

Extract from Budget Consultation:

Children and Families Committee proposals

Details about the purpose and responsibilities of the **Children and Families Committee** can be found [here](#).

The Children and Families Committee budget for 2023/24 is £79.1 million. Expenditure is forecast to increase by £15.6 million next year. Nearly 70% of this growth reflects the ongoing budget pressures associated with support to prevent children coming into care and where they need care, finding suitable placements and reflects the significant increase in costs associated with this activity. The remainder of the growth reflects the increase in special education needs and disabilities (SEND) demand and increasing costs of fuel and contracts, a reduction in available reserves as well as other inflation factors such as pay.

When reviewing the council's funding from 1 April 2024 councillors agreed that the affordable budget for Children and Families could increase by £9.9 million. This means savings of £5.7 million would have to be identified. Pensions costs have reduced by £0.5 million, which still means savings of £5.2 million are required to mitigate the increasing expenditure. Managing large scale change presents financial risks, but the council has very low reserves to protect against risk. The council should therefore aim to over-achieve savings targets where possible.

A total of 7 savings proposals have been put forward from services overseen by the Children and Families Committee, totalling £5.2 million of savings for 2024/25, and brief detail of each of these proposals are given below.

More details of how these savings will be delivered will be presented in High level business cases that will be considered by committees in January and February 2024.

Proposal CF1: Discretionary offer to children with disabilities

Review of discretionary and statutory offer to children with disabilities to reduce expenditure without compromising outcomes and align with short breaks and personal budgets and ensure there is a streamlined pathway to support families.

Potential savings for 2024/25 = £0.9 million

Generally speaking, do you support or oppose this proposal? *Tick one box only*

Your support or opposition for a proposal does not constitute a 'vote' for or against - this consultation informs a decision making process - as such it is important that you provide additional information about why you support, oppose or are not sure.

- Support
- Oppose
- Not sure

Do you have any comments about this proposal? *Write in below*

Proposal CF2: Remove school catering subsidy

Over recent years, the school catering service has not generated sufficient income to cover its costs and so the council has been subsidising the service. It is proposing to consider future delivery models for this service, including implementing the findings from an independent review. It is also proposing to introduce an annual increase to schools in relation to the cost of delivering their school meals to generate more income and remove the council's subsidy to the school catering budget. This will not affect free school meals.

Potential savings for 2024/25 = £0.5 million

Generally speaking, do you support or oppose this proposal? *Tick one box only*

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- Support
- Oppose
- Not sure

Do you have any comments about this proposal? *Write in below*

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

This savings proposal is to reduce the establishment and realign service areas to maximise the offer to children and families by reducing duplication and delivering efficiencies in a leaner, integrated structure across the Children and Families Directorate. This will include a review of leadership structures and realising all opportunities including the Mutually Agreed Resignation Scheme (MARS) and existing vacancies.

Potential savings for 2024/25 = £1.0 million

Generally speaking, do you support or oppose this proposal? *Tick one box only*

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- Support
- Oppose
- Not sure

Do you have any comments about this proposal? *Write in below*

Proposal CF4: Reduce discretionary Post-16 Travel Support

Appendix A – Children and Families Budget Consultation proposals

Cheshire East provides free or subsidised post-16 travel support to young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). With the increased pressure on the school transport budget, this discretionary transport is being reviewed to consider alternative arrangements. Full consultation on this proposal closed on 20 December 2023, with consultation results to be taken to Children and Families Committee for consideration in the New Year 2024.

Potential savings for 2024/25 = £0.4 million

Generally speaking, do you support or oppose this proposal? *Tick one box only*
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- Support
- Oppose
- Not sure

Do you have any comments about this proposal? *Write in below*

Proposal CF5: Achieve the Family Hub model

This savings proposal is to identify budget reductions within the wider Children's Centre estate and is aligned to delivering the national Family Hub model to target our resources and maximise service impact where need is greatest. This will include a review of buildings and estates and partnership opportunities for income generation.

Potential savings for 2024/25 = £0.25 million

Generally speaking, do you support or oppose this proposal? *Tick one box only*
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- Support
- Oppose
- Not sure

Do you have any comments about this proposal? *Write in below*

Proposal CF6: Other Service Reviews

Ensure the service is receiving value for money from targeting our resources to maximise service impact by reviewing all internal, commissioned and voluntary sector services.

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Cheshire East have been successful in securing temporary external funding for a number of innovative projects. These projects involve the onboarding of frontline colleagues, training, development, support and supervision and access to health and safety equipment which will be drawn down from grant funding.

Trade more services with schools (cross council) and promote a cross council co-ordinated traded model.

Potential savings for 2024/25 = £0.25 million

Generally speaking, do you support or oppose this proposal? *Tick one box only*

Your support or opposition for a proposal does not constitute a 'vote' for or against - this consultation informs a decision making process - as such it is important that you provide additional information about why you support, oppose or are not sure.

- Support
- Oppose
- Not sure

Do you have any comments about this proposal? *Write in below*

Proposal CF7: Reduce Growth in expenditure

Growth proposals reflect the ongoing budget pressures associated with support to prevent children coming into care and where they need care, finding suitable placements and reflects the significant increase in costs associated with this activity.

