

Annex 10: Budget 2025-26 Consultation Report

1. Background

This report sets out the process and outcomes of Bath & North East Somerset Council's consultation on its budget plans for 2025-26. The consultation took place from 12 December 2024 to 20 January 2025.

Our thanks go to all those who participated in the consultation.

2. Consultation on draft detailed budget proposals

On 12 December 2024 the council opened an [online consultation](#) on its draft spending plans for the next financial year, 2025 to 2026. This was made available on the council's website and ran until 5pm on 20 January 2025. A [press release](#) encouraged residents to complete the consultation and the public were also given the flexibility to submit a hard copy by post.

This consultation provided an opportunity to comment on the overall budget proposals as well as individual growth, income and savings areas.

Respondees were also able to state whether they supported, partially supported, or objected to the general Council Tax and Social Care precept proposals in preference to further budget restrictions. The proposals were for a 2.99% increase in general Council Tax and a 2% increase in the ring-fenced Social Care Precept.

Consultation Results

The council received **20 submissions** on these detailed budget proposals.

3. General response to the draft budget proposals for 2025 to 2026

The start of the consultation enabled respondents to comment on the overall draft budget proposals for 2025 to 2026. These are summarised below together with a council response:

Council Tax support – the value of the council's Local Council Tax Support Scheme was recognised but within the context of paying rent through Universal Credit.

" council tax support ... was increased to 100% for 2024/25 while at the same time, because of the 53 week year, I paid rent not covered by Universal Credit so I was no better off."

Parking Charges – the proposal to increase residents' parking charges was raised as an issue of concern:

"Adding to the residents parking charges is unfair. Costs, pollution and congestion should have already been reduced, so benefit to the overall city enjoyed."

Disposal of council owned buildings – was identified as an opportunity to generate a capital receipt and allow the authority to focus on its statutory duties:

"Sell off some of the Council owned buildings (if letting out is problematic as stated) and let the market handle the opportunity - thus allowing greater Council focus on its main responsibilities."

Other revenue opportunities – the council was encouraged to explore opportunities to generate additional revenue through a tourist tax, greater enforcement of the highway and revising Council Tax charges.

"Increase revenue by: a) Charge a tourist tax b) Increase council tax for higher band properties c) Enforce existing parking regulations d) Find a way of receiving speeding fines and use ANPR to manage enforcement."

General feedback:

- There was mixed support for the proposed changes to Council Tax and green bin charges
- Concerns that the consultation would be a box-ticking exercise
- There were calls for better procurement practices to realise savings
- There was some opposition to investment in Artificial Intelligence (AI)

"Scrap the idea of "investing in" (depending on) AI. It will NEVER replace humans, and can lead to misleading / inaccurate information"

The proposed changes to the general Council Tax and Social Care Precept are necessary to maintain service levels amidst increasing costs and rising demand faced by the council.

Without this proposal some services risk being significantly reduced or even stopping.

The council will continue to provide its Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2025-26 to support low-income households.

All revenue opportunities continued to be explored and targets are embedded within the budget, relating to building disposals.

The baseline charge for parking permits has not increased for over 10 years, and the increase for the most polluting vehicles will help to improve air quality.

4. Responses by portfolio

The consultation then provided the opportunity to comment on the draft budget proposals individually, grouped by portfolio. The results are set out below:

i) Adult Services

Proposal	Value	Budget status	Comments
Adult Social Care Demographics	£1.958m (growth)	Change to our existing budget	No comments received

Proposal	Value	Budget status	Comments
Adult Social Care contract inflation	£3,155m (growth)	Change to our existing budget	No comments received

Proposal	Value	Budget status	Comments
Adult Social Care commissioning	£750k (savings)	Change to our existing budget	No comments received

Proposal	Value	Budget status	Comments
Adult Social Care commissioning	£125k (savings)	New budget proposal	No comments received

Proposal	Value	Budget status	Comments
Review of Care Packages	£900k (savings)	New budget proposal	Yes

Proposal to review care packages to ensure the level of care matches people's needs:

Comments

Parents, carers and service users – should be included in any reviews

"Make sure you include parents/carers in reviews, as well as service users."

Communication – needs to be clear, honest and understandable

"Be open and honest, use language that people understand. Do not use technical/vacuous terms"

Council response – The council will actively work with people who need care and their carers to make sure their goals and needs are met. The council will do this by focusing on our clients' strengths, improving local services, building resilience, and reducing the use of expensive, restrictive services.

