

Funding our future: budget consultation 2024/25

Consultation findings summary report

January 2024

Overview

Westmorland and Furness Council is required to make decisions about its budget and council tax levels for 2024/2025. As part of that process the council conducted a public consultation to gather feedback on the following five key proposals:

- increase the rate of council tax for 2024/25 by 2.99% and implement the Government's 2% rise for the Adult Social Care precept – making a total increase of 4.99%.
- increase the council tax rate paid on second homes as part of the council's plan to tackle the affordable housing crisis by introducing a second homes premium of 100% from 1 April 2025.
- from 1 April 2024 apply the empty homes premium on properties that are substantially unfurnished after 1 year – rather than the current 2 years.
- from 1 April 2024 increase the empty homes premium on properties that are substantially unfurnished for more than 10 years from 300% to 400%.
- apply an inflationary uplift of 6.7% on the council's discretionary fees and charges.

The consultation ran between 12 December 2023 and 19 January 2024. This report provides a summary of the feedback received. It does not provide any recommendations or draw any conclusions.

Methodology

A public consultation document was produced which explained the five proposals and their background context. This was made available in council locations like libraries and offices and via the council's website.

The document included a short questionnaire which people were encouraged to complete and return, either online or in hard copy.

The consultation was promoted publicly via the local media, on social media and to subscribers of council email updates. It was also promoted to the council's staff and to the following stakeholder groups:

- Westmorland and Furness Council Members
- Trade Unions
- Parish and Town Councils
- Third Sector organisations
- Businesses via Cumbria LEP and Cumbria Chamber of Commerce

In addition, the consultation was considered at a meeting of the council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 12 January attended by seven non-executive Members. Their feedback is referenced at the end of this report.

Respondent profile

By deadline 588 individuals and 14 representatives of organisations had completed and returned the questionnaire.

In summary, respondents were:

- White British (94%)
- Mostly over 45 years old (76%)
- 47.8% male, 51.85% female, 0.35% chose to self-define
- 16% disabled

The full respondent profile can be found in Appendix A.

It is important to note that respondents were self-selecting, and their feedback cannot be assumed to be representative of the wider Westmorland and Furness population.

Responses were received from a small number of organisations, including the following partners/partnerships:

- ACTION with Communities in Cumbria
- Cumbria LEP
- Cumbria Rural Academy CIC
- Cumbria Third Sector Network and Cumbria CVS
- Preston Richard Parish Council
- Team Autism CIC

Individual responses from these organisations can be found in Appendix B.

Feedback on proposals

Proposal 1: Increase general council tax by 2.99% and apply an additional 2% increase to pay for Adult Social Care

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with the proposal to increase general council tax by 2.99% from 2024/25 to help pay for essential services provided by Westmorland and Furness Council.

600 people answered this question:

- 42.5% said they agreed with the proposal
- 52% said they disagreed with the proposal
- 5.5% said they did not know

Respondents were asked if they had any comments on the proposal and these are summarised below. The number provided in brackets indicates the number of respondents whose comment covered this issue; this is a subjective judgement but is included as a guide.

Those in opposition to the proposal commonly made the following points:

- The increase is too high given affordability and cost of living pressures. (56

- The council should make internal savings and spend money more wisely (44)
- The quality of services needs to improve. (26)
- Local Government Reorganisation in Cumbria should have brought savings and greater efficiency, not council tax increases. (16)
- Council tax increases are unfair as certain localities do not benefit from council funding/projects, or have access to all services. (9)
- Council tax-payers should not be paying for Appleby Horse Fair policing/clean-up costs. (2)

Those in support of the proposal commonly made the following points:

- General support and recognition that costs are increasing, and that increasing council tax is necessary to protect services. (23)
- Services and funding need to be spread fairly across Westmorland and Furness. (7)
- The council needs to support and protect specific service areas. (7)
- Support should be offered to those who are unable to afford the increase in council tax. (4)
- Opinion that central government should provide greater funding for the area. (2)

Respondents were also asked to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with the proposal to apply a 2% increase to pay for Adult Social Care from 2024/25.

