

2021/22 Cherwell District Council budget consultation

This annex sets out the key findings from Cherwell District Council's budget consultation, carried out between 8 December 2020 and 8 January 2021, to support budget and business planning.

Executive summary

In total, the council received **383** completed online survey responses and **five** email responses - one from a parish council, one from a business and three from residents.

Views on council services

- Household waste and recycling collection and food/garden waste collection were valued most by survey respondents. Alongside dealing with anti-social behaviour, they were also considered the most important in making somewhere a good place to live.
- Of lesser importance and value to survey respondents, compared to the other council services listed, were grants for voluntary and community groups, public conveniences and the provision of housing support services.

Savings proposals

- Except for the parking charges savings proposal (56 per cent opposed, 30 per cent support and 13 per cent neutral), all other savings proposals received a combined higher level of support or neutral views than opposition.

Council tax

- Three in five respondents (62 per cent) were prepared to support the proposed increase in council tax as expressed in the survey (increasing council tax by £5 per year for an average B and D property). A third (33 per cent) disagreed.

Approach

1. Between 8 December 2020 and 8 January 2021, Cherwell District Council invited comments on its budget proposals. Residents and stakeholders were also signposted to a supporting consultation document for background information and the report that went to Budget Planning Committee on Tuesday 15 December.
2. Feedback was primarily collated using an online survey, but residents and stakeholders could also submit comments by email. Due to COVID-19, paper copies were not placed in Cherwell District Council's public buildings but were available on request.
3. The budget consultation was actively promoted to a wide range of audiences using multiple channels (media, social media and other digital platforms,

website, advertising) including to staff and members to spread the word. The social media posts stimulated several comments and, where genuine questions were raised, we responded to clarify any misunderstandings and provide helpful information.

Responses and feedback

4. In total, the council received **383** completed online survey responses and **five** email responses - one from a parish council, one from a business and three from residents. Not everyone answered each question (as was permitted) – summaries in this report focus on the total number of people who answered each question.
 - Proportionally, slightly more women (51 per cent) than men (45 per cent) completed the online survey.
 - There was a spread of responses across different age groups, with most (77 per cent) respondents being aged 35 - 64. Eighteen per cent were aged 65 and over and very few (0.8 per cent) respondents were aged under 25.
 - Facebook (81 per cent) was the most successful channel by far in driving interest in the consultation.
5. This consultation feedback will be shared as followed:
 - All responses will be redacted (in line with data protection consent) and made available for all members to review.
 - The consultation report will be shared with members to support Executive and full Council meetings and will be published on the council's website with a link to the meetings.
 - We will also create a visually engaging report, post budget setting, summarising key points for residents and describing outcomes.

Views on council services

6. To encourage people to think about what Cherwell District Council does, council's services were grouped into the eighteen broad areas and people were asked: 'How much do you value each of these', using scoring out of 10, where 1= do not value at all and 10= value immensely.
7. Respondents were then asked to consider the role of the same eighteen different services areas in defining the quality of life in their local area. We asked, 'How important are these services areas in making your local area a good place to live?' A rating scale was set for: very important; fairly important; neither; of little importance; not important at all.
8. Household waste and recycling collection (93 per cent) and food/garden waste collection (91 per cent) were the services valued most by survey respondents, with over half stating they value them immensely. Alongside dealing with anti-social behaviour, these two waste services were also considered the most important in making somewhere a good place to live.

9. Of the lesser importance and value to survey respondents, compared to the other council services listed, were grants for voluntary and community groups, public conveniences and the provision of housing support services.
10. The table below shows the relative personal value respondents placed on each of the different council services listed and how important they considered each to be in making somewhere a good place to live. The services are ranked in order of perceived importance.

Perceived value and importance of our services

	Value score of least 7 out of 10 %	Very/fairly important in making somewhere a good place to live %
Dealing with anti-social behaviour	76	95
Household recycling collection and food/garden waste collection	91	94
Household waste collection	93	94
Street cleaning and tackling of environmental crime	79	89
Activities for young people	51	82
Recycling centres (e.g. bottle banks)	74	81
Monitoring of food hygiene and health and safety of businesses	76	80
Parks and playgrounds	68	77
Supporting the creation of jobs in the local area	65	76
Development control (i.e. planning permission and enforcements)	55	73
Planning Policy (i.e. long-term development and conservation)	65	72
Activities for older people	54	70
Sports and leisure facilities and activities	65	69
Town centre development	60	69
Providing affordable housing	53	64
Provision of housing support service	49	58
Public conveniences	48	55
Grants for voluntary and community groups	46	54

Savings proposals

11. The survey gave people the opportunity to give their views on the 53 savings proposals put forward, by stating if they supported, opposed or were neutral towards each and give comments. Overall, most people gave a view on each proposal but few people substantiated their views.
12. Except for the parking charges savings proposal (56 per cent opposed, 30 per cent support and thirteen per cent neutral), all other savings proposals received a combined higher level of support or neutral views than opposition. More detailed commentary grouped by broad service area, is below. All councillors will be able to view the full feedback in the consultation deposit including charts to show the feedback by savings proposal.

