



CABINET

Date of Meeting	Monday 24 th February 2025
Report Subject	Council Fund Revenue Budget 2025/26 – Final Closing Stage
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Finance and Social Value
Report Author	Corporate Finance Manager and Chief Executive
Type of Report	Strategic

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From July 2024, Members have received regular updates on the Council's challenging budget position for the 2025/26 financial year and the additional budget requirement has been continuously revised to consider the latest available information.

Cabinet and Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee received an update on the key headlines and financial impacts of the Welsh Local Government Provisional Settlement in January - at that stage there was a remaining 'budget gap' of £18.004m. The areas under consideration to meet the remaining gap were also set out in the January report.

A range of additional cost reduction options have been considered by specific Overview and Scrutiny Committees during the period 7 – 14 February, alongside some further adjustments to the additional budget requirement.

Following the conclusion of the above work this report sets out a proposal by Cabinet for the Council to be able to reach a legal and balanced budget position for the 2025/26 financial year.

The report sets out the Council Tax recommendations for setting local taxation levels for 2025/26. We are also able to propose the formal resolution to Council when it meets later today as we have received notification of the precepts of the Police and Crime Commissioner and all Town and Community Councils within Flintshire.

Cabinet is invited to make final recommendations to Council to set a legal and balanced budget based on the detail set out in this report.

A full presentation will be made at County Council.

The report includes the following tables:

- Table 1: Remaining Additional Budget Requirement 2025/26
- Table 2: Reduction in Cost Pressures
- Table 3: Final Proposed Budget Solutions 2025/26
- Table 4: Proposed Budget 2025/26
- Table 5: School Budget Adjustments 2025/26
- Table 6: Social Care Budget Adjustments 2025/26
- Table 7: Medium Term Forecast 2026/27 – 2027/28

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	That Cabinet notes and approves the revised additional budget requirement for 2025/26.
2	That Cabinet approves the final proposals for the cost reductions that will contribute to the budget.
3	That Cabinet recommends to Council a legal and balanced budget based on the calculations set out within this report.
4	That Cabinet notes the open risks which remain to be managed in the 2025/26 financial year.
5	That Cabinet recommends an overall annual increase in Council Tax for 2025/26 of 8.93% for Council Services and 0.57% for contributions to North Wales Fire and Rescue Service and Regional Coroners Service. This constitutes an overall uplift of 9.5%.
6	That Cabinet invites Council to pass the formal Council Tax resolution now that we have had notification of the precepts of the Police and Crime Commissioner and all Town and Community Councils within Flintshire.
7	That Cabinet notes the medium-term forecast as a basis for the next revision of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE COUNCIL FUND REVENUE BUDGET 2025/26																																																
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1.05	<p>The changes in the additional budget requirement are summarised below:</p> <p>Table 1: Remaining Additional Budget Requirement 2025/26</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>£m</th> <th>Note</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Remaining Gap - January Report</td> <td>18.004</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Review of in-year position:</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Older People’s Services</td> <td>1.500</td> <td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Children’s Services</td> <td>1.000</td> <td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Disability Services</td> <td>1.000</td> <td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Out of County Placements</td> <td>0.500</td> <td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Highways Maintenance</td> <td>0.400</td> <td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Additional Pressures:</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Council Tax Reduction Scheme</td> <td>0.364</td> <td>2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Specialist School Demography</td> <td>0.137</td> <td>3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Disclosure and Barring Service Checks</td> <td>0.091</td> <td>4</td> </tr> <tr> <td>North Wales Fire and Rescue Service increase</td> <td>0.069</td> <td>5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Management of Specialist Provision - Estyn</td> <td>0.058</td> <td>6</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Waste Collection Frequency</td> <td>0.053</td> <td>7</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Revised Remaining Gap</td> <td>23.176</td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Notes:</p> <p>1. To reflect the ongoing impacts of service demand levels following a review of the in-year position.</p>		£m	Note	Remaining Gap - January Report	18.004		Review of in-year position:			Older People’s Services	1.500	1	Children’s Services	1.000	1	Disability Services	1.000	1	Out of County Placements	0.500	1	Highways Maintenance	0.400	1	Additional Pressures:			Council Tax Reduction Scheme	0.364	2	Specialist School Demography	0.137	3	Disclosure and Barring Service Checks	0.091	4	North Wales Fire and Rescue Service increase	0.069	5	Management of Specialist Provision - Estyn	0.058	6	Waste Collection Frequency	0.053	7	Revised Remaining Gap	23.176	
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	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. To reflect the impact of the proposed Council Tax uplift. 3. To reflect the estimated increase in pupil numbers in specialist schools. 4. To reflect a significant increase in costs of 30% from December 2024 and increased turnover. 5. To reflect an adjustment to meet the final approved budget for the North Wales Fire and Rescue Service. 6. To reflect an adjustment to the previously reported pressure. 7. To reflect an adjustment for an implementation date of 28 April for the change of waste collection frequency.
	<p>Proposed Solutions to meet the Revised Additional Budget Requirement</p>
<p>1.06</p>	<p>Aggregate External Finance (AEF)</p> <p>The Welsh Local Government Provisional Settlement was announced on 11 December and full details were included in the January Cabinet report.</p> <p>The provisional Aggregate External Finance (AEF) for 2025/26 is £274.779m which, when compared to the adjusted 2024/25 AEF figure of £266.074m represents an <i>increase</i> of 3.27% (£8.705m) (All Wales average is an <i>increase</i> of 4.3% with Local Authority increases ranging from 2.8% to 5.6%).</p> <p>The provisional AEF represents a cash uplift of £16.252m (6.3%) over our actual 2024/25 AEF of £258.527m. An amount of £16.096m (6.2%) has previously been reflected in our calculations based on the adjusted AEF included in the provisional settlement.</p> <p>Therefore, an additional contribution of £0.156m can now be reflected in the calculations.</p>
<p>1.07</p>	<p>Portfolio Cost Reductions</p> <p>Due to the scale of the remaining budget challenge facing the Council, all portfolios have revisited their cost base with a view to identifying further budget reductions.</p> <p>The additional options for cost reductions identified totalling £4.487m were considered at Overview and Scrutiny meetings between 7 – 14 February and following consideration of feedback the following options have been <u>taken out</u> of the final proposals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Removal of Eligible Free School Meals in holiday period (£0.462m) - Bus subsidy cost reduction (£0.460m) - Removal of WLGA subscription (£0.108m) - Reduction of delegated IT support to schools (£0.057m) - Remove/withdraw school crossing patrols (£0.053m) - Removal of Microsoft Share point budget (£0.030m) - Reduction in investment in Rights of Way (£0.014m) - Cease Egress secure email facility (£0.004m) <p>The revised total amount from additional portfolio cost reductions is £3.299m.</p>

1.08 Further Reductions in Cost Pressures

Following further review, the following cost pressures can be reduced for final budget considerations:

Table 2: Reduction in Cost Pressures

	Original £m	Revised £m	Change £m
Pay Modelling – deferred pending completion and consideration of a preferred model	2.000	0.000	(2.000)
Youth Service Grant – funding confirmed for 2025/26	0.278	0.000	(0.278)
Resource Provision at Flint High School – grant remains 2025/26	0.185	0.000	(0.185)
ALN Reforms – Transfer of Post 16 responsibilities – grant funding remains	0.135	0.000	(0.135)
Youth Justice Service Grant – funding confirmed for 2025/26	0.093	0.047	(0.046)
Specialist Secondary - Mobile Classroom Provision – revised calculation	0.119	0.083	(0.036)
Corporate Joint Committee – final confirmed contribution	0.019	0.015	(0.004)
Total	2.829	0.145	(2.684)

1.09 Schools – Cost Reductions

Due to national funding constraints schools are continuing to face significant financial challenges, despite the fact that the schools’ delegated budget has been relatively protected in recent years (net uplift of £3.995m in 2024/25) However, as the Council’s largest budget, it has again been necessary to look for a net contribution to the overall budget gap from the schools delegated budget.

School cost pressures of £12.281m have been identified and a required potential top slice of between 2% and 3% has been considered. It is acknowledged that the Education, Youth and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee proposed that no top slice be applied to schools in 2025/26 - however, this is not achievable in view of our overall funding position.

	<p>Therefore, a 2.5% reduction on schools' delegated budgets (based on 2024/25 level) will need to be applied which provides a contribution of £2.932m towards the additional budget requirement.</p> <p>In addition, the Council will again not be able to make the contribution of £0.750m to school deficits based on affordability.</p> <p>The proposed budget still provides for a net uplift to schools of £6.950m (5.92%) (Para 1.24 provides further detailed analysis on school budgets).</p>
1.10	<p>Additional Funding for Collection and Disposal of Household Packaging Waste</p> <p>Draft Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging and Packaging Waste) Regulations came into force from January 2025 in relation to the Extended Producer Responsibility for Packaging (EPR) and we have been advised by the Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) of a significant potential funding stream for 2025/26.</p> <p>The additional funding is intended for waste collection activity and to assist Council's with achieving national recycling targets. The payment covers estimated net efficient costs associated with collection and disposal of household packaging waste from kerbside and communal collections, waste brought to Household Waste and Recycling Centres (HWRCs) and bring sites only. The funding is based on the estimated cost of managing the in-scope (household) packaging element of the waste stream and therefore the initial estimates received are still subject to change and full details of the terms and conditions are not yet known.</p> <p>Following review, it is considered prudent to include an amount of £2m in the 2025/26 budget and to review overall utilisation of the funding once more details are confirmed.</p>
1.11	<p>Use of Reserves</p> <p>As Members will be aware the use of reserves is not a sustainable way of meeting recurring Council spend as they can only be used once. However, the final budget proposals include three areas where spend is time limited in nature. Therefore, it is proposed that an amount of £0.261m is utilised from the contingency reserve to meet the one-off / time limited costs of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cambrian Aquatics (£0.100m) - Payroll – Fixed Term Posts (£0.106m) - VMware Licensing (£0.055m)
1.12	<p>Council Tax</p> <p>The level of annual increase in Council Tax is a decision for Full Council.</p> <p>Based on the calculations set out in the report an overall annual increase on council tax of 8.93% is required for Council Services and 0.57% for additional contributions to North Wales Fire and Rescue Service and the Regional Coroners Service.</p>

This equates to an overall uplift of 9.5% and provides overall additional net yield of £11,094,289 in 2025/26.

This amounts to an annual increase of £157.53 per annum (£3.03 per week equivalent) and brings the Council Tax on a Band D equivalent property to £1,815.78.

Police and Crime Commissioner/Town and Community Councils Precepts

The Police and Crime Commissioner and Town and Community Council Precepts for 2025/26 have all been notified to the Council as the Council Tax collection authority and a separate report on the Council agenda later today sets out the formal resolutions.

1.13 Table 3: Final Proposed Budget Solutions 2025/26

	£m
Revised Additional Budget Requirement (as in Table 1)	23.176
Less:	
Aggregate External Finance (para 1.06)	(0.156)
Portfolio Cost Reductions (para 1.07)	(3.299)
Reduction in Cost Pressures (para 1.08)	(2.684)
Contribution from Schools (para 1.09)	(3.682)
Additional Waste Packaging Funding (para 1.10)	(2.000)
Use of Reserves (para 1.11)	(0.261)
Amount Remaining to balance budget	11.094
Council Tax (9.5%) (para 1.12)	11.094
Amount Remaining	0.000

1.14 Summary and Conclusions

A legal and balanced budget for 2025/26 can be recommended by Cabinet to Council based on (1) the calculations and assumptions set out above, and (2) the detailed proposed budget as set out below.

1.15 **Table 4: Proposed Budget 2025/26**

Funding	£m
Aggregate External Funding (AEF) / RSG NNDR	274.779
Council Tax	120.673
SSA / Budget Requirement	395.452
Use of Reserves (2025/26 only)	0.261
Specific Grants (Estimated) (Appendix 7)	53.191
Total Funding	448.904
Expenditure	£m
Base Budget Rolled Forward	413.957
Previous Years Growth/Items Dropping Out (Appendix 1)	1.187
Transfers Into the Settlement (Appendix 2)	0.839
Inflation (Appendix 3)	17.496
Pressures & Investments (Appendix 4)	24.519
Cost Reductions	
Portfolio (Appendix 5)	(7.029)
Corporate Financing (Appendix 6)	(9.576)
Grants	
Less Specific Grants 2024/25	(45.679)
Plus Specific Grants 2025/26 (Estimated Appendix 7)	53.191
Total Expenditure	448.904
Balance	0.000

	Open Risks 2025/26
1.16	<p data-bbox="300 181 360 219">Pay</p> <p data-bbox="300 255 1406 360">A pay award uplift of 4% for both Teaching (from September 2025) and Non-Teaching (from April 2025) is included in the final budget proposals which is a higher assumption than many Welsh Councils.</p> <p data-bbox="300 403 1401 584">However, should national pay agreements conclude at a higher level (as they have in the past), the difference would need to be met from the Contingency Reserve. Therefore, the proposed uplift is considered reasonable and minimises the risk of the final award being higher than our budgeted provision.</p> <p data-bbox="300 622 1406 728">The outcome of the pay modelling review to address ongoing recruitment and retention challenges will need to be considered separately in-year once finalised including any future funding implications.</p>
1.17	<p data-bbox="300 770 612 808">Social Care Demand</p> <p data-bbox="300 844 1414 1182">The service has been impacted by a large increase in demand in 2024/25 resulting in a significant projected overspend. Like many authorities, we are continuing to experience a significant increase in both the level and complexity of service demand and there is a risk that demand may exceed our capacity to respond to requests for assessments in a timely manner. Once assessed people may have to wait for care and support due to limited capacity within local authority and independent sector services. During this time people's conditions/situations may deteriorate and could result in carer or family breakdown, requiring high-cost placements.</p> <p data-bbox="300 1225 1414 1585">In hospital settings people who are not discharged when they are medically fit could decondition and require more intensive and longer-term community support. Flintshire local authority is unique in that our residents attend three general hospitals outside of the county boundary (Wrexham Maelor, Countess of Chester and Glan Clwyd). This necessitates social care resources to be spread across three different geographical areas, attending meetings in each site and following the individual process of each hospital setting which both creates additional demand and reduces economies of scale that can be achieved when supporting a single general hospital within the local authority boundary.</p> <p data-bbox="300 1628 1406 1733">Whilst additional investment has been included in the budget to reflect the increased demand being experienced there is still a risk that the financial cost of meeting the growing demand could exceed our resources.</p>
1.18	<p data-bbox="300 1778 663 1816">Homelessness Demand</p> <p data-bbox="300 1852 1398 2033">Additional duties placed on Councils and the current demands on emergency housing is resulting in additional expenditure and continued budgetary pressures to homeless services. Whilst some grant is available for emergency housing and other discretionary funding, this is not sufficient to cover the full scale of the financial risk.</p>

