Public budget consultation on the council's budget for 2025/2026

Open for comments from Wednesday 23 October to Wednesday 4 December 2024.

The council has been working for a number of years to transform and modernise how it operates. Through the 'Our Cambridge' transformation programme we have already improved the way services are delivered, while also finding significant savings.

We currently spend £97.2 million per year to deliver services in Cambridge (of which £26.2 million is received from Government and passed directly to Housing Benefit recipients). Due to factors largely outside our control, these operating costs are rising.

These operating costs are paid for mainly from the income we generate from fees and charges, Council Tax and Business Rates, commercial property rent, and Government grants. This income is not increasing in line with the increase in costs, and it is not sustainable for the council's expenditure to be higher than its income year after year.

We therefore need to take action to reduce the budget gap. The council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) sets out an initial commitment to reduce the council's annual net expenditure by £6 million by 1 April 2026.

Because the council's finances have been well managed to date, we have time to take a measured approach to finding savings. We will continue to focus on modernising and finding efficiencies to bring down costs.

We have identified that £2.5 million per year could be saved by making further changes to the council's organisational structure – this work is underway.

A further £3.5 million per year could be saved by making changes to council services, such as making changes to some of the discretionary services that we offer or charges for some services.

This survey relates to the £3.5 million which could be saved by increasing fees and charges for council services and, as a last resort, making changes to some of the discretionary services we offer.

We remain absolutely committed to delivering exemplary mandatory services, and funding and supporting those services that we, and our communities, hold sacrosanct. For example, we are committed to our discretionary £1.2 million Community Grants programme, which supports voluntary and community organisations that help residents in the greatest need. It supports larger organisations, such as Citizens Advice**,** and smaller organisations, all of which reduce social and economic inequality.

The council charges users for several of its services. This is an important source of income, bringing in around £23 million every year. Without this income, many services would have to

stop. We could increase fees and charges in some areas, or start charging for services we currently provide for free. Some council services must be provided free of charge by law, whilst for some others the council has no control over how much is charged (for example planning application fees, which are set by central government).

We want to understand people's views on the services we provide and how we could make changes to help balance our budget for the next financial year (1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026) and beyond.

Services provided by Cambridge City Council

We provide a wide range of services to Cambridge residents including:

- benefits and housing advice
- community development and community centres
- council housing and homelessness support
- council tax and business rates collection
- economic development
- planning for sustainable development and planning applications
- public and environmental health
- household waste collection
- parks and open spaces
- sports and leisure facilities

The council provides services to 14 wards identified in this [map](#).

The council's priorities are set out in our [vision for Cambridge](#).

Some services in the city of Cambridge are provided by Cambridgeshire County Council (for instance maintenance of the highways, and social care for children and adults), the health service (including GPs and dentists), or other bodies. This consultation is not about those services.

Have your say

Please submit your views by completing our survey by 11.59pm on Wednesday 4 December 2024.

What happens after the consultation?

- Your responses to our survey will be summarised and reported to councillors. Your responses will inform our thinking on budget choices and service priorities as we finalise our budget for 2025/2026.

- The budget will be discussed at a meeting of the Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on 10 February 2025, and a decision will be made on the final budget for 2025/2026 at the Council meeting on 24 February 2025.

- We will publicise what has been decided after that meeting.

- Your responses will also shape the development of high-level budget proposals for 2026/2027 and future years.

Questionnaire

We want to hear your views on the services we provide and how we could meet our savings target for the next financial year (2025/2026).

Part one: council priorities

1) The following statements or phrases describe some of the things that may need to be done in Cambridge by either the council, its partners or other agencies in the year(s) ahead. In some cases, the council has a limited direct impact but seeks to work with partners to address those.

   What do you think are the three most important priorities for the city council to work on?

   Please select three options:
   a) Providing affordable housing
   b) Tackling climate change and improving biodiversity
   c) Investing in greener transport and active travel to cut congestion
   d) Preventing homelessness
   e) Improving the local economy and sustainable growth
   f) Developing local skills and ensuring people have equal access to opportunities and resources
   g) Addressing poverty and inequality
   h) Ensuring people are safe
   i) Something else? Please specify.

Part two: streets and open spaces

The council spends £7.4 million per year on Streets and Open Spaces.

It is estimated that we could save £910,000 per year through better use of technology and data, and prioritising some green spaces to support biodiversity (questions 2 and 3).

2) The council could use technology and data to focus its resources on the areas where spend will be most effective.

Example: Installing smart sensors on public bins will provide usage data to help us ensure that bins are placed and emptied in a more effective and efficient way. The data could demonstrate how to decrease the number of bins, single-use plastic liners, miles driven, and carbon footprint while maintaining high cleanliness standards.

