

Budget Consultation

Have your say

We are asking Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole residents, council service users, community groups, Town and Parish Councils, businesses, and partner organisations to **have their say on the work we are doing to prepare proposals to balance the council's budget for 2026/27 and beyond**, in line with our financial situation and our [corporate strategy](#).

Please read this information document and share your views by completing our online survey. Paper versions of the document and survey will be available in all BCP Council libraries. The consultation is available online at;

bcpcouncil.gov.uk/budget

If you have any questions or require the information in an alternative format or language, please email researchandconsultation@bcpcouncil.gov.uk giving your name, address, and telephone number.

BCP Council, like all other local authorities, is operating within an extremely challenging financial environment. The surge in demand for, and cost of, our services continue to grow. The funding we have available to provide these services has simply not kept up. Council Tax rates, for example, have not kept up with inflation.

Over the last few years, we have taken positive steps to deliver a balanced and sustainable budget, and we are working hard to remain on track throughout the next financial year. This means we must be extremely careful with our budget and work to deliver our services, savings and income targets, while also looking to identify further potential savings and efficiencies when we can. We are looking at all our services to see what additional savings can be made.

Before we set the budget for next year, we want to understand your thoughts on:

- Service priorities
- Council Tax levels
- Where you think the council should spend its money

The views you give us now will help inform our budget setting process for next year and the following years.

The consultation will **close at 11.59pm on Sunday 14 December 2025**.

Our commitment to you

We all know Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole is a place brimming with potential. We are committed to being an inclusive, open council working with partners to realise the potential for our people, communities and place. In 2023, after a widespread consultation, we adopted our [corporate strategy](#) and our vision:

“Where people, nature, coast and towns come together in sustainable, safe and healthy communities”

We are committed to working towards this vision, focusing our work in two priority areas:

- our place and environment
- our people and communities

We must deliver these priorities within our budget, and this means we must prioritise the services that we must deliver by law.

Rising demand on council services, such as those that keep children, young people and vulnerable adults safe, combined with higher costs of delivering council services that keep our communities clean and our infrastructure secure, means that balancing our budget has become increasingly difficult over the last few years. This has been made more challenging by the increase in the cost-of-living and years of constrained budgets.

In particular, there is increasing pressure on the council’s budget because of the cost of Special Educational Needs and Disability support. While central government pays the council to deliver this vital service, the funding it has provided has fallen far short of the actual cost of the service. BCP Council is therefore having to use its own funds to pay for the service (cash flow) while the government comes up with a long-term solution to this national problem. This impacts the amount of money available for the council to spend on its own services.

Good budget management

All councils have a legal obligation to set a balanced budget. Just as you and your household manage your outgoings against your income, so too does the council.

Good budget management involves living within our means and requires us to look at current spending, exploring alternative ways of delivering council services efficiently, and, in some cases, reducing or stopping services.

As a responsible council, we have been open and transparent about the difficult decisions we have had to make identifying savings and efficiencies essential to

protecting key services, supporting the most vulnerable and providing a sound, stable financial future for the council.

We have listened

When we have asked for your views on our approach to managing our budget previously, residents were supportive of the council saving money by:

- transforming our services
- selling or letting leases go on buildings we no longer need
- and aligning our services across Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole.

Residents were less supportive of the council increasing the cost of services we charge for (e.g. garden waste, car parking). Raising fees and charges is not something the council undertakes lightly, and we fully understand how difficult suggestions like this are for residents to hear. But, by taking these hard decisions now, we will be able to continue supporting other vital services.

What have we done so far to save money?

We have budgeted to achieve £127.7m in annual savings through efficiencies, transformation and additional income since 2019.

- Between 2024- 2027 it is estimated that we will receive £29 million from selling some of our assets. In the last year we have sold or have agreement to sell the following:
 - Land at Wessex Fields (agreed to sell)
 - Christchurch By-pass car park (sold)
 - The south part of Beach Road Car Park (sold)
 - Christchurch Civic Offices (sold)
 - Poole Civic Offices (agreed to sell)

There are strict rules set out by government about how we can use the money we get from selling assets. It can be used for things such as further investment in council assets or funding to support the council's transformation programme.