Adults and housing:

13. There was broad agreement with all three savings proposals in this section; with opposition under 10 per cent and neutral responses ranging between 23 per cent for SAV2112 (ensure that civil penalties are rigorously imposed and recovered in all appropriate cases in order that income is maximised) and 35 per cent for SAV2108 (a reduction in overheads within the housing service and restructure the debt and money advice contract).

Public health and wellbeing:

14. Broad agreement was shown for the following savings proposals:
- SAV2115 (delivering sports and physical activity in new ways and working in partnership to reduce the amount spent on venue hire, external coaches and equipment).
 - SAV 2116 (developing new models of delivery to make more use of the youth activators in school holidays).
 - SAV 2123 (working with partners to make Stratfield Brake, Kidlington more accessible and need less subsidy to operate well).
 - SAV 2117 (one-off reduction in the cost of the leisure contract linked to repairs and maintenance requirements).
 - SAV 2128 (additional income from Oxfordshire County Council to pay for administering the Councillor Priority Fund).
 - SAV 2118 (income generation from sports pitches).

Agreement ranged from 52 per cent to 62 per cent.

15. Other savings proposals where a neutral view is nearly equal to, or exceeds support, can be seen for:
- SAV 2132 (restructuring of the healthy place shaping team).
 - SAV 2119 (maintain the core grant to Banbury Museum but review additional support for utility costs that the Museum Trust will become responsible for).
 - SAV 2122 (correction of revenue budget to better reflect costs across all leisure facilities).
16. SAV2199 (review funding to the Citizen's Advice Volunteer Connect service and deliver some elements of reshaped service in house) received virtually equal responses across the three categories, with opposition being equal to support. Nine people provided comments as to why they opposed this proposal and specifically they were concerned about the likely increase in demand due to the coronavirus pandemic and its economic impact on people's lives. They felt this service is greatly valued, and a decrease in their offer is a false economy and to the detriment of residents.
17. The remaining proposal in this section where opposition (40 per cent) was virtually equal to support (38 per cent) was SAV2124 (reduce the grant payment to The Mill Arts Centre Trust). Six out of the 149 respondents opposed to this savings provided comments to substantiate their response. They stated the wellbeing benefits being delivered by The Mill, in terms of education and entertainment were crucial at this current time. They strongly supported funding continuing.

Place and growth:

18. Overall support was shown for all the savings proposals in this section, except SAV2101b (rental increase for affordable homes and shared ownership properties owned by the council). Opposition (40 per cent) is virtually equal to support (39 per cent) alongside (20 per cent) neutral views. Thirty-four people provided comments in this section to support their views and most related to SAV2101b. It was felt that increasing rent for people, who may already be on low incomes and more negatively impacted by the effects of COVID-19, could create long term damaging implications, driving up debt and homelessness, causing families to fall further into crisis and potentially increasing people's reliance on benefits to survive.

Regulatory services:

19. There was broad agreement (58 per cent) to the single proposal SAV2105 (increase income from licensing and chargeable work in environmental health) in this section.

Commercial development, assets and investment:

20. There was significant agreement with the eleven savings proposals in this section, except for SAV2133e (land disposal programme) and SAV2139 (removal of previously agreed project review funding within the growth and commercial service area) where neutral responses are equal to those in support. Overall, opposition averages just 6.5 per cent of responses.

Customers and organisational development

21. Significant support was shown for the following savings proposals in this section:

- SAV2158 (to reduce the annual budget of computer hardware expenses due to a reduced hardware demand currently).
- SAV2159 (to increase the land charges income by increasing our local standard search fee by £15 from £170 to £185).
- SAV2160 (to reduce the annual budget of mileage, stationery and paper due to an increased use of working from home and digital methods in customer services).
- SAV2166 (to remove the four cash and card payment machines located at the Cherwell District Council offices to reduce costs associated with accepting these payments).
- SAV2169 (to reduce the annual budget for postage as a result of ongoing increase in use of digital methods of accessing and sending correspondence and information).
- SAV2153 (deliver business administrative support to directors through a shared provision across Oxfordshire County Council and Cherwell District Council).
- SAV2154 (establish a charged videography and design service for external customers).
- SAV2156 (savings achieved by reducing consultant fees, Cherwell Link magazine moving online, no longer contributing to district data post and various other non-pay budget lines across the communities, strategy and insight service area).

