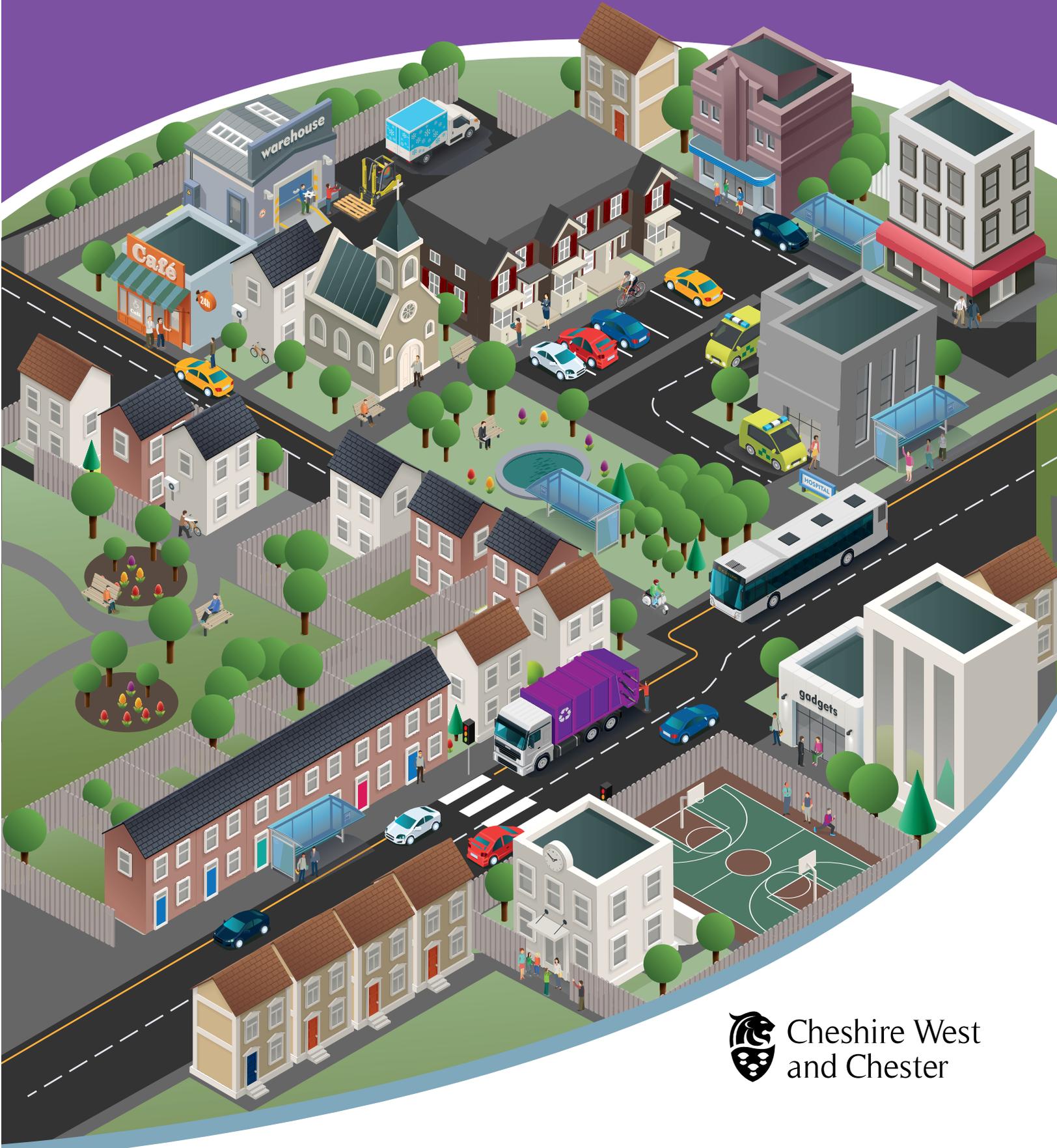


Cheshire West & Chester Council

Balancing the Budget

Consultation on our future budget plans 2018-21



Cheshire West
and Chester

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Foreword

When we were elected to lead the Council in 2015, we promised to listen to our residents and to be honest about the tough choices we faced. Unprecedented funding reductions from the Government and more demand on our services mean that we cannot afford to fund all of our current services in their present form. We have had to make a number of tough choices and there are still more difficult decisions to make. Between 2016 and 2020, we have to reduce our budget by £57 million. Crucially, these choices must be informed by your views.

In 2015, we completed a wide-ranging consultation on the Council's four-year budget and priorities (the materials and findings for this consultation can be found on the Council's website). We recognise that it is essential that we continue to have conversations with local residents about the things that matter to you. Your views have shaped our ambitious vision for a fairer, more prosperous, thriving borough – a place where everyone matters.