Example: Actively using vehicle tracking technology. For example, we can use data to optimise our grass cutting routes and to make appointments more efficient, letting tenants know if there are delays or changes. This could reduce driving, improve the tenant experience, help the environment and reduce costs.

Should the council invest in using technology and data more, to find savings and improve efficiency in Streets and Open Spaces?

   a. Strongly Support
   b. Support
   c. Neither Support nor Oppose
   d. Oppose
   e. Strongly Oppose

3) The council could prioritise some of the city's green spaces to support biodiversity, by reducing the frequency of mowing and leaf collection in some areas, having a positive impact on the environment. As well as saving money, this would promote wildlife habitats and reduce carbon emissions.
Should the council reduce the frequency of mowing and leaf collection in some areas?
   a. Strongly Support
   b. Support
   c. Neither Support nor Oppose
   d. Oppose
   e. Strongly Oppose

4) **Should the council pass responsibility for funding the out of hours grazing management service to those who are allowed to graze their cattle on the city's commons?**
   a. Strongly Support
   b. Support
   c. Neither Support nor Oppose
   d. Oppose
   e. Strongly Oppose

5) The council manages 14 public toilets. We have recently invested in refurbishing a number of them (including Cherry Hinton Hall and Drummer Street, with work underway at Silver Street), ensuring we are able to offer 'Changing Places' toilets across the city. Some public toilets are used far less than others but still require maintenance. We also meet the costs of recurring vandalism.

The council could reduce the overall number of public toilets it manages, and maintain high quality facilities where there is a proven need. This could save an estimated £305,000 per year. We are running a separate consultation about toilet provision with proposals to close low usage toilets or toilets that are close to other publicly accessible toilets – **view the standalone consultation here or find out more about proposed changes**.

Should the council reduce the overall number of public toilets it manages?

    a. Strongly Support
    b. Support
    c. Neither Support nor Oppose
    d. Oppose
    e. Strongly Oppose

Part three: communities

6) The council runs and supports a number of community centres across the city. They provide affordable spaces for residents to enjoy a wide range of activities and events from keep fit classes to art and craft classes, religious worship to rock gigs, children's birthday parties to weddings. Our centres are also somewhere local to pop in for a cup of tea and a chat, get advice from a range of services including Citizen's Advice, drop-in parenting classes or to access a community use computer. The council spends £1.4 million per year directly running, or indirectly supporting, community centres. The council could seek to reduce its spend by developing the capacity of local community groups, and exploring opportunities to transfer some or all of its community centres to community ownership. This could potentially save up to £350,000 per year.

Should the council consider actively developing local community groups and transferring ownership of community centres?

    a. Strongly Support
    b. Support
    c. Neither Support nor Oppose
    d. Oppose
    e. Strongly Oppose

7) The council spends £526,000 per year on public CCTV, which contributes to community safety, helps to prevent crime in hotspot areas, and provides evidence to the police. This covers both fixed CCTV cameras, and a small number of re-deployable cameras which can be moved to areas of concern in the city.

Should the council consider reducing the amount spent on CCTV cameras?

    a. Strongly Support
    b. Support
    c. Neither Support nor Oppose
    d. Oppose
    e. Strongly Oppose

8) The council's arts and culture development programme costs £115,000 per year. This consists of supporting work for local communities including free events and activities in schools, neighbourhoods and local network groups. This includes fundraising and working in partnership, and offers skills and employment opportunities, workshops for young people, access to cultural opportunities, the development of a film sector, and coordination of the 2,000 member Cambridge Arts Network in the city.

   Should the council consider reducing its arts and cultural development programme?
   a. Strongly Support
   b. Support
   c. Neither Support nor Oppose
   d. Oppose
   e. Strongly Oppose

9) The council spends £120,000 to address inequalities caused by discrimination in our communities. This includes providing advice, signposting, practical support and small grants to organisations supporting voluntary and community sector groups. This is in addition to the council's £1.2 million Community Grants programme. It also includes working with individuals and communities likely to experience inequality caused by discrimination to take action on what is important to them – this promotes social inclusion, community cohesion, and equality of opportunity. This support is discretionary, and the council must meet legal duties around the Equality Act 2010 in all decisions relating to discretionary or statutory service provision.

   Should the council reduce its equalities and cohesion work in the wider community?
   a. Strongly Support
   b. Support
   c. Neither Support nor Oppose
   d. Oppose
   e. Strongly Oppose

10) The council spends a net amount of £320,000 per year supporting communities to lead healthy and active lifestyles with a focus on supporting families, young people, older adults and adults living with long-term health conditions including mental-health challenges. Working collaboratively with a range of partners including local clubs, community groups and community and leisure facilities across the city, the council delivers a range of free and low-cost programmes, workshops, events and activities to promote active lifestyles.

