

## ANNEX 10: Budget 2023-24 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 2023-24. This consultation comprised two elements:

- Two special online briefings to discuss the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on residents and businesses and the impacts on council finances
- An online consultation on the council's draft budget proposals, which took place from December 14th 2022 to January 20th 2023

Our thanks go to all those who participated in the consultation on our 2023/24 budget.

### 2. Online briefings

The briefings were held on Zoom at 6pm on Wednesday 2 November and Thursday 3 November. Updates on the current situation were provided by Councillor Richard Samuel, deputy Leader of the council and cabinet member for Resources, Will Godfrey, Chief Executive and Andy Rothery, Chief Finance Officer.

The recordings of both of the meetings are available on the council's You Tube Channel. The links are below.

[2<sup>nd</sup> November meeting](#)

[3<sup>rd</sup> November meeting](#)

The slides that were presented at the meeting are available [through this link](#)

More details are set out below

<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Meeting attendance (excludes officers and cabinet)</b>	<b>YouTube views (as at 18/1/22)</b>
2 <sup>nd</sup> November meeting	22	128
3 <sup>rd</sup> November meeting	28	123
<b>Total attendances and views</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>251</b>

### 3. Consultation on draft detailed budget proposals

On December 14<sup>th</sup> 2022 the council [opened](#) an [online consultation](#) on its draft detailed budget proposals, which were made available on the council's website. This ran until 5pm on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2023.

This survey on the consultation web pages gave an opportunity to provide comments on our overall proposals, as well as individual savings. Respondeees were also able to state whether they supported, partially supported, or objected to the potential 4.99% increase in Council Tax, which proposed a 2.99% increase in general Council Tax combined with a 2% increase in the ring-fenced Social Care Precept.

#### Results

The council received 48 submissions on these detailed budget proposals.

All 48 submissions provided a response to the proposed changes in general Council Tax and Social Care precept. The breakdown of which is as follows:

**Table: Response to proposed changes in general Council Tax and Social Care Precept**

Response	No of responses	Percentage of responses
Support	13	27.1%
Partially support	6	12.5%
Don't support	29	60.4%
Total	48	100%

#### Support

When considering those who supported the proposal, there was a recognition that the council is facing a challenging budget situation and that an increase was required to preserve local services. The following examples are representative of these views:

*The rise is less than half the inflation rate and I would not like to see any further reduction in services.*

*There is no alternative..... if we want decent services*

*It's unavoidable and is a real terms reduction. What alternative is there to a Council Tax rise?*

## **Partial support**

The respondents who partially supported the proposal felt that the council should explore further opportunities to maximise efficiencies and income generation, whilst accepting the changes. Examples capturing these views include:

*Services need to be streamlined.*

*My preference would be to introduce a workplace levy.*

*There are opportunities to increase savings from those listed.*

## **Don't support**

60% of responses were not supportive of the proposed changes. The majority were concerned about the current cost of living crisis and the impact the proposals would have on residents, particularly those with the least money. Frustration was also voiced about the cost of funding some council projects, such as resident parking and cycle lanes. The following examples of feedback illustrate these points:

*I can't afford it*

*Many people are suffering a fall in income*

*There is a cost-of-living crisis*

*Raising Council Tax will hit poorer people hardest*

*This council has wasted funds on unnecessary projects – resident parking*

*Always seem to find money for unpopular policies e.g., cycle lanes*

## **General response to the budget**

Respondees were given an opportunity to provide an overall comment on the budget proposals. Predominantly the responses were similar to those expressed about the proposed general Council Tax and Social Care precept, for example:

*4.99% increase for Council tax and Social Care in this current climate is too much.*

*The emphasis should be on savings rather than tax increases at a time when many people are suffering a fall in real incomes*

*I object to the council tax rise. Working people cannot afford this in a cost-of-living crisis.*

Additional comments related to the amount of information provided as part of the consultation. Some respondents felt that the total budget for services to which a specific item related should have been included to illustrate the scale of the saving or income target. For example:

*Need a link to a draft budget to provide more clarity*

*I want to debate the overall macro decision*

Finally, comments were made about the consideration given to perceived wastage within the council and the value for money on investments.

*B&NES Council wasteful in its expenditure*

*I oppose spending millions on cyclist installations and road changes, which for the money spent, do not seem to get proportionate use.*

## **Council response**

**The proposed changes to general Council Tax and Social Care Precept is required to maintain service levels in the face of acute inflationary pressures. Without this proposal some services risk being significantly reduced or even stopping.**

**The council accepts the recommendation to include total budget line figures to provide greater context to draft income/savings proposals. This will be included in future budget consultations.**

**The council requires rigorous business cases to be completed prior to financial commitment. All approved spend is then subject to budget monitoring, ensuring public money is always used efficiently.**

## **Responses at portfolio level**

### **Adult Services and council house building**

When considering the budget proposals for this portfolio, public responses focused on the importance of efficient management and spend within adult social care:

*Tighter budget management required*

*Overspending and mismanagement in.....the council*

## Council response

**The adult services and council house building budget is managed efficiently and is subject to rigorous monitoring, including regular quarterly reporting to the council's cabinet.**

## Children, young people, and communities

No comments received.

## Economic development, regeneration and growth

No comments received.

## Leader of the Council

No comments received.

