

## Appendix 10 - Cherwell District Council budget consultation report 2024/25

This report sets out key findings from Cherwell District Council's budget consultation, conducted between 22 November 2023 and 22 December 2023, to support the 2024/25 budget and business planning setting process.

### Executive summary

#### Responses and respondent profile

- In total, we received **202** completed survey responses, with **165** more responses than the amount received in 2022 (**37**).
- **168** survey respondents named themselves as 'Cherwell' residents.

#### Approach to savings

- An average of **77%** responded "yes, I support" to all proposals; proposals with the highest support rate were "Providing playground inspections internally" and "Generate additional income from inspecting Taxis by widening the MOT offer", both with **94%** approval.
- The lowest scoring proposal, with **56%** respondents support, was the proposal to "Introduce a charge for replacing bins and food caddies that are lost or damaged (except for any damage caused by the crews when emptying them). This is also in line with other councils' proposals - £40 for a wheeled bin, £10 for a large food caddy and £5 for a small food caddy."
- The top three saving proposals with the highest respondents' support rate, from the list provided, were:
  1. Generate added income from inspecting taxis by widening the MOT offer (with a proposed saving of £10,000) – supported by 189 respondents.
  2. Providing playground inspections internally (with a proposed saving of £25,000) – supported by 189 respondents.
  3. Reviewing CCTV coverage across the district to remove duplication or no longer necessary coverage where appropriate to reduce monitoring and maintenance costs (with a proposed saving of £30,000) – supported by 173 respondents.

#### Council tax

- **65%** of the survey respondents (**131**) said yes; they were prepared to support the proposed council tax increase, by £5 per year for the average Band D property, while just over a third, **35%**, said no (**71**) of survey respondents.
- Focusing specifically on how Cherwell residents responded to the proposed council tax increase, **61%** said yes, where respondents supported this increase (**103**), while **39%** of respondents (**65**) said no, they did not support changes.

## Fees and Charges

Participation in this survey showed, **60%** of respondents (**121**) support the proposed increment of various fees and charges to align with our costs, the inflation impact and government directives.

## Report Details

### 1. Approach

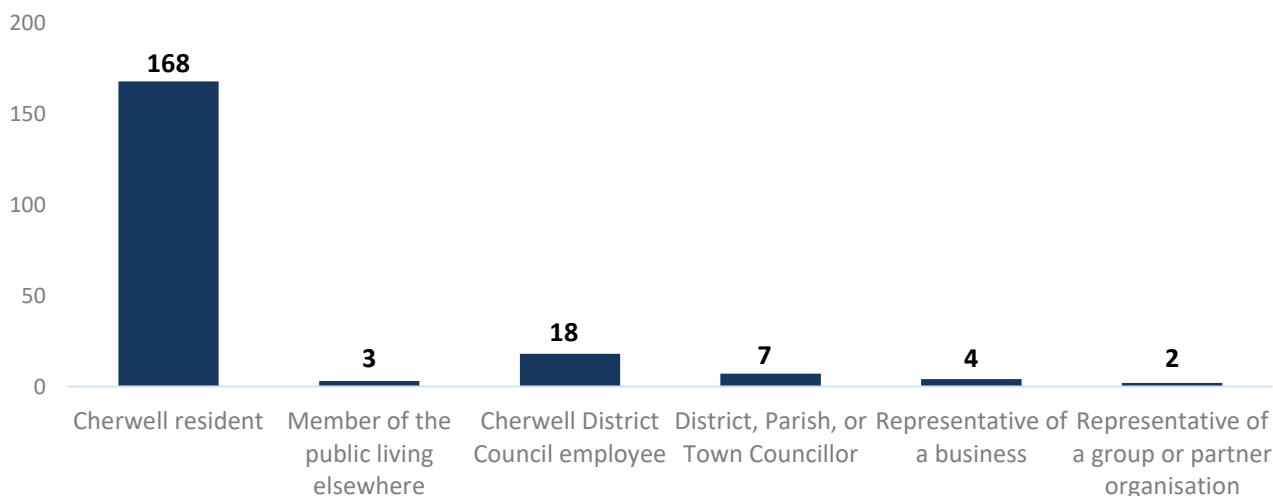
- 1.1 Between 22 November 2023 and 22 December 2023, the council invited comments on its budget proposals for 2024/25, including its proposed council tax and fees and charges increase. Residents and stakeholders were also signposted to supporting documents for detailed information on the proposed increment to various fees and charges.
- 1.2 Feedback was primarily collated using an online survey on the council's digital consultation and engagement platform, Citizen Space, with residents and stakeholders also being able to give comments by email or paper copies, on request.
- 1.3 The budget consultation was actively promoted to a wide range of audiences using multiple channels (media, social media and other digital platforms, the website, advertising) and to staff and councillors to help them 'spread the word'. Also, posters were distributed and placed across the district.