601 people answered this question:

- 52% said they agreed with the proposal
- 39% said they disagreed with the proposal
- 9% said they did not know

Respondents were asked if they had any comments on the proposal and these are summarised below. The number provided in brackets indicates the number of respondents whose comment covered this issue; this is a subjective judgement but is included as a guide.

Those in opposition to the proposal commonly made the following points:

- Any additional increases are too high/unreasonable given affordability and cost of living pressures. (19)
- The council should make savings to fund Adult Social Care. (16)
- Opinion that central government should support with funding for Adult Social Care. (14)
- It's unfair that those who don't use Adult Social Care services have to contribute towards them. (8)
- The level of service currently offered does not warrant an increase. (7)

Those in support of the proposal commonly made the following points:

- General support and recognition that Adult Social Care is a statutory responsibility which must be funded. (28)

- The increase should be greater than 2%. (6)
- Opinion that central government should support with funding for Adult Social Care. (5)

Proposal 2: Increase the council tax rate paid on second homes by introducing a second homes premium of 100% from 1 April 2025

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with the revised proposal to increase the council tax rate paid on second homes, as part of the council's plan to tackle the affordable housing crisis, by introducing a second homes premium of 100% from 1 April 2025.

600 people answered this question:

- 74.5% said they agreed with the proposal
- 21% said they disagreed with the proposal
- 4.5% said they did not know

Respondents were asked if they had any comments on the proposal and these are summarised below. The number provided in brackets indicates the number of respondents whose comment covered this issue; this is a subjective judgement but is included as a guide.

Those in opposition to the proposal commonly made the following points:

- Second homes benefit tourism and investment. As such, they should not be penalised. (19)
- This proposal should be brought forward to 2024. (12)
- Individual circumstances and income should be considered. (12)
- Second homeowners should pay the same as everyone else as they don't require the use of council services. (12)
- Second homes do not actually affect housing availability or cost for local buyers. (12)
- The premium should be applied to holiday rentals. (10)
- Second homeowners will rent their properties and get the business rate if this happens. (8)
- Poorly thought-out policy. (5)
- The premium should only be applied to certain areas in Westmorland and Furness where there is a shortage of housing for local people. (5)
- The council should be investing in affordable housing and applying more local occupancy restrictions. (4)
- The premium should be even higher than 100%. (4)

Those in support of the proposal commonly made the following points:

- The proposal should be brought forward to 2024. (31)
- People with second homes can afford more tax. (18)
- Support proposal, but an even higher increase should be agreed. (17)
- Need to tackle holiday rentals and Airbnb and/or business rates need to be reviewed. (15)

- Second homes have a negative impact on local communities/residents. (10)
- Money should be put back into providing housing for locals. (7)
- This should have been done years ago. (6)
- There should be a limit on the number of second homes and holiday rentals in Westmorland and Furness. (4)

Proposal 3: From 1 April 2024 apply the empty homes premium on properties that are substantially unfurnished after 1 year – rather than the current 2 years

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with the proposal to apply the empty homes premium on properties that are substantially unfurnished after 1 year – changed from 2 years previously (from 1 April 2024).

601 people answered this question:

- 75% said they agreed with the proposal
- 18% said they disagreed with the proposal
- 7% said they did not know

Respondents were asked if they had any comments on the proposal and these are summarised below. The number provided in brackets indicates the number of respondents whose comment covered this issue; this is a subjective judgement but is included as a guide.

