

Appendix 10 - Cherwell District Council – Budget Consultation 2026/27 Results

1. Purpose & Context

Cherwell District Council conducted its statutory annual budget consultation between 19 November and 23 December 2025. Note that the deadline was extended by four days following exceptionally high public interest, driven in part by a local campaign surrounding Banbury Museum. The consultation informs the 2026/27 Budget and supports the Council's wider Financial Strategy 2025–2030. Responses were gathered primarily via Citizen Space, supplemented by paper copies on request, only two were requested and one was return to the council. Engagement was significantly higher than previous years, with 1,184 responses, more than five times last year's figure.

2. Headline Findings

2.1 The below table summarises the total amount of support and rejection levels for all the proposals.

Question	Support #	Reject #	Support %	Reject %
Our approach to setting a balanced budget				
1. Considering the above, do you support our approach of making sure the council is as efficient and effective as possible before we consider making changes to the services we provide?	897	286	76%	24%
Capital Investments 2026/27				
2. To strengthen our efforts in preventing homelessness, we will look to acquire property that will serve as temporary accommodation for individuals and families in need. To achieve this, we are proposing an investment of £3m for 2026/27. The government has indicated that there could be funding made available to contribute towards temporary accommodation projects.	892	291	75%	25%
3. In addition to property acquisition, we plan to construct new accommodation to provide temporary housing and help prevent homelessness. To deliver this initiative, we are proposing an investment scheme of £2m for the 2027/28 financial year. The government has indicated that there could be funding made available to contribute towards temporary accommodation projects.	818	365	69%	31%
4. In line with our commitment to supporting active, healthy communities, we plan to deliver a new 3G all-weather sports pitch at North Oxfordshire Academy. The facility will enable year-round football, rugby, and other outdoor sports. We are seeking £1.5m capital investment in 2026/27, which is partially funded by £1.2m in secured grant funding, therefore an allocation of £0.3m to deliver the new facility will be required from the council. Once operational, the new pitch is expected to generate ongoing income for the council.	812	371	69%	31%
5. Bicester Leisure Centre's 3G pitch needs resurfacing, requiring an investment of £0.152m.	831	352	70%	30%
6. Remedial works are needed for several properties to meet Energy Performance Certification, requiring an investment of £0.716m.	814	369	69%	31%
7. Castle Quay Shopping Centre in Banbury needs work to improve visitor access, requiring an investment of £0.196m.	561	622	47%	53%

Question	Support #	Reject #	Support %	Reject %
8. To meet statutory requirements, the lifts at the Castle Quay South Car Park need replacing, requiring an investment of £0.470m.	883	300	75%	25%
9. The roof at Franklins House in Bicester needs a replacement waterproof membrane, requiring an investment of £0.080m.	976	207	82%	18%
10. Replacement of outdated computer hardware used by council officers is necessary to continue providing services at the standard you expect, requiring an investment of £0.136m.	854	329	72%	28%
Income and Savings proposals 2026/27				
11. Continue the operation of national changes made to the household applications fee (introduced in April 2025 by central government) – providing an estimated planning income of £0.224m in 2026/27.	991	192	84%	16%
12. Implement administrative service changes within the Housing Team to allocate resources toward critical delivery areas, aiming to improve customer outcomes - providing savings of £0.115m in 2026/27.	948	235	80%	20%
13. Increase our focus on achieving fewer empty homes, aiming to boost supply within the local housing system - providing a progressive saving of £0.005m in 2026/27 and a further £0.003m in 2027/28.	1074	109	91%	9%
14. Continue to support the Money Advice Service, currently delivered by Citizens Advice, when the current contract concludes in 2026 through external grant funding - providing a saving of £0.153m in 2026/27.	1054	129	89%	11%
15. Support Banbury Museum to transition to a new operating model of sustainable funding sources by 2027/28, reducing its dependency on council grant funding and building a more resilient, community-driven institution - providing a saving of £0.258m in 2027/28.	347	837	29%	71%
16. Explore moving to a three-weekly green bin collection to cut landfill by 14%, boost recycling and capture more food waste - providing a saving of £0.265m in 2027/28.	472	711	40%	60%
17. Increase garden waste fees to keep Cherwell's garden waste service sustainable and broadly aligned with neighbouring districts – providing an increase in income of £0.203m in 2027/28 and £0.228m in 2028/29	570	613	48%	52%
18. Introduce the deferred charge for lost or damaged bins to ensure our waste container service is fair, sustainable, and financially responsible – providing an income of £0.142m in 2026/27	647	536	55%	45%
19. Look again at closing or transferring the public convenience facilities in Pioneer Square, Bicester to reduce costs for cleaning, maintenance, utilities, and cash collection when the current contract is due for retendering – providing a saving of £0.026m in 2026/27.	738	445	62%	38%
20. Move from the current general amenity cut (75mm height, 16–20 cuts annually) to a flail cut (300mm height, 3–4 cuts annually) to significantly reduce mowing frequency of grass verges in urban areas, improving cost efficiency and sustainability. Funding will be provided through the Oxfordshire County Council Agency Agreement Grant, supplemented by contributions from Cherwell District Council and local town and parish councils - providing a saving of £0.100m in 2027/28.	751	432	63%	37%