   Should the council reduce its work to support residents to stay healthy and well?
   a. Strongly Support
   b. Support
   c. Neither Support nor Oppose
   d. Oppose
   e. Strongly Oppose

Part four: commercial property

11) The council owns a number of commercial properties which generate £7.4 million per year of income. The council could review its commercial investment properties (not those held for strategic or heritage purposes) to ensure they are bringing in enough income for the council, or consider disposal.
Should the council consider redeveloping or selling commercial properties that generate the least income?
   a. Strongly Support
   b. Support
   c. Neither Support nor Oppose
   d. Oppose
   e. Strongly Oppose

Part five: fees and charges

The council charges users for a number of its services. This is an important source of income, bringing in around £23 million every year. Without this income, many services would have to stop. One of the ways in which the council could balance its budget is to increase fees and charges in some areas, or to start charging for services it currently provides for free.

12) Car parking charges cover the council's operational, repairs and planned maintenance costs of its car parks, and surpluses contribute towards frontline services. We are currently consulting on car park charges – **view the standalone consultation here or find out more about proposed charges**.
Should the council consider increasing its car park charges to make a higher contribution to other council services?
   a. Strongly Agree
   b. Agree
   c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
   d. Disagree
   e. Strongly Disagree

13) Council car parks are currently free to park in overnight after 6pm.
Should the council consider reintroducing charging for parking after 6pm?
   a. Strongly Agree
   b. Agree
   c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
   d. Disagree
   e. Strongly Disagree

14) Currently, the council subsidises the use of its swimming pools, costing £250,000 per year. The council could reduce or stop this discount, so that the costs of maintaining and running the pools is covered by those who use it, rather than all Council Tax payers (still ensuring those on low incomes aren't disproportionally impacted).

Should the council stop this subsidy, so the costs of maintaining and running the pools are covered by those who use them?
    a. Strongly Agree
    b. Agree
    c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
    d. Disagree
    e. Strongly Disagree

15) Charging non-Cambridge residents a higher price to use swimming pools could provide an additional £80,000 per year.
Should the council charge higher prices for non-Cambridge residents who use the council swimming pools?
    a. Strongly Agree
    b. Agree
    c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
    d. Disagree
    e. Strongly Disagree

16) The running costs of other leisure services (such as tennis courts and pavilions) could be covered by those who use them instead of currently covered by all residents through Council Tax. This would mean introducing or increasing charges which could bring in £60,000 to support running and maintenance costs.
Should the council increase charges for people using sports and recreation facilities to better cover costs?
    a. Strongly Agree
    b. Agree
    c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
    d. Disagree
    e. Strongly Disagree

17) The council provides a free pest control service to all residents at a cost of £105,000 per year, this means the service is paid for by Council Tax payers regardless of whether they use the service. Those councils that provide this service now charge for it. The proposal could generate income of approximately £60,000 to £90,000 per year.
Should the council introduce charges for people using pest control services (with some exceptions for people on lower incomes)?
    a. Strongly Agree
    b. Agree
    c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
    d. Disagree
    e. Strongly Disagree

Part six: Council Tax

The council collects Council Tax on behalf of itself, Cambridgeshire County Council, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service, and the Cambridgeshire Police and Crime Commissioner.

In 2024/2025, the total Council Tax collected per band D property is £2,248.95. Of this, Cambridge City Council keeps £225.39 (10.02%).

Our current assumption is that the city council share of Council Tax will increase by 2.99% next year. This is equivalent to £6.74 per band D household, or 13p per week. This would bring in around £0.3 million of extra income for the council.

If Council Tax is not increased by as much as 2.99%, the council would need to find additional savings. This will mean further reductions to spending and/or increases in fees and charges elsewhere.

18) **Bearing in mind the council's budget gap, which of the following options do you support?**
   a. Reduce Council Tax
   b. Keep Council Tax the same
   c. Increase Council Tax by less than 2.99%
   d. Increase Council Tax by 2.99%
   e. Increase Council Tax by more than 2.99%

19) **Please explain why you chose this option**

20) Some councils in England have introduced a scheme to allow residents to make additional voluntary Council Tax contributions.
   To what extent would you support such a scheme being introduced in Cambridge?
   a. Strongly Support
   b. Support
   c. Neither Support nor Oppose
   d. Oppose
   e. Strongly Oppose

Part seven: your comments

21) **If you have opposed taking some of the above measures, what other measures would you support instead, to achieve a balanced budget?**

22) Do you have any other comments about the measures set out above? For example, are there any that you particularly support or oppose, and why?