

A summary of responses to Cheshire East Council's

Budget Prioritisation Survey 2026



Executive summary

Introduction

The Budget Prioritisation Survey 2026 was conducted between 8 July and 2 August 2026 to help Cheshire East Council understand the priorities, views and concerns of residents and stakeholders as it begins the process of developing its Medium-Term Financial Strategy for 2027 to 2032.

In total, 1,422 responses were received, including 1,417 online survey completions, 2 paper survey completions, and 3 email responses. The findings will be used to inform future stages of engagement, including a Community Assembly on budget priorities, and a more detailed consultation on specific budget proposals later during 2026.

Prioritising difficult decisions

When asked which priorities should be most important when the council has to make difficult budget decisions, the most frequently selected priorities were:

- Maintaining everyday services (85% selected this option)
- Keeping costs as low as possible (46%)
- Protecting the most vulnerable people (44%)
- Investing in preventing problems in the future (35%).

Prioritising services

Respondents were also asked which services they would like the council to do more of, and which services they would be most comfortable seeing reduced, changed or delivered differently.

Based on the resulting net scores, the services receiving the strongest support for greater prioritisation were:

- Roads and pavements (+75% net score)
- Waste collection and recycling (+39%)
- Clean and tidy streets including fly tipping (+36%)
- Community safety (+26%).

The lowest net scores were recorded for walking and cycling routes (-51%) and air quality and pollution (-39%).

The main reasons for making these choices were to help improve the local area (42% selected this option) and for long-term benefits and prevention (36%).

Open comment themes

Analysis of the three open comment survey questions identified a number of themes raised by respondents.

The themes summarised below represent the most prominent findings from the analysis, however, additional themes and more detailed findings are presented within the main body of the report.

The most commonly discussed services and policy areas were:

- **Highways, roads and pavements** – particularly potholes, road condition, pavement maintenance, drainage and the need for more preventative maintenance
- **Waste collection and environmental maintenance** – including collection reliability, recycling centres, fly-tipping, litter and street cleanliness
- **Social care and support for vulnerable people** – including protecting services for vulnerable residents whilst improving efficiency and sustainability
- **Community safety** – including anti-social behaviour, enforcement activity, policing and CCTV
- **Regeneration, economic growth and infrastructure** – including town centre regeneration, jobs, investment and infrastructure provision
- **Planning, housing and infrastructure** – particularly ensuring development is supported by sufficient infrastructure and services.

A number of broader themes also emerged across all three questions:

- **Council efficiency and value for money** – including management costs, consultants, agency staff, procurement, contract management and reducing perceived waste before frontline services are affected

- **Protecting core and everyday services** – with frequent references to roads, waste collection, street cleaning, community safety and services for vulnerable residents
- **Prevention and long-term planning** – including preventative maintenance, early intervention and investment that reduces future demand and costs
- **Trust, accountability and transparency** – including requests for clearer communication, stronger accountability and greater confidence in council decision-making.

When considering potential savings, respondents most frequently suggested that efficiencies should be found from internal costs, management structures, consultants, agency staff and organisational overheads before reductions to frontline services are considered. Other commonly identified areas for potential savings included regeneration projects, councillor expenses, active travel schemes and services perceived to benefit smaller groups of residents.

Many respondents also highlighted the importance of maintaining visible day-to-day services, improving organisational efficiency, adopting a more preventative and long-term approach, and ensuring that residents are kept informed and involved in future budget decisions.

Email feedback

Three email responses were received during the survey period, comprising one response from Bollington Town Council and two responses from members of the public. The issues raised were broadly consistent with themes identified elsewhere in the survey findings.

Additional issues raised through the email responses included:

- The role of town and parish councils in supporting service delivery and the importance of effective partnership working between principal and local councils
- Concerns about the design and interpretation of the survey, including how the findings should be analysed and used within future budget decisions

- Requests for greater transparency regarding the council's approach to agency staffing, consultants, recruitment challenges and organisational efficiency
- Calls for clearer communication about how consultation findings will influence future budget proposals and decision-making.

Conclusions

Survey response

The Budget Prioritisation Survey 2026 received a substantial response. However, as the survey was not conducted as a statistically robust random sample survey, the findings should be viewed as indicative of the views expressed by respondents rather than representative of all Cheshire East residents.

Residents prioritise visible day-to-day services

The strongest message from the survey is that respondents place particular importance on maintaining visible day-to-day services. Roads and pavements, waste collection, street cleanliness and community safety were consistently prioritised throughout both the quantitative and qualitative findings.

Many respondents appear to view these services as fundamental indicators of council performance and the quality of local communities. Comments frequently reflected a belief that visible, everyday services should be delivered effectively before resources are directed towards wider initiatives or discretionary activity.

Respondents support several priorities simultaneously

The survey suggests that respondents do not view budget decisions through a single lens. While maintaining everyday services emerged as the strongest priority, respondents also expressed support for keeping costs down, protecting vulnerable people and investing to prevent future problems.

Taken together, these findings suggest that respondents expect the council to balance multiple objectives rather than focus exclusively on a single priority. Future budget engagement may therefore need to consider how residents believe trade-offs should be made when these priorities come into conflict.

Efficiency is seen as a prerequisite for difficult decisions

A recurring theme throughout the consultation was the view that opportunities to improve efficiency should be explored before reductions to frontline services are considered.

Respondents frequently referred to management costs, consultants, agency staffing, procurement and organisational efficiency. While opinions differed regarding specific savings proposals, there was broad consistency around the expectation that the council should demonstrate value for money and make effective use of available resources.

Prevention remains important despite financial pressures

Although many respondents prioritised visible everyday services, there was also significant support for prevention, early intervention and long-term planning.

Comments frequently highlighted concerns that short-term savings can create larger costs in future years. This was evident across several policy areas, including highways maintenance, social care, health, education and environmental services. Respondents therefore appear to recognise the importance of balancing immediate service pressures with longer-term sustainability.

Trust and transparency will be important

The consultation identified a desire for greater transparency regarding financial challenges, spending decisions and the use of consultation findings.

Respondents frequently requested clearer communication about how decisions are made and how public feedback will influence future proposals.

The findings suggest that continuing to engage openly with residents, and clearly demonstrating how consultation evidence has been considered, will be an important factor in building confidence in future budget decisions.

Informing future engagement

The survey has successfully identified a number of clear priorities and recurring themes. However, it has also highlighted areas where views are more mixed and where competing priorities may create difficult choices.

The findings therefore provide a useful foundation for future stages of budget engagement, including the Community Assembly and consultation on specific budget proposals, which can explore these trade-offs in greater depth and help inform the development of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

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information.

Introduction

Purpose of the survey

The Budget Prioritisation Survey 2026 was conducted to help Cheshire East Council understand the priorities, views and concerns of residents and stakeholders as it begins the process of developing its Medium-Term Financial Strategy for 2027 to 2032.

The survey formed the first stage of a wider programme of budget engagement. The findings will be used to inform future engagement activities, including a Community Assembly on budget priorities, as well as a more detailed consultation on specific budget proposals later in the year.

The results of the survey will help shape the development of draft budget proposals and will be considered alongside future engagement findings as part of the council's budget-setting and decision-making process. The survey findings will also help identify the key issues, priorities and trade-offs that will be explored in greater depth through subsequent stages of engagement.

The survey was conducted between 8 July and 2 August 2026.

Survey promotion

Survey responses were invited from anyone who wished to respond – the survey was not run as a statistically robust random sample survey. Results should therefore be interpreted within the context in which they were gathered.

The survey was widely promoted via the following:

- Via [council media releases](#)
- On [the council's consultation portal](#)
- Through [the council's Community Voices Panel](#)
- Within all Cheshire East libraries and council reception areas, where paper survey packs were made available
- Via social media – Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn.