- We have increased our fees and charges and looked at ways to generate more income through some of our commercial services, such as hospitality and entertainment venues, beach huts and garden waste.
- We will continue to align our services across Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole to remove any differences and inefficiencies that exist following the formation of BCP Council and to take advantage of the larger scale.

- We will continue to invest in the short term in areas that will save money in the long term and help achieve our goals, such as installing solar panels which will reduce the cost of energy as well as help us reach our net zero ambitions.
- We will continue to invest in new technologies, data-driven solutions, and innovative service models - building on the success of our transformation journey - to create a council that is digital by design, driven by data, and focused on people. These investments will help us deliver seamless, personalised experiences for our residents, empower our communities, and ensure BCP Council leads the way in public service innovation.

Working with other organisations

In the last few years, we have worked with other organisations to keep services running, including;

- Christchurch Town Council who now fund the running of the Quomps paddling pool and has been funding a Community Safety Officer for Christchurch Town Centre
- Friends of Hamworthy Park who are actively raising funds to enable the long-term future of Hamworthy paddling pool
- We have transferred Bluebell Close play area to Highcliffe and Walkford Parish Council
- We have transferred ownership of Hengistbury Head Outdoor Education Centre to Hengistbury Head Outdoors Charity
- The Parks Foundation, who add value to our green spaces by providing volunteering opportunities that keep park cafes and toilets open, food growing spaces and nature recovery improvements that support residents' health and well-being.

Successful Grant Funding

- We have also successfully secured grant funding for several key projects, including.
 - securing almost £22 million from central government in 2021 as part of the 'Town Deal' for our regeneration plans for Boscombe
 - an award of nearly £20 million from central government in 2023 for seafront infrastructure projects including piers, cliffs, toilets and beach huts.
 - receiving £79 million in 2020 from central government to invest in public and sustainable transport across South East Dorset
 - securing over £14 million of capital and revenue grants between 2022 and 2025 to deliver better bus facilities and services in line with our Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP)

- receiving over £58 million central government grant in aid of various Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management projects, such as the Hengistbury Head Long Groyne upgrade and delivery of the Christchurch Bay and Harbour Strategy
- securing funding from Sport England and the Green Futures Fund to contribute towards renewable energy generation at Two Riversmeet leisure centre.
- receiving £1.7 million in Warm Homes Grant through the Dorset Retrofit Hub that will support low-income households to benefit

Council Tax

Around 78% of our new budget comes from Council Tax. We are expecting an update from the Government in their Autumn budget about local government finances and information on any increase in Council Tax. We know that household budgets are tight with many costs increasing, but we are anticipating the need to increase Council Tax to meet the rising costs and growing demand for council services. We can currently increase Council Tax by up to 4.99% without getting permission from the Government or holding a referendum. Our Council Tax rates remain below the average for similar sized councils with the same responsibilities.

Working with our MPs and Government

We will continue working with our local MPs to campaign for a fairer funding deal for local government that helps provide councils with a resilient and sustainable future and residents with good quality services. We are already engaging with Government on this and have established positive working relationships with our MPs. We will also continue exploring Council Tax reform which could contribute to more sustainable funding for local authorities in the future.

We will continue to work with government to find a solution to the pressures that funding our special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) service places on our finances. We have recently written to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government calling on a reform to the SEND system and an urgent solution to the unsustainable funding model that is creating a national crisis for councils across the country.

Council finances explained

After income from various sources, we need £359 million each year to continue running services for over 400,000 residents. Most of this money is spent ensuring we provide services when people need us the most such as keeping children and vulnerable adults safe and healthy.