Question	Support #	Reject #	Support %	Reject %
21. Generate commercial sponsorship and contributions from third parties to provide the floral provision, delivered in partnership with Cherwell District Council, to achieve a 10% reduction in costs incurred by the council in Banbury, Bicester, and Kidlington - providing a saving of £0.014m in 2026/27.	1075	108	91%	9%
22. Optimise resources within Regulatory Services to align with automation-driven efficiencies, enabling a more streamlined and future-focused operating model that does not impact on the service received by the public - providing a saving of £0.019m in 2026/27.	865	318	73%	27%
23. Reduce expenditure on property consultants and other fees, increasing rental income through lettings, lease renewals, and rent reviews of commercial properties, alongside managing service charges for community associations - providing an overall saving of £0.021m in 2026/27.	987	196	83%	17%
24. Conduct a comprehensive review of property contracts to assess the necessity of services and works, implementing adjustments where appropriate – providing an estimated saving of £0.053m in 2026/27.	1072	111	91%	9%
25. Remove unfilled positions within the Council, streamlining workload and building efficiencies - providing a saving of £0.140m in 2026/27.	939	244	79%	21%
26. Agree revised employer pension contributions based on the improved valuation of the council pension fund -providing a saving of £0.500m in 2026/27, £0.250m in 2027/28 and £0.250m in 2028/29.	883	300	75%	25%
27. Continue to optimise cash flow and investment strategies through effective treasury management, resulting in higher interest income. This additional revenue will be retained to support the council's general operations and contribute to the delivery of its strategic objectives - providing a benefit of £0.500m in 2026/27.	1090	93	92%	8%
28. Would you be prepared to support this proposed £5 increase for Band D council tax?	843	337	72%	28%
29. Considering the above, we would like to hear your views. If the government ever allowed us to increase council tax by more than £5 for a Band D property in order to compensate for other losses of income, which, if any, of the following would you be willing to support to help protect the local services that matter most to you? £5 per year (about 10 pence per week) £10 per year (about 19 pence per week) £15 per year (about 29 pence per week) £20 per year (about 38 pence per week) None	350 208 58 261 306	N/A	29% 18% 5% 22 % 26%	N/A
30. Do you have any other comments on our budget proposals you would like to share?	394	789	33%	67%

2.2 Strong Support for Efficiency and Statutory Measures

Residents consistently back proposals that improve back-office efficiencies, address statutory duties, and protect long term assets. Support for these proposals typically ranged from 70% – 90%, including:

- Optimised cash-flow & investment strategy (92%)
- Empty homes initiative (91%)
- Property contract review (91%)
- Housing fee changes (84%)
- Staffing/resource efficiencies (79%)
- Franklins House roof works (82%)

This suggests a continued public mandate for prudent financial management and efficiency-first decision making.

2.3 Proposals with Low or Divided Support

Several household-facing or cultural service proposals received low or divided support:

- Banbury Museum grant reduction (29% support): strongly opposed following an externally co-ordinated campaign; residents emphasise culture, education, and local heritage.
- Three weekly residual waste collection (40% support): concerns include hygiene, vermin, and fly tipping, issues that carry high reputational and operational risk.
- Garden waste fee increase (48% support): affordability pressures dominate feedback, especially during the current cost of living climate.

These areas require consideration.

2.4 Council Tax

The proposed £5 Band D rise received around 71% support, a notable improvement on the prior year (65%)

Residents, however, called for:

- More visible evidence of efficiency savings
- Clearer breakdown of district vs. county tax shares
- Consideration of progressive increases for higher band properties

There is broad willingness to pay more if increases are transparently justified and demonstrably linked to essential services.

3. Key Themes Raised by Residents

3.1 Cost of Living: cost pressures underpin objections to garden waste charges, bin fees, and Council Tax. Residents seek fairness measures such as:

- Tiered charging
- Hardship support
- Clearer reinvestment explanations

3.2 Transparency and Communication: a frequent request in this respect was for:

- Plain English explanations of costs and benefits
- “Budget at a glance” summaries
- Greater clarity on asset plans (e.g. Castle Quay)

3.3 Priority Services: residents consistently prioritise:

- Homelessness prevention
- Roads and public realm
- Cultural and youth services
- Public conveniences
- Core asset maintenance

3.4 Waste & Environmental Services: waste related proposals attracted the most scrutiny. Seasonal flexibility, larger bins, and enhanced hygiene guidance were among common suggestions.

4. Engagement Insights

- 10,541 Facebook users reached, generating 26,694 impressions and 232 click-throughs.
- A public campaign led to a late surge in participation, prompting the extension.
- The response profile is predominantly local, aged 35–64, and female.
- Response levels suggest heightened public interest and expectations of transparency.

5. Recommendations and further considerations

5.1 To following proposals had overall support from respondents:

- Efficiency savings and back-office reforms
- Asset protection investments
- Empty homes and housing service improvements
- Optimised treasury/investment practices
- ICT and statutory equipment replacement

These are low risk, high confidence items.

5.2 Areas with less support, where further engagement and analysis are required:

- Banbury Museum: explore phased change, mixed funding models, sponsorship, and income generation rather than abrupt cuts.
- Residual waste frequency changes: consider seasonal models, enhanced comms, or capacity adjustments.
- Garden waste fees: explore tiering, concessions, and clearer narrative on reinvestment.
- Castle Quay visitor access: require clearer justification and a recovery plan before investment.

5.3 Strengthening Public Trust, residents want:

- Demonstrable efficiencies ahead of any Council Tax rises
- Routine performance reporting
- Stronger use of infographics, videos, and service impact information.

6. Conclusion

6.1 The consultation demonstrates strong public alignment with the council's efficiency led financially prudent approach. However, proposals affecting households and cultural services have considerable opposition, these require further engagement and analysis.