Proposal	Value	Budget status	Comments
Technology enabled care	£50k (savings)	Existing budget proposal not yet consulted on	Yes

Proposal to develop a technology enabled care offer within the council-led Community Equipment Service:

Comments

Culture change – the single response received argued the need for an effective cultural programme to underpin the further rollout of technology enabled care.

***“without efforts to shift culture”... technology enabled care
“might be funded in addition to traditional care models rather
than replacing them”***

Council response – By using technology, the council will facilitate independence, provide support for individuals, and reduce the demand on social care resources.

Proposal	Value	Budget status	Comments
Provider services income opportunities	£100k (income)	Existing budget proposal not yet consulted on	Yes
Proposal to increase the level of income from self-funders, placements commissioned by other local authorities, and the ICB by charging the actual cost of delivering care.			
<u>Comments</u>			
A single response received supported this proposal:			
<i>“I agree that you should charge self-funders and incoming placements on full cost recovery basis”</i>			

ii) Neighbourhood services

Proposal	Value	Budget status	Comments
Green waste fees and charges uplift	£350k (income)	New budget proposal	Yes
Proposal to increase garden waste fees to £70 per year.			
<u>Comments</u>			
Unfairness – some felt that the charge for this waste collection is unfair			

"It is not something I agree with as green waste is easy enough to compost and the charge seems unfair."

Costs – support for the scheme if charges were representative of actual costs.

"Neutral, is this representative of actual cost? In which case support."

Fly tipping - others believed that the change would discourage the use of green bins and lead to fly-tipping.

"Cost increase seems disproportionate. Will just encourage fly-tipping..."

Council response – the council is required to provide an optional garden waste service as part of the Environment Act 2021. The proposals for green waste fees changing from £57 to £70 a year have been benchmarked against other councils. The revenue enables the council's green waste service to continue be sustainable and efficient, when faced with inflationary costs.

Proposal	Value	Budget status	Comments
Waste staffing costs	£756k (growth)	New budget proposal	Yes
Proposal to adjust the Waste Service's base budget to cover actual costs.			
<u>Comments</u>			
Health and Safety - the need for sufficient staffing paid at appropriate rates was highlighted, particularly when considering the important of health and safety..			
<i>"It is vital for our health and safety that waste is adequately dealt with so we need staff and should not be cutting corners."</i>			
<i>"Support paying correct wages and having correct staffing levels."</i>			
Redundancies and staffing history – One respondent raised an interest in understanding the impact on staffing levels when waste collection frequency changed.			

"Redundancies required. I'd be interested to know how many were made at the point our bins were collected every two weeks."

Council response – this proposal adjusts the base budget to ensure sickness and holiday cover within waste and fleet services are adequately funded for 2025-26.

Proposal	Value	Budget status	Comments
Waste running costs	£225k (growth)	New budget proposal	Yes
Proposal to rebase the revenue budget following the first year of operating Pixash Lane, Keynsham <u>Comments.</u> Feedback received related to the Waste Service in general, with calls to improve efficiency, maintain existing facilities and to halt development: <i>"I am in favour of efficiency measures and wonder if savings could be made by sending fewer trucks covering wider areas."</i> <i>"Halt Locksbrook development."</i> <i>"Keep Midland site open & staff it properly."</i> Council response – this budget proposal enables the council to continue to offer a high standard of compliant service from the new waste facility in Pixash Lane.			

Proposal	Value	Budget status	Comments
Recycling income	£450k (income)	New budget proposal	Yes

Responses to the projected income growth projected for 2025-26 from market prices and optimal sorting of recycled materials were supportive and recognised the strong recycling culture across B&NES:

"I recycle everything ..."

"Bath is very strong on recycling so we need to get more people on board."

"You should be doing everything you can to encourage recycling."

Council response – the council is fully committed to recycling as outlined in its Towards Zero Waste 2030 Strategy. By maintaining advantageous contract prices and by using optical sorting at the new facility to maximise materials value, it will increase income and help offset depot service operating costs.

iii) Resources portfolio

Proposal	Value	Budget status	Comments
Cyber improvements	£90k (growth)	Changes to our existing budget	Yes
This growth proposal to fund 24/7, 365 days a year cyber security and monitoring generated generally positive responses:			
<i>"Improvements to prevent cyber attacks is sensible."</i>			
Council response – cyber improvements ensures that the council's data is protected, public trust is maintained, service continuity is secure, financial resources are safeguarded and regulations are met.			