The rising demand on council services combined with an increase in costs to provide these services is predicted to add an extra £34.5million to the cost of running the council over the next financial year. Raising Council Tax by the maximum 4.99% will provide £15.7million towards this. For the council not to have to make any changes or reductions to services, we would need to increase Council Tax by approximately 10%. Therefore, we must consider how we can run our services more efficiently or where we can find savings.

Did you know?

- Between 2020 and 2024 there was a 156% increase in the number of applications for Education Health and Care Plans. These are critical plans that give children and young people the support they are entitled to receive.
- It is estimated that the net cost of storing, transporting, processing and disposing our waste will increase to £17.253 million next year.
- Next year, the National Living Wage is predicted to add £6 million to our Adult Social Care costs.

We are making progress to address these budget inflationary pressures and would like your views to help us decide on how the budget should be spent over the next two years.

Statutory and Discretionary services

Most of the services the council provides are known as **statutory** services which we must provide by law. They include everything from keeping children and vulnerable adults safe to providing a library service, bus passes for eligible residents, home to school travel support for children with special educational needs, bin collections and trading standards etc. Although we must provide these services, in some instances there is an element of choice in how we run them, for example:

- we must provide household recycling centres located at a reasonable distance for our residents and open them at the weekend, but we have discretion when we open them during the week
- we have a statutory duty to undertake grass cutting for safety reasons, including clearing of sight lines and obstructions to footpaths and roads, but grass cutting in other areas is at our discretion

- we are legally required to investigate anti-social behaviour, but we often go beyond this by taking actions such as issuing informal warnings, obtaining injunctions, and implementing closure orders

The council also runs **discretionary** services. We have no legal obligation to provide these, but we feel they are important for our residents and businesses (e.g. playgrounds, litter and dog waste bins, graffiti removal, additional cemetery provision, crematorium provision, community development and economic development). Other discretionary services provide an income for the council which can be used to support the running of statutory services (e.g. attractions and hospitality offers). Over recent years, as our budget has become more challenging, we have asked other organisations to support the running of some of our discretionary services (e.g. paddling pools and community safety officers). We will continue working with organisations to explore other opportunities.

How the council is funded

The council receives most of our core funding from Council Tax (78%), with business rate income making up 20% and a very small proportion coming from grants. We receive approximately £100 million per year less in government funding than in 2010 (if the previous authorities were combined). Whilst the council is responsible for collecting business rates, the income goes to central government who redistributes it to local authorities.

All councils have savings set aside, called reserves. Unearmarked reserves are there to help manage the council's financial security in the event of extraordinary or unforeseen events. They also act as a financial contingency should any additional costs associated with the general day-to-day running of the council change significantly.

How the council spends its money

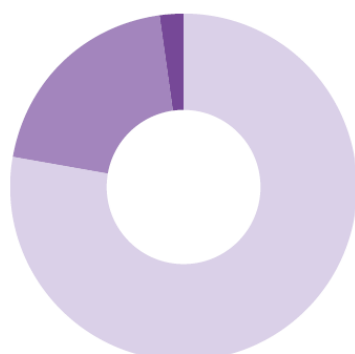
Capital and revenue are words you will often hear when we talk about our budget. Put simply, to the average household, revenue costs would be day-to-day costs such as your energy bills, petrol in your car or paying your TV licence. Capital costs would be big investments such as buying a house or building an extension.

The council's revenue expenditure includes things like salaries, building maintenance and the operating costs of running services such as maintaining refuse vehicles and opening libraries. Our capital expenditure includes things like major road improvement schemes and the council's new-build housing and acquisition programme where we have built 45 affordable homes in 2024-25. We have also purchased 141 existing homes in 2024-25 that are used for affordable housing. We have a further 152 affordable homes currently under construction of which two have been completed.

It may seem a simple solution to address the budget pressures would be to stop spending money on capital schemes and spend the money instead on the running of our day-to-day services. However, we are not permitted to spend capital money in this way. The government offers incentives for capital spending by providing specific grants to support national priorities (such as improving roads), and by enabling the council to borrow money cheaply to support our own local priorities and invest-to-save initiatives (such as housing schemes).

