

Budget Consultation 2024/25 questions from members of the public

Received 26 January 2024													
1	<p>Can the Council provide a revised version of Appendix 2 showing how a balanced budget is to be achieved, showing all budgeted income, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council Tax • Fees and Charges • Other commercial income • 'Additional' income specified in Appendix 3 • Government and other Grants (e.g. Levelling up Fund) 												
1	<p>Response from Cabinet Member</p> <p>Analysis has been included in the covering report for the final budget proposal which shows how the budget for 2024/25 is proposed to be funded. The gross expenditure in the 2024/25 final budget proposal is £61.679m. This is funded as follows:</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tbody> <tr> <td>Gross Income from Fees, Charges and Other External Sources</td> <td style="text-align: right;">£40.405m</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Income Generated from Investment Properties</td> <td style="text-align: right;">£3.944m</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Council Tax Income</td> <td style="text-align: right;">£10.396m</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Business Rates Income</td> <td style="text-align: right;">£5.524m</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Government Grants</td> <td style="text-align: right;">£1.410m</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Total</td> <td style="text-align: right;">£61.679m</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Gross Income from Fees, Charges and Other External Sources	£40.405m	Income Generated from Investment Properties	£3.944m	Council Tax Income	£10.396m	Business Rates Income	£5.524m	Government Grants	£1.410m	Total	£61.679m
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2	<p>Will the Council provide detail on exactly how £1m will be saved on Housing Services? Does the proposed cut of £1m mean that the Council is planning to reduce the deficit by 50%? What will happen to the valuable community outreach work undertaken by CBH?</p>												
2	<p>Response from Cabinet Member</p> <p>The transition of the housing services back in-house provides significant scope for considering the whole operating model, to streamline services and organisational design and maximise financial savings for both the General Fund and HRA. The proposal to deliver in house will enable the removal of an additional layer of management and associated costs, a reduction in duplication of processes and costs and allow a formal review of operational assets to be considered. It will also provide a single entity within the LGPS which will provide consequential financial savings. Whilst the total savings that can be delivered will be assessed and evaluated during the transition period, it would not be unrealistic to achieve in excess of £2m across the multiple work-streams. These savings would be proportionately shared between the General Fund and HRA to ensure financial sustainability can be achieved whilst ensuring that as one organisation the focus remains on strengthening the tenant and leaseholder offer, including our services in the community.</p>												
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3	<p>Will the Council provide detail on exactly how £0.5m will be saved on Environmental Services? Are additional charges going to be introduced?</p>												
3	<p>Response from Cabinet Member</p> <p>The savings target for environmental services has been determined in partnership with Ubico Limited who deliver the majority of the Council's grounds, street and waste services as well as the internal teams within the Council.</p> <p>A number of options are being discussed to ensure services are maintained for our residents but that they are delivered in the most efficient way whilst also supporting the Council's ambitions around recycling and carbon reduction. This includes the</p>												

