

ANNEX 10 : Budget 2024-25 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 2024-25. The consultation took place from 15 December 2023 to 15 January 2024.

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

2. Consultation on draft detailed budget proposals

On 15 December 2023 the council opened an [online consultation](#) on its draft spending plans for the next financial year, 2024 to 2025. This was made available on the council's website and ran until 5pm on 15 January 2024. 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 income/savings areas.

Respondeees 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 440 submissions on these detailed budget proposals.

389 of the responses were submitted via the online portal. 49 responses were sent directly to budget@bathnes.gov.uk and 2 by post.

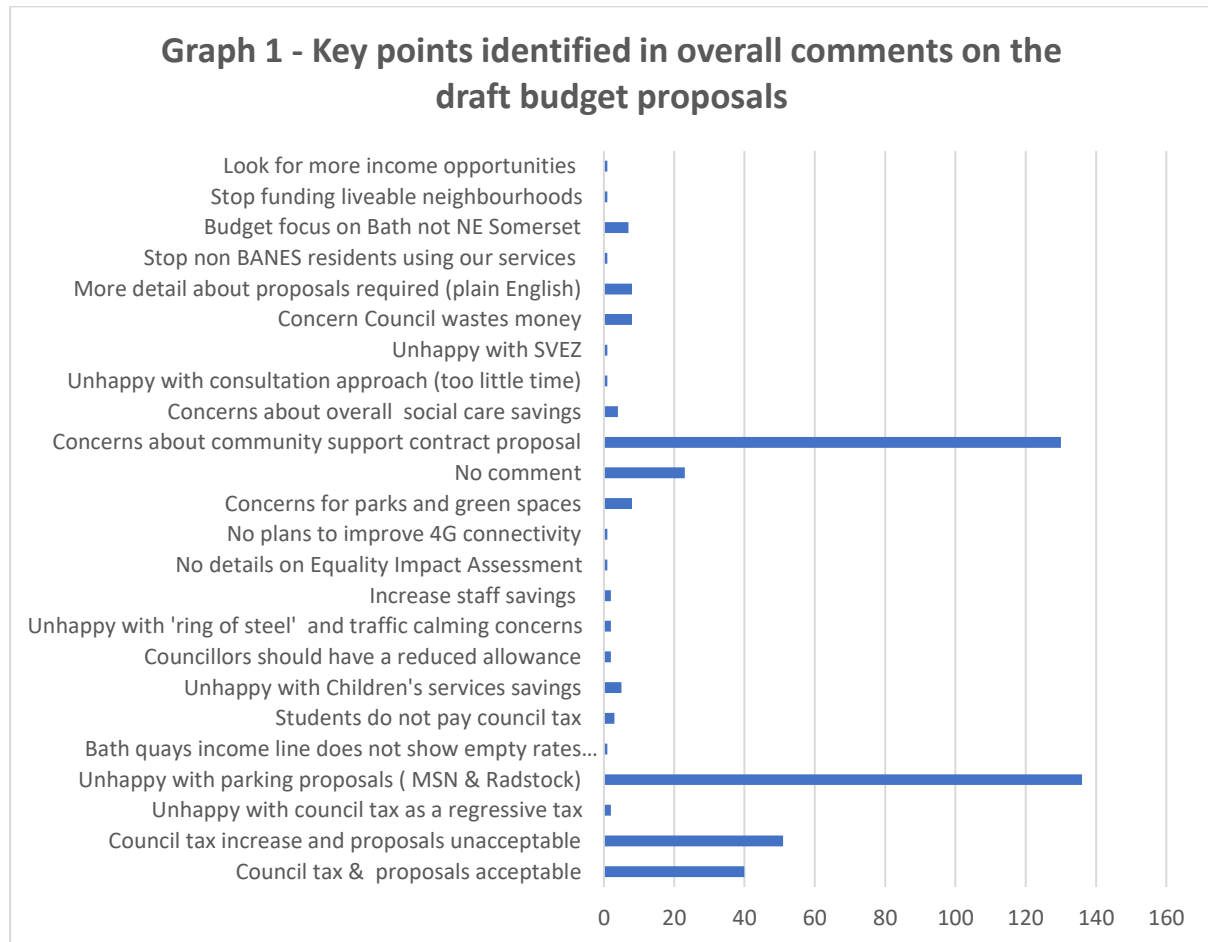
Formal responses were submitted via email by the following:

- Salford Parish Council
- Radstock Town Council
- Motorcycle Action Group Western Region
- Brighter Places
- Home Group (including service user surveys and service implications)
- Julian House (including video snips, service user surveys and individual service implications)
- Keynsham Town Council
- Cllr Shaun Hughes

3. General response to the draft budget proposals for 2024 to 2025

Respondees were given an opportunity to provide an overall comment on the draft budget proposals.

