

A summary of responses to Cheshire East Council's

Budget Consultation 2022 – 2026



Introduction

Purpose of the consultation

Between November 2021 and January 2022 Cheshire East Council consulted on the investment and savings proposals it intends to include in its Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2022 to 2026.

Results from the consultation will inform the adoption of the council's Medium Term Financial Strategy, due [to be voted on at full Council on 24 February 2022](#).

Consultation methodology

The council [set out its proposals in a budget consultation document](#), and promoted the consultation [through a Budget Engagement Hub](#).

For a full description of the consultation methodology please see Appendix 6 – Consultation methodology & response.

Consultation responses

In total, there were 380 consultation engagements, including:

- 264 survey completions (see Overall views on council spending for results)
- 73 attendees at a budget consultation event (see Appendix 1 – Consultation event feedback for details)
- 6 Budget Engagement Hub comments (see Appendix 2 – Engagement Hub public comments for details)
- 20 social media comments or replies (see Appendix 3 – Social media engagement & feedback for details)
- 3 email responses (see Appendix 4 – Email feedback for details)
- 14 “Save Us Money” ideas submitted by council employees

In addition, all 6 council committees considered the consultation material and debated it during public committee meetings – see Appendix 5 – Council Committee feedback for a summary of feedback from these meetings.

Care must be taken when interpreting consultation feedback due to the relatively low numbers of responses and different methods of capturing feedback, as they may not be wholly representative of all Cheshire East residents. Results should be treated as indicative only.

The number of consultation engagements in 2022 was slightly up on the number received in 2021 (380 in 2022 Vs 313 in 2021). The number of consultation

engagements in 2021 and 2022 are up significantly from those received in 2019 and 2020 – 3.7 times as many engagements were received in 2022 as compared to 2019.

For a detailed breakdown of consultation responses please see Appendix 6 – Consultation methodology & response.

Executive summary

Summary of results

General support for proposals – A majority of respondents, 56%, generally supported this year’s budget proposals, with 21% opposing them (the remaining 23% neither supported nor opposed them).

Rising costs of living

A key theme arising in the consultation feedback this year centred around increasing living costs and inflation.

46% of respondents agree that a 2.99% increase in Council Tax is appropriate, while 35% disagree. Respondents also indicated that for many of the most vulnerable residents such an increase will contribute to a real term cut in the standard of living, at a time when other costs of living are rising sharply as well. Some would rather see the council make greater efficiency savings rather than see a rise in Council Tax.

Spending budget in the right areas

Responses varied on whether the council is spending its budget in the right areas – Several suggested that the council must increase spending in “Place”, and particularly on highways and on improving the condition of the roads – this remains a consistently high priority for residents.

There was also a mixed response about spending on adults and children’s services, with some feeling it should be increased, while others felt it should be decreased.

Spending budget by location

Some comments were made that spending is not seen as equitable by area across the borough, with some holding the perception that some areas are favoured over others.

Responses to the investment proposals

23 investment proposals were included in this year’s budget consultation and the level of support for each ranged from 89% down to 34%. A table summarising the level of

support and the number of comments for each investment proposal can be found at the end of this section.

The investment proposals which gained either a larger number of comments, or low level of support included:

- **Local supported buses** (84% support, 8 comments): Respondents emphasised the importance of affordable bus services for the community
- **School transport** (79% support, 8 comments): Although a well-supported proposal, some felt that school transport should be funded by parents
- **Parking service – postponement of review of charges** (69% support, 18 comments): Parking charges in the borough remain a controversial issue, and those opposing this investment felt that the current parking charges policy is “totally unfair and discriminatory”, that charging policy should not differ from town to town, and that another review of this policy is required.
- **Improving Digital Customer Experience** (54% support, 7 comments): Opposition to this proposal was because 1) respondents felt it should not be assumed that everyone can get online and that it is difficult to get hold of a real person when needed, and 2) people felt money could be better spent elsewhere e.g. on improving the road infrastructure
- **Minimum Revenue Provision** (50% support, 6 comments): Opposition to this proposal centred around perceived unfair distribution of spend for Capital projects, seemingly favouring some towns / areas of the borough rather than others
- **Revenue costs for Crewe Youth Zone** (45% support, 10 comments): Opposition to this proposal was because 1) respondents felt Crewe seems to attract a disproportionate amount of the council’s budget 2) that this proposal would lead to an inequality of access to this service for those living in other towns 3) that youth zone models are not always successful 4) that redistributing funds from Early Help to fund this proposal was counter intuitive
- **Vendor Management Phase 3** (45% support, 2 comments): Respondents felt this should be a managed internal task that should not require funding
- **Change to unringfenced specific grants estimates** (45% support, 1 comment): There was a call for “solid figures” rather than estimates to be used here
- **Transactional Service Centre additional funding** (34% support, 3 comments): Respondents questioned whether funding a loss of income is the right thing to do if schools have opted out

Responses to the saving proposals

9 saving proposals were included in this year’s budget consultation and the level of support for each ranged from 86% down to 50%. A table summarising support and the

number of comments for each saving proposal can be found at the end of this executive summary.

The investment proposals which gained either a larger number of comments, or low level of support included:

- **A redesign of Early Help Services into a Locality model** (80% support, 9 comments): While support was expressed for a service review, there was concern that 1) the review may lead to a return to old ineffective ways of working 2) that budget reductions for Early Help should be avoided 3) that the Locality Model is untested and may not be successful
- **Council Tax** (61% support, 5 comments): There was a lack of clarity about what this proposal meant
- **Restructure Early Help Budget to fund Crewe Youth Zone** (56% support, 9 comments): Opposition to this proposal was because 1) respondents again felt Crewe seems to attract a disproportionate amount of the council's budget 2) that external sponsors for this proposal have not been confirmed 3) that a completed HLBC for this proposal has not been seen 4) that there are questions over the effectiveness of youth models 5) that redistributing funds from Early Help to fund this proposal was counter intuitive
- **Central Pension adjustment** (50% support, 3 comments): Opposition to this proposal was because 1) Some felt local government pension schemes were too generous 2) the council must not try to save on pensions and catch up at a later date

Net carbon impact assessments

A majority of respondents, 70%, supported the introduction of "net carbon impact" assessments for all new saving and investment proposals that are put forward.

However, support does seem to be conditional on measures being practical and not requiring people to incur "unrealistic" costs e.g. for Heat Pumps etc. They felt that cost estimates for any "net carbon impact" proposals would be helpful in future.

Consultation response overview for each INVESTMENT proposal in the 2022 budget consultation

2022 new or revised INVESTMENT proposals	CP Aim	% support for proposal	No. public comments	No. Committee comments
Improved debt recovery & correcting budgeted court costs income targets	Open	89%	0	0
IT Security and Compliance	Open	86%	0	0
Investment in Cared for Children and Care Leavers and other pressures	Fair	85%	1	1
Investment in Adult Social Care	Fair	85%	0	0
Local Supported Buses	Green	84%	8	0
Safeguarding Children – legacy staffing pressure	Fair	84%	1	0
School Transport	Green	79%	6	2
National Insurance increase at 1.25% for social care funding	Open	74%	2	0
Increase capacity to support Statutory SEND service	Fair	73%	1	1
Unified IT Communications	Open	70%	1	0
Parking service – postponement of review of charges	Green	69%	18	0
Increase capacity to support Statutory Education Psychology Service	Fair	67%	3	1
Growth in Children & Families Commissioning Contracts	Fair	67%	0	0
Care fee uplifts	Fair	65%	0	1
Pay inflation	Open	64%	3	0
Information Assurance and Data Management Phase 3	Open	63%	0	0
IT Procurements and Application Lifecycle Management	Open	61%	1	0
Improving Digital Customer Experience	Open	54%	7	0
Minimum Revenue Provision	Central	50%	6	0
Revenue costs for Crewe Youth Zone	Fair	45%	6	4
Vendor Management Phase 3	Open	45%	2	0
Change to unringfenced specific grants estimates	Central	45%	1	0
Transactional Service Centre additional funding	Open	34%	3	0

Consultation response overview for each SAVING proposal in the 2022 budget consultation

2022 new or revised SAVING proposals	CP Aim	% support for proposal	No. public comments	No. Committee comments
Removal of temporary implementation budget and investment to run the new Financial System	Open	86%	0	0
Staff Travel and related savings	Open	83%	4	0
Use of Earmarked Reserves	Central	81%	2	0
A redesign of Early Help Services into a Locality model	Fair	80%	5	4
Bad Debt Provision – change in provision	Central	70%	1	0
Business Rates Retention Scheme	Central	65%	1	0
Council Tax	Central	61%	5	0
Restructure Early Help Budget to fund Crewe Youth Zone	Fair	56%	8	1
Central Pension adjustment	Central	50%	3	0

More feedback about each of these proposals can be found in the main report.

Contents

Introduction	2
Executive summary	3
Contents.....	8
Overall views on council spending	9
Overall views on this year’s budget proposals	12
Views on the INVESTMENT proposals	13
Views on the SAVING proposals.....	19
The carbon impact of proposals	22
Final survey comments on the budget engagement.....	24
Conclusions.....	26
Appendix 1 – Consultation event feedback	28
Appendix 2 – Engagement Hub public comments.....	33
Appendix 3 – Social media engagement & feedback	35
Appendix 4 – Email feedback.....	39
Appendix 5 – Council Committee feedback.....	41
Appendix 6 – Consultation methodology & response	53

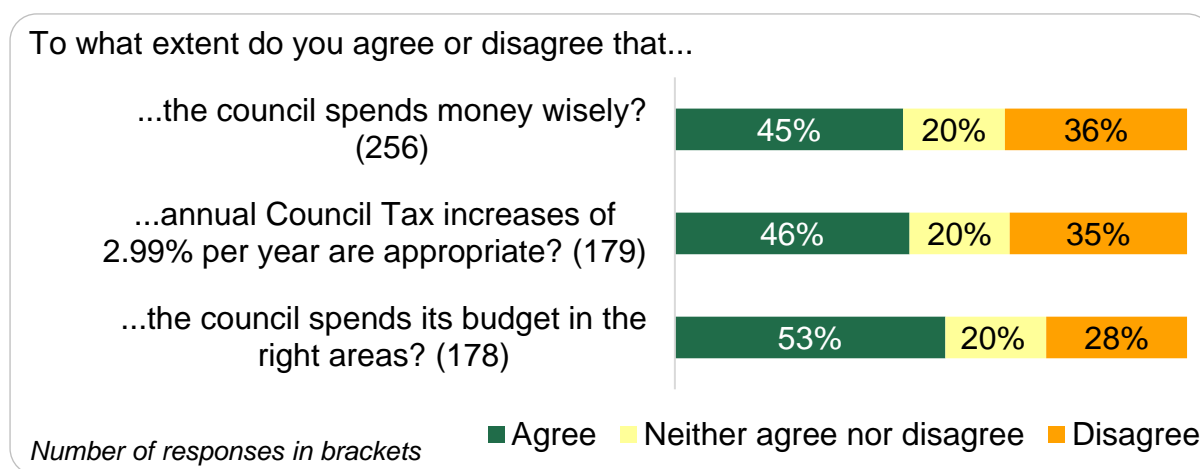
Report produced 14 January 2022 by Ben Buckley of the Research and Consultation Team, Cheshire East Council. Email RandC@cheshireeast.gov.uk for further information.

Overall views on council spending

Respondent views were fairly split on whether:

- The council spends money wisely (45% agree, 36% disagree) – Results similar to last year (45% agree, 32% disagree)
- Annual council tax increases of 2.99% per year are appropriate (46% agree, 35% disagree)

A larger proportion of respondents, 53%, agreed the council spends its budget in the right areas, while 28% of respondents disagreed with this statement.



