

## Budget Consultation 2023/24 questions from members of the public

<b>Received 4 January 2023</b>	
<b>1</b>	Unlike any normal person, I looked at your draft Housing Revenue Account budget for 23/24 over the New Year weekend. It is a masterpiece of vision and courage, taking us to the limits of what we (CBC and CBH) can do in the present dreadful economic climate. Great to see that despite the constraints we are pressing on with major investment in health and safety, major investment in achieving net zero carbon, and investment in community services including the St Peters and Moors hub. Quite a challenge to make it all work, but that is what CBC and CBH are there for!
<b>1</b>	<b>Response from Cabinet Member</b> Thank you very much for your response on the consultation. We are encouraged by your comments on the Housing revenue Account budget.
<b>Received 4 January 2023</b>	
<b>2</b>	To avoid a Council Tax rise because of money shortage one of the simple ways to solve this is to replace speed cameras, on the main roads, Tewkesbury road, Gloucester Road, etc. and above all traffic lights.  Why? when you had one camera on Boots corner for a period of 6 months an approx. of £1.5 million in fines was collected.  Finally if the top people who run the Council stopped their pay rise they would still be earning more than the Prime Minister who runs the UK on about £150,000.
<b>2</b>	<b>Response from Cabinet Member</b> Thank you for your response on the budget consultation. In Cheltenham, the Highways Authority sits with the County Council. This means all repairs, maintenance and monitoring of our highways is the responsibility of Gloucestershire County Council. Cheltenham Borough Council is not able to install and enforce speed cameras on the roads and we are therefore unable to issue and collect income from penalty notices.  Our draft Statement of Accounts 2021/22 is published on our website below.  <a href="https://www.cheltenham.gov.uk/downloads/file/9729/draft_statement_of_accounts_2021-22">https://www.cheltenham.gov.uk/downloads/file/9729/draft_statement_of_accounts_2021-22</a>  On page 44 you will see the Chief Executive salary for the year was £124,780 which is much less than our Prime Minister! The pay award for staff employed by Cheltenham Borough Council is negotiated nationally by the National Joint Council in consultation with trade unions. As an individual Council we have a minimal influence over the national pay award ourselves.
<b>Received 10 January 2023</b>	
<b>3</b>	As somebody that owns and lives in Property Band D i am shocked and appalled that you only want to increase council tax for Band D.  As someone with a wife and 3 children not only am i faced with cost pressures everywhere. To have this discriminatory proposal is very unjust.  Why cannot all property Bands be increased? Or why is it not proportional for everyone in all banded properties? Why is Housing Benefit not slashed for people in Council Houses who might not work? I am constantly paying more each year and they contribute nothing.  It is very unfair and everyone should contribute not just people in property D.
<b>3</b>	<b>Response from Cabinet Member</b>

	<p>Many thanks for your response on the budget consultation. I would like to apologise that the application of the increase in Council Tax was not explained more clearly in the papers. The Council Tax proposal is that all property Bands will be subject to a 2.99% increase on the District Council precept element of their charge. The recommendations in the report and the example in the net budget requirement Appendix 2 takes Band D as an example as this is the middle band and represents an average for budgeting Council Tax requirement.</p> <p>The application of the increase is set out by Central Government in a policy which focuses on funding more Local Authority services using local tax generation. Unfortunately we are not in a position to apply the increase proportionally across the bands.</p>
<b>Received 28 January 2023</b>	