	<p>Early estimates of a potential cost pressure of £7.5m have been reduced to £4.5m due to a number of mitigating options being identified such as:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Implementation of the staffing structure to improve homeless prevention outcomes and maximise housing costs recovery rates. 2. Increased number of alternative properties including utilising the D2 PropCo model. 3. Increased number of HRA properties including house shares utilising TACP funding where available. <p>However, it is important to note that this is based on the above options being delivered at pace and demand levels staying within the range we have seen over the last 18 months. Any spikes in demand could further increase the financial pressure to the service despite delivering on the above options.</p>
1.19	<p>Out of County Placements</p> <p>The position on Out of County placements remains an ongoing risk and the projected overspend in the current financial year is £1.835m. An additional amount of £2.5m is included in the budget based on increasing demand and potential new placements in 2025/26. This equates to an uplift of 12.95% on the 2024/25 budget of £19.299m.</p>
1.20	<p>Waste Collection - Potential Infraction Charges</p> <p>The Council did not meet the statutory minimum target, (64%) in 2021/22, for the percentage of municipal waste which must be recycled, prepared for re-use and composted, as specified in Section 3 of the Waste (Wales) Measure 2010. Welsh Government can therefore take steps to impose a penalty on the Council by way of an infraction fine. A potential penalty of up to £0.663m has previously been reported.</p> <p>The statutory recycling targets were also not achieved in 2022/23 and 2023/24, which means that further infraction fines of £0.356m and £0.184m respectively could be levied. Therefore, the total financial risk across all three financial years has previously been reported as £1.203m.</p> <p>However, confirmation has recently been received from Welsh Government that the penalty of £0.663m for 2021/22 is now waived due to the efforts made by the authority to make changes to its services in order to reduce the amount of household residual waste collected and increase recycling</p> <p>It is important to note that the minister did highlight that his consideration of whether to levy the potential fines for 2022/23 and 2023/24 would be based on the progress made against the service improvements that have been identified within the agreed plan to impact on the Council's recycling rate.</p> <p>The remaining infraction fine risk for 2022/23 and 2023/24 is a minimum of £0.540m (excluding any potential impact for 2024/25).</p>

1.21	<p>Funding for Increase in Employers National Insurance Contributions</p> <p>The UK Autumn Budget Statement included an increase in employer national insurance contributions from April 2025 with an estimated additional cost to the Council (including schools) of £4.189m.</p> <p>It has been confirmed that HM Treasury will be providing funding for Local Authorities to meet the additional costs of the increase, and the budget proposals assume that these costs will be met in full.</p> <p>However, Welsh Government are unlikely to be made aware of the amount that they will receive from UK Government until the Summer. Therefore, there is a risk that the amount may not be enough to cover the full costs for Local Authorities.</p>
1.22	<p>Harpur Trust vs Brazel Case</p> <p>The potential financial impacts are still being determined in relation to Tribunal claims submitted as a result of the Employment Appeal Tribunal (EAT) decision in the case of Harpur Trust v Brazel.</p> <p>The Supreme Court upheld the EAT judgment in the Brazel case in July 2022 which impacts on the calculation of holiday pay entitlements for staff who work for part of the year (i.e. term time).</p> <p>There are currently 300+ live employment tribunal claims in respect of this. The next preliminary hearing is scheduled for 8 May 2025.</p> <p>It is hoped that we will get to a position where we could seek to settle on a without prejudice basis, but there is some further work to undertake first. There is a risk that the final cost may be considerably more than the £0.254m currently held in reserves for this purpose.</p>
1.23	<p>Specific Grants</p> <p>We are still awaiting confirmation of some specific grants.</p> <p>The most significant is the Sustainable Waste Management Grant which is still to be confirmed on an all-Wales basis for 2025/26 onwards.</p> <p>Details of the specific grants we are aware of currently are included in Appendix 7.</p>

1.24 **Schools Budget**

Ensuring our learners receive the highest standards of education in our schools has always, and continues to be, a priority for the Council. The Council has always sought to protect front line education services (schools' budget) as far as possible.

The school's budget is the largest budget within the Council and given the scale of the challenge in setting a balanced budget this year it has not possible to fully protect the schools budget from reductions. However, the Council recognises the increasing demands, challenges, and risks that schools are currently facing.

The table below provides the details of an overall increase of £6.950m (5.92%) in funds for schools in 2025/26.

Table 5: School Budget Adjustments 2025/26

Pressures / Cost Reductions	£m
NJC Pay Award April 2025	1.517
Teachers Pay Award Sept 2024 – Shortfall in base	0.399
Teachers Pay Award April to August 2025	1.695
Teachers Pay Award Sept 2025 Estimate – Sept 2025 to March 2026	2.006
Employer Teacher Pensions	3.147
National Insurance Increases (NJC Schools) 2025/26	0.884
National Insurance Increases (Teachers) 2025/26	1.327
Specialist School Demography	0.137
Specialist Primary – additional accommodation	0.198
Specialist Secondary – Mobile Classrooms Provision	0.083
Resource Provision at Hawarden High School	0.138
Contribution to School Deficits	0.750
Total Increase in Schools Budget	12.281
Less:	
Contribution to School Deficits	(0.750)
Energy (Reduction in cost)	(0.300)
Demography (Reducing Pupil Numbers)	(1.349)
2.5% budget reduction	(2.932)
Total Net Uplift to School Budgets 2025/26	6.950

The budget also includes additional borrowing costs of £0.178m to support the Sustainable Communities for Learning Capital Investment Programme.

1.25 **Social Care Budget**

The 2025/26 budget includes a 12% increase for Social Care to meet the estimates of current demand and the additional costs of commissioned care. The Social Care sector remains under significant pressure from increased demand and inflationary pressures with costs for commissioned care

increasing. The need to support care providers to continue to operate safely and maintain market stability remains a challenge.

Recruitment and retention of care workers within the social care sector continues to present difficulties. Whilst the Real Living Wage has been adopted for all registered carers in Flintshire the sector does, in terms of hourly pay rates pay below comparable sectors such as Supermarkets.

Homecare is one of the most cost-effective types of social care and service shortages will result in increased pressure and demand on other, more expensive, types of care.

The table below provides the details to the overall increase of 12% in funding to Social Care in 2025/26.

Table 6: Social Care Budget Adjustments 2025/26

Pressures / Cost Reductions	£m
Social Care Pay Awards	1.554
Social Care Commissioning Costs	4.607
Older People Services	1.500
Children's Services	1.000
Disability Services	1.000
Transition to Adulthood	0.404
Croes Atti Extension – Revenue Costs	1.321
Social Worker Pay Review	0.108
Partnership Working Cost Increases	0.330
Grants Maximisation (Adults) – one-off efficiency adjustment	0.100
Less 2025/26 Portfolio Cost Reductions (some part year)	(0.698)
Total Net Uplift to Social Care Budgets 2025/26	11.226

Reserves and Balances

1.26 **Earmarked Reserves**

The Council holds earmarked reserves which are set aside for specific purposes. Some are restricted in their use by, for example, the terms and conditions of grant where their source is government funding. An update on current projected levels of earmarked reserves shows that the amount is likely to reduce from £9.277m to £6.876m by the end of the 2025/26 financial year as these reserves are 'drawn down' (See Appendix 8).

However, the estimates exclude a projected net deficit position for schools of £1.661m.

The Council reviews its remaining earmarked reserves on an ongoing basis, and only those for which there is a strong business case will be retained with the remainder being released for use as part of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

1.27	<p>Un-Earmarked Reserves</p> <p>The Council holds a base level of reserves of £8.985m following the increase of £3.216m agreed as part of setting the budget for 2024/25. The base level represents the Council's last line of defence in the event of a significant unforeseen financial issue arising and remains relatively low.</p> <p>Levels of unearmarked reserves over and above this figure are referred to as the Contingency Reserve. This reserve is projected to be at £2.987m at year end based on the 2024/25 (Month 9) revenue budget monitoring report.</p> <p>The budget proposals within this report utilise £0.261m of unearmarked reserves to meet the cost of time-limited pressures.</p> <p>The total level of our projected unearmarked reserves are therefore £8.985m + £2.726m = £11.711m which equates to around 3% of the net 2025/26 budget.</p>
1.28	<p>Funding Floor Mechanism</p> <p>Due to our disappointing provisional settlement the Council (alongside other Welsh Councils and the Welsh Local Government Association) has made representations to Welsh Government for the inclusion of a significant Funding Floor in the Final Settlement which is expected to be announced on 20 February.</p> <p>The budget proposals in this report are based on our provisional figures and do not consider any subsequent increase that may arise at final settlement stage.</p> <p>Due to the need to safeguard the Council against a challenging future funding outlook it is recommended that any additional funding provided is included as a budgeted contribution to Unearmarked Reserves.</p> <p>This would have the dual benefit of replenishing our much-depleted reserves in the short term and also build in some resilience to our budget over the medium-term.</p> <p>A verbal update on the Final Settlement will be provided at the meeting.</p>
	<p>Formal Advice of the Corporate Finance Manager</p>
1.29	<p>Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 includes a specific duty on the Chief Finance Officer (for Flintshire this is the Corporate Finance Manager) to report to the Council when it is considering its budget and Council Tax setting on the robustness of the estimates and the adequacy of reserves. The Act requires the Council to have regard to this report in making its decisions on its budget.</p>
1.30	<p>For the estimates contained within the budget, all figures are supported by a clear and robust methodology. The cost reduction proposals have all been risk assessed and reported to Members as part of the overview and scrutiny process – inevitably the challenge to identify cost reductions is becoming increasingly difficult each year.</p>

1.31	<p>The Council's Reserves and Balances Protocol sets out how the Council will determine, manage, and review the level of its Council Fund Balance and earmarked reserves, taking into account legislation and professional guidance. An outcome of this protocol was to report to both Cabinet and Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee the level of earmarked reserves held on a quarterly basis. This has been continued throughout 2024/25 through the monthly budget monitoring report, with a detailed challenge of earmarked reserves undertaken throughout the summer which resulted in an amount of £1.026m being released from earmarked reserves back to the general contingency reserve. This process ensures that Members have a good understanding of all the reserves held by the Council.</p>
1.32	<p>I can confirm the reasonableness of the estimates contained in the proposed budget having regard to the Council's spending needs in 2025/26 and the financial context within which the budget is being set. It is clear that there continues to be some significant open risks within the 2025/26 budget proposals, particularly around social care and homelessness demand levels and out of county placements. The increase in our Aggregate External Finance (AEF) for 2025/26 is very disappointing and does not meet our escalating cost base. There are no indicative allocations for 2026/27 and beyond although this may change following the UK Spring Budget.</p> <p>Therefore, it is important that, as far as it is able, the Council protects its current level of reserves to safeguard against these risks. Effective and disciplined in-year financial management is essential to ensure that budgets are managed effectively - with prompt action taken to mitigate any impacts should variances occur.</p>
1.33	<p>Our Base Level of Reserves was increased in 2024/25 to a more reasonable level of £8.985m and this is enhanced by a projected contingency reserve of £2.726 leaving a total amount of unearmarked reserves of £11.711m.</p> <p>However, this still only equates to around 3% of our 2025/26 net budget so is still relatively low.</p> <p>Due to future funding uncertainties and the high level of risk included in the budget proposals I recommend that any additionality arising from the Final Settlement is considered for inclusion as a budgeted contribution to reserves.</p>
1.34	<p>The budget proposals require an appropriate use of £0.261m of unearmarked reserves to meet the costs of time limited cost pressures.</p>
	<p>Formal Advice of the Chief Executive</p>
1.35	<p>My professional advice complements that of the Corporate Finance Manager, as set out above.</p>
1.36	<p>The draft budget as presented follows the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) adopted by the Council. It has been developed according to the budget setting model which has been adopted by the Council, and our principles and values.</p>
1.37	<p>We have taken a prudent and balanced approach to our annual budget, as required by law and the principles of good governance, whilst protecting the</p>

	public service duties and obligations of the Council. Our budget-setting process is a complex and intricate one, with all decisions being carefully risk-assessed.
1.38	<p>We have advised Council throughout that this is an extremely challenging budget set in a period of continuing economic volatility, much of this is outside of our control. Portfolios have scrutinised their respective service areas closely and in the context of risk considered these and the wider impacts on the council and the communities it serves. The settlement by Welsh Government does not address the increased challenge and risk within portfolios and pressures in the system.</p> <p>There are no further cost reductions of scale beyond those reported in the budget-setting process. Our strategy for achieving a legal and balanced budget was heavily reliant on the sufficiency of Government funding for local government and public services; the provisional settlement at 3.27% is disappointing and will lead to an increased risk profile for the Council going forward.</p>
1.39	Looking ahead the outlook remains uncertain with wider global events impacting on inflation and the cost of living. Although the Bank of England forecasts inflation falling throughout 2025/26, economic growth will remain weak, and the impacts of the war in Ukraine, positioning by America internationally and the influence this will have on the UK economy is likely to lead to continuing market volatility.
1.40	As noted, a number of significant 'open risks' remain to be managed and we will again need to adopt ongoing tight fiscal control in-year throughout 2025/26 particularly in relation to those more volatile demand led services which are generally delivered to those who are in greatest need and most vulnerable within our communities. Our work on risk management, reported throughout financial year 2024/25 indicates that our low funded position is creating significant service challenges and our relatively low level of reserves does not facilitate significant latitude and flexibility to address in year service impacts and system 'shock'.
1.41	It is important that we continue to plan for the medium-term and work with Governments on a sustainable funding model for local government avoiding where possible an over-reliance on Council Tax as a form of local income. There appears to be a wider acknowledgement that the current funding model is broken and inequitable and work to rebalance the system is needed to create a sustainable financial model which is fit for the future. Ongoing dialogue with Welsh Government is necessary to ensure the funding landscape for Flintshire is substantially improved.
1.42	<p>Medium Term Financial Forecast</p> <p>The financial forecast for the medium-term, for the financial years – 2026/27 – 2027/28, have been reviewed in readiness to update the MTFs. A high-level estimate on the major cost pressures predicted over the next two years following this budget is included in Table 7. The forecast includes (1) potential annual pay awards of 4%; (2) commissioning cost pressures within Social Services, and (3) other known cost pressures.</p>

The figures below show the additional budget requirement.