Those in opposition to the proposal commonly made the following points:

- Consideration should be given to those renovating a property or waiting for building work to commence. (11)
- Individual circumstances should be considered. (8)
- This is unfair to those trying to sell a property in the current housing market. (5)
- 12 months is too soon. (12)

Those in support of the proposal commonly made the following points:

- This proposal is reasonable given housing shortages. (17)
- Questions as to how the council will manage this and ensure loopholes aren't exploited. (7)
- The premium should be applicable after less than a year. (7)
- Agree unless there are mitigating circumstances. (17)
- Should have happened sooner. (3)

Proposal 4: From 1 April 2024 increase the empty homes premium on properties that are substantially unfurnished for more than 10 years from 300% to 400%

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with the proposal to increase the long term empty homes premium from 300% to 400% - chargeable after 10 years of a property being empty (from 1 April 2024).

600 people answered this question:

- 78% said they agreed with the proposal
- 15% said they disagreed with the proposal
- 7% said they did not know

Respondents were asked if they had any comments on the proposal and these are summarised below. The number provided in brackets indicates the number of respondents whose comment covered this issue; this is a subjective judgement but is included as a guide.

Those in opposition to the proposal commonly made the following points:

- The premium should be chargeable after less than 10 years. (15)
- This proposal is only to generate income for the council. (4)
- Individual circumstances should be considered. (3)
- The premium should be increased to more than 400%. (3)
- The council should be working with homeowners rather than imposing more costs. (2)

Those in support of the proposal commonly made the following points:

- The premium should be chargeable after less than 10 years. (33)
- Houses should not be left empty, and the proposal should help local housing shortages. (11)
- The premium should be increased to more than 400%. (5)
- These houses should be taken into public ownership and turned into affordable accommodation for residents. (5)
- This premium should also apply to businesses and council/government owned property. (3)

Proposal 5: Apply an inflationary uplift of 6.7% on the council's discretionary fees and charges

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with the proposal to apply an average inflationary uplift of 6.7% on the council's discretionary fees and charges.

593 people answered this question:

- 25% said they agreed with the proposal
- 48% said they disagreed with the proposal
- 27% said they did not know

Respondents were asked if they had any comments on the proposal and these are summarised below. The number provided in brackets indicates the number of respondents whose comment covered this issue; this is a subjective judgement but is included as a guide.

Those in opposition to the proposal commonly made the following points:

- The increase is too high/the council already charges enough. (20)

- The increase is too high given affordability and cost of living pressures. (15)
- The council should make internal savings and spend money more wisely. (12)
- This is higher than inflation and therefore unfair. (9)
- This depends on which discretionary fees and charges are included / need more information on the proposal. (5)
- Local Government Reorganisation in Cumbria should have brought savings and greater efficiency. (4)
- The quality of services needs to improve. (3)
- Wages are not rising at this rate and so the proposed increase is unfair/unaffordable. (2)

Those in support of the proposal commonly made the following points:

- General support and recognition that this is a realistic/necessary increase in the current economic climate. (8)
- Support should be offered to those who are unable to afford the increase in fees and charges. (2)

Any further comments

Finally, respondents were asked if they had any further comments they wished to make. These are summarised below:

- The council should support Ulverston Library. (34)
- The council should make internal savings and spend money more wisely. (28)
- Increasing council tax/fees during cost-of-living crisis will put more financial pressure on residents. (21)
- Services need to improve. (16)
- General expressions of support for the council. (13)
- Local Government Reorganisation in Cumbria should have brought savings and greater efficiency, not council tax increases. (11)
- The council is not supporting its residents with these proposals. (8)
- Second homeowners/holiday rentals/Airbnb should pay more council tax to support local economy and services. (8)
- Rural communities should pay less as they do not have access to or use of all services. (8)
- Questions as to whether the council will listen to the views shared in this consultation. (6)
- The council should re-consider its proposals on second homes. (6)
- The council needs to invest in more affordable housing for local people. (5)
- Opposition to paying for the costs of Appleby Horse Fair. (3)
- Support for council tax increase if it protects services. (3)
- Certain areas receive more support/funding than others in Westmorland and Furness. (3)

Feedback from Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the consultation and raised several issues for consideration, including:

- Querying the impact of the second homes premium delay.
- Querying the profile of proposed investment in change programmes discrepancy (the amounts identified for Climate and Natural Environment staffing being almost 10 times more than Economic Regeneration staffing).
- The importance of continuing commitment to the Coronation Hall in Ulverston.
- Concern regarding identified Children's Services savings.
- The importance of investing in the council's own staff to reduce agency staff usage particularly in Children's Social Care.
- Currently there are three different Broad Rental Market Areas in Westmorland and Furness, can we request the VO to review this?
- The projected spend of £107 million on the capital programme is really high; how can we ensure that the capital programme is realistic?

A full summary from this meeting can be found in Appendix C.

Appendix A: Frequency tables

Westmorland and Furness Council: Funding our future

Q1. In what capacity are you responding to this consultation?

| Answer Choices | Responses | |
|--|-----------------|------------|
| As a private individual | 97.67% | 588 |
| As a representative of an organisation | 2.33% | 14 |
| | Answered | 602 |
| | Skipped | 1 |

Q2. Do you agree or disagree with our proposal to increase general council tax by 2.99% to help pay for essential services that will be provided by Westmorland and Furness Council?

| Answer Choices | Responses | |
|-----------------------|-----------------|------------|
| Agree | 42.50% | 255 |
| Disagree | 52.00% | 312 |
| Don't know | 5.50% | 33 |
| Any further comments? | | 219 |
| | Answered | 600 |
| | Skipped | 3 |

Q3. Do you agree or disagree with our proposed approach to apply a 2% increase to pay for Adult Social Care?

| Answer Choices | Responses | |
|-----------------------|-----------------|------------|
| Agree | 52.25% | 314 |
| Disagree | 38.94% | 234 |
| Don't know | 8.82% | 53 |
| Any further comments? | | 167 |
| | Answered | 601 |
| | Skipped | 2 |

Q4. Do you agree or disagree with our revised proposal to increase the council tax rate paid on second homes, as part of our plan to tackle the affordable housing crisis by introducing a second homes premium of 100% from 1 April 2025? This would mean that council tax bills would be double for second home owners.

| Answer Choices | Responses | |
|-----------------------|-----------------|------------|
| Agree | 74.50% | 447 |
| Disagree | 21.00% | 126 |
| Don't know | 4.50% | 27 |
| Any further comments? | | 224 |
| | Answered | 600 |
| | Skipped | 3 |

Appendix 2

Q5. Do you agree that from 1 April 2024 we should apply the empty homes premium on properties that are substantially unfurnished to be applicable after 1 year (changed from 2 years previously)?

| Answer Choices | Responses | |
|-----------------------|-----------------|------------|
| Agree | 75.37% | 453 |
| Disagree | 17.80% | 107 |
| Don't know | 6.82% | 41 |
| Any further comments? | | 126 |
| | Answered | 601 |
| | Skipped | 2 |

Q6. Do you agree that from 1 April 2024 that the long term empty homes premium is increased from 300% to 400% - chargeable after 10 years of a property being empty?

| Answer Choices | Responses | |
|-----------------------|-----------------|------------|
| Agree | 78.00% | 468 |
| Disagree | 15.00% | 90 |
| Don't know | 7.00% | 42 |
| Any further comments? | | 127 |
| | Answered | 600 |
| | Skipped | 3 |

Q7. Do you agree that we should apply an average inflationary uplift of 6.7% on our discretionary fees and charges?

| Answer Choices | Responses | |
|-----------------------|-----------------|------------|
| Agree | 24.79% | 147 |
| Disagree | 48.06% | 285 |
| Don't know | 27.15% | 161 |
| Any further comments? | | 140 |
| | Answered | 593 |
| | Skipped | 10 |

Q8. Do you have any further comments you would like to make?

