

ANNEX 10: Budget 2022-23 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 2022-23. This consultation comprised four elements:

- A series of online Area Forum meetings, held in November and December 2021, focusing on winter pressures. These identified the financial challenges and context for the council's budget setting. There was also a separate online meeting for the voluntary and community sector, hosted by 3SG.
- An open online Forum meeting, held on Zoom on December 14th 2021 and chaired by the council leader, on the council's spending plans
- An online consultation on the council's draft spending plans, which took place from December 15th 2021 to January 4th 2022
- An online consultation on the council's draft detailed budget proposals, which took place from January 10th 2022 to January 24th, 2022

Our thanks go to all those who participated in the consultation on our 2022/23 budget.

2. Forum Winter Pressures virtual meetings

An update was given at [these meetings](#) from local partners including the council and NHS on winter pressures, including Covid, the vaccine programme and financial and operational challenges and pressures. These meetings can be viewed on the council's YouTube channel.

More details are set out below

Forum meeting	Meeting attendance (excludes officers and cabinet)	YouTube views (as at 18/1/22)
Chew Valley- 23 rd November	18	30
Bathavon – 24 th November	20	21
Somer Valley- 25 th November	11	18
Keynsham Area- 30 th November	18	30
Bath – 1 st December	21	43
Third Sector- 2 nd December	14	25
Total	102	167
Total attendances and views	269	

3. Budget Engagement Forum

This was held as a [virtual online event](#) on Tuesday 14th December. The council's Chief Finance Officer Andy Rothery, Chief Executive Will Godfrey and Councillor Richard Samuel, Deputy Leader and cabinet member for Resources and Economic Development outlined the council's financial position, the financial pressures it faces and its proposals for spending its limited resources.

The online event was attended by 30 people and [a recording](#) was uploaded to the council's YouTube channel, where it has received 220 views.

The presentation given to the virtual forum meeting can be viewed [here](#).

4. Consultation on spending plans

The council then [asked for comments](#) on the spending plans as set out at the Forum in an online consultation which took place from December 15th 2021 to 4th January 2022. Responses were invited through an online form as well as through the budget@bathnes.gov.uk email address.

Nine responses were received to the consultation. These are set out below alongside the council's response to them.

CONSULTATION RESPONSES	COUNCIL RESPONSE
<i>Areas of BANES should be prioritised, such as Twerton, Whiteway and Southdown</i>	The council has worked with communities in Twerton, Oldfield Park, Southdown and Weston to produce a business case for investment in local high streets as part of the Bath Local Centres High Street Improvement Scheme. If successful in winning funding, this will promote the renewal and recovery of local high streets and will be implemented in 22/23.
<i>People are already facing large increases in household bills, raising council tax by too much will push more people into poverty, they are possibly those who donate qualify for any reductions. I think a lot of money can be wasted e.g., using expensive contractors who don't provide good service.</i>	Inflation is currently forecast at c5%, the Council needs to fund pay and contract inflation. Council tax increases are below these inflationary levels and savings are required to meet the real terms cost and activity increases. The council has a good track record of delivering efficiency savings. The budget report includes a savings and income generation package of £11.87m in the draft budget.
<i>This appears to be the only question on the "consultation" so it feels like a paper exercise - who can complain about children and adult services and recycling?</i>	A consultation has taken place subsequently on the draft detailed budget proposals. To promote transparency and accountability, the council introduced quarterly performance