### 2. Responses and feedback

- 2.1 In total, the council received **202** online survey responses, with no emails or paper copies received (or requested).
- 2.2 **168** survey respondents named themselves as 'Cherwell' residents, **34** were identified as other stakeholders: with parish or town councillors, or representatives (**7**), non-residents (**3**), business representatives (**4**) and council employees (**18**).

A full breakdown of who responded to the survey is in the chart below:

**Chart 1: Profile of survey respondents**



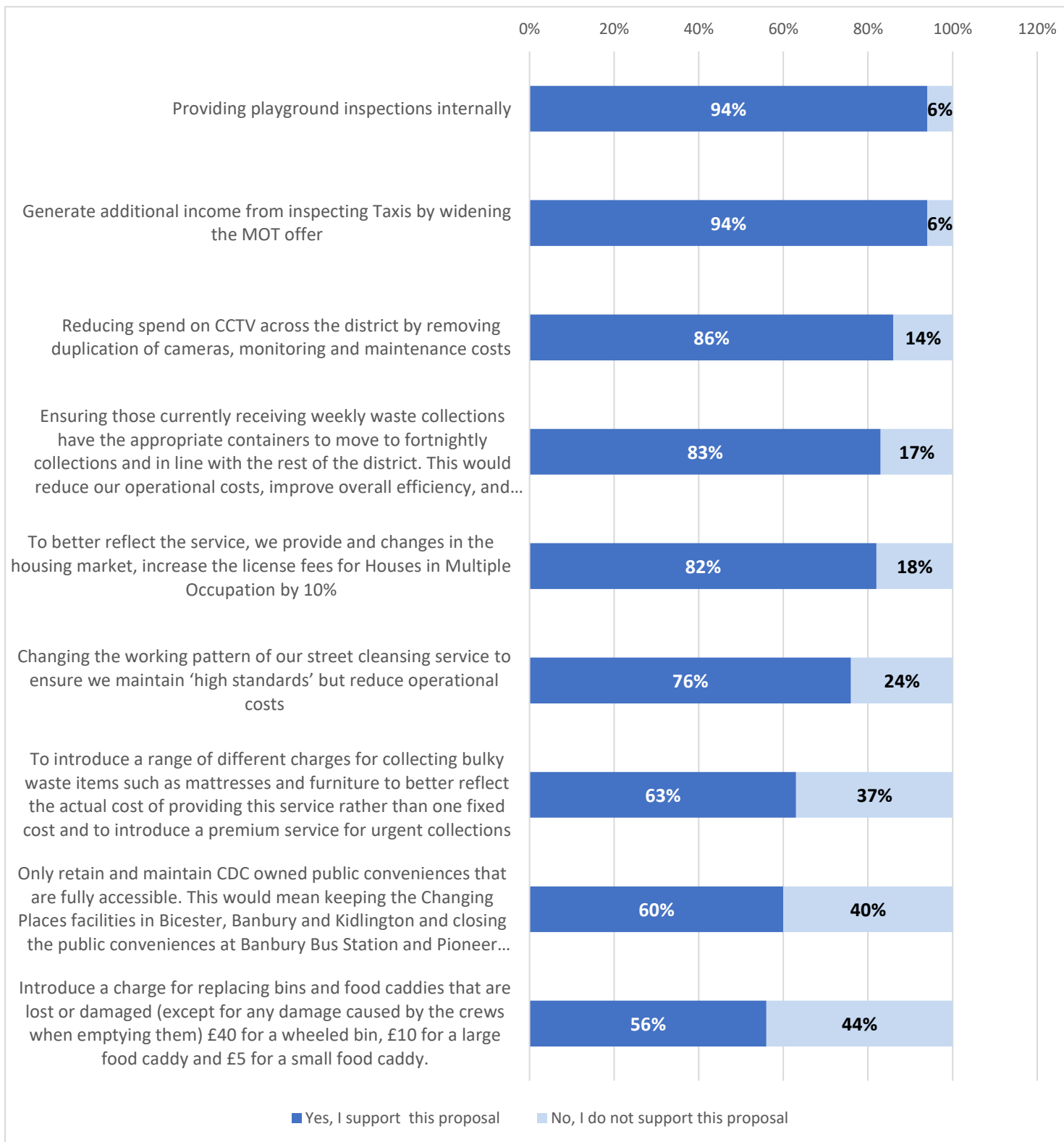
### 2.3 In terms of the demographic profile of respondents (where information was provided):