Survey response

In total, there were 1,422 responses, including:

- 1,417 online survey completions
- 2 paper survey completions
- 3 email responses.

The survey was supported by a communications campaign delivered between 8 July and 2 August 2026. Across social media, newsletters and other council communication channels, campaign activity generated over 74,700 social media impressions, 54,200 reach and 839 tracked clicks to survey and campaign content. A summary of this activity is provided in Appendix 2.

Reading this report

Feedback received via the survey is summarised within the main sections of the report. A summary of the social media engagements is provided in Appendix 2, and all email responses are published in Appendix 3.

Prioritising difficult decisions

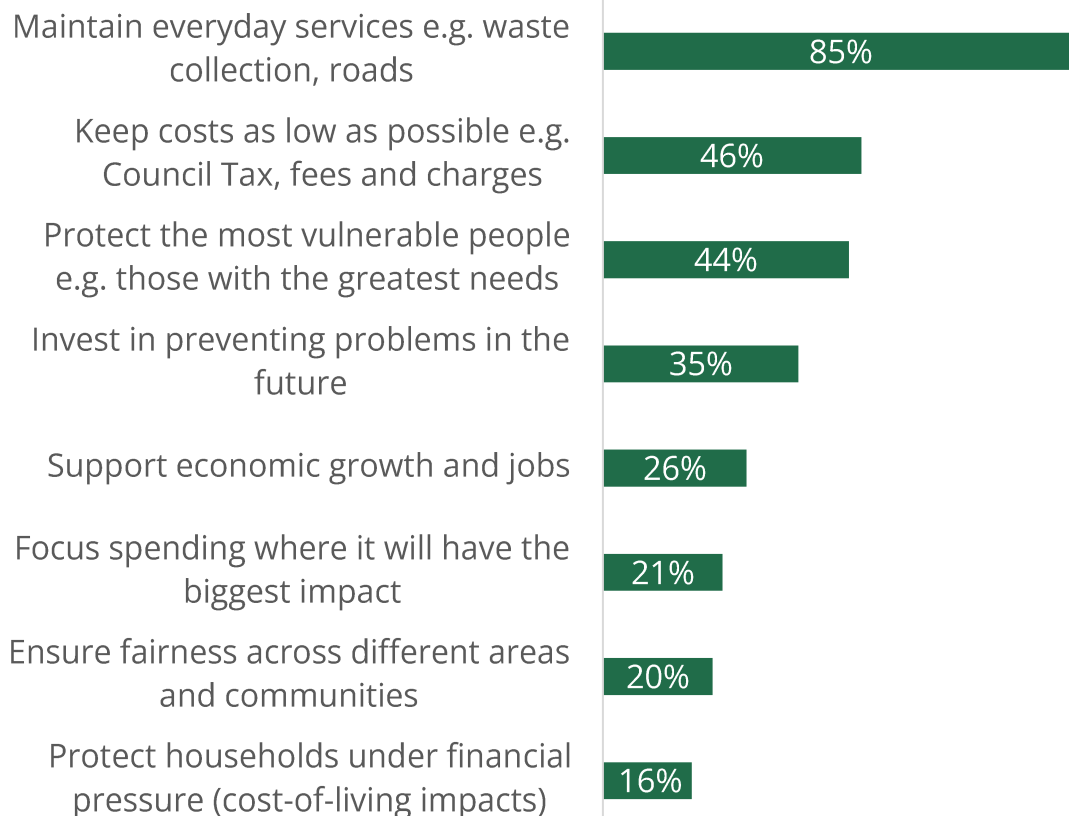
Respondents were asked to identify the three priorities they felt should be most important when the council has to make difficult budget decisions.

The most frequently selected priority was **"maintain everyday services"**, with 85% of respondents selecting this option.

Thereafter, respondents most frequently selected:

- Keep costs as low as possible (46%)
- Protect the most vulnerable people (44%)
- Invest in preventing problems in the future (35%).

When the council has to make difficult budget decisions, which 3 of the following should be the most important priorities?



Number of responses = 1,416

Prioritising services

Headline findings

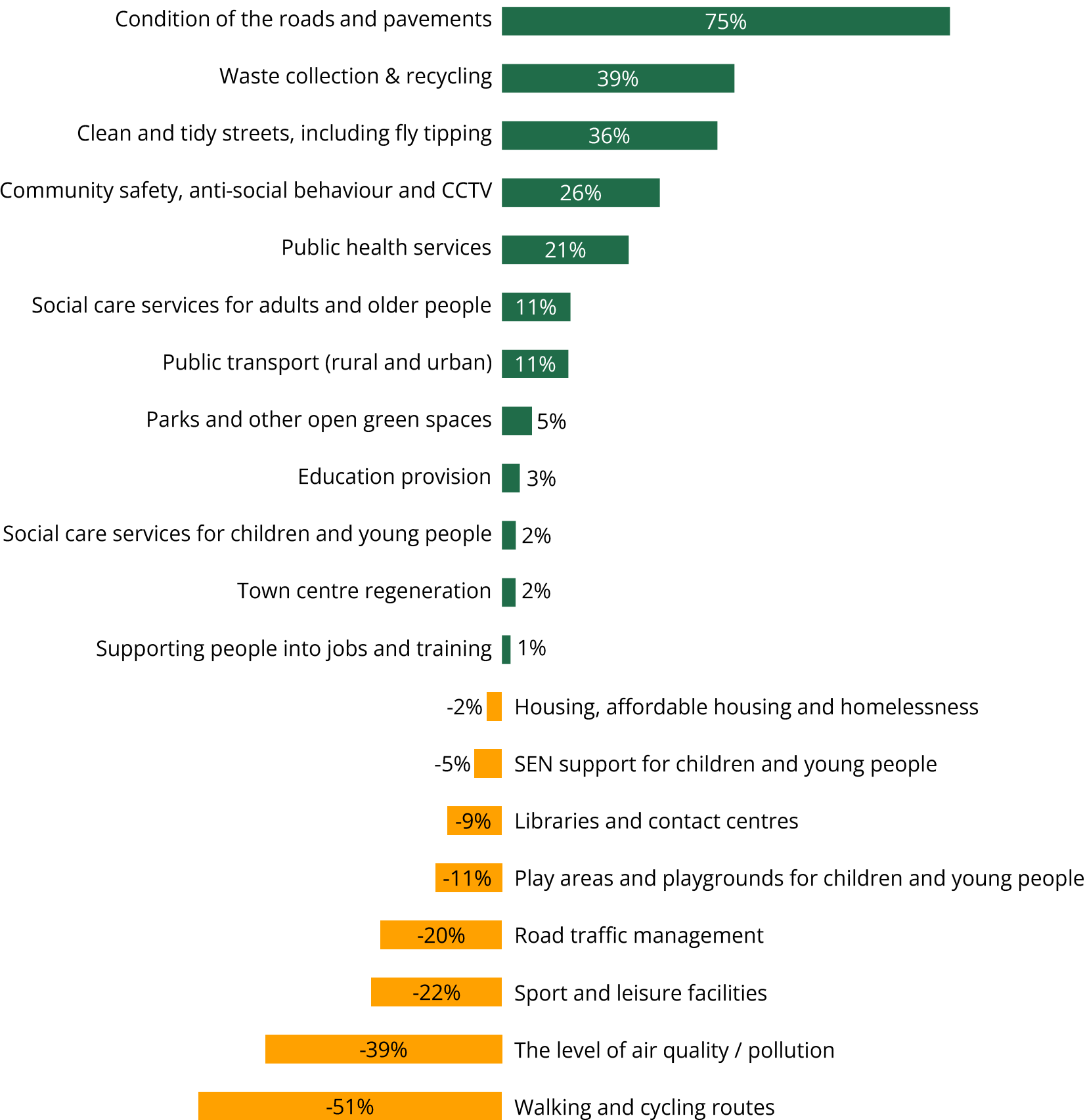
Survey respondents were asked to select 5 services from a list of 20 that they would like the council to do more of, and 5 services they would be most comfortable seeing reduced, changed or delivered differently.