The breakdown of the response to this question is represented in graph 1 below:



The proposed parking charge increases and implementation of new emissions-based parking charges generated the most general responses to this question, with 136 (31%) of all submissions highlighting their dissatisfaction with this proposal. Predominantly the responses focused on the potential impacts on Midsomer Norton and Radstock.

A flavour of the responses are captured below:

“MSN high street is struggling as it is. Implementing parking charges will only make this situation worse.”

“Implementing parking charges in Radstock and Midsomer Norton will only reduce the use of businesses in those areas, reducing business profit and resulting in business closure and empty units. This would create a larger loss through reduced rent income than any projected gain by implementing the charges”

Saltford – “this could increase visitor parking on the nearby narrow highway where permitted which is already heavily in demand”

The second area to generate the most responses related to the Adult services proposal to review and recommission community support contracts. 130 responses (30%) were received. Concern was raised about the scale of this saving compared to other budget lines, the impact it would have on the most vulnerable and the risk that this approach would lead to the council inheriting greater long-term costs that outweighed the saving proposal.

“The proposed cuts to funding for organisations such as Julian House will have a detrimental impact on some of the most vulnerable in our community.

“The budget cuts will drastically affect charities that have been commissioned to run services. They are already stretched and operating at crisis. Further cuts will cause irreparable damage to necessary services.”

“These contracts deliver essential accommodation and support services to individuals who would otherwise face the very real prospect of homelessness on the streets of Bath and North East Somerset.”

51 (12%) responses felt the general proposals around council tax and savings/income proposals were unacceptable. Conversely, 40 respondees (9%) felt the proposals were acceptable.

“4.99% is too much of an increase given current cost of living crisis.”

23 respondees (5%) provided no comment and 8 (2%) respondees felt the detail presented made it difficult to respond.

Other comments included frustrations that the large local student population do not contribute to Council Tax and there was concern from 8 residents (2%) that the changes to the parks delivery model would impact negatively on our parks and green spaces.

“Charge students Council tax”

“Parks - Parks provide a sense of community, people chatting about their dogs, children, the weather, the beauty surrounding them”

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.

Adult Services

- i) **Social care package review (£270,000 saving)** – comments centred on the need for people to contribute to their own care, the challenge of finding local providers and the impact on staff and carers:

‘Wealthy elderly people should ... pay more themselves to find ... care.’

“I have concerns about finding alternative care providers”

“If services are reduced, there will be increase pressure and demand on Adult social care teams as there will no longer be other services to take on some of the support/reviews/case management.”

“The reliance upon unpaid carers is already immense and reducing care to save money will add to carer stress”

- ii) **Community Resource Centres- (CRCs) (£300,000 saving)** – respondees felt that it was important that service users were not negatively impacted by this saving and concern was raised that the older people population number is increasing placing greater demand on CRCs:

“any changes do not negatively impact users of these services”

“A proposed saving of £300,000 surely means a reduction in service that provides support for the most vulnerable people, how are needs going to be met when the population is growing?”

- iii) **Commissioning (£280,000 saving)** – the importance of commissioners and their role in the quality-of-service provision was highlighted. The council’s commitment to commission local services to match users was well received:

“You need to retain the commissioners you have to keep good local knowledge and experience. In doing so, you will be able to robustly manage the quality and performance of the services.”

“Local provision is better, people don't want to be forced out of area, local communities and connections are so important for positive outcomes”

- iv) **Review of the Better Care Fund (£200,000 saving)** – comments argued that funding should be directed to social care and that it was important for there not to be a reduction in overall availability of key services as a result of this proposal:

“Money should go into social care”

“It's important, however, to ensure that this review does not lead to a decrease in the overall availability of crucial social care services”

- v) **Commissioning review (£250,000 saving)** – the proposal to review the commissioning model generated responses on the potential impacts on staff and service provision.

