Cheshire West & Chester Council

Let's Talk Budget

Budget Consultation 2026

Cheshire West and Chester

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Let's Talk Budget

Help shape the Council's budget and your local services

We want your views on how the Council can set a budget for next year that reflects your priorities and supports our Borough Plan, 2024-28, "Play your part towards a stronger future." www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/boroughplan.

Budgets are always about choices. This means making decisions about how the budget is spent; the services we run; and how the communities that you live and work in are supported. To help us make the right choices, we need to understand what is most important to you.

Like councils up and down the country, we are continuing to experience significant financial pressures. The demands on our services and the costs of providing them are continuing to increase; and the costs of providing them cannot be met by Council Tax alone. We need to prioritise what matters most - make the best use of our resources and reshape our services to achieve the best possible outcomes and value for money.

This document outlines some of our budget challenges, our proposed approach to setting the budget - and how you can get involved and have your say.

There are a number of ways you can share your views:

- **Visit:** www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/letstalkbudget to complete a survey and take part in our budget simulator
- **Email:** councilbudget@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk to share your views
- **Write to:** Let's Talk Budget, Communications and Engagement, Cheshire West and Chester Council, The Portal, Wellington Road, Ellesmere Port, CH65 0BA
- **Telephone:** 0300 123 8123 to speak to the Council's Contact Centre, quoting 'Let's Talk Budget'
- **Paper copies** of this consultation will be made available in public libraries and on request using the contact details above. **Alternative formats** are also available on request.

The consultation closes on Wednesday, 2 December.

Your feedback will help shape the approach to setting the budget.

We'll publish the findings on our website in January 2027 so you can see how your views have influenced decisions. The budget will be considered by all Councillors on 25, February 2027. There may be proposals that could result in more significant changes to services. If needed, we'll carry out further engagement on those specific proposals.

Budget challenges

The financial pressures facing local government are not new. The number of people in need of our help - and the cost of providing it - continue to increase significantly. This is the reality for councils up and down the country, and we are no exception.

Every day, we provide a wide range of care and support services which thousands of people across our borough rely on. This includes elderly people and adults with disabilities; people dealing with mental health challenges; children with special educational needs; and those experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, homelessness. We believe that investing in the wellbeing of our residents and families is not only a legal responsibility but a moral one - and an investment in our future. This is the approach we've taken in previous years, and one we're committed to maintaining moving forward.

At the same time, we need to continue to provide a huge number of services which everybody needs and uses. Emptying bins from 155,000 households across Cheshire West and Chester; maintaining local roads; maintaining over 100 schools; protecting and improving parks and green spaces; regenerating our towns and city centres; and very many more.

While the financial challenge we face is one being felt nationally, we must do all we can locally to continue to deliver effective, value-for-money services for our communities - now and into the future.

Challenges

Support needs are increasing, and more costly

The Council spends more than £1bn on services for local people. Looking after all the children, families and adults who need our support accounts for around two-thirds of that budget. This is on a par with the national average. The number of people coming to us for help continues to rise - and persistently high inflation is increasing the cost of providing that support. This places our overall budget under significant pressure.

Need to save to balance our budget

We currently face a funding gap of around £40m over the next four years - including over £20m in the next financial year. We also have a legal obligation to set a balanced budget, which means we cannot spend more than the income we receive. With that in mind, we need to find ways to reduce our costs and ensure that we continue to be financially sustainable; while limiting the impact on our services as much as we possibly can.

Approach

As we work to overcome our budget challenge, there are a number of principles to be mindful of:

- Prioritise those who need our help the most
- Invest in our future
- Focus on prevention
- Make sure every pound we spend has a positive impact
- Provide the best possible customer experience
- Work closely with our communities and partners

Prioritise those who need our help the most

When budgets are stretched, it's not possible to do everything we would like to do. This requires difficult decisions, and a focus on targeting limited resources in areas of highest need. We will, as much as we can, prioritise those most in need of our support. This might be by continuing to invest in services which care for children, vulnerable adults, or people experiencing domestic abuse. For example, over the last three years, we've invested an additional £94m to support adults and £44m to support children.

Invest in our future

Despite the significant financial challenges we face - we continue to give equal focus and priority to investing in the borough's future. As above, this includes recent, and ongoing, significant increases in what we spend to support vulnerable adults and children, to make sure they continue to receive the help they need. We've also continued to invest heavily in the ongoing regeneration of areas across the borough; creating modern, accessible and vibrant spaces our communities can be proud of.