To understand overall priorities, a net score was calculated for each service by subtracting the percentage of respondents who selected "reduce, change or deliver differently" from the percentage who selected "do more of".

A positive net score indicates greater support for increasing or prioritising a service, while a negative net score indicates greater support for reducing, changing or delivering it differently.

The chart below shows the net score for each service, ranked from the highest positive score to the lowest.

Which 5 of the following are the services you want us to do more of? And which 5 of the following services could you be most comfortable with seeing reduced, changed, or delivered differently?
Net score results shown = % saying ""do more of" - % saying "reduce or do differently"



Number of responses between 1,266 and 1,343

Commentary

The results show a clear preference for prioritising a small number of core services. The condition of roads and pavements received by far the highest net score (+75%), followed by waste collection and recycling (+39%), clean and tidy streets including fly tipping (+36%), and community safety (+26%).

At the other end of the scale, walking and cycling routes (-51%) and air quality and pollution (-39%) received the lowest net scores, indicating that respondents were more comfortable seeing these services reduced, changed or delivered differently than many of the other services included in the survey.

Several services received net scores close to zero, including town centre regeneration (+2%), supporting people into jobs and training (+1%) and housing, affordable housing and homelessness (-2%). While these services generated lower net scores, the underlying results suggest more mixed views amongst respondents about their relative priority, with notable proportions selecting both "do more of" and "reduce, change or deliver differently".

Detailed results

The chart above provides an overview of the relative priority of each service. The table below provides the detailed results for each service, including the percentage of respondents selecting "do more of", the percentage selecting "reduce, change or deliver differently", and the resulting net score.

Service	"Do More Of" %	"Reduce, change or deliver differently" %	Net score
Condition of the roads and pavements	77%	2%	+75%
Waste collection & recycling	43%	4%	+39%
Clean and tidy streets, including fly tipping	41%	5%	+36%
Community safety, anti-social behaviour and CCTV	36%	10%	+26%
Public health services	31%	10%	+21%
Social care services for adults and older people	29%	17%	+11%
Public transport (rural and urban)	25%	14%	+11%
Parks and other open green spaces	19%	14%	+5%
Education provision	16%	13%	+3%
Social care services for children and young people	19%	17%	+2%
Town centre regeneration	28%	26%	+2%
Supporting people into jobs and training	20%	19%	+1%
Housing, affordable housing and homelessness	22%	25%	-2%
SEN support for children and young people	15%	19%	-5%
Libraries and contact centres	14%	23%	-9%
Play areas and playgrounds for children and young people	8%	20%	-11%
Road traffic management	10%	31%	-20%
Sport and leisure facilities	10%	32%	-22%
The level of air quality / pollution	4%	43%	-39%
Walking and cycling routes	7%	58%	-51%
Number of responses	1,343	1,266	

Reasons for selecting these services

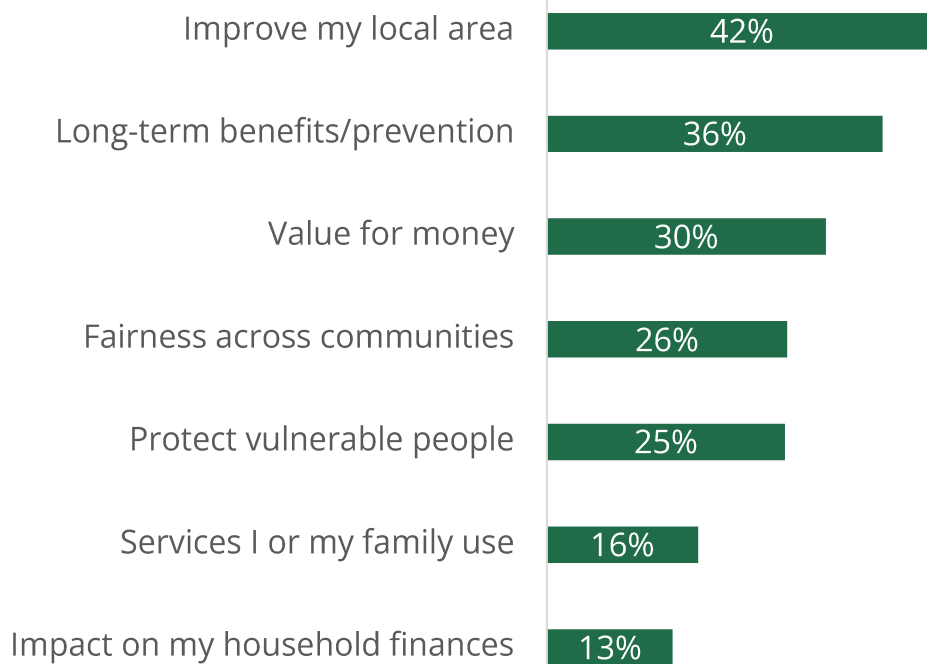
Respondents were asked to identify the main reasons for their choices in the previous service prioritisation questions and could select up to two options.

The most frequently selected reasons were:

- Improving their local area (42% selected this option)
- Long-term benefits and prevention (36%).

Value for money (30%), fairness across communities (26%) and protecting vulnerable people (25%) were also selected by notable proportions of respondents.

What were the main reasons for your choices in the previous 2 "prioritising services" questions? *Select up to 2 options*



Number of responses = 1,324

Additional respondent priorities

Survey respondents were asked the open-ended question: "Are there any services you think should be prioritised differently, or that are missing from this list?".

A total of 622 respondents answered this question, generating 1,138 individual comments between them.

These comments have been reviewed and grouped into themes to identify the most commonly raised issues, concerns and suggestions. The themes below summarise the key topics raised by respondents and provide an overview of the views expressed within each theme.

The initial coding and grouping of comments was assisted by artificial intelligence (AI), with all themes reviewed and validated by the Research and Consultation Team.

Highways, roads and pavements (181 comments)

This was the most frequently referenced service area. Respondents raised concerns about potholes, road surface deterioration, damaged pavements, faded road markings, blocked gullies, drainage issues, overgrown vegetation and the general condition of highways infrastructure.

Many respondents were frustrated by what they perceived as repeated temporary repairs that fail quickly and require further expenditure. There was strong support for preventative maintenance, resurfacing programmes and higher-quality repairs that provide long-term value rather than short-term fixes. Accessibility was also a recurring issue, particularly the condition of pavements, lack of dropped kerbs and the difficulties faced by disabled residents.

Overall sentiment

Respondents view highways maintenance as one of the council's most important responsibilities and want greater investment in high-quality, preventative maintenance that delivers lasting improvements.

Council efficiency and value for money (154 comments)

Many respondents focused on how the council organises and delivers services. Comments frequently referred to senior management costs, consultants, agency staff, procurement processes, contract management, staffing structures and perceived waste.

Several respondents suggested that more savings could be achieved through reducing bureaucracy, improving productivity, making better use of assets and technology, and improving oversight of contractors and procurement. There were repeated calls for stronger accountability, particularly around major projects and spending decisions.

Overall sentiment

Respondents want the council to demonstrate stronger financial discipline, reduce inefficiencies and ensure that available resources are being used effectively before considering reductions to frontline services.

Social care (102 comments)

Social care generated significant discussion and often reflected competing views. Many respondents emphasised the importance of protecting services for vulnerable adults, disabled residents, carers and older people, highlighting long waits for support, increasing need and concerns about unmet demand.