The service has plans to open residential children's homes in 2024 and are forecasting a gradual reduction in reliance on external placements where they are identified to be high cost with low outcomes for children. The service is also working to improve the commissioning of placements and increasing the number of our own foster carers. The costs associated with court proceedings including the required use of expert assessments and barristers has also increased significantly. The service has a clear plan to reduce the need for spend of council, expert assessment and this is also central to the targets of the local family justice board.

Potential savings for 2024/25 = £1.9 million

Generally speaking, do you support or oppose this proposal? *Tick one box only*

Your support or opposition for a proposal does not constitute a 'vote' for or against - this consultation informs a decision making process - as such it is important that you provide additional information about why you support, oppose or are not sure.

- Support
- Oppose
- Not sure

Do you have any comments about this proposal? *Write in below*

Appendix A – Children and Families Budget Consultation proposals

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Detailed list of proposals:

Reference	Item	Description	2024/25 budget change £m
CF1	Discretionary offer to children with disabilities	As per consultation extract	(0.900)
CF2	Remove school catering subsidy	As per consultation extract	(0.516)
CF3	Review of structure to further integrate children and families' services	As per consultation extract	(1.000)
CF4	Reduce discretionary post-16 Travel Support	As per consultation extract	(0.400)
CF5	Achieve the Family Hub model	As per consultation extract	(0.250)
CF6	Other Service Reviews	As per consultation extract	(0.250)
CF7	Reduce Growth in expenditure	As per consultation extract	(1.900)
Saving included in narrative section (see consultation extract)	Pension Costs Adjustment	This item relates to pension contributions funded by the council. Contributions can be reduced from 2023/24. This results from a successful financial strategy to secure stability in the funding of future pension liabilities. The effect is a reduction in overheads in pay cost budgets following a change in the employer's contribution rate confirmed by the Cheshire Pension Fund	(0.515)
Growth included in narrative section (see consultation extract)	Growth to deliver statutory Youth Justice service, and growth to ensure budget is sufficient to meet Safeguarding Partnership duties	Statutory safeguarding services are delivered through a partnership approach and include police and health partners. The JTAI identified that the local authority was not sufficiently resourcing the arrangements and an independent review and internal audit recommended that contributions were increased. Similarly, the youth justice, pan-Cheshire arrangements are statutory and similarly there was a funding shortfall in partnership contributions on the part of Cheshire East	+0.170
Growth included in narrative section (see consultation extract)	Growth to provide capacity to deliver transformation for SEND	The local authority is currently working with the Department of Education to address the significant deficit in the special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) budget. This requires fundamental and systemic transformation and 'invest to save' capacity to deliver on the programme of work.	+0.500
Growth included in narrative section (see consultation extract)	Wraparound Childcare Programme (funded)	The wraparound programme aims to remove barriers to setting up new provision or expanding current provision, including removing the financial risk of setting up new provision when demand is not yet guaranteed.	+0.587 (0.587)

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		Parents should expect to see an expansion in the availability of wraparound care from September 2024.	
Growth included in narrative section (see consultation extract)	Legal Proceeding - Child Protection	The local authority safeguarding duty for children at risk of harm may require the court to intervene and make legal arrangements for this to happen. The costs associated with court proceedings including the required use of expert assessments and barristers has increased significantly. The service has a clear plan to reduce the need for spend of counsel, expert assessment and this is also central to the targets of the local family justice board	+0.770
Growth included in narrative section (see consultation extract)	Growth in School Transport budget	This growth proposal reflects the increase in special education needs and disabilities (SEND) demand and increasing costs of fuel and contracts. This line includes removal of the temporary £1.2m investment in 2022/23 and factors in savings identified in the external review, the SEND review work and ensures travel support is provided in line with policy and statute.	+0.936
Growth included in narrative section (see consultation extract)	Pay inflation (including additional pay inflation required for 2023/24 shortfall)	This proposal includes incremental increases for eligible staff and nationally negotiated pay awards. Average increases are forecast at c.3% for 2024/25. This may not apply evenly across pay bands due to implications of the Living Wage. The proposal also recognises the additional impact of the higher than budgeted 2023/24 final pay award.	+1.374
Growth included in narrative section (see consultation extract)	Use of Children and Families Transformation Reserve - estimated balance	The Children and Families Directorate removed funding allocated for service transformation to achieve a balanced budget for 2023/24. This was a budget reduction for one year only with the budget reduction being reversed in 2024/25.	+1.065
Growth included in narrative section (see consultation extract)	Growth in Children's Placement costs	This growth proposal reflects the ongoing budget pressures associated with support to prevent children coming into care and where they need care, finding suitable placements and reflects the significant increase in costs associated with this activity. The service has plans to open residential children's homes in 2024 and are forecasting a gradual reduction in reliance on external placements where they are identified to be high cost with low outcomes for children. The service is also working to improve the commissioning of placements and increasing the number of our own foster carers.	+10.825
Overall Committee Target			+9.880
Total growth proposals			+15.640
Total savings proposals			(5.731)
On Target			(0.029)