<p><i>As residents we long for accountability and good use of resources.</i></p>	<p>reporting to Cabinet in 2021/22, to align with financial reporting.</p>
<p><i>I think there needs to be increased spending on community support for adults with mental health needs</i></p>	<p>We are currently reviewing our mental health provision to ensure that we maximise our resource to support as many people as possible in the most appropriate way</p>
<p><i>I support extra funding for childrens' and adult services but not for 'climate emergency' and neighbourhood services which have a very poor business case - spending extra on these areas would simply be a gross waste of scarce resources.</i></p>	<p>£708,000 of provision for additional demand from new placement and market pressures in Adult & Children Social Care is contained in the Budget proposals.</p> <p>A climate emergency is a situation in which urgent action is required to reduce or halt climate change and avoid potentially irreversible environmental damage resulting from it. This threat needs to be tackled at local, national and global levels.</p> <p>Investment in climate and ecological emergency is subject to the same value for money tests as other council priorities. Without action, Bath and North East Somerset residents will suffer – for example from higher heating bills – and the council's resources will be wasted – for example in processing waste that could be more easily recycled.</p>
<p><i>Yes, invest in Children's Substance Misuse Services and Adult Substance Misuse Services</i></p>	<p>New Government funding was made available to local authorities in 2021/22 for drug misuse services. The funding has supported additional drug & alcohol treatment capacity but the services remain under pressure. The council will apply for further Government funding in 2022/23.</p>
<p><i>As a pedestrian I see rather a lot of litter, especially on the non-city centre pavements; indeed, some pavements are virtually never swept which is somewhat disheartening. I quite understand finances are limited, but high visibility sweeping teams would I believe cost little (possibly next to nothing if unpaid volunteers were recruited), would "raise a banner" which in time other local authorities might well choose to copy, to everyone's advantage,</i></p>	<p>The council will invest a further £950,000 in neighbourhood services in 2022/23. This will enable us to enhance delivery in both city and non-city centre areas. The link below is to the Cabinet paper outlining our investment proposals and our current activity</p> <p>https://democracy.bathnes.gov.uk/documents/s67173/E3289%20Investment%20in%20Neighbourhood%20Services%20July%2020th%202021%20-%20FINAL.pdf</p>
<p><i>Stop spending huge amounts of money on skate parks, anti-car campaigns, student housing and CAZ and focus on real issues for majority of residents</i></p>	<p>The council worked with the Alice Park Trust on the new skatepark which followed a long-standing request for such a facility from the local community.</p>

	<p>The council does not spend money on “anti-car campaigns” or on student housing.</p> <p>Schemes to promote a reduction in car use provide a wide range of benefits including health improvement, air quality increases and of course providing more space on the network for journeys that are vital and can only be undertaken by car.</p> <p>The council has introduced the Clean Air Zone as the first charging zone outside of London to improve public health, using grant funding from central government so there is no additional burden on the council and local taxpayers. Poor air quality is the largest known environmental risk to public health in the UK. Investing in cleaner air and doing more to tackle air pollution are priorities for the EU and UK governments, as well as for Bath and North East Somerset Council (B&NES). Long-term exposure to air pollution is linked to increases in premature death, associated with lung, heart and circulatory conditions.</p> <p>Short-term exposure can contribute to adverse health effects including exacerbation of asthma, effects on lung function and increases in hospital admissions. There is also emerging evidence to suggest that improving air quality helps to reduce the effects of respiratory illnesses and therefore lowers the risk of people being more severely affected by COVID-19; and</p> <p>Other adverse health effects including diabetes, cognitive decline and dementia, and effects on the unborn child are also linked to air pollution exposure.</p>
<p><i>Are there any plans to adopt new build estates? Residents of Bilbie Green Estate in Keynsham, for example, have stuck paying both council tax and an estate management fee since 2018 for the upkeep of a park that is rightfully free to use for all Keynsham resident</i></p>	<p>The Council does not adopt parks and green spaces in all developments. Adoption depends on the development agreements and funding transfers. In this case there was no agreement reached to transfer the land to the Council. Residents should be aware of this when purchasing properties.</p>

	Highways on new build estates are normally adopted as Public Highway. The developer will usually wait until all houses are occupied before they complete the full construction of the Highway. There is then a 12-month maintenance period and the developer has to complete all remedial works during this period
<i>I also agree that there should be significant focus on infrastructure to support the climate crisis response. Some ideas on this front: 1. Bike lanes eg. Keynsham to Whitchurch, Keynsham to Willsbridge and 2. Council tax rebates to support residential solar panel installation</i>	Investment is planned in transport improvements following the devolution of the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement by the Department for Transport, allowing £145m investment in B&NES between 2022-27. The council will report on its wider action on the climate emergency in March 2022.