<b>4</b>	<p>Appendix 3 of the budget papers titled 'Budget Savings and Income Generation' is a key document, but unfortunately provides very little detail. We note that the Council is budgeting for £1.3m of both savings and additional income. Inevitably this will mean cuts in services, but no details have been published. Brief descriptions of where the £1.3m will be found are contained in the document.</p> <p>We are disappointed that the information on exactly what is being proposed is extremely sparse – six items with little more than half a dozen words on each. Two items in particular could encompass almost anything:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 're-alignment of resourcing with Corporate Priorities' – saving £125,000</li> <li>• 'Review of budget allocations against new Corporate Plan' – saving £300,000</li> </ul> <p>In response to our attempt to find out more about these and other items we were told that savings are 'subject to officer and Member working groups' and 'further details will be published in due course'. To be frank this is not good enough. On the key issues in the budget about how savings will be imposed and cuts made – potentially matters of great concern to the public - we are being asked to 'wait and see'. We think it is wrong to approve a budget where so much of the details of potential cuts and savings are not yet known. We therefore propose that the budget should not be approved until the details of the savings outlined in Appendix 3 of the budget papers have been finalised and a further consultation with the public undertaken.</p>
<b>4</b>	<p><b>Response from Cabinet Member</b></p> <p>In preparing the draft budget proposals we endeavour to be as transparent as possible with the information provided. Of the £1.3m savings target, there are three proposals which total £300k which are extensions of those implemented in 2022/23. There is also a proposal to reduce the base budget required to fund secondary pension contributions by £575k which is based on advice by the pension fund actuary. This leaves the two proposals which relate to the re-alignment of budget and resourcing with the new Corporate Plan.</p> <p>The new Corporate Plan is subject to approval and is being presented to Council at the same Council meeting as these final budget proposals on 20 February 2023. Once approved, we will be in a position to move forward with developing more detail of these proposals. Any changes to the budget will be subject to relevant Officer, Cabinet or Full Council decisions which will be published on the Council's forward plan. Further consultation periods may also apply in line with the constitution. No service will be impacted without clear and transparent assessment of risk and without the appropriate governance arrangements being undertaken.</p>
<b>Received 28 January 2023</b>	
<b>5</b>	<p>In the context of inflation running at over 10% we accept that the Council must increase Council Tax by the maximum allowed without calling a local referendum. The government website disingenuously claims that this is not a cap. However, since the law requiring a local referendum on any proposal to raise Council Tax above the government-set limit was introduced by the Tory/LibDem Coalition Government in 2011, there has only ever been one such referendum (in Bedfordshire), and it cost £600,000. In response to our question, the Council has estimated that such a referendum in Cheltenham would cost £200,000 - £250,000. We would not support calling a referendum in Cheltenham, and reluctantly accept that the Council can go no further in raising income from Council Tax.</p>
<b>5</b>	<p><b>Response from Cabinet Member</b></p> <p>Thank you for your support on this issue and for taking the time to understand the complexities around this funding mechanism for District Councils. Increasing Council Tax is not a decision</p>

	we take lightly however Government funding increases are hugely outstripped by inflationary cost pressures and there are few options but to rely on local tax generation to help bridge the gap.
<b>Received 28 January 2023</b>	
<b>6</b>	We note that the Appendix 3 document budgets for an additional £100,000 of 'commercial income generation'. We support the principle that the Council should seek additional income to mitigate savings and cuts in services. However, little information is provided to judge how realistic it is for this target to be achieved.
<b>6</b>	<b>Response from Cabinet Member</b> In the budget for 2022/23, there was an additional commercial income generation target of £50,000. Initiatives have been implemented in year to deliver this and a number of other initiatives have been identified to take forward into 2023/24. The background work undertaken in 2022/23 has provided assurance that £100,000 is challenging but achievable.