Comments about annual Council Tax increases (89 comments)

A 2.99% rise in Council Tax is too high – It's disproportionate, unfair, and bad value for money for taxpayers. This will put the most vulnerable people at more financial risk and cause severe hardship for many – it's not affordable for some people. The rise is more than people get in salary, pension or benefit increases, and therefore means a real term cut in standard of living for people. It impacts the most vulnerable, the poorly paid pensioners who have been denied rises in their pension, those that are claiming disability benefit, and those over 80 years of age. The amount I now pay is 360% higher than when I moved here in 1984 and I have seen worse services e.g. refuse collections fortnightly instead of weekly. Council Tax has increased rapidly over recent years. (34 comments)

A 2.99% rise in Council Tax seems ok – It's in line with inflation, though it should be means tested. Councils have to continue to deliver services somehow, especially without central government funding. Clamp down on those that don't pay. (13 comments)

The 2.99% Council Tax rise could be higher – Especially in light of the pandemic, and to help support young people, children and families that are currently struggling.

What happens if inflation increases above 3%? I would prefer to pay more and get proper services. (8 comments)

Cut bureaucracy, improve efficiency – Make savings instead of raising council tax. We are all having to do more with less – you are not challenging yourselves enough to achieve the same. Is the council spending money correctly on the right things, and are there other ways the money could be raised? Services are not improved and much of it will go to council staff and buildings, we are paying more each year and getting less and less services. (16 comments)

Council Tax is not value for money – Council Tax is my largest monthly bill, around twice what I spend on food, and I don't feel that I get much for it other than my bin emptied. Significant service improvements are needed to make it seem value for money. I want to see money spent in my town. We don't see improvements in services, quite the opposite many services seem to be getting worse. (9 comments)

Other comments:

- Central government needs to fund more, it keeps local government short. Underfunding is a result of low taxation by the Conservative government. (4 comments)
- 2.99% seems a cynical attempt not to say 3%. Trying to make it look less by putting 2.99 instead of 3 is insulting. (3 comments)
- Not enough information on planned expenditure has been provided to be able to comment. (1 comment)
- Increase the amount people in lower Council Tax brackets, or in single person households, pay – they don't pay enough. (1 comment)

Comments about how the council spends its budget (98 comments)

Increase Place spending (32 comments) – Spend more budget on this area. More money should be spent on fixing roads and potholes, repairing footpaths, clearing drains, cleaning streets, street lighting, winter gritting, grass cutting, leisure facilities, creating cycle paths, improving highways, improving the planning department and libraries. All of these areas services which need more attention.

Cut People spending (12 comments) – 59% seems high, this is too much spending on this area. We cannot afford to spend so much on adult social care, a new approach is needed. Less than half the budget being spent on general services rather than the requirement of specific sub-groups is inappropriate. Not sure some of the services used for social care deliver value for money. When it comes to social care the same families drain the council finances – this needs to stop by intervention. LAs should focus on the services that matter most to current taxpayers. An efficiency review of “People” is needed.

Increase People spending (8 comments) – More should be spent here, spending here is appropriate, People is the priority over place. I am concerned that so little is spent on children particularly given the case of ‘Arthur’ in the news at the present. Adult social care funding comes from central government and is inadequate when compared with the true cost of private-sector social care (LA rate c.£600 p/w against private sector value of c.£900 p/w). Adult social care financial demands will continue to rise over the coming years and in order to avoid a situation similar to that in the early years sector, whereby providers are put out of business due to insufficient rates set by LAs, funding should a. rise, and b. be provided direct by central government.

Cut Corporate spending (12 comments) – 11% of the budget spent here seems too high, it should be cut down on.

Cut Central Budgets (5 comments) – Reduce spending here. The amount on Central Items seems to be quite a large proportion as it feels to be essentially 'miscellaneous' costs.

Other comments:

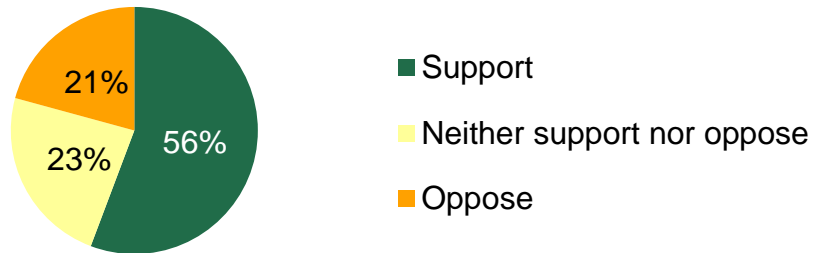
- Spend more in towns which have been underspent on e.g. Middlewich, Disley, Congleton, Macclesfield. Give budget spending breakdowns by towns. (6 comments)
- Improve efficiency of the council generally, reduce overheads and staffing costs. Adopt a "Right First Time" approach. (5 comments)
- Spend less on ‘virtue signalling’, Councillors, high wages, cycle lanes, outsourcing. (4 comments)
- More information is needed to give an opinion – Has each area been successful or not? (3 comments)
- Be clearer about what is discretionary spend within the budget, and what is statutory. (2 comments)
- The way the council is funded is a problem. There's never enough money. (2 comments)
- Break budgets for each directorate down. (2 comments)
- Leisure and Planning should be self-financing. (1 comment)
- There is no reference to performance measures in the document. (1 comment)
- Spend less on achieving carbon neutral. (1 comment)

Overall views on this year's budget proposals

A majority of respondents, 56%, supported this year's budget proposals.

21% opposed them, with the remaining 23% neither supporting nor opposing them.

Generally speaking, how strongly do you support or oppose this year's budget proposals?



Number of responses = 183

Views on the INVESTMENT proposals

OPEN Investment Proposals

Support for the new or revised OPEN investment proposals ranged from very strong support at 89%, down to low support at 34%.

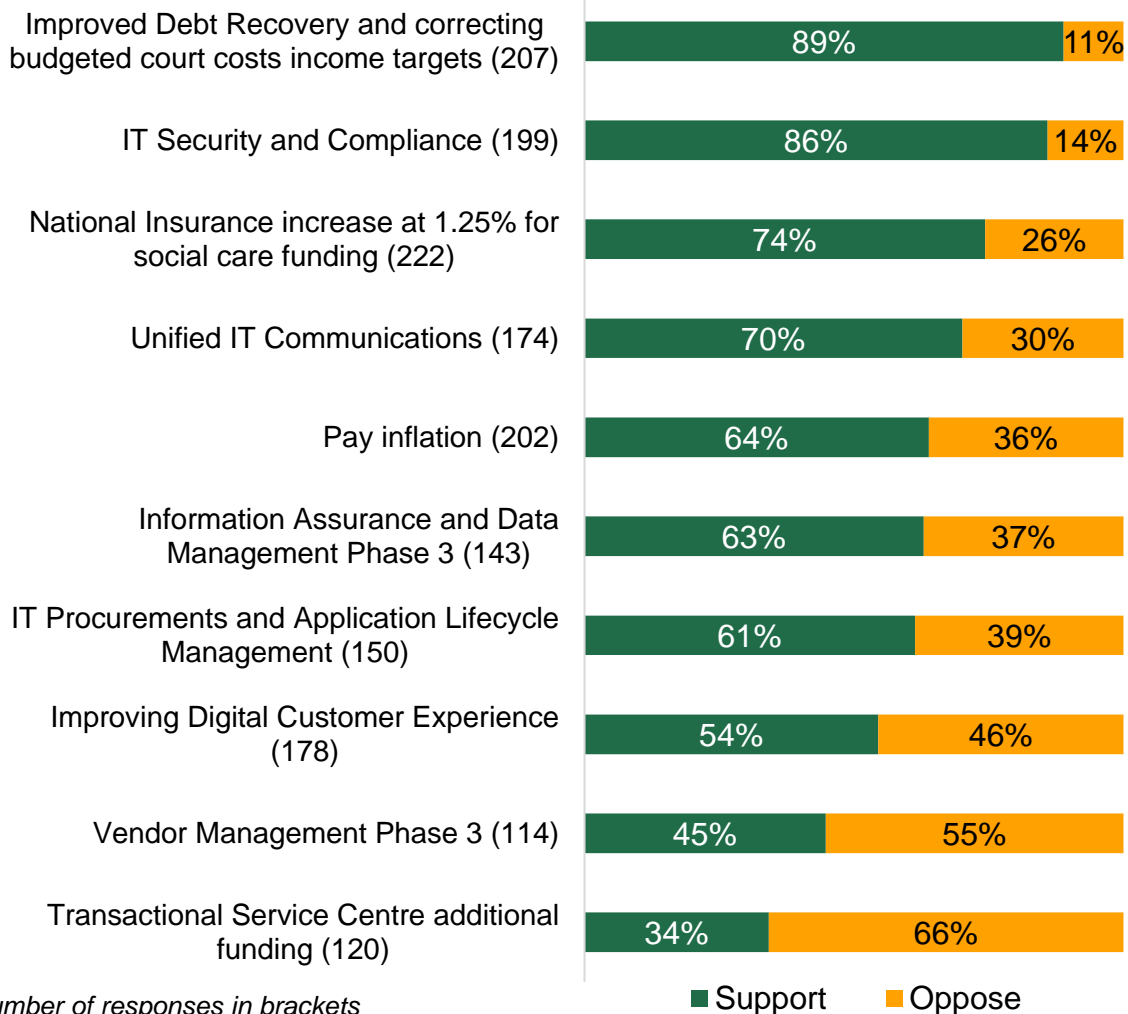
The proposals receiving the highest levels of support were:

- Improved Debt Recovery and correcting budgeted court costs income targets to reflect actual levels (89% support)
- IT Security and Compliance (86% support)

The proposals receiving the lowest levels of support were:

- Vendor Management Phase 3 (45% support)
- Transactional Service Centre additional funding (34% support)

Generally speaking, do you support or oppose each of the new or revised investment proposals for this year? OPEN



Number of responses in brackets

Comments about the OPEN investment proposals (19 comments)

National Insurance increase at 1.25% for social care funding: Oppose – Given the recent announcements regarding increase in NI to cover social care, I am not able to understand the justification for yet more “levies” and council funding increases. Funding for social care should come from income tax not national insurance as it spreads the cost more equally. (2 comments)

Unified IT Communications: Support – Working from home is the way to go not only to give a better lifestyle balance but also reduces the Council Tax bill in heating and lighting for council offices. There should be a drive to cut down the office space, which would help the council achieve their carbon footprint. (1 comment)

Pay inflation: Oppose – Pay increases amongst the highest paid at Cheshire East I think is unnecessary especially given the struggles that ordinary householders have faced during Covid, particularly those that have not seen a pay increase. We don't get pay rises but have a 3% increased council tax bill. Therefore, I don't agree with automatic pay inflation issues. (3 comments)

IT Procurements and Application Lifecycle Management: Vendor management should be a managed internal task. It shouldn't need new or increased funding. (1 comment)

Improving Digital Customer Experience: Oppose – Assuming everyone can go online is a mistake. I am concerned that a greater reliance on computer systems in connecting with the public does not provide the right level of service. It is almost impossible to get hold of a real person now when you need to. Improving "experience" usually means spending money on consultants and designers, which is an extravagance we can do without. I would want the money diverted to maintenance of the Highways, which is desperately poor. Stop wasting precious money trying to improve the imagined customer service when the road infrastructure is shambolic and falling apart. Use the money where it is vitally needed not on luxuries. (7 comments)

Vendor Management Phase 3: Oppose – Vendor management should be a managed internal task. It shouldn't need new or increased funding. There's a lack of information to give an opinion, though this expenditure doesn't seem justified. (2 comments)

Transactional Service Centre additional funding: Oppose – If schools are opting out, is providing funding to cover lost income the right thing to be doing? Why are schools being allowed to drop out? What is "Unit 4"? There's a lack of information to give an opinion, though this expenditure doesn't seem justified. (3 comments)

FAIR Investment Proposals

Support for the new or revised FAIR investment proposals ranged from very strong support at 85%, down to low support at 45%.