- Slightly more men (98 people or 49%) than women (88 people or 44%) completed the survey, 14 people (6%) preferred not to say and 1% did not answer.
- Respondents were spread across most age groups, and it is noticeable the lack of engagement from younger residents with only one stating to be between 16 to 24 years old, with no under-16 responding to the survey. The majority of respondents were between 35 and 54 years old (corresponding to 43% of respondents).
- Most survey respondents (163 - 81%) are white British, Irish, Scottish or any other white background; 12% preferred not to say, 3% are mixed (White and Black Caribbean, White and Black African, White and Asian and any other mixed background), 0.5% (1) Black or Black British (Caribbean, African, or any other Black background), 0.50% (1) Asian or Asian British (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi or any other Asian background), 2.5% other ethnic group and 1% did not answer.

### 3. Approach to savings

- 3.1 Survey respondents were informed that “Cherwell District Council alongside all other local authorities faces an uncertain funding situation”. In 2024/25, a combination of national and local factors came together to present significant financial challenges for the council, which resulted in the need to make savings of £2.6 million. This year, the challenge remains, meaning, we need to make new savings of £1.5 million in 2024/25.
- 3.2 Over the summer, options were considered at finding £1.2m in efficiency savings, and a further £0.3m through nine new savings’ proposals, Council tax and fees/charges increases.
- 3.3 Consequently, respondents were presented with nine different approaches the council could take to make savings and were asked if they supported or not each proposal, in case of answering not a further question was asked (If you do not agree, please can you explain why, and do you have an alternative proposal?)
- 3.4 The chart below shows the spread of responses across these nine proposals. It has a base of **202** respondents, and it was ranked in descending order of support. Please note that the chart below shows the percentages not actual individual numbers.

**Chart 2: Views on all saving proposals**



3.5 The proposals “Providing playground inspections internally” and “Generate additional income from inspecting Taxis by widening the MOT offer”, gathered the highest support, both with 94% approval rate.

3.6 The lowest scoring proposal, with 56% of respondents supporting and 44% against, the proposal to “Introduce a charge for replacing bins and food caddies that are lost or damaged (except for any damage caused by the crews when emptying them). This is also in line with other councils’

proposals - £40 for a wheeled bin, £10 for a large food caddy and £5 for a small food caddy.

3.7 Respondents who answered “no, I do not support this proposal” answered their reasons for each proposal, and/or an alternative solution to the proposals given. These have been summarise by theme per proposal on the tables below.

**Proposal 1:**

'To better reflect the service, we provide and propose changes in the housing market, with increase of license fees for Houses in Multiple Occupation by 10% (with a proposed saving of £2,000)'.

| Comment                         | Mentions |
|---------------------------------|----------|
| Other                           | 1        |
| Affects local area              | 1        |
| Why do I have to pay more?      | 7        |
| Cost of living crisis           | 3        |
| Mismanagement                   | 3        |
| Did not understand the proposal | 2        |

**Proposal 2:**

'Reviewing CCTV coverage across the district to remove duplication or no longer necessary coverage where appropriate to reduce monitoring and maintenance costs (with a proposed saving of £30,000)'.

