line if implemented. The proposals will have long term consequences and impacts on our community	6
The proposals do not set out the potential environmental impacts	2
The council should reduce overheads, but not at detriment to services	2

Suggestions for balancing the budget	84
Review senior management salaries, roles and value for money	18
Stop wasting money, have better control of spending	13
Reduce staff numbers, duplication, review staff performance, make sure staff are not abusing annual leave, have compressed hours, get back to working in the office	11
The council needs clear and effective leadership	9
Review contractor value for money, negotiate better deals, demand better quality of work	6
Seek more funding from central government	5
Do not ask Town and Parish Councils for more help	3
Focus on revenue generation	2
Sell assets	2
Look at other successful models, countries, councils	2
Only buy what you can afford, get money in before spending	2
Benefits, subsidies and Council Tax should be means tested	2
Target social services for savings as they use most of the budget	2
Take back ownership from private companies	1
Tax the rich	1
Recover debts	1
Invest in arts and culture, this is important for community wellbeing	1
Work with charity organisations for family support	1
Have more collaboration and work together with others (e.g. highways with parish councils)	1
Review benefits recipients and clamp down on fraudsters and cheats	1

Specific proposal comments	32
Car parking charges - Have free car parking to increase footfall, don't increase charges	7
Black bin comments	7
HS2 comments	7

SEND - School support should not be reduced, SEND support needs improving including the process	5
Oppose cuts to libraries and leisure services	3
Do not reduce bus services, residents and the elderly rely on this service	2
Reduce the number of recycling sites	1

The consultation	36
The questionnaire language was confusing and difficult to understand, it used too much jargon and needs plain language and better clarity	17
The council won't listen anyway or show they have listened, they've already made up mind and won't act on results	5
Consult with and listen to Cheshire residents	5
Happy consultation has taken place	3
How many residents have seen this consultation?	3
The council has already consulted on some of these proposals, and are wasting money surveying again on them	2
Proposals need buy in from everyone (town/parish councils/residents/diocese)	1

Conclusions

Frustration during a great period of change

The council is in the midst of one of the greatest periods of change, or transformations, in its history. This rate of change is being felt by stakeholders, with exasperation among many at the changes taking place, and at the perceived worsening performance of the council.

At the most extreme, some are stating the council is not fit for purpose and are calling for it to be abolished, and while this is a small proportion now, if the council continues to force through changes which residents are opposed to, and which seemingly make the borough a worse place to live in, those calls may only increase.

Stakeholders are willing to embrace savings

That said, stakeholders are not completely against change and budget savings – of the 39 proposals and money saving ideas put forward in this consultation, respondents provided net support for 80% of them (31 out of the 39).

This indicates a level of acceptance of the current financial situation and a willingness for stakeholders to agree to savings. The council should look to deliver these proposals and ideas with net support, but carefully so, as some of these proposals will impact on some of the most vulnerable in our community.

Opposition to key service cuts without alternatives being explored

There is strong opposition to proposals that impact key services, such as highways maintenance, street cleaning, Household Waste and Recycling Centres, and local bus services.

Respondents also seem strongly opposed to proposals when service reductions or site closures are put forward as the primary option, without alternative service delivery options being explored first.

It may be that respondents see service reductions and site closures as a last resort, and this may best be evidenced with the different levels of support for Library Service proposals in recent years – Last year's Library Service proposal set out service reductions in the form of reduced opening hours and the removal of the mobile library, and had net opposition of -58%, whereas this year's Library Service proposal set out to seek alternative funding for the service, explore partnership working and generate income to keep the service going, and this received net support of +24%.

Where the council is proposing to reduce key services, it must be extremely careful with how it does so, otherwise it may lose the goodwill of stakeholders and could destroy any remaining trust that remains between the council and its taxpayers. The council should consider carefully whether to proceed with any proposals strongly opposed by respondents in their current guise, and look to seek alternative solutions where possible.

Concern about the lack of long-term planning

Respondents are also concerned about the lack of holistic and long-term planning with budget saving proposals, including the compound effects of different proposals on each other.

For example they are concerned that the implementation of the green waste charge at the same time as the closure of Household Waste and Recycling Centres will lead to significant increases in fly tipping and in the amount of waste being deposited in black bins, which they suggested would cost the council more to deal with in the long run, than the savings will realise in the short term. They also feel these proposals will lead to a worsening local appearance of the borough, particularly at the same time as cuts to street cleaning, as well as impacts on the environment with people travelling further to dispose of waste.

There are strong calls from respondents for the introduction of impact assessments for proposals, and for improved long-term planning during this period of enormous change, to ensure that changes are in the best interest of the borough long-term.

Taking residents with us

Finally it will be essential for the council to take residents and stakeholders with it as best it can through this huge transformation, ensuring stakeholders are engaged in the co-design of services, rather than the council forcing through proposals without listening stakeholders.

Appendix 1 – Event feedback

329 budget consultation events were held during January 2024:

Event	Date	No. of attendees
Trade Union Budget Briefing	22 January 2024	7
Manager Share and Support Session 1	23 January 2024	150
Cheshire East Business Forum	24 January 2024	2
Manager Share and Support Session 2	25 January 2024	60
In The Know staff session	30 January 2024	85
Town and Parish Council Network	30 January 2024	25

During these meetings members of the council's Finance Team presented an overview of this year's budget consultation document. Below summarises the number of attendees at these events, and the feedback received. Feedback has been anonymised to protect the identity of individuals.

Trade Union Briefing 22/01/2024

Q – I know we are planning towards being self-sufficient. Understand cost increases but are the cuts and income generation proposals realistic? I.e. client contributions in ASC. Fees and charges increases? People don't want to pay more so will vote against these. C&F discretionary offer to SEND – key concerns around how much we are paying out in terms of packages / legal fees charged to LA's. Key area of concern around sharing services but we are now splitting East/West ICT with £5m cost? How is that saving money?

A – In terms of being self-supporting then people have to either receive less services or pay more through council tax and fees and charges. Discretionary services – we have not been charging as much as they cost (which we should have been doing). For example green waste: to provide that service free of charge is unrealistic. Same in ASC – statutory minimum but there are other items that are undercharged for, which we are subsidising. We have low Council Tax bills in Cheshire East. If you compare our band A to 90% of other North West Local Authorities then CEC is lower. But there aren't many Band As in Cheshire so overall more Council Tax is collected but this is due to proportion of larger houses, not having a higher charge. People are demanding more services now and we can't charge as much as we need to bridge the gap. Some proposals will be unpopular. Key is the discretionary element – we have no statutory duty to provide. We charge to lessen the gap.

Shared services: Where they create efficiencies we need to look at. Ideas welcome and conversations are being had. Need to generally share overheads. The cost model for the ICT shared service model was not working. The overheads between the two councils were not being funded by the activity so they got too much. Splitting

again was a better model. Cost of change will be a one off and will save money in the long run.

Q – ICT is costing more as moving forward towards split, the specialist areas will cost us more money. I am working with them on both East/West. ICT is spending more money as each side are choosing different ways to provide the systems.

A – costs are within budget for the project overall. In year income from projects are not where they need to be to fund the cost of the service. Contractors on high salaries were causing cost pressures. We need permanent staff for long term arrangements rather than having high cost short term measures for too long.

Q – £1m more NHB income than forecast which means more homes. But proposing to cut HWRC / move to three weekly collection etc. Plus £1m saving in ASDV running. And less street cleansing? How will this work with less HWRCs and more homes? Just spent £120k to track ANSA on green spaces progress (handheld devices). Challenging proposals that don't all stack up. Where will all the extra waste go? Green waste – 80% of borough not had a letter to say costs going up? People don't look at the consultation. 900 responses to date is nothing.

A – It is a better response rate than historically. We had 2,000 last year. It's enough responses to give the members an indication on proposals. ANSA – company structure requires frequent reviews to monitor performance. Will have to look at total cost of provision of service and overheads. Green waste – The letter has gone out and 50,000 have signed up to the scheme already. As more people realise that green bins are not being collected they will get in touch and will then know they have to pay if they want service, which should increase the sign up.

HLBCs will be shared in confidence with the committees, they can be shared with Trade Unions to help articulate each proposal and provide more detail.

Q – Re. bus services the consultation is looking at decreasing subsidies for them. But as a regular bus user I can say that the bus service is already expensive, infrequent and unreliable. One of the impacts will be people going out less and spending less in local economy – less money to the council. This proposal is counterproductive. We need to improve the service but without any subsidy the service will get worse, especially in rural areas. The cut to discretionary travel support for 16+ students with SEND – there is a danger that will exclude people with SEND even more from education.

A – In relation to buses, this is a good example of what we are talking about, we don't have to fund buses. Government grants come with match funding requirements so it is a double hit if we remove the expenditure completely. But we can't afford to run the services. We just can't keep subsidising through Council Tax so people will

need to pay more to keep the service running. It's an unpleasant situation but not a statutory requirement for Local Authorities to fund buses.

A – This session is not the place to be justifying the proposals individually. We do not want to cut services, but we don't have the money to run anything but statutory services. The statutory services alone are costing so much more now and that affects non statutory services. There is some cross party representation to central government on Local Authority current funding issues, this not just a local issue.

Q – This has a negative impact on staff also which I just wanted to highlight, it's not just residents. The less services we are providing means we can't help people. Will impact on local businesses also.

A – From a staff wellbeing perspective, we are not in a great place. The impact is on our residents but it's critical to think about our staff groups also. We have over 3,000 staff and some big challenging proposals in consultation which will have personal and professional impact. There is information on the website in terms of support available. Wherever possible we will look for savings that impact the least on our ability to deliver services.

Q – The Council Tax rise of 4.99%, just for clarity, is that just for CEC or does that include Fire/Police/T&PC too?

A – That's just for the CEC portion, other council and fire/police precepts are on top of that.

A – The material and this session was for clarity and to answer any general questions. If you wish to respond as a union we can accept in any format or use link on line. You have requested a similar meeting once all results are in. Draft results are being prepped now. Something is in the diary to run through the results once available. There is also public engagement through committee meetings. The presentation will be shared with this group.

Manager Share and Support Session 1 23/01/2024

All questions were asked through Teams chat during the meeting, and answered by the meeting host.

Q – What is DSG?

A – Dedicated Schools Grant

Q – Do we know approximately how much we have spent on HS2?

A – £8.6m of £11.2m (overall spend) is capital costs which is causing the pressure.