Others questioned the proportion of the council's budget allocated to social care and suggested efficiencies, service redesign and better integration with health services. Several respondents argued that social care funding challenges are primarily national issues that require government intervention.

Overall sentiment

Respondents generally support protecting vulnerable residents, but many would like to see social care delivered more efficiently and sustainably.

Waste collection, recycling centres and street cleanliness (97 comments)

Waste services were one of the most visible and frequently discussed services. Respondents commented on refuse collection reliability, food waste proposals, recycling centre closures, fly-tipping, litter, weeds and the overall appearance of local communities.

Strong concerns were expressed about the proposed three-weekly black bin collection cycle, with many respondents believing this could create hygiene issues and increase fly-tipping. Accessibility of household waste recycling centres was another major issue, with numerous calls to reopen or improve local facilities.

Overall sentiment

Respondents see waste collection and environmental maintenance as fundamental services and expect them to be reliable, accessible and well-managed.

Regeneration and economic growth (87 comments)

Respondents often supported investment that creates employment opportunities, attracts businesses and generates income for the council. However, views on regeneration projects were mixed.

Some respondents believe town centres require significant investment and revitalisation, while others criticised major regeneration projects and questioned whether they have delivered sufficient benefit. Comments frequently referred to empty shops, parking charges, town centre decline and the need to support employment and business growth.

Overall sentiment

Respondents support investment that generates jobs and sustainable growth but want clearer evidence of benefits and value for money.

Environment, green spaces and nature (69 comments)

Respondents highlighted a wide range of environmental concerns, including biodiversity, climate resilience, green space protection, flood prevention, maintenance of parks and protection of Green Belt land.

Some respondents strongly supported climate action and sustainability measures, while others believed these should take lower priority than core service delivery during periods of financial pressure.

Overall sentiment

Most respondents value the natural environment and green spaces, although views differ on how highly environmental initiatives should be prioritised.

Future planning, prevention and sustainability (66 comments)

Many respondents emphasised the importance of prevention and long-term planning. Common themes included preventative maintenance, early intervention, long-term financial sustainability, climate resilience and investment that reduces future costs.

Several comments argued that short-term savings often create larger financial problems later, particularly in relation to infrastructure, health, social care and environmental management.

Overall sentiment

Respondents support a more strategic and preventative approach that reduces future demand and long-term costs.

Core services and statutory priorities (65 comments)

A recurring message was that the council should focus on delivering its core responsibilities effectively before investing in less essential activities.

Respondents often referred to roads, waste collection, public safety and services for vulnerable residents as examples of key priorities.

Many respondents used phrases such as "getting the basics right" and emphasised that limited resources should be directed towards services that benefit the greatest number of people.

Overall sentiment

Respondents want resources concentrated on visible and essential services before discretionary projects are pursued.

Education and SEND (53 comments)

Education and SEND provision featured regularly, particularly concerns around specialist support, accessibility of services, assessment delays, educational psychology services and school funding pressures. Many respondents highlighted growing demand for support and concerns that current provision is not meeting needs.

Several comments viewed education as a long-term preventative investment that improves future outcomes and reduces demand on other services.

Overall sentiment

Respondents want improved support for education and SEND services and view them as important investments in the future.

Community safety, enforcement and policing (50 comments)

Many comments focused on anti-social behaviour, police visibility, CCTV, speeding, pavement parking, illegal trading and enforcement activity. Respondents frequently linked community safety with civic pride, town centre vitality and quality of life.

Several respondents called for greater enforcement activity and a more visible policing presence in communities.

Overall sentiment

Respondents see community safety as increasingly important and support stronger enforcement and more visible policing.

Planning and housing (47 comments)

Planning and housing comments focused heavily on housing growth, infrastructure pressures and protection of Green Belt land. Respondents

frequently argued that development should be accompanied by investment in schools, roads, healthcare and public transport.

Affordable housing remained an important theme, although views differed on the balance between affordable housing, social housing and open-market development.

Overall sentiment

Respondents support planned growth but want housing development better aligned with infrastructure and local capacity.

Public transport (42 comments)

Respondents frequently highlighted challenges associated with bus services, school transport, access to healthcare and rural connectivity. Many respondents felt that public transport provision does not adequately meet the needs of rural communities, older residents, young people and those without access to a private vehicle.

Several comments also highlighted accessibility concerns, including transport options for disabled residents, difficulties accessing healthcare and community services, and the need for public transport to support independence and reduce isolation. Respondents frequently linked transport provision to wider objectives such as improving access to employment, education and healthcare while reducing reliance on cars.

Overall sentiment

Respondents view public transport as an important service that supports accessibility, inclusion and economic opportunity, particularly for rural, older and disabled residents.

Health and mental health (41 comments)

Respondents highlighted healthcare access, mental health services, preventative health support and joined-up working between health and social care services. Several comments focused on the importance of early intervention and helping residents maintain independence.

Overall sentiment

Respondents want improved access to health and wellbeing support, particularly for vulnerable residents.

Youth services and voluntary sector support (30 comments)

Respondents highlighted the value of youth clubs, youth activities, community facilities, volunteering and support for local organisations. Many viewed these services as preventative interventions that help reduce anti-social behaviour, support wellbeing and strengthen communities.

Overall sentiment

Respondents see youth and community services as valuable preventative investments that contribute to stronger, more resilient communities.

Communication and customer access (27 comments)

Comments often focused on difficulties contacting the council, automated systems, telephone delays and limited face-to-face support. Several respondents emphasised the importance of accessible customer service, particularly for older residents and those who struggle with online systems.

Overall sentiment

Respondents want easier access to council services and more responsive communication channels.

Feedback on the survey itself (27 comments)

A number of respondents commented on the survey itself. Common concerns included insufficient information about budgets, uncertainty about statutory responsibilities, lack of financial context and difficulty prioritising services without more detail.

Others welcomed the opportunity to participate but wanted more transparency about how consultation results would influence decisions.

Overall sentiment

Respondents generally support consultation but would like more information and context to help inform their responses.

Suggestions for additional savings

Survey respondents were asked the open-ended question: "If the council needs to make savings, what changes do you think would have the least impact on residents or communities?".

A total of 748 respondents answered this question, generating 1,097 individual comments between them.

These comments have been reviewed and grouped into themes to identify the most commonly raised issues, concerns and suggestions. The themes below summarise the key topics raised by respondents and provide an overview of the views expressed within each theme.

The initial coding and grouping of comments was assisted by artificial intelligence (AI), with all themes reviewed and validated by the Research and Consultation Team.

Review of council staff, management and internal costs (344 comments)

This was by far the strongest theme, representing nearly half of all coded comments. Respondents consistently argued that savings should come from reducing management costs, executive salaries, agency staff, consultants, interim appointments, recruitment costs, pensions, sickness costs, office accommodation and other internal expenditure before frontline services are affected.

Many comments referred specifically to perceived management layers, duplicated roles, expensive contractors, poor procurement practices and the need for the council to be run more efficiently. Respondents frequently suggested greater use of technology, automation and AI alongside better workforce planning and stronger contract management.

Overall sentiment

Respondents overwhelmingly believe that internal efficiencies, management restructuring and reducing bureaucracy should be the first source of savings before any reductions to resident-facing services are considered.

Regeneration projects and capital investment (106 comments)

A large number of respondents identified regeneration schemes, town centre projects, major infrastructure developments and capital investments as possible areas for savings. High-profile projects, particularly town centre developments, car parks and public realm improvements, were frequently cited as examples of expenditure perceived to offer limited benefit compared with maintaining existing services.

Many comments suggested that resources should be focused on maintaining existing infrastructure rather than funding new developments.