Answered 240
Skipped 363

Q9. Are you?

| Answer Choices | Responses | |
|----------------|-----------------|------------|
| Male | 47.80% | 271 |
| Female | 51.85% | 294 |
| Self-define | 0.35% | 2 |
| | Answered | 567 |
| | Skipped | 36 |

Appendix 2

Q10. What age are you?

| Answer Choices | Responses | |
|----------------|-----------------|------------|
| Under 18 | 0.00% | 0 |
| 18-24 | 1.07% | 6 |
| 25-34 | 9.24% | 52 |
| 35-44 | 13.85% | 78 |
| 45-54 | 16.87% | 95 |
| 55-64 | 26.82% | 151 |
| 65+ | 32.15% | 181 |
| | Answered | 563 |
| | Skipped | 40 |

Q11. What is your ethnic group? Choose one option that best describes your ethnic group or background.

| Answer Choices | Responses | |
|--|-----------------|------------|
| White – English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British | 94.21% | 504 |
| White – Irish | 1.50% | 8 |
| White – Gypsy or Irish Traveller | 0.19% | 1 |
| Any other White background | 1.87% | 10 |
| Asian/Asian British – Indian | 0.00% | 0 |
| Asian/Asian British – Pakistani | 0.00% | 0 |
| Asian/Asian British – Bangladeshi | 0.56% | 3 |
| Asian/Asian British – Chinese | 0.19% | 1 |
| Any other Asian background | 0.00% | 0 |
| Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups - White and Black Caribbean | 0.00% | 0 |
| Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups - White and Black African | 0.00% | 0 |
| Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups - White and Asian | 0.19% | 1 |
| Any other Mixed/Multiple ethnic background | 0.37% | 2 |
| Black/Black British – African | 0.00% | 0 |
| Black/Black British – Caribbean | 0.19% | 1 |
| Any other Black/African/Caribbean background | 0.00% | 0 |
| Arab | 0.19% | 1 |
| Any other ethnic group | 0.56% | 3 |
| | Answered | 535 |
| | Skipped | 68 |

Q12. Do you consider yourself to have a disability?

| Answer Choices | Responses | |
|----------------|-----------------|------------|
| Yes | 16.10% | 90 |
| No | 83.90% | 469 |
| | Answered | 559 |
| | Skipped | 44 |

Appendix B: Responses from organisations

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| Organisation | ACTion with Communities in Cumbria |
| Question | Response |
| 2.99% general council tax increase | Agree |
| Apply a 2% increase to pay for Adult Social Care | Agree |
| Introducing a second homes premium of 100% from 1 April 2025 | Agree |
| Apply empty homes premium after 1 year (changed from 2 years previously) | Agree |
| Increase long term empty homes premium from 300% to 400% | Agree |
| Apply an average inflationary uplift of 6.7% on discretionary fees and charges | Agree |
| Additional comments | <p>While it is recognised that costs have increased and therefore fees need to too. Many people's incomes have not increased.</p> <p>For people in rural areas, who are already paying more to access services, these increased are unfair. There is a need for a rural policy that sets out how rural people benefit from council services and how delivery in this predominantly rural area is sustained, given the increased costs of delivery - without passing the predominance of costs on to the end user.</p> |

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| Organisation | Cumbria LEP |
| Question | Response |

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| 2.99% general council tax increase | Agree. Providing that this results in better quality services, particularly in relation to those functions that deliver economic, housing and population growth as this will increase future revenue for the Council. |
| Apply a 2% increase to pay for Adult Social Care | Don't know. Whilst the need for this is understand and recognised, a careful balance needs to be struck with affordability, particularly given that earnings in predominant sectors in some areas in Westmorland and Furness are not high. |
| Introducing a second homes premium of 100% from 1 April 2025 | Disagree. The LEP is trying to encourage people to both live and work in Cumbria, given Cumbria's demographic challenges. The projected increase in payrolled employees is already difficult to achieve without discouraging those that have homes elsewhere. Its also worth recognising that the number of second home owners has actually declined. This is designed to penalise those that infrequently use their homes but could disincentivise much needed future workforce from coming to Cumbria. |
| Apply empty homes premium after 1 year (changed from 2 years previously) | Agree. The lack of available housing is preventing people from living and working in Cumbria. Alongside this there needs to be a very active approach to managing housing supply, more generally. |
| Increase long term empty homes premium from 300% to 400% | Agree. As above, It is even more imperative that there is active management and enforcement. |
| Apply an average inflationary uplift of 6.7% on discretionary fees and charges | Disagree. Any increase needs to reflect the quality of the service provided. If there is a planned increase there needs to be a value for money assessment and active performance management arrangements. |
| Additional comments | |