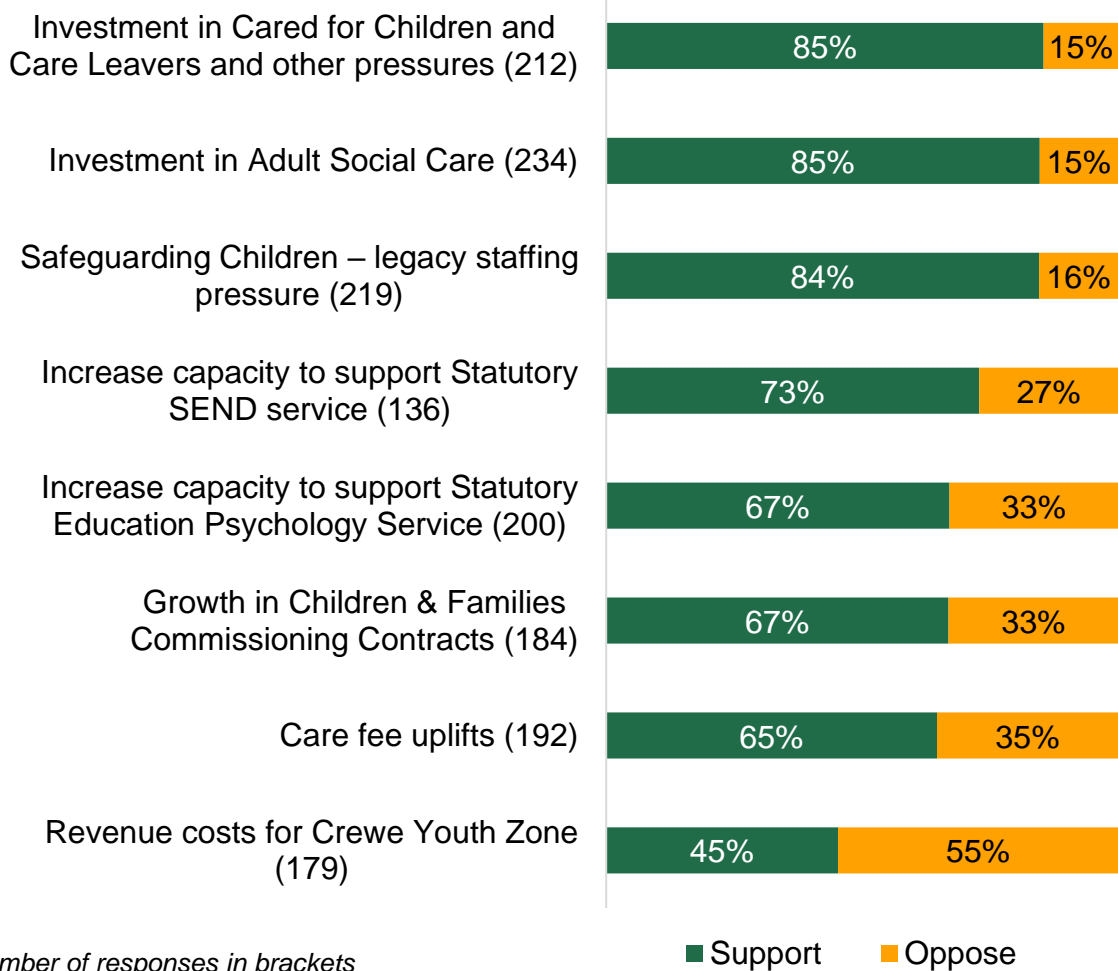
The proposals receiving the highest levels of support included:

- Investment in Cared for Children and Care Leavers and other pressures (85%)
- Investment in Adult Social Care (85%)

The proposals receiving the lowest levels of support included:

- Care fee uplifts (65%)
- Revenue costs for Crewe Youth Zone (45%)

Generally speaking, do you support or oppose each of the new or revised investment proposals for this year? FAIR



Comments about the FAIR investment proposals (13 comments)

Investment in Cared for Children and Care Leavers and other pressures: A first year £4million investment, followed by £400,000 investment each year thereafter is a ridiculous difference for each year's investment – the service desperately needs to have continuous high investment in the front-line social workers and foster carers. (1 comment)

Safeguarding Children – legacy staffing pressure: Legacy staffing pressures are a council / public sector tradition. If the service is managed better there won't be legacy pressures. (1 comment)

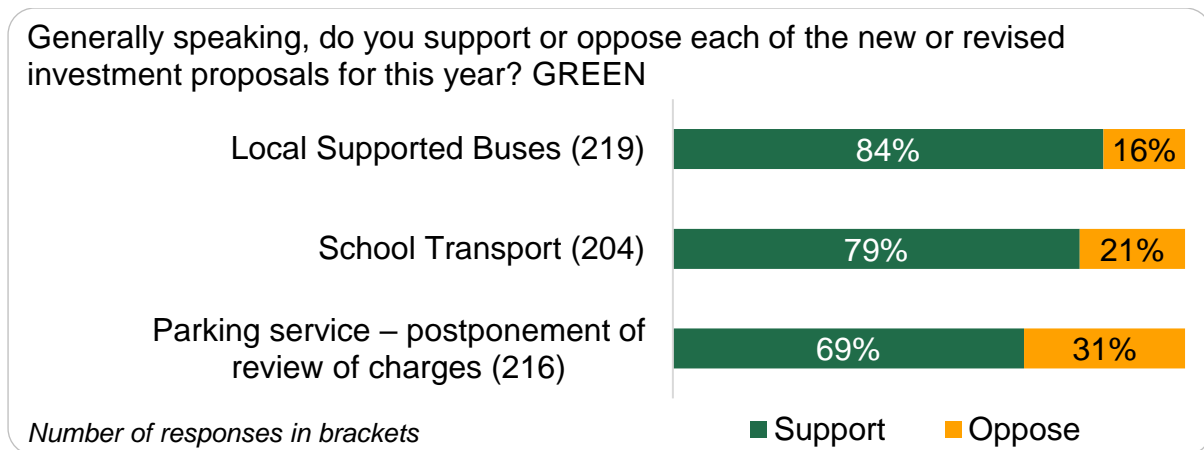
Increase capacity to support Statutory SEND service: Support for this proposal as SEND are always underfunded and early intervention makes for happier children, families, schools and peers. (1 comment)

Increase capacity to support Statutory Education Psychology Service: Support for this proposal as investment in educational psychology services is necessary. Increased capacity in the Education Psychology service is required because of the previous excessive cuts in this service over the last 10 years. Opposition to this proposal came in the form "Education psychology! Really!". (3 comments)

Revenue costs for Crewe Youth Zone: Support for this proposal was given as respondents approved of improving children's lives. Opposition to the proposal was expressed as some felt that Crewe seems to "suck in a disproportionate amount of the council's budget", and that it is disappointing to see yet another "Crewe centric" project singled out for extra spend. Where are the Macclesfield / Congleton / Bollington etc projects and spends going? Youth projects should be locally funded. (6 comments)

GREEN Investment Proposals

Support for the new or revised GREEN investment proposals ranged from 84% for the “local supported buses” proposal, to 79% for the “school transport” proposal, to 69% for the “parking service – postponement of review of charges” proposal.



Comments about the GREEN investment proposals (32 comments)

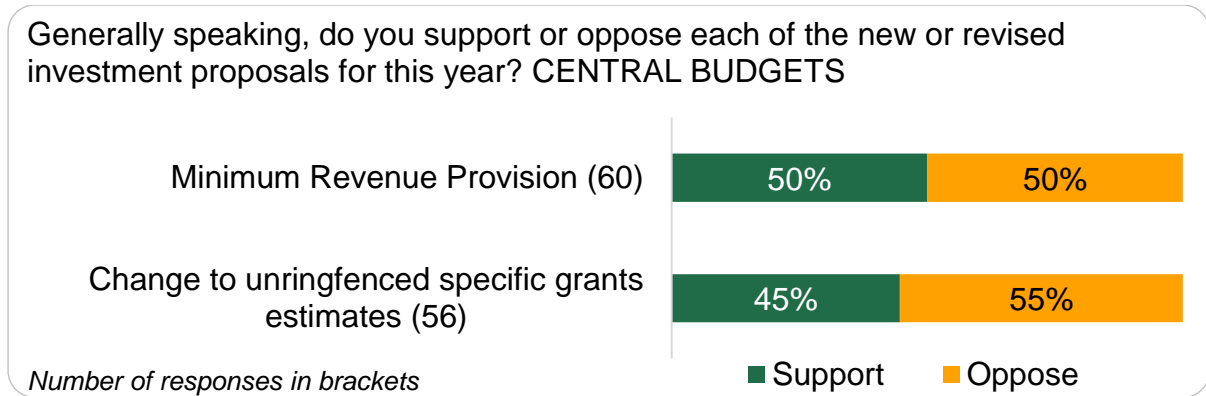
Local Supported Buses: Support was expressed for an affordable bus services as they are a lifeline for elderly people. Some felt services should be extended and should also service the new housing estates that have been built around most Cheshire East towns, as without such expansion there will be an inevitable increase in car journeys. Some felt it was difficult to get around Cheshire East by public transport and so more buses are needed. Opposition for the proposal was expressed as some felt that a lot of local buses seem to be empty and unused. (8 comments)

School Transport: Opposition to this proposal was that some felt school transport should be funded by parents unless there is a genuine affordability issue, or if a child has special needs. Others felt the council should make children walk or cycle, that children need more exercise, and that safe cycle routes should be provided especially in all new housing estates for children to cycle to school on. (6 comments)

Parking service – postponement of review of charges: Opposition to this proposal came from those that felt a comprehensive and fair arrangement of parking charges is well overdue. They felt that parking charges should be the same across the borough and should not differ between different towns. They felt this is an issue that has not been resolved in 12 years – since 2009 when the council was formed. Why do some towns like Macclesfield pay for parking when others like Alsager and Sandbach do not? Others were unhappy that Members “refused to allow the public to have their say on the parking proposals which would have ensured fair and equal charging across the free towns, villages and local service centres”. They felt a review of car parking charges should be urgent as the current policy “is totally unfair and discriminatory”. Others simply felt car parking should be free across the borough. (18 comments)

CENTRAL BUDGET Investment Proposals

Support for the new or revised CENTRAL BUDGET investment proposals ranged from 50% for the “Minimum Revenue Provision” proposal, to 45% for the “change to unringfenced specific grants estimates” proposal.



Comments about the CENTRAL BUDGET investment proposals (7 comments)

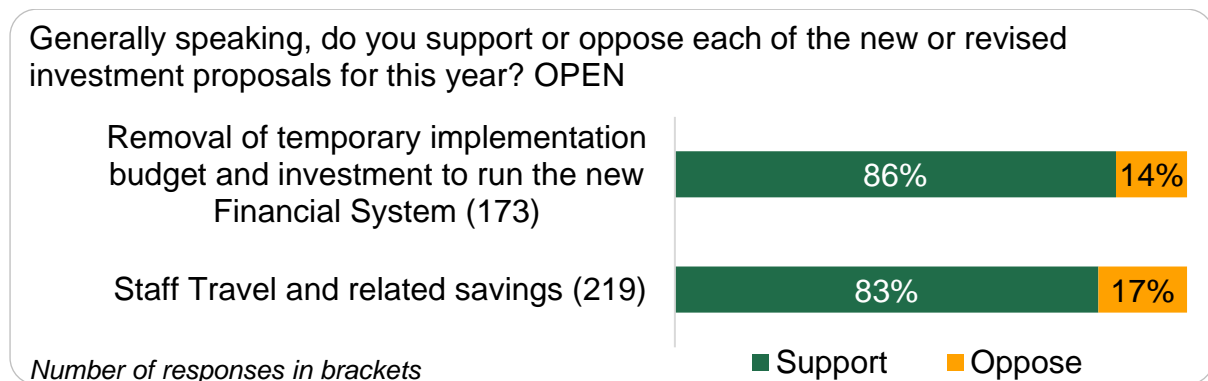
Minimum Revenue Provision: Funds should not be spent unless the council can demonstrate that it benefits all, not the few, they should not be allocated based on “political bias”. Why is the Middlewich bypass not mentioned yet the Poynton relief road is? That bypass is essential and grossly overdue. Unsure why the initial investment is £4 million, then £1 million and £1 million – more information is needed about why this is the case. (6 comments)

Change to unringfenced specific grants estimates: More solid figures are required, rather than estimates, before they are passed. (1 comment)

Views on the SAVING proposals

OPEN Saving Proposals

Support for the new or revised OPEN saving proposals ranged from 86% for the “Removal of temporary implementation budget and investment to run the new Financial System” proposal, to 83% for the “Staff Travel and related savings” proposal.