Overall sentiment

Major regeneration and capital programmes were often viewed as discretionary spending that could be reduced with less impact on residents than cuts to everyday services.

Councillor expenses and political costs (88 comments)

Many respondents suggested reducing councillor allowances, travel expenses, subsistence costs and other political expenditure. Some proposed reducing the number of councillors or limiting pay increases, while others highlighted concerns about recent decisions relating to allowances and expenses.

There was a recurring view that elected representatives should help lead savings efforts by reducing their own costs before frontline services are affected.

Overall sentiment

Respondents frequently believe councillors should demonstrate leadership through restraint in allowances, expenses and political costs.

Less spending on services used by smaller groups (88 comments)

Many respondents argued that, where difficult choices have to be made, resources should be directed towards services that benefit the largest proportion of residents. Comments often suggested reviewing programmes perceived to serve smaller groups or specialist interests, particularly where spending was seen to have limited wider community benefit.

A number of respondents referred to fairness, value for money and concentrating resources on services used regularly by most households.

Overall sentiment

Respondents generally favour prioritising services with the broadest community benefit when resources are limited.

Active Travel (cycling and walking routes) (67 comments)

Cycling and walking infrastructure was one of the most commonly suggested areas for savings. Respondents frequently referred to cycle lanes, active travel schemes, pedestrianisation projects and traffic management measures that they felt were underused or offered lower value compared with spending on highways maintenance or other services.

Several respondents explicitly questioned usage levels and argued investment should be redirected towards roads or core services.

Overall sentiment

Many respondents view active travel schemes as a lower priority than traditional infrastructure and frontline services.

Review or reduce social care spending (62 comments)

Social care generated mixed responses. While many respondents recognised the importance of supporting vulnerable people, others questioned the proportion of the budget devoted to adult social care and SEND services.

Suggestions included reviewing care packages, reducing high-cost placements, improving assessment processes, integrating health and care services more effectively and shifting some funding responsibilities to national government.

Overall sentiment

Respondents generally support protecting vulnerable people but want closer scrutiny of social care spending and greater focus on efficiency and sustainability.

Don't know / need more information (56 comments)

Many respondents stated that they did not feel sufficiently informed to identify where savings should be made. Comments frequently requested more information about budgets, statutory responsibilities and service costs.

Several respondents felt that meaningful prioritisation is difficult without greater financial transparency.

Overall sentiment

A notable proportion of respondents feel unable to identify savings without better information about spending and service obligations.

Green spaces and parks (46 comments)

Some respondents suggested reducing maintenance costs by cutting grass less frequently, expanding wildflower areas, reducing flower displays or transferring responsibilities to parish councils and community groups.

Comments generally focused on changing maintenance practices rather than removing parks entirely.

Overall sentiment

Respondents often viewed modest reductions in maintenance as having less impact than cuts to core frontline services.

Education and SEND provision (43 comments)

Comments focused mainly on SEND provision, transport costs, specialist placements and assessment processes. Respondents frequently questioned rising SEND expenditure and suggested reviewing eligibility, delivery models and the balance between specialist and mainstream provision.

Others highlighted the importance of supporting children with genuine need.

Overall sentiment

SEND spending was frequently identified as an area requiring greater scrutiny, although views were divided regarding the scale of potential changes.

Waste and recycling services (43 comments)

Comments included suggestions relating to recycling centres, food waste schemes, green waste collections and service redesign. Several respondents specifically highlighted new food waste collection arrangements as an area where savings could potentially be achieved.

However, many comments focused on efficiency and service redesign rather than outright reductions.

Overall sentiment

Respondents generally favour making waste services more efficient rather than significantly reducing service provision.

Green / Net Zero agenda (40 comments)

A number of respondents suggested reducing expenditure related to climate change initiatives, clean air projects, net zero programmes and environmental campaigns. Many felt these issues should receive lower priority than financial pressures facing core services.

Others argued that environmental projects should continue because of their long-term value.

Overall sentiment

Environmental spending was often viewed as discretionary and a potential area for savings during periods of financial pressure.

Leisure Centres and recreation (37 comments)

Leisure centres, recreation facilities, sports provision and play facilities were often described as desirable but non-essential. Some respondents suggested alternative funding arrangements, community management or reduced investment.

Overall sentiment

Leisure services were frequently considered a lower priority than statutory and frontline services.

Community engagement, consultation and governance (28 comments)

A smaller number of respondents suggested reducing expenditure on consultation exercises, governance arrangements, communications activity and partnership structures. Some respondents viewed these activities as administrative overheads rather than direct service delivery.

Overall sentiment

Respondents generally favoured streamlining governance and consultation processes where savings could be achieved.

Public transport (27 comments)

Views on transport remained mixed. While many respondents elsewhere wanted transport protected, some suggested reducing subsidies for bus services or transport schemes that they perceived to be underused.

Overall sentiment

No clear consensus emerged, but a minority viewed transport as a potential area for savings.

Libraries (22 comments)

Libraries attracted relatively few specific comments compared with other themes. Suggestions focused on reduced provision, alternative delivery models, co-location with other services or greater involvement from local councils and community organisations.

Overall sentiment

Libraries were occasionally identified as a lower priority than statutory services, although many respondents still recognised their value.

Final survey comments

Survey respondents were asked the open-ended question: "Do you have any final comments you wish to make on this Budget Prioritisation Survey?".

A total of 434 respondents answered this question, generating 841 individual comments between them.

These comments have been reviewed and grouped into themes to identify the most commonly raised issues, concerns and suggestions. The themes below summarise the key topics raised by respondents and provide an overview of the views expressed within each theme.

The initial coding and grouping of comments was assisted by artificial intelligence (AI), with all themes reviewed and validated by the Research and Consultation Team.

Council efficiency, management and value for money (178 comments)

This was by far the most frequently raised theme and dominated the final comments. Respondents regularly highlighted concerns about senior management costs, councillor allowances, consultancy fees, agency staff, redundancy payments, recruitment costs and perceived bureaucracy. Many suggested that greater savings could be achieved through better procurement, stricter contract management, improved accountability and more effective use of resources before services are reduced or charges increased.

There were repeated calls for the council to operate more like a business, improve productivity, reduce duplication and review whether current structures represent value for money. Respondents frequently questioned spending on projects they viewed as non-essential while everyday services continue to face pressure.

Overall sentiment

Respondents want the council to demonstrate stronger financial discipline, improve efficiency and eliminate perceived waste before considering service reductions or further financial burdens on residents.

Prioritise core services and everyday needs (118 comments)

Many respondents stressed the importance of focusing resources on the services that residents use most frequently and notice most directly. Roads, waste collection, street cleaning, community safety, services for vulnerable residents and local infrastructure were commonly referenced. Several comments argued that the council should focus on "getting the basics right" before investing in wider initiatives, regeneration schemes or discretionary projects.

Many respondents also highlighted the importance of protecting services that contribute to community life, including libraries, leisure facilities and services for vulnerable groups.

Overall sentiment

Respondents want core and visible services prioritised, with investment focused on the services that have the greatest day-to-day impact on communities.

Trust, accountability and confidence in the council (94 comments)

A significant number of comments reflected frustration with the council's perceived performance, leadership and decision-making. Respondents frequently questioned previous spending decisions, expressed concern about declining service quality and criticised what they viewed as poor financial management. Several comments suggested that trust has been damaged by previous decisions, ongoing financial challenges and visible service pressures.

There were also concerns that consultation exercises may not genuinely influence decisions, with some respondents expressing scepticism about whether their feedback would be acted upon.

Overall sentiment

Many respondents feel confidence in the council has been weakened and believe trust can only be rebuilt through visible improvements, stronger accountability and better decision-making.