So, to balance our finances, we need to make savings from our revenue budget. The breakdown below is to help you understand where this money is spent. It is based on our expected net costs for 2025/26. Most of our money goes on Adults' and Children's services.

How BCP Council is funded



- Council Tax 78%
- Business Rates 20%
- Grants and New Homes Bonus 2%

Where BCP Council spent its budget (2025-26)



People and Communities	Percentage	£ 000s	Pence in £
Adults and Older People Services		128,417	35.7p
Children's Social Care		66,428	18.5p
School Services		24,056	6.7p
Other Children's Services		9,482	2.6p
Community Services		6,690	1.9p
Library Services		6,186	1.7p
Housing Services		4,651	1.3p
Customer Service		4,121	1.1p
Place and Environment	Percentage	£ 000s	Pence in £
Transport Services		18,094	5.0p
Waste and Recycling		15,613	4.3p
Highways		7,109	2.0p
Parks and Open spaces		5,285	1.5p
Street Cleaning		4,116	1.1p
Planning		3,167	0.9p
Development and Investment		1,389	0.4p
Modern council	Percentage	£ 000s	Pence in £
Support Services		53,437	14.9p
Other central items and accounting entries		16,930	4.7p
Cost of running our operational premises		6,752	1.9p
Commercial		-22,574	-6.3p
Total		359,348	

This list of services doesn't include all the detailed services delivered by the council. It gives an idea of the kinds of services that are included in the costs.

Adults and Older People Services £128.417M (35.7p in every £1)

Supporting people to live independently at home either by accessing community services or through residential/nursing homes for those with long-term complex needs.

Children's Social Care £66.428M (18.5p in every £1)

Supporting and safeguarding vulnerable children, young people and families, and children in care to make sure they are protected. Securing fostering and adoption places and support for care leavers to find education, training and housing.

School Services £24.056M (6.7p in every £1)

Securing specialist education places and services for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities. Assisting with school admissions and support for that home educating their children.

Other Children's Services £9.482M (2.6p in every £1)

Supporting children, young people and families with complex needs through targeted help (e.g. parenting support), and Family Hubs. Supporting young people involved in or at risk of becoming involved in crime or anti-social behaviour. Providing a youth justice service.

Housing Services £4.651M (1.3p in every £1)

Providing advice and support for those seeking housing, including help with finding a home, applying for the housing register, and understanding tenant rights. Helping individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Ensuring properties meet safety and health standards. Managing housing for specific needs, such as Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs).

*We also manage 10,000 council homes in Bournemouth and Poole, but this is a completely separate budget to the council's revenue budget.

Library Services £6.186M (1.7p in every £1)

Providing a book, audiobook, DVD and CD lending service. Giving online access to e-books, e-audiobooks, digital magazines, and newspapers. Providing computers and internet access through libraries. Providing a Home Library Service for those unable to visit the library.

Customer service £4.121M (1.1p in every £1)

Providing accessible ways to interact with our services including online, by phone, or in person at our offices. Providing out-of-hours services for urgent issues. Assisting with applications and registrations for various council services, such as housing, benefits, and permits. Facilitating the payment of Council Tax, business rates, housing rent, parking fines, and other bills. Receiving reports of problems or faults, such as street cleaning issues, housing repairs, or anti-social behaviour. Dealing with complaints, feedback and compliments about the council.

Community Services **£6.690M (1.9p in every £1)**

Providing community safety initiatives to ensure public safety and well-being. Environmental health services relating to food safety, noise control, and pollution monitoring. Licensing services including taxis and hackney carriage. Running our museums and providing cultural events for both residents and visitors. Operating a telecare service.

Highways **£7.109M (2p in every £1)**

Inspecting, repairing and maintaining roads and footways. Responding to highway emergencies, managing winter gritting and severe weather responses. Gully emptying service. Street lighting and engineering.

*This does not include road infrastructure improvements, such as resurfacing and major road repairs, cycle lanes which are funded from the capital budget.