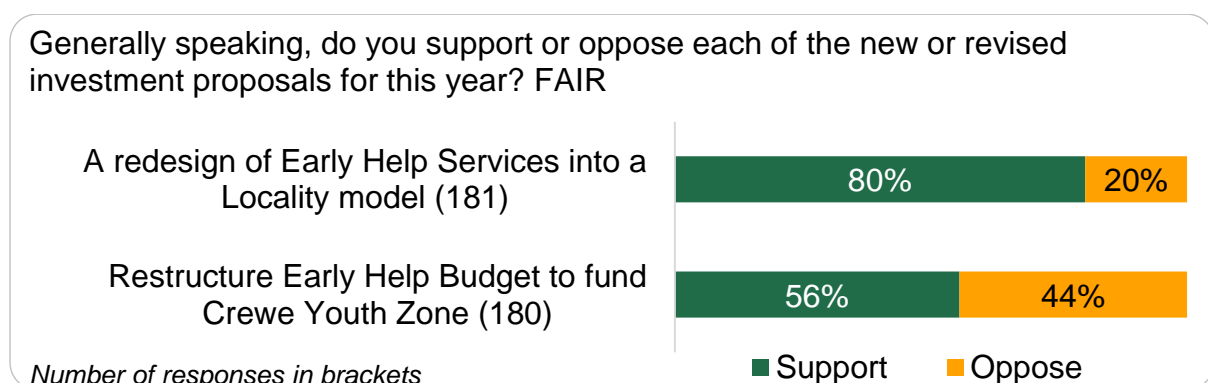


Comments about the OPEN saving proposals (4 comments)

Staff Travel and related savings: Support was expressed for this proposal as it was felt staff travel is mostly not necessary when digital alternatives such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom etc are proven alternatives, they felt staff work on the premise that staff have no reason to travel anywhere. One respondent queried if this a real saving, as council staff have worked from home for a year now, they wondered if car allowances are still being paid. (4 comments)

FAIR Saving Proposals

Support for the new or revised FAIR saving proposals ranged from 80% for the “redesign of Early Help Services into a Locality model” proposal, to 56% for the “restructure Early Help Budget to fund Crewe Youth Zone” proposal.



Comments about the FAIR saving proposals (13 comments)

A redesign of Early Help Services into a Locality model: Support was expressed for a review / redesign of the service. Opposition to the proposal was that some felt the Early Help restructure would be a return to old ways of working which were proven not to work for the service in the past. They felt budget reductions in the Early Help Service should be avoided, as cutting budget here would be a false economy. Rather grants should be sought to implement changes, then the benefits could be reaped. A query was raised as to whether this service can be delivered with a reduced budget. One respondent questioned the Locality Model being proposed, as they felt this “does bring advantages in meeting local need BUT there is no evidence that the adoption of this model will compensate for those early help services that have already been cut from the MTFs. In the light of rising costs in Childrens services this is an untested model that may prove to be a false economy and put our most vulnerable children and families at unprecedented risk as we continue to move through the Covid pandemic”. (5 comments)

Restructure Early Help Budget to fund Crewe Youth Zone: The main opposition to this proposal seemed to be around the fact Crewe was being given investment for extra services, but other areas were not, and this was seen as unfair. Respondents wanted equal expenditure per head of population, rather than one place benefitting over others as is perceived. Some felt Crewe gets too much focus for spending when youth services are greatly needed across the whole borough, and to focus just on Crewe is a high-cost and potentially high-risk enterprise. One respondent questioned the Youth Zone model, stating “it is reliant on external support funding, government grants and ongoing revenue spending from the council. To date the external sponsors are not confirmed and without a sound business case, the government funding will not be released. Sustainability after the initial three years (into the next MTFs period) is unknown. Whilst the Youth Zone model has been successful in some urban areas, it has experienced significant failures in others”. (8 comments)

GREEN Saving Proposals

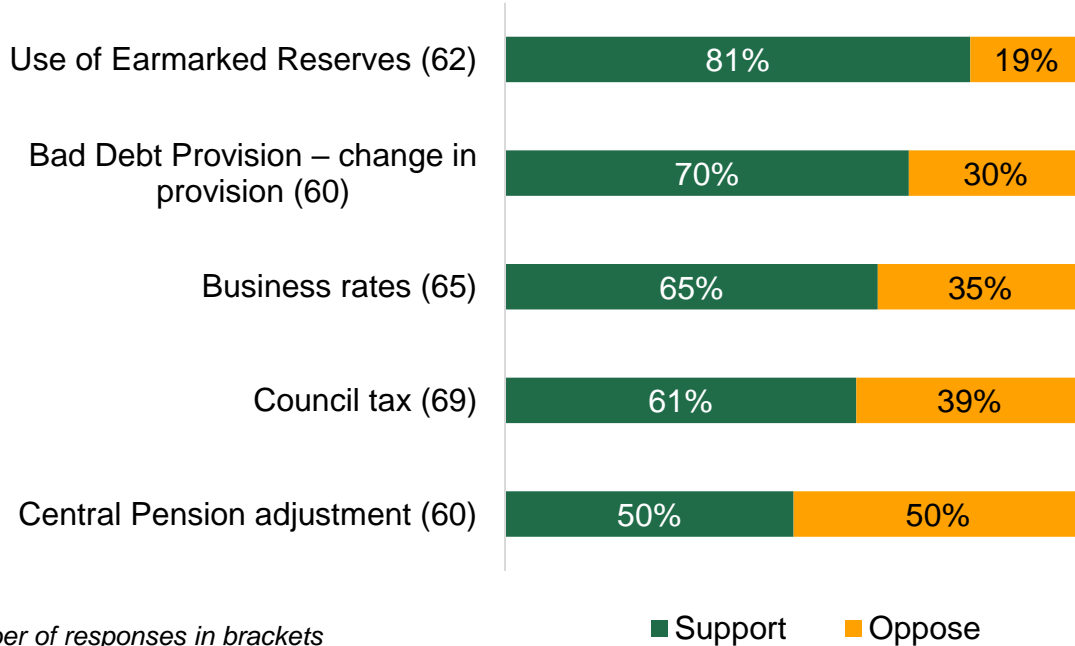
No new or revised Green saving proposals were put forward for 2022 – 2026.

CENTRAL BUDGET Saving Proposals

Support for the new or revised CENTRAL BUDGET saving proposals ranged from very strong support at 81%, down to low support at 50%.

The proposal receiving the highest level of support was 81% for “use of earmarked reserves”, and the proposal receiving the lowest level of support was 50% for “central pension adjustment”:

Generally speaking, do you support or oppose each of the new or revised saving proposals for this year? **CENTRAL BUDGETS**



Comments about the CENTRAL BUDGET saving proposals (11 comments)

Use of Earmarked Reserves: Would it not be more prudent to utilise these funds to increase general reserves to more than the current level of just 3.4%? I do not have enough knowledge on this proposal to be able to comment. (2 comments)

Bad Debt Provision – change in provision: I do not have enough knowledge on this proposal to be able to comment. (1 comment)

Business Rates Retention Scheme: It seems odd to not factor in any saving estimate figures, whereas you have for all other proposals. (1 comment)

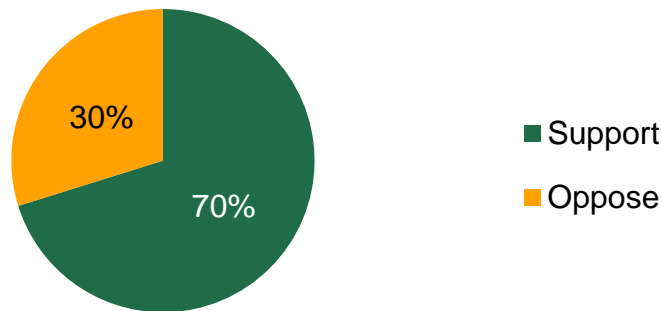
Council Tax: This proposal isn't clear – If the proposal is to decrease spending, does that mean council tax will go down or that we just get less for our money? I support this proposal if payments are reduced, I oppose it if they go up and we get less! Council Tax should not be increased for 2022/23. Council Tax does not represent good value for money. Waste collection should be included within the council tax so to state that this is in additional costing seems erroneous. Don't allow extra planning permission if you cannot support the infrastructure from the income brought. (5 comments)

Central Pension adjustment: You should not be using MTFS to deal with pensions, which are inherently LONG term – Cheshire East Council should not fall into the trap of most Local Authorities trying to save on pensions and then having to catch up later. The council pension scheme is already generous and being paid for by householders who cannot afford their own pension. I do not have enough knowledge on this proposal to be able to comment. (3 comments)

The carbon impact of proposals

A majority of respondents, 70%, supported the introduction of “net carbon impact” assessments for all new saving and investment proposals that are put forward.

Generally speaking, do you support or oppose the introduction of “net carbon impact” assessments for all new saving and investment proposals that are put forward?



Number of responses = 228

Reasons for supporting the introduction of “net carbon impact” assessments (34 comments)

Respondents were in support of the introduction of “net carbon impact” proposals and felt the council should get on with it. They felt the council could be more ambitious on this and hoped that it is not just a “box ticking exercise” (5 comments).

Some felt that:

- Getting the council culture right will be important for achieving carbon neutrality (1 comment)
- Integrated plans will be needed to deliver carbon neutrality (1 comment)
- The council must ensure it fully understands the issues before implementing changes (1 comment)
- It won't work unless the government "levels up" (1 comment)

Respondents suggested how the council could help achieve net carbon neutral:

- Commit to electric vehicles and EV charging points, including electric buses and council vehicles (7 comments)
- Restrict car use / reduce reliance on cars (3 comments)
- Council staff to work from home more. Reduce council office space. (3 comments)
- Ensure Planning and Building regulations are “green” (2 comments)
- Improve walking and cycling routes (2 comments)

- Reduce reliance on solid fuel heating, improve alternative heating such as geothermal heat distribution (2 comments)
- Improve public transport (1 comment)
- Focus on improving air quality (1 comment)
- Keep traffic moving to reduce carbon emissions (1 comment)
- Provide alternatives to Electric Vehicles, such as Green Hydrogen for Transport and Heating, systems which do not involve dangerous mining for materials (1 comment)
- Don't rely on one energy source for everything (1 comment)

Reasons for being opposed to the introduction of “net carbon impact” assessments (17 comments)

Becoming carbon neutral will cost too much – Some felt that residents cannot afford carbon neutral policies, and that they do not care about being net carbon neutral if it costs money (apart from a minority of people that have a lot of it that is).

They felt it's just another tax on those that can't afford it, and that money would be better used elsewhere, and that the council should prioritise getting services right.

Their support for this was conditional on measures being practical and not requiring people to incur unrealistic costs e.g. for Heat Pumps. They suggested it would have been helpful to have an estimate of the additional overhead associated with each proposal in order to give an informed opinion whether net carbon neutral proposals are acceptable or not. (10 comments)

Others were opposed to it as they felt:

- 2025 is too soon and too ambitious a deadline and needs extending (3 comments)
- Being net carbon neutral for the UK is a waste of money and time, and regardless of what we do, our impact is about 1% of world emissions now (2 comments)
- It will increase bureaucracy and the number of consultants (1 comment)
- “Offsetting” should not be used as it feels like it is “quite a scam!” (1 comment)

Final survey comments on the budget engagement

Respondents were given the opportunity within the engagement survey to give any final comments on the budget consultation if they wished to – 61 comments were made by respondents and these have been summarised below.

Rising living costs and Council Tax value for money

Some respondents pointed out that costs are rising rapidly at the moment for both the council and residents and felt that a more efficient / smarter approach will be needed in the near future to make savings, and to prioritise and streamline services. Some felt that 3% Council Tax rises are unacceptable, and that Council Tax is not value for money. They suggested that taxation should be reduced wherever possible, particularly at a time of rising inflation and living costs, and that perhaps more savings proposals should have been made within this consultation to stop Council Tax going up (6 comments).

Others felt that while they feel the council does a good job overall, that past corruption still taints the council's image, and that central government funding cuts over the last decade has "a lot to answer for" (5 comments).

Prioritise spending

Others suggested the council needs to "stop spending money on stuff the public don't need", and that the council has "gone over complicated and need to go back to offering basic services again". They felt the council needs to manage its finances better, think like a business, not waste money on IT projects and on employing people for "woke" jobs (9 comments).