Q – Would we save money initially if we ceased the Gemini project which seems to be costing a lot of money in time, resources, splitting ICT equipment between east and west?

A – The Gemini project has future savings in 25-26 budgets onwards i.e. its an invest to save project. We can't stop it as the costs would be abortive and be charged to the revenue budget in year.

Q – With new properties come new children and we would need more schools or at least more school places etc.

A – Agreed.

Q – You said our Ear Marked Reserves were quite healthy, can any of those be released to help the current situation?

A – Some have been used in year so balances have gone down. Any more general/ringfenced EMRs are now are likely to go into the general fund balance to help with the overall overspend. Some are very specific so cannot be released for use in this way.

Q – What are the chances of getting compensation from Government over HS2?

A – Government might give us money for other projects in place of HS2 so not cash compensation. But we would have to spend money on other things we weren't doing. Government might say we can carry on to capitalise and pay off over time to spread the cost. Still not compensation. Politicians want to lobby for the cash. If government compensate CEC then others might follow and ask for compensation. Ultimately, we don't know what will happen yet.

Q – Budget Consultation document – the savings identified clearly aren't enough to bridge budget gap. Highways & Transport not balanced. Is that the same for other service areas?

A – Targets were set for each committee based on current spending and having to provide additional funding to Childrens Services due to really high price inflation. Targets gave money to Children and Families and meant other areas had to have savings targets. Achievement against targets: Adults & Health are about balanced and Children & Families with growth were balanced. Central over budget due to interest costs. Not far off in other services so a mixed bag. They were targets only and the deficit belongs to everybody.

Q – Centranet: CEBERT update page not updated since 20 Oct. Plans to update?

A – The page was updated at 12 noon today – the refresh date doesn't always update.

Q – Are there any In the Know sessions planned for staff.

A – The In The Know session will be similar to this session.

Q – Surely you know if S114 is likely and staff would like to know if they need to prepare for that.

A – In terms of a S114 “plan to commit illegal act”. So if you spent money illegally or if you are planning to do something illegal like putting together a package of measures that didn’t agree a robust balanced budget. So S114 cant be issued while we haven’t done anything illegal. It would help if we stopped calling it bankruptcy but one thing we can all do is stop calling it that as it will put suppliers off engaging with us. The council can’t technically go bankrupt. Even if we run out of money, the government will get a plan together to get us out of the situation. Please spread the word that we are not going “bankrupt”. Reiterate that to suppliers.

Q – Do all non-essential services stop when a S114 is issued? Staff feel worried if they provide a non-statutory service. Would we be at less risk of S114 if we hadn’t been a unitary? Central government give lots of very narrow prescriptive use ringfenced grants that we cant spend somewhere else or timeframes are really tight? Makes it really hard to plan without more flexibility.

A – Key question re statutory vs non. Very complicated situation and rules are very vague – never a simple conversation. But we aim for value for money at all times. Majority of councils in difficulty are LA’s responsible for social care. Smaller districts do not provide this service. Districts have also benefitted from higher business rates income generally. Frequently having conversations with government that these grants are not funding priority services or they do not always cover all the costs. Time consuming to bid for these things. Match funding is now not really possible due to lack of funds.

Q – What is the council doing about the large capital programme. What are we doing to put accountability on the programme, gateway reviews for some of the bigger schemes. Uncertainty around interest rates and inflation. Can we borrow better/cheaper?

A – We constantly report against Capital programme. Risk items are the ones that are unfunded. Daily review of Treasury Management and use advisors to get best investments via brokers. We are usually doing very short-term borrowing at low rates. But now interest rates are higher we are more exposed as we don’t have fixed borrowing (same as most other councils). Need as much scrutiny on capital spend as we have on revenue spending. The results don’t show up as easily as they are over a longer period. Inflation on construction costs have risen sharply. We need to restrict access to risk pots.

Q – What is happening with Bright Ideas submissions?

A – Responses are being gathered and allocated out to relevant Heads of Service for a response. The Comms team are looking at how to publish responses.

Q – Large figures can be overwhelming for people to understand. Budget managers only manage smaller budgets so difficult to know how to contribute. Would be good to see inclusion in service plan template – how can services avoid growth/generate income/make savings. That would be a good place to capture ideas.

A – It's about empowerment and personal responsibility. Don't always need permission to just do things that will make a difference however small. Helps to set the culture and value that nothing is wasted and delaying spending can make a difference.

Q – Have we got a target response rate for public consultation?

A – We never set a target. We've had almost 1,000 responses so far. We received 2,000 last year in total. CWAC conducted their budget consultation which lasted 2 months and only got 74 responses. It's not a high number out of residents for us but it's a meaningful response to enable members to get a feel for sentiment towards proposals. We would encourage all to respond to the survey.

Cheshire East Business Forum 24/01/2024

Q – When does the consultation end?

A – 28th January 2024. Elected members won't vote on budget until 27th February and representation through ward members can be made any time up to then.

Q – Going back a few years, we used to do budget consultation meetings. Will they be reintroduced to give more time?

A – We much prefer to tap into your meeting structure and present to those sessions. The consultation period used to be quite lengthy, but we didn't used to get as many responses as we do now. Last year we got an increased response over a shorter period of time. In future we aim to get back to having longer budget engagements with key stakeholders.

Manager Share and Support Session 2 25/01/2024

All questions were asked through Teams chat during the meeting, and answered by the meeting host.

Q – Have we seen a notable decline in Council Tax receipts due to the cost of living?

A – We are still hitting 99% collection rate over two years. The team are good at pointing to support or managing payments over a longer period. The Council Tax

Support scheme is more generous after being changed a couple of years ago which helps.

Q – Appreciate that difficult decisions need to be taken and the consultation items do not close the gap. On the further measures suggestions – “Review of Arts and Culture”. The team knew nothing about it until filling in the survey. Goes against consultation with staff/working together? Don’t know where it came from and no comms were issued. What does review mean? What is the scope/timescale? This sits outside the process of putting forward business cases? It also prompted partners to question the funding we provide and if it will cease. This should not have been named in a public document without engagement first.

A – This is why this proposal is at the end without a value. Every service could be on the list and reviewed. Suggestions come from members and officers. Review just means looking at every way to reduce the net expenditure on a particular service. The item would then be subject to a business case if it was to proceed and consultation with partners would then take place. Understand the comments and upset and will talk to senior management.

Q – HS2: We are not the only council affected I’m sure. Are we joining with others to lobby the government about getting monies back? What is the likelihood of compensation? Will it show in our accounts this year?

A – Essentially if the government give us compensation for our speculative spend on HS2 then it could lead to others wanting the same compensation. It is difficult for them to give us the money back but they appreciate the situation. Multiple government departments would have to agree. The Department for Transport have said they will put money into other schemes but that doesn’t help if they are new schemes that we haven’t already got in our budget, won’t save us any money. Most of our letters to government are unanswered so far so no decision made yet. We are fairly unique in terms of being actually part of the project and incurring costs. Yes, likely to appear in our accounts this year.

Q – Corporate Plan: We have been going out to consult on the new priorities. are they different priorities to what is in the budget consultation? How does that work in terms of affordability vs what people want? Residents want short term fixes rather than spending on longer term investments.

A – It is possible there will be a conflict of what we can afford vs what the residents want to happen. The financial position has developed much more dramatically over the past 3 months. We wouldn’t have known things were going to be quite so severe when we started the Corporate Plan consultations. We will always try to align spending against priorities. Members will have to make final decisions on priorities and what we can afford. Transformation projects / productivity plans where there is a budget gap – we will run out of reserves if we don’t do a transformation programme.

So next year we will have to achieve all business cases alongside setting up new things that will help the council to look different to close the gap longer term. Under S114, if something is value for money then it should be able to carry on (even if it is not statutory).

Q – DSG grant: Do you think government will take a look and realise its every council that has an overspend (partly due to increased educational requirements). Funding is therefore out of date?

A – The government don't want to just give away taxpayers money. They want an awful lot of data to review the position before any money is given out. The longer they can delay a decision on funding to enable them to gather evidence the better for them. Government need to look at why some councils don't have a problem and others do. Probably will chip away rather than a wholesale bail out for all. Emergency measures may come forward to fix some councils that are particularly affected. They created the Safety Valve scheme to look at the situation.

Q – Integration work with Health and Social Care – All partners are exceeding budgets within health, there is just not enough funding. What is your view on pooled budgets?

A – Generally supportive. It gives joint accountability so everyone tries to reduce costs. It's a good thing from a professional point of view as everyone is working to the same goal/ambition. Problems come if priorities are not aligned. Councils cannot roll deficits over but others can so it could become complicated.

In The Know staff session 30/01/2024

Q – On the Centranet home page there is the deficit tracker. £12.0m currently but you mentioned £13m? As you are doing more scrutiny are you finding savings but more costs too and therefore that's why the figure is static?

A – £12.0m is against the £13m previously so it's coming down slowly. It is a dynamic position and constantly changing but moving in the right direction.

A – Many Local Authorities are suffering financially. We are responsible for statutory services and have to achieve value for money. S114 is issued if council believes it has committed an illegal act or planning to perform an illegal act. The S151 officer then has to issue a S114 notice to full council. A plan then has to be drawn up to get out of that position, whatever that is. Not being able to balance the budget with income or reserves means the budget is planning to be unbalanced which is illegal so would trigger a S114. Council would then need a plan to resolve. Central government want lengthy conversations to try to avoid these notices as they are not necessarily helpful. To be clear - It is not bankruptcy. Local Authorities cannot go

bankrupt. It also affects customers and suppliers confidence so please avoid using the term.

Q – What is likelihood of a S114?

A – We are currently estimating to cover shortfalls from reserves so not an illegal unbalance budget. But need to re look at what we are spending money on as we cannot keep funding from reserves and need to put money back in reserves. Need to review all services to make sufficient changes to how we work and manage within resources.

Q – Growing number of councils in same position not just Cheshire East. We're talking to central government re safety valve, business rates etc. We are a robust council and well managed. Do you think the government are really listening to you and others re our reputation and this situation isn't of our making? Are they working with us to resolve?

A – Different parts of public sector have different rules. Central government don't have the requirement to balance every year. NHS can also carry deficits over to next year. Don't have to annually balance, they just have to have a plan to get out of the deficit. Frequently civil servants don't understand the need to balance the budget every year. We can't borrow to pay for social care etc. Some of the partner relationships we have we need to educate more so they understand why we have to stop spending. We have had consultation responses from partner services. We do probably need to work more closely to pool budgets etc and come up with other ways of working.