<b>Received 28 January 2023</b>	
<b>7</b>	<p>We note that the Council's aim is 'maximising income streams'. We also note that the Council states that 'a significant proportion of the Council's funding comes from fees and charges'. We accept that the Council has to charge fees and make charges for a range of services. Given that inflation is running at over 10%, it seems reasonable that increases in fees and charges should broadly reflect this. However, the Council's proposals for fees and charges in 2023/24, involving more than 1,000 separate items in Appendix 7 of the budget papers, show:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• some fees will increase by 10% (or 10.1%);</li> <li>• many fees will not increase at all;</li> <li>• allotment fees will increase 4.2%</li> </ul> <p>The Council explains that some fees will not increase due to 'market forces'. This seems hardly credible. Many of the fees being held at current prices are where the Council is the sole licensing authority, and there is no 'market' for licensing fees. Or is it that the Council wishes to stimulate the market for those activities for which it proposes a zero fee increase, and depress the market for those with the full fee increase?</p> <p>Whilst we accept that there may need to be some variation in the increase in fees and charges, the current proposals appear to be based on entirely wrong priorities. Why should, for example, Suffolk Street Traders have to pay 10% more for their licences while owners of gambling establishments pay no increased fee? Why should Acupuncturists pay more for their licences while Sexual Entertainment businesses pay no more? Why should people wanting to bury their deceased relatives at the cemetery pay more while those who abandon their vehicles do not? Why should Playgroups have to pay more while scrap metal dealers do not? We propose that there should be a presumption that all fees and charges should be increased by 10%, except where a case is made for a lower increase (or none at all) that would benefit specific groups in the community. In all cases where an increase of less than 10% is proposed, the reason should be given.</p>
<b>7</b>	<p><b>Response from Cabinet Member</b></p> <p>Many thanks for your observation on the fees and charges proposal for 2023/24.</p> <p>As you note, the Council publishes over 1000 separate items in the fees and charges schedule. The proposed increases are determined by service managers who have the knowledge and experience of the local market and have delegated authority for their income budgets and determining appropriate inflationary increases each year.</p> <p>At the time that the draft budget proposal was published, the licencing service were undertaking a full review of their fees and charges following changes to management in the team. You will note that inflationary increases have been applied in the appendix in this final budget proposal.</p>
<b>Received 28 January 2023</b>	
<b>8</b>	Although the budget does not make this clear, the Council provides services that it is required to by law ('statutory services'), and other services which, at various times in the past, have been judged to be beneficial to the citizens of Cheltenham ('discretionary services'). We have asked if an estimate can be made of the relative costs of providing these two types of service, but the response from the Council was that it would be 'difficult'. We understand the difficulties involved, but we note that it was not deemed 'impossible'! We note the statement in the

	Council's consultation document the 'it continues to be difficult to deliver current levels of services when government support does not cover all additional costs we expect to incur'. We further note that the Council will not receive government funding for any discretionary services, so the costs fall entirely on local Council Tax payers. We propose that more work is done on the costs of statutory and discretionary services and that the Council ensures that the citizens of Cheltenham are made better aware of the costs of those services provided by the Council which are statutory and those which are over and above what it is legally obliged to provide.
8	Many thanks for your comments on statutory and discretionary services. Whilst it is correct that the request made to officers was difficult to deliver within the statutory consultation timeframe, this relates more to determining how such services would be costed. All services currently provided by the Council share a set of support services; from finance and ICT to senior management oversight. It was therefore challenging to deliver separate costings for statutory and discretionary services that were robust and reconciled to our overall budget. As part of the review of resources available to deliver the new Corporate Plan, further work is indeed planned to be undertaken to understand the cost of individual services.
<b>Received 28 January 2023</b>	
9	The Council is proud of its 'No Child Left Behind' scheme. However, it appears to us that this scheme is to make up deficiencies in Children's Services, which are the responsibility of the County Council, and for which it receives government funding. Children's Services in Gloucestershire have over several years been judged as inadequate by the Inspectorate. Furthermore, the Council's own evaluation suggested that the scheme was having difficulty in reaching the most vulnerable children. It should not be down to the Borough Council to make up deficiencies in services that are the responsibility of the County Council. We propose that the Council should seek additional funding from the County Council for the 'No Child Left Behind' scheme and publicise the fact that this service is making up a shortfall in County Council provision.
9	<b>Response from Cabinet Member</b> Firstly, thank you very much for acknowledging the work the Council do with our 'No Child Left Behind' scheme. It is an initiative we are very proud of and has made a real difference to some of our most vulnerable children. Like yourselves, we always wish to do more and actively lobby the County Council to demonstrate how effective our interventions have been and to request funding to deliver more local support. Additional funding was passported to the Council as part of the response to COVID-19 but there is no long-term certainty over its continuation.
<b>Received 28 January 2023</b>	
10	Swindon Road recycling centre. There are press reports that the Council will reduce the opening hours of this centre with the aim of saving £35,000 in a full year (although this is not mentioned in the budget papers). Councillors have been quoted publicly as saying that the recycling provision is not a statutory requirement, and that the Council receives no government funding for it. This is another example of where the statutory responsibility for providing this service lies with the County Council. We propose that the Council should seek additional funding from the County Council for the costs of the Swindon Road recycling centre and publicise the fact that this is making up a shortfall in County Council provision.