Table 7: Medium Term Forecast 2026/27 – 2027/28

Cost Pressure	2026/27 (£m)	2027/28 (£m)
Pay Inflation	7.875	8.193
Non-Pay Inflation	1.673	0.417
Social Care Pressures	7.849	8.751
Other Pressures	2.138	1.735
Total	19.535	19.096

1.43 The 2025/26 Provisional Settlement excluded an indicative all-Wales revenue allocation for 2026/27. Forecasts from the Wales Institute of Fiscal Studies have advised that the Welsh Government budget is front-loaded in 2024/25 and 2025/26 so it is clear that the future funding outlook is likely to continue to be significantly challenging at best.

Therefore, it is essential that the Council prioritises work to address the major differential between its anticipated increases to operating costs compared with anticipated increases in income streams, primarily through its developing Strategic Transformation Programme.

Concluding Advice to Close the Budget

1.44 Council is able to set a legal and balanced budget for 2025/26 based on the calculations and advice set out in this report and can fulfil its collective legal responsibility.

The Final Settlement is expected to be received on 20 February and any additional funding would assist with ensuring the future financial sustainability of the Council.

A recommended use of any additional funding is included within the report and a verbal update on our final funding allocation will be provided at the meeting.

1.45 The timetable for the closing stages of the annual budget setting process is as follows: -

20 February 2025: Announcement of the Final Welsh Local Government Settlement.

24 February 2025 Council Meeting: Final budget-setting decisions including final agreement on the level of Council Tax and the passing of the Council Tax Resolution.

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	<p>Revenue: the revenue implications for the 2025/26 budget are set out in the report.</p> <p>Capital: there are no new implications for the approved capital programme for either the current financial year or for future financial years.</p> <p>Human Resources: Any implications for increased/reduced capacity within portfolios are as set out in the report. Any implications for schools would be a consideration for each individual school based on the funding received through the Schools Funding Formula.</p>

3.00	IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT	
3.01	Ways of Working (Sustainable Development) Principles Impact	
	Long-term	Negative – the absence of longer-term funding settlements from Welsh Government means that sustainable support for service delivery is challenging for the longer term. Sustainable funding from Welsh Government that provides additional funding for Indexation, Service demands, and new legislation will provide a positive and sustainable position for the Council in the longer term.
	Prevention	As above
	Integration	Neutral Impact
	Collaboration	Services continue to explore opportunities for collaboration with other services and external partners to support positive impacts.
	Involvement	Communication with Members, residents and other stakeholders throughout the budget process.
	Well-Being Goals Impact	
	Prosperous Wales	Longer term funding settlements from Welsh Government that provide additional funding for indexation, service demands, and new legislation will aid sustainability and support a strong economy that encourages business investment in the region. The opposite will be true if settlements are inadequate.

	Resilient Wales	Continuation of services to support communities and social cohesion will have a positive impact. The opposite will be true if settlements are inadequate.
	Healthier Wales	An appropriate level of funding will ensure that communities are supported and will have a positive impact. The opposite will be true if settlements are inadequate.
	More equal Wales	A positive impact with greater parity of funding from Welsh Government for all Welsh Local Authorities. The opposite will be true if settlements are inadequate.
	Cohesive Wales	Appropriate level of funding will support services working alongside partners. The opposite will be true if settlements are inadequate.
	Vibrant Wales	As Healthier and Cohesive Wales above
	Globally responsible Wales	Neutral impact.

4.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED/CARRIED OUT
4.01	<p>Overview and Scrutiny Committees – all cost pressures and cost reductions have been subject to relevant scrutiny.</p> <p>Chief Officer Team, the Finance Team, Cabinet Members, Group Leaders and Scrutiny Committees, School Forums. Workforce conferences have been held for employees.</p>
4.02	A public consultation was held between 15 October and 24 November 2024. 3480 people took part. Not everyone who started went on to complete all questions. The findings of responses received up to abandonment are included in the summary report which can be found at Appendix 9.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	<p>Appendix 1: Prior Years Growth / Item Dropping Out</p> <p>Appendix 2: Transfer into the Settlement</p> <p>Appendix 3: Inflation</p> <p>Appendix 4: Pressures & Investments</p> <p>Appendix 5: Cost Reductions - Portfolios</p> <p>Appendix 6: Cost Reductions - Corporate Financing</p> <p>Appendix 7: Specific Grants 2025/26</p> <p>Appendix 8: Balances & Reserves</p> <p>Appendix 9: Summary of public consultation results</p>

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	The series of preparatory budget reports for the 2025/26 financial year. The series of presentations made to Cabinet and Council for the 2025/26 financial year.

7.00	CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS
7.01	Contact Officer: Gary Ferguson, Corporate Finance Manager Telephone: 01352 702271 E-mail: gary.ferguson@flintshire.gov.uk

8.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
8.01	<p>Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS): a written strategy which gives a forecast of the financial resources which will be available to a Council for a given period and sets out plans for how best to deploy those resources to meet its priorities, duties and obligations.</p> <p>Revenue: a term used to describe the day-to-day costs of running Council services and income deriving from those services. It also includes charges for the repayment of debt, including interest, and may include direct financing of capital expenditure.</p> <p>Budget: a statement expressing the Council's policies and service levels in financial terms for a particular financial year. In its broadest sense it includes both the revenue budget and capital programme and any authorised amendments to them.</p> <p>Revenue Support Grant: the annual amount of money the Council receives from Welsh Government to fund what it does alongside the Council Tax and other income the Council raises locally. Councils can decide how to use this grant across services although their freedom to allocate according to local choice can be limited by guidelines set by Government.</p> <p>Specific Grants: An award of funding from a grant provider (e.g. Welsh Government) which must be used for a pre-defined purpose.</p> <p>Welsh Local Government Association: the representative body for unitary councils, fire and rescue authorities and national parks authorities in Wales.</p> <p>Financial Year: the period of 12 months commencing on 1 April.</p> <p>Local Government Funding Formula: The system through which the annual funding needs of each council is assessed at a national level and</p>

under which each council's Aggregate External Finance (AEF) is set. The revenue support grant is distributed according to that formula.

Aggregate External Finance (AEF): The support for local revenue spending from the Welsh Government and is made up of formula grant including the revenue support grant and the distributable part of non-domestic rates.

Provisional Local Government Settlement: The Provisional Settlement is the draft budget for local government published by the Welsh Government for consultation. The Final Local Government Settlement is set following the consultation.

Funding Floor: a guaranteed level of funding for councils who come under the all-Wales average change in the annual Settlement. A floor has been a feature of the Settlement for many years.

BUDGET 2025/26 - COUNCIL FUND REVENUE
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Prior Years Growth / Items Dropping Out	£m
<u>Central & Corporate</u>	
Minimum Revenue Provision	0.300
Single Person Discount	0.250
21C Schools Band B Borrowing Costs	0.809
Use of Reserves 2024/25	(0.172)
TOTAL - PRIOR YEARS	1.187

BUDGET 2025/26 - COUNCIL FUND REVENUE	
Transfers Into the Settlement	£m
<u>Housing & Communities - Homelessness Service</u>	
No One Left Out Approach	0.590
Discretionary Homelessness Prevention	0.197
Strategic Posts	0.052
TOTAL - TRANSFERS IN	0.839

BUDGET 2025/26 - COUNCIL FUND REVENUE
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Inflation	£m
<u>NJC Pay</u>	
NJC Pay Award Estimate (Non Schools)	3.952
NI Increases (Non Schools)	1.978
NI Increases (NJC Schools) 2025/26	0.884
NJC Pay Award Estimate April 2025 Estimate (Schools)	1.517
<u>Teachers Pay / Pensions</u>	
Employer Teachers Pensions	3.147
NI Increases - (Teachers) 2025/26	1.327
Teachers Pay Award - Sept 2024 - Shortfall in Base	0.399
Teachers Pay Award - April to August 2025	1.695
Teachers Pay Award - Sept 2025 to March 26	2.006
<u>Service Contract Inflation</u>	
ADM's / CAT's Service Contract Inflation	0.202
ADM's / CAT's - Other Pressures	(0.025)
<u>Other Inflation</u>	
Corporate Joint Committee/Growth Deal Inflation	0.015
Non Standard Inflation - Fuel	0.250
Non Standard Inflation - Energy	0.150
TOTAL - INFLATION	17.496

BUDGET 2025/26 - COUNCIL FUND REVENUE
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Pressures & Investments	£m
<u>Central & Corporate</u>	
North Wales Fire and Rescue - Levy increase	0.614
Capital Borrowing Costs	0.083
Sustainable Communities for Learning Rolling Capital Investment Programme	0.178
Coroners Service	0.021
Joint Archive Borrowing Costs	0.011
Children's Residential Care - Borrowing costs	0.052
Croes Atti Extension Borrowing Costs	0.039
SubTotal - Central & Corporate	0.998
<u>Education & Youth</u>	
Management of Specialist Provision - Estyn	0.193
EOTAS / Specialist Provision - Estyn Inspection of Plas Derwen	0.382
EOTAS / Specialist Provision - Medical Need	0.274
Youth Justice Service - Grant Funding Reduction	0.047
Sub Total - Education & Youth	0.897
<u>Schools</u>	
Specialist School Demography	0.137
Specialist Primary - additional accommodation	0.198
Resource Provision at Hawarden High School	0.138
Specialist Secondary – Mobile Classroom Provision	0.083
Sub Total - Schools	0.556
<u>Governance</u>	
Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales (IRPW)	0.112
Schools Information Management System	0.011
VMWare Licensing	0.055
Midland iTrent Maintenance	0.087
Microsoft E5 Security Licences	0.038
NDR Transitional Relief	0.046
NDR Increase in Multiplier	0.097
Network Connected Device Compliance & Assurance Solution	(0.015)
Sub Total - Governance	0.431
<u>Housing & Communities</u>	
Homelessness Demand	4.500
Eligible Free School Meals - Holiday Provision	0.462
Council Tax Reduction Scheme	2.008
Sub Total - Housing & Communities	6.970
<u>Out of County Placements</u>	
Out of County Placements	2.500
SubTotal - Out of County Placements	2.500
<u>People & Resources</u>	
Payroll Officers	0.106
Disclosure and Barring Service Checks	0.091

Pressures & Investments	£m
Sub Total - People & Resources	0.197
<u>Social Services</u>	
Social Care Commissioning	4.607
Older People Services	1.500
Children's Services	1.000
Disability Services	1.000
Croes Atti Extension - Revenue Costs	1.321
Partnership Working Cost Increases	0.330
Grants Maximisation Adults - one-off efficiency adjustment	0.100
Social Worker Pay Review	0.108
Transition to Adulthood	0.404
Sub Total - Social Services	10.370
<u>Assets</u>	
Cambrian Aquatics	0.100
Sub Total - Assets	0.100
<u>Streetscene & Transportation</u>	
Public Health Burials	0.020
School Transport	0.350
Residual Waste Indexation	0.080
Highways Maintenance	0.400
Drainage - Summer Storm Events	0.150
Reduced Income via NMWTRA	0.100
Depot Maintenance	0.160
Winter Maintenance Service	0.200
Additional Infrastructure (non-commuted sums)	0.010
Mayrise Replacement Licences and IT Equipment	0.030
Sub Total - Streetscene & Transportation	1.500
TOTAL - PRESSURES & INVESTMENTS	24.519

BUDGET 2025/26 - COUNCIL FUND REVENUE
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Cost Reductions - Portfolio	£m
<u>Assets</u>	
Vacating County Hall	(0.371)
2 x Vacant Posts - Design Services	(0.116)
Reduction to Gwella Subsidy	(0.188)
Total - Assets	(0.675)
<u>Chief Executives</u>	
Regional Emergency Planning Team	(0.005)
TTP Management Fee	(0.020)
Sub Total - Chief Executives	(0.025)
<u>Education & Youth</u>	
EOTAS PDG - Plas Derwen	(0.037)
Inclusion Special Education - Vacant Post	(0.030)
Inclusion Special Education - Assistant EP	(0.030)
Youth Services - Relinquish Building at Sealand	(0.007)
Youth Services - Grant Maximisation	(0.037)
Youth Services - Forest School	(0.024)
Youth Services - Relinquish Building at Penyffordd	(0.008)
Primary & Secondary Learning - 0.2 FTE Vacancy Saving (Adult Community)	(0.019)
Primary & Secondary Learning - 0.2 FTE Vacancy Saving (Early Entitlement)	(0.014)
Business Support - 0.6 FTE FTP (Temporary Post Ceased)	(0.019)
Archives - Reduce 1 x team member by 1 day	(0.010)
School Place Planning Team - Mobile Classrooms	(0.025)
Sub Total - Education & Youth	(0.260)
<u>Governance</u>	
Central Despatch - Vacant Post	(0.032)
Democratic Support Officer Vacancy	(0.013)
Council Tax Single Person Discount	(0.100)
Revenues - Write off review	(0.005)
NDR Discretionary Rate Relief	(0.005)
Revenues - New Civica Payment Portal	(0.015)
Legal - Increase in Charges	(0.129)
Flintshire Connects - Service Review	(0.077)
Consultation & Engagement Software	(0.015)
Confidential Waste - Reduced Costs	(0.008)
InPhase Software	(0.015)
iTrent MFA & ePayslips	(0.015)
Cease Nitro-Sign e-signature	(0.003)
Cease Engage Process Modelling Software	(0.010)