Q – Liked the donuts slides. You mentioned new grant for new house building. When new houses are built, we still need to provide the services for the new residents. Predicted spending – does that include the increased number of residents?

A – We try as much as we can to include additional spend i.e. waste services for number of new homes. This can be calculated and factored in. It is not as easy in other areas, we cannot predict social care usage for example. So Council Tax income and New Homes Bonus grant may be more than services needed or may be less. Income received doesn't always cover the growth.

Q – What benchmarking do we do in terms of spend? Is it proportionate with other Local Authorities?

A – We benchmark with other statistically near neighbour councils. But we have to take into account we are different in some ways. We do benchmark well and some of our costs are lower. But our aging population means we are spending more in Adult Social Care for example. This isn't really addressed in current government funding levels as it is mainly based on deprivation statistics. We need the delayed national Fair Funding review to happen to help population/aging increases to be recognised.

Service managers can use data to help understand the detail in their own areas and assist the challenge of looking at all services we provide.

Town and Parish Council network 30/01/2024

Q – New properties create demand. Not all properties are the same so what affect does that have? Larger houses? Smaller estates? How does more social housing affect the position?

A – Houses bring in different levels of council tax. Band D is an “average”. Band H is double. Band A is two thirds of a band D for example. That’s an instant variation. One person households pay 75% for example. Waste costs are easier to identify – one bin per property so that can be predicted and will be universal. Harder to predict if the resident might need social care for example. Could maybe tell by age profile of the estate. But you couldn’t predict if social housing might have higher social care needs compared to other housing. Older persons might cost more with day care etc. Children with special needs in larger households etc. Overarching point – more net Council Tax comes from larger properties.

Q – Birmingham example: Unless we can get more grants in from government then the national picture is unsustainable. What is the position across the nation?

A – The term is S114. Many Local Authorities are suffering financially. We are responsible for statutory services and have to achieve value for money. S114 is issued if council believes it has committed an illegal act or planning to perform an illegal act. The S151 officer then has to issue a S114 notice to full council. A plan then has to be drawn up to get out of that position, whatever that is. Not being able to balance the budget with income or reserves means the budget is planning to be unbalanced which is illegal so would trigger a S114. Council would then need a plan to resolve. Central government want lengthy conversations to try to avoid these notices as they are not necessarily helpful. To be clear it is not bankruptcy. Local Authorities cannot go bankrupt. It also affects customers and supplier confidence so please avoid using the term. Different councils are closer/further away from that position. Local Government Association – maybe 1 in 5 in medium term (2-3 years). Government is very conscious that many councils accumulated a lot of reserves over recent years. Trying to make sure all councils are efficient and not just sat on reserves. But broad-brush approach doesn’t work for low reserve authorities like us. Secretary of State not changing mind on levels of funding for LA’s. Local Government Finance Settlement was set for 2 years so they are clear intentions. Inflation and interest rates having huge impact on Local Government. S114 would mean going down to statutory services and value for money only where appropriate.

Q – Last year there was £20m of unrecovered council tax. What steps are being taken to cover that? That could replace the deficit.

A – The Council Tax collection rate is around 99% over 2 years. The amount of money collected in total per annum is around £280m, so any shortfall is material in terms of value. We are at the top end of collection compared to other councils. We have good performance and efforts to collect, and the team is very highly rated. We don't stop collecting unless money is written off for various reasons e.g. death. Attachment orders even for very low sums. But still we do more – second or third placement companies to track people down wherever possible.

Q – In last year's budget, there was a proposal to close of Stanley Centre. Cost of consultation even though decision already made to close it at full council?

A – When we build a budget there is an element of risk in making assumptions. But if post budget setting full consultation changes that decision, then we would have to plug that gap with something else or reserves. Some items are subject to consultation even if approved through full Council. You can't assume no budget changes and can't assume it will definitely happen so it's a difficult position.

Q – The conservative group have put forward an alternative budget? One of the issues is the influence Tatton Park have on the budget.

A – Any Councillor can put forward proposals. Can't really comment on Tatton issue.

Q – Surprised given number of developments in Cheshire East so far that very little Council Tax has been raised from those properties? As soon as new developments are available for purchase, I would expect people to pay Council Tax. I think the income seems low from them.

A – Council Tax properties are charged based on banding projections from 1991. Council Tax is instant from the day the resident moves in. Even completion to a certain specification would prompt a bill to the developer as though they were occupied.

Q – One of our concerns is around road repairs in the area. Questioned new tarmac laid but then the roads not sealed. No direct feedback on why not as water egress would happen and damage the surface. Is the council monitoring and looking for value for money feedback on work carried out by contractors.

A – I can't comment on specifics on road surfaces, policies on what is required to be repaired in timeframes can vary the quality of the work. May not have time for the full repair. Material amount of contract negotiation goes on. Highways commissioned review of the quality of repair to check for improvements in repairs standard.

Q – We recognise the position. We are being brought in more significantly as being asked for more contributions to fill gaps in service levels. This is making it difficult. During next year can we discuss earlier what the likely issues are so we can plan. We have the same budget process, just smaller numbers. We need to talk to you

much earlier so we can help (larger towns specifically involved). You have £61m in earmarked reserves. That's quite a lot? How much is really committed and what is in scope to use?

A – Very good point and definitely need to look at earlier engagement. With Ear Marked Reserves we know we are going to spend about half this year, next year's deficit will take up another half so then after HS2 costs there won't be much left at all by the end of next year.

Q – Cheshire East Council owns quite a lot of assets. Assume you are looking at selling off assets?

A – A review is already happening through the estate rationalisation programme. We had 5 main offices: Cledford in Middlewich, Westfields in Sandbach, Municipal Buildings in Crewe, Delamere House in Crewe, and Macclesfield Town Hall. Rear offices on the Municipal Buildings are being repurposed as a technology information centre (privately owned). Cledford House is being relocated out. Corporate Policy Committee in November decided to close Westfields. So only 2 main offices left. Farms – question in consultation document asking opinion re. keep or disposal. Environment and Communities committee are looking at the future of the farms estates. It is worth money but also brings in financial returns. We need to look at the strategic purpose for every asset to justify holding each asset. Balance Sheet value of farms is c.£35m (but can't access in one go as tenanted). Estimated cost of Westfields project – £2m realised from repurpose of that asset, saving on asset per annum would be £0.5m. Sale would make one off income. Environment and Communities Committee will look at this.

Q – If the cost of Council Tax doesn't cover the cost of services would the council hold off on new developments?

A – This is no blocker to development. Development of new homes is linked to the local plan – numbers are assigned in that document. Needs to be addressed by fair funding review / business rates review to address what funding is linked to local taxation. Highly political to stall housing development as cost vs need of houses for people.

Q – Middlewich bypass: Latest figure for budget for the scheme is £102m? I am an engineer and built a few roads, I can't see how that scheme costs that much as construction costs should be around £50m. Land can't be costing that much. So what is it all being spent on. Are there any recoverable costs?

A – Costs won't be recoverable other than parcels of land for holding building equipment etc. Costs breakdown will all be available online. We will get some details.

Q – What is the current value of Cheshire East investments.

A – There are different ways to assess investments. Investment property must make a return/must be leased out, the value is around £25m (B&Q majority). Investments linked to loans/shares (e.g. Alderley Park) not material and some we couldn't sell as option to sell in future (£5m-10m). Cash balances that we temporarily invest. Cash flow that we don't just leave to sit there but will be spent on services so needs to be available (£40m on average).

Q – £20m of uncollected Council Tax. Has Cheshire East factored in the situation getting worse? Impact of news of potential S114 / services being reduced, a larger number of people may withhold if lower service levels.

A – No we haven't factored that in, we have very high collection rates. Even when we deferred payments during Covid, the money still came in. We need to avoid the term bankruptcy as Local Authorities cannot go bankrupt, we do not want suppliers to think they won't get paid.

Q – Auditors haven't signed off last few years accounts. Services in response to local taxpayers – don't think that's a good thing that they haven't been signed off.

A – Just a google of Cheshire East shows up a holding up of audit certificates due to investigations outstanding. The latest accounts are delayed due to national issues of assets and pension valuation / depreciation. This is a national issue, not a local issue. Last accounts is lack of audit capacity to meet the deadline of the accounts sign off. Again, this is a national issue. We are actually further ahead in that regard. A&GC have not identified any issues with our statements of accounts.

Q – Pupil premium. Is there going to be a cut and any chance free school meals will end?

A – Pupil premium is national funding within Dedicated Schools Grant. Uplifted with inflation and is passed on in full to schools. Free School Meals are funded by government and have not seen any intention about them being stopped. There is a proposal in budget consultation around reducing subsidy for paid school meals.

Q – The highways budget over last three years, how many times has it been reduced and by how much?

A – We would have to provide the figures. It is complicated by receiving capital funding, it is not all revenue funding. Will reply in writing.

Q – Maintaining adopted highway. Written to Edward Timpson. Maintenance in Cheshire East is broken due to lack of funding. Hard to legally maintain roads in parish rural areas. Maintenance is not there for repairs and safety funding. We have an insignificant parish budget to be able to contribute. Are you going to try to bring forward more budget for highways?

A – In current circumstances, one way to increase/maintain service is to charge users through carpark charges, lane rental schemes, stopping up orders for events for organisations that hold events etc. Second way is through more efficient use of money and use capital money to patch roads. All are being tried but lobbying government for fairer settlement is appropriate and funding formula recognises deprivation rather than road length for example. Government tends to give one off capital funding rather than recurring revenue money. We have received increased pothole money and government have committed to keeping that going. But need a bigger pie in terms of overall funding for highways.

Q – Could you tell us what consideration Cheshire East have given to using one of the options available to increase the level of Council Tax to raise the necessary gap in revenue and if rejected why?

A – We can go to referendum to ask the public if they want to go above referendum level. Public usually say no to Council Tax increases and the cost of running a referendum is about £700k and with a no answer that's very costly. Secretary of State can allow higher increase, and this has happened for those Local Authorities that are in a severe emergency situation.

Q – Are you subject to restrictions on use of capital receipts for capital expenditure? E.g. does sale of assets actually help with the operational budget challenges?

A – If we sell farms estate for example, capital receipts can't be used for day to day spend. Borrowing/selling assets is long term money so restrictions on capital receipts. But they can fund one off costs of transformation.

Q – How can we still respond to the consultation given it has closed and up to what date please?

A – You can feed back through all Councillors right up to council meeting on 27th February 2024.