10	<b>Response from Cabinet Member</b> The proposal to review the Household Waste Recycling Centre was included in the budget consultation for 2022/23 and the decision to amend the opening hours was taken in late 2022. It is correct that the household waste recycling centre is not a statutory service but one the Council chose to provide for our residents. It also provides an opportunity to encourage recycling of waste and generates income from the sale of recyclables, which is re-invested in our services. As this is a discretionary service we are not in a position to seek funding from the County Council for the Swindon Road site.
<b>Received 28 January 2023</b>	
11	We note that the Council's priorities have been to develop prestige projects in the 'public realm' within the Town Centre, the High Street and the Minster, and we note that 87% of residents are satisfied with the town centre as a place to visit. We believe that the Council should now shift its focus on investing in the 'public realm' in other parts of the town, particularly those of high deprivation. There are a number of parts of the town that are independently assessed as deprived, as measured by the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD): areas such as St Paul's, St Mark's, St Peter's, Hesters Way, Oakley, All Saints. We propose the Council should consult residents in the more deprived areas of the town to ascertain what

	investments in the public realm would bring to these parts of the town the benefits that have accrued to the Town Centre in recent years.
<b>11</b>	<p><b>Response from Cabinet Member</b></p> <p>The Council's revised Corporate Plan for 2023-27 includes a priority to ensure residents, communities and businesses benefit from Cheltenham's future growth and prosperity. One of the goals under this priority is to identify and drive opportunities in all aspects of economic development across Cheltenham at every level, using economic evidence and data to inform our priorities and outcomes.</p> <p>A number of projects are currently underway that support this, particularly in St Peter's and the Moors and we look forward to more activity over the next four years which will support economic and public realm investment across the town.</p>
<b>Received 28 January 2023</b>	
<b>12</b>	<p>Treasury Management We note that the Council is committed 'in the longer term' to divesting from oil and gas investment. We consider this to be far too cautious. We propose that the Council sets a target date for completing its divestment from oil and gas, which should be no later than the end of the 2023/24 financial year.</p>
<b>12</b>	<p><b>Response from Cabinet Member</b></p> <p>Thank you for your representation on the 2023/24 budget consultation. As you may be aware, the performance of our investments and the issue of divestment from oil and gas is discussed quarterly as part of the Council's cross party Treasury Management Panel.</p> <p>As a Council, we are committed to divestment and this needs to be balanced with the importance of robust financial management. Presently, immediate divestment would have an immediate capital cost to the Council of £520,000 which would have to be cut from elsewhere to manage the other commitments in the budget.</p> <p>The Council will continue to review the financial risks of divestment against the new Corporate Priorities throughout 2023/24. The proportion of our overall investment in oil and gas has reduced from 11% to 8.75% in 2022/23 and we will continue to reduce our reliance on the fund and consider more green investment in our portfolio until we are able to safely divest the remaining investment.</p>
<b>Received 31 January 2023</b>	
<b>13</b>	<p>The budget proposals do not contain enough detail. There is talk about efficiencies being made given the high levels of inflation. The services that will suffer most from real term budget cuts in 23/24 should be detailed within the consultation papers.</p>
<b>13</b>	<p><b>Response from Cabinet Member</b></p> <p>In preparing the draft budget proposals we endeavour to be as transparent as possible with the information provided. Of the £1.3m savings target, there are three proposals which total £300k which are extensions of those implemented in 2022/23. There is also a proposal to reduce the base budget required to fund secondary pension contributions by £575k which is based on advice by the pension fund actuary. This leaves the two proposals which relate to the re-alignment of budget and resourcing with the new Corporate Plan.</p> <p>The new Corporate Plan is subject to approval and is being presented to Council at the same Council meeting as these final budget proposals on 20 February 2023. Once approved, we will be in a position to move forward with developing more detail of these proposals. Any changes to the budget will be subject to relevant Officer, Cabinet or Full Council decisions which will be published on the Council's forward plan. Further consultation periods may also apply in line with the constitution. No service will be impacted without clear and transparent assessment of risk and without the appropriate governance arrangements being undertaken.</p>
<b>Received 31 January 2023</b>	
<b>14</b>	<p>The report should include how spending, much of which is targeted in the town centre, benefits residents in the most deprived areas, many of whom cannot afford to travel into town and/or spend money in the restaurants and bars or take part in festivals, use the parks, go ice skating or on big wheels.</p>
<b>14</b>	<p><b>Response from Cabinet Member</b></p> <p>The Council's revised Corporate Plan for 2023-27 includes a priority to ensure residents, communities and businesses benefit from Cheltenham's future growth and prosperity. One of the goals under this priority is to identify and drive opportunities in all aspects of economic development across Cheltenham at every level, using economic evidence and data to inform our priorities and outcomes.</p> <p>A number of projects are currently underway that support this, particularly in St Peter's and the Moors and we look forward to more activity over the next four years which will support</p>

	economic and public realm investment across the town. The spend in these areas will be reported regularly as part of the monitoring of the delivery of the Corporate Plan.