Proposal	Value	Budget status	Comments
Investment in Artificial Intelligence (AI)	£65k (growth)	New budget proposal	Yes

Proposal to fund the introduction of AI capabilities to improve the way our residents interact with the council:

Comments

Opposition to investment in AI

"AI investment is an utter waste of money (that the council don't have available in the first place!)."

A preference to communicate with people:

"We want to hear back from a real person, not have the added frustration of only being able to hear back from a robot."

Accuracy and Reliability Issues – with concerns about the accuracy and reliability of AI

"AI is not accurate and will result in misleading and inaccurate information being given."

Council response – this investment in artificial intelligence will enhance service quality for residents, increase staff efficiency by allowing interactions with the public to be summarised and easy queries to be answered using AI.

Proposal	Value	Budget status	Comments
Improved customer contact technology	£251k (growth)	New budget proposal	Yes

Proposal to invest in replacement telephony and a contact system:

Comments

Preference for Human Interaction:

"Would prefer the customers could contact actual human beings for support."

Partial support:

"This will be a good thing if only implemented and supported appropriately."

Council response – by replacing the legacy telephony and contact centres it will improve the experience for residents and service users when contacting the council via telephone, email, social media, WhatsApp and Webchat.

Proposal	Value	Budget status	Comments
Commercial Estate - increased income	£200k (income)	New budget proposal	Yes
Proposal to deliver additional income by refurbishing empty commercial properties more quickly so they can be let: <u>Comments</u> Approach to disposals – it was suggested that the council should dispose some of its assets to generate funding <i>"Sell off some of the freehold property portfolio to raise cash"</i> Challenging the council's performance in this area: <i>"You're notoriously bad at this & proposals prove nothing has changed."</i>			
Council response - The vision for the Commercial Estate is to support the council's goals and budget by generating steady income. The Commercial Estate team achieves this through new lettings, property management, and income recovery. By prioritising necessary refurbishments to make empty properties market-ready quickly, the council is confident this target can be met.			

iv) Children's Services

Proposal	Value	Budget status	Comments
Children's Services Demographics	£3,824m (growth)	Change to our existing budget	No comments received

Proposal	Value	Budget status	Comments
Children's Services inflation	£1,193m (growth)	Change to our existing budget	No comments received

Proposal	Value	Budget status	Comments
OFSTED SEND staffing	£179k (growth)	New budget proposal	No comments received

Proposal	Value	Budget status	Comments
Home to School Transport rebasing	£1,718m (growth)	New budget proposal	Yes

Proposal to increase the budget to address the current cost pressures as a result of high demand and increasing costs:

Comments

Efficiencies - Concern that the council is considering growth before exhausting efficiencies:

" A lot of councils are looking at route optimisation and other potential efficiencies around this, I couldn't see that mentioned anywhere here, just a lot more money."

Council response – this funding is required to enable Home to School Travel arrangements to be provided to eligible children. The council is continuing to recruit drivers to enable an increase in house provision and improving tendering by securing earlier confirmation of children's placements.

Proposal	Value	Budget status	Comments
Home to School Transport investment	£350k (growth)	New budget proposal	No comments received

Proposal	Value	Budget status	Comments
Home to School Transport savings	£600k (savings)	New budget proposal	No comments received

Proposal	Value	Budget status	Comments
Reunifications	£1.4m (savings)	Change to our existing budget	Yes

Proposal to an increase in family reunifications and step downs from residential placements:

Comments

Risk Concerns – the proposal was felt to be risky especially considering the vulnerability of children and young people.

"This to me seems enormously risky on a number of fronts. Most importantly please remember - these children and young people are extraordinarily vulnerable."

Savings likelihood - concern on the viability of delivering savings in this area

"I think you should RAG rate your potential savings in terms of their likelihood of being achieved."

Council response – this project is an expansion of existing work with higher targets to be achieved before the end of the 2024-25 financial year. These savings will be subject to public scrutiny through the council's Policy Development and Scrutiny Panels and proposals will place the welfare of the child at the centre of any decision making.

Proposal	Value	Budget status	Comments
Specialist Commissioning Saving	£923k (savings)	Change to our existing budget	No comments received

v) Highways

Proposal	Value	Budget status	Comments
Parking reinvestment fund	£210k (savings)	New budget proposal	Yes

One off proposal to not spend the Reinvestment Fund in parking Services:

Comments

Parking provision – a call to provide enhanced parking to support the local economy.

"Provide more parking to encourage more businesses."