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| Organisation | Cumbria Rural Academy CIC |
| Question | Response |
| 2.99% general council tax increase | Don't know. Would like to see the plans for the use of an increase and its benefits. |
| Apply a 2% increase to pay for Adult Social Care | Disagree. Is this just for council establishments or corporations as well? |

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| Introducing a second homes premium of 100% from 1 April 2025 | Agree. |
| Apply empty homes premium after 1 year (changed from 2 years previously) | Agree. |
| Increase long term empty homes premium from 300% to 400% | Agree. The time scale should be 5 years. |
| Apply an average inflationary uplift of 6.7% on discretionary fees and charges | Don't know. Clarification of what are discretionary fees. |
| Additional comments | Need rates support for Charities and Community Interest Companies etc. |

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| Organisation | Cumbria Third Sector Network and Cumbria CVS <i>This response has been submitted on behalf of Cumbria Third Sector Network and Cumbria CVS. Due to the short consultation period, we have only been able to undertake limited consultation with third sector organisations – the response is based on input from Cumbria Third Sector Network Executive members and Cumbria CVS staff and trustees (and incorporates their knowledge of the issues faced by the wider third sector and the people third sector organisations support).</i> |
| Question | Response |
| 2.99% general council tax increase | Agree. Third Sector organisations are very aware of the cost of living pressures on people in our communities, and that many people will struggle to afford increases in Council Tax; this will be exacerbated if national Government does not extend the Household Support Fund into 2024/25. However, we also realise that these Council Tax increases are essential to maintain Council services. We therefore reluctantly support an increase in Council Tax (and other charges), but ask that efforts continue to support those most affected by the Cost of Living pressures, and ensure that they are made aware of the support, such as Council Tax reductions, that may be available to them. |
| Apply a 2% increase to pay | Agree. As Q2. |

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| for Adult Social Care | |
| Introducing a second homes premium of 100% from 1 April 2025 | Agree. As Q2. |
| Apply empty homes premium after 1 year (changed from 2 years previously) | Agree. As Q2. |
| Increase long term empty homes premium from 300% to 400% | Agree. As Q2. |
| Apply an average inflationary uplift of 6.7% on discretionary fees and charges | Agree. As Q2. |
| Additional comments | <p>We believe that local voluntary and community sector organisations have a key role to play in transformation, both in terms of providing intelligence and expertise to improve Council delivery, and as funded service providers (particularly with regard to the priority identified around preventative services). We would welcome the opportunity to be more closely involved in Westmorland and Furness Council's transformation work and to coproduce future delivery, and hope this can be achieved through the process of refreshing the Cumbria Compact.</p> <p>Local voluntary and community sector organisations play an important role in ensuring our communities thrive – they often provide opportunities for people to come together, to strengthen relationships, and build community resilience and cohesion, as well as supporting other priorities such as healthy lifestyles. As such, they play an important preventative role, reducing the demand on statutory council services.</p> |

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| Organisation | Preston Richard Parish Council |
| Question | Response |
| 2.99% general council tax increase | <p>Don't know.</p> <p>Following your letter advising the discontinuation of the Council Tax Support Grant we should like to know if Government has discontinued it or if you will still receive same but will not be passing it on? If the latter then the increase in funds is substantial to the Unitary Council and towns and Parishes will need to increase their precepts to make</p> |