“What will this mean for staff”

“You need to retain the commissioners you have to keep good local knowledge and experience. In doing so, you will be able to robustly manage the quality and performance of the services”

- vi) **Community Support Contracts (£802,000 saving)** – the scale of this saving and the impact on the 3rd sector/vulnerable people was questioned, as were the cost implications when reducing funding on prevention. Approximately a third of all responses sited this proposal as their main area of concern.

“Why is this area having to save so much?”

“Need to protect service for rough sleepers and domestic abuse otherwise risk even more acute and expensive services later”

“What will be the impact on the charitable sector”

“£802,000 proposed cut equates to a 21.4% reduction in current funding, while the average saving being asked across other departments is 4.9% in comparison. This is unacceptable.”

“Is it possible to ameliorate the cuts to ... fund through the introduction of a tourist tax”

“We cannot ignore the potential rise in deaths on the streets and/or drug-related deaths caused by a lack of access to necessary, timely interventions and support”

- vii) **Royal Victoria Park leisure facilities (£10,000 income)** – this proposal was positively received, and further income opportunities were encouraged to be sought by the council:

“Good plan”

“Make greater use to bring in more of an income e.g. park concerts”

- viii) **Health and Wellbeing services (£200,000 saving)** – concern was raised about the potential impact on service users from this proposal, and the importance of investing in preventative services:

“you are actively pushing people to either go private or spiral and get sick as there will be no provision left”

“Any cuts in this area only causes costs further down the line and should be resisted”

Council response to key issues raised in this portfolio

In relation to the community services savings item, these specific contracts have not been looked at for some time and given the financial pressures the council needs to focus spend on the greatest need and prioritise the statutory provision laid down by central government.

The council is aware of the risk that a decrease in funding for preventative services may create a budget pressure for statutory services in the future. We greatly value our third sector partners and will work with them to make sure that contracts which are cost effective in preventing pressure on statutory services are maintained.

We have listened carefully and will take this feedback into account when determining the budget and during its subsequent delivery.

Children's services

- i) **Early Help contract redesign (£50,000 saving)** – In response to the proposal to recommission Early Help contracts, concern was raised that this would have longer term implications around need and subsequent costs, the importance at looking at the redesign implications on the wider family was raised:

“The investment in children's services is critical to tackle future costs that arise from e.g. complex upbringings. The funding used here is an investment that ultimately saves money in the future.”

“The redesign of the Early Help contracts, while aimed at improving service delivery, should also consider the interconnectedness between children, young people, parents, and grandparents”

- ii) **Specialist commissioning (£500,000 saving)** – The importance of commissioners in managing the quality and performance of services was once more raised as was the importance in specialist commissioning ensuring key needs are met:

“You need to retain the commissioners you have to keep good local knowledge and experience. In doing so, you will be able to robustly manage the quality and performance of the services.”

“The process of specialist commissioning, which involves rebasing contracts as part of the commissioning review, can be a critical step in ensuring that specific, often complex, needs are met effectively.”

- iii) **Reprofiled transformation savings (£460,000 saving)** – more detail was requested to be able to respond to the proposal and it was emphasised that this work should not lead to a reduction in service:

“I would need to see the detail of this to be able to comment to see if its fair”

“this transformation must be managed carefully to avoid any negative impact on service quality and accessibility”

- iv) **Reduce discretionary spending in areas including family support** – concern was raised about the impact this would have on families already facing challenges:

“This will impact families many of whom have nowhere else to turn and are already under huge pressure”

‘...concerned that this proposal will put additional pressure on families who are already struggling due to the cost of living crisis.’

“again we will see an increase in families going into crisis and needing higher level support impacting on over stretched social care statutory services”

Council response to key issues raised in this portfolio

The council continues to develop services in line with its strategic aims and changing population to ensure improved experiences and outcomes for families.

Across the portfolio the council has experienced significant contract inflation. Reviews of contract spend will be commissioned to ensure best value, whilst continuing to prioritise the needs of children, young people and their families.

The council will look to increase the number of fostering households to reduce reliance on independent fostering agency placements, whilst also increasing the number of children returning to the care of their families and experiencing positive outcomes.

Climate emergency and sustainable travel

- i) **Corporate Strategy priority projects (£150,000 income)** – the responses for this proposal focused on the role of central government in tackling climate change, the value of the portfolio and the need for the council to actively respond to its declared climate emergency:

“Spend less on tackling the climate emergency. You will not make a big difference with these small measures. Let national government deal with it.”