Waste and Recycling **£15.613M (4.3p in every £1)**

Blue, black, food waste & green bin collections. Recycling and treating waste and providing Household Waste Recycling Centres. Managing and operating waste transfer station. Providing ways to increase recycling, composting and generating energy, improving environmental outcomes. Providing a commercial waste service.

Parks and open spaces **£5.285M (1.5p in every £1)**

Maintaining our parks, gardens, trees, playgrounds and sport pitches, allotments and verges. Looking after our nature reserves such as Hengistbury Head, Stanpit Marsh, Kinson Common, and Talbot Heath.

Planning **£3.167M (0.9p in every £1)**

Managing planning applications and associated public notices, ensuring that building regulations are met for design, construction, and alterations to buildings. Developing and implementing planning policies, local plans, and neighbourhood plans, enforcing unauthorised building work and breaches of planning regulations, managing conservation areas, protected trees, and listed buildings.

Street Cleaning **£4.116M (1.1p in every £1)**

Emptying and maintaining public litter bins, including dog waste bins. Collecting litter from streets, parks, seafront and public spaces, removing illegally dumped waste. Cleaning graffiti from public properties. Street sweeping and special clean ups including road traffic incidents.

Transport Services **£18.094M (5p in every £1)**

This includes providing statutory bus passes, socially necessary bus services providing free off-peak travel for senior citizens and people with a disability. Investigating road collisions, providing road safety education to children and working with partners to prevent injuries and death. Network management including Highway Enforcement, coordination of Street Works, maintenance and improvement of traffic signals. Local Transport Plan (LTP) Policy and the securing and delivery of externally funded transport related revenue and capital grants, such as the LTP capital programme, Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI), Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP).

**Development and Investment
£1.389M (0.4p in every £1)**

Overseeing the development and delivery of new housing projects to meet local demand. Managing significant regeneration projects, such as Holes Bay, the Dolphin Centre, and the area around the Winter Gardens. Attracting external investment into the area, creating conditions for successful partnerships and commercially viable projects.

**Support Services
£53.437M (14.9p in every £1)**

Helping lead and manage services and support frontline workers. This includes services like Finance, HR, IT, Legal, Democratic, Marketing, Communications, Policy and Business Support. This cost includes IT software costs for the whole council workforce.

**Cost of running our operational premises
£6.752M (1.9p in every £1)**

This includes most of our facility management costs for all our buildings e.g. annual servicing, electrical testing, structural repairs.

**Other central items and accounting entries
£16.930M (4.7p in every £1)**

Transformation costs, short-term loans and debt repayments. Insurance, National pay award for all staff. Contingency funding potentially undelivered annual service savings and unexpected events.

Some of our services bring in more income than the cost of running them.

**Commercial
-£22.574M (-6.3p in every £1)
We spend £37.640M on this service but we receive an income of £60.214M so our net spend is -£22.574M**

Promoting, managing and developing visitor attractions and services. Operating public car parks and managing parking enforcement. Running leisure centres, sports facilities, and other recreational services that offer memberships and pay-as-you-go options.

**Public Health
Improving health and wellbeing across Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole. The money we spend on Public Health services is ring fenced which means we must spend it on this service area.**

How to have your say

In February, councillors must set the council's budget for the next financial year. The following committees will all discuss the council's budget.

Monday 26 January 2026 Overview and Scrutiny Board

Wednesday 4 February 2026 Cabinet

Tuesday 10 February 2026 Full Council

It is important that we hear your views. We would like to hear from you about your priorities before setting our budget for 2026/27 and beyond.

You can have your say by completing our online survey on the following website haveyoursay.bcpCouncil.gov.uk/budget

Alternatively, you can view a copy of the information document and complete a paper copy of the survey by visiting any BCP Council library.

If you have any questions or require a large print copy of the survey or alternative language or format, please email researchandconsultation@bcpcouncil.gov.uk giving your name, address, and telephone number.

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