Cost Reductions - Portfolio	£m
Migrate all Blackberry Users to intune	(0.060)
Sub Total - Governance	(0.502)
<u>Housing & Communities</u>	
DFG Capitalisation	(0.005)
Support Recharges from NEW Homes	(0.030)
Welfare Rights - Reduction in Funding	(0.042)
Housing Solutions - Increase Number of HRA 3 Bed Properties	(0.366)
Carelink - Increase in Income Generation	(0.127)
Sub Total - Housing & Communities	(0.570)
<u>People & Resources</u>	
Finance Support Officer Vacancy	(0.027)
Sub Total - People & Resources	(0.027)
<u>Planning, Environment & Economy</u>	
Business & Community - Removal of Vacant Admin Assistant Post	(0.032)
Business & Community - Trading Standards Removal of Vacant Post	(0.051)
Business & Community - Removal of Neighbourhood Warden Vacant Post	(0.013)
Development Management - Review of Fees for pre-app enquiries	(0.020)
Development Control	(0.073)
Business & Performance - Business Support Assistant Vacancies	(0.055)
Minerals & Waste - Monitoring Visits	(0.032)
Minerals & Waste - Service Contract Fees Uplift	(0.005)
Regeneration - Funding for Investment Zone Staff Costs	(0.080)
Strategy - Removal of IT Post	(0.034)
Surface Water Management - SAB pre-application charges	(0.015)
Access & Natural Environment - Reduce investment in Parks	(0.035)
Portfolio Service Management Review	(0.140)
Sub Total - Planning, Environment & Economy	(0.584)
<u>Schools</u>	
Energy (Reduction in cost)	(0.300)
Sub Total - Schools	(0.300)
<u>Social Services</u>	
Remodel In-house day care provision for older people	(0.098)
Right sizing Review - Learning Disabilities	(0.200)
Review Mental Health Packages of Support	(0.100)
Reduced reliance on Residential Care for Older People	(0.300)
Savings from Digital Strategy (Paris/Carecubed)	(0.058)

Cost Reductions - Portfolio	£m
Sub Total - Social Services	(0.756)
<u>Assets</u>	
Reduction of Indexation Pressures	(0.400)
Sub Total - Assets	(0.400)
<u>Streetscene & Transportation</u>	
Waste Collection Frequency	(0.600)
Increase in Car Parking Charges	(0.159)
Re-procurement of Waste Disposal Contracts	(0.025)
Public Toilets	(0.059)
Maximise income/cost recover from in-house construction service	(0.050)
Review/change in shift pattern - Highways and Drainage operations	(0.038)
DEFRA Waste Funding	(2.000)
Sub Total - Streetscene & Transportation	(2.930)
TOTAL	(7.029)

BUDGET 2025/26 - COUNCIL FUND REVENUE
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Cost Reductions - Corporate Financing	£m
<u>Corporate</u>	
Reduction in Travel Budgets	(0.160)
Employers NI Funding	(4.189)
Pay Award	(0.754)
Fastrack Project Income	(0.042)
Fees and Charges Review 2025	(0.150)
Sub Total - Corporate	(5.295)
<u>Schools</u>	
Demography (Reducing Pupil Numbers)	(1.349)
2.5% budget reduction	(2.932)
Total - Schools	(4.281)
TOTAL - COST REDUCTIONS	(9.576)

BUDGET 2025/26 - COUNCIL FUND REVENUE

Specific Grants 2025/26	Budget 2024/25 £	Budget 2025/26 £	Variance £	Conf (C) or Est (E)
Education & Youth - Non Delegated				
Promoting Positive Engagement (CCG)	193,106	193,385	279	E
YOT / Youth Justice Board (inc. JAC)	223,448	287,503	64,055	E
Welsh Network of Healthy School Schemes	101,380	91,102	(10,278)	E
Youth Support Grant (Youth Service Revenue Grant)	469,114	535,933	66,819	E
Free School Milk	245,891	245,891	0	E
Playworks Holiday Project (CCG)	0	50,000	50,000	E
Families First (CCG)	1,533,520	1,607,664	74,144	E
Pupil Development Grant	3,751,070	4,479,922	728,852	E
Adult Community Learning	273,111	273,111	0	C
Feminine Hygiene	143,786	132,821	(10,965)	E
Universal Primary Free School Meals	2,698,323	4,679,504	1,981,181	E
LAEG - School Standards	7,682,840	8,065,209	382,369	C
LAEG - Equity	940,857	1,277,360	336,503	C
LAEG - Reform	2,849,182	3,280,398	431,216	C
LAEG - Cymraeg	398,258	361,224	(37,034)	C
LAEG - Schools Essential Grant	660,550	468,595	(191,955)	E
Post 16 - Learner Recovery & Progression	128,971	128,971	0	E
Post 16 - Transition Funding	36,590	36,000	(590)	E
Post 16 Specialist Placements	0	50,000	50,000	E
Neurodivergence Improvement Programme	0	70,945	70,945	E
SPF - LEAP	0	518,510	518,510	E
SPF - Multiply	0	443,926	443,926	E
Support Schools - Enrichment Opportunities	0	14,549	14,549	E
NPQH Celebration Events	0	795	795	E
Sub Total - Education & Youth (Non Delegated)	22,329,997	27,293,318	4,963,321	
Education & Youth - Delegated				
6th Form Funding (Formally DCELLs)	4,819,841	5,021,001	201,160	E
Sub Total - Education & Youth (Delegated)	4,819,841	5,021,001	201,160	
Housing & Communities				
Housing Support Grant (formerly Supporting People)	7,828,610	9,592,674	1,764,064	E
No One Left Out Approach - Homelessness *	381,898	0	(381,898)	C
Discretionary Homelessness Prevention *	121,358	0	(121,358)	C
Strategic Co-ordinator Post - Homelessness *	60,000	0	(60,000)	C
Sub Total - Housing & Communities	8,391,866	9,592,674	1,200,808	
Planning , Environment & Economy				
Substance Misuse	517,933	536,037	18,104	E
Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator Funding (VAWDASV)	177,000	186,766	9,766	E
Communities for Work Plus	671,410	554,471	(116,939)	E
Sub Total - Planning, Environment & Economy	1,366,343	1,277,274	(89,069)	
Social Services				
Social Care Workforce Development Programme	333,488	333,488	0	E
Flying Start (CCG)	4,662,647	5,303,636	640,989	E
St. David's Day (CCG)	40,125	40,183	58	E
Childcare & Play (CCG)	142,019	142,158	139	E
Out of Court Parenting Support (CCG)	34,457	34,506	49	E
Early Intervention Parenting Support & Interparental Conflict Grant (CCG)	102,725	50,000	(52,725)	E
Childcare Admin Offer	352,045	352,045	0	E
Funding to Support proposals relating to eliminating profit from the care of looked after Children	561,000	561,000	0	E
Support for the radical reform of the care of looked after children	85,878	85,878	0	E
Sub Total - Social Services	6,314,384	6,902,894	588,510	
Streetscene & Transportation				
Concessionary Travel	1,900,000	1,900,000	0	C
Bus Service Support Grant - BSSG	557,000	557,000	0	C
Bus Service Support Grant - BNG	0	646,901	646,901	C
Sub Total - Streetscene & Transportation	2,457,000	3,103,901	646,901	
TOTAL - GRANTS	45,679,431	53,191,062	7,511,631	

*2024/25 Budget including estimated amounts not final

BUDGET 2025/26 - COUNCIL FUND REVENUE
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Summary of Council Fund Earmarked Reserves	Est Bal 01/04/25 £m	Est Bal 31/03/26 £m
<u>Service Balances</u>		
Corporate Services	0.745	0.267
Housing & Communities	0.083	0.000
Planning, Environment & Economy	0.448	0.000
Social Services	0.102	0.058
Streetscene & Transportation	0.070	0.000
Total - Service Balances	1.447	0.325
<u>Corporate Balances</u>		
Workforce Reserve	0.455	0.455
General Reserve - Investment in Organisational Change	0.571	0.300
Total Corporate Balances	1.026	0.755
<u>Specific Reserves</u>		
County Elections	0.300	0.300
Warm Homes Admin Fee	0.247	0.167
Design Fees	0.100	0.000
Insurance Funds	2.575	2.800
School HWB ICT Replacement	1.053	1.316
Plas Derwen Wave 4	0.007	0.009
IT COVID Enquiry	0.041	0.000
Schools Intervention Reserve	0.196	0.176
Organisational Change/ADM	0.360	0.000
Solar Farms	0.306	0.000
Employment Claims	0.092	0.092
Community Benefit Fund NWRWTP	0.686	0.936
Grants & Contributions	0.841	0.000
Schools	(1.661)	(1.661)
Total Specific Reserves	5.143	4.135
Total Earmarked Reserves	7.616	5.215

APPENDIX 9

Flintshire County Council

Have your say!
2025/26 Budget Consultation

December 2024

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The purpose of the consultation:

To outline the challenges facing the Council in balancing its budget for 2025/26.

To seek the views about what's important to residents along with their thoughts on strategies to bridge the budget gap, not only by Flintshire County Council but by other Council's across the UK.

To support members in their consideration of options to help balance the books.

When people could have their say:

The consultation opened on 15th October 2024 and closed on 24 November 2024.

How people could have their say:

People could have their say by completing a short on-line questionnaire.

Residents who were unable to complete the survey online were signposted to any of the five Flintshire Connects Centres where support was available.

The questions:

Seven consultation questions were asked and supplemented by the statutory equality monitoring questions. The full set of questions can be found at Appendix A.

Number of people taking part:

3480 people took part. Not everyone who started went on to complete all questions. All responses received up to abandonment are included in this summary report.

What people told us:

1. Understanding the challenges

92% of people taking part confirmed they had read the information about the budget challenges on the website.

2. The importance of services

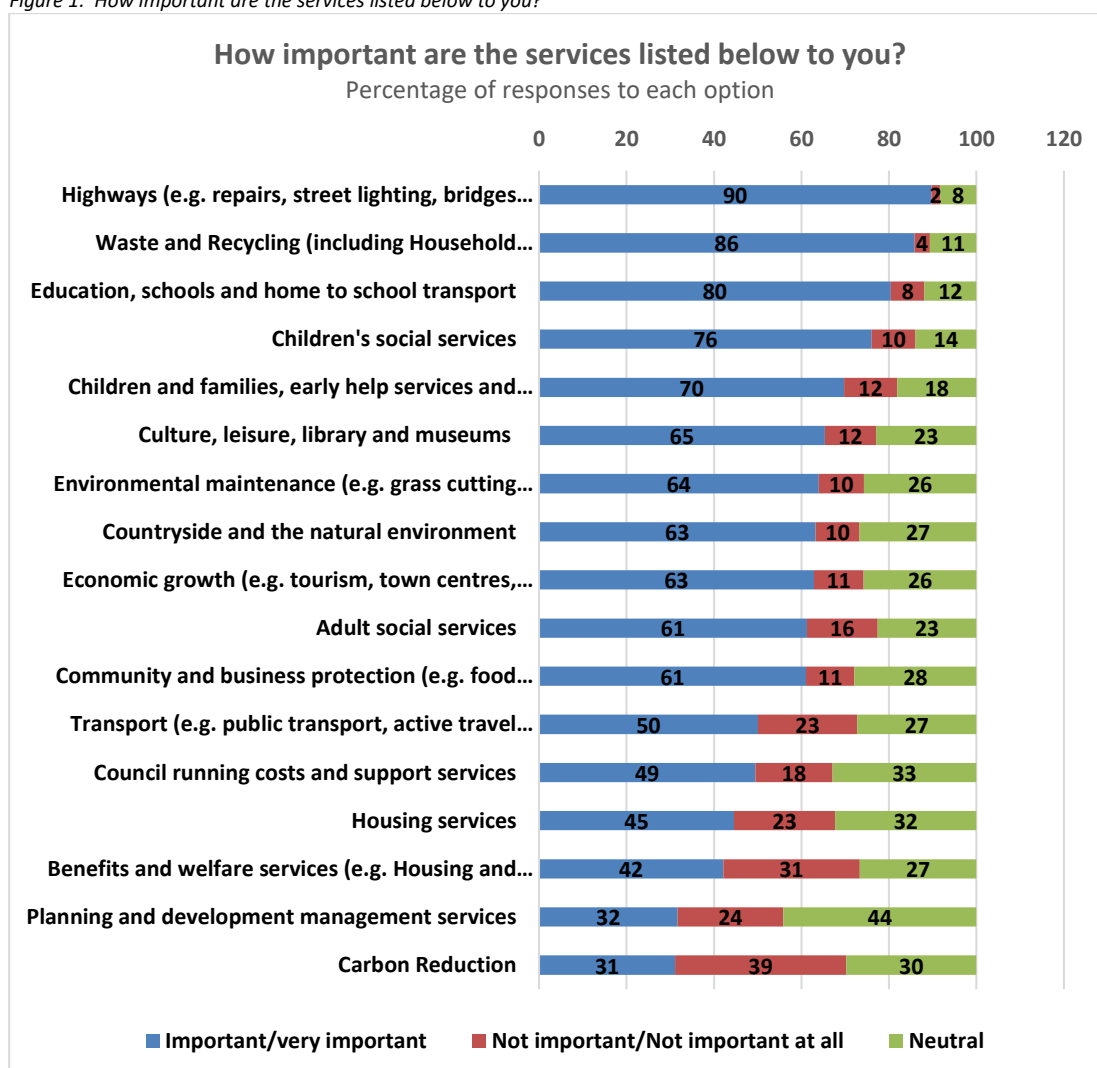
When asked to identify what council services were important to them Highways (90%), Waste and Recycling (86%) and Education (80%) returned the largest majority.