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| | ends meet therefore families will be paying more. As Brandon Lewis MP stated "If an authority does insist on not passing down funding I would expect the authority to justify to their council taxpayer as to the reason why." |
| Apply a 2% increase to pay for Adult Social Care | Agree. |
| Introducing a second homes premium of 100% from 1 April 2025 | Don't know. Do second homes now pay the full rate (100%) that was announced on the last budget if so we agree if not and they still only pay (50%) why are you delaying it for a further year? |
| Apply empty homes premium after 1 year (changed from 2 years previously) | Agree. Yes housing is needed and second homes drain the life out of rural areas so the owners should put something back into the community. |
| Increase long term empty homes premium from 300% to 400% | Agree. Yes although why wait 10 years, is this a legality? If not ten years is a long time to stand empty and adding nothing to the community. |
| Apply an average inflationary uplift of 6.7% on discretionary fees and charges | Disagree. We feel this figure seems high. |
| Additional comments | I would appreciate some responses on the above to be responded to or made public. |

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| Organisation | Team Autism CIC |
| Question | Response |
| 2.99% general council tax increase | Don't know. If the increase is to pay for local services ie Penrith taxes pay for Penrith services. |
| Apply a 2% increase to pay for Adult Social Care | Don't know. If it will be used for that and kept local. |
| Introducing a second homes premium of 100% from 1 April 2025 | Agree. Too many empty properties that are used for holiday homes / air bnb and if they are not using regular services ie refuse collections/recycling/shopping locally then it will have negative impact on community. |

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| <p>Apply empty homes premium after 1 year (changed from 2 years previously)</p> | <p>Agree.</p> |
| <p>Increase long term empty homes premium from 300% to 400%</p> | <p>Disagree. It should increase incrementally annually.</p> |
| <p>Apply an average inflationary uplift of 6.7% on discretionary fees and charges</p> | <p>Don't know.</p> |
| <p>Additional comments</p> | <p>Will Team Autism CIC be able to access some of Health & Social care budget to pay for the service we provide to Autistic Adults in the area?</p> |

Appendix C: Summary from Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 12 January

| Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee 12 January 2024 2024/25 Budget Consultation | |
|---|--|
| Purpose of the session <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reminder of MTFP 2023-2028 position • Update on Budget consultation 2024/25 – Funding Our Future • Timescales for setting a balanced Revenue Budget for 2024/25, MTFP 2024-2029, and Capital Programme 2024-2029 <p>Following a presentation on the proposed budget, Corporate O&S welcomed the comprehensive answers to questions on the budget and recognised where information is not yet readily available. It was evident that the Director of Resources and Cabinet Member for Finance were on top of their brief and had an understanding of the detail, risks, challenges, pressures and future opportunities.</p> <p>The presentation included international, national and our financial landscape and context; 2022/23 financial accounts; 2023/24 revenue budget; 2023/24 capital programme; setting the 2024/25 budget; revised assumptions; public budget consultation; proposed funding changes and pressures; LGR disaggregation pressures; proposed investments; proposed income; proposed savings; and what is still left to do.</p> <p>The following is a summary of the questions and answers from Overview and Scrutiny Members:</p> | |
| Question | Answer |
| What was the impact of Second Homes Premium delay? The budget gap identified as £5million would the figure not be £10 million? | Whilst the lost income from the delay is circa £10 million, £5 million was earmarked to be used to support delivery of the Council's priorities and help tackle the affordable housing crisis. The net gap is £5 million. |
| The profile of proposed investment in change programmes discrepancy between the amounts identified for Climate and Natural Environment staffing being almost 10 times more than Economic Regeneration staffing. Why is that? | There is a difference in the level of proposed investment across these two areas and that is due to the Climate and natural environment base budget being much lower than that of the Economic Regeneration team. It supports delivery of the Council Plan priorities. |
| Members stressed the importance of continuing commitment to the Coronation | The proposed expenditure in 24/25 for the Coronation Hall, Ulverston enables |