They felt that "given the limited funds available to the Council, money should be spent on real things like road repairs", and highways, with others suggesting the council should reduce capital spend on building new roads and should focus on looking after the ones that already exist instead (5 comments).

Others asked why they should pay for services, such as social care, that they do not use. Others suggested that Social Care Services will always spend more than they have, that having worked in this area this is the ethos and culture of the service and that it needs to change (4 comments).

Respondents also reiterated that they felt that Crewe gets too much focus for spending at the expense of other areas in Cheshire East, and that equity of spending by area is a concern (6 comments).

Improve the budget engagement

Respondents reiterated that the budget engagement could be improved by providing more transparency on spending – provide detail about who is spending what.

They felt the engagement could be improved by providing more and clearer information, using simpler language, publicising it better (perhaps in Council Tax leaflets), acting on feedback, and consulting for a longer period of time (21 comments).

Final comments

Some final comment on the budget engagement included:

- Working from home has many benefits for everyone (1 comment)
- The council should remove rubble charges (1 comment)
- The council should reduce Town and Parish Council precepts and not allow them to spend money on "vanity projects" (1 comment)
- That the council's culture must improve generally (1 comment)
- Free car parking for staff should be removed in car parks where members of the public have to pay (1 comment)

Conclusions

General support for proposals

Respondents generally supported this year's proposals overall, with 56% in support, and 21% in opposition to them.

Responses to the investment and saving proposals

Of the 32 new or revised investment and saving proposals put forward this year, most achieved majority support from consultation respondents, with just 4 achieving less than 50% support. Full feedback on each of these proposals can be found in the main report and in the appendices.

The proposals that stand out as receiving the greatest number of responses included:

Parking service – postponement of review of charges: This remains a divisive legacy issue which continues to engender feelings of discrimination in some residents – can the council develop a more satisfactory policy for this issue?

Crewe Youth Zone and Early Help Services redesign: Concern was raised about the models being proposed for both these proposals, and about whether redistributing funds from one to the other is the right thing to do.

Rising costs of living

A key theme arising in consultation feedback this year centred around increasing living costs and inflation.

Whilst some respondents indicated that they could afford to pay a 2.99% increase in Council Tax, and could even pay more, for many of the most vulnerable residents such an increase will contribute to a real term cut in the standard of living, at a time when other costs of living are rising sharply as well. Some would rather see the council make greater efficiency savings rather than see a rise in Council Tax.

Spending budget in the right areas

There were mixed responses about whether the council spends its budget in the right areas – Several suggested that the council must increase spending in "Place", and particularly on highways and on improving the condition of the roads – this remains a consistently high priority for residents.

There was also a mixed response about People spending, with some feeling it should be increased, while others felt it should be decreased. This may also be an issue that will dominate discussion for years to come as the council dedicates increasing

amounts of its budget to social care, and as the average age of the Cheshire East population continues to rise.

A key concern raised this year was also that Crewe gets too much focus for spending. This is a continuing concern from many that spending is not seen as equitable by area across the borough, with many holding the perception that some areas are favoured over others.

Appendix 1 – Consultation event feedback

5 budget consultation events were held during December 2021 and January 2022:

- Business Forum Meeting – 7 December 2021
- Members Briefing – 10 December 2021
- Member Briefing – 16 December 2021
- Town & Parish Council Event – 17 January 2022
- Town & Parish Council Event – 20 January 2022

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.

Business Forum Meeting – 7 December 2021

Meeting attendees

7 Councillors and council officers.

14 Business representatives from the following organisations: Barclays Technology Centre, Bird Bellows, Cheshire Cheese Co, Balfour Beatty, Comensura, Engie, Ringway Jacobs, FSB (Federation of Small Businesses), FPB (Forum of Private Business), South Cheshire Chamber, Plus Dane Housing, Peaks & Plains Housing, Cheshire East Social Action Partnership, Cheshire for Good.

Feedback

No feedback received.

Members Briefing – 10 December 2021

Briefing attendees

22 Council Members, including Cllr Lata Anderson, Cllr Rachel Bailey, Cllr Mike Benson, Cllr David Brown, Cllr Janet Clowes, Cllr Sam Corcoran, Cllr Laura Crane, Cllr Anthony Critchley, Cllr Hazel Faddes, Cllr J Paul Findlow, Cllr Kathryn Flavell, Cllr Rod Fletcher, Cllr Steve Hogben, Cllr Sally Holland, Cllr Laura Jeuda, Cllr David Marren, Cllr James Nicholas, Cllr Brian Puddicombe, Cllr Mike Sewart, Cllr Margaret Simon, Cllr Amanda Stott, and Cllr Phil Williams.

Feedback

Cllr Brown: Servicing loans for capital projects. For 2025-26, the amount goes up to £23 million. Does that mean CE is paying an extra £2 million in interest for capital projects in that year?

A. It's a simplified way of putting it but yes. In local government there is the prudential code and minimal revenue provision, so it's not automatically assumed that we are paying interest, but there is a requirement from government that when we have capital expenditure, we set aside revenue money to fund that capital expenditure.

Cllr Brown: For 22-23 we go from 17 million a year to 20 million year after, so what are the major capital projects that have caused that increase?

A. You don't pay for schemes immediately after you finish it (e.g., Congleton Link Road), it can be a couple of years later before you've got completion of those projects. Significant Road schemes include Poynton, Middlewich, A500; these are in the programme and some of these will be pushing those figures up. Will relate the final version of the MTFS to those year-by-year increases.

Cllr Clowes: When we start reaching those critical points in the projects that releases government funding like Highways England, do we not get some of those monies back?

A. Two issues. Where we forward fund a project, effectively that is cash flow which doesn't reflect on the annual revenue budget. With the total cost of the project, the government pays up front its grant monies, but the developer contribution depends on the houses being built to release the trigger payments. Council will be out of pocket for a while but that is not charged to the taxpayer, effectively we just carry the debt, and this has a limited impact on the figures.

Cllr Findlow: Pay inflation and other related items – it has gone up over three years from 6 million to 18 million. Is that principally referable to national pay awards?

A. It is but (the position) doesn't start from zero. All pay awards are split between services and give an indication of scale, as it is a genuine cost where we have £100million+ a year spend on staffing. When you get a pay award that is then escalated by an increase in increments, lower pay elements and inflation.

Cllr Findlow: So, what are the other pay related items referring to. Incremental drift you've sighted, are there others?

A. Variations to tax and national insurance would impact on those figures as well.

Cllr Brown: In terms of this year's budget, how much are you expecting to save on the staff travel and related savings with covid been in place. How much is that and how does it compare with savings next year?

A. There are three issues: carbon impact against our zero strategy, cost of wear and tear/petrol, and productivity. All those things have been radically changed by people working from home and savings in the future will be less than savings in the last couple of years. There will still be a significant reduction because we recognise the

productivity benefits of staff being able to flip between Teams meetings rather than having to than drive between buildings so very similar figures (£0.5million on an annual basis) will be realised in this year.

Cllr Brown: In the long term, it will lead to a review of the amount of accommodation resource that we are going to need. It might be useful to have a view of how the estate is going to be reviewed and how we are going to monitor progress on that to make sure we're not retaining assets which we should be letting out.

Cllr Findlow: How much are we exposed to interest rate increases risk factor in paying back loans?

A. We have some very, very short-term borrowings to other local authorities, but the majority of our loans are with PWLB. Those are ten years old and were fixed at the time that we took out the loan, so they are not exposed to interest rate increases. If interest rates increase, we may find that some temporary borrowing would dry up and we would have to go to PWLP or reduce spending. It is an assessment which is going to be included within the treasury management strategy, but we have got limited exposure from existing loans.

Cllr Findlow: You would have to look at the extent and scope. Is this very large on a comparative basis i.e., the capital programme £400 million?

A. We take advice from treasury management advisers who forecast when interest rates might go up. That would lead us to taking out longer term borrowing to be able to minimise that impact. That's when we will start locking some of the money in and at that point you might see a steady increase in revenue implications.

Cllr Brown: Can we as a Council forward borrow money while interest rates are low, to put it in the bank to pay for things that are coming through, rather than wait until the project is completed?

A. We shouldn't borrow in advance of need. To keep costs down right now, we temporarily borrow from other Councils who can't find good places to invest. The most cost-effective way at present is to borrow in the very, very short term because we can get that at very, very low rates. In theory, we could borrow long term for long term projects, but we would only do that if there was a risk that we could not short term borrow.

Cllr Brown: In terms of town and parish councils, will there be a special event for them during this consultation or is it down to the ward councillors to take it forward?

A. We have sent copies of the documents to all the individual town and parish councils and have written out to them to ask for their precepts.

Cllr Findlow: Can you remind members of the figures to be incorporated into the forthcoming budget for pay and price inflation i.e., 2.5 percent for pay, what was price inflation?

A. It will be mixed across the different services. There is an assumption of target inflation which is about 2% but for some services, this is locked into contracts where performance is required to receive inflation. Others will be running at RPI which is slightly higher than the 2% at the moment.

Members Briefing – 16 December 2021

Briefing attendees

8 Council Members, including Cllr Peter Groves, Cllr Arthur Moran, Cllr Patrick Redstone, Cllr Jos Saunders, Cllr Julie Smith, Cllr Sam Corcoran, Cllr Carol Bulman, and Cllr Lesley Smetham.

Feedback

Cllr A Moran: Social care – Consulted on ASC at 1% (£2.5m). Looking forward, we are looking at £4m growth so decisions need to be made on how to cover the shortfall? No alternative not to take this increase. Is the limit 1%?

A. Yes and agreed that we need to use the flexibility to help to cover costs in demand (which are running at around 4% of ASC budget per annum).

Cllr A Moran: NI increases – There is some indication the government will cover this cost? Is that right?

A. Yes, it will form part of the settlement grants funding as government won't want to give funding for the social care levy and fund it by taking away from the very same public services.

Cllr L Smetham: CEC has a reputation for good care for children which brings demand into the borough. Is that still the case?

A. Our quality of care for complex care in CEC is good so it is recognised as a good place to live in that regard.

Cllr A Moran: In the budget, the chancellor announced a 50% business rates rate cut on buildings. Has this information been picked up? Will we benefit?

A. Not seen anything on that yet – will look into it.

Town & Parish Council Event – 17 January 2022

Event attendees

There were 13 event attendees in total, including representatives from Bollington, Nantwich and Poynton Town Councils.

Feedback

- We'd like to see investment in Highway, such as fixing potholes and repairing gullies
- We are interested in the timescales and new approach to the Car Parking Strategy
- What savings were made from the review of the gritting strategy?
- We want a conversation on increased devolving of budgets. We need options and timescales to be able to consider enhancement to local services
- The consultation on local government funding, expected from government in the Spring, should be shared with T&PCs to allow a more local response. There needs to be a particular focus on highways
- Recruitment difficulties are noted, but it would be interesting to know how the Council is responding, in particular how the Council understands what employees are looking for in employment

Town & Parish Council Event – 20 January 2022

Event attendees

There were 9 event attendees in total, including representatives from Chelford Primary School, Cheshire Association of Local Councils (CHALC), Disley Parish Council and Shavington & Gresty Parish Council.

Feedback

- Must improve highways, as potholes and gritting policy make roads unsafe
- Highways contract is not performance managed (quoted example of poor patching work that was only resolved after a complaint)
- Suggested people in certain parishes would willingly pay more Council Tax to improve local roads
- There are too many dangerous potholes and funding should be allocated to more permanent repairs
- Level of Council General Reserves is too low, and seems very uncomfortable position to be in

Appendix 2 – Engagement Hub public comments

The following comments were publicly posted on the Engagement Hub during the consultation period:

25 November 2021 at 7:13PM, David Jenkins wrote:

The council spends a big portion of its budget 60% on social care for adults and children and these costs are rising larger and larger each year faster than everything else? It spends all its money on social care which only benefits a very few ?? The number of people dependent on the state is increasing year on year, we are moving towards a 'dependent' society or dare I say it a socialist society. The council should be telling families and communities to look after themselves not bailing everyone out at my expense. Our societies are not getting any younger and we can't be propped up by the state. That's not a sustainable model. You've got to think outside the box, you've got to think better and more clearly please.