<b>Received 31 January 2023</b>	
<b>15</b>	Regarding the carbon zero by 2030 ambition, we ask the Council sets aside money to commission a feasibility study into a workplace parking levy in Cheltenham. Nottingham City council have raised over £90m over 10 years from their parking levy and are now offering to conduct feasibility studies for other councils for £24,999 as a one off cost. Even if Cheltenham could raise a quarter of the revenue that Nottingham has, this would bring a huge cash windfall to the council to support their efforts to meet net zero targets. This could be financed in many ways, including the deletion of two cabinet posts.
<b>15</b>	<b>Response from Cabinet Member</b> A Workplace Parking Levy functions by allowing revenues to be invested in transport schemes, offsetting the impact on businesses. This could only be introduced and implemented by the highways and transport authority, Gloucestershire County Council.
<b>Received 31 January 2023</b>	
<b>16</b>	We want the council to accelerate its ambitions to divest from investments in oil and gas during 23/24. Many green investment funds are now performing as well. We see no reason for the Council to delay moving away from fossil fuels.
<b>16</b>	<b>Response from Cabinet Member</b> Thank you for your representation on the 2023/24 budget consultation. As you may be aware, the performance of our investments and the issue of divestment from oil and gas is discussed quarterly as part of the Council's cross party Treasury Management Panel. As a Council, we are committed to divestment and this needs to be balanced with the importance of robust financial management. Presently, immediate divestment would have an immediate capital cost to the Council of £520,000 which would have to be cut from elsewhere to manage the other commitments in the budget. The Council will continue to review the financial risks of divestment against the new Corporate Priorities throughout 2023/24. The proportion of our overall investment in oil and gas has reduced from 11% to 8.75% in 2022/23 and we will continue to reduce our reliance on the fund and consider more green investment in our portfolio until we are able to safely divest the remaining investment.
<b>Received 31 January 2023</b>	
<b>17</b>	Reduction in the Household Recycling Centre's opening hours risks an increase in fly-tipping, an increase in the burning of polluting waste in gardens, a decrease in recycling, and a long queue of idling vehicles at the weekends. It makes no sense to reduce hours to those of the GCC facilities unless there is a plan to close the HRC altogether. If a reduced service is to remain, opening hours should include some early morning and evening hours and any days when the HRC is closed should be different to the GCC sites, giving residents flexibility and making recycling and lawful waste disposal as accessible as possible.
<b>17</b>	<b>Response from Cabinet Member</b> The proposal to review the Household Waste Recycling Centre was included in the budget consultation for 2022/23 and the decision to amend the opening hours was taken in late 2022. The changes to opening hours were introduced in February 2023 and the usage and feedback will be reviewed regularly by the Lead Member.
<b>Received 31 January 2023</b>	
<b>18</b>	Retain current cemetery fees (during a Cost of Living Crisis the financial burden on a family due to bereavement should not be increased) and increase Gambling and Planning fees and car parking charges. Any surplus should go towards exploring options for green burial sites.
<b>18</b>	<b>Response from Cabinet Member</b> Many thanks for your observation on the fees and charges proposal for 2023/24.  The proposed increases to fees and charges are determined by service managers who have the knowledge and experience of the local market and have delegated authority for determining appropriate inflationary increases each year.  At the time that the draft budget proposal was published, the licencing service were undertaking a full review of their fees and charges following changes to management in the team. You will note that inflationary increases have been applied in the appendix in this final budget proposal.