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| <p>Hall in Ulverston, whilst the initial expenditure is welcomed.</p> | <p>the venue to continue to deliver following the transfer of the Coronation Hall to the Council on 1 January 2024. During the year further work on the future business case will be undertaken and that will determine any additional future investments required..</p> |
| <p>Members welcomed some of the additional resources identified for Children's Services in the proposed investment in capacity, but raised concerns over identified Children's Services savings.</p> | <p>It was clarified that the identified savings are efficiencies within Children's Services and do not result in a direct impact upon frontline teams. The additional investment includes additional posts required as a result of new legislative responsibilities.</p> |
| <p>Members raised the importance of investing in our own staff to reduce agency staff usage particularly in Children's Social Care.</p> | <p>This was strongly endorsed and the Committee were reassured that there had been a significant increase in permanent recruitment of Children's Social Care staff and this has reduced the cost of agency workers.</p> |
| <p>Regarding the £5 million, how will funding be treated in future years? How are we tracking benefits that not necessarily financial?</p> | <p>The priority investments in 2023/24 are funded from the one off capitalisation directive. Where there are proposals to continue with the schemes they are included the proposed budget for 2024/25. All benefits and impact of the investments are being monitored both from a financial and non-financial perspective.</p> |
| <p>There is £11 million in the Transformation budget. What opportunities for savings are included in the forward budget above the 350k for asset rationalisations?</p> | <p>The process of transferring to a new Unitary Council has been challenging and this year has focused on stabilisation and getting the basic right. In respect of transformation it is important that we have a solid baseline to deliver transformation from. The efficiencies of being a unitary council and transforming our services through various change programmes is being developed. These financial benefits will be required in order to ensure financial sustainability for the future.</p> |
| <p>Is Team Barrow a revenue or capital budget item?</p> | <p>The business case for investment through Team Barrow is still being</p> |

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| | <p>developed and finalised by Government. It will include both revenue and capital investment potentially.</p> |
| <p>What is the proposed increase in Council Housing Charges? Are they in line with the increase in LHA announced in the Autumn Statement? Currently there are 3 different Broad Rental Market Areas in WAF, can we request the VO to review this?</p> | <p>We recognise the 3 different approaches in the Districts and are working to harmonise this as far as possible. The detail on this will be provided separately as it is a complex area.</p> |
| <p>The projected spend of £107 million on the Capital Programme is really high. How can we ensure that the capital programme is realistic?</p> | <p>The capital programme is reviewed regularly for deliverability and this includes assurance reviews on cost, time and impact of individual schemes and programmes. The Capital Programme is fully funded and if any of the schemes are delayed both the funding and the cost envelope can be reprofiled into future years or accelerated if required. The governance around the project delivery group is effective and hence as part of the quarterly monitoring reports recommendations to reprofile the capital programme are regularly reported.</p> |
| <p>Do the value of the reserves reflect a risk based budget or standard budget?</p> | <p>The sct 151 officer (Director of Resources) has a statutory responsibility to provide a statement on the adequacy of reserves as part of the budget setting process. The adequacy of reserves is dependent upon the financial risks within the overall budget. For 2024/25 there are still areas of the legacy budgets that we are reviewing and hence the level of reserves needs to reflect that risk position.</p> |
| <p>At what point will Corporate Overview & Scrutiny review this budget?</p> | <p>The quarterly budget monitoring is available for Corporate Overview & Scrutiny to review following Cabinet and for the formal budget setting process overview and scrutiny are consulted as early as possible on the options being proposed.</p> |

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| <p>How will we plan to deal with any possible additional pressures from Equal Pay Claims?</p> | <p>The Council is not in a position to be able to quantify the likelihood of any liability being realised or the value of any potential liability.</p> |
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