

A summary of Cheshire East Council's

Budget Community Assembly

September 2026



Executive Summary

Introduction

On 7 September 2026, Cheshire East Council held a Budget Community Assembly at Holmes Chapel Community Centre.

The event brought together 26 residents from across the borough to explore the financial challenges facing Cheshire East and to consider the question “what principles should guide future budget decisions when there isn't enough money to do everything?”.

The Community Assembly followed the Budget Prioritisation Survey conducted during summer 2026 and formed part of a wider programme of engagement supporting the development of Cheshire East Council's 2027-2032 Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

Participants took part in a series of discussions and activities designed to explore what services matter most to residents, what should happen before services are reduced, and what principles should guide future budget decisions.

Activities 1 & 2: Defining and Prioritising Everyday Services

The first two activities explored what participants considered to be “everyday services” and which of those services should be protected when money is limited.

Discussions revealed a broad understanding of everyday services. While roads, waste collection and street cleaning featured strongly, participants also identified social care, children's services, education, public transport, libraries, housing services and parks as everyday services because of the important role they play in supporting residents and communities.

Participants were then asked to prioritise those services they felt should be protected. The chart below summarises the services that received the highest levels of support.

Council Services	Number of selections
Waste collection and recycling	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
Social care for children and young people	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
Roads, pavements and highway maintenance	● ● ● ● ● ● ●
Housing, homelessness and affordability	● ● ● ● ● ● ●
Community safety, anti-social behaviour and CCTV	● ● ● ● ● ● ●
Social care services for adults and older people	● ● ● ● ● ● ●

The results suggest that participants place greatest importance on protecting both highly used everyday services and services that support vulnerable residents.

Activity 3: Doing More, Doing Less or Doing Things Differently

The third activity explored what the council should do more of, less of, or differently before reducing services that residents value.

Participants overwhelmingly focused on improving and modernising the delivery of services rather than reducing them. Much of the discussion centred on identifying opportunities to improve efficiency, strengthen partnership working and prevent problems before they become more costly.

Do More – Participants most frequently suggested:

- Prevention and early intervention
- Better communication, transparency and resident engagement
- Partnership working and joined-up services.

Do Things Differently – Participants most frequently suggested:

- Partnership delivery and shared resources
- Co-location and flexible use of buildings
- Outcome-focused service delivery.

Do Less

Participants identified relatively few areas where activity should be reduced. Suggestions focused primarily on:

- Reducing internal administration and duplication
- Reducing costly or inefficient processes.

Overall, participants consistently argued that the council should focus on doing things better, more efficiently and in a more joined-up way before considering reductions to the services that residents rely upon.

Activity 4: Principles for Future Budget Decisions

The final activity asked participants to reflect on the discussions that had taken place throughout the Assembly and identify the principles they felt should guide future budget decisions.

Although individual discussion groups used different wording, a number of recurring themes emerged across the event.

These have been grouped into **six overarching principles**, which provide a **resident-led framework for approaching future budget decisions**:

1. **Prioritise the services people rely on most**, particularly for those who depend on them, so they are considered first when making difficult decisions.
2. **Deliver value for money** by improving efficiency before reducing services.
3. **Be transparent** about how and why decisions are made.
4. **Get things right first time** by planning ahead and avoiding bigger problems later.
5. **Work in partnership** with partners, communities and local councils.
6. **Focus on outcomes and community wellbeing**, improving people's lives rather than just measuring activity.

These principles represent the culmination of the Community Assembly and bring together the key messages expressed throughout the event.

Conclusions

The Community Assembly Successfully Built Upon the Budget Prioritisation Survey

The Budget Prioritisation Survey provided an indication of which services residents felt should be prioritised when resources are limited, while the Community Assembly built upon these findings by exploring how difficult budget decisions should be approached when those priorities compete with one another.

While the survey largely focused on *what* residents want protected, the Community Assembly focused on *how* future budget decisions should be made.

Together, the survey and Community Assembly provide a stronger and richer evidence base than either activity could have provided independently.

Residents Focused More on Improvement Than Service Reductions

During activity 3 participants spent considerably more time discussing how services could be improved, modernised and delivered differently, rather than identifying services that should be reduced.

Suggestions focused heavily on prevention and early intervention, better communication, greater partnership working, the use of technology, reducing duplication and inefficiency, and delivering services in different ways.