	Likewise, we are also planning to go out to consult on a separate proposal for new pricing structures for car parking charges.
<b>Received 31 January 2023</b>	
<b>19</b>	Cease provision of a Mayor's car. The position of mayor comes with an allowance of £7712 to cover expenses incurred in the carrying out of civic duties. (The mayor also receives the basic allowance of £6174 and a chair of Council allowance of £500.) The savings should fund extending the work of No Child Left Behind.
<b>19</b>	<b>Response from Cabinet Member</b> The funding of the Mayor's car has been discussed at length in the Council Chamber in 2022/23. There are multiple rationales for providing a car for the Mayor – amongst them being to safeguard the Mayoral Chain which is of high value. We are proud of the work done by the No Child Left behind initiative and in the Corporate Plan for 2023-27 we have re-affirmed our commitment to it.
<b>Received 31 January 2023</b>	
<b>20</b>	The Minster Exchange is millions over budget and yet more town centre property has been purchased. The Golden Valley represents a massive commitment and is a long way from seeing a return on investment. With borrowing at nearly £153 million and uncertainty around interest rates, the Council should not commit to further large investment projects until the current ones are seeing returns.
<b>20</b>	<b>Response from Cabinet Member</b> Thank you for your representation on this area of the budget. The investment decisions we have made to date are predicated on generating returns either through capital receipts or through revenue which provides a contribution to the general fund. This then provides funding for the delivery of our services. In the examples provided the revenue returns to the Council are forecast to more than cover the cost of borrowing to invest, in spite of the rise in interest rates. This assessment is made for every new project which is considered by the Council.
<b>Received 31 January 2023</b>	
<b>21</b>	We could not see any specific capital spending plans for the leisure centre - we understand it is at the end of its 50-year build life and is needing some substantial investment to maintain its operational integrity. All of the property planned maintenance costs are rated "high priority", indicating a lack of proper management of these assets? CBC should not be waiting until buildings are at risk of becoming dangerous before investing in their maintenance and should not be purchasing new ones when those in current portfolio are hitting "high priority" before maintenance work is budgeted for.
<b>21</b>	<b>Response from Cabinet Member</b> The strategy for the use of the council's capital resources is led by our corporate priorities. At the moment you are quite correct that the capital programme doesn't include specific projects relating to the leisure centre but there is a revenue base budget of £1.064 million which covers planned and reactive maintenance and the running costs of the buildings covered by the Council. During the 2023/24 financial year, other projects and schemes may come to light which require investment by the Council. These proposals will be considered by the Cabinet and approval will be requested through the relevant channels in line with the Council's Budget and Policy Framework Rules.  In relation to the planned maintenance programme, there have been a number of large maintenance projects undertaken in 2022/23 which will be split over multiple years which is why they have included in 2023/24 as high priority. Likewise, our programme is based on the knowledge of our building surveyors and the results of conditional surveys and other specialist reports. The priority of remedial works is based on this intelligence to ensure our buildings remain in good condition and are compliant with health and safety requirements. The management and maintenance of our £500 million asset portfolio is regularly reviewed by Asset Management Working Group.
<b>Received 31 January 2023</b>	
<b>22</b>	We welcome the re-introduction of spending on new affordable housing after nothing was spent during this current year but the budget and forecasts do not keep up with inflation so in actual fact housing will suffer a significant real term decrease for the next 3 years. Where will these cuts will fall?
<b>22</b>	<b>Response from Cabinet Member</b>

<p>As a Council, we continue to be committed to the delivery of Affordable Homes in Cheltenham and this is re-affirmed as one of our Corporate Priorities for 2023-27. There are a number of options available to deliver this goal – acquiring new stock, building our own properties or enabling others to deliver greater proportions of affordable homes through their own housing developments. It is correct to say that at the moment, building costs are much higher than previously and the strategies we use to deliver the outcomes we want for the town we need to reflect this. The HRA Business Plan and the Council’s Housing Investment Plan are both due to be published this year and will in part set out how we propose to do this.</p>
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