| Comment            | Mentions |
|--------------------|----------|
| Other              | 3        |
| Affects local area | 1        |
| Safety concerns    | 6        |
| Mismanagement      | 2        |

**Proposal 3:**

'Providing playground inspections internally (with a proposed saving of £25,000)'.

| Comment                         | Mentions |
|---------------------------------|----------|
| Other                           | 1        |
| Affects local area              | 2        |
| Why do I have to pay more?      | 1        |
| Mismanagement                   | 1        |
| Did not understand the proposal | 2        |

**Proposal 4:**

'Generate additional income from inspecting taxis by widening the MOT offer (with a proposed saving of £10,000)'.

| Comment                         | Mentions |
|---------------------------------|----------|
| Other                           | 4        |
| Cost of living crisis           | 1        |
| Why do I have to pay more?      | 1        |
| Did not understand the proposal | 1        |

**Proposal 5:**

'Introduce a charge for replacing bins and food caddies that are lost or damaged (except for any damage caused by the crews when emptying them). This is also in line with other councils' proposals (with a proposed saving of £75,000)' - £40 for a wheeled bin, £10 for a large food caddy and £5 for a small food caddy –

| Comment                    | Mentions |
|----------------------------|----------|
| Other                      | 19       |
| Affects local area         | 4        |
| Safety concerns            | 8        |
| Why do I have to pay more? | 8        |
| Cost of living crisis      | 2        |
| Mismanagement              | 3        |

**Proposal 6:**

'To introduce a range of charges for collecting different bulky waste items to better reflect the actual cost of providing this service rather than one fixed cost. To introduce a premium service for urgent collections (with a proposed saving of £10,000)'.

| Comment                    | Mentions |
|----------------------------|----------|
| Other                      | 2        |
| Affects local area         | 10       |
| Safety concerns            | 2        |
| Why do I have to pay more? | 7        |
| Cost of living crisis      | 10       |
| Mismanagement              | 6        |

**Proposal 7:**

'Ensuring those currently receiving weekly waste collections to have the appropriate containers, and move to fortnightly collections, in line with the rest of the district. This would reduce our operational costs, improve overall efficiency, and encourage households to reduce the amount of waste they produce (with a proposed saving of £35,000)'.

| Comment                         | Mentions |
|---------------------------------|----------|
| Other                           | 5        |
| Affects local area              | 4        |
| Safety concerns                 | 4        |
| Mismanagement                   | 5        |
| Did not understand the proposal | 2        |

**Proposal 8:**

'Changing the working pattern of our street cleansing services to maintain high standards but reduce operational costs (with a proposed saving of £70,000)'.

| Comment                         | Mentions |
|---------------------------------|----------|
| Other                           | 6        |
| Affects local area              | 4        |
| Mismanagement                   | 8        |
| Did not understand the proposal | 6        |

### Proposal 9:

'Only retain and maintain Cherwell District Council owned public conveniences that are fully accessible. This would mean keeping the Changing Places facilities in Bicester, Banbury and Kidlington and closing the public conveniences at Banbury Bus Station and Pioneer Square that do not meet these standards (with a proposed saving of £43,000).'

| Comment            | Mentions |
|--------------------|----------|
| Other              | 5        |
| Affects local area | 75       |

Please note comments categorised under "Other" include those not related to the proposal. All comments are available on request.

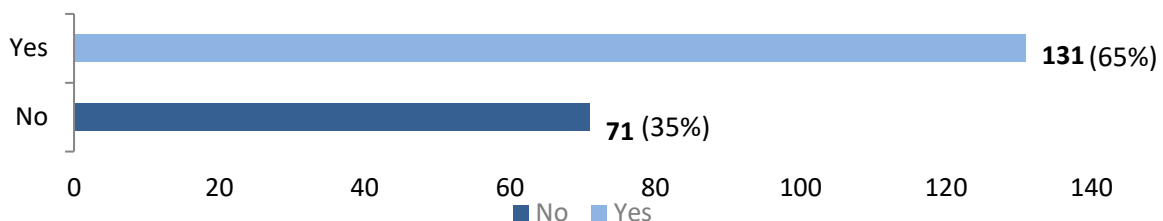
## 4. Proposed council tax increase

4.1 In this section of the survey, respondents were informed that, in 2024/25, Cherwell District Council is proposing to increase council tax by **£5 per year** for the average Band D property. This works out at less than **10p per week** and is the maximum amount the government will currently allow. Respondents answered whether they would be prepared, to support this proposed increase, or not and, if not, to provide with an alternative proposal.