Appendix 2 – Public comment, email and letter feedback

In total 44 public comments, emails and letters were received as part of this consultation, and this included 25 emails, 15 public comments and 4 letters.

The comments made in the public comments, emails and letters are summarised in the table below, with the 9 most detailed responses and those received on behalf of organisations published further down.

Summary of content	No. of comments
Opposition to proposal EC3: Reduce costs of waste disposal and number of HWRCs	13
Opposition to proposal EC4: Fund libraries in a different way	4
Opposition to proposal HT2: Introduce annual increases to car parking charges	3
Opposition to proposal CP3: Reduce election costs and increase charges where possible.	2
Opposition to proposal EC7: Increase garden waste charges to recover costs	1
Opposition to proposal HT1: Highway maintenance savings. States the roads are currently in a very bad state as it is.	1
Opposition to the proposal EC6: Reduce revenue impact of carbon reduction capital schemes	1
Comments on proposal EC4: Fund libraries in a different way. Suggests the council looks at alternative delivery models, such as those used by Derbyshire council, Staffordshire council, Midlands Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust. Suggests the council refers to the governments library good practice toolkit. Suggests making the service more efficient by reducing management and reviewing pay scales.	1
Alternative money saving ideas including: Selling the B&Q land in Crewe; Cancelling the Poynton Pool project; Reducing council employee wages; Reducing the number of Directors and Heads of Service; Increasing Council Tax by more than 4.99%; Improving council efficiency; Liaising with central government for more funding; Increasing charges for services; review the use of outside contractors;	11
Improve council efficiency, stop wasting money. Better scrutiny of council finances is needed. Find more savings from the Children and Families budget.	4
Concerns about the consultation including: Not enough information provided to give a response; feels proposals could be made clearer; feels the council needs to listen to feedback more.	3
Conduct a staffing review and skills audit. The council must take care when reducing jobs, ensuring vital skills are not lost.	2

Abolish Cheshire East Council, it is not fit for purpose, bring back smaller local councils for local people.	1
Alleged benefits fraud among parents of school children who claim free school meals.	1
Comments on the Economy and Growth Committee statement that “subsidy reductions to Tatton Park and the Visitor Centre operating model are already set to deliver savings for 2024/25 of £0.07m”. States the National Trust is keen to work alongside CEC to ensure Tatton’s finances are sustainable. Will continue to work with CEC to enable new forms of investment and revenue where possible.	1
Concerns around HS2 and the impacts on council finances	1
Everybody Health and Leisure Chief Executive comments on the budget consultation process and proposals, and how they clash with the recent Strategic Leisure review Consultation. Lists numerous queries regarding proposal EC2: Strategic Leisure Review (Stage 2), including that the savings target included for 2024 to 2025 is unachievable by April 2024. Wishes to proactively help find solutions, however, increasingly concerned about the short term changes being proposed. States it imperative that the council clarifies the position as soon as possible so that EHL can set its own budget and make changes as required as soon as possible.	1
General opposition to cuts	1
Improve waste collection services.	1
Market supplier comments regarding Supported Living Provider Fees/Rates for 2024/25 - Suggests there is a significant risk of market failure and contract hand-back in the Supported Living sector.	1
Opposed to ever increasing Council Taxes.	1
Rent out assets rather than selling them, to generate more long term income.	1
The Chief Executive and senior staff are paid too much.	1
The council delivers services very badly	1
The council is facing difficult decisions due to government cuts.	1
The council must think longer term, and not short term.	1
The council needs to come out of the Cheshire Pension Fund (CPF).	1
We're all in this together and need to make difficult decisions based on the information provided.	1

Published response #1

From: Anonymous respondent

Date received: 13 January 2024

Format: Email

Summary of content: Extremely detailed consultation response. Concerns about the consultation: Feels the council needs to listen to feedback more. Suggests the

council needs to come out of the Cheshire Pension Fund (CPF). Suggests a staffing review is conducted, and that staff numbers must be reduced carefully. Suggests there needs to be better scrutiny of council finances. Suggests renting out assets rather than selling them, to generate more long-term income. Suggests finding saving from the Children and Families budget. Suggests a review the use of outside contractors. Suggests improving waste collection services. Opposed to ever increasing Council Tax. Suggests improving council efficiency. Suggests the council must think longer term, and not short term.

Full content:

Dear Sir/Madam,

With regard to the above consultation. I started to respond to the online survey but after the first page found that there wasn't enough information to be able to make observations/comments in order to tick the "support, Oppose, Not Sure radials" and have therefore set out my thoughts below.

Employer Pension Contributions

Firstly, you need to come out of the Cheshire Pension Fund (CPF). Employer contributions in the private sector are 3%. The CPF is currently 21.8%. This is the very first thing you need to be looking at. Residents are being asked to pay for services they are not getting whilst staff are getting very good pensions. I'm sure there will be a lot of resistance, but this is an overly generous pension contribution which needs drastically reducing.

Staffing Levels

Undertaking a review of staffing levels to better understand who is required to carry out what tasks. You are closing down services left right and centre but so therefore staffing levels (and associated costs should be reduced).

Financial Accounts

You don't appear to have submitted an audited set of accounts for 2 years! If this were a private company you would be in serious trouble.

I would suggest an independent advisor is brought in to review your accounts and offer suggestions as to what can be done for less whilst retaining the services for residents.

You also need to tell residents what your actual debt levels are. You mention having a balanced budget. A balanced budget means to most people, retaining the services and having the costs accounted for. Whereas in your eyes a balanced budget

appears to mean to increase costs for everything and from recent “consultations” remove facilities from the north and spend it on the south.

I'm also not sure how, when HS2 hasn't been coming to the area, you feel fit to blame the Government for spending £11m? What have you spent this on especially as it wasn't even due to be extended here for another 10 years?

There needs to be better scrutiny of finances by members.

Assets

You can only sell Westfields once. If you own it, why don't you rent it out, thus securing an income in perpetuity?

Alternatively, why don't you look at converting it into accommodation? You mention pressures on housing from asylum seekers, surely this would prove more financially viable over the longer term.

Children & Families

If the pressures are on Children and Families budget, then you need to understand if there are ways to save monies that way. For example, are you paying increased costs for sending pupils out of area? If so, you should be looking at longer term solutions and thinking strategically such as building SEN schools within CE. Whilst you may be upfront costs in building a new school there are monies available from the DfE. Unfortunately, the lack of information given in this section of the consultation meant I couldn't determine how the proposed savings were going to be made or who would be impacted.

Outside Contractors

You need to review your contracts with sub-contractors, in particular roads maintenance. The roads are an absolute disgrace in this county. You report potholes and they never seem to be filled in. When they are, they are to such a poor standard that they degrade almost instantly resulting in another repair. This means that the contractor is being paid twice for the same job and costing residents more money. If it was done properly the first time round they wouldn't be paid twice.

Costs for works carried out by your contractors are above the market rate (as a Town Councillor and Quantity Surveyor I have found this when we have had to seek costs for such things as installing a bike stand). These need to be reviewed. Where you have internal contractors such as ANSA are you sure that these costs are competitive? Are you paying a dividend or premium to use them?

Refuse Services

You have recently introduced (despite overwhelming opposition from residents) a green bin tax. Aside from this I found out that the north of the borough have three bins (Black, Silver & Green) whereas a colleague in Nantwich has 4 with two separate bins for paper and bottles/tins. Surely this is more expensive to collect and further, why are there different systems within the same county?

Why don't you look at how often bins are collected. For example, remove the green bin tax and collect the green and black bins once a month removing the green bin collection from say November to February. The grey bin is always full but the green and black could last a month between collections.

Closing down waste disposal sites will result in more fly tipping. Aside from the impact on the environment from more people having to drive greater distances, I would suggest that this will cost more than you save.

Council Tax Increases

Council tax appears to constantly increase but services are reduced or removed. I cannot support an increase in the council tax without the Council undergoing a financial audit. With all the new housing built comes more council tax. Where is this going? I would also reduce council tax support back to pre-covid levels.

Efficiency

Be more efficient. In the private sector decisions are made fairly quickly. You (like most government organisations) spend a lot of time and resources on making decisions which could have been made and actioned a lot quicker.

For example, this is yet another consultation on how we think you can do things. Aside from the time taken for residents to respond, it takes staff time to prepare and review these. The questions in this survey have already been answered in other consultations. Very inefficient!

Listen

You hold these costly consultations and then appear to ignore the results. Don't!

In Poynton you are proposing the works to Poynton Pool which will cost millions. The works in the opinion of a number of experts are not required to the extent proposed. Listen to people and explore alternative solutions which may be more cost effective and less damaging to the environment. By doing so you may be able to make a saving here.

Finally, don't think short term. Think strategically and long term. Work with partners such as the NHS. Your recent leisure centre consultation is a prime example of this. You are looking at savings, whilst not looking at the longer-term picture. Closing

down services will remove facilities for the old and young to attend, add to the obesity crisis and add to strain on the NHS resulting in more monies needing to be spent on tackling health issues later.

These are just some of the suggestions but without detailed accounts and understanding how various departments operate it is difficult to come up with other suggestions.

Kind Regards

Published response #2

From: Steve Nichols (Rossendale Trust), Ian Pritchard (Alternative Futures Group), and Jeff Dawson FIC (1st Enable Ltd)

Date received: 12 January 2024

Format: PDF letter

Summary of content: Detailed budget consultation response regarding Supported Living Provider Fees/Rates for 2024/25. Suggests there is a significant risk of market failure and contract hand-back in the Supported Living sector.

Full content:

To:
Helen Charlesworth-May (Executive Director Adults, Health & Integration)
Councillor Jill Rhodes (Chair Adults & Health Committee)

Cheshire East Council
Westfields c/o Municipal Buildings
Earle Street
Crewe
CW1 2BJ

12th January 2024

Sent by email

Cheshire East - Supported Living Provider Fees/Rates for 2024/25

Dear Helen and Jill,

We write to you as a united and majority group of Supported Living Providers for Cheshire East Council. Together, we support a significant share of Cheshire East vulnerable residents with a learning disability or chronic mental health condition that are supported in their own tenancies within the locality.

In preparation, of the Council setting Supported Living provider rates for 2024/25 we would like to set out our combined position, expectations and offer of support, that will enable providers to continue to provide high quality, safe, and person-centred services to vulnerable residents in Cheshire East for the long term.