	<p>implementation of in-cab technology to improve the customer service experience and data available, reviewing the value for money of our recycling contracts and the location and use of bring banks around the town.</p> <p>The Council are committed to ensuring that all residents have access to recycling services but the rising cost of providing receptacles means delivery charges for these also need to be considered. Again, this should also reduce our own carbon footprint if receptacles are re-used and fewer are needed to be purchased by the Council.</p>
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4	Will the Council ensure that the Equalities Impact assessment of cuts in expenditure is a comprehensive analysis, including in particular the impact of cuts in Housing Services and Environmental Services, and the impact on those living in the more deprived areas of Cheltenham?
4	<p>Response from Cabinet Member</p> <p>The final budget report for 2024/25 contains an Equalities Impact Assessment of the areas of the budget proposal relating to savings and additional income. Any further key decisions in relation to the delivery of these areas will also be subject to their own assessment.</p>
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5	Will the Council provide information on how much it currently spends on discretionary services including those that are the responsibility of the County Council?
5	<p>Response from Cabinet Member</p> <p>It is very difficult to determine accurately the cost of all discretionary services provided by the Council. This is because most service areas deliver a combination of statutory and discretionary services. There are also a number of interdependencies between teams – for example our neighbourhood team who may be viewed as discretionary provide indirect support for some of our statutory enforcement activity. Quantifying this valuable indirect support is therefore very complex.</p> <p>Where discretionary services are provided by the borough Council but are the statutory responsibility of the County Council, work has been undertaken to ensure that the contracts in place between the two parties are reviewed to ensure we are able to cover costs incurred. This includes ensuring inflationary uplifts are applied and project management or admin fees are accounted for correctly.</p>
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6	Will the Council provide detail of how £200,000 will be saved on discretionary services
6	<p>Response from Cabinet Member</p> <p>In preparing the Council's budget proposals we endeavour to be as transparent as possible with the information provided. Of the £2.887mm savings and additional income target for 2024/25, £200k relates to re-aligning resources in areas of discretionary spend.</p> <p>The Council delivers significant activities across the borough which are outside of the statutory requirements. With pressure continuing on funding and local tax generation, and uncertainty around the Fair Funding Review and expected changes to Business Rates in 2026/27, the Council needs to ensure resources are focused and prioritised against the ambitions of our Corporate Plan.</p> <p>The new Corporate Plan was approved in February 2023 and work is ongoing to develop the details of how discretionary spend is allocated and whether these services could be delivered differently. One example is the twinning service which the Council deliver at the moment but are looking to work with the Cheltenham twinning Association to support the same opportunities in a different way.</p> <p>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>

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7	What representations, (if any), has the Council made to the County Council about transferring the costs of providing services that are the responsibility of the County Council?
7	<p>Response from Cabinet Member</p> <p>The detailed consultation response provided with this question refers to a number of discretionary services the Council provide which should be provided by the County Council, specifically noting the No Child Left Behind scheme and the household recycling centre at Swindon Road.</p> <p>The borough Council has taken the decisions historically to provide these services which are not statutorily required to be delivered and in areas there is overlap between these and County Council services.</p> <p>No specific representation is planned to be made to the County Council in respect of transferring costs. However, work is ongoing in some areas such as verge cutting and public realm to ensure that where the borough is contracted by the County Council to deliver a service or support communities that the income received is appropriate to the costs incurred.</p>
Received 26 January 2024	
8	Why are charges for allotments increasing by around 10%?
8	<p>Allotment charges are pro rata covering the period up to the 31 December and the bills are prepared and issued in January of each year.</p> <p>The timing means that we apply inflation a year in arrears to the charges. The charges that were approved in the 2023/24 applied an increase of 4.2% which means the 2024/25 charges are increased by the prior year inflationary figure.</p>
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9	What are charges for burials increasing by around 30%, and for interments by about 11%?
9	<p>Response from Cabinet Member</p> <p>Burial fees have been increased by around 30% and other costs by approximately 11% to reflect the increasing costs of maintaining a substantial cemetery whilst keeping Cheltenham's prices in-line with what is considered reasonable within the marketplace.</p>
Received 26 January 2024	
10	Betting and Gambling: We note that all these fees are increasing by 6.8%, which appears to be in line with the September 2023 CPI inflation figure. We were informed last year that these charges are controlled by the government. Can we therefore infer that 6.8% is the inflation figure being used by the government?
10	<p>Response from Cabinet Member</p> <p>These fees are set by regulations. Some elements allow for some discretion whereas others do not. Where there is discretion, it is within a defined minimum and maximum threshold. When setting the level within the permitted minimum and maximum, we are still bound but the general rule of cost neutrality which ensures Local Authorities are not profiting from licencing activity. Increased costs at the Council are a factor in determining the fees and charges each year as well as other considerations such as time and motion studies, any relevant enforcement and compliance costs.</p>
Received 26 January 2024	
11	Hackney carriage Driver licences: Why are these fees being increased by only 2.88%?
11	<p>Response from Cabinet Member</p> <p>This charge was determined in the same cost neutrality basis as other licence fees. The charge will be reviewed again in 2025/26 and will be adjusted to ensure we remain as close to cost neutral as we are able. A general overview of these is captured in the guidance linked below.</p> <p>https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/5%2013%20%20OpenForBusiness_02_web.pdf.</p>