Carbon Reduction was most evenly split 31% very important/important, 39% not important/not important at all and 30% having no strong views one way or the other.

When considering responses to this question it is important to note that people were not asked to rank what was most important to them, merely to identify whether a service was important to them or not.

The full table of responses can be found at Figure 1.

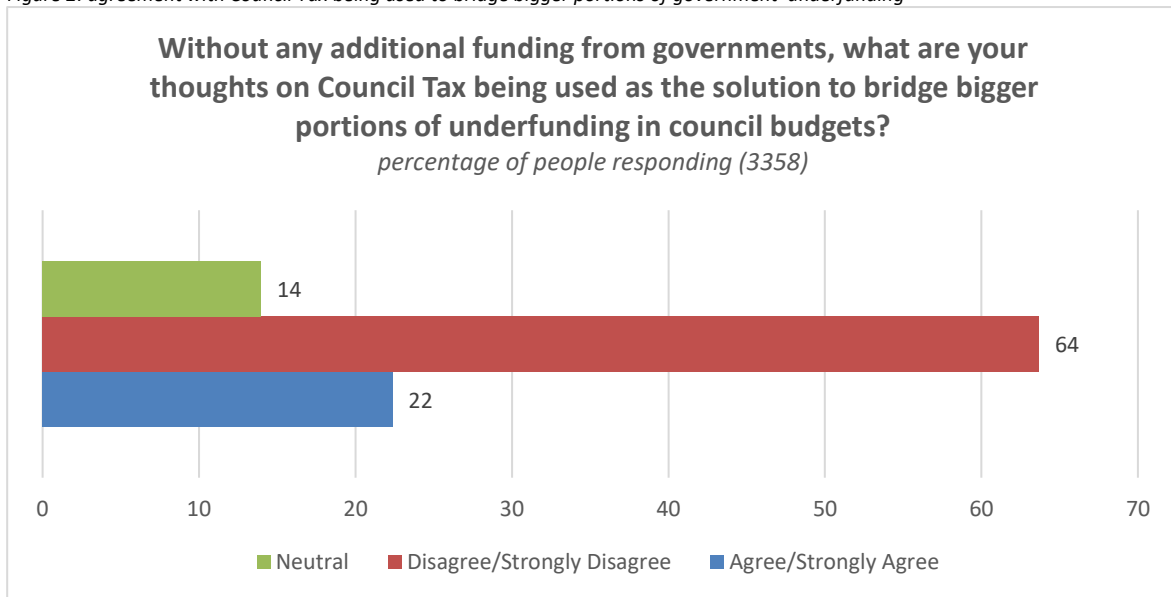
Figure 1: How important are the services listed below to you?



3. Council Tax

The majority of people responding to this question disagreed with Council Tax being used to close the rising gaps in underfunded council budgets.

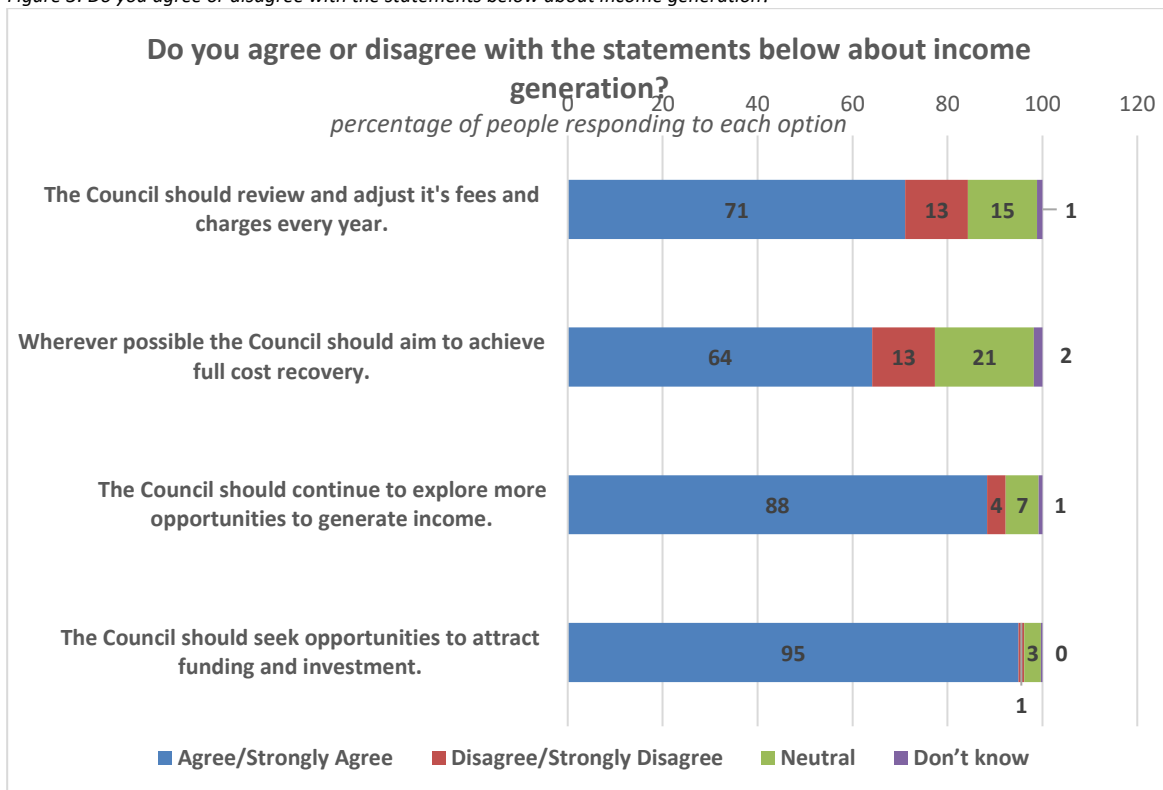
Figure 2: agreement with Council Tax being used to bridge bigger portions of government underfunding



4. Income Generation

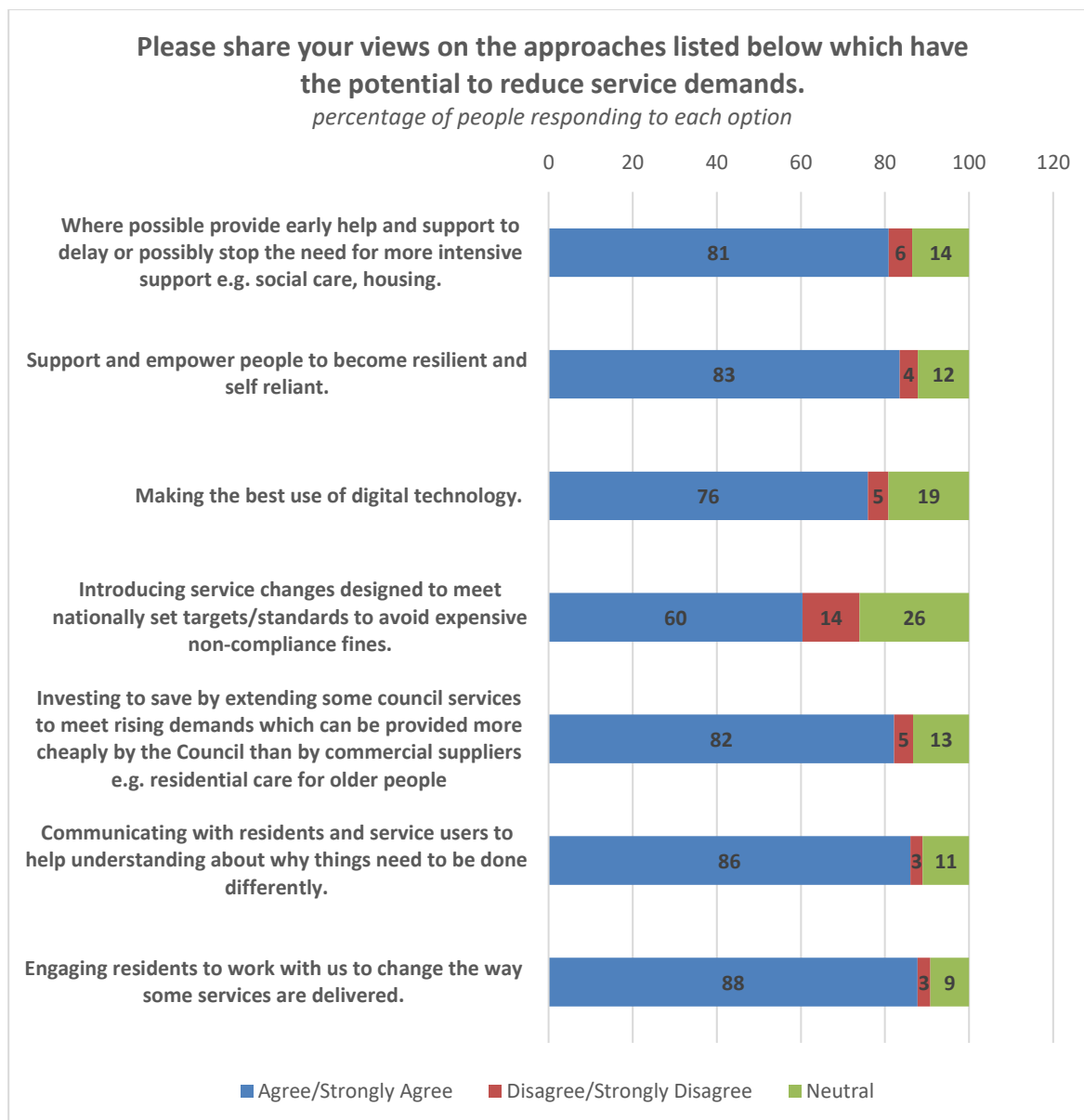
There was strong support for the council generating more income.

Figure 3: Do you agree or disagree with the statements below about income generation?



5. Managing demand pressures

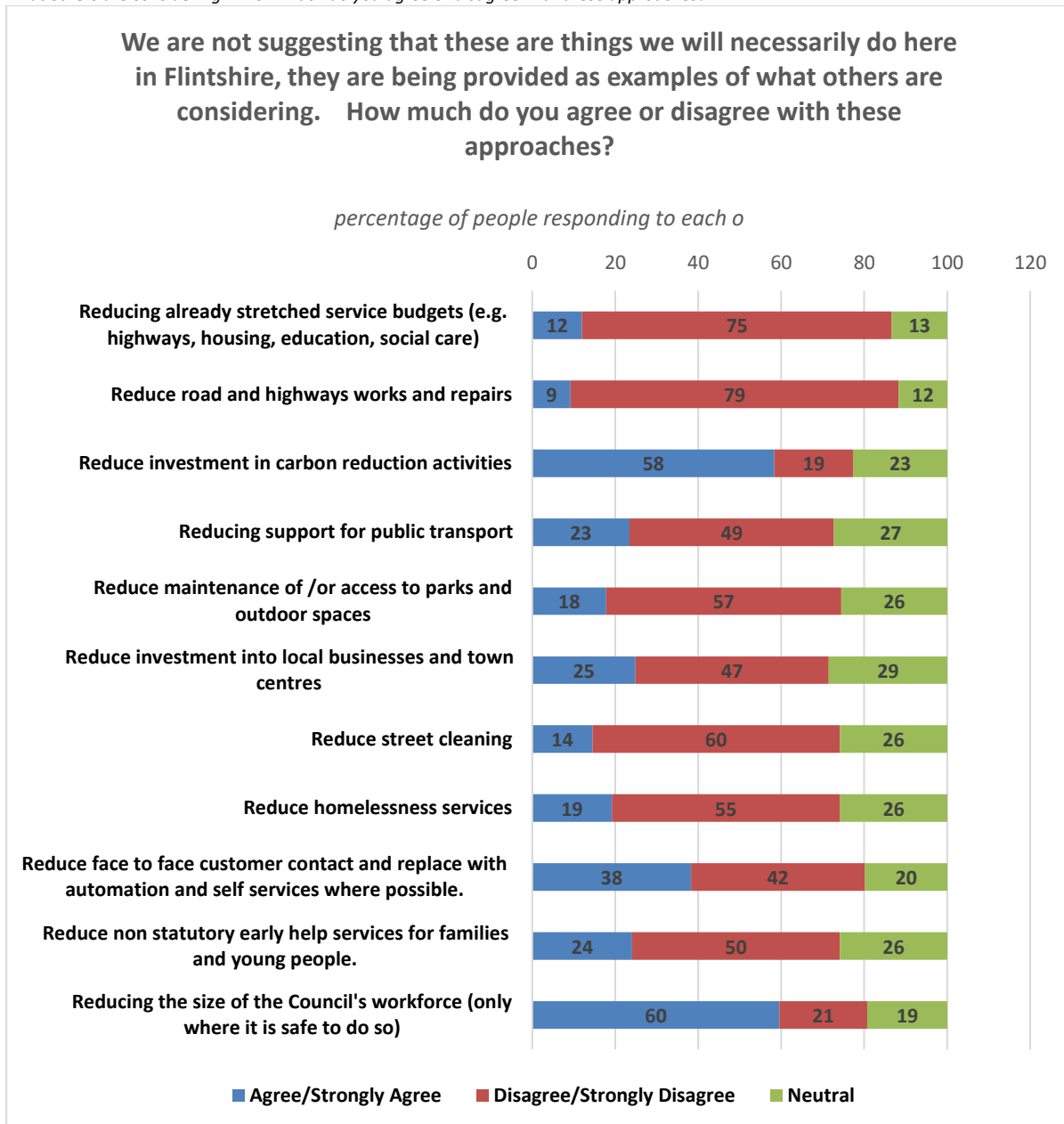
There was support in the Council adopting measures that had the potential to reduce demand on services.



6. Prioritising our spending

People were invited to express their level of agreement/disagreement with options being considered by other council to cut spending.

Figure 4: We are not suggesting that these are things we will necessarily do here in Flintshire, they are being provided as examples of what others are considering. How much do you agree or disagree with these approaches?