“There is no analysis of the cost effectiveness of this portfolio, and as a result, arbitrary changes to savings and income cannot be readily assessed.”

‘A climate emergency has been declared and every effort should be made to ensure that these projects are delivered’

Council response to key issues raised in this portfolio

Overall funding for the council’s Green Transformation Team is to be maintained over the next three years reflecting the council’s key policy of responding to the climate and ecological emergencies.

Council priorities and delivery

- i) **Being Our Best Programme (£2,500,000 saving)** – the feedback emphasised the need for the council to main its competitiveness within the job market and the potential to be more ambitious in this area in order to reduce savings requirements within other budget areas:

“Benefits must outweigh costs. Council jobs still need to be competitive in terms of salary.”

“a modest additional saving in this program could help reduce the necessity for cuts in services crucial for those most in need in our community.”

Council response to key issues raised in this portfolio

The Being our Best (BoB) programme will review all council roles to ensure the structure of the council is fit for purpose. The programme is focused on three strands:

Great Jobs – making sure the responsibilities and rewards are set at the right levels.

Smarter Structure’s – reducing duplication, increase integrations between departments, and simplifying structures

Culture of Excellence – making sure staff can maximise their potential through a readiness for change, seeking to improve services and engaging with residents.

Programme savings will be delivered over the next two financial years; 2024-25 and 2025-26.

Economic and cultural sustainable development –

- i) **Business and Skills: recharge officer time to projects** – comments received suggested that the council could be more ambitious on this saving line to help reduce pressures on community services:

“considering the wider context of budget constraints, a slight increase in savings from this area might be beneficial. Such an approach could help reduce the need for more significant cuts in essential community services, particularly those serving the most vulnerable.”

- ii) **Heritage services additional income** – the feedback challenged the lost income relating to the Fashion Museum and the length of time it will take to restore this revenue source. Further responses questioned the income

target for this proposal and the importance that local residents are not penalised from accessing the service:

“Why have you not opened the income generating Fashion Museum? It should not take years to do this - you have known about the Assembly Rooms being taken back by NT for years and yet you have not planned for this move.”

“Is this realistic taking into consideration cost of living pressures which will mean residents and visitors may reduce leisure spend.”

“any measures taken to increase income do not restrict public access or affordability, particularly for local residents”

- iii) **Corporate landlord: centralisation of facilities management** – the feedback called for greater transparency around this proposal. Ensuring public facilities were not adversely impacted was also flagged:

“Greater transparency and review of what’s working and what’s not working”

“it's important to ensure that this restructuring does not adversely affect the availability and quality of public facilities”

- iv) **Bath Quays South lettings** – the benefits of the proposal were challenged when considering current occupancy levels. Any successes linked to increased lettings it was felt should be used to contribute to the wider budget/community:

“I doubt the anticipated rental income when majority vacant. Net income when reflect non recoverable running costs such as empty rates”

“The success of Bath Quays South lettings should contribute to the broader community's wellbeing and align with the city's overall development goals.”

- v) **City and Town Centre Management Service redesign** – the feedback received called for greater consultation on this proposal:

“Public consultation needed”

Council response to key issues raised in this portfolio

The council has robust income generating proposals for this portfolio, including the items listed above.

Highways

- i) **Parking services: income rebasing** – this proposal generated a significant number of responses. Comments received focused on the potential impact on local businesses and visitor numbers, the perception that this would penalise people who can only afford older cars, the impact this will have on parking on side roads, the lack of an alternative sustainable method to travel, the approach adopted in Bath not necessarily transferrable to North East Somerset towns and the impact on local workers and business rates:

“Implementing parking charges in Radstock and Midsomer Norton will only reduce the use of businesses in those areas, reducing business profit and resulting in business closure and empty units. This would create a larger loss through reduced rent income than any projected gain by implementing the charges”

“Shameless exploitation of people who need cars, as most of us do. Even worse the punishment of those with less money and older cars, though most now are very clean anyway”

“There will be more cars parked on the side of the roads where it’s free and that’s dangerous”

“MSN is NOT Bath and what works there is not necessarily good here.”