Listen to residents and improve communication (78 comments)

Many respondents called for more transparent communication about budgets, spending decisions and service changes. A recurring request was for the council to clearly explain how consultation responses are used and to provide feedback on decisions made as a result.

Respondents also wanted more accessible communication, including clearer explanations of financial pressures, greater visibility of spending decisions and stronger engagement with local communities. Several comments suggested that respondents would be more supportive of difficult decisions if the rationale behind them was explained openly.

Overall sentiment

Respondents want meaningful engagement, greater transparency and reassurance that their views are genuinely influencing decision-making.

Council Tax and affordability (51 comments)

Many comments reflected frustration at increasing council tax levels, particularly where respondents believed service standards had declined. Respondents frequently questioned why council tax has continued to rise when roads, waste collection and other services are perceived to have worsened.

Several respondents also linked affordability concerns to wider cost-of-living pressures and called for stronger efforts to identify internal savings before increasing charges. A smaller number suggested alternative funding mechanisms or charging approaches.

Overall sentiment

Respondents are concerned about affordability and want clearer evidence that council tax increases provide tangible improvements and value for money.

Fair distribution of resources across Cheshire East (44 comments)

Respondents frequently raised concerns about how resources are distributed across the borough. Some felt too much investment is concentrated in particular

towns (e.g. Crewe), while rural communities and smaller settlements receive less attention. Concerns were particularly evident around transport, infrastructure, leisure facilities and regeneration investment.

Several respondents emphasised that all areas should benefit fairly from council spending.

Overall sentiment

Respondents want confidence that council resources are allocated equitably and that all communities benefit from investment.

Economic growth, regeneration and income generation (42 comments)

Many respondents encouraged the council to focus on growing the local economy and creating future income streams rather than concentrating solely on reducing expenditure. Common suggestions included supporting town centres, attracting businesses, creating jobs, reducing barriers to investment and making better use of development opportunities.

Views on regeneration projects were mixed. While many supported investment that creates employment and town centre activity, others questioned whether existing regeneration schemes have delivered sufficient value.

Overall sentiment

Respondents generally support investment that delivers jobs, economic growth and sustainable income generation, provided there are clear community benefits.

Appreciation of the challenge facing the council (40 comments)

Although criticism was widespread, many respondents recognised the difficult financial context facing local government. Comments acknowledged increasing demand for services, particularly social care, alongside limited funding and rising costs.

Several respondents expressed sympathy for decision-makers and recognised that balancing competing priorities is increasingly difficult. Others described the

choices facing the council as "impossible" or acknowledged there are no easy solutions.

Overall sentiment

While many respondents were critical of specific decisions, some recognised the scale and complexity of the financial challenges facing the council.

Roads, pavements and preventative infrastructure investment (36 comments)

Road conditions, potholes and pavement maintenance remained prominent concerns even within the final comments section. Respondents frequently criticised temporary repairs that quickly fail and called for more durable, preventative maintenance approaches.

Many believed that spending more upfront on quality repairs would deliver better value for money than repeated patching and reactive maintenance.

Overall sentiment

Respondents strongly support long-term investment in roads and infrastructure to improve quality and reduce future costs.

Joined-up working and long-term planning (35 comments)

Many respondents felt the council needs to adopt a more strategic and coordinated approach. Comments frequently referred to silo working, duplication between departments and a tendency towards short-term decision-making.

There was strong support for preventative approaches, better coordination between services and longer-term planning that reduces future costs. Respondents often linked this theme to infrastructure maintenance, social care and wider service transformation.

Overall sentiment

Respondents favour a more joined-up, preventative and long-term approach to service delivery and financial planning.

Role of local communities, volunteers and Town/Parish Councils (28 comments)

Some respondents supported greater involvement of community organisations, volunteers and town or parish councils in delivering local services and maintaining facilities. Suggestions included devolving more local decision-making, encouraging volunteering and supporting community-led initiatives.

Respondents often viewed local involvement as a way of maintaining services while strengthening community ownership.

Overall sentiment

Respondents see potential for greater community participation and more localised service delivery.

Waste collection and recycling services (26 comments)

Waste services continued to attract comment, particularly around collection frequencies, food waste arrangements, recycling centres and fly-tipping.

Respondents viewed waste collection as a highly visible service and often used it as an example when discussing overall council performance.

Several respondents opposed service reductions and highlighted the importance of maintaining convenient and reliable waste services.

Overall sentiment

Respondents expect waste collection services to remain reliable, accessible and responsive to local needs.

Funding pressures and need for National Government support (21 comments)

Some respondents recognised that Cheshire East's financial challenges are influenced by wider national funding arrangements. Comments frequently referenced increasing social care costs, SEND pressures and broader challenges facing local government.

Many argued that councils require greater financial support from central government and that some long-term funding issues cannot be resolved locally.

Overall sentiment

Respondents recognise that some financial challenges are driven by national policy and funding arrangements beyond the council's control.

Feedback on the survey itself (21 comments)

A number of respondents commented directly on the survey itself. While some welcomed the opportunity to participate, others felt the questions lacked detail or did not provide enough financial information to allow informed decisions.

Several respondents suggested that more context, budget information and opportunities for open comments would improve future consultations.

Overall sentiment

Respondents generally support consultation but would like more information, context and evidence of how responses are used.

Environment, climate and sustainability (15 comments)

Views on environmental issues were mixed. Some respondents argued that biodiversity, climate resilience and sustainability should remain priorities and be embedded within long-term planning. Others believed environmental projects should receive lower priority when core services are under financial pressure.

Overall sentiment

Environmental concerns remain important to some respondents, although views differ on how highly they should rank against immediate service pressures.

Public transport and accessibility (14 comments)

A smaller but important theme focused on transport accessibility. Respondents highlighted the importance of bus services for rural communities, older people, young people and those without access to private vehicles.

Comments often linked public transport to wider issues including employment, healthcare access, social inclusion and support for local economies.

Overall sentiment

Respondents view public transport as an important enabler of access to services, employment and community participation.

Conclusions

Survey response

The Budget Prioritisation Survey 2026 received a substantial response. However, as the survey was not conducted as a statistically robust random sample survey, the findings should be viewed as indicative of the views expressed by respondents rather than representative of all Cheshire East residents.

Residents prioritise visible day-to-day services

The strongest message from the survey is that respondents place particular importance on maintaining visible day-to-day services. Roads and pavements, waste collection, street cleanliness and community safety were consistently prioritised throughout both the quantitative and qualitative findings.

Many respondents appear to view these services as fundamental indicators of council performance and the quality of local communities. Comments frequently reflected a belief that visible, everyday services should be delivered effectively before resources are directed towards wider initiatives or discretionary activity.

Respondents support several priorities simultaneously

The survey suggests that respondents do not view budget decisions through a single lens. While maintaining everyday services emerged as the strongest priority, respondents also expressed support for keeping costs down, protecting vulnerable people and investing to prevent future problems.

Taken together, these findings suggest that respondents expect the council to balance multiple objectives rather than focus exclusively on a single priority. Future budget engagement may therefore need to consider how residents believe trade-offs should be made when these priorities come into conflict.

Efficiency is seen as a prerequisite for difficult decisions

A recurring theme throughout the consultation was the view that opportunities to improve efficiency should be explored before reductions to frontline services are considered.

Respondents frequently referred to management costs, consultants, agency staffing, procurement and organisational efficiency. While opinions differed regarding specific savings proposals, there was broad consistency around the expectation that the council should demonstrate value for money and make effective use of available resources.

Prevention remains important despite financial pressures

Although many respondents prioritised visible everyday services, there was also significant support for prevention, early intervention and long-term planning.

Comments frequently highlighted concerns that short-term savings can create larger costs in future years. This was evident across several policy areas, including highways maintenance, social care, health, education and environmental services. Respondents therefore appear to recognise the importance of balancing immediate service pressures with longer-term sustainability.