Council response – this proposal will not impact the council's car park provision, however its reintroduction will improve operational efficiency and customer experience by offering improved non-essential maintenance, for example.

Proposal	Value	Budget status	Comments
Parking permit charges review	£172k (savings)	New budget proposal	Yes

Proposal to review the baseline charge for on street parking permits, including emissions based resident parking permits:

Comments

Opposition - to any additional charges without alternatives:

"Until the P+R to the east is built, P+R bus charges reasonable and public transport is improved no additional charges should be levied via residents' parking."

Impact on Low-Income Earners:

" this affects low-income earners, shift workers and those not served by appropriate public transport."

Public Consultation - frustration in the council's response:

"The public consultation showed very clearly that the majority did not want parking permit brought in, but it was and we have to suffer the financial consequences of that."

Support for increased charges:

"Agreed that resident charges should increase."

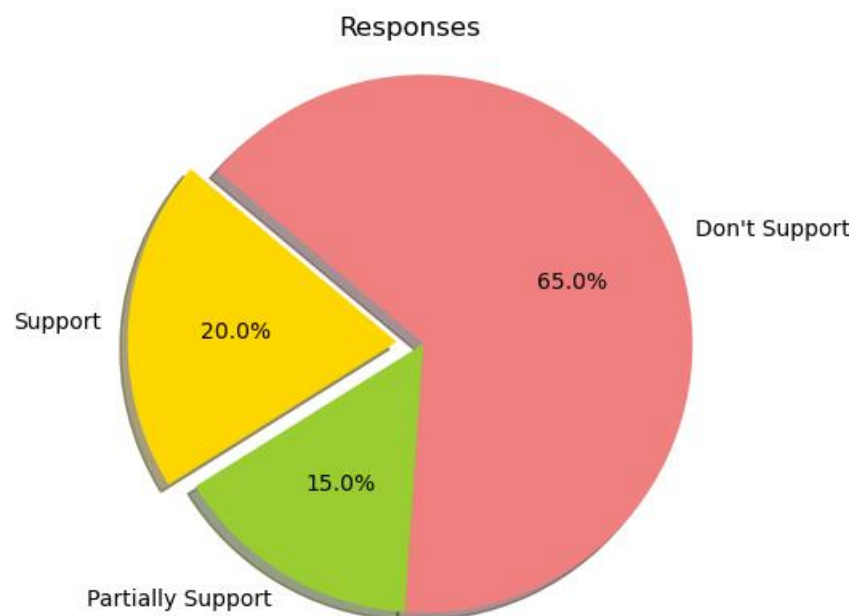
Council response - The baseline permit charge has not increased for over 10 years, despite ongoing inflationary pressures. A new charge will also increase the cost of a permit for more polluting vehicles; further helping to encourage behaviour change and reduce air pollution caused by private vehicles, whilst also reducing the emissions that cause climate change.

5. Responses to the proposed changes in Council Tax

Respondees at the end of the consultation were given the opportunity to answer the question of whether they supported the council's proposal for changes to next year's Council Tax and Social Care Precept.

Their responses are captured in the table below:

Support	Partially Support	Don't Support
4 (20%)	3 (15%)	13 (65%)



Respondees were then given the opportunity to provide a statement to support their answer above:

Support
Low council tax rates for higher band properties: <i>"Bath council tax rates are on the low side, especially for higher banded properties which should pay surcharges."</i> Underfunding – recognition of the budgetary challenges facing local authorities:

"Councils have been underfunded for a number of years."

Request for quality services – acknowledgement that this requires investment

"I want decent services."

Partial support

Council Tax Support Scheme – feedback that the scheme needs to be effective:

"Some people really can't afford another increase so you must also put in place a CT relief scheme that is fit for purpose."

Artificial intelligence - concerns that additional payment will be directed to AI:

"If none of the increase was to be wasted on AI then I would support an increase. If you're going to just waste the extra money on things that will actually make life harder for residents (AI cannot respond to emails in the way a human can, and a lot of residents will feel that once the 'bot' has 'replied' then their query will just be deleted / ignored by humans), then no I do not support any increase."

Don't support

Above inflationary increase – the Council Tax rise is above the current inflation rate:

"It is more than twice inflation. The Council need to work harder to show improved productivity and savings from within."

Focus of investment - concern about some of the projects where money is being directed:

"The council is already wasting so much time and money on schemes like shutting Winifred's Lane that nobody asked for and nobody wants."

Cost of living - the pressure an additional rise will place on residents when facing a cost of living crisis:

"Struggling with cost of living as is."