Relatively few suggestions focused on reducing services directly. Instead, participants consistently argued that opportunities to improve efficiency, modernise delivery models and work more collaboratively should be explored before reductions to valued services are considered.

This reflects a broader expectation that the council should demonstrate value for money and pursue improvement before considering reductions to services.

This finding suggests that participants were generally willing to engage constructively with difficult budget decisions, provided they could see evidence

that opportunities for improvement, efficiency and modernisation had been fully explored.

The Community Assembly Produced a Clear Resident-Led Framework for Decision-Making

The six principles identified through the Community Assembly represent the most significant output from the event.

Importantly, these principles were not developed by officers or Councillors, but emerged from discussions between residents themselves. Together, they provide a simple, practical and resident-led framework for approaching difficult budget decisions. The principles emphasise the importance participants placed on prioritising the services people rely on most, delivering value for money, being transparent, getting things right first time, working in partnership and focusing on outcomes and community wellbeing.

There would be value in using these principles to inform future budget proposals, the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), future budget engagement activity and wider decision-making processes. Doing so would help ensure that the views expressed through the Community Assembly continue to shape subsequent stages of the budget-setting process.

A Successful Community Assembly

The Budget Community Assembly successfully brought together residents from across Cheshire East to discuss complex issues and competing priorities.

While views often differed on specific issues, there was notable consistency regarding the broader principles that should guide future budget decisions. The event generated a substantial volume of feedback and provides decision-makers with a valuable source of resident insight to inform future budget discussions.

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information.

Introduction

Purpose of the Community Assembly

A Budget Community Assembly was held on 7 September 2026 at Holmes Chapel Community Centre as part of Cheshire East Council's engagement programme supporting the development of its 2027-2032 Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

The Assembly followed a Budget Prioritisation Survey conducted during summer 2026 and formed part of a wider programme of budget engagement taking place before the council's 2027/28 budget is finalised in February 2027.

The event brought together a diverse group of residents from across the borough to explore the financial challenges facing Cheshire East and to consider how the council should approach difficult budget decisions over the coming years through a series of facilitated discussions and activities.

Participant recruitment and attendance

Participants were recruited through a multi-stage process designed to achieve a balanced mix of residents from different backgrounds and circumstances, including different age groups, geographic areas, employment circumstances and levels of familiarity with council budgets and local government.

Recruitment was primarily undertaken through the council's Community Voices Panel, a panel of residents who have expressed an interest in participating in consultation and engagement activities. A targeted recruitment campaign was also undertaken through social media to broaden participation and attract residents who were not already members of the Community Voices Panel.

As a thank you for their time and contribution, attendees who took part in the Community Assembly received a £60 One4All gift card, recognising participants' time and travel costs and helping reduce barriers to participation.

A total of **26 residents** attended the Budget Community Assembly.

Format of the Community Assembly

The Community Assembly combined short introductory presentations with a series of facilitated table activities. Participants took part in four activities consisting of discussions, brainstorming exercises and prioritisation activities designed to explore what services matter most to residents, what should happen before services are reduced, and what principles should guide future budget decisions.

Each table was supported by a trained facilitator, with councillors, senior officers and other representatives participating in discussions throughout the event.

Outputs from the activities were captured using post-it notes, flipcharts and facilitated feedback sessions, and were subsequently analysed to inform this report.

Reading this report

This report summarises the discussions, activities and outputs from the Budget Community Assembly.

The main body of the report presents the findings that emerged from each activity, together with analysis of the themes arising from participant discussions.

Additional information is provided within the appendices:

- Appendix 1 – Video and photographs from the Community Assembly
- Appendix 2 – Attendee demographic profile
- Appendix 3 – Event agenda
- Appendix 4 – “Results on a page” document.

The report is intended to provide a transparent summary of discussions during the event. The findings presented should not be interpreted as representing the views of all Cheshire East residents, but rather the views expressed by those who participated in the Community Assembly.

Where appropriate, participant comments have been grouped into themes to aid analysis and interpretation.

Activity 1: Defining everyday services

Activity purpose

The first activity was an introductory session designed to help participants begin discussions with one another and council representatives, while exploring what residents mean when they refer to “everyday services”.

Participants were asked “When residents talk about “everyday services”, what services do they mean?”, with responses captured on post-it notes and added to a flip-chart.