Trust and transparency will be important

The consultation identified a desire for greater transparency regarding financial challenges, spending decisions and the use of consultation findings.

Respondents frequently requested clearer communication about how decisions are made and how public feedback will influence future proposals.

The findings suggest that continuing to engage openly with residents, and clearly demonstrating how consultation evidence has been considered, will be an important factor in building confidence in future budget decisions.

Informing future engagement

The survey has successfully identified a number of clear priorities and recurring themes. However, it has also highlighted areas where views are more mixed and where competing priorities may create difficult choices.

The findings therefore provide a useful foundation for future stages of budget engagement, including the Community Assembly and consultation on specific budget proposals, which can explore these trade-offs in greater depth and help inform the development of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

Appendix 1 – About survey respondents

This appendix provides demographic information about survey respondents. Completion of demographic questions was optional and therefore respondent counts vary between questions.

Respondent type

95% of survey respondents were residents of Cheshire East, while 7% were council employees. 26 elected Cheshire East Councillors completed the survey.

Respondent type	Count	Percent
As a Cheshire East resident	1,351	95%
As a Cheshire East Council employee	92	7%
On behalf of a local voluntary or community organisation	29	2%
As an elected Cheshire East Ward or Town / Parish Councillor	26	2%
As a visitor to Cheshire East	10	1%
On behalf of a local business	9	1%
Other	4	0%
Valid responses	1,417	

Cost of living situation

85% of respondents stated they were managing with the current cost of living, though a good proportion acknowledged things were becoming more difficult.

15% of respondents stated they were finding it difficult to manage with the current cost of living, and this included 4% of respondents who were finding it “very difficult” to manage.

Thinking about your current situation, which of the following best describes how the cost of living is affecting you?	Count	Percent
I am managing comfortably	396	30%
I am managing, but it is becoming more difficult	719	55%
I am finding it difficult to manage	149	11%

I am finding it very difficult to manage	55	4%
Valid responses	1,319	

Gender

49% of survey respondents were male, 50% were female.

Which of the following best describes you?	Count	Percent
Male	553	49%
Female	565	50%
Prefer to self-describe	11	1%
Total valid responses	1,129	

The 1% of respondents who stated they preferred to self-describe provided the following descriptions:

- 2 x "Non-binary"
- 1 x "Why does it matter"
- 1 x "Irrelevant"
- 1 x "ANGRY RESIDENT"
- 6 x no description provided.

Age

33% of survey respondents were aged under 55, with the remaining 67% aged 55 and over.

What age group do you belong to?	Count	Percent
16-24	16	1%
25-34	70	6%
35-44	124	11%
45-54	158	14%
55-64	286	26%
65-74	279	25%
75-84	168	15%
85 and over	15	1%

Total valid responses**1,116**

Disability status

34% of survey respondents have a health problem or disability which limits their day-to-day activities, 66% do not.

Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months?	Count	Percent
Yes, a lot	120	11%
Yes, a little	257	23%
Not at all	725	66%
Total valid responses	1,102	

Appendix 2 – Social media and communications activity

Overview

The Budget Prioritisation Survey was supported by a communications campaign delivered between 8 July and 2 August 2026. Activity included social media promotion, targeted advertising, newsletters, media relations, promotion through libraries and council reception points, and direct communications through existing council networks.

Campaign reach and engagement

The campaign generated:

Measure	Result
Social media impressions (from 55 posts)	74,700
Social media reach	54,200
Video views	51,200
Targeted impressions (under 35s)	10,594
Digital newsletter impressions	35,398
Estimated media reach	32,300
Tracked clicks to survey and campaign content	839
Comments	133
Shares	69
Social media engagement rate	1.43%

Facebook was the strongest-performing platform and accounted for the majority of campaign reach, engagement and traffic. Content was shared on Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, TikTok, Bluesky and X during the campaign period.

Wider communications activity

The survey was also promoted through:

- Community Voices Panel
- Residents' Newsletter
- Members' Bulletin

- Town and Parish Council Newsletter
- Cheshire East libraries
- Mobile Library Service
- Council reception points
- Media release with some local media coverage.

Key observations

Campaign activity suggests residents were most likely to engage with content that:

- Explained how council funding works in a clear and accessible way
- Encouraged discussion about spending priorities
- Asked residents to consider difficult but realistic budget choices
- Addressed common misconceptions and increased transparency.

The communications campaign supported awareness of the consultation and directed residents to opportunities to participate in the survey.

Overall, the campaign met its objectives of informing residents, encouraging participation and creating meaningful discussion about local spending priorities.

Appendix 3 – Email responses

Three email responses were received during the survey period, one from Bollington Town Council, and two from members of the public.

The full original emails are published below, alongside an AI summary of the first two responses which are more detailed.

Responses are published in reverse chronological order of when they were received and have been redacted where appropriate to protect personal or sensitive information.

Response 1 – Bollington Town Council

Email received: 27/07/2026

AI summary of the email:

Bollington Town Council recognised the significant financial challenges facing Cheshire East Council and the need to set a balanced budget. The response emphasised the importance of protecting vulnerable residents, maintaining investment in statutory services, and ensuring that preventative services are not disproportionately reduced, arguing that early intervention and community-based services can help reduce future demand and costs.

The submission identified a number of priorities for future investment, including adult social care, children's services, highways and transport infrastructure, planning and infrastructure delivery, community safety, and environmental services. It also highlighted the importance of ensuring infrastructure keeps pace with housing growth, strengthening partnership working with town and parish councils, and pursuing efficiencies and income-generation opportunities before considering reductions to frontline services.

Full original email:

Submitted on behalf of Bollington Town Council.

Bollington Town Council welcomes the opportunity to respond to Cheshire East Council's Budget Prioritisation Survey. We recognise the significant financial

challenges facing local government, including increasing demand for statutory services, rising inflationary costs and continued pressures on local authority funding.

The Town Council appreciates the need for Cheshire East Council to set a balanced budget. However, we believe that difficult financial decisions must continue to be guided by the long-term wellbeing of communities, protection of vulnerable residents and investment in the infrastructure required to support sustainable growth.

General Comments

Bollington Town Council recognises that adult social care and children's services are statutory responsibilities and should remain a priority. Protecting vulnerable residents must remain at the heart of the council's budget decisions.

However, whilst statutory services are essential, it is equally important that preventative and community-based services are not disproportionately reduced. Investment in local communities often prevents greater costs arising later through poor health, social isolation, anti-social behaviour and declining community resilience.

Key Priorities

The Town Council believes Cheshire East Council should prioritise investment in the following areas:

Adult Social Care

Demand for adult social care continues to increase due to an ageing population. Investment in quality care, early intervention and support for unpaid carers should remain a primary priority.

Children's Services and Early Intervention

Protecting vulnerable children and investing in preventative family support helps reduce long-term costs whilst improving life opportunities. Early intervention services should be protected wherever possible.

Highways and Transport Infrastructure

Residents consistently identify the condition of roads, pavements, drainage and highways maintenance as major concerns.

Investment should continue in:

- Road resurfacing and pothole repairs.
- Flood prevention and drainage maintenance.
- Pavement accessibility.
- Public rights of way.
- Sustainable transport and active travel where appropriate.

Planning and Infrastructure

The council is concerned that significant housing growth across Cheshire East is placing increasing pressure on infrastructure.

Budget decisions should ensure adequate investment in:

- Planning enforcement.
- Infrastructure planning.
- Highway modelling.
- Flood risk management.
- Environmental protection.
- Delivery of infrastructure alongside development rather than after it.