The following responses relate to the council's detailed draft budget proposals:

## Deputy leader and resources

**Corporate and commercial estate income** – (Increase in income from new lettings, review of bad debt provision, and improved Council Tax collection)

## Feedback received

*Rents for council owned property should be charged at the same rates for businesses and charities. Any discounts applied to charities should be applied to businesses.*

## Council response

**Any concessions reduce income to the council and its ability to spend on services. However, the council aims to have low vacancy rates amongst its portfolio and does consider rent incentives to encourage long term occupancy, particularly for long term vacant properties.**

**Corporate property and capital financing** (Review and rationalise the utilisation, and reduce running costs, of Council occupied estate, review and re-profile corporately funded capital programmes)

Responses to this budget proposal focused on the opportunities to rationalise the council's estate following increased usage of staff working from home.

### **Feedback received**

*With working from home there should be savings that can be made in the estate*

*There must be more savings here especially as more workers are working from home.*

*More could be done to let out space that is not being used.*

### **Council response**

**The Council through its 'Corporate Landlord Programme' is actively looking to make best use of its estate through letting spare capacity, disposing of surplus properties and making more effective use of existing office space, whilst ensuring the estate is carbon neutral by 2030.**

**Chief Financial Officer service review** (Review and benchmark Chief Financial Officer functions running costs, restructure and rebase teams staffing and running costs to align with revisions in functions and current management arrangements)

Responses to this proposal encouraged the increased usage of IT to promote efficiencies.

### **Feedback received**

*Use technology more intelligently.*

*Increase use of IT automation and fund the efficiency through reduction in staff.*

*Internal efficiency savings and higher productivity should be prioritised*

### **Council response**

**This proposal has identified 50% of the savings to come from IT efficiencies including reduction in software costs through optimising the functionality of core systems.**

## Planning and licensing

**World Heritage** (Restructure service by moving into Planning department and use of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL))

Of the responses received it was felt that this savings target reflected a lack of commitment to heritage by the council. Also, a recommendation was included to promote better joint working with community preservation groups to potentially result in efficiencies.

*Bath is Bath because of our World Heritage & it doesn't seem to be taken seriously*

*World Heritage should be planned in close conjunction with Bath Preservation Trust and other concerned bodies to preserve the heritage of the city. Liaising with them prior to any consultations could save time and money*

## Council response

**There is no direct service impact from this saving**

**The council takes its World Heritage site stewardship very seriously and continues to work closely with the World Heritage Steering Group to ensure a partnership approach to preserving our local heritage. Additionally, the council through its local planning policies has ensured heritage is at the forefront of development decisions, an example including the recently developed Milsom Quarter proposals.**

## Neighbourhood services

**Reduce consultancy spend on projects and absorb inflationary pressures within existing budget for one year** (Reduction to consultancy revenue budget for waste strategy work for 2023/24 only, budget not required next year)

### Feedback received

*At a time of huge energy costs and increasing inflation the use of paid consultants is not acceptable.*

### Council feedback

**It is often more effective for the council to use external experts on a temporary basis to meet demand, rather than retaining specialist officers permanently with associated costs.**

**Structure review** (Service efficiencies through holding and removing vacant posts in Waste and Fleet services)

**Feedback received**

*Highways is the one of the most important parts of the council's work..... can these posts be sacrificed?*

**Council feedback**

**There is no anticipated direct service impact from this budget saving.**

**Transport**

**Maintenance volume capping** (spend up to available budget with profiling of work across more than one financial year)

**Feedback received**

*Will profiling of work across financial years not lead to increased problems in the future?*

**Council feedback**

**The council is investing an additional £2 million into its highway capital improvement programme reducing the demand for reactive maintenance work.**

**Increased charging measures** (Uplifts in line with inflation to chargeable services, introduction of new Residents Parking Zones, CAZ Financial assistance scheme contract income, emission-based charging, recovery of parking demand to pre-pandemic levels)

This proposal generated 15 responses. Most concerns related to the potential impact on businesses/residents and car users following any potential increases in charging.

**Feedback received**

*You are just driving businesses and residents out of Bath.....the council are pinning their hopes for increased income mainly on car and van drivers who will also probably be paying council tax.*



*This is no more than an additional tax on residents*

*RPZ and CAZ charges hit car owners. Cars are essential items, not luxuries.*

*Charging of cars to enter the city will have a significant effect on retail and visitors coming to the city - the measure will be totally counterproductive.*

### **Council response**

**The council confirms that there are no plans to charge for cars to enter the 'clean air zone'. There is also no evidence to support that car parking charges have negatively impacted on retail and businesses within the city. The revenue generated from residents parking zones will be utilised on maintaining and improving the highway infrastructure for the local community in line with legislation.**

**Structure review** (Removal of vacant technician and engineer posts, revision to CCTV operating schedule)

### **Feedback received**

*What is the revision of the CCTV operating schedule? A further reduction will make Bath more unsafe.*

*I don't want to a cut to CCTV operations/monitoring. Bath's Park & Rides need to be monitored more closely to stop vehicle crimes.*

### **Council response**

**Public safety is and continues to be the council's priority and so we have recently undertaken a strategic review of our security surveillance operation to improve our CCTV system. Coverage levels will not be impacted by this proposal.**