Key themes emerging from the activity

The activity revealed a strong focus on the practical, visible and day-to-day services that Cheshire East Council provides. Across all 6 table groups, participants identified the same core set of “everyday services” that they rely on most in daily life. These included waste and recycling, road and pavement maintenance, social care, public transport, parks and green spaces, libraries, leisure facilities and environmental health.

Although participants listed a wide range of services, most responses lay within several reoccurring themes, which have been summarised below. The numbers shown in brackets indicate how many participant responses were grouped within each theme.

Waste, bins and environmental cleanliness (28 mentions)

This was the most frequently mentioned theme across all six discussion tables.

Responses included general references to:

- Bin collections
- Waste disposal and tips
- Recycling
- Street cleaning
- Litter and dog waste bins
- Environmental health (hygiene, noise, food safety)

- Green waste.

Specific references included:

- Refuse disposal
- Waste management and street cleaning
- Trading standards (food hygiene links).

Roads, pavements and highways maintenance (26 mentions)

Road conditions and safety were consistently identified as everyday services.

General references included:

- Potholes
- Resurfacing
- Pavements and footways
- Road markings
- Gulleys and drains
- Gritting
- Street lighting
- Road closures
- Clear signage.

Specific locations included:

- A530 and A534 into Sandbach
- Macclesfield town centre (raised cobbles on Mill Street).

Social Care for adults, children and SEND (24 mentions)

Social care appeared in all six table discussions and was consistently described as an essential everyday service, particularly for vulnerable residents and families.

General reference included:

- Adult social care
- Children's social care
- SEND support
- Early years

- Domestic abuse services
- Care leavers
- Cared-for children
- Vulnerable children
- Loneliness support.

Specific examples included:

- Meals on wheels and day visits
- Residential adult care
- Children's home
- Fire alarms for elderly residents.

Public and school transport and connectivity (20 mentions)

Transport was repeatedly described as essential for accessing work, education and services, indicating a high level of priority. Participants often linked transport to wider access to employment, healthcare, education and community life.

General references included:

- Bus routes
- Rural subsidised routes
- School transport
- Parking and car parks
- Pedestrian crossings
- Transport safety
- Public transport generally.

Specific examples included:

- Smaller electric shuttle buses for rural roads
- Historical bus routes
- Transport help for isolated residents.

Parks, green spaces and leisure facilities (18 mentions)

Participants highlighted the importance of accessible outdoor, green and recreational facilities.

General references included:

- Parks
- Green spaces
- Landscaping
- Leisure centres
- Youth centres
- Community gardens
- Nature-based wellbeing hubs.

Specific examples included:

- Regeneration of unsociable spaces in Macclesfield (e.g. outside B&M).

Libraries, community spaces and cultural assets (12 mentions)

General references included:

- Libraries
- Community meeting areas
- Quiet spaces
- Event venues.

Specific references included:

- Library services across many tables.

Planning, building control and town centre vitality (10 mentions)

Participants recognised planning as an everyday council function that shapes local communities.

General references included:

- Planning services
- Building regulations
- Town centre regeneration
- Licensing.

Specific references included:

- Licencing specifically for businesses and restaurants
- Busy town centres
- Regeneration is needed in both Crewe town centre and Macclesfield town centre.

Housing, homelessness and support for vulnerable residents (10 mentions)

Housing support was clearly seen as part of everyday council activity.

General references included:

- Homelessness services
- Housing support
- Halfway houses
- affordable housing needs.

Specific examples included:

- Clubs for isolated older people
- Support for young adults facing homelessness.

Community safety, policing and CCTV (9 mentions)

Safety was a recurring theme, especially in relation to women and vulnerable groups.

- Anti-social behaviour
- Policing presence
- Community safety officers (CSOs)
- CCTV.

Specific examples included:

- CCTV on Middlewood Way near Tesco.

Emergency planning, climate resilience and environmental protection (8 mentions)

Participants identified several everyday and potential future risks requiring a council response.

General references included:

- Flooding
- Snow and ice
- Adverse weather
- Climate resilience.

Specific references included:

- Solar and wind power
- Flood prevention measures
- Swift responses to unexpected events (pandemics, storms).

Education and schools (7 mentions)

Education was seen as part of everyday life, crucially SEND and school transport.

General references included:

- Schools
- Education support
- Home-school transport
- NEETs (Not in education, employment or training).

Specific references included:

- Early years and children's services
- SEND needs and support.