“Bath parking has become so unaffordable that I now only travel in to the city less than a handful of time each year”

- ii) **Parking charge increases and implementation of new emissions – based parking charges** – this proposal generated both positive and negative responses. Respondees felt that it was unfair for large diesel vehicles to be charged the same as smaller more efficient alternatives. The negative comments were similar to those seen under the income rebasing proposal, with residents raising concern about the impact on the high street, the air quality in North East Somerset not necessitating this measure and the lack of clarity on how this will impact residents parking on their own driveways:

“Totally agree. Charge based on emissions - why should a small car be charged same as a huge SUV pumping out double exhausts of diesel fumes!!”

“All it will result in is people spending less money locally and more online shopping”

“Wrapping up the parking charges in Midsomer Norton and Radstock as improving air quality seems a convenient way of justifying a way of making money from residents. It is likely to damage the existing traders in the town’s and people will be more likely to travel to Bath or Bristol to shop”

“Not clear whether we will have to pay on all cars even when parked in our drives?”

“There should be a two hour limit for free parking so retailers are not impacted by charges and also would stop on street parking which is a safety risk from children running from in between cars.”

- iii) **Motorbike permits** – comments on this proposal questioned the revenue receipt for this proposal against the impact it will have on motorcycle users which it was felt had reduced impact on the highway in comparison to cars:

“This policy is discouraging those residents who are doing the right thing and who cause little damage to roads and take up only a small amount of space.”

“This seems petty and unnecessary, and almost certainly unlikely to yield material income of any worth.”

“Seems unfair as motorcycles take up limited space, especially smaller capacity bikes, where a lot of owners are young and are on low salaries.”

Council response to key issues raised in this portfolio

The council understands the concerns put forward on the impact on Midsomer Norton and Radstock however, given the financial pressures a consistent approach to charging for parking across BANES is appropriate. We will seek to ensure any charges introduced protect and enhance the vibrancy of the high street. Any associated Traffic Orders will be subject to the statutory consultation processes and will provide opportunity for ongoing public input into the final parking model.

Neighbourhood services

- i) **Income from new fees and charges for businesses** – no comments
- ii) **Operational & contract efficiencies** – it was felt that contract efficiencies should be built into current practice within the council:

“These should be part of every check and balance regardless”

- iii) **Weekday Recycling Centre efficiency savings** – positive responses felt that this proposal was sensible because the public will have continued access, with the online booking system working well. Concerns included the potential impact on fly-tipping, the lack of detail in terms of the new opening hours and that access would be limited over weekends:

“A well-thought out proposal which maintains access at the level of the overall council area”

“The on line booking of slots for recycling centres works well.”

“we would see an even bigger increase to fly tipping and dumping of litter/waste in our streets”

“The consultation does not state what the changes proposed would be”

“I think it needs to be open all day Friday - Sunday. Those are the peak days and need to be manned”

- iv) **Customer experience programme** – it was felt that customer interactions should be at the centre of everything the council does and as such should not require additional investment.

“I believe this is a non issue as customer interface should be at the heart of all businesses as an intrinsic part of it's operation. The right people for the right jobs is a management and recruiting issue, get it right in the day to day operation this shouldn't require any investment.”

- v) **Park service redesign** – concern was raised that this proposal would impact on the public's enjoyment of its green and open spaces:

“Parks and green spaces are important so this should not impact residents enjoyment of spaces”

“All evidence points to parks and open spaces providing improved health and lifestyle for users, and that more people should be encouraged to use them.”

Council response to key issues raised in this portfolio

The park service redesign proposal is very limited in scope and will not reduce access to parks or the maintenance of them.

Resources

- i) **Therma Spa income** – some respondees felt that local people should pay less to access the Spa whereas visitors should meet increased revenue targets:

“Tourists to pay more than locals”

“Increase costs to tourists but encourage local users by offering lower rates with discovery card”

- ii) **Capital programme borrowing review** – the comments suggested the council should look at asset disposal to generate receipts. Concern was raised that this saving should not result in community projects being scaled back.

“Sell off existing unused properties to reduce borrowing”

“it's essential to ensure that this review does not lead to delays or scaling back of essential capital projects that could benefit the community, particularly in the context of creating an Age Friendly Community”

- iii) **Consolidation of IT systems** – the proposal to rationalise IT systems to consolidate core systems was questioned around cost, it was also suggested the council works with peer authorities to share experiences:

“It's supposed to save money when, in fact, it usually costs more and the old systems were better in the first place”

“Review, efficiently and swiftly, how other authorities use their systems and compare with those in current use.”