5. Consultation on draft detailed budget proposals

On January 10th the council [asked for views](#) on its draft detailed budget proposals, which were published in the [papers](#) for the Corporate Policy and Development panel of this date, The online consultation ran until midday 24th January 2022, and again was via an online form and dedicated email address.

The council received 79 submissions on these detailed budget proposals. These are summarised, alongside the council's response in (A)- (C) below.

75 of these submissions related to two items contained in the Draft 2022/23 Savings and Income Generation Proposal document. These were:

- Income - Parking Charges Review Introduce hourly based charging in Midsomer Norton and Radstock
- Review of the delivery of the Library and Information service - A review of service delivery options for Keynsham and Midsomer Norton Libraries, a review of the mobile library service operations, and the relocation of some information services into Bath Central Library

A) Income - Parking Charges Review Introduce hourly based charging in Midsomer Norton and Radstock

Feedback received

52 respondents made comments opposing any introduction of car park charging in Midsomer Norton and Radstock, which is the total of those who referred to this issue. The following are representative of the clear views put forward:

Totally against proposals for ending free parking in Radstock or Midsomer Norton

There must be NO parking charges for MSN or Radstock.

To lose Free Parking would be a disaster.

The reasons put forward for these views focused on the impacts that introducing charges would have on the town centres, particularly on shops and other businesses. Comments included:

To introduce a charge to park (even a very nominal one) would be to disincentivise people from visiting and would be the death of these towns.

Parking should remain free to encourage more people to visit our beautiful town, and encourage more investment in a diversity of shops

We have to encourage people to the town and Free Parking goes a long way towards that. My business and others are still trying to recover from having to close during lockdowns due to Covid

It was also highlighted that the council should consider the differing needs across the local authority area and that Midsomer Norton and Radstock could not be compared to Bath:

Please take more notice of local issues rather than a blanket approach to the entire council area. This applies particularly to transport and parking in areas outside Bath City

These areas are local centres for small shops, doctors, chemists, dentists and other services plus school runs and cannot be compared to central Bath locations. My business and others are still trying to recover from having to close during lockdowns due to Covid

Reasons cited for opposing the introduction of car park charging in these towns also included the impact on local communities, including:

elderly people often have to rely on cars to get around as many cannot cycle to places and buses are not convenient for weekly grocery shopping

I believe it would deter people like myself from coming to Midsomer Norton and enjoying the space. I feel it will have an impact on the amount of people visiting. I feel it is vital to keep it free so local families can benefit from living in the area.

Reference was also made to

- the redevelopment of car parks

any redevelopment of car parks as will finish off high streets that are struggling to survive

- impact on the climate emergency

Car park charges will encourage people to DRIVE to places that do not charge. Climate emergency so Bathnes is therefore making people drive further

- the level of gain to the council compared to local impact

introducing parking charges in Midsomer Norton and Radstock will have an immense negative affect on the business and community activities in these areas for very little gain to the local authority

Council response

We acknowledge the depth of feeling set out in these responses. The council will continue to listen to views on this and will respond in a way that balances the need for effective parking management with thriving town centres, particularly in light of the Covid challenges.

B) Feedback on the proposal to review service delivery options for Keynsham and Midsomer Norton Libraries, a review of the mobile library service operations, and the relocation of some information services into Bath Central Library

Feedback received

23 responses were received about this budget line. All of these responses were directed to the element of this proposal relating to “the relocation of some information services into Bath Central Library”. There were no comments made on the review of service delivery options for Keynsham and Midsomer Norton libraries, or of the review of mobile library service operations.

Respondents highlighted in particular the importance of Bath Central Library as a community facility, with a strong focus in the responses on not integrating One Stop Shop Services into Bath Central Library

Representative comments included

Turning the library into an info centre is a terrible idea

I am opposed to any co location of services in present OSS location to the Podium Library, believing that that space should be used for purely library-based services

Please leave the library alone. So important for everyone...young and old

It is essential that Bath library remains a library and not a council information centre

I am against proposals to integrate council services from the one stop shop into bath central library

this message is to advocate strongly for the ring fencing of the central library and as many of the local libraries as possible so they don't become offices for council services or see hours reduced.