Focus on prevention

Providing that support at the earliest possible stage prevents situations from escalating for our residents. It also reduces the need for the Council, and our public sector partners, to provide more intensive, high-cost services. By continuing to promote and enable people's independence, we can reduce levels of expensive support and relieve avoidable pressure on the budget. This might be by allocating more funding to services designed to help people before their needs become more serious.

Make sure every pound we spend has a positive impact

The Council's budget is public money, and we have a duty to ensure it is spent as cost-effectively as possible. This must continue to focus on positive outcomes for our residents; transforming and modernising our services; and making sure they're targeted in ways that make the biggest difference to people's day-to-day lives.

We will continually assess how our services are performing, monitor their outcomes; and, where we need to, improve how our services are delivered. This might be by changing how, when and where we provide services for people, so they work as effectively as possible.

Provide the best possible customer experience

Our residents and businesses rightly expect and deserve great quality, timely, effective and accessible services - with support and information provided right first time. We will continue to shape everything we do around the needs and priorities of our customers; ensuring services work for the people who use them. This might be by continuing to improve and update the help we provide online, or by ensuring the face-to-face support we have in place is as convenient as possible.

Work closely with our communities and partners

Working together isn't desirable - it's essential. We need to continue focusing on stronger communities and helping people to live positive, independent and fulfilling lives. Building close and trusted relationships with our local residents and organisations is the only way we can clearly understand their needs and aspirations, and be sure we are effectively providing the support they need. That includes by listening carefully to all the views we receive through consultations like this one, and use them to help shape the Council's decisions.

Please share your views on our proposed approach by taking part in this survey

If there are any questions that you do not wish to answer, please feel free to leave them blank.

Completing this survey is voluntary and all the information you provide will be treated in strict confidence. No information will be released that could identify an individual or household.

If you would like to know more about how we use and store the information you give us, you can find out by visiting: www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/privacynotice.

Council information is also available in audio, Braille, large print or other formats. If you would like a copy in a different format, in another language or require a BSL interpreter, please email equalities@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk, telephone 0300 123 8 123 or textphone 18001 0300 123 8 123.

1. **Please tell us your views on the Council's proposed approach to setting the budget in the box below.** If your comments relate to any of the specific principles described in this document, please tell us which principle(s) they relate to.

2. **If you have any further suggestions for how the Council could save money or raise income, please use the box below to share your ideas.**

About you

All questions are voluntary and will be treated in the strictest confidence. The answers you give will only be used to see where views differ. Please feel free to leave blank any questions you do not wish to answer, we will still use the comments you have given us so far. No information will be released that would allow the identification of you as an individual or of your household.

(This information will only be used to help us understand how views differ).

3. **Are you responding as…?** Please select all that apply.

- ☐ A resident of Cheshire West and Chester
- ☐ A member of the Council's Citizens' Panel – the Participate Panel
- ☐ A representative of a local business
- ☐ An employee of Cheshire West and Chester Council
- ☐ An elected Member of Cheshire West and Chester Council
- ☐ An elected Town or Parish Councillor in Cheshire West and Chester
- ☐ A representative of a voluntary or community organisation
- ☐ Other (please state):

4. **If you are responding on behalf of a group or organisation, please state the name in the box below.** You do not need to complete the rest of this About You section.

5. **Please tell us your postcode.** (This information will only be used to understand where responses have come from and how views differ. No information will be released that would allow the identification of you as an individual or household.)

6. **Are you…?** Please select one option.

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Prefer not to say

7. **Which age group do you belong to?** Please select one option.

- ☐ Under 16 (If you are aged under 16, you will need permission from a parent or guardian to take part in this survey – please provide details in the box below)
- ☐ 16 – 24
- ☐ 25 – 34
- ☐ 35 – 44
- ☐ 45 – 54
- ☐ 55 – 64
- ☐ 65 – 74
- ☐ 75+
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Please provide the name and email address of the parent/guardian to consent that the person aged under 16 can complete this survey.

If you would like to know more about how we use and store the information you give us, please read our privacy notice: www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/privacynotice

Thank you

Thank you for taking the time to share your views. Your feedback will help shape the final approach to setting the budget.

We'll publish the findings on our website in January 2027 so you can see how your views have influenced decisions. The budget will be considered by all Councillors on Thursday, 25 February 2027.

Please return this survey to us by Wednesday, 2 December either by posting it to the following address: Let's Talk Budget, Communications and Engagement, Cheshire West and Chester Council, The Portal Wellington Road, Ellesmere Port, CH65 0BA.

Accessing Cheshire West and Chester Council information and services

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