Business support, grants and economic activity (4 mentions)

Less frequently mentioned, but still identified by some residents as an everyday council function.

General references included:

- Business and community grants
- Support for local businesses.

Registration, heritage and civic services (3 mentions)

These services were mentioned infrequently, but some participants still regarded them as part of the council's day-to-day responsibilities.

General references included:

- Births, deaths and marriages
- Heritage services.

Summary

Although participants listed a wide range of services, the discussion demonstrated that residents interpret “everyday services” more broadly than visible neighbourhood services such as roads and waste collection.

Alongside highways, waste and environmental maintenance, participants consistently identified social care, children's services, education, public transport, libraries and parks as everyday services because of the important role they play in supporting residents and communities.

Activity 2: Prioritising everyday services

Activity purpose

The second activity was a prioritisation exercise designed to explore which council services participants felt should be protected when financial resources are limited. Participants were asked "which of these services should the council prioritise protecting when money is limited?".

Each participant was given three voting dots and asked to place them alongside the services they felt were most important. Participants could distribute their votes across multiple services or place all three votes against a single service if they wished.

The services available for consideration were:

- Clean and tidy streets including fly tipping
- Community safety, anti-social behaviour and CCTV
- Conditions of the road and pavements
- Education provision
- Housing, affordable housing and homelessness
- Libraries and contact centres
- Parks and other open green spaces
- Play areas and playgrounds for children and young people
- Public health services
- Public transport (rural and urban)
- Road traffic management
- SEN support for children and young people
- Social care services for adults and older people
- Social care services for children and young people
- Sport and leisure facilities
- Supporting people into jobs and training
- The level of air quality / pollution
- Town centre regeneration
- Walking and cycling routes
- Waste collection and recycling.

This section of the report summarises the results of the exercise and identifies the services that participants felt should be prioritised for protection when difficult budget decisions need to be made.

Activity results

The table below summarises how participants prioritised the services discussed during the activity.

Council Services	Number of selections
Waste collection and recycling	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
Social care for children and young people	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
Roads, pavements and highway maintenance	● ● ● ● ● ● ●
Housing, homelessness and affordability	● ● ● ● ● ● ●
Community safety, anti-social behaviour and CCTV	● ● ● ● ● ● ●
Social care services for adults and older people	● ● ● ● ● ● ●
Public health services	● ● ● ● ●
SEN support for children and young people	● ● ● ●
Town centre regeneration	● ● ● ●
Clean and tidy streets including fly tipping	● ● ●
Public transport (rural and urban)	● ● ●
Education provision	● ● ●
Supporting people into jobs and training	● ● ●
Libraries and contact centres	● ●
Road traffic management	●
Walking and cycling routes	●
The level of air quality / pollution	
Sport and leisure facilities	
Play areas and playgrounds for children and young people	

Key findings from the activity

- Waste collection and recycling received the highest level of support overall, indicating strong consensus that it should be protected when difficult budget decisions are made

- Social care services for children and young people, housing and homelessness, community safety, adult social care, and roads and pavements also attracted high levels of support across the discussion groups
- Public health services, SEND provision and town centre regeneration received moderate levels of support alongside clean and tidy streets, education provision, public transport and support for jobs and training
- Walking and cycling routes, road traffic management, air quality initiatives, sport and leisure facilities, and play areas received little or no support during the exercise.

Summary

The activity suggests that participants place greatest importance on protecting both highly used everyday services and services that support vulnerable residents.

Waste collection, social care, highways, housing and community safety emerged as the highest priorities, indicating that participants believe these services should be given particular consideration when difficult budget decisions need to be made.

Activity 3: Doing more, doing less or doing things differently

Activity purpose

The third activity explored what participants felt Cheshire East Council should do more of, less of, or differently before reducing services that residents value.

Participants were asked "before reducing services that residents value, what should the council do more of or less of? Could any services be delivered differently?".

Attendees were invited to discuss their ideas and record them on post-it notes. Responses were then grouped into common themes by table facilitators to support discussion and analysis.

Key themes emerging from the activity

The activity revealed a strong preference for improving, modernising and coordinating services before any reductions are considered.

Across all table groups, participants consistently emphasised prevention, efficiency, communication, partnership working and better use of technology as the most important ways the council could change how services are delivered.

Most responses fell within three clear categories: Do more; Do things differently; and, Do less.