- iv) **Review transport expenditure** – the main comment requested the council to support rural bus services:

“Prioritise subsidised rural buses over Bath ones. Having 4 university buses an hour vs. 2 a day in Timsbury,.”

- v) **Corporate overhead rebasing** – no comments

- vi) **Contract management** – comments again centred on the importance of good commissioners and the need to closely monitor contracts following award:

“You need to retain the commissioners you have to keep good local knowledge and experience. In doing so, you will be able to robustly manage the quality and performance of the services.”

“Closely monitor contracts given out.”

“it's important that this focus on improved contract management also considers the impact on service delivery, particularly for essential community services”

- vii) Contract savings** – to deliver this proposal it was suggested that the council should encourage economies of scale and take lessons from other councils:

“Encourage some providers to come together and collaborate”

“Look at how other councils are making savings and learn from them”

Council response to key issues raised in this portfolio

B&NES residents that are discovery holders are eligible for a discount to the Bath Thermae Spa.

The council looks to minimise its capital borrowing by disposing of buildings it no longer requires which generate funds for the authority.

In regards IT consolidation and contract savings the council works closely with neighbouring authorities to share best practice and explore opportunities.

5. Responses to the proposed changes in Council Tax

389 submissions provided a response to the question of whether the increase to Council Tax by 4.99 % was supported in preference to further budget reductions.

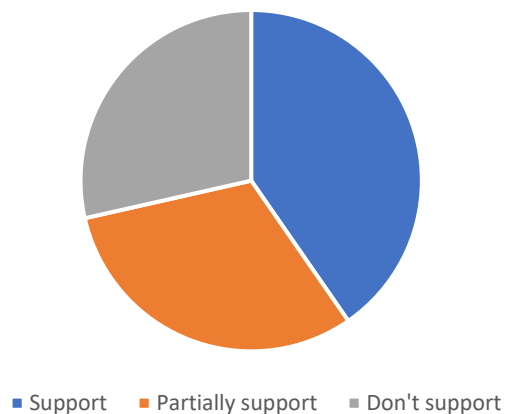
When considering this question 71% of respondents support or partially support the increase as opposed to 29% who do not support the changes.

The breakdown of which is as follows:

Table: Response to proposed changes in general Council Tax and Social Care Precept in preference to further budget reductions

Response	No of responses	Percentage of responses
Support	157	40%
Partially support	121	31%
Don't support	111	29%
Total	389	

Graph 2 - Response to Council Tax proposals in preference to further budget reductions



Support

When considering those who supported the proposal, there was a recognition that the council is facing a challenging budget situation, exacerbated by inflation:

“Without an increase of this sort the council will effectively go bust”

“It’s reasonable in light of inflation”

“Given the unsatisfactory budget settlement from central government, an increase to council tax is crucial in order to raise the funds needed to protect the most vulnerable people in B&NES, whilst maintaining other public services.”

Partial support

The respondents who partially supported the proposal felt that the council should avoid reducing services and focus on eliminating waste:

“I partially support it to minimize the need for negative cuts in services and increases in other charges like parking. However I do believe that more should be done to cut waste in council services before cutting the services themselves!.”

“I understand that the council needs to increase its revenue. However being a resident of BANES I feel costs are rising and services are falling. A double whammy for us.”

Don’t support

It was felt that the additional charge was particularly difficult when considering the current cost of living. Students and tourists were viewed as adding to service demand but not contributing to local Council Tax. Concern was raised that the council is too focused on Bath and that some current projects had not offered value for local people:

“It’s too much to pay, whilst people are struggling to get by”

“Students and tourists use a large amount of council resources and more of the costs should fall to them and not local people.”

“The waste of money in Bath is astronomical on the ring of steel etc etc. . Why should we pay for the mistakes made by BANES .”

“Only worried about bath improvement, outer rural services are stripped without thought or impact to those it concern”

Council response

The Council recognises the challenges faced by residents by the cost-of-living crisis and provides support schemes for those on the lowest incomes who are struggling with their council tax bills. However, the council is also affected by the same very significant inflationary pressures that affect residents.

The proposed changes to general Council Tax and Social Care Precept are essential to maintain service levels in the face of acute inflationary pressures. Without this proposal there would be a significant risk that some services would have to be significantly reduced or stopped altogether.