7. Feedback

Residents were also given the opportunity to provide additional comments and feedback. A total of 1,363 people shared views and opinions which have been summarised below:

7.1 National Funding

Of those who provided feedback, people wanted to see fairer Welsh Government (WG) funding for Flintshire, with an expectation for the Council to actively seek, and press for, a fairer funding settlement. Longer term WG funding settlements would also be beneficial.

7.2 Council Tax

There was strong feeling from the majority of responses that Council Tax increases should not be applied to bridge the budget gap. It was generally felt that residents are feeling the strain of the increasing costs of living and as a result of year-on-year underfunding in council budgets they are being asked to pay more for less.

Some felt that pushing residents into further financial hardship, as a result of Council Tax increases, would be counterproductive potentially resulting in less Council Tax being collected and increasing demand for council services.

A smaller number of people providing feedback felt that Council Tax should be increased to bridge the gap.

7.3 Council Structure / workforce / elected members

Generating the most feedback, suggestions covered:

- Streamlining management structures/layers
- Reducing pay and benefits
- Performance management
- Hybrid working
- Outsourcing services
- Retaining/bringing services back in-house
- Reducing/ceasing the use of consultants/agency workers

There was a strong perception that the Council employs too many managers who are paid too much and that generally there are too many council workers who are overpaid, receive too many perks and benefits and inflated pensions.

There was a view that performance management needs improvement and that auditing and systems thinking should be applied to streamline processes and procedures to cut out waste.

There were conflicting views around hybrid working with some people wanting to see employees returning to an office environment to improve performance, whilst others were suggesting hybrid working as a solution to cutting expensive building, heating and electricity costs.

Some felt that outsourcing work to the private/commercial sector should be stopped - along with the employment of agency workers and consultants - all of which were considered expensive options which the councils existing workforce could do more cheaply and efficiently in-house. Others had an alternative view that outsourcing could be a more cost-effective and efficient option.

Similar to views expressed around the council's structure and workforce, the role of elected members also generated significant feedback with a strong feeling that there were too many elected members who were paid too much for their services and with a need to improve performance management.

7.4 Working with others

A number of suggestions were put forward to improve efficiency and effectiveness.

- Developing and encouraging a variety of volunteering opportunities – empowering local people to look after local communities/services.
- Capitalising on the wealth of knowledge and expertise available in Flintshire by working with local businesses and communities to generate innovative solutions.
- Working with local colleges to provide practical hands on work opportunities which both benefits the curriculum and the council.
- More cohesive joined up working between council services.
- Merging with other councils.

7.5 Council assets

Comments around the use of council assets included:

- Selling off surplus land/buildings at full market value relevant to its future use.
- Generating income through lease/hire of public facilities
- Maximising the use/benefits of buildings for multi-use by different services/agencies to create community hubs.

7.6 Strategic Planning

There was a feeling that data driven decision making along with long-term sustainability needed to be key considerations on where funding should be invested.

There was also a general feeling that short term planning was not particularly efficient or effective.

There were concerns over the decision to bring libraries and leisure services back in-house at a time when finances are so dire, and how that decision may impact services in the future.

7.7 Procurement and contracts

Views around procurement and contracts included:

Improvement of contract procurement processes to ensure competitive tendering and best value for money – cheapest isn't always best, whilst there is also the risk of paying too much.

Strengthen procedures to ensure the delivery of high-quality work, to specification and on time - issuing and collecting penalties where work falls short.

Stop awarding contracts to external suppliers/contractors where it can be done more efficiently and effectively in-house.

Investigate and maximising what added value can be achieved through procurement along with opportunities for the inclusion of social value clauses for example housing developers contributing to the costs of increased service demand e.g. waste collection, road maintenance, parks and amenity spaces – and enforce them.

7.8 Income generation

Ideas to generate income put forward included:

- Investing in the creation of commercial enterprises in fields such as waste management, renewable energy and affordable housing with profits reinvested into communities.
- Maximise income generation for all fee paying services to help support those services that can't charge.
- Considering all the services that could be offered by the Council at an affordable cost – applying sliding scales/dynamic pricing - and widely publicise them.
- The use of crowdsourcing and/or obtaining non-profit charitable status to enable donations for community projects/initiatives.
- Stronger enforcement and collection of non-compliance fines where applicable.
- Actively chase and recover monies owed to the Council.

7.9 Economic growth

Suggestions for economic growth:

- Invest to optimise attractions that bring people into the county and have potential to generate income for the council e.g. tourism, markets, events, along with protecting those which are already established.
- Invest in the county to make it a place that people want to live, work, visit and stay.
- Speed up processes that will bring investment into the county e.g. planning, licencing, etc.

7.10 Digital transformation

Exploring and introducing new technology and ways of working to transform services, reduce costs and improve service delivery was considered beneficial by some, however there were others who cautioned against this being used as a blanket approach

particularly for those who are not digitally enabled or whose needs prevent digital accessibility.

7.11 Early Intervention

Of those commenting, there was a view that *'prevention is better than cure'*.

Investing earlier to slow down or stop the need for more intensive support/work has the potential to reduce the need for more expensive solutions further down the line. These views related to a range of different services, for example:

- Adult and children's social care services
- Education
- Community resilience and responsibility
- Highways repairs/maintenance
- Waste and recycling
- Parks and open spaces
- Leisure and library services

7.12 Efficiencies

Some people felt the benefits of delivering services in-house should be considered/ reviewed before awarding the work to external suppliers/contractors, whilst others felt that outsourcing work to external providers would be more cost effective.

The reduction of waste across all council services was felt to be a priority ensuring value for money and cutting out red tape and duplication of effort.

In addition to reducing waste, economy of scale/bulk buying should also be a key consideration when purchasing.

The empowerment of employees to be constructive and creative in identifying and delivering savings and efficiencies.

Review service delivery to ensure it meets the needs of residents/customers taking account of new technologies and online opportunities.

Suggestions about how to keep general housekeeping costs down were also provided such as switching lights and heating off/down and using electronic communications as much as possible to cut down on postage costs.

Cutting back on Welsh translations was suggested as a means of reducing spending. Some responses identified as Welsh speakers and/or were supportive of the drive to increase the use of Welsh, they felt that in times of such financial hardship this was perhaps not an essential service. Ways of achieving this ranged from stopping translations altogether to collecting and storing the language preferences of our residents and communicating with them accordingly.

7.13 Service prioritisation

Of those who commented some were of the view that there should be a return to focusing on statutory/basic services only, and spending on non essential services should be reduced or temporarily suspended to bridge the budget gap.

Some were of the opinion that front line services such as Education, Housing, Social Services and Streetscene should be protected from cuts.

There was a view that national policy to improve recycling rates should be temporarily suspended. Potentially fining councils for non-compliance was felt to be counterproductive.

It was also felt that spending on carbon reduction measures should be reduced or stopped.

7.14 Education

Comments received specifically in relation to education included:

- The protection of school budgets.
- More investment needed in ALN/SEN provision.
- More investment in mental health services.
- Reducing/stopping free school transport.

7.15 Housing/residential development

Comments received specifically in relation to housing/residential development included:

- Improving rent collection for council houses, along with introducing contract holder (tenant) contributions for repairs/improvements.
- Getting empty council houses back to a condition for reletting more quickly, both to help with homelessness and to increase income.
- Look to things other councils have done to introduce innovative solutions for homelessness.
- Stop picking up costs for services which should be funded directly by housing developers.
- Whilst some people suggested building more houses for the homeless and to generate more council tax income, others were of the view that stopping housing building would stem the growth of Flintshire's population and help reduce demand on services.

7.16 Social Services

Comments received specifically in relation to Social Services included:

- Lobbying for removal of the social care cap and charging more realistic rates for care provided.
- Pushing for joint funding where there is equal responsibility between the Council and NHS to deliver services, e.g. continuing care/community health services.

- Collecting all money owed to the Council for the care services it provides, including that owed by the NHS.
- More investment in social workers to get people out of hospital and into care.

7.17 Streetscene

Comments received specifically in relation to Streetscene included:

- The protection of waste and recycling budgets/service frequencies.
- Focusing on essential/statutory services only.
- Investing in road repairs/maintenance to halt further deterioration and potentially larger costs in the future.
- Reviewing opening times for Household Recycling Centres and applying simplified processes for the recycling of materials – to encourage people to recycle more and reduce fly tipping.
- Household black bin collections – some people were against moving to a three weekly collection services whilst others were in favour of moving to a four week collection service.
- Increase charges for non-statutory services e.g garden waste.
- Switching off/reducing street lighting through the night.
- Reduce grass cutting frequencies.
- Reviewing public transport services to ensure most efficient use resources.

7.18 Communication, consultation and engagement

Some welcomed the opportunity to have their say on the budget challenges, however, there was a general feeling that more could be done to improve communication, consultation and engagement with residents on a wide range of topics.

Internal communications between services was also highlighted as an area for improvement.

7.19 National Policy Decisions

A number of comments were received which related to national policy decisions and included:

- Spending on the introduction of 20mph speed limits across Wales.
- Benefits and universal credit.
- Free school meals.
- Free bus passes.
- NHS free prescriptions.
- Immigration.

The consultation process and which groups of people took part

Who could get involved:

Available online the consultation was open to everyone.

Elected members, town and community councils, the Council's workforce, professional, community and equality networks, social media and the press.

How people were engaged:

Targeted communications requesting support to amplify our communications were sent by email to:

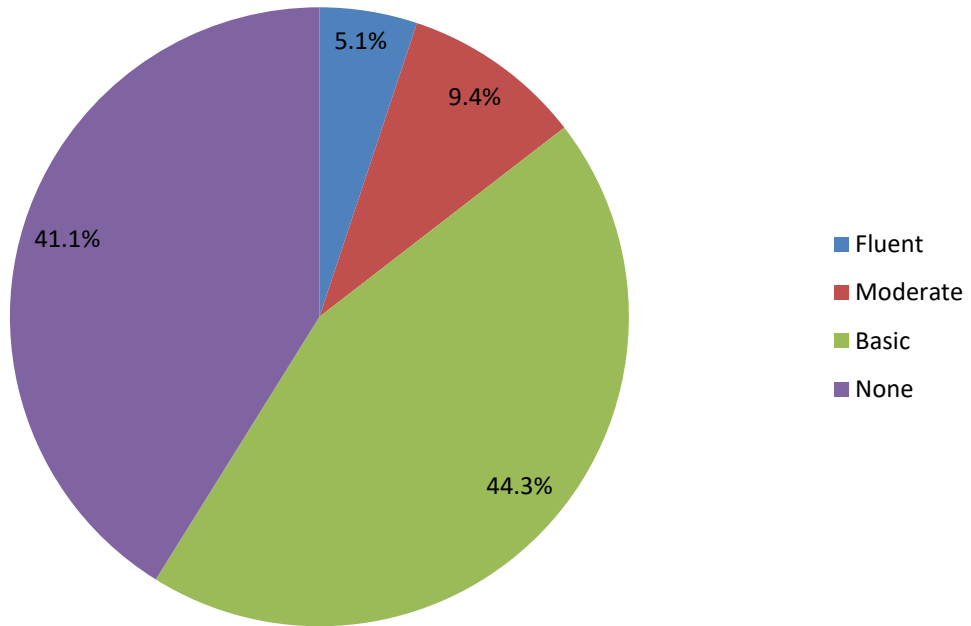
- FCC Councillors
- Town and Community Councils
- Professional networks / service user groups:
 - FCC workforce
 - Housing tenants
 - Schools
 - Older people
 - Young people
 - Families
 - Voluntary and charitable organisations
 - Businesses
 - Equality groups

Communications were also issued through:

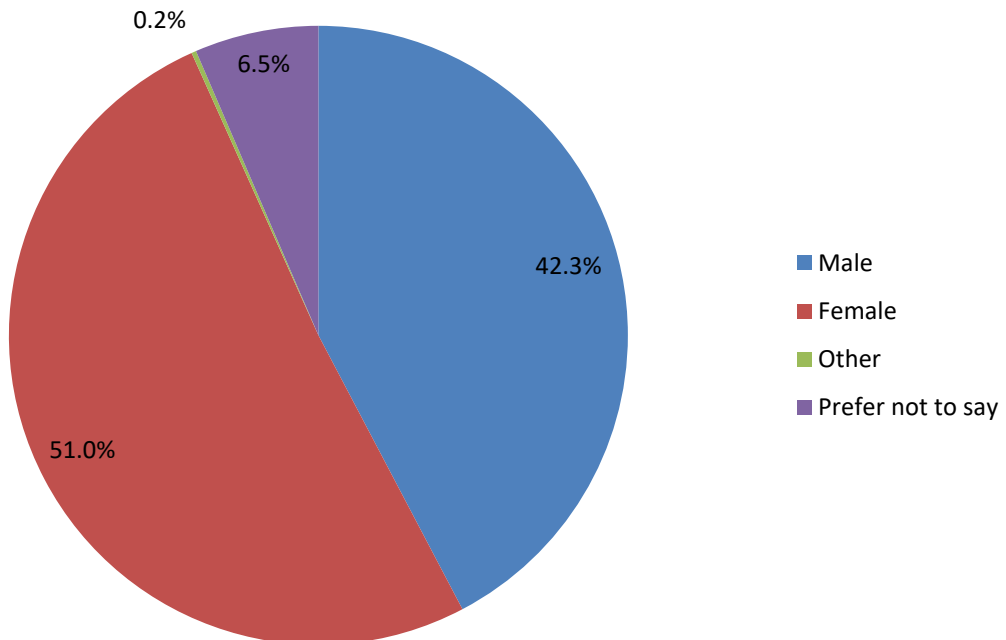
- Council's website – a main banner on the home page, through the consultation and engagement hub and pop up alerts on visits to the site
- A main banner on the Council's Infonet (intranet)
- Social Media
- Gov Notify (electronic news email to subscribers)
- Press release, media coverage

Groups of people who took part

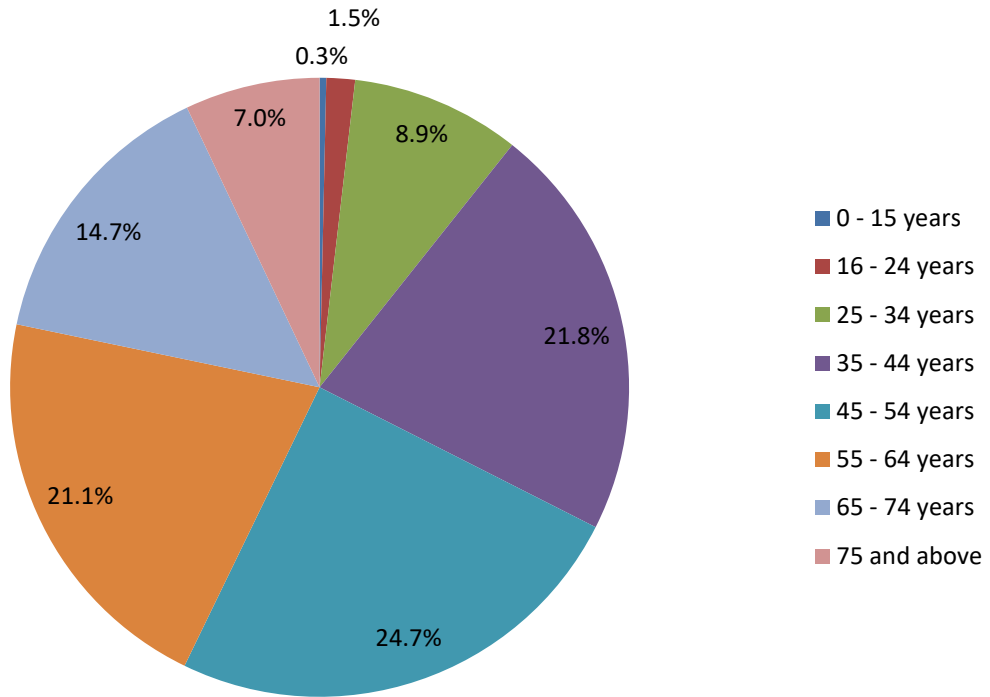
How would you describe your Welsh Language skills?