With provider costs further increasing this year due to a 10% increase in both Real Living Wage and National Living Wage, high levels of inflation throughout the year, and, persisting workforce challenges, we are concerned with the viability of our sector and the quality of provision of Supported Living services for the vulnerable residents of Cheshire East.

We highlight these significant risks to you in preparation of the Council setting its budgets and social care provider fees for 2024/25. This letter should form part of any provider consultation and feedback process and we would kindly request that its content is openly shared and discussed with all members of the Council so that they are fully aware of the seriousness of these issues when decision-making.

We believe there is a significant risk of market failure and contract hand-back in the Supported Living sector should the Council continue with a strategy of persistent provider under-funding for this forthcoming year.

1. Council Financial Situation

We are fully aware of the financial and Government funding challenges that Cheshire East Council is currently facing and we acknowledge this makes funding of statutory social care services incredibly difficult.

We note that in 2023/24 the Council received £19.4m as part of your social care grant determination and £8.7m from the Better Care Fund to support (in part) ensuring the provider market was supported. The Council also received a further £6.8m in Market Sustainability and Improvement funding to improve provider rates and workforce retention. The Council used the majority of these funds to support provider funding improvements in Elderly Care services. Legacy under-funding in other areas of social care was not addressed (e.g. Supported Living).

We are aware that the Councils proposed social care grant funding for 2024/25 is likely to be in the region of £22.6, an increase of £3.2m (16.5%), noting equalisation requirements. We are also aware that the Government has committed to funding further increases in the Market Sustainability and Improvement Fund and the Workforce component fund. Previously the funding received by Cheshire East has been disproportionately spent to address market sustainability and workforce retention issues in the Elderly care sector. We strongly believe the time is now for the Council to use a higher proportion of these funds to address the unfairness, instability and risk of the Disability Supported Living sector. Funding increases are urgently required to address legacy underfunding of providers and enable market and workforce equity with that paid for Elderly Care home and Domiciliary care services.

2. Supported Living Fees

It is a matter of record that Cheshire East has been the lowest and poorest payer of Supported Living fees amongst all of its North West and ICB comparators for over 10 years. In the last 5 years the Council has twice provided an unacceptable 0% (nil) annual uplift in fees for Supported Living providers despite significant rises in National Living Wage (NLW) costs and inflation for providers.

This has resulted in a significant legacy problem in Cheshire East with Supported Living fees being the lowest in the region and significantly below a sustainable market level for providers. All Cheshire East Supported Living providers are in some form subsidising their services from their reserves, almost all organisations are making an operating loss.

For 2023/24, the Councils Supported Living day fee of £17.50 per hour is £1.86 (10.5%) behind that of Cheshire West and Chester Council, and £2.10 (12%) behind Wirral, to provide just two local examples. Furthermore, your Waking Night rate of £10.27 per hour does not even cover the National Living Wage pay rate for a care worker of £10.42 per hour, excluding employer on-costs, provider overhead costs and a return on operations. Your 9 hour Sleep-in rate of £85.06 is also significantly below market rates and thus does not attract care workers to provide this vital night time service.

The Councils strategy and fee position is therefore extremely destabilising of the provider market, highly unethical and unreasonable in its application, and, in our view a breach of the spirit, principles and various statutory terms of the Care Act (2014).

3. Fair Cost of Care

We are aware as providers that in 2021/22 the Council completed a Fair cost of Care exercise for Care Home and Domiciliary Care Services. Alongside this the Council also reviewed Supported Living provider data, however, a fair cost of care exercise for Supported Living fees was never published. We would welcome the Council sharing this with providers.

We note that following the Fair Cost of Care exercise the Council provided significant uplifts to both Care Home and Domiciliary Care service fees during 2023/24, whereas Supported Living fees received a much lower uplift, and from a much lower legacy fee base.

Domiciliary Care currently has rates of £22.50 per hour (some as high as £24.50 per hour). Compare this to Supported Living at £17.50 per hour in the day and £10.27 per hour at night. There are minimal differences in the activity/costs of provision of Domiciliary and Supported Living services, the only difference being that of travel time and travel expenses. According to the Councils fair cost of care data, travel time and expenses in Domiciliary Care accounts for only £1.89 of the total fee cost. This would mean that an equivalent rate for

Supported Living should be at least (£22.50-£1.89) £20.61. This means a current shortfall of (£20.61-£17.50) £3.11 per hour in the Supported Living hourly rate. **This outlines the legacy shortfall.**

4. Two-tier Market Funding Risks

In the Councils Market Sustainability plan, under the section relating to "Wider impact on services outside of scope" your plan states the following risks to the market; *"The impact of uplifting rates for Domiciliary care to the cost of care has implications for other types of care which sit outside the scope of the Market Sustainability Plan such as Direct Payments, Complex Care, Supported Living and Rapid Response... fee changes in one area can have a direct impact on the other due to linkages in the recruitment market".*

We must point out that this identified risk has been realised for providers of Supported Living, with significant attraction and retention issues in all our workforces. As a Supported Living provider group we are all reporting higher (than pre-pandemic) vacancy rates and agency usage. A key driver for this is that Care Home and Domiciliary providers are able to offer improved pay and contractual terms to workers due to their improved funding levels. Care worker pay in Care Homes and Domiciliary care is typically at Real Living Wage levels (£10.90/£11 per hour 2023/24) as opposed to Supported Living services at National Living Wage levels (£10.42 per hour 2023/24).

The result of this is to unfairly unbalance and destabilise the provider market as care workers from National Living Wage paying Supported Living providers leave and move to that of (higher) Real Living Wage paying Care homes and Domiciliary care providers. The Council in its actions has effectively destabilised the local social care market and effectively created a two tier care workforce in Cheshire East. Care workers in Supported Living feel highly under-valued by the Council which is why we see high levels of increased workforce churn and higher vacancy rates. The ultimate victims of this strategy are the people supported who suffer with the quality, continuity and familiarity of care issues of an underfunded, underpaid and under-valued workforce.

The attraction and retention of care workers to Cheshire East Supported Living services at **National Living Wage levels** remains an extremely difficult and almost impossible task.

5. Subsidisation, Inequality and Discriminatory Risks

In order to maintain safe and effective levels of care and support, many Supported Living providers are having to subsidise the Council fees in order to pay Real Living Wage to attract and retain experienced care workers. This is not a sustainable situation as providers should not be using their own funds to subsidising public services. It is also likely, for Charities, to be a breach of the Charities Act (2022) to openly subsidise public statutory services.

Furthermore, the two tier market also creates a significant discriminatory risk for the Council as providers of Supported Living (typically supporting people with a Learning Disability or chronic Mental Health condition) are unable to provide the workforce continuity, high quality and safe services that Care Homes and Domiciliary Care (typically supporting Elderly people) now can. We would strongly advise the Council to undertake an Equality Impact Assessment and legal advice to identify any potential risks in relation to this policy/strategy.

The Council are reminded of their duties under the Care Act (2014) guidance and potential breaches of the Equality Act by creating a two tier, discriminatory market. Section 4.25 – *"When arranging services themselves, local authorities must ensure their commissioning practices and the services delivered on their behalf comply with the requirements of the*

Equality Act 2010, and do not discriminate against people with protected characteristics; this should include monitoring delivery against the requirements of that Act."

6. Care Act (2014)

We note the Councils comments in your Market Sustainability Plan Introduction as follows: *"The Council acknowledges its duties under the Care Act 2014. However, these cannot be viewed in isolation from other pressures on local authority resources, the duty on all Councils to deliver a balanced budget and the duty to obtain value for money as referenced in sections 4.27, 4.60 and 4.61 of the Care and support statutory guidance"*.

Whilst recognising the challenges of overall Council budgeting and spending, we must point out the other relevant section of the Care Act (2014) Care and Support Statutory Guidance which have been ignored and not quoted in the Market Sustainability Plan, namely:

4.30 When commissioning services, local authorities should assure themselves and have evidence that service providers deliver services through staff remunerated so as to retain an effective workforce. Remuneration must be at least sufficient to comply with the national minimum wage legislation for hourly pay or equivalent salary.

4.31 When commissioning services, local authorities should assure themselves and have evidence that contract terms, conditions and fee levels for care and support services are appropriate to provide the delivery of the agreed care packages with agreed quality of care. This should support and promote the wellbeing of people who receive care and support, and allow for the service provider ability to meet statutory obligations to pay at least the national minimum wage and provide effective training and development of staff. It should also allow retention of staff commensurate with delivering services to the agreed quality, and encourage innovation and improvement. Local authorities should have regard to guidance on minimum fee levels necessary to provide this assurance, taking account of the local economic environment. This assurance should understand that reasonable fee levels allow for a reasonable rate of return by independent providers that is sufficient to allow the overall pool of efficient providers to remain sustainable in the long term.

4.35 Local authorities should consider the impact of their own activities on the market as a whole, in particular the potential impact of their commissioning and re-commissioning decisions... Local authorities must not undertake any actions which may threaten the sustainability of the market as a whole, that is, the pool of providers able to deliver services of an appropriate quality, for example, by setting fee levels below an amount which is not sustainable for providers in the long-term.

We believe that the above statutory guidance is being ignored in respects of the Councils policy and practices towards the Supported Living sector, favouring that of achieving the Councils wider financial goals. We must point out that the Councils Supported Living fees are not even sustainable to pay National Living Wage. Moreover, the market dynamics in Cheshire East require providers to pay Real Living Wage in order to retain an effective workforce and the delivery of safe, high quality and effective care.

7. A Sustainable Supported Living Provider Rate for 2024/25

As set out in section 5 of the Care Act 2014, *"Local authorities have a duty to promote the efficient and effective operation of a market in services for meeting care and support needs, with a view to ensuring services are diverse, sustainable, and high quality for the local population"*.

To achieve this for Supported Living, we believe a provider rate equivalent to that of the current Domiciliary Care (minus travel time/costs) should be paid.

For 2023/24 this would be at least **£20.61 per hour** for both daytime and night-time support (we currently receive £17.50 day/£10.27 night). For 2024/25 an anticipated 10% rate increase to at least **£22.73 per hour** to reflect the 10% increase in Real Living Wage costs (from £10.90 to £12.00).

This would enable providers to pay care workers in Supported Living services the Real Living Wage thus providing a level playing field and equitable social care market for workforce pay, attraction and retention.

8. Importance of Real Living Wage

The above issues and risk presented provide an unquestionable case for Cheshire East paying Supported Living provider fees that supports payment of at least the Real Living Wage (**£12.00 per hour 2024/25**) for care workers.