The numbers shown in brackets indicate how many participant responses were grouped within each theme.

Do more (42 mentions)

Most discussion focused on things the council should do more of before considering service reductions, particularly prevention, communication, partnership working and technology.

This was by far the largest category. Residents overwhelmingly preferred the council to increase or improve existing activities and services, rather than reduce them.

Prevention and early intervention (10 mentions)

General references included:

- Early intervention in social issues
- More proactive social services
- More mental health and wellbeing support.

Specific examples included:

- Preventing homelessness
- Preventing social care crises
- Preventing problems before they become expensive statutory crises
- Keeping people in their homes.

Better communication, transparency and resident engagement (9 mentions)

General references included:

- Improved communication so decisions are clear
- More communication about available support (benefits, bills, help)
- Listening more to residents
- Publicising what the council does
- More good news stories.

Specific examples included:

- Publicising the ASB-trace system
- Clearer communication channels.

Partnership working and joined-up services (8 mentions)

General references included:

- More integration with NHS, volunteers and partners
- More joint working between departments

- Cross-function support for adults and children
- More access for residents to get involved in council projects.

Specific examples included:

- Co-locating services (libraries, NHS, GP surgeries, council)
- Using schools for community and health services.

Technology and Digital Innovation (6 mentions)

General references included:

- Using AI to analyse financial and service data
- AI to monitor contracts and delivery standards
- Investing in technology to improve efficiency.

Specific examples included:

- Using AI to identify better solutions
- Using IT to replace people
- Using AI to spot errors and recover money.

Better use of buildings, assets and community spaces (5 mentions)

General references included:

- Using council spaces for events
- Creating community hubs
- Building more community spaces.

Specific examples included:

- Schools used for GPs, dentists, community services
- Warm spaces in winter, cool spaces in summer.

Infrastructure planning alongside housing (4 mentions)

General references included:

- Planning schools, shops and GPs alongside new housing
- Ensuring infrastructure can cope with additional homes.

Specific examples included:

- Considering S106 contributions from developers.

Income generation and innovation (3 mentions)

General references included:

- Sponsorship
- Attracting big retailers
- Think-tank spaces for new ideas.

Specific example included:

- Hub spaces for office workers.

Transport improvements (3 mentions)

General references included:

- More bus routes
- Better alignment of public transport with user needs.

Specific examples included:

- Buses on Sundays.

Do things differently (22 mentions)

Residents suggested a number of ways in which services could be delivered differently, focusing primarily on collaboration, flexibility and outcome-based approaches rather than simply increasing or reducing services.

Partnership delivery and shared resources (8 mentions)

General references included:

- Delivering services with voluntary and community groups
- Shared resources across partners
- Using best-practice solutions from other organisations.

Specific examples include:

- Running services jointly with NHS or voluntary sector

Co-location and flexible use of buildings (6 mentions)

General references included:

- Co-locating services
- Using buildings more flexibly.

Specific examples included:

- Schools being used for GPs, dentists, community services
- Libraries used as shared spaces.

Outcome-focused service delivery (4 mentions)

General references included:

- Shifting from “services delivered” to “outcomes delivered”
- Commissioning based on outcomes rather than hours.

Specific examples included:

- Evaluating everything through a health and wellbeing model.

Infrastructure planning alongside development (3 mentions)

General references included:

- Planning infrastructure with housing
- Ensuring services keep pace with development.

Specific examples included:

- Schools delivering alternative and inclusive provision.

Simplifying access to services (1 mention)

General references included:

- Creating one council “front door”.

Specific examples included:

- Single website / phone route for all services

Do less (10 mentions)

Although the “do less” ideas were far fewer than those in the “do more” and “do things differently” categories, they still showed clear patterns focused on reducing inefficiency.

Reducing internal administration and duplication (5 mentions)

General references included:

- Reducing internal administration
- Reducing duplication between departments.

Specific examples included:

- Not relying on Facebook for feedback.

Reducing costly or inefficient processes (3 mentions)

General references included:

- Reducing highways transport where possible
- Reducing reliance on recruitment agencies and consultants.

Specific examples included:

- Caveat for recruitment agents, only paid if appointment fails.

Reducing manual staffing where technology can replace tasks (2 mentions)

General references included:

- Using ICT to reduce manual processes.

Specific examples included:

- Considering where ICT means fewer staff are needed.