- SAV2172 (deliver targeted savings across digital and IT).
- SAV2188a (service redesign in the human resources transactional team due to the roll out of i-Trent HR system).
- SAV2188c (reduction in training budget).

All of these received between 60 per cent (SAV2154) and 87 per cent (SAV2160) support.

22. SAV2157 (reducing staffing costs within customer services) has virtually equal support and opposing responses. Thirty-six per cent opposed and 36 per cent support this proposal. This proposal received five free text responses with a mixed level of opinion.
23. For SAV2167 (to close the LinkPoint offices, and provide appointment services by phone and online, with face to face appointments at Bodicote House only) 27 per cent opposed and 30 per cent were neutral. Around four in ten (43 per cent) supported it. Of the eight respondents who provided comments to substantiate their opposition, concern focused on the potential to disproportionately negatively impact residents who are vulnerable and do not have access to IT.
24. SAV2155 (hold three vacancies across communications, strategy and insight service area) showed 42 per cent neutral responses versus 50 per cent supported.
25. Finally, SAV2188b (no graduate trainee will be recruited by the council in the current round) shows a level of opposition of 43 per cent versus 32 per cent support, with 25 per cent neutral. Eight respondents provided comments on why they opposed this savings proposal. They suggested this proposal did not generate a significant enough saving to justify not providing opportunities to young people who have been severely affected by COVID. It was advocated that the council should set an example to employers in the private sector in their continued commitment to the next generation of workers.

Communities

26. This is the one broad service area where level of opposition was most pronounced.
27. SAV 2143 (growth of the bulky bin and bulk waste service has made it easier for residents to get rid of their waste with this cost-effective service) was significantly supported (80 per cent).
28. SAV2149 (increase charging for using public conveniences to 20p) saw broadly similar level of support (46 per cent) compared to opposition (41 per cent with 13 per cent neutral).
29. SAV2150 (mechanical sweeping in villages to be carried out annually with a reduction in urban town centre late evening cleansing in the summer) was opposed by 42 per cent, to 38 per cent in support and 21 per cent neutral responses. This proposal received mixed comments with five people feeling that it would be further detriment to the quality of environments that people

live, shop, work and travel. There was a suggestion that, while the service was needed, it should be carried out when required, rather than on a time basis.

30. Of all the savings proposals put forward, SAV2144 (review parking charges in car parks) received the greatest level of opposition (56 per cent) compared to 30 per cent support alongside thirteen per cent neutral. Two of the emails we received also strongly opposed this proposal. Twenty-one people clarified their opposition in the comments section. The main concerns were the perceived reducing footfall in towns at a time when they are in decline; and increased parking charges, further discouraging people from entering the town centre.
31. SAV2145 (introduce a new food waste collection service; charge for the garden waste collection service from July 2021) received support of 47 per cent, with 40 per cent opposed and 12 per cent neutral. This savings proposal received the highest number of comments from people wishing to clarify their views, with 45 people providing their opinions.
- Comments ranged from concern about the burning of garden rubbish, flytipping and additional trips to the recycling centres, to complaints that this service should fall within the current council tax charges and that this service should not attract an additional cost.
 - The proposal to introduce a new food waste collection service was largely overlooked within the free text, with most respondents focusing on the garden waste charges being introduced.

Proposed council tax increase

32. Around three in five respondents (62 per cent) agreed they would be prepared to support the proposed increase in council tax as expressed in the survey (increasing council tax by £5 per year for an average B and D property) whereas a third (33 per cent disagreed and five per cent did not know).
33. Fifty respondents made comments to support their response and while many people used this opportunity to make individual points, such as sharing their views on the council or the taxation system in general, three themes did emerge.
- A small number of respondents raised concerns about raising taxes in the current economic climate and/or the impact it will have on the less well-off in society (nine responses).
 - Others said they would be happy to pay the increase but not if some of the other proposed charges were also introduced (four responses)
 - Others were willing to pay more in general to stop cuts or improve services (three responses).

All councillors will be able to view the full feedback in the consultation deposit.

Other comments on the budget

34. Forty-four respondents provided feedback when asked if they had any other comments on the council's budget. Many people used this as an opportunity

to make individual points about the council, not directly related to any savings proposal. A small number of people used this as an opportunity to reiterate their views on specific service change proposals (four people), whereas others provided feedback on the consultation (seven people). Again, all councillors will be able to view the full feedback in the consultation deposit.

Ends

15 January 2021