In your own Medium Term Financial Strategy you quote data collected by you in 2022/23 as follows – *“Pay information submitted by providers indicates that hourly rates of pay for care workers have risen above this to a range of £11.04 per hour to £13.77 per hour as they seek to compete with other sectors including retail and hospitality”*.

This data cannot be continually ignored. The Council must give full consideration for ALL care workers in Cheshire East to be paid at least the Real Living Wage in 2024/25 of **£12.00 per hour**, not least in recognition and acknowledgement for the amazing work they do for vulnerable residents of Cheshire East.

The ongoing cost of living crisis has also hit all care workers hard and many surviving only on National Living Wage (or less) have found themselves in dire situations of hardship and poverty. Cheshire East have a duty of care to ALL their care workers as much as they do to their vulnerable residents. Care workers make up a significant proportion of the working economy in Cheshire East as well as being significant drivers of wider social health determinants across the borough.

9. Our Offer of Support and Collaboration

As a significant group of Supported Living providers in Cheshire East we remain fully open and willing to work strategically with the Council to identify areas for service improvement, service re-modelling, and cost reduction that could support future increased funding for providers. We understand that overall funding must be sustainable and affordable for the Council against a backdrop of increasing demand.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with your team and plan strategically, together, to meet our joint challenges for a more sustainable future. Collaboration is the only viable solution for such challenges and must start with a stable provider market.

10. Summary

In this letter, we have outlined our combined provider position and view on the current status of Supported Living funding in Cheshire East. Our collective view is that of a local sector in funding crisis and significant risk of contract hand back.

We have also outlined the significant operational challenge we face as providers and the serious risks to our provision resulting from legacy and continued underfunding, plus the recent policy, strategy and practice in creating a two tier, discriminatory, funding market.

We unequivocally state to you that the Supported Living provider market in Cheshire East is not sustainable on the current fees and funding being provided. Cheshire East provider rates are not sufficient to provide high quality, safe and person-centred support. Nor are they even remotely comparable with fees paid by other neighbouring Local Authorities in the region.

Providers are currently subsidising Cheshire East Supported Living services by many millions of pounds annually in order to protect their services, maintain continuity of care to people supported, and attract and retain a highly-valued workforce. This is wholly unacceptable and highly unethical for you to expect us to do this.

In this letter, we have outlined our expectations as to what we believe is a fair, sustainable and appropriate provider rate for Supported Living. More detailed cost model information can be provided to support this, however, we believe the Council already know the appropriate rate from your fair cost of care exercise. Similarly, other Local Authorities cannot be wrong in their significantly higher rates of provider funding.

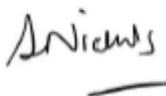
Costs of service provision have increased significantly this year already and will again further by at least 10% on 1st April 2024 when the National Living Wage increases. Our expectation and polite request is that the Council seeks to address the under-funding and legacy rate issue once and for all and establish for 2024/25 a fully-funded Supported Living provider rate of at least £22.73 per hour. A sustainable provider rate that allows payment of the Real Living Wage to our (and your) dedicated care workers.

Failure to address the underfunding issues in 2024/25 is likely to have a catastrophic impact on Supported Living provider market and risk large-scale contract hand-back in Cheshire East. Contract hand-back is extremely impactful on vulnerable adults and their families and is an outcome we wish to seek to avoid.

As a group of providers we kindly request to meet with you face to face to discuss and resolve the funding issues for 2024/25. We are also open to working collaboratively and strategically with you to create a mid to long-term sustainability plan for the sector. We believe working together will provide the best long-term benefit for the Council, your local care workers, and the residents we support on your behalf.

We look forward to hearing from you with some potential meeting dates in January.

Yours sincerely,



Steve Nichols
CEO
Rossendale Trust




Ian Pritchard
CEO
Alternative Futures Group




Jeff Dawson FIC
Managing Director
1st Enable Ltd



Published response #3

From: Jack Price-Harbach, Liberal Democrat Parliamentary candidate for Mid-Cheshire

Date received: 20 January 2024

Format: PDF letter

Summary of content: Opposition to the closure of Middlewich Household Waste and Recycling Centre (proposal EC3). Opposition to an increase in garden waste costs (proposal EC7). Opposition to proposed highways maintenance savings (proposal HT1). Concerns around proposals CF1 and CF4. Support for proposals CF3, CF5 and CF7.

Full content:



Jack Price-Harbach For Mid Cheshire

jack4midcheshire@gmail.com | jackpriceharbach.co.uk

Research and Consultation
Cheshire East Council
Westfields
Middlewich Road
Sandbach
CW11 1HZ

Delivered via e-mail

Saturday, 20th January 2024

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Budget Consultation for 2024-2025

I am not a resident of Cheshire East Council, however, I am writing in my capacity as the Liberal Democrats Parliamentary Candidate for the Mid Cheshire General Election constituency, which includes Middlewich within its boundaries.

I am writing to raise my concerns regarding the following proposals:

Proposal EC3: Reduce costs of waste disposal and number of Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRC)

I understand that this proposal would result in the closure of the Middlewich Recycling Centre. This would not only be of great inconvenience to my constituents, but I fear that the consequences of this decision would impact on the £750,000 you plan to save as part of your budget.

Firstly, my constituents may be less motivated to sort their waste into recyclables and non recyclables due to the inconvenience of having to travel further distances to dispose of excess waste.

Secondly, reducing your overall number of recycling centres across the country will likely see an increase in fly tipping. Obviously, I do not support such egregious offending due to the negative impact it has on local communities, but more instances of fly tipping will also have an adverse impact on your annual budget.

Proposal EC7: Increase garden waste charges to recover costs





Jack Price-Harbach For Mid Cheshire
 jack4midcheshire@gmail.com | jackpriceharbach.co.uk

I have opposed similar measures in my resident council of Cheshire West & Chester, where my constituents will have a 20% hike on the cost of their Green Bin collections imposed on them this year. Families that are struggling financially are having to make difficult choices to balance their own budgets and I anticipate that green bin collections may not be high on their list of priorities. Again, my concerns are the same with regards to constituents being motivated to do their bit and recycle waste which can be repurposed into green energy solutions.

I have also noticed that as part of this consultation, you are asking residents if they would support moving to 3 weekly bin collections. I would like to think that most residents would oppose such measures and if that is the case, I would urge the council to respect their wishes. Such a move would again have a negative environmental impact and lead to a potential increase in fly tipping.

Proposal HT1: Highway maintenance savings

I have acknowledged that the council plans to achieve a saving of £750,000 by reducing service levels. I and many of my constituents have had to endure long delays between potholes being reported and roads being resurfaced across all of Cheshire. It is a common bug bear for us all and one which carries not only an increased risk of road traffic accidents and breakdowns, but also a potential increase in compensation payments to impacted drivers. I fear that this medium term reduction in operational costs could prove to be more costly in the long term.

Children's & Families Services Proposals

Finally, I also wish to express my concerns with regards to CF1 and CF4, which concern provisions made available to children with disabilities and young adults with special educational needs. As they are discretionary in nature, I fear that young people who once benefited from these provisions, would see a substantial detriment to their social mobility if said benefits are withdrawn.

However, in principle, I do agree with proposals CF3, CF5 and CF7 with regards to Children's and Families services. I am aware of the huge impact that statutory spending increases have on local councils. Any measures that avoid unnecessary repetition or duplication, properly functioning and integrated shared services and less dependence on the private sector would receive my support, provided that there is no negligible impact on the provisions of Children's & Families Services.





Jack Price-Harbach For Mid Cheshire
jack4midcheshire@gmail.com | jackpriceharbach.co.uk

Thank You for taking the time to read my concerns and I hope that you will

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jack Price-Harbach".

Jack Price-Harbach



Published response #4

From: Disley Parish Council

Date received: 21 January 2024

Format: Email

Summary of content: Concerns about the consultation process, feels proposals could be made clearer. Opposition to a reduction in election costs and increase in charges where possible (proposal CP3). States Disley Parish Council would be unable to cover such costs. Opposition to the closure of Bollington and Poynton Household waste and recycling Centres (proposal EC3). Concern re. the proposal to fund libraries differently (proposal EC4) – States the parish council would be unable to contribute more to the running of the local library. Opposition to the proposal re. increasing car parking charges (proposal HT2).

Full content:

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am writing on behalf of Disley Parish Council regarding the Cheshire East Council (CEC) Budget Consultation. We appreciate the opportunity to provide our input and trust that our response will be carefully considered.

Before delving into specific aspects of the consultation, we would like to express concerns about the consultation process itself. Firstly, the proposed changes appear considerably more drastic than previous CEC budget proposals, and the allocated time for response does not seem proportionate to the gravity of the changes. It is likely that the Council has been aware of the necessity for these proposals for some time, given the nature of the topic.

Secondly, we believe that the impact of the proposals should be made clearer to respondents. For instance, Proposal EC3 mentions an emergency reduction of Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRC) to four core sites (Alsager, Crewe, Knutsford, and Macclesfield), but it does not explicitly specify the fate of our local site in Poynton – whether it will close partially, fully, or permanently.

Thirdly, several proposals seem to overlap with ongoing or recently concluded consultations, such as car parking charges, libraries, HWRCs, and green bin charges. We feel that consistent and coherent decision-making is crucial, as perpetual changes undermine the integrity of the consultation process with residents.

Now turning to specific proposals, we have reservations about the following:

Proposal CP3: Reduce election costs and increase charges where possible. Ensure full cost recovery for all elections carried out by the council on behalf of other organisations, including charging Parishes for all Parish-related election costs.

Parish Council elections held concurrently with Cheshire East or national elections are highly efficient and should be encouraged. It is challenging to envision how costs could be fairly allocated to the Parish Council, given its subordinate status to

Cheshire East and Parliamentary elections. Disley Parish Council lacks the budgetary provisions to cover such costs.

Proposal EC3: Reduce costs of waste disposal and the number of Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRC). Mitigate the impact of contract inflation and tonnage growth through new or revised contracts and a review of commissioner contract risk budgets. Emergency reduction of Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRC) to four core sites at Alsager, Crewe, Knutsford, and Macclesfield from 1 April 2024.

As previously mentioned, the proposal implies potential closures of Poynton and Bollington sites, necessitating Disley and Newtown residents to endure a one-hour/32-mile round trip to Macclesfield. We feel this is particularly punitive to our residents. Cheshire East Council should be concerned about the increase in emissions, and inevitable rises in fly-tipping and pollution and fire risk caused by an increase in on site incineration. Disley already has an Air Quality Management Area and is at the far reaches of the Cheshire Fire Service provision.