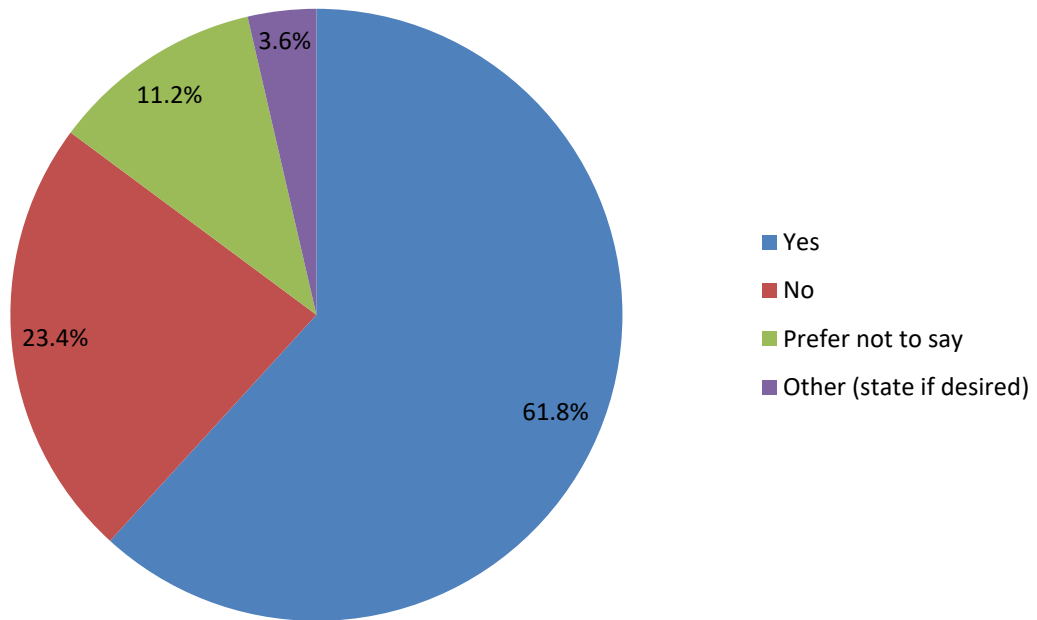
Sex



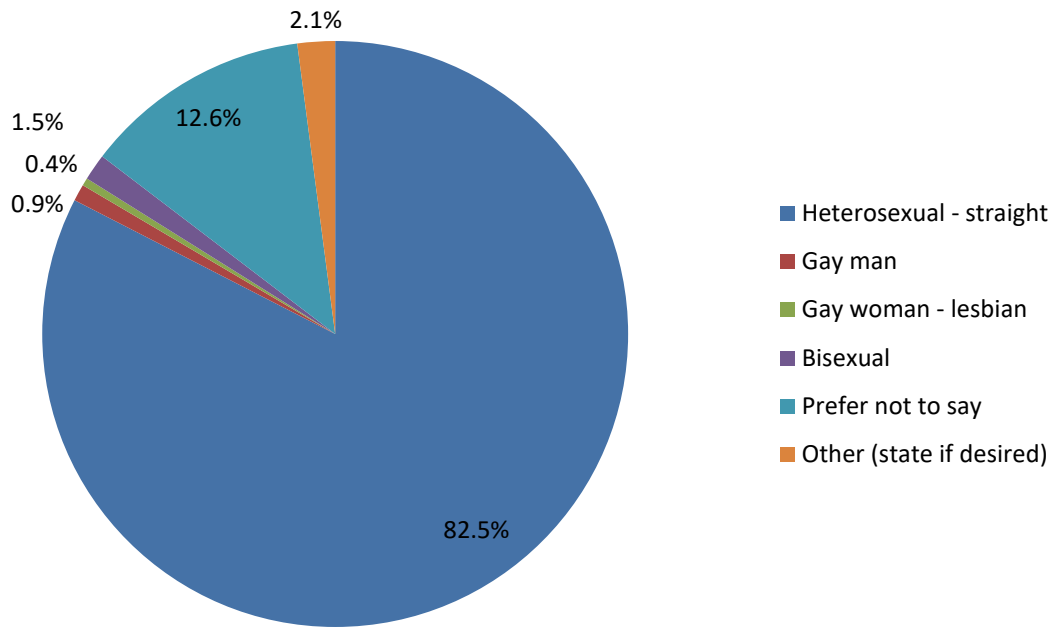
Please indicate your age by ticking the appropriate box:



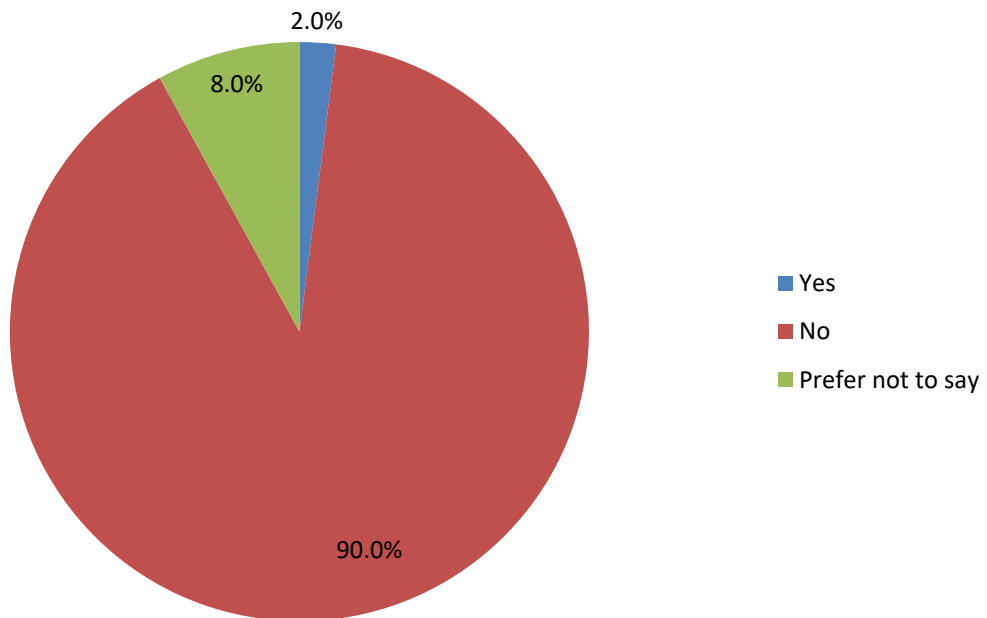
Are you married or in a civil partnership?



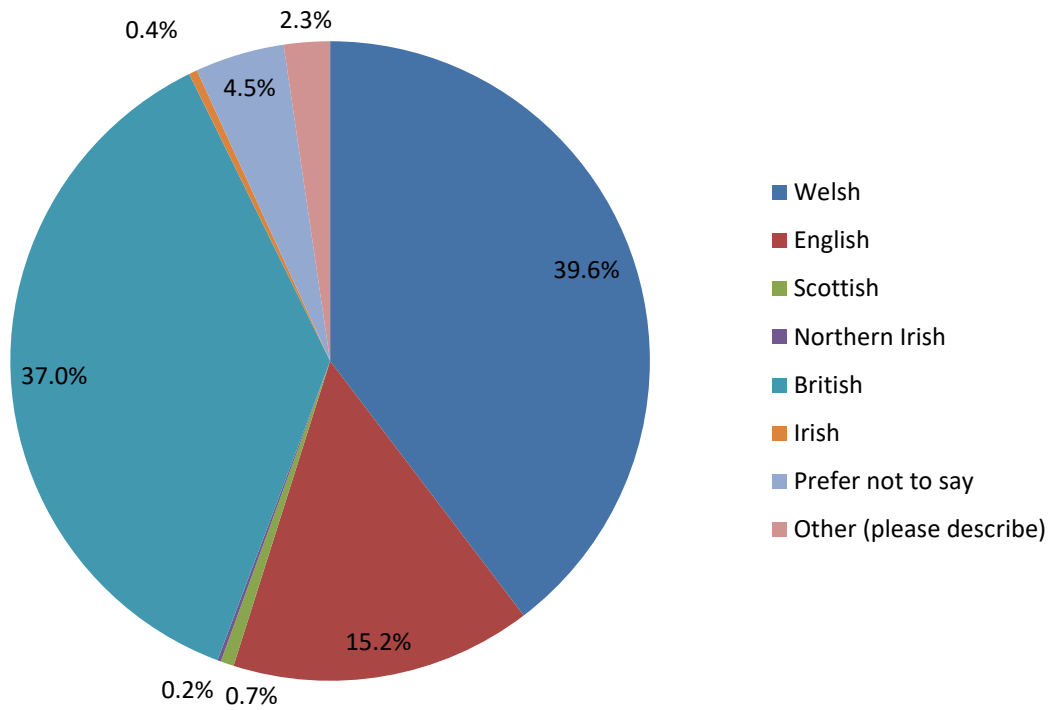
Sexual Orientation: Which of the following options best describes how you think of yourself?



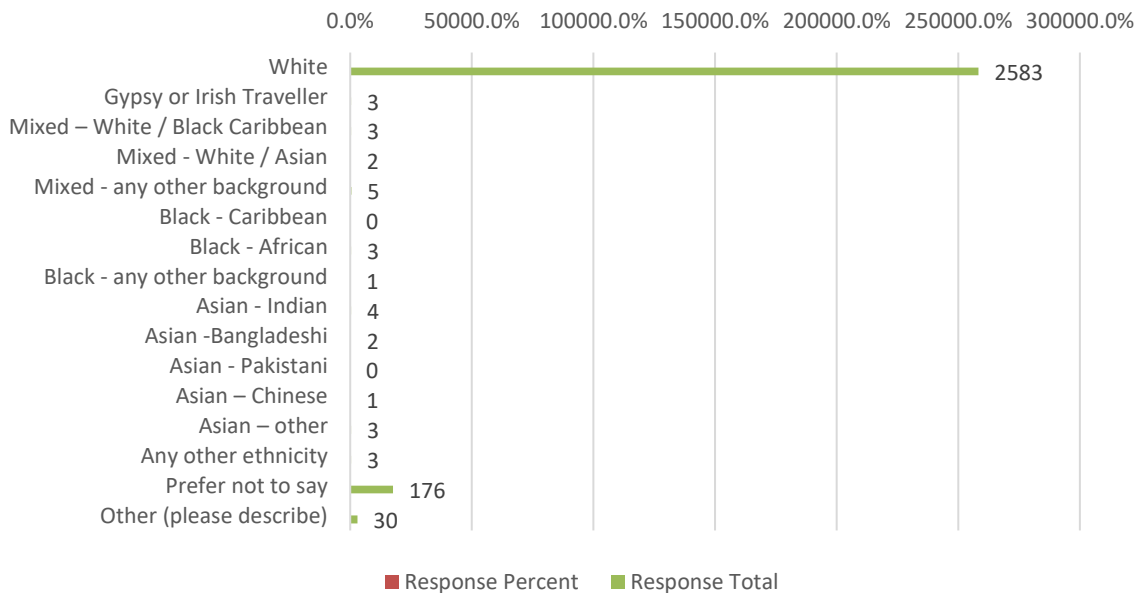
Has your gender identity changed from that assigned at birth?