Community Safety

Funding should continue to support community safety initiatives, including environmental enforcement, anti-social behaviour reduction, CCTV where appropriate and partnership working with local councils and the police.

Climate Change and Environmental Services

Investment should continue in:

- Biodiversity enhancement.
- Parks and open spaces.
- Tree planting.
- Flood resilience.
- Waste reduction.
- Climate adaptation measures.

These services contribute significantly to public health and quality of life.

Working with Town and Parish Councils

Bollington Town Council encourages Cheshire East Council to strengthen partnership working with town and parish councils.

Where services are devolved, sufficient funding should accompany those responsibilities. Local councils are often able to deliver services efficiently because they understand local priorities, but they cannot continue to absorb additional responsibilities without appropriate financial support.

Early engagement with local councils regarding budget proposals and service changes is essential.

Efficiency Before Service Reduction

Before reducing frontline services, the council encourages Cheshire East Council to continue exploring opportunities for:

- Shared services.
- Digital transformation where appropriate.
- Improved procurement.
- Rationalisation of assets.
- Partnership working.
- External funding opportunities.
- Income generation where appropriate.

Any efficiencies should seek to minimise impacts upon residents.

Importance of Prevention

Investment in preventative services often represents the best long-term financial decision.

Services that support health, wellbeing, youth provision, community facilities, public spaces and early intervention reduce future demand on expensive statutory services.

The council therefore encourages Cheshire East Council to consider the wider financial consequences before reducing preventative services.

Conclusion

Bollington Town Council recognises that Cheshire East Council faces extremely challenging financial circumstances and difficult decisions ahead.

The Town Council asks that future budget decisions:

- Protect vulnerable residents.
- Prioritise statutory services whilst recognising the value of preventative services.
- Ensure infrastructure keeps pace with development.
- Maintain investment in highways and environmental maintenance.
- Work collaboratively with town and parish councils.
- Seek efficiencies before reducing frontline services.
- Continue engaging openly with residents and local councils throughout the budget-setting process.

We appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this important consultation and look forward to continuing to work constructively with Cheshire East Council to support the communities we jointly serve.

Response 2 – Member of the public

Email received: 17/07/2026

AI summary of the email:

This respondent acknowledged the significant financial challenges facing Cheshire East Council but raised concerns about the design and interpretation of the Budget Prioritisation Survey. The response argued that some of the prioritisation options represented different types of concepts, such as outcomes, financial constraints and policy approaches, and therefore may not provide a robust basis for identifying clear public priorities. The respondent suggested that the results should be treated as indicative of broad values rather than a definitive mandate for specific service reductions.

The response emphasised protecting vulnerable people, maintaining essential everyday services and investing in prevention. It also highlighted the importance of reducing organisational costs and improving efficiency before considering

reductions to frontline services. Particular attention was given to agency staffing, interim appointments, consultants, recruitment challenges, procurement and contract management.

The respondent called for greater transparency regarding how survey results will be analysed and used, and requested that future budget decisions be informed by considerations including statutory duties, demonstrated need, long-term consequences, public value and organisational efficiency.

Full original email:

Dear Councillor Clark, *[name redacted]* and Community Voices team,

I am writing as a *[location redacted]* resident in response to Cheshire East Council's Budget Prioritisation Survey. Please record this email as a formal response to the consultation.

I have copied the council leader, the Cabinet member responsible for communities and engagement, the officer presently covering the Chief Executive's duties, and Sandbach's four Cheshire East councillors because my response concerns not only spending priorities but also consultation design, corporate governance and organisational efficiency.

I recognise the seriousness of the council's financial position. Cheshire East's announcement of 8 July reports a final 2025/26 net overspend of £18.5 million, albeit £3.8 million below the earlier forecast, together with a potential funding gap of approximately £15 million in 2027/28. I do not underestimate the difficulty of setting a lawful and sustainable budget under these conditions.

My concern is that the survey does not provide a particularly robust framework for establishing residents' priorities.

The six options presented are neither mutually exclusive nor conceptually equivalent. "Protect vulnerable people" and "maintain everyday services" are desired outcomes. "Keep costs as low as possible" is a financial constraint. "Invest to prevent problems" and "support local jobs and growth" are policy strategies. "Focus spending where it will have the biggest impact" should be an overarching principle applied to every budget decision.

Requiring residents to choose three therefore creates artificial trade-offs and produces answers whose meaning may be ambiguous. For example, selecting “focus spending where it will have the biggest impact” does not reveal which services a respondent believes create that impact. Conversely, failing to select it cannot sensibly be interpreted as support for ineffective expenditure.

As an introductory exercise intended to stimulate public engagement, the survey may have some value. However, its results should be treated as indicative expressions of general values, not as a statistically robust public mandate for particular service reductions.

If required to select three priorities, mine would be:

1. Protect vulnerable people.
2. Maintain essential everyday services.
3. Invest to prevent problems in the future.

A defensible budget-setting framework should assess individual proposals against statutory obligations, demonstrated need, equity, cost-effectiveness, marginal social value, long-term fiscal consequences and delivery risk. The cheapest immediate option is not necessarily the most economical. Reducing preventative provision can simply transfer greater costs into adult social care, children’s services, SEND, homelessness, public health or emergency provision later.

“Keeping costs low” should begin with avoidable organisational expenditure rather than indiscriminate reductions in frontline services.

As I recently explained to my [*location redacted*] councillors, a Freedom of Information response I received identified seven senior agency or temporary arrangements at Cheshire East with a combined annualised cost of £1,058,400. It also referred to failed senior recruitment exercises since January 2024.

Temporary cover will sometimes be necessary, but prolonged dependency upon agency staff, interim appointments and external consultants is not a sustainable operating model. It creates direct expenditure, repeated recruitment costs, loss of institutional knowledge and risks to consistent service delivery.

Before residents are asked to accept reduced services, increased charges or higher council tax, I believe the council should:

1. Publish clear and cashable targets for reducing agency and interim expenditure.
2. Secure successful permanent appointments to senior positions.
3. Examine and address the causes of repeated recruitment failure and staff churn.
4. Reduce consultant dependency once knowledge and capability have been transferred internally.
5. Strengthen procurement, contract management and back-office efficiency.
6. Report progress against these measures publicly and in plain English.

Essential frontline provision—including adult social care, children's services, SEND, waste collection, highways safety and maintenance, libraries and visible neighbourhood services—should be protected wherever reasonably possible.

I would therefore be grateful if the council would confirm:

1. That this email will be included in the formal budget consultation evidence.
2. How the forced-choice survey results will be interpreted and what methodological limitations will be acknowledged.
3. Whether the council will publish the number and demographic profile of respondents, its analytical method and the weight given to the survey when budget decisions are made.
4. Whether the 2027/28 budget papers will include measurable savings targets covering agency workers, interim appointments, consultants, recruitment churn, procurement and contract management.

Residents should not be asked which sound principle they are prepared to abandon while avoidable organisational costs remain insufficiently addressed. Focusing expenditure where it produces the greatest public value should not be

one optional priority among several; it should be the discipline governing the entire budget.

Yours sincerely,

[Personal details redacted].

Response 3 – Member of the public

Email received: 09/07/2026

Full original email:

Why ask for more ideas in how to spend a shortfall in overspending. The first answer would be reduce the deficit, the second just do your job properly, repair roads that have not been done although IN LAST YEARS BUDGET. Like *[location redacted]*, Brereton and empty the bins on time - last few weeks you have a woeful record in Brereton.

[Personal details redacted], a resident who pays extra for garden bin that have not been collected on due date for the last two collections, and has had to pay for repairs to car suspension due to having to drive on *[location redacted]* twice each time I go out.

It would be nice for the council to respond to my two request for info on *[location redacted]* repair, and for my local member to respond to a request on the same. It is not rocket science.