Please don't turn it into a council centre, we need libraries

Comments also emphasised the importance of Bath Central library to the local community

It's a very important focus for our Bath communities, for the young, the old, for people working

I'm concerned about changes to bath central library, specifically the prospect of 100K being cut/saved from the library budget

an essential resource for much of our community, especially at a time when covid has made life even harder for so many, both physically and mentally

However, it was also recognised that libraries could further extend their potential to enhance community wellbeing

The Council DOES have access to potential income-generating opportunities - and to community assets such as leisure facilities and the libraries that can help lower social care costs

Council response

The council is wholly committed to a thriving library service because we recognise the importance of the service to local residents. We intend to work with users and user groups to trial new technologies and service improvements that will allow the library service to reach a wider audience, including hard to reach groups.

C) Other issues raised in the consultation

- (i) Income - Parking Charges Review Evening Civil Enforcement Officer (CEO) patrols in Bath City Centre

Feedback received

The additional cost of proposed evening enforcement officer will reduce any income gained, with the return to the councils coffers being relatively small. The number of empty premises in the centre is already spoiling the experience.

Council response

Given the scale of the budget challenges, and to offset other reductions in the council's income, the council's proposal- which would raise £9000 - is considered reasonable

The enforcement of all restrictions is also considered necessary to maintain the safety of all road users including the disabled and vulnerable. Anti-social and illegal parking prevents the use of dropped kerbs, reduces visibility for road crossing and increases hazards for all road users. Whilst all visitors are welcome, any parking needs to be in appropriate locations.

(ii) Emerging capital schemes- Social Rent Programme/Affordable Housing

Feedback received

Please build as much social and affordable housing as you can.

Council response

The proposed budget contains provision of £11.7m to deliver new council homes alongside £5m for new affordable housing. A programme to deliver directly around 50 units of accommodation over the next 1-2 years, including supported housing and shared-ownership housing, is currently in progress. This allocation reflects the cabinet decision to extend this programme to deliver a further tranche of up to 58 social rented homes by utilising a further eight sites in existing Council ownership.

(iii) Emerging Capital Schemes- Green Vehicle replacement

Feedback received

You must be reducing spending not increasing it. Particularly stupid was the money proposed to be spent on 'greening' council vehicles

Council response

The proposed investment in the replacement of council fleet vehicles is designed to address the fact that many vehicles are approaching the anticipated end of their lives. Replacement vehicles will be evaluated against our Climate Emergency objectives.

Poor air quality is the largest known environmental risk to public health in the UK. Investing in cleaner air and doing more to tackle air pollution are priorities for the EU and UK governments, as well as for Bath & North East Somerset Council (B&NES). Long-term exposure to air pollution is linked to increases in premature death, associated with lung, heart and circulatory conditions.

Short-term exposure can contribute to adverse health effects including exacerbation of asthma, effects on lung function and increases in hospital admissions. There is also emerging evidence to suggest that improving air quality helps to reduce the effects of respiratory illnesses and therefore lowers the risk of people being more severely affected by COVID-19.

Other adverse health effects including diabetes, cognitive decline and dementia, and effects on the unborn child are also linked to air pollution exposure.

(iv) Climate Emergency Spend

Feedback received

£1.2m spend on the Climate Emergency is disproportionate to its importance, and almost looks like a token.

Council response

A climate emergency is a situation in which urgent action is required to reduce or halt climate change and avoid potentially irreversible environmental damage resulting from it. This threat needs to be tackled at local, national and global levels. Without action, Bath and North East Somerset residents will suffer – for example from higher heating bills, and the council's resources will be wasted – for example in processing waste that could be more easily recycled.

The council is therefore making significant investment in tackling the climate emergency, including modernising waste facilities, expanding the council's green vehicle fleet and energy efficiency improvements in our own commercial estate as well as investment in Green Infrastructure including a Nature Recovery and Delivery Plan.

Investment in climate and ecological emergency is subject to the same value for money tests as other council priorities.