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1 2	Premises licences: Why is a range of premises and club licence fees being frozen at 2023/24 rates, and not being increased at all?
1 2	Response from Cabinet Member These are centrally set without any discretion at local level. See The Licensing Act 2003 (Fees) Regulations 2005 for reference.
Received 26 January 2024	
1 3	Sex Establishments and Sexual Entertainment Licences: We note that licence fees for Sexual Entertainment Venues (SEVs) are to be increased substantially (50% - 90% depending on the heading). Last year we drew the Council's attention to the fact that some other Councils are charging considerably more than Cheltenham for such licence fees, and recommended above-inflation increases. The Council's response at that time was that increases above inflation were constrained by legislation. So we are pleased that the Council appears to have taken note of our comments last year. We look forward to a similar above-inflation increase next year. However, we also note that licence fees for Sex Establishments will only increase by 6.8%. Why is there a difference in licence fee increase between Sex Establishments and Sexual Entertainment Venues?
1 3	Response from Cabinet Member There are a number of different type of licenses under the broad umbrella of "sex establishments" – sex shops, sexual entertainment premises licences and sex cinemas. We calculate fees for these separately as a requirement in common law, primary legislation and guidance. In other words, we look at a number of factors for each of these types of licences and calculate fees accordingly. The reality is that sexual entertainment premises cost the authority significantly more to administer than, for example, sex shops. This is reflected in the number of objections applications attract, the number of licensing hearing required as a consequence and therefore the officer time and effort required to administer. Accordingly, the base fees and annual uplifts for sexual entertainment premises reflect the annual cost and effort for administering this licence type compared to administration associated with licensing sex shops which are more simple.
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1 4	Section 28 Fixed Penalty Notices served in Environmental Protection & Streetscene Enforcement: We note that penalties for a range of offenses will be increased very substantially, some by 233%. Why is the penalty for abandoning a vehicle being frozen at the 2023/24 rate, and not being increased along with the other penalties?
1 4	Response from Cabinet Member The changes were introduced through legislation that did not include abandoned vehicles. For reference, see The Environmental Offences (Fixed Penalties) (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2023.
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1 5	Can the Council clarify what it means by 'market forces' for those services where the charges will be below (or above) inflation?
1 5	Response from Cabinet Member Examples of market forces include competition, consumer preferences, technological advancements, economic growth, and government regulations. Changes in market forces may have a significant impact on the behavior of buyers and sellers in the market. This means for some of our income generated services where fees are not set by the government we have flexibility to adjust our charges in line with these factors and their impact in the local market we operate in. The Head of Service may determine that if there is significant competition locally for that service that a below inflationary increase is applied and vice versa if the opposite applies.
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16	Income from Fees and charges What is the budgeted income from each of the Services set out in Appendix 8?																																		
16	<p>Response from Cabinet Member</p> <p>The table below shows the budgeted income for each of the services, and where available for each type of activity undertaken by the services for 2024/25.</p>																																		
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17	<p>I have been through the budget proposals and I cannot see any reference to repayments of a loan made jointly by Cheltenham and Glos City Councils to Gloucestershire Airport.</p> <p>Recent press reports suggest the Airport may be sold this year and therefore will the loan (in excess of £10m) be repaid in full prior to any sale ?</p> <p>In the meantime, can we assume repayments are being made in full in accordance with the loan agreement?</p>																																		
17	<p>Response from Cabinet Member</p> <p>The loans and investments held by the Council and the strategies for managing capital and treasury activities will be outlined in a set of documents which will be presented to Council for approval in March 2024.</p> <p>The sale agreement is subject to a Non-Disclosure Agreement but the final budget proposal in February makes full provision for the repayment of the loan made to the Airport by the Council.</p>																																		