You told us to prioritise supporting vulnerable people, and to run a well-managed Council, with the budget guided by your priorities.

Your views have influenced everything we have done over the last two years. We have protected funding for services that support our most vulnerable, particularly our older residents and young people in need of our care. We have also agreed a four-year budget that gives us the financial stability to invest in your priorities, support the economy, and ensure that we deliver the best possible services to you.

The nature of any four-year plan is that it is inevitable that some adjustments will be needed as circumstances change. Due to pressures, particularly in children's and adults social care, we need to make additional efficiencies to ensure that we can continue to prioritise those in most need. We recognise that these changes will have an impact on our residents and the services you receive, and want to hear your views on the proposals.

These proposed changes will also impact on our staff and the way that we work, as we spend most of our budget on salaries. Your views will inform the choices that your Councillors will make in March 2018, when they decide on the budget and Council Tax rate for the next financial year. This is one of the Council's biggest decisions and influences how we organise and deliver services.

We are already thinking about our next four-year plan that will take us into the next decade. We are starting to identify some ideas that are at an early stage and we want your views on whether we are on the right track.

Your views are taken seriously and will help us to shape the future of your services and communities. We look forward to hearing what you have to say.



Councillor Samantha Dixon
Leader of Cheshire West and Chester Council



What we are consulting on:

We are consulting on two aspects in relation to our budget:

1. How we can make additional savings over the next two years to ensure we set a balanced budget and also prioritise the things you have told us are important.
2. Early ideas for further proposals that would inform budget planning beyond 2020.

The story so far:

In February 2016, the Council agreed a four-year budget plan that included proposals to fund vital services but also to reduce our spending on others. This plan reflected the reduced amount of money the Council received from central government and the need to fund increased demand for some of our services, such as adult social care. This decision followed a major consultation and engagement with local people.

Since then we have made a number of difficult decisions to deliver this four-year budget plan. We have saved around £27.8m, of which £13.9m has been reinvested into priority services. We have done this by focusing on your priorities, increasing our efficiency and looking at innovative ways of delivering services. We have protected services for the most vulnerable and have taken the decision to increase Council Tax to meet these pressures.

New challenges:

The challenge of supporting vulnerable children, families and adults is growing and is placing more pressure on the budget. To ensure that these services have enough money, further efficiencies are required across the Council.

We have some early ideas for further proposals for the Council's next four-year budget plan (2020-2024). These proposals are at an early stage, but we are keen to hear your views before developing them further.

This document is split into three main sections. The first section summarises proposals that relate to services for people, particularly in regard to Children and Adults Social Care. The second section provides an overview of proposals for place based services such as; Highways, Environmental Services and Economic Development. The final section provides an outline of proposals that relate to essential Council-wide back office services that support our frontline delivery such as; human resources, finance and ICT.

Tell us your views:

There are a number of ways to have your say:



Complete the feedback form attached to this document to comment on how we bridge the budget gap to 2020 and beyond. This should take no longer than 10 minutes and can be posted to the Council or accessed online: www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/balancingthebudget



Our online budget simulator: You can complete our budget simulation tool and put yourself in the shoes of Councillors to set a balanced budget in line with your priorities at <https://cheshirewestandchester.budgetsimulator.com> or www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/balancingthebudget



Email: You can send your views via email to: BalancingtheBudget@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk



Phone: You can phone the Council's Contact Centre on **0300 123 8 123**, and quote 'balancing the budget consultation' to let us know your thoughts and views.



Write: Send a letter to: **Balancing the Budget, Insight and Intelligence Team, Cheshire West and Chester Council, Council Offices, 4 Civic Way, Ellesmere Port CH65 0BE.**



Social Media: Let us know your views on Facebook or tweet [@Go_CheshireWest](https://twitter.com/Go_CheshireWest) using [#CWACbudget](https://twitter.com/hashtag/CWACbudget) and encourage others to get involved.

The consultation closes on **23 November 2017**. The results will be published on our website in February 2018 so that you can see how your views have influenced decisions.

Thriving People



Councillor Paul Dolan
Cabinet Member for
Adult Social Care



Councillor Nicole Meardon
Cabinet Member for
Children and Young People



Councillor Louise Gittins
Cabinet Member for
Communities and Wellbeing

This area of the Council includes services such as Adult's Social Care, Children's Social Care, support for vulnerable families, Education and Public Health. Key priorities in this area include:

- Supporting children to have the best start in life;
- Ensuring the safety of young people and adults;
- Supporting independence for vulnerable adults;
- Enabling healthy communities.

Overall the budget for this area amounts to £183.6m a year. The Council has previously consulted on gross reductions of £10.3m (5.6%) in this area which will largely be achieved by improving services that prevent issues and avoid more expensive and intensive support later on. Of this gross saving, £5.9m will be reinvested into priority services, leading to a net reduction of £4.4m (2.4%). The Council has made the decision to raise additional funding for Adult Social Care from Council Tax. Overall this relatively lower level of reduction, while still a challenge, reflects the priority of the public to support the most vulnerable residents.