03 December 2021 at 8:25AM, Andrew shaw wrote:

Utility companies and their contractors must be held responsible for not reinstating our roads properly. Why should we pay for their shoddy work?

06 December 2021 at 12:17PM, Carl Wainwright wrote:

All main subsidised bus routes must be hourly Monday – Saturday including the 391 / 392.

31 December 2021 at 10:56AM, Nigel Ollier wrote:

I believe that the people off Crewe and Nantwich should be allowed to return to there own council. This needs to be put to a public vote. We can look after are own towns.

19 January 2022 at 1:11PM, keith gilby wrote:

Why do the people in power make such seemingly stupid and dangerous decisions such as the stopping of rural gritting? Moreover, why do Ringway Jacobs get paid to fill the same pot holes time and time again, and where are the quality and performance metrics? Lastly, why are CE roads in such a dangerous and disgusting condition? Is our money being wisely spent???

22 January 2022 at 7:08AM, Laura Turner wrote:

This budget engagement wasn't advertised very well and lots of residents have missed to opportunity to add comments. To be put on the CEC page the day before the closing date is pretty poor.

I would like to address the quality of the services CEC supply especially highways and highlight the financial waste CEC creates.

I believe a full efficiency audit is needed on your budget and cost effective improvements need to be made.

A couple of examples, you keep replacing bus shelters with glass, they keep getting smashed, you now buy cheap and poor road signs and street signs they keep needing to be replaced, you temporarily fix roads then they need repairing again... these are all examples of wasting money. More innovative thinking needs to happen CEC seem to be picking quantity over quality and that isn't always the cheapest way. You must be hemorrhaging money everywhere. Your children SEN budgets in deficit but this could have been prevented years ago. All the planning you do may have consultations but that isn't sufficient, CEC should be directly meeting with towns at least twice a year and meet residents to hear on improvements and what isn't working well. You could get out of one public meeting more than you could get out of 20 consultations that no one knows about or has time to fill in.

Time is wasted in CEC and time costs money. It seems you have more meetings than action which is also eating money and costing residents in expensive CEC staff salaries.

A lot of the data councillors make decisions on are inaccurate or out of date so the planning is poor and money is spent on things that now may not be needed? This is all wasting the tax payers money.

CEC need to work smarter not harder and stop wasting our hard earned money in such desperate times this would not be happening in a private sector company that has to generate a profit.

Appendix 3 – Social media engagement & feedback

Social media campaign methodology

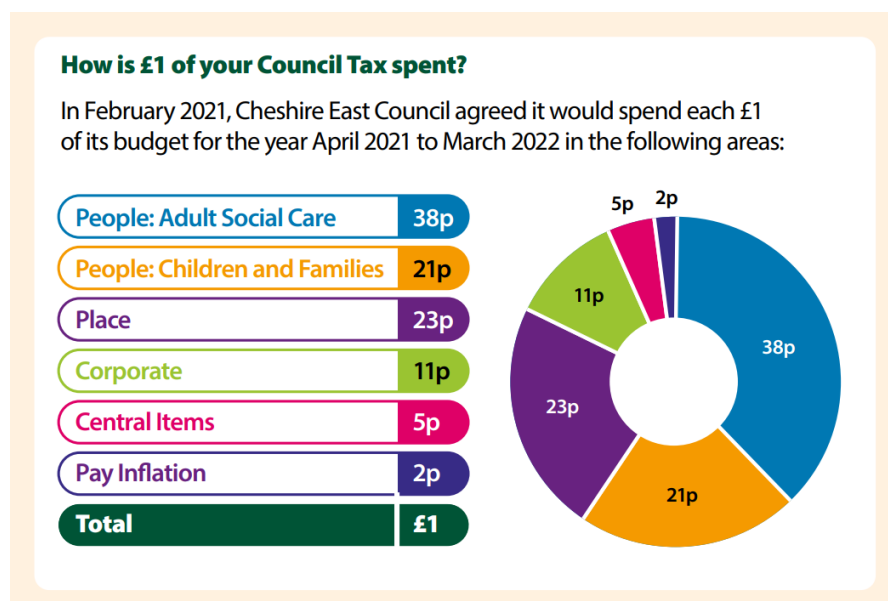
The consultation was promoted on Facebook and Twitter via 6 different posts that were pushed out at different days / times on both platforms.

The 6 posts used to promote the consultation were:

- We're committed to managing our budgets carefully for the future of our services and are consulting on our budget. Find out more and have your say.
- Our corporate plan outlines our ambitions around open, fair and green. Find out what this means for our budget and have your say on our consultation.
- Did you know 59p in every £1 of council tax is spent on services for children & adults, including those who are most vulnerable in our community? We are consulting on how we do this - find out more and have your say.
- Should the proposals in our budget be altered? and if so in what way? Feedback to us via our online survey or via your local councillors by 4 January
- The consultation on our budget closes on the 4 January- why not take a look and see how we deliver services that meet the needs of local people
- Last chance to have your say on our budget proposals - the consultation closes tomorrow (4 Jan) - why not take a look now and fill in the online survey

In total 20 comments and replies were made in response, and all 20 comments and replies were made to just one post – “Did you know 59p in every £1 of council tax is spent on services for children & adults, including those who are most vulnerable in our community? We are consulting on how we do this - find out more and have your say.”

This post was accompanied with the below picture:



Facebook engagement

Engagement

- 9 Facebook posts advertising the consultation
- 21,329 reach (number of people reached in their feeds)
- 21,937 impressions
- 899 engagements (includes clicks)
- 18 comments and replies (see below)

Comments

Post: Did you know 59p in every £1 of council tax is spent on services for children & adults, including those who are most vulnerable in our community? We are consulting on how we do this - find out more and have your say

Comment 1: Chris Parr – “I'd love to know what "corporate" is supposed to cover”

Rachel McNulty – “Chris Parr I found their wording ‘for children and adults’ to be amusing. Like the rest must be for animals and robots.”

Chris Parr – “Rachel McNulty I'm in favour of this. Free charging points for robot animals”

Comment 2: Johnny Wazzock – “Pay inflation” 🤔🤔🤔🤔

Chris Hill – “Johnny Wazzock Tbf, that’s less than inflation. So they are essentially getting a pay cut. Be interesting if everyone got a flat 2% though, or just certain areas/teams”

Comment 3: David Bloor – “How much is spent of cleaning up fly tipped rubbish because of your abject failure to tackle the problem? #waste”

Richard Hoffmann – “David Bloor perhaps if they had the money from the Treasury they could.”

Richard Hoffmann – “David Bloor why not address this with your Crewe CEC Councillors”

Comment 4: Chris Mountcastle – “I don’t have a problem with how each £1 is spent... It’s the quantity of £1’s you demand from us each year that I have a problem with. 🙄”

Comment 5: Larry Hallett – “Well - I'm struggling to take all this in, because we are constantly paying more; and getting less in return. High tax for a sub-standard service.”

Comment 6: Andy Oakes – “So how many Christmas cards do I need to write for all the people I support with my taxes!”

Comment 7: Jacqui Dexter – “How much goes into your pension pots and expenses?”

Comment 8: Jack Wardle – “Wouldn't pay a penny for the social care in Cheshire East rated one of the worst in the UK”

Comment 9: Paul Cawood – “I love that none of the headings make sense to anyone one outside CEC.”

Andy Oakes – “Paul Cawood that's because they're corrupt”

Comment 10: Paul Mullen – “Cheshire East Is that from the full council tax, or only from the Social care element that arrived a year or 2 ???”

Graham J Whitehouse – “Paul Mullen from the total annual income of which council tax is small part.”

Comment 11: Phoebe Williams – “Why is it not spent on gritting our roads?”

Twitter engagement

Engagement

- 9 twitter posts advertising the consultation
- 11,908 impressions (similar to views/appeared on people's feeds)
- 148 Engagements (Clicks, pauses to read for longer)
- 35 URL clicks
- 26 Hashtag clicks
- 2 comments (see below)

Comments

Post: Did you know 59p in every £1 of council tax is spent on services for children & adults, including those who are most vulnerable in our community? We are consulting on how we do this - find out more and have your say

Comment 1: Denise Green @devonden 1 Dec 2021 replied with “Don't you mean civil servant pensions?”.

Comment 2: Itchy Iguana @Lanx75 21 Dec 2021 replied with “Who's the pay inflation for?? Because us minions certainly aren't getting it!”

LinkedIn engagement

Engagement

- 737 impressions
- 26 clicks
- 11 likes and 2 shares

Appendix 4 – Email feedback

Mere Parish Council

Dear Sir/Madam,

After having received the e-mail from [Cheshire East Council], Mere Parish Council wishes to state it does not feel we are currently getting value for money. Too much is currently being spent on social care and not enough on highways, waste etc.

Regards,

Clerk To Mere Parish Council.

Disley Parish Council (1)

Hello,

Thank you for an interesting presentation and discussion on Thursday evening.

Following the conversation about the highways budget, I checked back on my notes from the Highways Top Up Meeting on 27/5/21. At this meeting it was stated (I think by a CEC councillor) that the Highways budget is currently £16m but £27m is required to maintain CEC roads to the current standards. Therefore, we are budgeting for decline in the state of CEC roads. It was also said that £150m would be required to bring the roads up to a good state of repair. I would be interested to know the accuracy of these figures.

In Disley, key roads are in a very poor state. Redhouse Lane and the 4-way junction where Buxton Old Road and Jacksons Edge Road meet the A6 are now in an extremely dangerous condition. This has been highlighted repeatedly to CEC by Disley Parish Council. I know that these issues are not confined to Disley.

Therefore, it is my opinion that the highways budget needs to be increased immediately to allow for necessary repairs to CEC roads to be carried out. I believe that the current funding levels for highways are not acceptable to residents. As a parish councillor I receive more complaints about the condition of the roads than all other matters raised added together.

Please can my email be included in the consultation process.

Kind regards,

Chair, Disley Parish Council.

Disley Parish Council (2)

Hello,

My questions are as follows:

(1) I am concerned about the low level of reserves held by CEC, both relative to the level of council income/expenditure and the reserves held by other local authorities. Good forecasting and a relatively stable economic environment in recent years (pre-pandemic) has meant that this position has been relatively low risk. However, this situation has now changed, with serious inflationary pressures, labour shortages in key areas and considerable economic and political uncertainty. Can you provide details of stress testing that has been carried out to confirm how resilient CEC would be in terms of its reserves?

(2) At a meeting I attended recently with people from the voluntary sector, there was a considerable amount of concern about the reduction in grant funding available from CEC. Funding diverted to the Cheshire East Crowdfunding scheme has meant that small local voluntary groups have lost out as crowdfunding is frequently not appropriate for them. I am strongly supportive of the Cheshire East Crowd and we have benefitted from a successful project in Disley. However, this approach to funding is not suitable for small local voluntary groups who have previously applied for relatively small amounts of funding on a regular basis. Crowdfunding is also not appropriate for some of the less popular causes eg. supporting asylum seekers and those suffering from drug or alcohol abuse. Is it possible to look again at the amount of grant funding available for small voluntary sector organisations, who provide enormous benefit to our communities at very little cost to the public purse?

Many thanks,

Chair, Disley Parish Council.

Appendix 5 – Council Committee feedback

Children and Families Committee – 10 January 2022 10:30

The following minutes relating to the budget consultation are taken from [the full meeting minutes on the Cheshire East Council website](#):

The committee received the report which aimed to capture the committee members' responses to consultation on the Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2022 to 2026. Comments were put forward on the following proposals:

Investment in Cared for Children and Care Leavers:

- This investment was welcomed and noted to be a good news story.

Increase capacity to support Statutory SEND service:

- Councillor Flavell acknowledged the deficit in SEND but welcomed the increase of capacity.

Revenue costs for Crewe Youth Zone:

- Councillor Flavell highlighted the positive impact for Crewe and that, if successful, this is something which could be rolled out wider in the long term.
- Councillor Saunders expressed a concern about the perceived inequality of access for young people depending on their geographical location due to a lack of public transport in some areas, particularly Macclesfield.
- Councillor Saunders expressed a further concern about the youth zone model not always being successful and the committee not having seen the business plan yet.
- Councillor Saunders raised a concern about taking £400,000 out of Early Help to fund this service and expressed the view that this was counter intuitive as it would have a negative impact on families elsewhere.