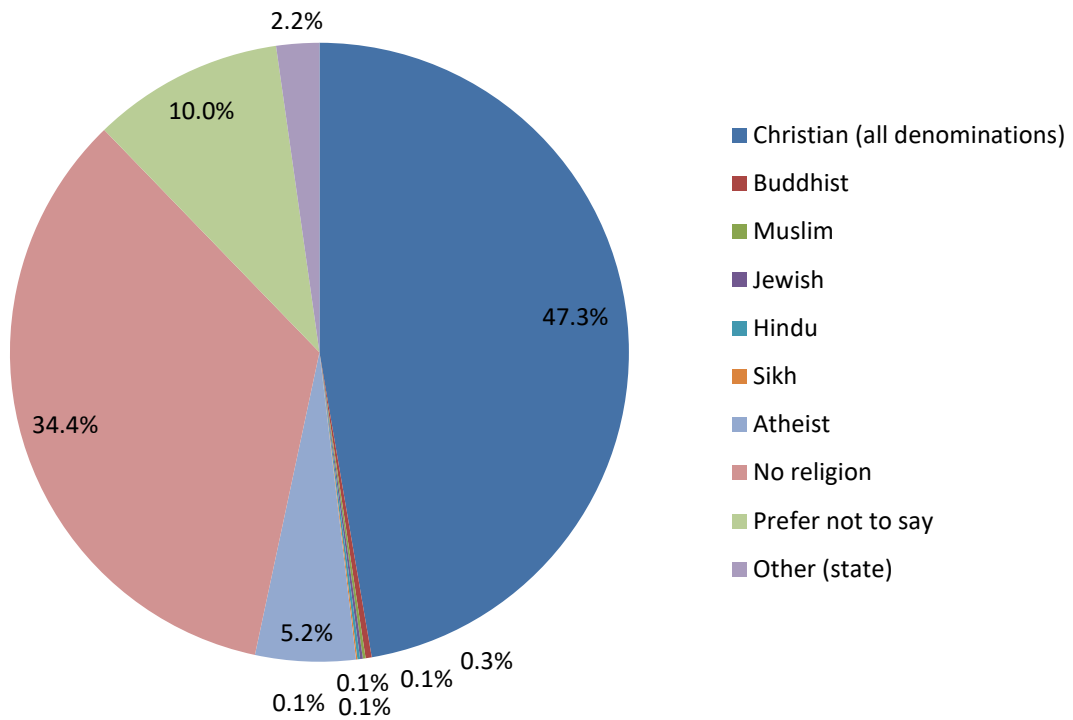
How would you describe your national identity?



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

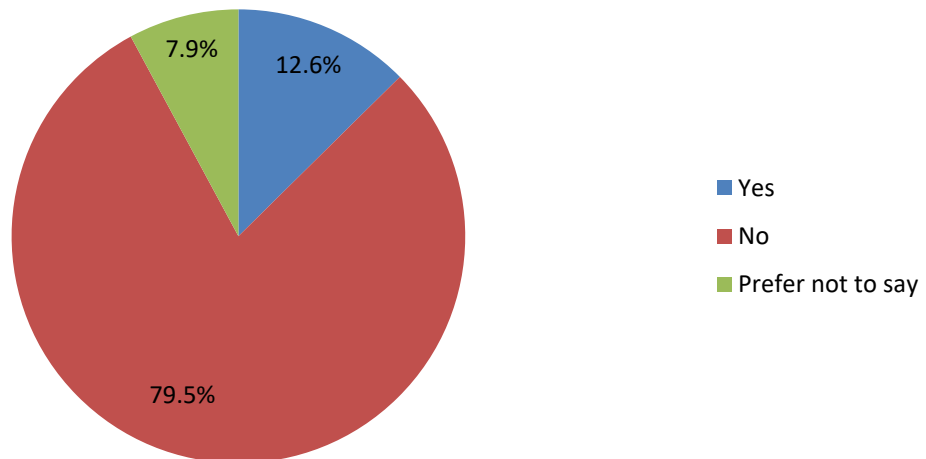


What is your religion?

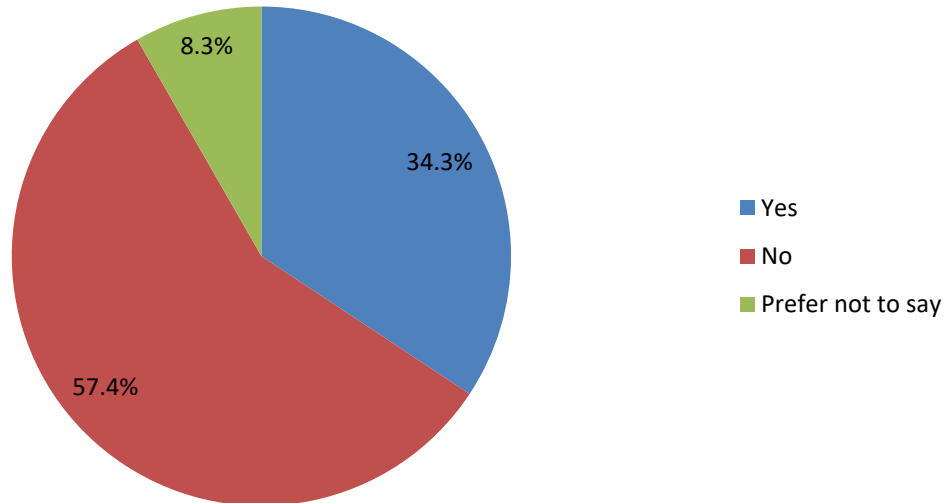


Section 6(1) of the Equality Act 2010 states that a person has a disability if:

- (a) That person has a physical or mental impairment, and
- (b) The impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on that person's ability to carry out normal day-to



Do you look after or give help or support to family members, friends, neighbours or others because of either: long term physical or mental ill-health/impairment; or problems related to old age.



APPENDIX A - Budget Consultation 2025/26 questions

1. Introduction

Flintshire County Council has forecast a **£38.4m** shortfall in the money it needs to spend in 2025/26.

Under the Local Government Finance Act 1988 it is illegal for any council in the UK to go into a new financial year without setting a budget that has balanced the money it receives with the money it needs to spend.

For well over a decade all councils in the UK have faced considerable financial challenges because of year on year underfunding from national governments.

Over this time Flintshire has cut it's spending **by more than £125m**.

68% of the funding Flintshire receives comes from Welsh Government and per head of population we are ranked 20 out of 22 councils in Wales for the money we receive to deliver services.

Every year it gets harder and we share our concerns that the gap between the money we are given and what we need to spend may be too big, but with a lot of hard work and some difficult decisions we just about manage to do it.

Over this time we've exhausted all the easy options to cut spending and we've also exhausted the moderate to difficult options. Without any additional funding from Welsh Government we are at a serious, critical stage where we are left with only hard choices that will significantly impact our residents and workforce.

Although we are working hard to identify solutions, it's no exaggeration when we say that 2025/26 may be year when we can't close the gap.

Why is 2025/26 so different to other years?

Welsh Government will announce its budget in December and without a significant increase in our funding we will be facing a major and serious challenge.

Each 1% of extra funding we receive from Welsh Government is worth £2.585m.

To shrink our gap by 50% (£19.202m) we would need a 7.4% increase from Welsh Government.

Independent analysis of Welsh Government's budget is telling us that at best we may only get 1% or less. We also can't rule out a 0% increase, so until we know more we must plan for this possibility.

To balance past budgets, Flintshire has already done much of what other councils across the UK are currently considering to cut spending. We have very few options left to cut more spending without our residents and workforce feeling the impact.

Considerations are now at a critical stage and Councillors would like to hear your views and opinions.

More information about our budget challenges can be found on our [website](#) (opens in new window).

To see how we will handle the information you give us go to our [website](#) (opens in new window).

2. Before we begin

1. Have you read the information on our [website](#) about the budget challenges facing Flintshire and councils across the whole of the UK? (link opens in new window)

Yes

No

3. What is important to you?

Before we begin we would like to understand what things are important to you.

2. How important are the services listed below to you?

	Very important	Important	Neutral	Not important	Not important at all
Adult social services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Benefits and welfare services (e.g. Housing and Council Tax benefits)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Carbon Reduction	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Children and families, early help services and youth services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Children's social services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Community and business protection (e.g. food safety, licensing, pollution control, trading standards)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Council running costs and support services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Countryside and the natural environment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Very important	Important	Neutral	Not important	Not important at all
Culture, leisure, library and museums	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Economic growth (e.g. tourism, town centres, employability, business support)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Education, schools and home to school transport	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Environmental maintenance (e.g. grass cutting and maintenance of public open spaces)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Highways (e.g. repairs, street lighting, bridges and structures, car parking)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Housing services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Planning and development management services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Transport (e.g. public transport, active travel solutions such as cycling and walking)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Waste and Recycling (including Household Recycling Centres)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

4. Council Tax

When Welsh Government allocates funding to councils in Wales, it makes an assumption in its calculations that an additional amount of Council Tax will be raised locally to help pay for council services.

How much extra we will need to increase Council Tax next year will be influenced by how much funding we receive, how much income we can generate, how we can reduce the growing demand for services and what we can save by cutting back on spending.

For example an increase of ...

4% would raise £4.94m
7% would raise £8.25m
10% would raise £11.35m

To bridge the gap in 2024/25 Council Tax increased by 7.9% to pay for Council services with an additional 1.1% to cover the extra costs of the Fire and Rescue and Coroners Service. 9% in total. [Read more about this on our website](#) (opens in new window).

With the gap getting bigger every year and little options left open to us to cut back on spending it is not sustainable to expect Council Tax increases to bridge the gap.

3. Without any additional funding from governments, what are your thoughts on Council Tax being used as the solution to bridge bigger portions of underfunding in council budgets?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

5. Generating Income

Flintshire County Council applies fees and charges for some of the services it delivers.

Wherever possible fees and charges are set to achieve full cost recovery - the income received must meet the full costs of delivering the service - e.g. Bereavement Services, Licensing.

Where it is not possible to achieve full cost recovery additional costs are subsidised by the Council e.g. domiciliary care for older people

A full list of [fees and charges](#) can be found on the Council's website. (link opens in new window).

4. Do you agree or disagree with the statements below about income generation?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
The Council should review and adjust it's fees and charges every year.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
Wherever possible the Council should aim to achieve full cost recovery.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Council should continue to explore more opportunities to generate income.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Council should seek opportunities to attract funding and investment.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

6. Managing Demand Pressures

All UK councils are experiencing an increased demand for services.

This can range from things like more people needing social care or homelessness support, to a more general reluctance to change the way more routine services have always been delivered.

Finding ways to **reduce** service demands will be critical as we continue to deal with reduced funding and overstretched budgets potentially for many years to come.

5. Please share your views on the approaches listed below which have the potential to **reduce** service demands:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Where possible provide early help and support to delay or possibly stop the need for more intensive support e.g. social care, housing.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Support and empower people to become resilient and self reliant.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Making the best use of digital technology.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Introducing service changes designed to meet nationally set targets/standards to avoid expensive non-compliance fines.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Investing to save by extending some council services to meet rising demands which can be provided more cheaply by the Council than by commercial suppliers e.g. residential care for older people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Communicating with residents and service users to help understanding about why things need to be done differently.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Engaging residents to work with us to change the way some services are delivered.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

7. Prioritising our approach to spending

More information about how we've cut our spending over the past decade can be found on our [website](#) (opens in a new window).

Without additional government funding the Council will have no option but to make hard choices about where to cut spending. No decisions have yet been made.

Below you will see a list of things other councils are considering to cut spending.

6. We are not suggesting that these are things we will necessarily do here in Flintshire, they are being provided as examples of what others are considering.

How much do you agree or disagree with these approaches?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Reducing already stretched service budgets (e.g. highways, housing, education, social care)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reduce road and highways works and repairs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reduce investment in carbon reduction activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reducing support for public transport	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Reduce maintenance of /or access to parks and outdoor spaces	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reduce investment into local businesses and town centres	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reduce street cleaning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reduce homelessness services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reduce face to face customer contact and replace with automation and self services where possible.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reduce non statutory early help services for families and young people.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reducing the size of the Council's workforce (only where it is safe to do so)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

8. Any other information or ideas

7. Please use the box below to share any other information or ideas relating to the Councils budget.

(Maximum 250 words)

9. About you ...?

Before you go we would like to ask you one or two more questions. We will not ask you for any information that will personally identify you. Answers to questions in this section are **completely voluntary except for question 11 – your age**. The way you answer this question will make sure you are directed to the next appropriate set of questions. This is important for those under 16 years of age.

The answers you give in this section will be used to help us understand how many people from different groups respond, for example how many women, men, young people, older people, disabled people etc.

8. In what capacity are you completing this survey? Please select all that apply...

- Local resident
- Representative of a local business or commercial organisation
- Member of a local interest or community group
- Representative of a Town or Community Council
- Flintshire County Councillor
- Flintshire County Council Employee
- Visitor to Flintshire or a member of the public living elsewhere
- None of these
- Prefer not to say
- Other (please specify):

9. Your postcode

Please only provide the first part and the first number of the second part of your postcode e.g. CH7 6

Providing your postcode in this way will not identify you as an individual.

10. How would you describe your Welsh Language skills?

- Fluent Moderate
- Basic None

11. Sex

Male Female

Other Prefer not to say

12. Please indicate your age by ticking the appropriate box:

0 – 15 years 16 – 24 years 25 – 34 years

35 – 44 years 45 – 54 years 55 – 64 years

65 – 74 years 75 and above

10.

13. Are you married or in a civil partnership?

Yes No

Prefer not to say

Other (state if desired)

14. Sexual Orientation: Which of the following options best describes how you think of yourself?

Heterosexual – straight Gay man

Gay woman – lesbian Bisexual

Prefer not to say

Other (state if desired)

15. Has your gender identity changed from that assigned at birth?

- Yes No Prefer not to say

11.

16. How would you describe your national identity?

- Welsh English
 Scottish Northern Irish
 British Irish
 Prefer not to say
 Other (please describe)

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

- White Gypsy or Irish Traveller
 Mixed – White / Black Caribbean Mixed - White / Asian
 Mixed - any other background Black - Caribbean
 Black - African Black - any other background
 Asian - Indian Asian -Bangladeshi
 Asian - Pakistani Asian – Chinese
 Asian – other Any other ethnicity
 Prefer not to say

Other (please describe)

18. What is your religion?

Christian (all denominations)

Buddhist

Muslim

Jewish

Hindu

Sikh

Atheist

No religion

Prefer not to say

Other (state)

19. Section 6(1) of the Equality Act 2010 states that a person has a disability if:

(a) That person has a physical or mental impairment, and

(b) The impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on that person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Using this definition, do you consider yourself to be disabled?

Yes No Prefer not to say

20. Do you look after or give help or support to family members, friends, neighbours or others because of either: long term physical or mental ill-health/impairment; or problems related to old age.

Yes No Prefer not to say