Summary

The activity revealed a strong preference for improving, modernising and coordinating services before considering reductions to services that residents value.

Participants spent considerably more time discussing how services could be delivered better than identifying areas where services should be reduced. Recurring themes included prevention and early intervention, better communication, stronger partnership working, greater use of technology, reducing duplication and focusing on outcomes rather than processes.

Suggestions for doing less were relatively limited and were generally focused on inefficiency, unnecessary administration and costly processes rather than reductions to frontline services.

Overall, participants consistently argued that the council should focus on doing things better, more efficiently and in a more joined-up way before considering reductions to the services that residents rely upon.

Activity 4: Principles for future budget decisions

Activity purpose

The fourth and final activity invited participants to reflect on the discussions and findings that had emerged throughout the Community Assembly and consider how these should influence future budget decisions.

Participants were asked "based on today's discussion, what principles should guide future budget decisions?". Working as a group, participants were asked to identify 3-5 principles that they felt should guide future budget decisions when money is limited. The principles were recorded on flipcharts and, where possible, ranked in order of importance.

This section of the report summarises the principles identified by participants and the themes that emerged from those discussions.

Activity results – In detail

Participants discussed and developed a wide range of principles which they felt should guide future budget decisions. While individual tables often used different wording, a number of common themes emerged repeatedly throughout the discussions.

To support analysis, the principles identified by participants have been grouped into six overarching principles. These represent the issues most frequently raised across the discussion groups and reflect the factors participants felt should be given greatest consideration when making difficult budget decisions.

Principle 1: Prioritise the services people rely on most

Participants consistently argued that the services people rely on most should be prioritised when difficult budget decisions are made.

This was one of the strongest themes across all tables and included repeated references to social care, community safety, highways, waste services and other

core council responsibilities. Participants also recognised that some residents rely more heavily on certain services than others, and that this should be taken into account when priorities are considered.

Principle 2: Deliver value for money

Participants felt budget decisions should be guided by value for money, strong contract management, good commissioning and efficient use of resources.

There was a strong expectation that opportunities to improve efficiency should be explored before reductions to frontline services are considered.

Principle 3: Be transparent

Participants repeatedly highlighted the importance of being transparent, explaining decisions clearly and ensuring residents understand how and why decisions are made.

There was also support for improving communication about council services, spending decisions and future plans, helping residents better understand how budgets work, how decisions are made and how public money is allocated.

Participants also emphasised the importance of accountability and being open about the impacts of decisions.

Principle 4: Get things right first time

Participants frequently argued that the council should get things right first time, planning ahead and avoiding bigger problems in the future.

Early intervention, long-term planning and investment that reduces future demand emerged as recurring themes throughout the discussions.

Participants repeatedly emphasised the importance of addressing issues early, avoiding "fire-fighting" approaches and ensuring services and infrastructure are planned properly from the outset.

Principle 5: Work in partnership

Many participants believed services could be improved through greater collaboration between the council, local councils, the NHS, voluntary organisations, community groups and residents.

Partnership working was often viewed as a way to improve outcomes while making better use of available resources.

Principle 6: Focus on outcomes and community wellbeing

Participants frequently suggested that decisions should be judged by the outcomes they achieve rather than the volume of activity delivered.

This included references to outcome-based commissioning, health and wellbeing impacts, fairness, inclusion and ensuring services genuinely improve people's lives.

Activity results – In brief

The **six overarching principles** identified through the Community Assembly for making budget decisions are summarised below.

These principles reflect the issues most frequently raised by participants and provide **a resident-led framework for approaching future budget decisions**.

1. **Prioritise the services people rely on most**, particularly for those who depend on them, so they are considered first when making difficult decisions.
2. **Deliver value for money** by improving efficiency before reducing services.
3. **Be transparent** about how and why decisions are made.
4. **Get things right first time** by planning ahead and avoiding bigger problems later.
5. **Work in partnership** with partners, communities and local councils.
6. **Focus on outcomes and community wellbeing**, improving people's lives rather than just measuring activity.

Conclusions

The Community Assembly Successfully Built Upon the Budget Prioritisation Survey

The Budget Prioritisation Survey provided an indication of which services residents felt should be prioritised when resources are limited, while the Community Assembly built upon these findings by exploring how difficult budget decisions should be approached when those priorities compete with one another.