The pressures on services that support older adults and vulnerable families are growing. Savings of £804,000 have been proposed for these service areas. This is the smallest reduction across the Council, reflecting the prioritisation of these services. **Proposals under active consideration are:**

- A1 Reducing back office support staff:** It is proposed that a small number of back office support staff are reduced. Following a review, it is expected that the tasks carried out by these staff can be undertaken elsewhere in the organisation. Overall this would provide savings of £93,000 in 2018-2019 and would represent a reduction of two staff.
 - A2 Contract savings:** The Council continues to review its contracts and has identified opportunities to ensure that we continue to provide value for money services. This particularly relates to services which support adults with learning disabilities where spending has exceeded the original agreed contract price. It is expected that this spend can be reduced in line with the agreed contract price through more challenge on the appropriateness of the care packages we offer to residents, and more effective contract management. Overall this is forecast to save £200,000 between 2018 and 2020. Contract savings may also be possible to achieve in relation to family support. These services support vulnerable children and families but there is evidence of some duplication with existing services already provided. Overall a review to remove this duplication could save £50,000 without reducing the current level of service.
 - A3 Community Safety Review:** The Police and Crime Commissioner is undertaking a review of the work and existing funding arrangements for Police Community Support Officers, and the findings of this are expected in Autumn 2017. It is proposed that we work closely with the Police and Crime Commissioner, elected Councillors and Parish Councils to establish what level of financial contribution is required by the Local Authority. Through this review, it is anticipated that the current financial contribution could be reduced by £65,000 by 2018-2019 with minimal impact on the level of service delivery and greater collaborative working arrangements with existing community safety services. This approach would also provide greater opportunity for Police Community Support Officers to work towards wider Council outcomes.
 - A4 Arranging care in a more efficient way:** When our residents need social care, a significant amount of time is spent by social workers to find a care provider who can meet their needs (estimated at over 20% of their time). Following a review, it is proposed that this task is carried out by a central team rather than social workers. This should lead to a better use of social worker time and packages of care being arranged quicker. Overall this could save £66,000 by 2020.
 - A5 Reviewing our non-staffing budgets:** Budgets that are not spent on staff have been reviewed, these cover things like computers and travel. As the organisation reduces in size we can reduce spending in these areas without impacting core service delivery. Also, there is a budget for transformation projects which, following a review, isn't fully required. Overall it is expected that this proposal will save £230,000 by 2019-2020.
 - A6 Review of Bed-Based Provision:** The Council is committed to closer integration of services with our local NHS partners as we are convinced that this will provide a better service for our residents. As part of this we are continuing to review, with our health partners, all bed-based services currently provided by the Council and look to maximise any efficiencies, income generation and removal of duplication to deliver an efficiency saving of £100,000 per annum.
- Emerging ideas:**
- In addition further proposals are being explored to help address the budget challenge beyond 2020. These ideas are at an early stage and not yet fully costed:**
- A7 Integration of Adult Social Care and NHS services:** This proposal would involve the better integration of Adult Social Care with NHS provided services. There are already a number of services integrated with the NHS, but this proposal would ensure the remainder of services are fully joined up. This could remove duplication for residents, reduce costs and enable resources to be shifted towards more preventative services.
 - A8 Children's residential care provision:** The service is reviewing its Placement Strategy aiming to provide an increasingly bespoke service that works more collaboratively with partners. The outcome of the review will create a service that is better equipped at meeting the varying needs of children and young people who require residential care, including secure placements. This will create a skilled service to directly deliver specialist support for complex placements, increasing opportunities to improve outcomes for children and helping to reduce costs by avoiding the need to use external providers.

Thriving Places



Councillor Karen Shore
Cabinet Member for
Environment



Councillor Angela Claydon
Cabinet Member
for Housing



Councillor Brian Clarke
Cabinet Member for
Economic Development
and Infrastructure

This area of the Council provides services such as maintaining roads, managing planning applications, licensing premises, collecting household waste, maintaining public spaces and supporting local economic growth.

Key priorities in this area include:

- Supporting a skilled local economy with well paid jobs;
- Improving support for businesses;
- Enhancing transport links to make the Borough more accessible;
- Ensuring local neighbourhoods are clean, safe and environmentally sustainable;
- Supporting good quality and affordable housing.