4.2 Of the total **202** survey respondents, where **65%** (131) said yes, they were prepared to support the proposed council tax increase, council tax by £5 per year for the average Band D property, whereas **35%** (71 respondents) said no.

4.3 The chart below, shows the approval proportion (responding yes) higher than the disapproval proportion (responding no), to the council tax increase:

**Chart 3: Would you be prepared to support the proposed council tax increase? (All respondents)**



4.4 Focusing specifically on **Cherwell residents which** responded 'no', **35%** (71 respondents), they were not prepared to support the proposal, and having a closer look at the reasons given by respondents, is clear that affordability, in cost-of-living crisis or other is the main driver of disapproval, categorised:

| Comment                               | Mentions |
|---------------------------------------|----------|
| Services do not justify increase      | 5        |
| Taxed enough already                  | 7        |
| Proposed increases are not affordable | 18       |
| Cut costs instead                     | 3        |
| Not enough information                | 3        |

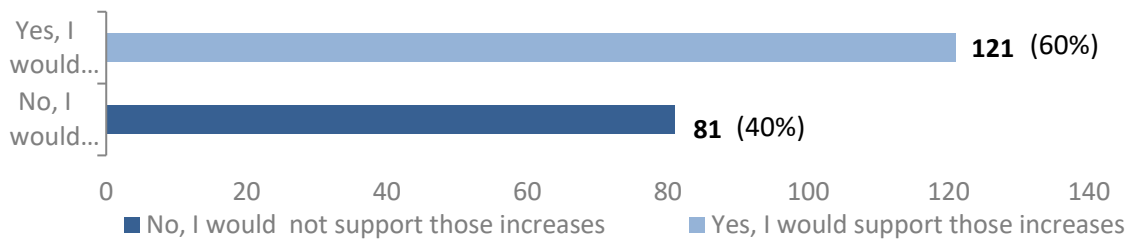
## 5. Proposed Fees and Charges increase.

5.1 Respondents were informed, that in 2024/25, Cherwell District Council is proposing “to adjust various fees to align with our costs, the inflation impact and government directives”. These adjustments are essential to sustain the delivery of crucial services and maintain the standards expected. A full list with details of all proposals was included for respondents to review.

5.2 Of the total 202 survey respondents, **60%** (121) said yes, they were prepared to support the proposed increases, whereas **40%** (81 respondents) said no.

5.3 The chart below, shows the approval proportion (responding yes) higher than the disapproval proportion (responding no), to the proposed increases:

**Chart 4: Would you be prepared to support the proposed increases? (All respondents)**



5.4 Focusing specifically on **Cherwell residents which** responded ‘no’, **35%** (71 respondents), they were not prepared to support the proposal, and having a closer look at the reasons given by them, is clear that the sense is that services provided do not justify increases and that there is enough tax implemented already, closely followed by affordability, and cost-of-living crisis or other as the main driver of disapproval:

| Comment                               | Mentions |
|---------------------------------------|----------|
| Services do not justify increase      | 16       |
| Taxed enough already                  | 14       |
| Proposed increases are not affordable | 10       |
| Cut costs instead                     | 2        |
| Not enough information                | 3        |

## 6. Final comments on the council’s budget proposals

6.1 All survey respondents had the opportunity to add final comments, on our budget proposals. Some respondents used this opportunity to make general comments.

6.2 From all respondents **31%** (63), added final comments to their survey response, below a summary of these by common themes that emerged:

| Comment                               | Mentions |
|---------------------------------------|----------|
| Services do not justify increase      | 5        |
| Taxed enough already                  | 7        |
| Proposed increases are not affordable | 20       |
| Cut costs instead                     | 3        |
| Not enough information                | 3        |