Safeguarding Children – legacy staffing pressure:

- The committee noted this proposal.

Growth in Children & Families Commissioning Contracts

- The committee noted this proposal.

Increase capacity to support Statutory Education Psychology Service:

- Councillor Hayes advised he was broadly in support of this in order to meet statutory requirements, although had concerns about what would happen at the

end of financial year 2024 to sustain the increase in provision. A request was made for detail on what would happen from 2024 onwards.

A redesign of Early Help Services into a Locality model:

- Councillor Saunders raised a concern about the reference to change to items 10, 11, 50, 72 in 2021/22 budget (page 141) and requested that it is noted that what is being proposed to be taken out next year is greater than what was originally proposed. It was agreed that a written response would be provided for clarity on this.
- Councillor Hayes noted from other reports received today that more extreme and complex cases were coming through Early Help services resulting in additional pressure. Councillor Hayes expressed a concern that there could be a double risk of some children being missed by the system due to not having capacity and thresholds being reduced meaning less impact from Early Help.
- A question was raised as to whether there is there likely to be a reduction of frontline staff proposed through this saving and what that would look like for communities. The committee were advised that the proposals were not for a reduction in frontline capacity but that a written response would be provided with more detail.
- A further question was raised regarding the total of earmarked reserves and it was agreed that Jo Wilcox would circulate a full list to the committee.

Restructure Early Help Budget for Crewe Youth Zone:

- It was requested that comments detailed above regarding concerns about restructuring Early Help to fund the Youth Zone also be noted for this proposal.

School Transport:

- Councillor Saunders raised a concern that this proposal was unrealistic going forward as, historically, it had not been possible to achieve.
- The committee put forward the general concern about ongoing savings in school transport after next year.

Establish an Education Psychologist traded service:

- Councillor Hayes requested that concerns raised under item 10 be noted for this proposal, specifically the concern about establishing traded services while not meeting the statutory timeline and about creating inequality in the system.

Establish a traded service for non-statutory elements of Attendance Service:

- The committee noted this proposal.

Development and Partnerships Service:

- The committee noted this proposal.
- A request was made for a written response to provide detail on the saving of £300,000 in year 2.

Economy and Growth Committee – 11 January 2022 14:00

The following minutes relating to the budget consultation are taken from [the full meeting minutes on the Cheshire East Council website](#):

The committee received a report on the Medium-Term Financial Strategy for 2022/23 – 2025/26. As part of the consultation process the committee was asked to provide comments and feedback to the Corporate Policy Committee on proposals related to the responsibilities of the committee.

Concerns were raised by Members that the provisional settlement from Government referred to items over a number of years, but the detail of allocations to individual local authorities only related to the 2022/23 financial year. It was noted that it is not unusual for Government to only give one-year allocations, and that whilst the Council must continue to plan for the medium term the settlement creates limited scope for sustainable changes.

A question was raised in respect of the rationale for putting the compensation for under-indexing the multiplier, which related to Business Rates income, into the Collection Fund Reserve, rather than the General Fund. It was agreed that a written response would be provided outside of the meeting and circulated to committee members.

The following comments were raised by committee:

It was felt that the core headings within the Budget Engagement document did not always align with the proposals listed and therefore the information did not flow for the reader. It was proposed that, in addition to the headings with respect to the Council's vision, in future documents supplementary wording could be added under each heading to cover the main services relating to each of the Corporate Priorities.

There was some discussion in respect of the one-year settlement funding from Government, and the services this funding could be put towards. The committee agreed that it would like the following items to be considered for funding at the next stage of MTFS development:

- Landlord Licensing Scheme
- Invest to Save Projects

RESOLVED (unanimously):

1. That the committee noted the MTFS 2022 to 2026 Consultation Document (Appendix 1 of the report).
2. That the following proposals rolling forward from the MTFS 2021-25 relevant to the committee (as part of Appendix 1 (Appendix A of the report) be noted.

25) Transfer of Congleton Visitor Information Centre

49) Estates Transformation - Office Accommodation

51) Neighbourhood Estate Review

80) Tatton Park

81) Asset / Service Transfer

3. That the impact of the local government financial settlement as provided at Appendix 2 on the MTFS Consultation Document be noted.
4. That the minutes of the meeting form the consultation response of the Committee for consideration by the Corporate Policy Committee, including:
 - a. That consideration be given to providing a budget for development of the Landlord Licensing Scheme in the final MTFS;
 - b. That officers be asked to bring forward proposals for Invest to Save projects for inclusion in the final MTFS;
 - c. That the Committee's comments with regard to the Budget Engagement document be noted for future reference.

Corporate Policy Committee – 12 January 2022 10:30

The Committee considered the Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2022 to 2026 as part of the budget consultation. The consultation document included proposals to update the current MTFS that was approved by Council in February 2021.

All Committees were being asked to provide feedback in relation to their financial responsibilities as identified within the Constitution and linked to the budget alignment approved by the Finance Sub-Committee in July 2021. Responses to the consultation, including those of all service committees, would be reported to the Corporate Policy Committee at its meeting on 10th February 2022 with a view to the Committee making recommendations to Council.

Appendix 1 to the report contained the Budget Engagement document, including the survey questions that had been used during the consultation period, which closed 4th January 2022.

The Provisional Settlement announced on 16th December 2021 had varied the assumptions contained in the Budget Engagement document. Appendix 2 to the report, which had been circulated to members before the meeting, set out the changes announced and the impact on the estimated funding envelope.

The Executive Director of Corporate Services informed the Committee that the budget for Corporate Services remained fairly static over the four year period of the MTFS, at £36m next year, rising to £38m largely as a result of inflation. There was some growth attributable to the revenue consequences of capital expenditure on ICT and to pay inflation and increased national insurance contributions. The Executive Director briefly discussed the proposals within the consultation document that were relevant to the responsibilities of the Committee.

Members raised the following matters in relation to the consultation document:

- Members asked whether the mitigation to address reducing levels of Dedicated Schools Grant was as up to date as it could be. The Executive Director of Corporate Services would ensure that this was addressed in the report back to the Committee in February.
- The question was asked whether there was sufficient flexibility to allow for a smaller increase in Council tax, for instance by utilising money currently intended for the General Reserves? Officers responded that the Government had an expectation that councils would increase Council tax to achieve financial sustainability. Members would have to consider any flexibility in Council tax rises in relation to risks such as the pressure on the Adult Social Care budget and inflation.
- The question was asked whether the Government would be moving to a deprivation-based model of assessing the needs of local authorities from 2023. The Director of Finance and Customer Services replied that this had been a feature of the fairer funding consultation that had taken place in recent years. Whilst it was not certain when any such change would take place, the Government did appear to be moving towards a deprivation-based model.
- Concern was expressed about the energy consumption of the cloudbased platform Atamis and the green credentials of the company providing the system. The Executive Director of Corporate Services undertook to look into the matter and write to all members of the Committee.

RESOLVED

That the Committee

1. notes the MTFS 2022 to 2026 Consultation Document (Appendix 1) and the proposals relevant to the responsibilities of the Committee as set out in the following paragraphs and on the following pages of the Consultation Document:

- 1) Improving Digital Customer Experience (page 11 of the report)
- 2) Pay inflation (page 11)
- 3) National Insurance increase at 1.25% for social care funding (page 11)

- 4) Improved Debt Recovery and correcting budgeted court costs income targets to reflect actual levels (page 11)
- 5) Transactional Service Centre additional funding (page 12)
- 6) Vendor Management Phase 3 (page 12)
- 7) Unified IT Communications (page 12)
- 8) IT Security and Compliance (page 12)
- 9) IT Procurements and Application Lifecycle Management (page 12)
- 10) Information Assurance and Data Management Phase 3 (page 12)
- 11) Removal of temporary implementation budget and investment to run the new Financial System (page 14)
- 12) Staff Travel and related savings (page 14)

2. notes those proposals that are rolling forward from the MTFS 2021-25 relevant to the Committee (as part of Appendix 1 (Appendix A)):

- 6) Mitigation of reduction in the Dedicated Schools Grant (Corporate Services) (page 33)
- 7) Mitigation of the year-on-year reduction in the Dedicated Schools Grant (ICT) (page 33)
- 13) Efficiency savings and Restructures within Corporate Services (page 33)
- 15) Shared services review (page 33)
- 21) Review of corporate subscriptions (page 33)
- 34) Brighter Futures Together Programme Customer Experience (page 34)
- 43) Infrastructure Investment Programme (page 34)

3. notes the impact of the local government financial settlement as provided at Appendix 2 on the MTFS Consultation Document;

4. notes the other elements of the MTFS Consultation Document related to the responsibilities of the Committee (including WOC Business Plans, and Reserves levels); and

5. notes that the minutes of this meeting will form the consultation response of this Committee, and along with feedback from all the other Committees, will be considered at the Committee's next meeting on 10th February 2022.

Highways and Transport Committee – 13 January 2022 10:30

The committee received a report on the Medium-Term Financial Strategy for 2022/23 – 2025/26. As part of the consultation process the committee was asked to provide comments and feedback to the Corporate Policy Committee on proposals related to the responsibilities of the committee.

At the start of the debate a proposal was moved by Councillor L Crane which was seconded by Councillor C Browne that the Corporate Policy Committee be recommended to consider allowing the Highways and Infrastructure service to take up to a further £3.9 million increase in its capital budget of which £2.694 million could potentially be funded from the New Homes Bonus Scheme. It was felt this recommendation could address some of the issues raised by Members regarding the lack of spend by the Council on infrastructure. In addition it was anticipated this request would potentially assist with the revenue budget and free up finances to spend on service areas where there had been budget cuts.

Further comments were made as follows:

- (i) Councillor L Crane commented that the Corporate Policy Committee should be asked to consider the delineation between departments and whether the service was receiving the appropriate proportion of the budget for such an important asset;
- (ii) Councillor L Gilbert commented that there were reports that the Cheshire East Countryside Access Forum's footpaths maintenance budget had been cut by 62%. There was no reference to this in the report, nor had it been reported to Public Rights of Way (PROW) Committee. There was a concern that this reported cut in budget represented an inconsistent approach to the promotion of the Council's healthy lifestyle agenda and active travel programme;
- (iii) Councillor L Gilbert also commented that during the pandemic footpath usage had greatly increased and therefore it was felt it was felt inappropriate to reduce budget and treat maintenance of footpaths as a low priority.
- (iv) Councillor L Jeuda commented that funding be made available so all over 60s and young people were offered a free bus pass. This would increase the opportunity for more people to travel by bus thus cutting down the isolation of the older sections of society and promoting a greener way of travel;
- (v) Councillor S Akers Smith commented that additional finance for the highways service and Public Rights of Way service areas was essential in order to provide people with the choice if they wanted to walk or cycle.

(vi) Councillor R Bailey felt it was regrettable that the revenue budget had not been used as wisely as it could have and that the £0.8 million reduction followed by a £0.6million reduction for the next two years thereafter previously agreed at a full Council budget meeting had been a retrograde step;

(viii) Councillor M Sewart stated that focus needed to be on spending more on services and infrastructure;

(ix) The Chair commented that the settlement received was good news even if it only offered certainty of one year. He felt that if investment in the capital budget took place then this potentially could lead to the reduction in some of the revenue spend;

(x) Councillor A Gage suggested if additional capital was made available to undertake level 2/3 repairs then an active listening exercise with each individual Ward Councillor should be conducted prior to any monies being allocated. In response the Chair advised that recommendations from local ward Members and highways engineers already formed part of the assessment process for determining which roads would benefit from the repair work;

(xi) The Chair further commented that if there was a reduction in the money required to be spent on the reactive potholes repairs from the revenue budget as anticipated then the Council should look to see if it could allocate some of the monies to the PROW service;

(xii) Finally Councillor R Bailey requested that further consideration should be given to an overview of the core revenue share currently proposed particularly in terms of the underspend in communities and environment and the overspend in highways and given the two service areas were linked before the introduction of the new committee system.

RESOLVED (Unanimously):

1. That the Corporate Policy Committee be recommended to consider allowing the Highways and Infrastructure service to take up to a further £3.9 million increase in its capital budget of which £2.694 million could potentially be funded from the New Homes Bonus Scheme.