Overall the budget for this area amounts to £61.4m a year. The Council has previously consulted on net reductions of £6.3m (10.3%) in this area. Further budget proposals under active consideration for 2018-2021 are worth approximately £1m, and they include the following:

- B1 Staffing efficiencies:** The Council has conducted significant reviews of internal processes, and invested in new technology to make services more efficient in areas such as Highways and Streetscene. It is felt that now these new processes are in place, there are further opportunities to reduce staff within the Highways, Waste, Streetscene and Regulatory Services without impacting on service delivery. Overall this would save an additional £193,000 and result in the reduction of around six members of staff.
- B2 Income generation:** The Council brings in income from services such as Planning, Waste Collection, Environmental Health, Trading Standards and from businesses occupying our commercial buildings. The income levels for these services continue to rise as demand increases. In addition, a review of fees and charges would take place to ensure full costs are being recovered. Overall this could increase income by £690,000, reducing pressure on the Council's budget.
- B3 Concessionary fares:** The Council has funding available to pay for free bus travel for residents of pensionable age. Following a review, it is clear that demand on the service is lower than the available budget, enabling the Council to make savings without reducing eligibility for this service. It is proposed that this would save around £150,000.

Emerging ideas:

In addition, **further proposals** are being explored to help address the budget challenge beyond 2020. These ideas are at an early stage and not yet fully costed.

- B4 Further income generation:** Proposals to bring more income into the Council are being considered including introducing more digital advertising, selling professional services and consultancy to businesses and investing in commercial property.
- B5 Service reviews:** In depth reviews of services will take place to see if there is scope for efficiencies. This will include services such as Planning and Regulatory Services. Where possible technology will be introduced to make processes more efficient and improve the effectiveness of services.
- B6 Staffing structures:** A review of staffing structures will take place across the department to ensure that similar functions are working together. This could reduce management costs and lead to a more joined up service.
- B7 Collaboration:** Economic Development and Transport functions could be shared with neighbouring authorities to reduce costs and also to support joint working across the local economy.

Thriving Council



Councillor Paul Donovan
Cabinet Member for
Democracy and Workforce



Councillor David Armstrong
Cabinet Member for
Legal and Finance

This area of the Council includes support services such as Finance, Legal, support to Councillors, Human Resources, Communications and Information Technology. The key priority is to ensure the Council is well managed in line with the priorities of residents. Overall the budget for this area amounts to £32.2m a year. The Council has previously consulted on net reductions of £1.5m (4.7%) in this area.

Further budget proposals under active consideration for 2018-2021 are worth approximately £1.5m, and include the following:

- C1 Reducing the use of consultancy:** The Council has historically used external consultants to support major projects which involve modernising services. An in-house projects team now carries out the majority of this work and therefore the consultancy budget can be reduced. Whilst there would still be occasions when the Council would use support such as designers or project managers for some specialised projects, it is expected that this change would result in a saving of £100,000.
- C2 Using new technology to make back office services more efficient:** The Council has agreed to invest in a new system which supports payroll, accounting for income and paying suppliers. The new system should enable the Council to be more efficient by automating processes and will reduce the number of staff needed for these transactions. Overall it is estimated that this could save £715,000. Efforts will be made to support staff affected by this change including moving them into other roles where possible.
- C3 Further efficiencies to back office services:** A series of reviews will take place across back office services such as Legal, Finance, HR and IT to explore further reductions. In certain cases, these reductions would impact on the level of support offered to frontline services. Overall this could deliver savings of around £152,000.
- C4 Responding to external opportunities:** There are a number of opportunities to reduce our costs as circumstances change. For example, the introduction of Universal Credit by the Government will reduce the support required to administer Housing Benefit. Also, the new Apprenticeship Levy provides a funding source to support local training and apprenticeship opportunities. Finally, the Council is obliged to appoint an external auditor to ensure it is well managed. The contract price for this service has now reduced. Overall these changes will not have an impact on service delivery but could save around £530,000.

Emerging ideas:

In addition, **further proposals** are being explored to help address the budget challenge beyond 2020. These ideas are at an early stage and not yet fully costed.

- C5 Digital transformation:** Further services that could be automated are being explored. This would mean residents engaging with the Council more through the web rather than by phone or face to face. In addition, it would involve upgrading ICT systems to ensure they are cost effective.
- C6 Supporting Council companies to generate income:** The Council owns or partly owns a number of separate companies that provide services such as managing buildings, providing care for vulnerable adults, leisure services and support to schools. The Council will continue to work with these companies to ensure they are delivering on our priorities but also to ensure they are well placed to sell their services to other organisations, thus generating income which can be spent on local services.

Please let us know what you think

We would like to hear your views on the draft budget proposals and emerging ideas contained in this booklet. The feedback we get will be published and help inform final decisions on the budget at the meeting of Full Council on 1 March 2018. To let us know what you think, please complete the attached feedback form. The closing date for feedback is **23 November 2017**. This will enable all feedback to be shared with Elected Members before the budget is set.

Accessing Cheshire West and Chester Council information and services.

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 us at: equalities@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk

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