Proposal EC4: Fund libraries differently. Seek alternative funding to maintain either current or a reduced level of service delivery, including partnership working with Town and Parish Councils to secure contributions towards safeguarding service provision in their local area.

This proposal should be considered on a case by case basis. A very recent consultation highlighted residents views regarding the importance of the library within the Community Hub in Disley and the Health & Wellbeing benefits. The outcome was to maintain the library service in Disley. CEC officers will be aware that the Community Centre, the asset, was transferred to DPC to avoid the closure of the Centre and library. DPC has worked hard to ensure that the building is run efficiently and the formation of the community hub has been extremely successful and important to residents of all ages. This is an example of an asset that the parish council in Disley has already taken over by significantly raising the parish precept. Further demands on the parish budget at this time would not be affordable or sustainable.

Proposal HT2: Introduce annual increases to car parking charges.

Cheshire East Car Parks in Disley are currently free. We have provided detailed reasons for advocating the continuation of this arrangement.

Common across many of the proposals are an inference that Parish and Town councils may absorb costs relating to services currently funded by Cheshire East. Its should be stressed that the Parish precept for 2024/25 has already been agreed. It is therefor too late to ask or expect Disley Parish Council to contribute to Cheshire East funding shortfall in the 2024/25 year. It should further be noted that as part of its

24/25 budget Disley Parish Council has already taken on costs related to the maintenance of several green spaces, previously managed by Cheshire East.

Finally, we would like to draw attention to the overall impact on rural communities, such as ours. Residents here do not benefit from the plethora of CEC services more urban communities receive. Urban communities also benefit from choice and more access to private provision. We feel not enough attention has been given to preserving what are very often vital services in rural communities and instead exploring options to rationalise those provided in more urban settings. A good example here would be leisure centre provision, where a urban leisure centre would be far more attractive to a private operator than a more rural one.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to share our concerns and feedback. We trust that these points will be considered during the decision-making process.

Yours sincerely,

Published response #5

From: Rainow Parish Council

Date received: 26 January 2024

Format: Email

Summary of content: Opposition to proposal EC3: Reduce costs of waste disposal and number of HWRCs, specifically the site at Bollington. Opposition to proposal CP3: Reduce election costs and increase charges where possible.

Full content:

Rainow Parish Council would respond to the consultation as follows:

1. Members object to closure of the refuse site in Bollington as this would have a detrimental impact on Rainow residents particularly due to the charges on green bins.
2. Regarding the proposal to charge Parish Councils for administering local elections, Members would object to this proposal with the following specific comments:
 - Rainow Parish Council have a very small precept of £14k so, it is likely that a charge for elections would require a disproportionate increase in the precept.
 - We have not been informed as to what the likely range of costs would be.
 - We would have no control over the CEC costs.
 - The costs could potentially be highly variable depending on whether or not the election is contested.

- Would the Parish Council have the choice to resource the administration by other means?

Published response #6

From: Goostrey Parish Council

Date received: 26 January 2024

Format: Email

Summary of content: Concerns about the consultation including: Not enough information provided to give a response.

Full content:

Good afternoon,

Goostrey Parish Council has discussed its response to the budget consultation and have found that it is unable to provide a considered response. The consultation gives a high-level overview of the issues but doesn't provide enough detail on which to base responses. For example:

- Proposal EC4: Fund libraries a different way. There is not enough detail here about what contributions may be required from Town/Parish Councils to provide an answer.
- Proposal EC5: Reduce costs of street cleansing operations. The one-line proposal is to "Revise street cleansing operations boroughwide to secure operational efficiencies" without suggesting what this might entail.

Overall, the questions posed and the statements provided are too general and lack details.

Published response #7

From: A Sandbach resident

Date received: 27 January 2024

Format: Email

Summary of content: Comments on proposal EC4: Fund libraries in a different way. Suggests the council looks at alternative delivery models, such as those used by Derbyshire council, Staffordshire council, Midlands Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust. Suggests the council refers to the governments library good

practice toolkit. Suggests making the service more efficient by reducing management and reviewing pay scales.

Full content:

To whom it may concern

I write with reference to the latest CEC Budget Consultation 2024 to 2025 published recently.

I write in particular about the delivery and operation of library services in Cheshire East.

I write to suggest that Cheshire East Council look closely, in detail, at the ways in which other authorities propose to deliver library services in the future, such as Derbyshire County Council & Staffordshire County Council (see links below).

<https://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/leisure/libraries/libraries-for-derbyshire/interested-in-running-a-library/interested-in-running-a-library.aspx>

<https://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/Libraries/managed-libs/Community-managed-libraries.aspx>

Unique community managed libraries partnership to expand :: Midlands Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust (mpft.nhs.uk)

Unique community managed libraries partnership to expand :: Midlands Par...

MPFT, award-winning manager of several community libraries in Staffordshire has been appointed to run another

In line with the above, I suggest that Cheshire East Council proactively invite a wide & varied range of community groups & potentially interested parties to talks & discussions to run community managed library services.

Groups interested in running library services may come from a wide & varied section of the community.

Groups such as U3A (University of the third Age) for example or 'Friends of' groups are some possible examples.

There is an online toolkit produced by the U.K. Government to help Cheshire East Council with the above process.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-libraries-good-practice-toolkit/community-libraries-good-practice-toolkit>

I would also strongly encourage Cheshire East Council give serious consideration to:

(a) a significant reduction in 'management hours' attributed to the running and operation of what is, a relatively small library service as has happened in neighbouring councils such as Cheshire West & Chester.

(b) initiate a review of the pay scale of CEC library managers.

Managing a library is not a professional role as a professional is not essential to carry out this role.

However, the salary scale paid to library managers at CEC is scale 9.

This is higher than the pay scale offered by Cheshire East Council to experienced social workers. Experienced social workers are usually paid at scale 7 or in some cases, with a high degree of responsibility, scale 8.

A Social Worker is a professional role. To work as a social worker requires a professional qualification as essential. There appears to be a disparity.

At CEC, library managers are paid more than junior doctors, working for the NHS.

Local authorities are able to initiate a review of services and a review of salary scales and in some cases increase or decrease salary scales as appropriate.

As a Sandbach resident & Cheshire East council taxpayer, I would be pleased to receive an acknowledgement of my email.

Published response #8

From: Thomas Barton, Chief Executive , Everybody Health & Leisure

Date received: 28/01/2024

Format: Email

Summary of content: Everybody Health and Leisure Chief Executive comments on the budget consultation process and proposals, and how they clash with the recent Strategic Leisure review Consultation. Lists numerous queries regarding proposal EC2: Strategic Leisure Review (Stage 2), including that the savings target included for 2024 to 2025 is unachievable by April 2024. Wishes to proactively help find solutions, however, increasingly concerned about the short term changes being proposed. States it imperative that the council clarifies the position as soon as possible so that EHL can set its own budget and make changes as required as soon as possible.

Full content:

FAO: CEC R&C Team, CEC Finance Team;

I am writing to you to record the response to the current MTFS consultation (2024-2028) on behalf of Everybody Health & Leisure:

1. Timing & Process

We recognise the challenge of the Council's current and emerging financial pressures. However, it is difficult as a key stakeholder to understand the changes (i.e. targeted savings values) and timings of the separate public consultations; in particular the recent leisure services (targeting £479k across the 4 years) and the current MTFS (targeting £1.3m in 1 year under EC2).

The leisure consultation process (re MTFS:90) closed on 7th January 2024 and the 2024/25 MTFS CEC consultation was launched on 9th January 2024 – to the above corresponding changes in savings targets and respective accompanying narrative.

As a result of the above, despite some officer conversations, it is difficult to truly interpret this consultation proposal(s) and/or to respond. Furthermore, residents have responded to the leisure services process based on the savings target of £479k over 4 years – therefore we would ask if this is truly meaningful consultation to all parties at this time given the potential service implications such savings could ultimately result in.

I have attached the letter in response to the leisure services consultation, which we would also like to be confidentially considered as part of this process – given the reference to EC2.

2. Contents & queries

The actual details contained in the current MTFS consultation in relation to Leisure are very limited, given the increased target savings value for 2024/25. As such, we would like to make the following points and/or queries:

- The 4 year 2023-2027 full MTFS is still set out in the consultation document and includes SLR year growth in 2024/25; having removed £1.29m in 2023/24. This was despite all our concerns set out in our email correspondence in January-March 2023 with key officers. Please refer to all our points raised at that time.
- The specific reference to 'potential savings of £1.3m' seems extremely difficult to achieve – with or without major service reductions. Even if we can negotiate or help with one off-savings we cannot currently see how such a level could be achieved for April 2024.
- Presumably the above savings would include a combination of CEC FM costs and the ongoing targeted reduction of the EHL Management Fee. However this is difficult to interpret with limited visibility of the CEC full FM costs. This past year is the first time numbers have ever been disaggregated after 9

years incorporating into corporate landlord base. As such we may have expected those savings to be achieved under the corporate services budget area. This is difficult to comment on though, as we are yet to receive clarity of the actual costs in year, further to our outstanding queries on the different information/values.

- Capital schemes are still shown for the 2023-27 document. Clearly the Poynton expenditure wasn't applied in 2023/24, as we expected & set out this time last year. We are advised that despite the detailed business case being approved and capital funds allocated - that this could no longer be applied at the same cost of borrowing – agreed at the time it was put into the MTFS.
- The Environment & Communities Committee is due to consider the SLR on 11th March 2024 we believe. As such a series of key revenue & capital decisions will be subject to decisions on 11/3/24 by this Committee – after the Council is due to sign off its annual budget on 27th February ?

From the limited consultation question and one area referenced in the document at EC2 (and related to MTFS90) we would like to clarify the following points against the brief descriptive areas of suggested savings;

- “reviewing pricing for leisure services across the borough” – As discussed extensively with officers and now members – this is our policy to set under the contract. Of course like we have every year; we will continue to actively engage with CEC officers to consider all CEC commissioning requests & policies. Currently the use of pricing is required to be utilised to offset our considerable growth cost pressures for our charity to safely operate (e.g. pay for NLW and considerable increases in supplies and services). All the details of which have been set out to officers for 2024/25.
- “reduction in corporate landlord costs via asset transfer” – We understand and support that this should be explored in some instances. However there is considerable complexity and therefore capacity needed to realise any sustainable changes in 2024/25 and at best only part year effect could be achieved; alongside the cost of change required. EHL have considerable commitments and liabilities aligned to all sites which must be considered accordingly.
- “exploring potential invest to save capital schemes removing all current programme allocations that cannot be delivered on an invest to save basis” - We continue to work with officers to present a range of opportunities to make pocket investments and improvements to CEC assets. However these are subject to various deployment conditions for corresponding ‘reductions of management fee’ to be achieved. The removal of previous schemes including Poynton is very disappointing given the opportunity cost. We believe the Middlewich scheme still has viability and is deliverable with the planning approval granted in March 2023. The removal of all schemes leaves ongoing challenges for us to manage and if now ceased (rather than paused) there will

be some residual direct close-down charges potentially required for both Poynton and Middlewich projects.