While the survey largely focused on *what* residents want protected, the Community Assembly focused on *how* future budget decisions should be made.

Together, the survey and Community Assembly provide a stronger and richer evidence base than either activity could have provided independently.

Residents Focused More on Improvement Than Service Reductions

During activity 3 participants spent considerably more time discussing how services could be improved, modernised and delivered differently, rather than identifying services that should be reduced.

Suggestions focused heavily on prevention and early intervention, better communication, greater partnership working, the use of technology, reducing duplication and inefficiency, and delivering services in different ways.

Relatively few suggestions focused on reducing services directly. Instead, participants consistently argued that opportunities to improve efficiency, modernise delivery models and work more collaboratively should be explored before reductions to valued services are considered.

This reflects a broader expectation that the council should demonstrate value for money and pursue improvement before considering reductions to services.

This finding suggests that participants were generally willing to engage constructively with difficult budget decisions, provided they could see evidence

that opportunities for improvement, efficiency and modernisation had been fully explored.

The Community Assembly Produced a Clear Resident-Led Framework for Decision-Making

The six principles identified through the Community Assembly represent the most significant output from the event.

Importantly, these principles were not developed by officers or Councillors, but emerged from discussions between residents themselves. Together, they provide a simple, practical and resident-led framework for approaching difficult budget decisions. The principles emphasise the importance participants placed on prioritising the services people rely on most, delivering value for money, being transparent, getting things right first time, working in partnership and focusing on outcomes and community wellbeing.

There would be value in using these principles to inform future budget proposals, the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), future budget engagement activity and wider decision-making processes. Doing so would help ensure that the views expressed through the Community Assembly continue to shape subsequent stages of the budget-setting process.

A Successful Community Assembly

The Budget Community Assembly successfully brought together residents from across Cheshire East to discuss complex issues and competing priorities.

While views often differed on specific issues, there was notable consistency regarding the broader principles that should guide future budget decisions. The event generated a substantial volume of feedback and provides decision-makers with a valuable source of resident insight to inform future budget discussions.

Appendix 1 – Event video and photos

The following video and photographs were taken during the Budget Community Assembly. The video and photographs are included to illustrate the event and the activities undertaken by participants.

All individuals shown in this video and these photographs provided consent for Cheshire East Council to use them for communications, reporting and promotional purposes. Participants also acknowledged Cheshire East Council's use of their information for the administration of the event.

Every reasonable effort has been made to ensure that only individuals who provided consent are included in the video and photographs contained within this report.

Event video

A short video summarising the Community Assembly can be viewed here:

[Budget Community Assembly September 2026 - Video \(Instagram\)](#)

Photo 1: The Council Leader in discussions



Photo 2: Activity 2 underway #1



Photo 3: Activity 2 underway #2



Photo 4: Activity 2 underway #3



Photo 5: Activity 2 underway #4



Photo 6: Activity 3 underway



Photo 7: Team activity



Photo 8: General table discussions #1



Photo 9: General table discussions #2



Appendix 2 – About attendees

This appendix provides demographic information about the Budget Community Assembly attendees. Completion of demographic questions was optional and therefore respondent counts vary between questions.

Summary of attendees

Of the 26 attendees:

- **Sex:** 38% were male, 62% female
- **Age:** 20% under 45, 40% aged 45-64, 40% aged 65+ (n=25)
- **Ethnicity:** 88% identified as White British and 12% identified with other ethnic groups
- **Region:** 36% lived in the “North” of CE, 32% lived in the “Centre” of CE, 32% lived in the “South” of CE
- **Housing tenure:** 48% own outright, 39% own with mortgage, 4% social housing, 4% private renter, 4% other
- **Employment status:** 44% retired, 44% employed or self-employed, 12% other (looking after home or other)
- **Cost of living:** 25% managing comfortably, 67% managing but becoming difficult, 8% finding it very difficult
- **Familiarity with budget setting:** 12% fairly familiar, 32% somewhat familiar, 56% unfamiliar.

Detailed attendee breakdown

The following is a detailed breakdown of the 26 attendees.

Sex

38% were male, 62% female.

Which of the following best describes you?	Count	Percent
Male	10	38%
Female	16	62%
Total	26	

Age

20% were aged under 45, 40% were aged 45-64, 40% were aged 65 or older.