2. That the comments made by individual Councillors as outlined above be fed back to the Corporate Policy Committee for their consideration.

3. That the MTFS 2022 to 2026 Consultation Document (Appendix 1 of the report) be noted.

4. That the following proposals rolling forward from the MTFS 2021-25 relevant to the committee (as part of Appendix 1 (Appendix A of the report) be noted. 87) Carbon Reduction-Replacement of existing illuminated signs and bollards with LED units

5. That the impact of the local government financial settlement as provided at Appendix 2 on the MTFs Consultation Document be noted.

6. That the minutes of the meeting form the consultation response of the Committee for consideration by the Corporate Policy Committee.

Adults and Health Committee – 18 January 2022 10:30

The committee received a report on the Medium-Term Financial Strategy for 2022/23 – 2025/26. As part of the consultation process the committee was asked to provide comments and feed back to the Corporate Policy Committee on proposals related to the responsibilities of the committee.

It was noted that the provisional settlement from Government referred to items over a number of years, but the detail of allocations to individual local authorities only related to the 2022/23 financial year. It was noted that whilst the Council must continue to plan for the medium term the settlement creates limited scope for sustainable changes.

Feedback and comments were noted in respect of the following: - Councillor J Clowes requested that it be noted that it would have been helpful to have the results of the wider budget consultation process, to inform the consideration of the proposals by the committee.

Investment in Adult Social Care

Clarity was sought in respect of the profile of the additional investment in Adult Social Care which was lower in the 2023/24 financial year than for other years in the proposals for 2022-2026.

Care Fee Uplifts

Building in care fee uplifts for social care partners in the private sector was noted.

Proposals that are rolling forward from the MTFs 2021-25

Clarity was sought in respect of what progress had been made in the capital investment proposals previously made, that would create increased provision in supported living accommodation and help to enable the needs of individuals currently with high-cost care packages out-of-Borough to be met within Cheshire East more cost-effectively.

Councillor Gardiner raised a question seeking clarity on the amounts Service budgets being spent on the different forms of Social Care. It was agreed that a written response would be provided outside of the meeting.

Councillor Gardiner raised a further question in respect of whether capital monies could be used to assist in reducing the revenue budget requirement. It was noted that

capital resources would not directly be able to help with revenue expenditure such as salaries or other day-to-day costs; they must be used for spending on items that would last longer than one year, for example on buildings or equipment, which may in turn help deliver day-to-day services.

Questions were raised in respect of the increases in the Adults Social Care budget relative to budget changes other services. It was noted that the information referred to was within the Budget Engagement document, and as such did form part of the balanced budget proposals for 2022-2026; and that it was the case that spending on Adults Services was increasing as a proportion of the Council's net revenue budget.

RESOLVED (unanimously)

1. That the committee noted the MTFS 2022 to 2026 consultation Document (Appendix 1 of the report).

2. That the following proposals rolling forward from the MTFS 2021-25 relevant to the committee (as part of Appendix 1(Appendix A of the report) be noted

- 9) Continuing Healthcare Reviews
- 12) Reduce Base budget assigned to Community Grants
- 48) Productivity and Efficiency in Adult Social Care
- 61) Direction of travel for the Communities Team
- 63) Day Opportunities, Redesign, Strategy and Savings
- 64) Mental Health Services Review
- 67) Electronic Call Monitoring Reclamation
- 73) Learning Disabilities Future Service Development and Review

3. That the impact of the local government financial settlement as provided at Appendix 2 on the MTFS Consultation Document be noted.

4. That the minutes of the meeting form the consultation response of the Committee, for consideration by the Corporate Policy Committee, including the comments with regard to:

- a. It being helpful for the results of the budget consultation process to be made available to each committee to inform consideration of proposals, for future reference
- b. The delivery of the invest to save proposals in respect of supported living accommodation

Environment and Communities Committee – 20 January 2022 10:30

Paul Goodwin, Head of Financial Services & Deputy Chief Finance Officer attended the meeting and introduced the item to the Committee.

The Committee was advised that the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) report was the opportunity for the committee to feed back on the budget consultation document that related to the MTFS 2022-2026 for services under the remit of this committee. There were no specific new proposals that related to services for this committee but there were a number of existing proposals rolling forward from the MTFS 2021-25 relevant to this committee, these were listed as an appendix within the report.

The Committee were given the opportunity to ask questions.

Councillor Peter Groves asked if the salary levels for planning officers was being considered in relation to retention and recruitment of staff within this area.

Paul Bayley, Director for Environment and Neighbourhood Services noted that the Executive Director for Place had instigated a deep-dive review of planning services within Cheshire East and recruitment and retention of Planning Officers, including salary levels, would be considered within the scope of this review.

RESOLVED: That:

- 1) the MTFS 2022 to 2026 Consultation Document be received and noted;
- 2) comments made by individual Councillors be fed back to the Corporate Policy Committee for its consideration;
- 3) the following proposals rolling forward from the MTFS 2021-25 relevant to the committee (as part of Appendix 1 (Appendix A of the report) be noted:
 - 26) Regulatory Services and Environmental Health ICT procurement
 - 27) CCTV migration to wireless networks
 - 29) Orbitas income and management fee
 - 31) Everybody Sport and Recreation Management Fee
 - 39) Review of governance of ASDVs
 - 42) Strategic Leisure Review
 - 84) Waste Contract Inflation and Tonnage Growth

85) Environment Strategy and Carbon Neutrality

86) Tree Risk Management

5) the impact of the local government financial settlement as provided at Appendix 2 on the MTFS Consultation Document be received and noted;

6) it be noted that this committee can comment on any other element of the MTFS Consultation Document related to the responsibilities of the Committee (including WOC Business Plans, and Reserves levels);

7) it be noted that the minutes of this meeting will form the consultation response of the Committee for the consideration by the Corporate Policy Committee.

Appendix 6 – Consultation methodology & response

Consultation promotion

The council [set out its proposals in a budget consultation document](#), and promoted the consultation [through a Budget Engagement Hub](#).

People could respond to the consultation by:

- Completing a long online survey on the full budget consultation document
- Completing a short online survey on a reduced version of the consultation document (the short version of the survey was only promoted to Digital Influence Panel members)
- Completing a paper version of the long survey, made available at all libraries in Cheshire East
- Emailing (RandC@cheshireeast.gov.uk)
- Writing to Research and Consultation, Westfields, Sandbach, CW11 1HZ
- Tweeting @CheshireEast #CECBudget21
- Publicly commenting on [the Engagement Hub](#)

The consultation was widely promoted, most notably though:

- [Media releases](#)
- Members Briefings
- Business and Schools forums
- Emails to key stakeholders including all local Town and Parish Councils
- [The council's Digital Influence Panel](#)

Additionally, Cheshire East Council employees were invited to submit ideas on how the council could save money and raise income for the council via a “Save Us Money” campaign.

Consultation responses

Total consultation engagements for 2022

In total, there were 380 consultation engagements, including:

- 264 survey completions (see Overall views on council spending for results)
- 73 attendees at a budget consultation event (see Appendix 1 – Consultation event feedback for details)
- 6 Budget Engagement Hub comments (see Appendix 2 – Engagement Hub public comments for details)

- 20 social media comments or replies (see Appendix 3 – Social media engagement & feedback for details)
- 3 email responses (see Appendix 4 – Email feedback for details)
- 14 “Save Us Money” ideas submitted by council employees

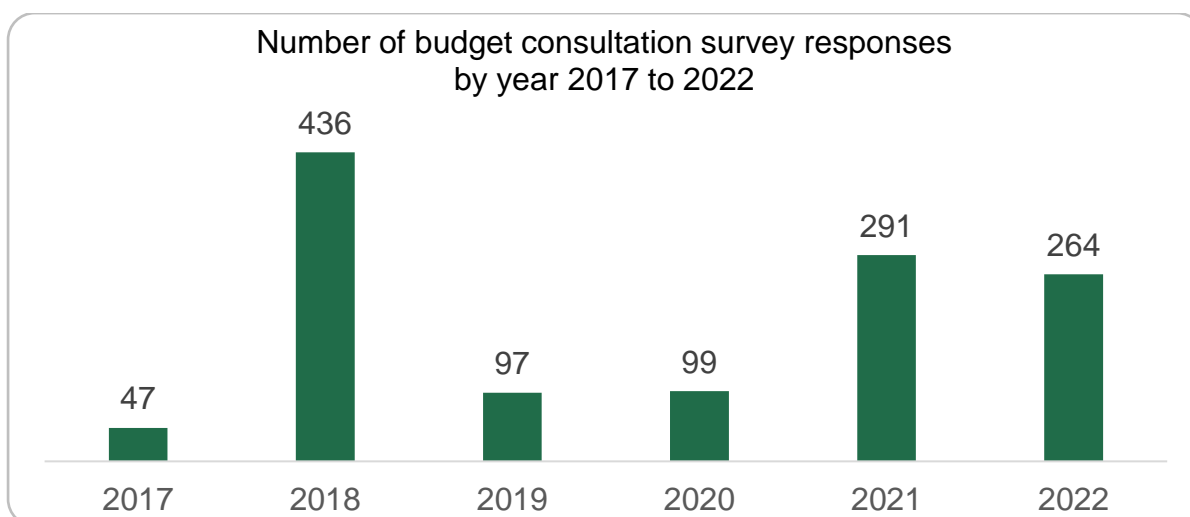
Consultation engagements compared to previous years

The number of consultation engagements in 2022 was slightly up on the number received in 2021 (380 in 2022 Vs 313 in 2021), though the number of survey completions in 2022 (264) is down slightly from 2021 (291).

The number of survey completions and engagements in 2021 and 2022 are up significantly from those received in 2019 and 2020 – 3.7 times as many engagements were received in 2022 as compared to 2019, and this most probably reflects the improvements made since 2021 in the presentation of consultation material, and in the development of the Engagement Hub used to promote the consultation. The consultations conducted between 2019 and 2022 did not include any particularly “controversial” proposals.

The number of consultation engagements and survey responses received in 2018 were significantly higher than those received either before or since. The 2018 budget consultation included “controversial” proposals as compared to other years, including proposals to potentially close Alderley Edge, Disley and Prestbury libraries. These proposals received a large number of representations, and as a result of the opposition received to these proposals, the council decided to keep the libraries open, and make budget savings through changes to opening hours and staffing instead.

Consultation engagements by year	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Survey responses	47	436	97	99	291	264
Engagement Hub comments	-	-	-	-	14	6
Emails / Letters	14	132	5	2	8	3
Event attendees	32	-	-	2	-	73
Social media comments or replies	26	116	-	-	-	20
SUM ideas submitted	-	-	-	-	-	14
Petitions	-	3	-	-	-	-
Total engagements	119	687	102	103	313	380



A breakdown of 2022 survey responses

In 2022, the budget consultation survey was promoted in 3 main ways:

1. Through general promotion including media releases, social media campaigns and emails to key stakeholders
2. Through the council's [Digital Influence Panel](#) (DIP), which is a database of residents that wish to get involved in council consultations
3. Through paper consultation packs distributed in all Cheshire East libraries, which included copies of the budget consultation material and questionnaires

Two versions of the consultation survey were also sent to the Digital Influence Panel (DIP) members – the usual long version which was being promoted elsewhere, and a shorter, abridged version of the consultation material and survey.

A short, abridged version was also sent to DIP members as previous feedback suggested some found they budget consultation material too long to read and feedback on. DIP members could choose which version they wished to complete – the long or the short version.

35 DIP members chose to complete the long version of the survey, compared to 184 that chose to complete the short version of the survey – DIP members were 5.3x more likely to complete the short version of the survey compared to the long one when given the choice.

219 survey responses were received from DIP members in total, compared to 44 responses received through general promotion of the survey, and just 1 response received as a paper response.

It should be noted that libraries were quieter than usual during the consultation period as a result of Omicron variant restrictions, enforced during the Covid pandemic of 2020 to 2022.

2022 survey responses broken down by promotion method and survey length	Long survey responses	Short survey responses	Total survey responses
General promotion responses	44	-	44
Digital Influence Panel responses	35	184	219
Paper survey responses	1	-	1
Total survey responses	80	184	264