- “removal of historical subsidies relating to free car parking” – This area is extremely concerning, as set out last year. We are unable to agree such a change without CEC underwriting the financial risk of income losses which we would envisage for both Crewe and Nantwich sites, should such a policy actually be implemented. This is currently net-nil for CEC as the parking dept receipt all the income – to the same value CEC leisure commissioning reimburse. This would not achieve the same value of parking income if this policy changed in any event i.e. less people would likely use and/or pay to park at those sites. We do not believe £70k is an achievable savings target related to this proposed change.
- “use of public health and other one off grants” – We believe that different sums have been applied for previous years. Our charity delivers considerable public health benefit and we encourage the approach for consideration of such funding now and in the future to protect the leisure estate and align public health investment against its output/outcomes realised.
- “partnership working with Town Councils to secure contributions towards safeguarding provisions in their local area” – We are in conversations with CEC officers about this approach and understand contributions would be made to the FM/estate costs directly to CEC. We will continue to work to consider and support this approach where possible.

3. Key Considerations

We want to proactively help find solutions to the CEC financial challenges, whilst protecting the highly valued current leisure estate, and of course ensuring the viability of our charity, which was set up by Cheshire East for Cheshire East in 2014. We hope to achieve a long-term sustainable plan with you for leisure delivery in Cheshire East.

However we are increasingly concerned about the decreasing timeframe, in the short-term, to achieve tangible savings/changes for 2024/25. We hope to find a mutually agreeable arrangement but at this stage believe it would be prudent to ensure there is financial provision in place for the contractual default value for 2024/25. Our cost base is increasing (as set out).

We have to present a draft balanced budget to our finance and risk committee on 12th February and the full board of trustees on 27th February. Also we have deferred negotiations with the trade unions and need to make a proposed formal offer to them by 8th February for which they will ballot their members on for 21-28 days thereafter. Also we must advise our customers of pricing changes in early March (due to bank DD requirements etc) and must configure systems before then too.

Therefore it is paramount we accelerate any relevant discussions and hopefully achieve an agreed position as soon after this consultation closes, as possible.

Regards,

Thomas Barton, MBA, FCIPD, Chief Executive , Everybody Health & Leisure

Published response #9

From: Kirsten Warren, Assistant Director of Operations, North West, National Trust

Date received: 29 January 2024

Format: Email

Summary of content: Comments on the Economy and Growth Committee statement that “subsidy reductions to Tatton Park and the Visitor Centre operating model are already set to deliver savings for 2024/25 of £0.07m”. States the National Trust is keen to work alongside CEC to ensure Tatton’s finances are sustainable. Will continue to work with CEC to enable new forms of investment and revenue where possible.

Full content:



National
Trust

kirsten.warren1@nationaltrust.org.uk

Mobile: 07971 107172

27/01/2024

Research and Consultation,
Cheshire East Council,
Westfields,
Middlewich Road,
Sandbach,
CW11 1H

Dear CEC Consultations team,

Re: National Trust response to Budget Consultation for 2024

I would like to submit feedback from the National Trust on Cheshire East's 2024 Budget consultation.

We make these comments as a conservation charity and visitor business with significant interests in Cheshire East. In particular, as the owners of Tatton Park we work constructively with Cheshire East Council to supporting management of this major attraction, which the Council holds on a long lease. The National Trust also directly manages Lyme Park, Quarry Bank, and Little Moreton Hall, as well as popular countryside sites such as Alderley Edge and Hare Hill.

The National Trust truly appreciates the challenging times faced by all local authorities and the consequent need to reduce expenditure and raise income. We also know from feedback from our local members, communities, and visitors, how much people in Cheshire East value the rich mix of nature, beauty, and history on their doorstep. Visitors to the area are attracted by these assets too, contributing to jobs and growth.

Therefore, we will continue to work with the Council to protect the historic and natural environment and support Cheshire East's 'fairer, greener' vision.

Comments on specific proposals

- **Economy and Growth Committee proposals**

We note that reductions in the subsidy towards Tatton Park, which is owned by the National Trust, are included in the agreed savings of £0.07m (alongside changes to Visitor Centres). As set out in previous budget consultation responses, we are keen to

National Trust
Altrincham Hub
18 High Street
Altrincham
Cheshire WA14 1PH
Tel: +44 (0)161 928 0075
Fax: +44 (0)161 929 6819
www.nationaltrust.org.uk

President: His Majesty The King
Regional Chair: Janet Haddock-Fraser
Director of Region: Mike Innerdale

Registered office:
Heelis, Kemble Drive, Swindon
Wiltshire SN2 2NA
Registered charity number 205846



work alongside CEC to ensure that Tatton's finances are sustainable and that the Council is able to fulfil its statutory requirements with regard to conservation. We will continue to work with CEC to enable new forms of investment and revenue where it is sympathetic to the overall conservation of Tatton.

Thank you for giving the National Trust the opportunity to contribute to this consultation. I look forward to continuing to work with the Council on behalf of the people of Cheshire East.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kirsten Warren', written in a cursive style.

Kirsten Warren
Assistant Director of Operations, North West

Cont/d

2

Appendix 3 – Social media engagement

9 posts advertising the consultation were posted on X, Facebook and LinkedIn during the consultation on corporate council accounts (@CheshireEastCouncil).

In total there were 1,105 social media engagements during the consultation period.

X engagement

4 posts issued:

- 8,594 impressions (number of times posts were displayed to users on X)
- 453 engagements, including 195 link clicks through to the consultation survey

Facebook engagement

4 posts issued:

- 19,764 people reached (number of users seeing posts)
- 592 total engagements including 246 link clicks through to the consultation survey

LinkedIn engagement

1 post issued:

- 963 impressions and 60 clicks

Appendix 4 – Newspaper Articles

A total of 17 newspaper articles were published throughout the duration of the consultation – these are listed below.

Date	Source	Article link
10/01/2024	BBC	Tip closures among Cheshire East Council's budget plans
10/01/2024	Nantwich News	Cheshire East plans ANOTHER 4.99% Council Tax rise
10/01/2024	Cheshire East Council	Cheshire East Council launches its budget consultation – protecting essential services for those most in need
10/01/2024	Wilmslow.co.uk	Council's budget proposals include closing tips and increasing new garden waste collection charge
11/01/2024	Local Gov	Leaderships posts left vacant to cut costs
12/01/2024	Northwich Guardian	Cheshire East Council budget plan reveals 29 cost-cutting measures
12/01/2024	Northwich Guardian	Cheshire East Council issues statement on bankruptcy speculation
13/01/2024	Nantwich News	Cheshire East battling to avert bankruptcy and Section 114 notice
14/01/2024	Cheshire Live	Cheshire East Council planning to axe tips and increase green bin fee on top of tax hike
14/01/2024	Manchester Evening News	Council planning to axe tips and increase green bin fee on top of tax hike
17/01/2024	Northwich Guardian	Cheshire East makes savings by leaving 12 per cent of posts vacant
17/01/2024	Knutsford Guardian	Knutsford Town Council sets aside £100k to help keep services afloat
17/01/2024	Nantwich News	LETTER: Cheshire East Council Budget Consultation 2024-25
21/01/2024	Stoke Sentinel	Cash-strapped council proposing tip closures and green bin price hike
22/01/2024	BBC	Cheshire East: Council aims to avoid financial distress notice - leader
22/01/2024	Nantwich News	Adult social care costs rocketing with £5m overspend likely
22/01/2024	Northwich Guardian	Cheshire East pays £9k a week for some adult care as costs soar

Appendix 5 – Council Committee feedback

Throughout January and February 2024 budget sessions were held at all council Committees, to discuss the budget consultation proposals. Follow the below links to listen to the sessions, or to view the meeting minutes.

Date	Budget Session Committee links
26/01/2024	Economy and Growth Committee
30/01/2024	Highways & Transport Committee
30/01/2024	Environment and Communities Committee
31/01/2024	Children and Families Committee
31/01/2024	Finance sub-Committee
01/02/2024	Corporate Policy Committee
02/02/2024	Adults and Health Committee

Appendix 6 – Survey respondent demographics

Respondent type

80% of survey respondents were Cheshire East residents, 15% were Cheshire East Council employees. 24 local Councillors responded to the survey.

Respondent type:	Count	Percent
As a resident of Cheshire East	942	80%
As a Cheshire East Council employee	171	15%
As a Town or Parish Councillor	16	1%
As a Cheshire East Council Ward Councillor	8	1%
As a visitor to Cheshire East	6	1%
On behalf of a group, organisation, club or local business	6	1%
Other	27	2%
Total valid responses	1,176	20%

Gender

49% of survey respondents were female, 42% were male.

Gender	Count	Percent
Female	550	49%
Male	471	42%
Prefer not to say	99	9%
Other	13	1%
Total valid responses	1,133	100%

The 13 “other” responses comprised of the below which have been printed verbatim in alphabetical order:

- “Being male or female is not a ‘gender identity’ - it’s a biological sex.”
- “Cybernaught”
- “Fluid”
- “GOD”
- “Household - male and female”
- “Irrelevant to this survey”
- “None of your business”
- “Prefer to self describe” x3
- “Sex, not gender”

- “Straight, white male”
- “Why does this matter?”

Age group

Survey respondent numbers by age group were as follows:

Age Group	Count	Percent
16-24	11	1%
25-34	65	6%
35-44	187	16%
45-54	240	21%
55-64	276	24%
65-74	178	16%
75-84	82	7%
85 and over	1	0%
Prefer not to say	96	8%
Total valid responses	1,136	100%

Health or disability status

Survey respondent numbers by health or disability status were as follows:

Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months? This includes problems related to old age.	Count	Percent
Yes	166	15%
No	860	76%
Prefer not to say	111	10%
Total valid responses	1,137	100%