What age group do you belong to?	Count	Percent
25-34	0	0%
35-44	5	20%
45-54	8	32%
55-64	2	8%
65-74	7	28%
75-84	2	8%
85 and over	1	4%
Total	25	

Ethnicity

88% were "White British", 12% were in other ethnic groups.

What is your ethnic group?	Count	Percent
White British	22	88%
Other ethnic group	3	12%
Total	25	

Housing tenure of attendees

48% owned their houses outright, 39% owned with a mortgage, with the remainder being in social housing, private renter or "other".

Housing tenure of attendees:	Count	Percent
Own outright	11	48%
Own with mortgage	9	39%
Social Housing	1	4%
Private Renter	1	4%
Other	1	4%
Total	23	

Employment status of attendees

44% were employed or self-employed, 44% were retired, 12% had other occupations including looking after the home or “other”.

Employment status of attendees:	Count	Percent
Employed (mainly in Cheshire East or home)	7	28%
Employed (mainly working outside Cheshire East)	2	8%
Self-employed	2	8%
Retired	11	44%
Looking after home or family	1	4%
Other	2	8%
Total	25	

Current cost of living situation

25% of attendees described themselves as “managing comfortably” during the current cost of living situation, 67% described themselves as “managing, but it is becoming more difficult”, while 8% described themselves as “finding it difficult to manage”.

Current cost of living situation	Count	Percent
I am managing comfortably	6	25%
I am managing but it is becoming more difficult	16	67%
I am finding it difficult to manage	2	8%
Total	24	

Familiarity with budget setting

12% were fairly familiar with council budget setting, 32% were somewhat familiar, while 56% were unfamiliar.

How familiar are you with budget setting?	Count	Percent
Fairly Familiar	3	12%
Somewhat familiar	8	32%
Not very familiar	11	44%
Not at all familiar	3	12%
Total	25	

Home locations

36% lived in the “North” of the borough, 32% lived “Central”, 32% lived in the “South”.

Home location of attendees	Count	Percent
North Cheshire East	8	36%
Central Cheshire East	7	32%
South Cheshire East	7	32%
Total	22	

Appendix 3 – Event agenda

Holmes Chapel Community Centre

16:45 – Arrival and registration

17:00 – Welcome (Leader – Cllr Mannion)

17:05 – Housekeeping and agenda (Deputy Leader – Cllr Gorman)

17:10 – Presentation: Context Setting and Budget Prioritisation Survey (Cabinet Member for Finance – Cllr Clark)

17:15 – Activity 1: What are everyday services?

Question: When residents talk about "everyday services", what services do they mean?

Looking at the survey findings and the chart showing how the council currently spends its money, what services do you think residents are talking about when they say "maintain everyday services"?.

17:35 – Activity 2: Prioritising everyday services

Question: Which of these services should the council prioritise protecting when money is limited?

17:45 – Activity 3: Doing more, doing less or doing things differently

Question: Before reducing services that residents value, what should the council do more of or less of?

Could any services be delivered differently? If so, how? For example, with our partners, town and parish councils, and communities?

18:15 – Activity 4: Principles for future budget decisions

Question: Based on today's discussion, what principles should guide future budget decisions?

18:45 – Table feedback

Each table facilitator to feed back to the room their table's their top principles for future budget decisions, giving reasons.

18:55 – Closing remarks (Leader Mannion)

Appendix 4 – Results on a Page

The following "Results on a Page" document has been produced to provide a concise summary of the key findings from the Community Assembly.

Cheshire East Council's

Budget Community Assembly

September 2026

Results On A Page

See full results at <https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/consultations>



Assembly date: 7 September 2026

Location: Holmes Chapel Community Centre

Attendees:

- 3 x Ward Councillors
- 26 x Cheshire East residents
- 2 x council main facilitators
- 6 x council table facilitators



Event conclusions

- The Community Assembly built on and deepened findings from the Budget Prioritisation Survey
- Residents focused more on service improvements rather than reductions
- Residents identified how future budget decisions should be approached



Main event outcome

The main outcome of the Community Assembly was a set of six resident-led principles to guide future budget decisions:

1. Prioritise the services people rely on most
2. Deliver value for money
3. Be transparent
4. Get things right first time
5. Work in partnership
6. Focus on outcomes and community wellbeing



Why does this matter?

These principles will help inform future budget proposals, engagement activity and development of the council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

Research and Consultation, Cheshire East Council, September 2026

